

world is important, for although the fashion of it passes away, the world itself shall be re-formed in the fashion of Christ. It is eternity, the eternity of the coming Christ, that makes having a wife, weeping, rejoicing, buying, and use of the world significant. It is eternity, the eternity of the coming Kingdom of God, that makes instruction concerning this world, and life in it, significant.

We live and rear our children with a view to eternity.

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Educational Pluralism: A Threat or an Ally

by Agatha Lubbers

We are met here tonight as believers who have covenanted to support Protestant Reformed Christian Education with our love, our time, our money, and all our resources. Several vocal and active Reformed Christians advocating a philosophy of life called Pluralism have developed a carefully argued appeal that says we should most certainly support Christian Schools with our love and our time. However, they also assert that we can legitimately petition for more financial support from the state and federal government than we have received thus far in the history of the independent, non-public Christian school movement in the United States. This movement advocating a philosophy known as "Pluralism" says that now is the time for Reformed Christians and all others who support non-government schools to work for the *disestablishment* of sole and primary monetary support for monopolistic system of education known as public education. They would argue, I am sure, that a meeting and fund-raising activity, such as we enjoy here tonight, is good. We should be concerned with methods for engendering and promoting among ourselves more support for Christian Schools. But they believe we also should be attempting to find ways to retrieve the tax dollars we pay for education, so that some of these taxes come to Christian Schools. Rockne McCarthy, one of the chief advocates of Pluralism, writes in a recent *Christian Home and School* article that "There is a pressing need throughout Canada

and the United States for a more just public policy that will insure that the funds collected from everyone are distributed in a non-discriminatory fashion to all accredited schools that genuinely do 'serve all.' "

In a book published in 1981 by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., entitled *Society, State and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism*, the authors Rockne McCarthy, Donald Oppewal, Walfred Peterson, and Gordon Spykman (all fellows of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship, Calvin College) argue most enthusiastically for such conduct as I have just described. In this book the writers state that Christians committed to the cause of Christian education should work at this time for an amendment to the federal Constitution. Currently the Constitution is interpreted so that individuals have religious rights as guaranteed by the First and Fourteenth Amendments but *associations of individuals* do not have these same rights. The writers claim that now is the time to develop greater clarity regarding the nature of associations so that rights of individuals in relation to rights of different associations can be balanced. These spokesmen claim that this is the time to work toward such an amendment because Anti-abortionists and Equal Rights advocates are already in the field and "just possibly, a convergence of unrelated forces might make the amending process much more open than it has been" (p. 208, *Society, State, and Schools*).

A book published by the Christian College Consortium in 1982 entitled *Disestablishment a Second Time: Genuine Pluralism for American Schools* is essentially the manuscript of Rockne M. McCarthy, professor in the Dordt Studies Center at Dordt College. He is joined in this effort by James W. Skillen, Executive Director of the Association for Public Justice, Washington, D.C., and William A. Harper, professor of Political Science and Chairman of the Department of Political Science at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. These proponents for pluralism write as follows:

...if justice is to be achieved for educational freedom and diversity, for parental choice and societal pluralism, then governments must assume real responsibility for shaping a just republic that is structured differently than it has been to date. . . . We are convinced that part of what justice requires is the recognition and encouragement of healthy pluralism in the public arena. Government can assume its full responsibility for public justice and for training of good citizens without having to control and favor a single public school system to the unjust disadvantage of other schools (pp. 128-129 *Disestablishment a Second Time*).

I. PLURALISM — WHAT IS IT?

Pluralism is a philosophical position held by the authors of the two books I have cited. Although the last word has not been said or written on this, these writers are forging a challenging appeal for a system of government in relationship to schools that will disestablish the public school movement and re-enfranchise the non-public schools as they were in the 17th century and the early 18th century before the days of Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann. (In order to accomplish this these writers advocate the use of the courts and litigation.)

Pluralism is a philosophical position held by many educators and theorists in Reformed circles and by scholars in Roman Catholic schools. These theorists maintain that the current policy, which locates school authority exclusively in the *State*, violates “prior rights” parents have for their children. These writers cite the pronouncements of Pope Pius XI who gave official formulation for the Roman Catholic Church to the “doctrine of multiple sources” of school sponsorship in his 1936 encyclical on “Christian Education of Youth.” Pius XI wrote, “. . . in the matter of education it is the right, or to speak more correctly, it is the duty of the State to protect in its legislation, the prior rights, already described, of the family as regards the Christian education of its offspring. . . .”

For Reformed Pluralists and Roman Catholics to have a common cause seems strange to our ears but more strange yet is the use made by these Reformed thinkers of expressions found in the “United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” which declares that “parents shall have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given their children.” They also cite the European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms, which is even more specific: “. . . in relation to education and teaching, the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.”

Those who advocate the Pluralist ideology are the chief leaders of a movement that will attempt to disestablish the financial monopoly of the state schools in our country. Dr. Marion Snapper has argued in a pamphlet, “. . . our reason for saying yes to government support is that justice demands it, and the Christian School needs it.”

II. AN ILLUSTRATION OF PLURALISM IN ACTION

Let me illustrate how those who advocate pluralism think the system should operate by referring to a system of education that operates in the Netherlands.

The history of the modern Dutch educational system goes back to the 19th century. After the Reformation, education in the Netherlands was predominantly Christian. Slowly, however, it became secularized, culminating in the institutionalization of the monopolistic centralized state school system of the late 19th century. In 1840, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer had described the root of the problem when he said in Parliament:

Parents who, with or without sufficient grounds, are convinced that the religious orientation of the teaching in a particular school is un-christian, must not, either directly or indirectly be hindered from giving their children the kind of education that they feel is necessary before God. Such coercion, I say it plainly, is intolerable and must cease. It is presumption that springs from the doctrine of the French Revolution which views the children as the property of the state (*Society, State, and Schools*, p. 142).

The pivotal issue in the theories of the Pluralists is family rights versus state control of education. This pivotal issue was to remain at the center of the dispute between the free school supporters in the Netherlands and the state school supporters for years.

In 1888 a coalition of Roman Catholics and Protestants came into power in the Dutch parliament. In 1889 the legislature placed the free schools on a basis similar to that of state schools. Although full financial parity was not yet accomplished, state schools were no longer officially assumed to be suitable for all people.

Some funds were now available for free schools but they were woefully insufficient and caused Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper to argue that the right to establish a free school was a practice available only to the rich, for only they could afford it. The school struggle continued for another thirty years until complete equity both in funds and in recognition was established.

In 1917 an amendment to the constitution of the Netherlands made it possible to implement the Primary Education Act of 1920. This Act abolished the traditional distinction between public and private schools. It also abolished the distinction between state and free education. Today *all* schools in the Netherlands are *considered to be part of the public (common) effort to provide education*. The Dutch constitution now states that the parents have the "natural right and duty" to determine the kind of schooling that their children will have. In addition, the Constitution assured financial parity between the free schools and the state schools.

The Dutch constitution states:

Private general elementary education fulfilling conditions to be imposed by law shall be defrayed from public funds according to the same standards as public education.

The present educational system in the Netherlands operates in this way: Any group of parents may form a school association providing they have at least 50 students for a city whose population is up to 50,000, or at least 100 students for a city whose population is between 50,000 and 125,000 or more. If according to state regulations there are not sufficient children to form a new school, the parents may send their children to the school of their choice in a neighboring town. The government will pay for the transportation costs. If a proposed school is approved, the government pays the entire cost of the building and its furnishings. The government also pays for lighting, heating, cleaning, books, and maintenance. Each year the school board draws up a budget that must be approved by the local authorities. (This does not include teachers' salaries. These are paid by the national government.) The yearly financial need is determined by comparison with state-run schools. If the budget is approved the city pays for all costs (pp. 142-142, *Society, State, and Schools*).

Thus, the national and local governments in the Netherlands pay equally for all schools, whether they be state or non-state.

Schools that receive financial support must meet certain conditions and standards. Government inspectors of various faiths have free access to classrooms to check on the following:

- 1/ Teacher-pupil ratios.
- 2/ Teacher certification, qualifications, and health.
- 3/ Basic curriculum design. (This means certain core subjects must be taught.)
- 4/ Building safety.
- 5/ Minimum number of classes per year for each student.

These conditions are necessary to insure proper academic and health standards and wise use of tax money.

Complete freedom remains in:

- 1/ The appointment of all personnel.
- 2/ The nature and orientation of instruction.
- 3/ Teaching methodology.
- 4/ The admission and retention of pupils.

The advocates of a form of pluralism for American schools similar to the pattern of the schools in the Netherlands claim that "it is safe to say that non-state schools in the Netherlands enjoy complete freedom in the essential matters of education." They think it significant that whereas in 1850, 73% of primary school students attended state schools, now 73% of primary students attend non-state schools.

III. THE CONCLUSION OF SPYKMAN, McCARTHY, & ASSOCIATES

Spykman, McCarthy, and allies concluded that because educational pluralism exists and works in other democratic countries such as parts of Canada, Israel, Belgium, and the Netherlands, we should attempt to change things in the U.S. so that the non-state schools in our country get a share of the financial pie.

The advocates for pluralism claim that countries like Canada, Israel, Belgium, and the Netherlands provide direct aid to independent non-state schools and yet they place no greater regulations on independent education than the regulations placed on independent education in America where no financial aid is given.

The advocates of pluralism conclude as follows:

1/ The adage that increased aid to independent education necessarily brings with it increased government control is not supported by their comparative data.

2/ Pluralism is not a utopian ideal but is a plausible and realistic goal because it works in countries like Canada, Israel, England, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

3/ Independent schools are not divisive but make unique contributions to society. They also offer strength, diversity, and healthy competition to other schools. In these and in other ways independent schools build up a culture.

4/ Independent schools in a pluralistic framework are more democratic than the present American unified and monopolistic educational system. Under the present American system this freedom cannot be realized by all, for there is only one real choice: state-run education. In this sense, say the pluralists, we are more like totalitarian Russia and other totalitarian countries than like our neighbors in the free world.

5/ Government schools do not suffer under the pluralistic view of society. The purpose of educational pluralism is not to usurp government schools, but to give all schools a fair chance in order that rich and poor alike may experience true justice and freedom in education.

Spykman, McCarthy, *et. al.* writing in *Society, State, and Schools* say,

In our vision of educational pluralism each system of schools would work out its educational ideology as freely and as clearly as it wished, with all having equal status and rights before the law. No American family, theist, nontheist, humanist, or agnostic would be denied the right to choose, without fear of economic penalty, a school most clearly reflecting its own value system (p. 135).

IV. A RESPONSE TO PLURALISM

My task tonight is not only to describe the movement advocated by McCarthy and Spykman but also to answer the movement – to react to the goals of this movement. Can we, Protestant Reformed Christians, go along with such a movement?

In order to respond properly, permit me to quote again from the article by Rockne McCarthy found in the January, 1983, *Christian Home and School*. The article entitled “Funding: The Christian School Serves All” begins as follows:

Christian Schools International and each of its member schools have a two-fold commitment. The first is to assist parents in providing a Christian education for their children. The second is a commitment to the general public, to uphold schools that are characterized by excellence in education. This double commitment stands at the heart of the argument that since “Christian schools serve all,” they ought to receive a proportional share of the public funds allocated by government for education.

This beginning to McCarthy’s article advocating public funding for Christian education signals the point to which the pluralistic ideology has led McCarthy and his allies. All schools in the Netherlands are considered to be part of the public (common) effort to provide education. The same must be true, when viewed from the pluralistic view point, for education here in the U.S.

What has happened?

Christian education is common – it is for all – it is public.

Christian schools and other non-government schools are simply public schools because they offer a public service and this entitles them to support equivalent to that given to state schools.

McCarthy asserts that, because his claim is not widely recognized, independent schools in the U.S. and certain parts of Canada are treated as second-class institutions – institutions not worthy of standing alongside government schools to receive a proportional share of public funds allocated for education.

My initial response to such an assertion is: “So What?”

The complaint of McCarthy is dangerous and self-serving. Although we know the distinction between public and private schools was not well established in our country until the middle of the 19th century – the days of Horace Mann – that distinction does exist today. It is a distinction that we ought to cherish and not complain against. The courts have indeed said that there is a form of education that they define as secular and there is a form of education that they define as religious. *For this I am glad*. What the courts meant by these terms can

certainly be debated but the terms “secular” and “religious” — terms disliked by Pluralists — do define the kind of teaching that Reformed Christians do in the Christian Schools. *Christian instruction in the nature of the case is religious instruction.* With this the pluralists like McCarthy and Spykman have no quarrel but they want religious instruction and state support too.

It is my contention that the work of the Christian School is religious in the sense that it cannot and should not be supported by public monies. Religious freedom for the school and freedom to instruct freely means freedom from the support of the State.

McCarthy and his allies wish to redefine the meaning of the terms so that Christian education and Secular education are both religious and are therefore both public because they both serve the common good. Therefore both deserve a share of the public funds.

This will never work!!

The pluralist in this way destroys the very thing that he hopes to preserve. He believes that Christian education cannot long endure if *it does not get a certain* share of the public monies. In my judgment, the Christian school will not long endure if it gets its seemingly legitimate share.

The Pluralist is right when he says that public education is not genuinely secular or irreligious but is instead a religious ideology — a state-supported religion. Richard Neuhaus has shown that the defenders of the public school admit that the public school is an expression of religious vision. In an article entitled “No More Bootleg Religion” Neuhaus quotes Sidney Mead, an American religious historian, who says,

...of necessity the state in its public-education systems is and always has been teaching religion. It does so because the well-being of the nation and the state demands this foundation of shared beliefs. . . . *In this sense the public-school system of the United States is its established church* (italics, A.L.) (*Society, State, and Schools*, p. 113).

All this is true and we have said the same thing for many years ourselves and therefore we erected our own Christian Schools. It is for this very reason that I contend that the pluralist destroys the strength and singular purpose of Christian education by his pluralist design. Although the freedom that Abraham Kuyper gained for schools might not have been accomplished except through a kind of coalition with the Roman Catholics of the Netherlands, he did not want to see the school bound by the secular state.

I am not unmoved by the desire of McCarthy and his associates.

I presume that his motivation is only financial. Financial considerations are not per se evil but can have an unwanted and unexpected result. I have seen Christian parents during the thirty years I have taught in our Christian Schools struggle to maintain schools that would and could provide an education that was soundly Reformed and at the same time academically excellent. I know what it is like to be paid extremely low wages. I am sensitive to the argument that public schools having unlimited access to state funds will outstrip the Christian School in the quality of education. I am particularly sensitive to that argument in today's world when so much education seems to depend on a complex knowledge in a computerized and mechanized world.

At the same time I see the great danger of pluralism — a danger that the advocates of the theory do not seem to want to recognize. I fear that the goals and intent of the pluralists will result in the ultimate destruction of the strength and distinctiveness of Christian education as we have learned to know it and to love it. What is that strength? It is a Covenant Christian School where Covenant parents and Christian teachers work as believers in the nurturing and rearing of the seed of the Covenant.

Christian Education, my dear friends, is *not Public Education* and it must never become such!!! If it does, the cause is lost.

Christian Education is for our children — it is not for all children in the sense that it is common. Although this may seem to make Christian education exclusive, it is that because Christian education is for those who can use it — it is for those who are children of the promise — the spiritual seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the Christian school we must supervise the instruction. To do this we must support it financially — not the state. Scripture teaches that such is the rule.

In Deuteronomy 6:7 we read: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children. . . .” In Ephesians 6:4 we read: “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The whole book of Proverbs speaks to the issue but particularly Proverbs 1:8, “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.”

Pluralists may argue that they have a Biblical case for structural and confessional pluralism in which the State and society are clearly distinguished and where all can live together separately but in peace. This peace will include the kind of tolerance that will make it possible for all kinds of schools to coexist and receive support from the state equally. This cannot be!!

This society includes Protestant Reformed parents and supporters of

Protestant Reformed Christian Schools who consider the educational task so important and so exclusive that the state cannot be asked to assist in this education by financially supporting the schools. This spells disaster. The task of rearing children and young people so that they become men and women of God is an exclusive task and is one to which we willingly give ourselves and all our resources. We do not whimper and complain because we do not get a share of the educational dollars set aside by the state for the established schools. Multimillion dollar school complexes are not good enough for our children.

We are happy to assert with these Reformed pluralists that our children are not the State's children. We agree with Groen von Prinsterer who said, "It is presumption that springs from the doctrine of the French Revolution which views the children as the property of the state."

We appreciate the efforts of Abraham Kuyper who played such a massive role in organizing an alternative school movement in the Netherlands that became a model for similar school movements here in the United States. He argued the cause of public justice and educational equity for all, regardless of who should benefit by it, be they humanists, Roman Catholics, Jews, or Calvinists. I am certain, however, that he was most interested in arguing freedom so that free Reformed Education might be the rule without intrusions by the state.

Standing on the shoulders of the freedom for which Kuyper and other Reformed men have stood we do not invite the intrusions of the state into our educational systems. Here in the U.S., in the middle of the 19th century the State transgressed the bounds set for government by God in Scriptures (cf. Rom. 13, etc.). The result of this transgression is a vast godless, humanistic educational monopoly and monolith that today fails to educate. Were we to permit ourselves to be swept along with the arguments of the Pluralists we could legitimately fear that our schools for which we have struggled hard and long would be swept along in the unstoppable tide of humanism and godlessness.

Although Pluralists claim the opposite, the cost of receiving money from the government is the eventual secularization of instruction in our schools. Rev. Engelsma in his article "The Danger of Government Funding of the Christian School" — *Perspectives*, December, 1981, sounds the warning:

Because the Christian school is religious it is constitutionally unable to accept much of the State aid that is available. To accept the aid, the Christian School would have to deny itself.

Pluralists claim that all education is religious and therefore State

money given to State schools should be given to none of the schools or should be given to all of the schools. We agree wholeheartedly that the State should not be in the business of education. Although the State claims that it is necessary to fund public education so there will be an educated citizenry, it remains true that it is not the task of the State to fund such education. Christians cannot permit this.

Consistories shall see to it that parents erect good Christian schools and hire good Christian School teachers. For this reason it is principally wrong for Christian School Associations to receive state aid or to seek such aid. The acceptance of government funding, which is principally wrong will lead to the practical problem of taking the instruction of the youth out of the control of those who should control education. We must remain completely in control of our schools.

The proponents for state aid to education think that those who oppose state aid are frozen into inactivity in this regard by an inordinate fear of state control. They claim that this fear is not substantiated by any real proof that state control follows state funding. We agree with Rev. Engelsma when he says, "We are not psychologically disordered but we are justifiably afraid because of the stark realities of life in the U.S. today. Government is a creature of God, but the State oversteps its God-ordained bounds and usurps power in every sphere."

We do not need the power of the State in the realm of education in any greater measure than we now experience it. If we accept or seek state aid, we shall surely have such greater power of the State in education.

We have seen what State aid has done in the public schools. Government support results in an environment that is hostile to the true religion. The school becomes evolutionistic, lawless, and Godless. This is Anti-Christ.

We do not have the time to cite the many examples of situations in which the state through the Courts have warned those who have attempted to seek state aid saying that such aid will result in unwarranted entanglement of the state in the affairs of religion. Past litigation of the kind proposed by McCarthy, *et. al.*, has only proved that the Court has argued against aid to non-government schools unless they could prove as in the case of aid to colleges that they were giving solely secular education. This we could never say and would never say — not even if our schools were colleges. The very stones of the buildings in which we teach would cry out against us.

It is true that in a 1975 Pennsylvania case (Meek, *et. al.*, vs. Pittinger), Justice Burger examined the establishment clause of the First

Amendment and said, "One can only hope that, at some future date, the Court will come to a more enlightened and tolerant view of the First Amendment's guarantee of the free exercise of religion thus eliminating the denial of equal protection to children in church-sponsored schools, and take a more realistic view that carefully limited aid to children is not a step toward establishing a state religion — at least while this Court sits."

Such arguments seem to give hope to the cause of the pluralists that now may be the time to seek a change in the rules concerning government funding through constitutional amendments. I cannot accept this contention.

I believe the argument remains that we must resist the encroachments of government that are certain to come with government aid for such things as buildings, teachers' salaries, books, and other instructional materials.

(For a more documented treatment of this aspect of the problem I recommend that you reread the article of Rev. Engelsma in the *Perspectives*, December, 1981.)

It would be unrealistic for us not to admit that we do join with those who correctly complain of the injustice in the system of education in our land which creates financial hardship for the supporter of the Christian School and for the School as well. We do not join the pluralists in their drive and call for litigation for educational equity on the basis of an equal share for the finances. We might petition for tax relief because we educate our own children and should not be forced to pay the tax used to educate another man's children. This certainly will not succeed. Even if it does not succeed, we also call the State to release control of education and discontinue its support of that which it should not support or control.

Most important, however, and with this I conclude my speech tonight, we should continue as we are doing tonight — support the Christian School. The day may come when the schools will be taken from us but let it never be said of us that we gave them up because we did not know what it meant to sacrifice for Christian Education in the best of times. Our fathers knew how to sacrifice in the past — we are called to use that which the Lord has given us to maintain the schools in the present.

With the Psalmist in Psalm 78, we conclude as follows:

Instructing our sons, we gladly record
The praises, the works, the might of the Lord,
For He hath commanded that what He hath done
Be passed in tradition from father to son.

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