

William McGuffey and John Dewey- Two Very Different Educators

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Abraham Lincoln said, "The philosophy of the classroom is the philosophy of the government in the next generation." The philosophy of the classroom not only affects the government in the next generation but the home, the church, and society in general.

America's public schools were first established by Horace Mann in 1837. The curriculum of the early public schools was Bible-oriented, largely because of one outstanding American educator. His name was William Holmes McGuffey, compiler of the famous McGuffey Readers. Modern liberal historians have purposely ignored William McGuffey in American history books because to do so would require acknowledgment of the remarkable religious and academic impact McGuffey made on the first half century of American public education. In his book, *McGuffey and His Readers*, John H. Westerhoff III writes, "It is estimated that at least 120 million copies of McGuffey's Readers were sold between 1836 and 1920, placing their sales in a class with the Bible and Webster's Dictionary." In 1929 historian Mark Sullivan chastised other American historians and scholars for ignoring McGuffey, the "most popular, most affectionately remembered person in the nineteenth century, a national giant to be ranked with George Washington and Abraham Lincoln."

William McGuffey, born in 1800 on the Ohio frontier to Scottish Presbyterian parents, was known in his day as "the schoolmaster of the nation!" He was a popular minister of the Gospel, a Christian college professor and a Christian college president. As an education reformer he introduced a graded reading series (McGuffey Eclectic Readers — four levels), pictures in elementary textbooks, study

questions to insure comprehension and more parent involvement in the education of children. His famous readers were filled with stories that had a moral point. Some were actual Bible stories. To McGuffey, the Bible was not on trial. He believed the Bible was God's Word and deserved the central place in American education. In the preface to his third reader he wrote, "The time has gone by, when any sensible man will be found to object to the Bible as a school book, in a Christian country."

While William McGuffey pointed children *toward God* in the first half century of public education, another American educator in the second half century turned children *away from God*. His name was John Dewey. Born in 1859, John Dewey became the head of the Education Department at Columbia University in New York. He is regarded as the most significant philosophic touchstone of American public education in the last fifty years. He was the originator and promoter of what he called "progressive education." Dewey's Department of Education at Columbia University became the model for teacher education departments at colleges and universities across America. His teachings continue to be held in high regard.

Professor John Dewey was an atheist. He was the first president of the American Humanist Association. In 1933 he wrote *Humanist Manifesto I* and openly referred to humanism as a religion. The first point of his famous manifesto reads, "Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing (evolution) and not created." Elsewhere Dewey wrote, "There is no God and there is no soul. There is no room for fixed, natural law or moral absolutes."

In 1973, forty years after Dewey's *Humanist Manifesto I*, the American Humanist Association published an additional "doctrinal statement" called *Humanist Manifesto II*. A concluding statement reads: "...the Manifesto has provoked world-wide debate over humanist recommendations for mankind in the areas of religion, civil liberties, the right to suicide, abortion, divorce, euthanasia, sexual freedom and the building of world community."

In the absence of no moral absolutes, no Bible, no God, and no soul, Dewey believed students are left to clarify in their minds their own moral code of ethics. They can make it up as they go! His atheistic, humanistic ideas led American education step by step into the frightening era of "Values Clarification" where like the children of Israel, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Deut. 12:8). The result is an academic and moral decline on a scale never possible in the days of William McGuffey. Dewey's humanism has

1. More than 250,000 students and 5,000 teachers in public schools are physically assaulted in a typical school month.
2. One student in nine will have something stolen in a month.
3. One student in eighty will be physically attacked in a month.
4. The risk of violence to teenagers is greater in school than out.
5. Each year taxpayers pay one billion dollars for school vandalism. In California last year the cost of textbooks was \$42 million. California's bill for school vandalism last year was \$90 million.



A “Word to the Wise” Regarding your School’s Written Policies

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