



SCHOOL

ALL  
YOUR KIDS  
ARE BELONG  
TO US

ON

# SECULAR EDUCATION

**R.L.DABNEY**

*Foreword by Douglas Wilson*

# On Secular Education

R.L. DABNEY

Edited for the modern reader  
by Douglas Wilson

© 1996 by Canon Press  
P.O. Box 8741, Moscow, ID 83843  
800-488-2034

All rights reserved. Those interested in reproducing any portion of this publication are cordially invited to contact the authors. However, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the authors, except as provided by USA copyright law.

ISBN: 1-885767-19-6

The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. It is the one business for which the earth exists. To it all politics, all war, all literature, all money-making, ought to be subordinated; and every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that, next to making his own calling and election sure, this is the end for which he is kept alive by God—this is his task on earth.

R.L. Dabney





## Editor's Foreword

Some years ago I was introduced to the writing of R.L. Dabney. In his "secular" writing I was struck by what can only be called his prophetic insight. Although he was embroiled in the controversies of the last century, it is very clear that he understood the fundamental principles involved. Because he was a principled thinker, he was able to see where America was headed. The years have proven him right on many things.

Because of the value of his insights, I thought it would be profitable to present some of his work to the modern Christian public. This booklet will prove especially helpful to those Christians who are involved in education, whether in private schools, or home schools. I have taken the liberty of editing this essay for the modern reader, and I trust that I have done so without taking liberties with the meaning of it.

Some may find Dabney's polemic against Catholic education distasteful, and may wonder why I retained it. There are two reasons. The first is that the question of Catholic education is so wound up with his argument, that it would not be possible to remove it without doing considerable violence to the essay. The second reason is that I believe Roman Catholicism today is a greater threat than when Dabney wrote these words, and there is therefore no need to remove his warnings. Those who are struck by his insight on the nature of "secular education" should perhaps consider that his position on the threat of Catholicism has some weight.

This is not to say that I agree with everything in the essay. For example, I am not quite as optimistic as he appears to be concerning "natural law" as the basis of civil government. Nevertheless, the insights he puts forth are well worth our study, particularly when we consider the time he wrote. We stand in the midst of the ruins of a once proud public educational

system, and many Christians *still* do not see what Dabney saw in the last century. I trust that God will use his thoughts once again, and I pray that, among Christians, he will receive a better hearing than he did the first time.

Special thanks for help in this project need to go to Dan and Catherine Walker, and to Chris LaMoreaux.

*Douglas Wilson*  
*Moscow, Idaho*

## On Secular Education

Who should control education, and what is a proper education? The two questions are interdependent.

In history, two answers have been proposed to the first question—the State, and the Church. In Europe, liberalism has insisted on the State, and seeks to secularize education. Through this it means to wrest education from the control of Catholicism. Liberals see clearly that under Catholic control there will be no true freedom in education. But, as they also insist on secularizing the State, their idea of a free education is of one devoid of religion. They separate mental from spiritual culture. Thus they conclude that education must be godless in order to be free.

The Catholic Church has herself to blame for this—she claims that she alone is Christian. Independent minds reply, “Well, then Christianity is evil.” If Catholic education were the only Christian education possible, freemen would have to reject Christian education. Consider: If individual judgment is sin; if the teacher is a real priest; if his teaching is infallible; if the real end of culture is to enslave the soul to a priesthood with a foreign head; if that head is absolutely superior to secular authorities, education based on these tenets will bring about civil slavery. It is not strange that men seeking civil liberty spurn it.

The mistake lies in confusing church education with *Christian* education. Let the Scripture be heard: “The kingdom of God is within you.” It consists, not in a greedy hierarchy, but in the rule of truth. The clergy are not to be lords over God’s people, but only “ministers by whom we believe.”

The church has no penalties other than spiritual penalties. It touches no man’s civil rights. Its only other function is to teach, and its teaching only binds so far as the layman’s own conscience responds to the Word of God as it is declared.

Now it is the church's duty to instruct parents how God would have them rear their children, and enforce the duty by spiritual sanctions; but there its official power ends. It does not usurp *the doing* of the important task it instructs the parents to do.

As a Christian private man, the minister lends to other parents his knowledge and example to help them in their work. But all this constitutes no danger either to spiritual or religious liberty.

So it would be good for the modern liberal to pause and ask whether he secures anything by this transfer of educational responsibility from the Church to the State? Does he point to the results of Catholic teaching? There we do see a spurious and shallow scholarship, along with an enslaved and morbid conscience, which dares not even wish to break its fetters. There is also the insatiable greed of the hierarchy for influence and money. The picture is sufficiently repulsive.

But are only Catholic churchmen grasping? Are not all humans depraved? Isn't it essentially the same in all men? Then why are we surprised when churchmen act in a similar way to other men, when subjected to the same temptations? The modern liberal should be the last man to overlook this truth; he is already skeptical of all professions of spiritual principles in clergymen. He is already prone to ascribe secular motives. He should therefore be consistent, and expect the demagogue to show a misguided ambition exactly like the priests. What is the churchman but a ghostly demagogue? The demagogue is but the priest at the altar of Money.

Does not the liberal pervert that other educating agency, the press, just as violently as the Jesuit does the school? If he comes to control the State, and the State assumes responsibility for education, there is therefore a great risk that the education of youth will be perverted to serve an ideological faction. This will

occur by the hateful means of filling their minds with error and passion in place of truth and right. The result is despotism of a faction instead of a pope. One may be as bad as the other.

If the State in America becomes the educator, education must be secularized totally. In theory, our State is the institution for accomplishing secular justice. It has absolutely severed itself from all religions equally. It has pledged itself that no man's civil rights shall be modified, or equality diminished, because of his religion, or lack of one. It has forbidden the establishment of any religion by law, and the imposition of any burden, for religious reasons, on any.

Now the public school teacher is an official of the State, and teaches by that authority. All school officials derive their authority from State laws. Therefore all their functions are truly State actions—as those of the sheriff in hanging, or the judge in sentencing a murderer. The school fund, raised by taxation, is the common and equal property of the people.

But Americans are divided among many religions, so that money ought no more to be used in schools to teach one religion in preference to the others, than in a church establishment.

Once, in states like Connecticut, the population was so homogenous, and the dissidents so few in number, that the dominant religion could be taught on the state's account without any protest loud enough to be inconvenient. But the mixture of our people, and especially the strength and audacity of Catholicism, now makes all this very different.

Catholics make an effective point when they argue that the State must not use the people's money to teach using the King James Version, which they, a part of the people, believe to be heretical.

Zealous Protestants, usually zealous advocates of public schools, try to refute this. But would they assent to the teaching of *their* children, with their money, a version which says:



“Except ye do penance ye shall all likewise perish?” They exclaim: “That is an erroneous version, while the King James is faithful.” Theologically that is doubtless true. But shall the State be appointed to judge whether that proposition is true?

In the public arena, our commitment is to respect the religious views of Catholics, precisely as we require them to respect ours. Suppose then, some day, in as large a majority in some state as Protestants are in New England, they attempted to force the study of a Catholic version of the Bible in public schools? Unless we admit that our might makes right, we ought not to inflict such wrongs on the Jews, Moslems, atheists, and Buddhists among us, simply because they are still few in number.

It is sought to parry this conclusion this way: While all religions are equal, and no one established, the State is not an atheistic institution. It must ground itself in the will of God, which is the standard of all rights. The State is an ethical institution, and it exists for ethical ends. Therefore it enforces the Sabbath, punishes blasphemy, etc. The State, while not establishing one religion to the disadvantage of others, ought to teach the divine truths common to all, by the nonsectarian use of the Bible.

But whether this be the just basis of a commonwealth or not, our states do not openly acknowledge it. Secondly, the question is over what version to use, among other competing ones. Because of this, the question of which version to use raises sectarian issues.

Third, we do not believe, any more than these reasoners, that the State can be atheistic. It is an ethical institution, and the divine will is the only valid ethical rule. But the State finds its theistic basis in natural theology. The proof is that pagan States, resting only on a natural theism, were valid, and rightfully possessed the allegiance even of Christians (Rom. 13:5). The evasion therefore is futile.

But whatever the logic of the question, the actual result is certain. The Catholics will inevitably carry the point, as they have already done in many places. That they will triumph everywhere else that they care to try is plain from the growing timidity of the evangelicals, the poverty of the compromises they offer, and the spreading indifference of the masses to the value of biblical teaching.

In fact, given American premises, the evangelicals have no plea but a pious appeal to prejudice. Sooner or later, the logical considerations, which are so clear, must assert their force. The difficulty of the problem can be seen in the fact that it troubles other free governments, such as Britain and Holland.

Given public education, there are four possible solutions to the problem:

The first is the unjust one of forcing the religion of the majority on the minority.

The second is what is called in Great Britain the plan of "concurrent endowments." Each denomination may have its own schools endowed by the State, and teach its own religion in it along with secular learning. This is virtually the plan by which New York Catholics have been partially appeased. It is justly rejected by Protestants everywhere, for a number of reasons.

First, it offers no solution except where the several denominations are large enough to sustain a school for each in the same vicinity. Second, the State has no right to assert the equal value of opposing creeds, the truth of one of which may imply the positive falsehood of another. Third, the State has no right to indicate of either of the creeds that it is, or is not, true and valuable. Fourth, Protestantism is more promotive of thrift and wealth than the erroneous creeds. Consequently, a given number of Protestants will pay more school-tax than the same number of those in error, so that this plan uses a part of their money to

foster creeds they conscientiously believe mischievous. Fifth, it gives to error a financial and moral support beyond what it would receive from the spontaneous zeal of its adherents. And last, it disunites the population by training youth in hostile religious camps. Irish and American Catholics have professed to approve because they gain by the plan. But who dreams that if they were in the majority they would be willing to see “good Catholic money” expended in teaching Protestant heresy?

The third plan proposes to give nonsectarian religious instruction in the first hour of the day, while parents who dissent from it are allowed to detain their children from school until that hour is passed. This amounts to establishing a religion and using the people’s money to teach it, but permitting dissent without any other penalty than the taxation for a religious purpose which the taxpayer condemns. That is to say, it places the matter where England places her established religion, since the “Toleration Act” of William and Mary relieved dissenters of penal pains for absence from the Anglican churches.

But the thing Americans claim is liberty and not toleration. They deny the State’s right to select a religion, as the true and useful one, for anybody, willing or unwilling. Those who dissent from the selected religion deny that the State may thus expend the people’s money as a bait to induce careless or erroneous parents to submit their children to the inculcation of error.

The only other alternative is to secularize the teaching in public schools completely, limiting it to matters merely secular. The parents or the Church are left to supplement it with such religious teaching as they may please, or none. Some Christians, driven by the difficulty which public schools create, adopt this conclusion. The larger number, notwithstanding the difficulty, reject it with energy. Let us see whether this plan is either possible or admissible.

This is really the vital question, but it cannot be discussed until we agree what education is, and remove deceptive misconceptions of it.

It is properly the whole man or person that is educated, but the main subject of the work is the spirit. Education is the nurture and development of the whole man for his proper end. That end must be conceived rightly in order to understand the process, and even man's earthly end is predominantly moral.

If dexterity in any art, as in the handling of printer's type, a musket, or a power-loom, were education, its secularization might be both possible and proper. Is not a confusion here the source of most of the argument in defense of that public education?

For instance, "Why may not the State teach reading and writing without any religious bias? Why not do it as the mechanic teaches his apprentices filing, planing or hammering?" *Because dexterity in an art is not education.*

The latter nurtures a soul, the other only drills a sense-organ or muscle; the one has a mechanical end, the other a moral purpose. This answer cannot be met by saying, "Let it then be agreed that the State is only teaching dexterity in letters."

The State refuses to be understood this way. It claims to *educate*. This can be seen in the universal argument of the advocates of public education. It assumes that the State has the right and duty of providing that the young citizens shall be competent to their responsibility as citizens. But this responsibility is *ethical* in nature.

Again, if the State professed to bestow mere dexterity, and not an education, equity would require the bestowal of more than ability in letters. All other useful arts would have to be included. The children would have an equal right to be taught the other bread-winning arts, and the government would have embraced the wildest communism. No, the State cannot adopt

this evasion. Unless she says that she educates, she can do nothing.

It should also be remarked here that the arts of reading and writing are rather means of education than education itself, and not necessarily the most effective means. As Macaulay showed, in answering Dr. Johnson, the unlettered part of the Athenians were, in some respects, highly educated. We also see many people, who are literate, still uneducated.

So is a really secularized education either possible, or admissible?

1. Before ours, no people of any age, religion, or civilization, has ever thought so. Against the present attempt, right or wrong, stands the whole common sense of mankind. Pagans, Catholics, Moslems, Greeks and Protestants have all rejected any education not grounded in religion as absurd and wicked.

One instance can be seen in the controversy over the Girard Will. It required, in order to exclude Christianity from a college, that no minister should ever enter its walls. Mr. Webster argued against the will in this way: the trust it proposed to create was so opposed to all civilized jurisprudence, as to make it outside the law, and therefore void. So formidable did the point seem to lawyers, that the defense attorney, Mr. Horace Binney, went to England to ransack the British laws of trusts. It was in urging this point that Mr. Webster uttered the memorable words:

In what age, by what sect, where, when, by whom, has religious truth been excluded from the education of youth? Nowhere. Never! Everywhere, and at all times, it has been regarded as essential. It is of the essence, the vitality of useful instruction.

This was not the assertion of Mr. Webster, the politician, but of the learned lawyer, face to face with able opponents. He

was making one of the most responsible forensic efforts of his life. He knew that he was uttering the weighty voice of history and jurisprudence.

Let another witness be heard, of equal learning and superior character. John B. Minor spoke to this issue:

It must be acknowledged to be one of the most remarkable phenomena of our perverted humanity, that among a Christian people, and in a Protestant land, such a discussion [whether the education of youth may be secularized] should not seem as absurd as to inquire whether schoolrooms should be located under water or in dark caverns! The Jew, the Moslem, the follower of Confucious, and of Brahma, each and all are careful to instruct the youth of their people in the tenets of the religions they profess, and are not content until, by direct and reiterated teaching, they have been made acquainted with at least the outline of the books which contain, according to their beliefs, the revealed will of God. Why are Christians so indifferent to such an obvious duty, which is so obviously recognized by Jew and pagan?

We are attempting therefore an absolute novelty. But may not the tree be already known by its fruits? State education among Americans tends to be entirely secularized. What is the result?

In this country, there is a general revolt from the Christian faith, even though the country is full of churches, preachers, and a redundant Christian literature.

And what has prepared so many for the dreary absurdities of materialism? Why do the journals which seek a national circulation think it their interest to affect irreligion? Why so many lamentations over public and popular corruptions?



One who notes the current of opinion sees that the wisest are full of misgivings about the fruits of our present methods of public education. As an example, let us take these words. Governor Rice of Massachusetts “lifted up a warning voice, with respect to the inadequacy and perils of our modern system of one-sided education, which supposed it could develop manhood and good citizenship out of mere brain culture.”

2. True education is, in one sense, a spiritual process. It is the nurture of a soul. Education is the nurture of a spirit which is rational and moral, in which conscience is the regulative and imperative faculty. The proper purpose of conscience, even in this world, is moral.

But God is the only Lord of the conscience; this soul is his miniature likeness. His will is the source of its obligations. Likeness to him is its perfection, and religion is the science of the soul’s relations to God. Let these statements be placed together, and the theological and educational processes appear so related that they cannot be separated.

It is for this reason that the common sense of mankind has always invoked the guidance of the minister of religion for the education of youth. In India it is the Brahmin, in Turkey the Imam, in Jewry the Rabbi, and in Christian lands the pastor. In the same way, the sacred books have always been the principal textbooks. The only exception in the world is that which Rome has made for herself by the intolerable abuse of her powers.

The soul is spiritually indivisible. Those powers, which we name as separate faculties, are only different modes of functioning. The central power is still one. From these truths it would appear that the soul cannot be successfully cultivated by patches. We cannot have the intellectual workman polish it at one place, and the spiritual workman at another. A succession of objects may be presented to the soul, to evoke and discipline its several powers; yet the unity of the being would seem to necessitate a unity in its successful education.

It is Christian concepts which are most stimulating and ennobling to the soul. He who omits them from his teaching is robbed of the right arm of his strength. Where shall he get such a definition of virtue as is presented in the revealed character of God? Where so ennobling a picture of benevolence as that presented in Christ's sacrifice for his enemies? Can the conception of the interstellar spaces so expand the mind as the thought of an infinite God, an eternal existence, and an everlasting destiny?

Every line of true knowledge must find its completeness as it converges on God, just as every beam of daylight leads the eye to the sun. *If religion is excluded from our study, every process of thought will be arrested before it reaches its proper goal.* The structure of thought must remain a truncated cone, with its proper apex lacking.

3. If secular education is to be made consistently and honestly non-Christian, then all its more important branches must be omitted, or they must be mutilated and falsified, which is far worse than absolute omission. The instructor has to teach history, cosmogony, psychology, ethics, and the laws of nations. How can he do it without saying anything favorable or unfavorable about the beliefs of evangelical Christians, Catholics, Socinians, Deists, pantheists, materialists, or fetish worshippers, who all claim equal rights under American institutions? His teaching will indeed be "the play of Hamlet, with the part of Hamlet omitted."

Shall secular education leave the young citizen totally ignorant of his own ancestry? How shall he learn the story of those struggles, through which Englishmen achieved those liberties which the colonies inherited, without understanding the fiery persecutions of the Protestants under "Bloody Mary?" How shall the sons of the Huguenots in New York, Virginia, or Carolina know why their fathers left beautiful France, to hide

themselves in the Northern snows or the malarious woods of the South? Shall they read nothing of the violation of the “Edict of Nantes,” the “Dragonnades,” and the wholesale massacre of St. Bartholomew’s day, in honor of which an “infallible” predecessor of the pope sang *Te Deum*s and struck medals? If the physicist attempts to go back farther into man’s history, can he give the genesis of earth and man, without indicating whether Moses or Huxley is his prophet?

Can the science of moral obligation be established without reference to God? Do we not need to ask whether or not His will defines all human duty?

Can an ethnologist settle the rights of nature and nations without affirming or denying with the apostle that from “one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” (Acts 17:26)?

How much of the noblest literature must be excluded if this plan is to be consistently carried out? The public school teacher must not mention to his pupil Shakespeare, nor Bacon, nor Milton, nor Macaulay. The censorship of free democracy will be far more stringent than that of despotic Rome!

But it is not necessary to multiply these examples. They show that *Christian truths and facts are so woven into the warp and woof of the knowledge of Americans, that they constitute a beneficial and essential part of our civilization.* The public school teacher who impartially avoids either the affirmation or denial of them must reduce his teaching to the bare giving of scanty rudiments. Such rudiments are, as we have seen, not knowledge, but the mere signs of knowledge.

Someone may say that this is an exaggeration. Why can’t a teacher just present secular subject matter, without maiming either his subject or Christianity?

If his teaching is more than dabbling in some corner of education, it will be found to be tacitly anti-Christian. Overt

assaults are not made, but there is a studied avoidance which is in effect hostile. There can be no neutral position between these two extremes, which have a “great gulf fixed” between them.

4. With regard to right human action, the will and the conscience must be purified and enlightened. To enhance the vigor of the soul’s other actions by training is nothing but superfluous mischief. If in a ship the compass is broken and the pilot is blind, it is better that there should not be a great force to move her machinery. The more energetic its motion, the greater is the likelihood the ship will speedily be upon the breakers. Surely this is sufficient to show the reflecting mind that right moral instruction cannot be separated at any point, or for any time, from intellectual training, without great mischief being done.

One small but very obvious application of this truth is to the discipline of the school itself. No training of any faculty takes place without some government. On what moral basis shall the teacher who wholly suppresses all appeal to religion rest that authority which he must exercise in the classroom? He will find it necessary to say to the pupil, “Be diligent. Be obedient. Do not lie.” This must be done so the student may acquire his secular knowledge. *But on whose authority? By what standard?*

There is but one ground of moral obligation—the will of God. Among the people of this country the one who does not find the disclosure of that will in the Scriptures, most often finds it nowhere. But this teacher must not inculcate the teachings of this Bible. Therefore his mere might must make right—or else the might of the parent, or of the magistrate, to whose delegated authority he points. Or should his appeal be to the student’s self-interest? Will such government be wholesome for a youth’s soul?

When a student has grown he becomes a citizen. He comes under wider and more complex obligations. The purpose of the public schools is to equip him for this. The same question comes up again. *On what basis shall these duties rest?* As a man, it is presumable he will act as he was taught while a boy. It follows then that the grounds of obligation given to him in school should be the ones he is to recognize in adult life. In the public school, a non-Christian standard alone could be given to him. He cannot be expected now to rise to any better, although he may sink to a lower standard, seeing that what was given to him earlier had no foundation under it.

What is the result? Young Americans are to assume their responsibilities with pagan morals, for these are just what human reason attains without revelation from God. Will this suffice to sustain American institutions?

One may say that natural theism may deduce quite a high ethical code, as evidenced by ancient Greek philosophy. A man who rightly understands the data of his consciousness may be an atheist, and even the atheist might find in them some proof that conscience ought to govern. But this is not how it works out in practice. Let us begin to legislate for people as they ought to be, instead of how they are, and we shall have a fine card-castle!

In fact, Americans, taken as we find them, who do not get their moral restraints from the Bible, have none. If, in our moral training of the young, we give up the "Thus says the Lord," we shall have no hold left. The training which does not base duty on Christianity is, for us, practically immoral.

If testimony is needed, let us quote Dr. Griffin, "To educate the mind of a bad man without correcting his morals is to put a sword into the hands of a maniac."

John Locke spoke to the same point. "It is virtue, then, direct virtue, which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in education. If virtue is not settled in the student, to the

exclusion of all vicious habits, all the education in the world will do nothing but make the student worse or more dangerous.”

Let Dr. Francis Wayland be heard. “Intellectual cultivation may easily exist without the existence of virtue or love of right. In this case its only effect is to stimulate desire; and this, unrestrained by the love of right, must eventually overturn the social fabric which it at first erected.”

And last, we should consider what Washington said in his farewell address. He taught us that the virtue of the citizens is the only basis for social safety, and that the Christian religion is the only adequate basis for that virtue.

But is not mental culture *in itself* elevating? It is hard for us to give up this conceit, because up to this point education has been more or less Christian. The minister has been the American schoolmaster. But are not the educated the more elevated? Yes, this is true for the reason just given. There is also another. *It is not that their mental culture made them seek higher morals, but their (and their parents’) higher morals made them seek mental culture.* We are prone to put the cart before the horse. Again we must turn to the evidence.

Knowledge does not rule the heart. If anything does, it is conscience. Mere knowledge, without the fear of God, makes desire grow faster than discretion.

Sir Henry Bulwer put it this way: “I do not place much confidence in the philosopher who pretends that the knowledge which develops the passions is an instrument for their suppression, or that where there are the most desires there is likely to be the most order, and the most abstinence in their gratification.”

The soul should grow symmetrically. If the branches of a tree grow while the roots (without actual disease) stand still, the first gale would blow it over because of the disproportion of its parts.



5. We need the best men to teach our children. But the best are true Christians, who carry their religion *into everything*. Such men cannot bind themselves to be teachers of precious souls for whom Christ died, and make no effort to save them.

Therefore the tendency must be towards throwing public schools into the hands of halfhearted Christians, or of contemptuous unbelievers. Can such people even be trusted with an important secular task? Railroads persist in breaking the Sabbath; so they must exclusively employ profane Sabbath-breakers or compromised professors of religion. What is the consequence? They are plagued with negligent officials, drunken engineers, and defaulting cashiers.

So then our public schools will fall into the hands of teachers who will not even teach secular learning honestly. Money will be wasted, and the schools will become corrupting examples to their own pupils of slighted work and abused trusts.

6. To every Christian citizen, the most conclusive argument against a secular education is contained in his own creed concerning human responsibility. According to this, obligation to God involves all of every man's being and actions. Even the best attempts will be judged a shortcoming. "The ploughing of the wicked is sin." The intentional end to which our actions are directed determines their moral complexion supremely.

Our Savior has also declared that there is no moral neutrality—he that is not with Him is against Him. Combined with this, consider that every man is born in a state of alienation from God. Practical enmity and atheism are the natural outgrowth of this disposition. The only remedy for this natural disease of man's spirit is gospel truth. The comparison of these truths will make it perfectly plain that a non-Christian training must be literally an anti-Christian training.

This is the conclusive argument. The rejoinder is attempted. "Don't Christians hold this theology as church members, and

not as citizens? Didn't you yourself argue that the State is not an evangelical agent, and its proper business is not to convert souls from original sin?"

True, but neither does it have the right to become an anti-evangelical agency, and resist the work of the spiritual commonwealth. While the State does not authorize the theological beliefs of the Christian citizens, neither does it have a right to war against them. While we have no right to ask the State to propagate our theology, we have a right to demand that it shall not oppose it. *And to educate souls in this way is to oppose it.* This is because a non-Christian training is an anti-Christian training.

Another contrary argument may be brought up. "This result, if evil, will not be lessened by the State's ceasing to teach at all, for then the training of youth will be, so far as she is concerned, equally non-Christian."

The answer is that it is one thing to tolerate a wrong done by someone over whom we do not have lawful control, and it is quite another to perpetrate that wrong ourselves. For the State to do what she ought to condemn in the godless parent (although she is not authorized to interfere) would be the sin of "framing mischief by a law." This is the very trait of a "throne of iniquity," with which the Lord cannot have fellowship.

Another objection is that if the State may govern and punish, which are moral functions, she may also teach. If we are prepared for the totalitarian idea of the State, which makes it the universal human institution, then we can conclude this. But should the State do *everything*, from mending a road and draining a marsh, up to supporting a religion?

But then consistency will add to public schools a government religion, a tax-supported clergy, a religious test for office, and the power of the State wielded to suppress theological as well as social error. Again, while secular ruling and punishing

are ethical functions, they are sufficiently grounded in the light of natural theism. But teaching is a spiritual function—in the sense defined. For teaching fallen and morally ruined individuals, natural theism is wholly inadequate, as seen by the state of pagan society.

Christian citizens are entitled by God (not by the State) to hold that the only teaching adequate for this fallen soul is the teaching of redemption. But of this the State, as such, knows nothing. As God's institute for realizing secular justice, she does know enough of moral right to praise those who do right, and to cause wrongdoers to be afraid.

The most plausible evasion is this: Because education is so comprehensive, why can't we have a "division of labor?" Let the State train the intellect, while the Christian parent and the Church train the conscience and heart, both in the home and the house of worship. This solution is one that many Christians find satisfactory. Of course such an arrangement would not be so bad as the neglect of the heart by both State and parent.

These objections have already been answered. Because conscience is the regulative faculty of all, the teacher who cannot deal with conscience cannot deal well with anything. Since the soul is indivisible, it cannot be equipped in different parts at different times and places, as a man might get his hat at one shop and his boots at another.

Because all truths converge towards God, the teacher who cannot name God must have fragmented teaching. He can only construct a truncated figure. In history, ethics, philosophy and jurisprudence, religious facts and propositions are absolutely inseparable from the subject at hand. The necessary discipline of a schoolroom and secular fidelity of teachers *require* religion.

And no person or institution has a right to seem to say to a responsible, immortal soul, "In this large, intellectual and ethical portion of your life you are entitled to be godless." The

public school must not even venture to disclaim that construction of its own activity to its own pupil. That disclaimer would itself be a religious inculcation!

But there is more. Why do people wish the State to interfere in education? The answer is that she has the power and the revenues to do it better. But then, unless her intervention is to be a cheat, her secular education must be a very impressive thing indeed. This means that its impression, which is to be non-Christian, according to the theory, will have a major effect in the youth's soul. This is to be counterbalanced by the feebler teaching which occurs in Sunday School.

The natural heart is carnal, and naturally inclines away from the gospel. To the young person, inspired by his studies, his teacher is often like a god, and according to this plan he must be to his enthusiastic young student wholly a heathen deity. His Christian side, if there is one, must not be revealed to the worshipper! If this happens how pale and cold will the infrequent ray of the gospel appear when it falls on him on Sundays! In a word, to the successful pupil under an efficient teacher, the school is his world. *Make that godless, and his life is made godless.*

We ask again, "Why may not the State save itself trouble by leaving all education to parents?" The answer that comes back to us is, "Because so many parents are too incapable or careless to be trusted with the task."

Evidently if most parents did the work well enough, the State would have no reason to meddle. But then the very reason for the public school's existence is this large class of negligent parents. But man is a carnal being, alienated from godliness. Therefore all those who neglect their children's mental training will also neglect their spiritual culture.

We must therefore expect that, in the very class which is the pretext for the State's intervention, the fatally one-sided

training she give will remain one-sided. She has no right to presume anything else. But someone may reply, "Isn't the church there to take up this job, neglected by both secularized public school and godless parent?"

The answer is that the secular school cannot claim the Church as an ally. Besides, if the Church is found sufficiently omnipresent, willing, and efficient, throughout the country, to be thus relied on, why will she not inspire in parents and individual philanthropists zeal enough to care for the whole education of youth? So again, the whole reason for the State's intervention would be gone.

But in fact the Church does not and cannot repair the mischief which her more powerful and rich rival performs. The secular State is giving, under the guise of a non-Christian education, an anti-Christian training.

It is also well known to practical men that public schools obstruct parental and philanthropic effort. Thus, parents who, if not meddled with, would follow the impulse of enlightened Christian neighbors, their natural guides, and create private schools for their children. The schools would be both primary and classical. But now they always stop at the primary. "The school tax must be paid anyhow, and it is heavy. This is all we can do."

In the past, children of poor parents who showed aspiration for learning found their opportunity for classical tuition near their homes, in the innumerable private schools created by parental interest and public spirit. Kindly neighborhood charity never allowed such deserving youths to be arrested for the mere lack of tuition. Because the best men are natural leaders of their neighbors, they would draw a large part of the children of the class next them upward into the private schools created for their own families. These, for the same reason, were sure to be Christian schools.

But the result of public education is to bring a larger number of children into primary schools, and reduce illiteracy somewhat—which is a great delight to shallow philanthropists. But the number of youths well educated above the mere rudiments, and especially of those brought under daily Christian training, is diminished.

So the actual and consistent secularization of education should not be tolerated. But nearly all public men and preachers declare that the public schools are the glory of America. They are a finality, and in no event to be surrendered. *We have seen that their complete secularization is logically inevitable. Christians must prepare themselves then, for the following results: All prayers, catechisms, and Bibles will ultimately be driven out of the schools.*

But this will not satisfy the Catholics, who obstinately—and if their religion were correct, correctly—insist that education shall be Christian for their children. This power over the hopes and fears of the demagogues will secure for them what Protestants cannot consistently ask for—a separate endowment out of the common funds.

Rome will enjoy therefore, in relation to Protestantism, a great advantage in the race of propagandism. *Humanity always finds out, sooner or later, that it cannot get on without a religion, and it will take a false one in preference to none.* Infidelity and practical ungodliness will become increasingly prevalent among Protestant young people, and our churches will have a more difficult contest for growth, if not for existence.

Perhaps American Protestants might be led, not to abandon, but to revise their opinions concerning education. They could recall the conditions under which the theory of public education came to be first accepted in this country. It came about in the colonies which at the same time held firmly to a union of Church and State.



The Massachusetts and Connecticut colonies, for instance, honorable pioneers in public education in this country, were decidedly theocratic in their constitution. The Reformed religion was established by law.

It was the same in all the Protestant countries of Europe, whose successful example is cited. Scotland and Prussia, for example, have the Protestant faith as an established religion. This church/state union and public primary education have always been parts of one consistent system in the minds of their rulers in Church and State.

A secular education, such as that which will be the result of our public school system, would have been indignantly repudiated by the Winthrops and Mathers, the Knoxs, Melvilles, and Chalmers. It is even safe to say that the Tholucks and Bismarcks, who are pointed to as precedents and models, would condemn such a thing.

Is it exactly candid for public school advocates to quote the opinions and acts of all these great men, for something that is quite different than what they advocated? John Knox, for example, urged the primary education of every child in Scotland by the State. But it was because the State he had helped to reconstruct in Scotland was clothed with a recognized power of teaching the Reformed religion (through the allied Church), and because it was therefore able, in teaching the child to read, also to teach it the Scriptures and the Assembly's Catechism.

If Knox had seen a severance of Church and State (which he would have denounced as wicked and paganish) leading to a secular education, which trained the intellect without the conscience or heart, his heroic tongue would have given no uncertain sound.

We see then that wise and good men have adopted and successfully worked this system. But they did so only for communities which united Church and State, and mental and spiritual training. The question for candid consideration therefore

is, "What modifications should the public education theory receive, when it is imported into commonwealths whose civil governments have absolutely secularized themselves, making the union of the secular and spiritual powers illegal and impossible?"

The answer may perhaps be found by going back to a first principle hinted at in the outset of this discussion. Is the education of children either a civic or an ecclesiastical function?

Is it not properly a domestic and parental function? First, we read in the Scriptures that God ordained the family by the union of one woman to one man, in one flesh, for life, for the declared end of "seeking a godly seed." Does not this imply that God looks to parents, in whom the family is founded, as the responsible agents of this result?

In the Fifth Commandment, He has connected the child, not with either presbyter or magistrate, but with the parents. This of course confers on them the adequate and the prior authority. This argument appears again in the very order of the historical genesis of the Family and State, as well as of the visible Church. The Family was established *first*.

Parents at the outset were the only social heads existing. The right rearing of children by them was necessary for the right creation of the other two institutions. It therefore appears that parental authority over children could not have come by delegation by either the State or the visible Church, any more than the water in a fountain comes from its reservoir below.

Secondly, how God works in the course of nature shows where the power and duty of educating are deposited. God has determined that the parents decide in what status the child shall begin his adult career. The son inherits the fortune, the social position, the responsibility, or the ill-name of his father.

Third, God has provided the parents social and moral influences so unique, so extensive, that no other earthly power, or all others together, can be a substitute for them in

fashioning the child's character. The example at home, armed with the venerable authority of the father and the mother, repeated continually at home, reinforced by filial reverence, ought to have the most potent force over character. This unique power God has guarded by a natural affection, the strongest and most unselfish which remains in the breast of fallen man. Until the magistrate can feel a love, and be nerved by it to a self-denying care and toil, equal to that of a father and a mother, he can show no reason for assuming any parental function.

The best argument here is the heart's own instinct. No parent can fail to resent the intrusion of any authority between his conscience and convictions, and the soul of his child. If the father conscientiously believes that his own creed is true and righteous and obligatory before God, then he must intuitively regard the intrusion of any other power between him and his child, for the purpose of causing the rejection of that creed, as a usurpation. The freedom of mind of the child alone, when he is an adult, can justly interpose. If this usurpation is made by the visible church, it is in the direction of Catholicism. If done by the magistrate, it is in the direction of despotism.

It may be objected that this theory makes the parent sovereign during the child's mental and moral minority. This affects the moulding of the child's opinions and character, and because the parent is fallible, and may teach his child wrongly, there ought to be a superior authority to superintend and intervene.

The answer to this is that the supreme authority must be placed *somewhere*. God has indicated that, on the whole, no place is so safe for it as the hands of the parent, who has the supreme love for the child and the best opportunities.

But may parents nevertheless neglect or pervert the power? *Yes, but does the State never neglect and pervert its powers?* With the lessons of history to teach us the horrible and almost universal abuses of power in the hands of civil rulers, that question

is conclusive. In the case of an unjust or godless State, the evil would be universal and sweeping. There is no doubt that God has deposited the duty in the safest place.

The competitions of the State and the Church for power over education have been so engrossing that we have almost forgotten the parent, the third and rightful competitor. And now many look at the parental claim almost contemptuously. Because the spheres of Church and State are so much wider and more populous than that of the parent, they are prone to regard it as every way inferior. But have we not seen that the smaller circle is, in fact, the most original and best authorized of the three?

Will any thinking man admit that he derives his right to marry and to be a father from the permission of the State? There is an illusion of State authority here because civic constitutions confer on the State certain police functions concerning marriage and families. In the same way there are laws concerning certain ecclesiastical belongings. But what Protestant concedes from this that his religious rights were either conferred, or can be rightfully taken away, by civil authority?

The truth is, that God has immediately and authoritatively instituted three organisms for man on earth—the State, the visible Church, and the Family. These are coordinate in their rights and mutual independence. *The State or Church has no more right to invade the parental sphere than the parent to invade theirs.* The right distribution of all duties and power between the three circles would be the complete solution of that problem of good government which has never yet been solved with full success.

What is vital to a true theory of human rights? The real independence of the smallest but highest realm, that of the parent, must be respected. Has it not been proved that the direction of education is one of its prerogatives?

But does not the State's right to exist imply the right to secure all the conditions of its existence? Might not parents so pervert or neglect education as to rear a generation incompetent to preserve our civil institutions? Does not this give the State control over education?

The first answer is that it is not even a pretext for the State's invasion of the parental sphere any farther than the destructive neglect exists. That is, they must stimulate, or help, or compel the neglectful parents alone.

Secondly, precisely the same argument may authorize the State to intrude into the spiritual circle and establish and teach a religion. There is a sophism here. It is assumed that a particular form of civil institutions has a prescriptive right to perpetuate itself. It has none. This is the American approach—the people have an inherent right to change their institutions.

Did our republican fathers hold that any people ever have the right to subvert the moral order of society ordained by God and nature? Surely not. Here then is disclosed that distinction between the moral order and any particular civil order. This is so often overlooked. It is not true that the civil authority is entitled to shape a people to suit itself. The opposite is true; the people should shape the civil authority.

It is a maxim in political philosophy, as in mechanics, that when an organism is applied to a function for which it was not designed, it is injured and the function is done poorly. Consider a farmer who has a mill designed and well fitted to grind his meal. He resolves that it shall also thresh his sheaves. The result is wretched threshing, and a crippled mill.

I repeat, God designed the State to be the organ for securing secular justice. When it turns to teaching or preaching it repeats the farmer's experience.

Government powerfully affects the national character by the way in which it performs its proper functions. If the

administration is equitable, pure and free, it exalts the people. But this is by indirect influence. This is all it can do well. The rest of any national elevation (a result which every good man must desire), must come from other agencies. We should look to the works of Almighty Providence. We should seek the fruitful ideas and heroic acts with which God inspires the great men whom He sovereignly gives to the nations He designs to bless. We must also seek the energy of divine Truth and the Christian virtues, which are seen first in individuals, next in families, and last in visible churches.

Let us suppose that both State and Church recognize the parent as the educating power. Suppose further that they assume towards the parent a restrained, but helpful attitude—instead of one of domination. The State should encourage individual and voluntary efforts by holding the impartial shield of legal protection over all property which may be devoted to education. It should encourage all private efforts, and it could aid those whose poverty and misfortunes disable them from properly rearing their own children.

In this way the problems concerning religion in public schools would be solved. The State is not the responsible creator of the schools, but rather the parents. Our educational system would have a less mechanical symmetry, but it would be more flexible, more practical, and much more useful.







