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Editor's Note: This paper was given in response to Dr. Glenn's presentation.

Charles Glenn: A Response



by **Nicholas Lantinga**

Perhaps the central political theoretical question underlying the relationship between education and politics is the question of pluralism. How do people who disagree over profoundly important matters live together? We need to recognize that this question of pluralism always rests on an authoritative vision, which compels a political community toward pluralism or uniformity.

Dr. Glenn's fine comparative study, "Historical Background to Conflicts over Religion in Public Schools," does us all a great service by describing the deeply conflicted attempts to situate Christianity within the public-legal orders found in Europe and North America. I believe he adequately relates these various attempts to the particular histories of state education policies. However, I believe that more can be gained by

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connecting these various brief histories to the broader debate over religious pluralism. This long political-philosophical debate is not foreign to Dr. Glenn's concern but is the broader framework of meaning in which the particular debate resides. I believe that recalling this larger frame of reference can help us (1) better understand the variations in current education policy, (2) better understand the various histories of education policy within Western Europe and North America, and (3) direct our efforts toward further educational justice within North America.

I will briefly outline the contours of the long debate and then conclude by noting some ways in which this approach strengthens Dr. Glenn's own effort to understand some of the paradoxes of contemporary education policy.

Constantine's fourth-century adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire lasted, in one form or another, until Europe's sixteenth-century wars of religion. After the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and finally after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the authoritative vision of Pope and Emperor was forever divided among the many new states. This division did not mean that religious orthodoxy no longer mattered to Lutherans, Calvinists, Catholics, and Anabaptists. Rather, seventeenth-century Europe settled on the formula *cuius regio, eius religio*—"whose reign, his religion" (Lindberg 247)—as a practical answer to the question of pluralism.

After Westphalia, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, among others, re-examined the limited rights afforded religious dissenters. Hobbes and Rousseau opposed religious orthodoxy as lethal to the political community. Hobbes placed all under the sovereignty of a Leviathan state, a "mortall God," and Rousseau sought to coalesce all citizens into a General Will reinforced by civil religion. Locke, on the other hand, sought to

extend religious liberty to all but atheists, Papists, and “Mahumetans.” However different these thinkers may appear, they all redefined Christianity as essentially private and otherworldly, in a word, Gnostic. Public life, as opposed to the private life of faith, would be rational and inter-subjective—that is, based on principles everyone agrees upon.

Notable dissenters included Edmund Burke in England and Groen Van Prinsterer in Holland. Burke based his opposition to enlightenment-inspired revolution on English customs, which he believed to be blessed by God, and Van Prinsterer looked for scriptural norms. Both recognized the dangers of radically humanist first principles for civil society. That is, both recognized that terror would result from imposing a radically Promethean set of principles upon society.

Against Hobbes and Rousseau, America’s founders crafted their own response to the question of pluralism. The solution, as Madison wrote in Federalists 10 and 51, was to promote a proliferation of factions within an ever-expanding commercial republic. (Looking back to Lloyd Den Boer’s response to Dr. Glenn’s paper, I would point out that the ideology of the common school is *opposed* to the federalist tradition of controlling disunity through the proliferation of factions.) The Federalists seem to have created not so much a solution as a way to put off the question as long as possible. For a couple of reasons, I think that the time is up on this approach. A growing number of American Christians are increasingly insistent that their whole life reflects their Christian commitment. Further, Christians are increasingly suspicious of liberal claims about public neutrality. We are rightly alarmed when the Supreme Court declares that central to being human is a “right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (Casey v. Planned Parenthood). This claim sounds rather like theology—and bad theology at that.

What does this brief overview mean for Dr. Glenn’s paper? First, at least in four countries surveyed there seem to be connections between the history of education policy regarding religion and the Enlightenment’s final solution for religious liberty. In France, Rousseau’s enlightenment plan continues to prevail, as the recent decision

regarding the *hijab* demonstrates. In England, a rather Burkean traditionally religious organization of the schools appears to suffice—barely. As increasingly large numbers of Muslims take up residence, they add pressures that England’s own national tradition of religious tolerance will likely prove unable to accommodate. In the United States, militant secularists and Christians, both descendants of America’s founding, continue to battle for the soul of the Supreme Court. This battle has become so fierce in part because the Supreme Court’s religion jurisprudence is nearly devoid of guiding principles. It can no longer simply exclude religious viewpoints because the liberal swindle of public rationality has been revealed and important segments of the population reject it. Thus, *the Supremes* cast about, aimlessly contradicting precedence until the only thing guiding current decisions seems to be the ability to cobble together five votes.

As justices look about for principles to guide public life, we might recommend the Dutch approach for a couple of reasons. First, in part because of the insights of Van Prinsterer, and later of Kuyper, the Dutch recognized and rejected the liberal swindle. That is, the Dutch did not allow the myth of viewpoint neutrality to privilege one set of schools over another. In that sense we would do well to abandon such terms as “public” and “private” as they refer back to an authoritative vision that restricts pluralism to those who accept liberal premises. Second, the Dutch seem to have connected honest faith with pluralism. That is, they have recognized that forced faith is false faith. Because a true conversion to the gospel cannot be coerced by the state, Christians should seek a pluralist public-legal order where people of other faiths can nurture their own vision. The authoritative vision that gives rise to these principles is not neutral but rather exemplifies the ways in which orthodox Christian belief can move beyond liberals’ supposed goal of tolerance toward authentic religious freedom within education.

Works Cited

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