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# Pro Rege

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Volume 3 | Number 1

Article 4


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September 1974

## Whence and Whither: A Resume of Government-Education Relations in America

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### Recommended Citation

Van Dyke, Louis Y. (1974) "Whence and Whither: A Resume of Government-Education Relations in America," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 3: No. 1, 14 - 19.  
Available at: [http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol3/iss1/4](http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol3/iss1/4)

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A quarterly faculty publication of  
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

# WHENCE AND WHITHER: A Resumé of Government-Education Relations in America

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Numbers 23:18-24 contains the account of how Balaam was hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. Balaam, of course, could only speak the words that God had put into his mouth and Balaam's purported curse turned out to be a blessing instead. He marveled at what great things God had done for Israel, "What hath God wrought!" But his blessing ended with a prophecy. The people of Israel would not be content simply to rest where they were. Although they were a great people, they would become greater still. "Behold a people rearing up like a lioness, rampant like a lion; he will not couch till he devours the

prey and drinks the blood of the slain." Conquering, the Israelites would go on to conquer.

The advocates of Christian education may also justly marvel at "what God hath wrought." The Christian education movement has grown vigorously over the years. However, our task is not merely to count our blessings. We must also consider ways in which we can continue to be "rampant like a lion." As a prerequisite, we should investigate the past in order to understand how we got to the present so that we may intelligently deal with and plan for the future. Whence have we come in the history of education in America, and whither do

we go?

In colonial America, education in the Southern and middle colonies was private and vocational. In New England the Act of 1647 required each village of fifty houses or more to establish elementary schools and each village of 100 houses or more to establish secondary schools. The purpose of this law was to make certain that everyone was able to read the Bible, this being the surest way to ward off the wiles of the Devil. As a result, in New England an important precedent was established in combining state and religious interest in education. However, as religious orthodoxy waned in eighteenth-century United States, and as interest developed in pushing back the frontier, education became primarily a private concern.<sup>1</sup>

The American Revolution had no immediate effect on the schools. Education by and large still reflected the training for a gentleman as it had in the previous century. Not

In spite of how some of the Founding Fathers felt about the importance of education, the Federal Constitution says nothing about the matter. Several reasons might be suggested for this omission. For one, there was a lack of precedent. Free public education for all citizens had not been offered before. For another, in most states, education had for a long time been carried on either privately or by the churches. Finally, the Founding Fathers themselves had received their education in this manner and perhaps this caused them not even to think of education as a national responsibility.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, the Tenth Amendment, which is a kind of catch-all amendment, seemed to take care of the matter. "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively or to the people." It was generally understood that one of the powers reserved to the states was the responsi-

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all were happy with this situation, however. Noah Webster, the lexicographer, stated, "The constitutions are republican, and the laws of education are monarchical. The former extend the civil rights to every honest and industrious man; the latter deprive a large portion of the citizens of a most valuable heritage."<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson argued that political power was safest in the hands of the people, but that at the same time the people should be educated and informed. John Adams wanted leaders to provide liberally for the education of all classes.<sup>3</sup>

bility of providing for education. By conceding educational authority to the various states, the basis was laid for the state school systems that later developed.<sup>5</sup>

However, early nineteenth-century America was a time of *laissez-faire*. It was a time when people believed that the main, if not the only, function of government was to preserve the peace and to protect property. Not surprisingly, states did not wish to get involved in free public education. Responsibility for education should be met by parents, churches and philanthropic agencies.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, in the nineteenth century the United States contained a vigorous parochial school system. Lutherans maintained over 200 private schools by 1820. Episcopalians sponsored their own schools in a dozen states by 1865.<sup>7</sup>

As the nineteenth century wore on, chauvinistic nationalism manifested itself in Europe and also appeared in American speech and writing. The trend was to support one's own country and to look out for its interests at the expense of any and all other countries if necessary. This included an emphasis on, and an indoctrination into the desirability of one's own political and economic system. The obvious place to carry out this indoctrination was in the schools. In the United States the question was raised as to how a democratic government could preserve equality and the democratic system if it did not educate its youth in its own school system.<sup>8</sup> As one American educator put it, "Children are the raw material out of which we build our society through education. To a large extent children are helpless to escape the influences of their environment. They can be made evil or good. They can be turned into self-reliant, free people or into slaves."<sup>9</sup> The implications are obvious. The child is no longer considered as a subject to be educated, but as an object to be manipulated and indoctrinated in order to support the state.

This new demand in the latter part of the nineteenth century for a common public school was Protestant oriented even though the public schools were supposedly nonsectarian.<sup>10</sup> The development of this common school movement took place at a time when the country was virulently anti-Catholic. As the public school movement grew, the Catholics came in for increasing trouble, especially when popular opinion began to regard the public schools as fortresses against Catholic "heretics."<sup>11</sup> For example, when in 1840 Catholic Bishop John Hughes requested that New York state support a parochial school system with tax revenues, the New York State Legislature replied that, "no school. . . in which any religious sectarian doctrine or tenet shall be taught. . . shall receive any portion of the

school moneys to be distributed." Massachusetts affirmed in 1855 that ". . . money

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shall never be appropriated to any religious sect for maintenance. . . of its own schools." Illinois took the same stand in 1870. In fact, nearly every state enacted laws similar to those of Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup>

At the turn of the century, the problem was compounded by the arrival of many immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. These people were largely Catholic or Jewish in background and were far different in ethnic and cultural background from mainstream America. These immigrants posed a potential threat to Protestantism and to democracy. Howard B. Grose, in an article published in 1906 by the Young People's Missionary Movement, reflected the fears of most Americans and he posed a solution as well. "What effect has immigration had, and what is it likely to have, upon our national education policy? The parochial school is opposed to the public school; the parochial school is Roman, the public school American." Grose continued by quoting an unidentified source:

The supine bowing of the native element in our political parties to this foreign, domineering, un-American and denationalizing opposition to the state control of the education of the child for citizenship is in itself a menace. When we hear of public schools in America taught in German,

and Polish, instead of the language of Emerson and Longfellow, Lincoln and Grant, one feels like taking not Diogenes' lantern, but an Edison searchlight, and going about our streets to see if there be in all our cities a patriot. American patriotism must steadily and resolutely resist every Roman Catholic attack, open or covert upon our public school, every attempt to divert public moneys to sectarian purposes. This is vital to the preservation of our civil and religious liberty. For the immigrant children the public schools are the sluiceways into Americanism. When the stream of alien childhood flows through them it will issue into the reservoirs to national life with the Old World taints filtered out, and the qualities retained that make for loyalty and good citizenship. We shall have to look to our school boards, elevate them above party politics and the reach of graft, and elect upon them men and women instinct with the spirit of true Americanism, or see this mightiest agency of modern civilization diverted from its high mission to produce for the Republic an enlightened and noble manhood and womanhood.<sup>13</sup>

The schools, then set out to teach the immigrant American values and the American way of life. It was in this pulling and hauling between one group trying to establish the values of a single national identity (Americanism) and the other group insisting upon "a cultural pluralism based upon religious and ethnic diversity, that the relations between public and private education were hammered out."<sup>14</sup> During the period of strong nationalist feeling before, during and immediately after World War I, many attempts were made to restrict or abolish schools run by groups who were considered a threat to "Americanism."<sup>15</sup>

The high point of the drive toward conformity was reached in a law passed by the State of Oregon in 1922 requiring that all children between the ages of eight and six-

teen attend public schools. In order for all the children to become good citizens, they needed to have a common education. When children from diverse backgrounds were given a common education, bigotry and delinquency could most easily be prevented and patriotism could effectively be instilled.<sup>16</sup> The Federal Supreme Court, in the case, Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 1925, struck down the Oregon law. The majority opinion argued,

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.<sup>17</sup>

The United States Supreme Court in invalidating the Oregon law argued, in effect, that the official American attitude toward education must recognize American culture to be pluralistic rather than monistic. The Court also affirmed that the primary obligation to educate rests upon the shoulders of the parent. The Supreme Court took its argument from the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution which states that a person cannot be deprived of his life, liberty or property without due process of law. Parents had the liberty to educate their children in private or parochial schools. The Court recognized the right of the state to insist upon compulsory education and to regulate all schools reasonably, but as long as private schools met these reasonable standards these schools had the right to exist.<sup>18</sup>

It was at this juncture that our own school system began to grow and that our National Union of Christian Schools came into existence. We must thank God that He guided the affairs of men, and that by using the Constitution as a tool He created the climate that allowed our movement to grow and to prosper. Thus, it became possible for us to prevent our children from coming under the influence of

ipulated to serve political ends. We could also protect our children from the influence the state to become mere objects to be man-

"The 1920's marked the beginning of a new trend in education. From that time the Federal government has begun to play an increasing role in education."

of the Progressive school of education that sought to make the child an end in himself allowing him, in modern parlance, "to do his own thing." We could teach our children that God is Sovereign and that they are his creatures, not free and independent but as Paul says, "slaves of Jesus Christ."

The 1920's marked the beginning of a new trend in education. From that time the Federal government has begun to play an increasing role in education. The most probable defense for the constitutionality of Federal participation in education is Article I, Section 8 of the Federal Constitution. It states that Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, pay debts, and to provide for the common defense and general welfare. The argument goes that education comes under the heading of providing for the general welfare.

The precedent of Federal aid to education is as old as the Republic itself although the incidents of participation have increased greatly since World War II. For example:

1. The Land Ordinance of 1785--set aside one section of every township of public domain for the support of schools.

2. Morrill Land Grant Act, 1862--set aside 30,000 acres of public domain in each state for each Representative and Senator in

Congress for the establishment and support of Agricultural and Mechanical colleges.

3. Hatch Act, 1887--established agricultural experiment stations.

4. Smith-Lever Act, 1914--created the Agricultural Extension Service.

5. Smith-Hughes Act, 1917--provided for financing vocational programs in high schools.

6. Social Security Act, 1935--provided for the allocation of funds for vocational programs to rehabilitate the physically handicapped.

7. Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944--created the famous "G. I. Bill."

8. National Science Foundation, 1950--provided funds for programs in mathematics, foreign languages, science and personnel services.

9. Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965--provided funds for programs to help the disadvantaged develop library resources.

10. Higher Education Act, 1965, containing such provisions as Title III for summer school grants, and various interschool academic activities, and Title VI providing for purchase of educational equipment.

Some states are also giving some form of indirect aid. The state of Iowa has a tuition equalization fee for low income families who wish to send their children to private colleges. Minnesota allows private school children to ride public school busses, and Iowa has recently passed a law to the same effect.

The conclusion is evident that educational theory and educational freedom did not spring full-blown from the minds of the Founding Fathers. Rather, it is a developmental process. In other words, educational rights and privileges are something that we must keep working at. We must not merely marvel and rejoice at the great things that God has done for us. The educational policies of the various states have been developed over the past century or so. Generally, these policies have hardened and are not easily changed. Furthermore, these policies reflect a lack of sympathy for the private school. On the other hand, Federal policy is still in the process of

formulation and is still comparatively flexible. Now would be the time for Christians to become active in government policy planning agencies in order to lend direction. The National Union of Christian Schools should also continue its systematic appeal for tax relief and/or tax support for private and parochial schools. We should continue to promote the idea that ours is indeed a pluralistic rather than a monistic society.

## FOOTNOTES

1. John S. Brubacher, A History of the Problems of Education (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), pp. 546ff.

2. Quoted in Brubacher, History, p. 43.

3. Brubacher, History, p. 43.

4. Ibid., 63.

5. Ibid., 64.

6. Ibid., 551.

7. Christopher J. Lucas, Our Western Educational Heritage (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 520.

8. Brubacher, History, p. 554.

9. Tyrus Hillway, Education in American Society, an Introduction to the Study of Education (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 53.

10. R. Freeman Butts, The Education of the West, A Formative Chapter in the History of Civilization (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973), p. 445.

11. Lucas, Educational Heritage, p. 520.

12. Ibid., pp. 520-521.

13. Howard B. Grose, "Aliens or Americans?" in The Educating of Americans: A Documentary History, ed. by Daniel Calhoun (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), pp. 409-410.

14. Butts, Education of the West, p. 442.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Quoted in Brubacher, History, p. 567.

18. Butts, Education of the West, p. 442.

## INCIDENTALLY....

### SHARING IN COMMUNITY FACILITIES

"Joint-use facilities" is the phrase used to describe a concept which prevails in the Dordt College community. It means, simply, that facilities are shared by several identifiable groups in Sioux Center, including the College.

At a time of inflated prices, and in a small community where utilization of specialized space is imperative, joint-use of facilities is not only wise but necessary. In this ar-

rangement the College has available certain areas for its academic and student life programs, such as an indoor swimming pool, an athletic field, and, as is now being provided, a community center and a 400-seat theatre.

With a College student body of 950, and a city population of about 3,000, it would be impossible to consider separate provisions for each educational and civic group. Having this situation well in mind, the city govern-