

Why Christians Should Not Support Government Schools

By Dan Smithwick (*)

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Public schools (or as some like to say, government schools) have come upon hard times in the past several years. One would be hard-pressed to find a community where the public school system is not having serious problems. While gun shootings get the most coverage, understandably, there are many, many other problems plaguing the 150-year-old experiment of government-run education. Budget crises, teacher shortages, facility problems, undisciplined youth, and now more frequently, problem parents plague most school districts. In addition to these is the fundamental problem -- poor education. Standardized test scores have fallen dramatically over the past few decades. Both college and business leaders lament how poorly high school students are educated.

For the first two centuries of our nation, civil government had no role in education. In the last century, it has wanted to be the only role. We spend more money on education per pupil than any other industrialized nation yet we rank near or at the bottom in academic performance, especially in math, physics and sciences. Why? The answer is theological in every sense.

I want to give nine reasons why the church today should cease using state-run schools. I also want to acknowledge up front that there are often times circumstances why Christians believe they have to use the public schools. It is neither my place, nor anyone else's I believe, to judge all situations from afar. I will say more on this later. First, some background on the theological basis for arguing why the church should abandon government schooling.

Here is the fundamental issue:

Jesus said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). For the past several decades it appears that leaders of our nation, particularly in the field of education, have systematically set out to demonstrate that Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. From the removal of the Ten Commandments in the classroom to denying prayer in school to forbidding any display of religious objects in public places (including a closed Bible on a teacher's desk), our nation has determined to become a secular people officially. No Word, just bread; no supernatural, just natural.

The fruit of this removal of Christianity from the public square is apparent to anyone who wants to see -- a decrease in good things (honesty, morality, literacy, family coherence,

etc.) and an increase in bad things (crime, sexual immorality, bankruptcies, business and government corruption, family breakdown, etc.). Within a few short generations, our nation has been changing from liberty to bondage (government dependency), from free enterprise to socialism, from creditor status to debtor status, from community spirit to isolationism, from honoring God to ignoring Him.

The seedbed for this change, I believe, more than any other place, has been the public school classroom. When the public/government school system began in the early 19th century, it was absorbed in an environment of Christian ethics held to publicly and privately since the days of the Pilgrims. Bible reading and fear of the Lord were the foundations of learning. Not anymore. The spiritual capital inherited by the public school system has been spent and will not be replenished.

But America didn't enter this experiment of non-religious secular education without warning. Theologian and educator Dr. A. A. Hodge, Princeton Theological Seminary said, "I am sure as I am of Christ's reign that a comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separated from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove the most appalling engine for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen."

Scholar J. Gresham Machen said, "An education that trains the mind without training the moral sense is a menace to civilization rather than a help." On January 12, 1926, Machen testified before a Congressional committee on the dangers of creating a federal Department of Education. He stated, "Do we want a federal Department of Education, or do we not? I think we do not, and I am asking your permission to tell you very briefly why. We do not, I think, want a federal Department of Education because such a Department is in the interests of a principle of uniformity or standardization in education which would be the very worst calamity into which this country could fall."

Martin Luther said, "I'm afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the heart of youth." America's government-run education system has proven Luther right.

These men, and many others, gave us clear warnings about government-run, secular, no-Bible education, but churches pressed on. They bought the concept of "free" education and surrendered their posterity to be raised by the state. Would to God that all parents would have seen the error of this as early as one parent from Iowa who said, "I don't want my children fed by the state. I don't want my children clothed by the state, but I would prefer either to their being educated by the state."

"Insider" John Taylor Gatto, 1991 New York State Teacher of the Year, speaker, author of *Dumbing Us Down*, and *The Exhausted School*, stated, "We live in a time of great school crises. Our children rank at the bottom of nineteen industrial nations in reading, writing and arithmetic. At the very bottom. Our teenage suicide rate is the highest in the

world, and suicidal kids are rich kids for the most part, not the poor. In Manhattan fifty per cent of all new marriages last less than five years. Something is wrong for sure.”

Education expert Samuel L. Blumenfeld stated, “The plain, unvarnished truth is that public education is a shoddy, fraudulent piece of goods sold to the public at an astronomical price. It’s time the American consumer knew the extent of the fraud which is victimizing millions of children each year.”

Pastor and author Douglas Wilson captured the situation well by saying in *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* (1991), “For over one hundred years, Americans have been running a gigantic experiment in government schools, trying to find out what a society looks like without God. Now we know.”

Here are my nine reasons why Christians should no longer use public schools (and really never should have) -- listed in reverse order.

Unsafe Environment

Surely, every parent in America has heard about the gun-shootings in more than a dozen public schools over the past several years. What mom hasn’t worried as she watched her children go off to school wondering if today it might happen to them? But there are tens of thousands of students who go to their public school daily without ever being confronted with such violence. There are lesser-degree acts of violence (fights, sexual abuse, name calling, teasing, etc.), but these problems show up in private schools as well. Even drug and alcohol problems occur in Christian schools. Public schools are unsafe in many ways, but I believe it belongs last on the list of “top nine” reasons for Christians not enrolling their children in them.

Negative Role Models

The Bible says, “*Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals*” (1 Cor. 15:33). An environment where the majority of people are not Christian is unquestionably going to produce a different ethic than will occur when nearly all are Christian (faculty and students). The value system, or worldview, of non-Christian teachers and students will produce a “normal” environment that is hostile to Christianity. If we believe the Bible to be true, it simply cannot be any different.

Most students like to model their teachers, especially when they are viewed as “cool.” However, the morals of Christian-family youth are being corrupted when the lifestyle of their teachers reflects such anti-Christian views as gay “rights,” abortion “rights” and sex before marriage. Believing otherwise is already proof that the warning of this Scripture was ignored -- *you have been deceived*.

Reverse Evangelism

Many Christian families state that a key reason for staying with the public school system is to be “salt and light” to a pagan culture. I think this may be an excellent reason for an adult who is called to teach and who has a burden for evangelism of the lost. There are many Christian teachers in public schools who choose their work for this reason, and my hat goes off to them. They are undoubtedly facing in-your-face hostility to Christian principles yet remain there to pray for the lost, be a witness for Christ, and give the best education they can to students, but the “salt and light” concept ends there. I think it is unwise (dangerous) to send little-trained or untrained youth to perhaps the key battleground of humanists (the public school classroom) and expect them to be effective in winning over unbelievers -- adult or student. The evangelism is working in reverse far too often as is evidenced by Christian-family youth adopting morals of their unbelieving friends.

Godless Curriculum

School is about learning, and learning is about knowing truth. Fundamental to Christian faith is the axiom that God IS truth. God chose to reveal Himself in Word-form (the outworking of truth) in four primary ways: 1) By His spoken Word -- “Let there be...” Creation came into existence with order and purpose; 2) By inspiration -- His written Word was given to us in the Scriptures for right living; 3) By incarnation -- His Word was given to us in flesh (Jesus Christ) for our redemption; and 4) By His final Word all will be judged, “*For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law*” (Romans 5:12).

When schools use curriculum that is completely void of God’s Word, how can we possibly expect students to be educated? How can we expect our children to be blessed? To be successful? Peter Marshall said, “Let us not fool ourselves -- without Christianity, without Christian education, without the principles of Christ inculcated into young life, we are simply rearing pagans.” A Godless curriculum will produce a Godless people.

Public Schooling Is Not Thorough

Pick any subject taught in K-12 education. If it has been taught apart from the knowledge revealed in Scripture, it is incomplete (and likely inaccurate). History, biology, mathematics, sociology, science, language, arts, economics, government -- each are openly addressed in Scripture. In other words, the God Who made all creation has also told us how to understand creation. Why would we want to go to the effort and expense of having our children educated for 12-16 years ignoring what the original Author has to say about the subjects we are teaching? It makes no sense, except for the fallen mind who wants no part of God. As Christians, we understand this dilemma for the unbeliever, but why should we give our children to them for the primary education of their lives?

Take history for example. Schools teach world history, but do students in government schools learn the factual history of mankind: formations of people groups, nations, or why certain civilizations came and went? Or, the origins of different languages? Do they learn of the individuals who were greatly used of God in shaping civilization -- Noah? Abraham? Moses? David? Paul? Are they taught about some of the world's greatest events such as creation, the flood, the birth, death and resurrection of the Son of God (by whom the school's calendar is dated)? Not likely.

What about U.S. History? It is beyond the scope of this article to make the case for America's foundation being squarely laid upon Christianity. I will only quote Dr. D. James Kennedy, "Today there are those who gnash their teeth at the very mention of the fact that America was founded as a Christian nation, but the facts of history are not easily dismissed, though they are certainly ignored in our schools and in many of our modern, revisionist history books." Yet, public schools have dismissed this part of U.S. History. Students can receive an "A" in history and never have to know what the original Author had to say or to know of His hand on our history. This is not education.

Poor Academic Results

It is secret to none: Public school students, to a large degree, are simply not well-educated. Much has been written about the "dumbing down" of our public schools. There are exceptions of course. Some youth, because of their gifting and good homes, are excelling in public schools in spite of the overall deterioration of the system, but for the great majority, even average to above average in intelligence, they are being badly educated. What a travesty this is.

My friend, Rev. E. Ray Moore, Jr. recently wrote, "Abundant evidence, assembled from test scores and elsewhere, assures us that today's public school graduates do not have the mastery of basic subjects that earlier generations had. Students are leaving public high schools in record numbers without having acquired basic writing skills, reading comprehension, or mathematical ability. They know little or nothing of this country's founding or its history. They cannot place major historical figures or events in the right century. They cannot walk up to wall maps and point out significant foreign countries. This intellectual deterioration has spread into public colleges and universities that have admitted more and more unprepared students into college level work."

Government Schooling Breeds The View That Success Can Be Obtained Apart From God

If we throw out all the bad stuff found in public schools (shootings, rapes, stealing, fighting, cheating, etc.) and have a "nice" school where no student is afraid, we are still left with an education system that is robbing youth of the most important aspect of being educated -- to trust God. The supreme value being touted today for education is so you can be successful and have a good life. Students are told, "You need a good education so you can get a good job so you can give your children a good education so they can get a

good job,” *ad infinitum*. Not only is this a horrible philosophy of life, it is grossly un-Biblical. The Bible says, “*But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He Who is giving you power to make wealth*” (Deuteronomy 8:18), but this wealth is not simply for the sake of our being rich, for this verse continues, “*that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.*”

Here is the purpose of being properly educated and successful -- to establish God’s covenant on earth. Government schools do not go this direction but rather promote materialism as a way of being successful. This is a formula for failure, the exact opposite of the stated purpose of public education.

Government Schooling Produces No Fear Of God

Now we are getting closer to the heart of the problem with secular, government-run education. God said, “_Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children_” (Deuteronomy 4:10).

Fear of God is almost a lost concept in our culture. The meaning of the word fear as used in the above Scripture is: 1) morally to revere; and 2) causatively to frighten. Five times in the Book of Deuteronomy the phrase “learn and fear” is found in the context of knowing God’s Word. The reason there is little shame anymore (have you seen any lately?) is because there is no fear of God anymore.

Horace Mann and John Dewey, founders of our public school system, openly expressed their hatred for Christianity. They literally feared an education system that would teach youth to fear God, which is just what America had for the first two hundred years of existence. Jesus had a very different view about fear: “_Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell_” (Matthew 10: 28). It would now be considered illegal to quote this statement of Jesus in public schools.

Education, in any subject, should create fear (reverence) of God for how His majesty is revealed in that area of life. Teaching should also instill a proper fear (fright) of going against God’s order and purpose in each discipline of life. Sadly, our public schools teach subjects simply as if God does not exist.

Public Schooling (Secular Education) is Disobedience To God

Herein lies the primary reason why Christians should not use government schools. Having been educated myself in public school through college, having become a Christian at age 33, and having put our five children through combinations of public and private Christian schools, I can only look back and confess that I was not always obedient in “education.” I wish every day I could relive some of those years and do it “by the

Book,” but those days are gone. It is only the present in which we can decide to be obedient in this all-important field we call education.

The Bible says, “_Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it_” (Proverbs 22:6). There is simply no easy way around the fact that putting our children in an anti-Christian education system is not training them up in the way they should go. Many parents want to say, “But we are giving our children Bible training at home.” Really? Are you going back to all the subject matter your children are taking and giving them a Scripture-based education to correct wrong teaching? If so, you are in essence homeschooling them, so why continue to have them enrolled in the government school? If you mean that you are giving your children moral training, and letting the government school give them “academic” training, you are simply denying them a Christian worldview. Your children are being given an anti-Christian worldview in all subjects at the local government school.

At the beginning of this article I acknowledged that there are Christians who sincerely believe that, for their situation, government schooling is what they need to use. In response, I would say that if you have sought pastoral counsel, prayed, and are trusting Christ for this decision and have peace that you are doing the right thing for your children, then walk in it. If you have not done these things, but are simply “doing what everybody else in church is doing,” then I would like to challenge you to seek the Lord and get His mind on the matter of public schooling for your children.

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