

WHAT'S REALLY WRONG WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

By David H. Chilton

Note : All emphasis and underlining are not the author's.

The usual argument against public education is very convincing. And very wrong. It runs something like this: **Public schools have become breeding grounds for violence and sexual promiscuity**; they often are **outlets for socialist propaganda**; they now constitute a formidable **enemy of Christianity** (by teaching evolution and prohibiting prayer and Bible reading) and **of the family** (by teaching sex education and deriding traditional authority structures). And so on — which is not an unmitigated tragedy, since it is being used, under the providence of God, to lead more and more Christians to abandon the system of public education. No matter what the reason, that is certainly a good result.

Unfortunately, the argument above is not as principled as it looks. It is' *not an* argument against state education, but only against certain perceived ills of public schools as they now exist. Thus, even among Christians who agree with the argument, **you will find the following attitudes:**

- (1) "The real problems exist in the inner-city schools, but **there's nothing wrong with public schools in a rural, Christian community** with traditional values";
- (2) "**We should work to make public schools more moral**, by pressuring our legislators to reinstitute prayer and abolish sex-education";
- (3) "**We should try to force the public schools to give Creation 'equal time' with Evolution.**"

These and similar positions all attest to the fact that much of the opposition to public schools is merely pragmatic: **we are very willing for the state to control education**, as long as we can be reasonably sure our children won't be beaten, drugged or raped in the library. To put it bluntly, **we want our socialism, but we want it *clean***. If only the public schools would teach what we want them to teach, we would be happy to have our children's education funded by legalized theft. Quite an interesting position, philosophically: we'll give our children a "moral" upbringing by robbing our neighbors to pay for it.

As Christians, we do not argue against abortion simply by citing the dangers of malpractice; nor should we consider it sufficient to oppose state education simply because of its evil consequences. We do not work for safer methods of abortion; nor should we work to improve public schools. The basic biblical argument, you see, is that *the very existence of state schools is immoral* — regardless of the level of "morality" contained in them.

According to the Bible (see, e.g., Romans 13:4), the state has an extremely limited function, which may be summed up in two points: *punishing criminals* (as defined by God's law) and *protecting the law-abiding*. That's it. God has appointed civil rulers as His *ministers*, and their responsibility is to administer His laws. The Bible severely limits the powers of the state — and just in case rulers might misunderstand the extent of their commission, God built a "strict constructionist" interpretation right into the law: the ruler "may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:20). **The Bible does not give rulers the power to educate children; that responsibility belongs to the family.**

State schools are therefore immoral in principle. They exist only because God's laws have been violated — by greedy rulers who covet the powers of deity, and by greedy citizens who covet "free" education at their neighbors' expense. Viewed in this light, it is no wonder that the public school system has spawned a generation of illiterate criminals who assume the world owes them a living. Why not? According to their parents, the world owed them an education; they're just extending the logic.

The rise in public-school crime and violence is nothing but the humanistic superstructure built on a rotten foundation. It is quite predictable; in fact, *it was predicted* in Deuteronomy 28, the list of the curses which necessarily fall upon a culture that departs from God's law. If our educational principles are not founded on God's word, we have shut God out of our system of knowledge — **and committed cultural suicide.** Romans 1:28-32 tells us what happens to people who will not have God in their knowledge: it reads like a modern report card on "citizenship."

"But," it may be objected, "if the state doesn't provide education and force citizens to submit to it, some parents won't bother to do it themselves." This is true. It is also true that some people don't brush their teeth. We should therefore provide free dental care and send bureaucrats to each home every morning and evening, armed with dental floss, to enforce oral hygiene on the population. Right? Where do you draw the line? You draw the line where God draws it: in His law. God has defined the responsibilities and limits of the state, and whenever it falls short of those responsibilities, or transgresses those limits, it is playing god. The inevitable result is national damnation.

No matter what objection you have to all this, it fails the ultimate test: conformity to God's law. **When you say the rural, "moral," community-oriented public schools are still OK, ...all you're saying is that the full harvest of apostasy hasn't caught up with them yet.** But the fact that none of your bad checks have returned is no justification of forgery. Those wonderful schools are possible only by the illegitimate beneficence of a deified state which plunders your neighbors to give your kids a free lunch. There's just no way around it. Public schools are immoral, and always have been — even in the bygone, halcyon days of old, when students got regular doses of birch rods and McGuffey readers.

Look at yourself for a prime example. You went to a "nice" public school, and you didn't turn out so badly. You didn't take LSD in 5th grade, you didn't carry a switchblade in Jr. High, and you were a virgin on Graduation Day. State education didn't pervert *you*. Or did it? Consider your reaction to this essay. (Never mind that I'm begging the question for a minute.) **Regardless of the biblical evidence, you still find it hard to swallow that the state shouldn't do something beyond God's requirements.** You think the argument that public education involves theft is somewhat "abstract." Face it: you're a socialist. Many of your ideas about the proper role of government were fed to you from K through 12, and it's like pulling teeth to get rid of them. I'm constantly running into sincere Christians who are absolutely aghast at the thought of abolishing unbiblical government regulation. ("How will the mail get delivered?") I even heard one theologian boldly assert that *the value of gold and silver comes from the paper money behind it!*

The real problem with public schools is that they exist in the first place. They are an ungodly, unlawful, collectivist institution. The many evils now spewing out of them derive from the curse of God inflicted on all institutions that defy Him. **He has commanded parents to educate their children in terms of His law; that cannot be done in a public school.** If we want our children to fear Him, to grow into diligent workers for His kingdom, we cannot afford to train them in an institution which has as its fundamental presupposition that I am entitled to as much money as I can vote out of my neighbor's pocket.

Prayer doesn't belong in a public school (Proverbs 28:9). Your money doesn't belong in a public school. Most of all, your children don't belong in a public school. Institutions premised on sin must not be redeemed, but abandoned. We cannot send young maidens into brothels in the interests of "equal time for chastity." As the light of the world, we must set the standard.

Our Lord never called His people to help build the tower of Babel in the hope of getting a Bible study in the basement. He commanded us to build our own city on a hill.