

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. VII, No. 6

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1983

November/December, 1983

HOTHOUSE CHRISTIANITY

Christians who advocate pulling their children out of the public schools eventually confront other Christians who are unwilling to admit that tax-supported education is inherently and legally anti-Christian. Those who continue to "save money" by sending their children into the public schools are seldom impressed with the factual argument that tax-supported education is humanistic to the core, or that it produces substandard educations in the majority of cases. They are especially unimpressed with the moral argument that tax dollars that are taken from one family should not be used to indoctrinate students in a faith which is alien to the religion of the taxpayers.

What is their response? For generations, it has been this one: "What are you trying to do, protect your children from the world? Well, it doesn't work. Eventually, they enter the world, and if they haven't seen it first-hand, they won't be prepared to deal with it. Yours is a **hothouse Christianity**."

There is another response. "The public schools are a mission field. Children there need to hear the gospel. We need to send our children into the public schools to serve as missionaries for Christ. **We** also need to get Christians to become teachers, so that they can go in and serve as Josephs and Daniels in the midst of a hostile culture."

Apparently, Christians have taken these two arguments seriously. If these arguments didn't work, we would not find them repeated again and again, even in the pages of

and similar sources of contemporary Christian wisdom.

Hothouses

A hothouse is a greenhouse. You take seeds and plant them in a controlled environment. Or you take shoots and plant them. You manage the environment in order to reduce the likelihood of the death of your plants. Eventually, this protected environment produces sturdy young plants. Then you take them outside and plant them. Even then, you don't forget them. You look after them until you are fairly certain that they will survive and begin to produce.

The use of greenhouses has proven commercially successful, especially in the case of plants that are in a hostile foreign climate. It is also required when you are trying to grow plants out of season. Without the capital investment that the greenhouse represents, many types of agriculture would become far more risky.

It is odd that critics of private Christian education have adopted this particular analogy as their favorite rhetorical device. What it points to is **the necessity of Christian schools**. The hothouse is an apt metaphor for Christian education. The physical capital involved, the extra time, the

painstaking care lavished on young plants: all point to the reasons why **Christian** education **is** so important in the child's life.

The Tutorial Principle

The Christian parent today is confronted with a dilemma. We live in a highly specialized world. The instructional skills required to impart a large body of information to a student may be beyond the capacities of a parent. Also, the division of labor allows parents to specialize in their occupations, thereby producing greater output (income). Thus, the parent begins to consider the hiring of a **tutor**.

Tutors are expensive. Parents can save money by getting together to pool their resources in order to hire a tutor for all of their children. They look for a tutor who will be able to impart information effectively to a larger group of students.

Yet even here, there are problems. Who makes the decision about which tutor to select? Where does he recruit the applicants? Which parent handles the finances? Which one selects the curriculum? Who monitors student performance? Who collects the tuition payments and disburses the funds? In short, who serves as the **entrepreneur who** assembles the resources and produces a cost-effective school?

The answer is: not parents. Instead, specialized entrepreneurs develop the educational program and then present it to the parents. They may establish profit-seeking, taxable schools, or they may incorporate as non-profit institutions. They may be people hired by a local church as agents of the church. But they bear the risks associated with creating any organization. If they are successful, and the school is established, they become agents of the parents in the education of the children.

The Bible is clear concerning what is required of parents. This responsibility can legitimately be delegated, but the assignment may not be shirked:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou **sittest** in thine house, and when thou **walkest** by the way, and when thou **liest** down, and when thou risest up (**Deut. 6:6-7**).

The tutor hired by Christian parents must obey this injunction. He or she must impress upon the students throughout the school day the requirements of God's law in every area of life. The children are to live within an atmosphere of continual law. The applicability of God's law to

each child's life must be the primary lesson of all Christian education. It is this assignment which the parent can delegate, but never escape as morally binding.

"Discount" Apostasy

Enter the humanist State. "Tell ya what I'm going to do. I'm going to hire tutors for your kids. You won't pay me a cent now. Just turn this difficult task over to me, and I'll get the brightest tutors in the land. I can do it because I'm going to build the largest buildings, offer the best retirement program, offer eternal security (tenure), and get a discount price because I buy in volume! And all it will cost will be pennies a day. Better yet: I'll get your costs down by forcing your neighbors to pay for your kids' educations. That elderly couple down the street with no children: why shouldn't they be required to pay? After all, they get the benefits of educated children who will grow up and become taxpayers some day. (If they die before the kids graduate, well, tough bananas.) That's the proper goal in every person's life, after all: to become a taxpayer.

"Of course, there will be some problems. This religion business, for example. We can't use everyone's money to finance your religion. But we can give an A-1 neutral education that will benefit the whole community. Reading, writing, and arithmetic for all! Then you can tell them what to read when they get home after school."

A terrific deal, right? All you need to do is assent to one minor presupposition: "**Man can properly understand this world apart from God and His revelation of Himself in the Bible.**" If you just assent to this, the State will provide you with the best education known to autonomous man. Free! (Well, not quite. Let's say, "No money down, with a lifetime to pay. Easy terms available. Just sign here on the dotted line.")

And have Christians signed! For three hundred years, they have signed. Free education, Who could argue against that? Neutral education. After all, two plus two is four. We're all agreed. Free education. We can buy a new car with what we save in tuition payments. We can move into a nicer neighborhood. Free education. Get those old folks to pay. After all, we're paying for their Social Security. We might as well get them to fork over. . . **Free. Free. Free.**

Of course, publicly supported tutors can't teach every law God commanded. Not everyone agrees about which laws are still binding. But tutors can teach the Ten Commandments. Everyone agrees on that. Well, at least we all agree on the last five commandments. Whose commandments? Gods? Which God? you ask. We aren't all agreed? Well, the **Universe's**. You know, "Nature and Nature's God."

But are they really commandments? Who enforces them? you ask. Who guarantees that they'll pay off? God? (Sorry; I forgot.) Some topics can't be discussed, you say. God is one of these topics. Well, how about moral precepts? No? How about general guidelines? Too controversial? How about good manners? Without corporal punishment? Well, then, how about deeply felt interpersonal commitments? How about values clarification? How about true intimacy? How about contraceptives for teens without parental notification? How about abortion information without parental consent? How about abortions on demand? Just so long as they're . **Free. Free. Free.**

Off to the Congo

Would you send your five-year-old into the jungles, in order to bring the gospel to savages? No? How about your eight-year-old? Too young? Well, what about your 13-year-old daughter? Not what you had in mind? On the contrary. If you have your children in the public schools, this is exactly what you have in mind. You're arguing about geography, not culture. The jungle is just down the street. So are the pushers—drug pushers, ideology pushers, sexual liberation pushers, "vote yes on all bond issue" pushers, "the State is my shepherd; I shall not want" pushers.

"My son, the missionary." You're asked to believe it by Christians who "just can't see" Christian education.

Who trained these youthful missionaries? Not Christian parents; they pushed them into the "mission field" at age five. Not Sunday School teachers, who see them for 45 minutes per week. Not T.V. cartoonists, who produce the visual drugs to which most American children are addicted, with ghosts, monsters, and wizards every Saturday morning, with "white magic" winning over 'black magic,' and supermen defeating aliens. But Christians are supposed to rejoice because they are being given the opportunity to assign their children the morally uplifting responsibility of evangelizing youthful theological savages.

Who grades them? Older theological savages. Who writes their textbooks? Theological savages. From class to class, from bell to bell, Christian children are being taught by savages that God is an educationally irrelevant concept. Unless man is God, of course.

Christian children are the ones who are being "evangelized." Christian children are required to sit passively and listen to the stranger who comes in the name of a different god, bringing literacy and printed materials. Christian children are not the functional missionaries in the public schools; they are treated as children being reared in backward, primitive tribes.

Christians try to justify their support of the government's schools in terms of the evangelism impulse. But if they look at the position their children occupy in the modern public school, they cannot miss their resemblance to those dark-skinned tots in all the missionary schools: wide-eyed, totally dependent, and awed by the wonders that Bwana has brought. And the pitch to the parents in both mission fields is the same:

. . . **Free. Free. Free.**

Conclusion

It is amazing what people will believe. As Mordecai Jones said in "The Flim-Flam Man": "People will buy anything if they think it's stolen ." Tell a savage that he's going to get free education or free medical care, and he may submit himself to the stranger. He'll turn over his children to the stranger, and thereby turn over his culture's future. Similarly, let white-skinned savages offer 40 million Christians a similar deal, and they'll also spring for it. Worse: they'll pay the taxes for the savages to provide the program. They'll vote yes on the bond issues that will be paid for by increased tax rates on their homes.

That's one difference between Christians and savages in the bush: savages in the bush expect the missionaries to raise the funds to support the mission. **Savages have more financial sense than Christians who promote public education.**