

TENTMAKERS

Financial Counsel for Pastors, Deacons, and Seminarians

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1978

Nov. /Dec., 1976

Vol. I, No. 6

SUBSIDIZING ONE'S OPPONENTS

by Gary North

When a Christian begins to consult the Bible and finds out the comprehensive claims that the Bible places on Christ's followers, he steadily discovers how many of Christ's opponents want him to finance rival callings. The most glaring example today is the government (public) school movement. Everyone is compelled to support the spread of so-called neutral education, meaning the religion of secular humanism. The funds are coerced from Christian parents. Then, in many cases, parents are penalized for sending their children to a Christian school. The secular humanists demand that the Christians use State-approved textbooks, hire State-certified teachers, and teach State-approved curricula. If the schools refuse, they lose their accreditation or their tax exemption. In some cases, pastors and school administrators, as well as parents, have been sent to jail for refusing to comply. If you think I am exaggerating, get some back issues of the *CLA Defender*, the publication of the Christian Law Association. Send a few dollars to

CLA Defender
P.O. Box 30290
Cleveland, OH 44130

The serious Christian eventually begins to figure out that he is being asked to finance his own destruction, not to mention the destruction of his children. Not only is he being asked to do this, he is being told to do it, on threat of imprisonment. And far too many Christians capitulate, though the ranks of those who won't are growing.

In other cases, the conflict is not so clear-cut. Within the institutional church, there are rival positions. 'These rival groups can sometimes gain control of the churches' various subcommittees or peripheral organizations. Christians can be found on both sides of a particular question. The problem arises when one group claims to have lawful access to the other side's tithes and offerings, to be used primarily for the benefit of the group's activities and goals. Immediately, there are conflicts. Who gets what? On what criteria? For how long? Will there be contribution quotas set up? Will my group be allowed to get into the other group's share of the contributions? Do they contribute their fair share? What is a fair share? Have they been continuing over many years to give their fair share? Can we compel them to give their fair share in the future? What kind of institutional penalties can we impose if they refuse to contribute their fair share in the future?

These issues are not hypothetical. Questions like these are always sources of conflict in any organization, including the institutional churches. It should be the goal of peace-keepers

to set up institutional buffers and barriers to such conflicts. Smoothing over conflicts is one of the most important functions of a price system. To the extent that churches ignore the price mechanism, they will produce more conflicts than would otherwise have been necessary.

Education

One of the obvious sources of conflict in any church is the question of educating the children. First, should the institutional church be involved at all? People debate this fervently. Second, how should a school be financed? Third, who will screen the teachers? Fourth, which students will be allowed in? These are hard questions.

At the level of the elementary school, the issues are easier to resolve. The basic curriculum is fairly well agreed upon. The students should be taught the fundamental skills of literacy and computation. They may also be assigned Bible lessons. The debates between rival schools of theology are less intense, or appear to be, in the case of simple Bible stories. So the debate over screening of teachers is subdued, and it tends to focus on teaching competency, that is, on the teacher's ability to impart seemingly neutral, agreed-upon skills.

The higher we go up the grade ladder, the more likely we will find conflict. People don't agree about government, history, economics, sex education, and so forth. Unless the school teaches only math, and perhaps some chemistry and physics, parents will disagree. If the church is involved in any way, other members may be brought into the debate, since their funds are involved. Finally, teachers may organize, or the administration may rebel. It can be very ugly.

The easiest, least wasteful way to solve this kind of conflict is to separate the school from the church, while simultaneously adopting the policy of charging full-cost tuitions. If the church or churches want to get involved with a particular school, it will be possible only indirectly, through financing scholarships for deserving children (families). The church can choose not to permit its scholarship funds to be spent in a particular local school if the conflict between church and school is great enough. But the price system tends to resolve the conflict most efficiently. Anyone who doesn't like the educational product needn't pay. He can shop around. Christ's institutional nonopoly, the church, need not become tyrannical in areas like curriculum policy or teacher screening.

Unfortunately, church officers in the twentieth century have not been trained to think in such terms. The question of full-cost tuitions is not a chapter in a denomination's hand-

book for deacons, especially since the denominations do not have handbooks for deacons. So churches rush in where private entrepreneurs fear to tread, and the result is conflict.

Higher Education

If the conflict over curricula is heavy at the high school level, consider the problems of the college. (I do not mention universities, since I am aware of no denomination-sponsored Protestant and Reformed university.) The faculties are hired for many reasons, but pleasing parents is low on the list, if it is on the list at all. They are hired because someone has earned a Ph. D at some secular, atheist university, or because the Administration wants people of a particular political philosophy — generally, a philosophy not shared by the rank and file of the denomination's laymen — or because a department chairman wants a colleague who shares his ideological outlook. But conforming faculty philosophies to the outlook of the bulk of the school's financial supporters is not, by any stretch of the imagination, anything that a college Administration intends to do.

In a market situation, the seller of a service must conform himself to the demands of the buyers. If he fails to do this, he goes bankrupt. But the academic world has a shield against this pressure from the "unwashed": tax-exempt status. If the college Administration can convince outside donors to cover the deficit, then the college can teach what it wants, as long as it can offer an academic degree which buyers believe will entitle them (or their children) to lifetime monopoly economic returns. Max Weber, the great German social scientist, was correct when he observed over 60 years ago: "When we hear from all sides the demand for an introduction of regular curricula and special examinations, the reason behind it is, of course, not a suddenly awakened 'thirst for education' but the desire for restricting the supply for those positions and their monopolization by the owners of educational certificates." What parents really want for their children is money, other things being equal.

But who will pay the freight? Rich alumni, if the school is an older one, or a very prestigious Ivy League school. The Federal government, if the Administration is willing (as too many of them are) to compromise their morals and their theology, and beg for other people's confiscated tax money. After all, all they have to give up is the right to mention God or the Bible in the buildings constructed with Federal dollars. A small price to pay, if you're an administrator. Better a new gym and no prayers, than no gym and the right to mention the name of God. First things first, you know.

The Christian colleges have another source of funds: the

denomination. They can continue to keep tuition levels low if church officers will use part of the money collected in God's name and the moral requirement of the tithe to finance the politically liberal professors in their tenured safety. Then the steady indoctrination of the students can continue, all financed by parents and church members who do not share either the political outlook or the tenured safety of the college's faculty members.

The denomination ought to tell the college to charge full-cost tuitions. Why subsidize a long-term investment made by middle class and upper middle class parents for their children's financial futures?

But what about poor families with bright children? Well, what about them? Why not set up a denomination-operated college scholarship fund, with tax-exempt donations from those with money, for the sake of the poor? Why must the college be subsidized directly?

I'll tell you why: Because the college administrators know that many parents would refuse to send their children to the Keynesian or Freudian dominated college if they were required to pay full-cost tuitions. They would send their children to other less liberal or less expensive institutions. The college administrators know that below-cost tuitions are the means of buying parental **loyalty**, even though the parents know that the children will be compelled to run through the gauntlet of political liberalism in the social science and humanities departments. Below-cost tuitions are the bribe offers paid to parents to send their kids to a politically alien institution, and unsuspecting church members are supposed to finance the **bribes**. That way, the college's administrators can avoid having to staff the faculties in terms of what parents would really want if they had to pay the full cost of educating their children. All the college administrators have to do is to convince a handful of church officials to finance the deficit of the college, rather than set up a church scholarship program (where students could take their scholarships to competing colleges — perish the horrifying thought). Now the silent laymen can continue to finance the tenured political liberals in their positions of safety from parental demands.

Is your church playing this game? If so, what do you think you can do to remedy the situation? When?

And if your denomination is financing another denomination's liberal-dominated faculty, then you had better make some changes soon. Just because a group of political liberals once earned Ph. D's doesn't mean that conservative laymen have a moral obligation to support them in their tenure-protected security.