

Recovering School Choice

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This article argues against the present government educational monopoly and explains why taxpayers should not be forced to subsidize what is, in effect, an establishment of a "religion" of secularism. It argues that parents in justice have a right to have the wherewithal to have genuine choice in the education of their children (i.e., to be able to exercise that choice outside of the government school monopoly alone).

Those who recognize that the present system of school funding is gravely unjust should make it clear to opponents of reasonable parental choice in education that:

a) The "money trail" does not start at the public treasury. It starts in checking accounts of taxpaying citizens and corporations. So, taxpaying citizens and corporations that want to direct their money to support an educational system that meets reasonable academic and civil rights criteria and is an alternative to the thoroughly secularized government system are not trying to "raid the public treasury." They want to regain what is justly theirs, i.e., control of their own education funds.

b) They do not have the right to force their neighbors to surrender their funds to subsidize a thoroughly secularized educational system. That is what has been happening, especially at the primary and secondary level.

c) They do not have the right to force their neighbors to surrender their children to a thoroughly secularized government school system. Even the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled, in the famous *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* case, that parents have the right to direct the education of their children. However, following that decision tens of millions of parents were still forced to surrender their children to the established government school system. That was due to the fact that those parents were still required to surrender their education funds to subsidize the government system. So, the right of parents to direct the destiny of their children in a most important area of their lives and shield their children from government regimentation and indoctrination remains, for most nonwealthy parents, a phantom right, a right that exists in theory but not in fact.

d) There is no "compelling state interest" that entitles the government to force all taxpayers to subsidize a secularized governmental education system.

e) All persons of good will should support efforts to disestablish and modify the present secularized government system. Even though the present government system is unjust and in many ways tailor-made for secular humanists, the secular option should be one of those available for parents that want such an educational environment.

f) Defenders of reasonable freedom of choice in education do not want to force other citizens to subsidize their form of education. They also have the right to reciprocity from those who prefer another type of system.

g) They would do well to consider carefully a portion of the *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* decision and apply it to our present set of educational conditions:

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.

At the time when that decision was rendered, in the early part of the 1920s, most schools, which were deceptively called "public schools," were suffused with either some denominational or generic form of Protestantism. In view of present legal and educational circumstances, however, we should substitute the term "secular" for the term "public."

h) It is unjust to extract funds from taxpayers at large and to allot a portion of those funds to subsidize students who attend non-government colleges and universities, but to deny those same opportunities to students who attend or want to attend non-government primary and secondary schools.

i) Religious tokenism, such as posting the Ten Commandments in classrooms, reinstating school prayer or including Christian hymns in choral programs in government schools, only serves to disguise the secular character of government schools, colleges and universities. In some cases, religious tokenism may amount to an intentional exploitation of non-secular religions and in most other instances, often unintentionally, a desecration of religion.

j) There are secular religions. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that fact, but that same Court has been involved, unwittingly perhaps, in establishing a common-denominator form of secularism in government schools, colleges and universities.

k) Many, and perhaps most, of those who oppose the present system as unjust do not see any grave reason why, under a revised system, the right of teachers to unionize should not only be respected but also encouraged.

l) Not all of those who recognize that the present system is unjust and needs modification favor a voucher system as an alternative. Some advocate an education tax check-off formula, which is somewhat similar to the United Way Donor Option program and systems employed by some Western democracies.

m) The present government monopoly has failed many of the minority children who live in large urban areas. Those children, many of whom are already disadvantaged, deserve an alternative to inferior or failing established government schools.

