

WHICH WAY, AMERICA?



If parents continue sacrificing children on the altar of government schools, the future looks bleak indeed. But if they take back the role of guardians, a glorious future of restoration and healing is possible.

by E. Ray Moore

“Things reveal themselves passing away,” wrote Irish poet William Butler Yeats, reviving an old folk saying about how changing times bring into sharp focus the dying old ways that were once taken for granted. On another occasion, he wrote in his 1919 “The Second Coming”: *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world ... The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.*

Yeats’ analysis describes our world too, but our situation is much worse than in 1919. The culture is in steep decline, and conservatives and Christians suddenly realize that our unique history and constitutional system embody what is good and beautiful about America. Many are battling to reverse the slide into the moral abyss. They know now what is being lost in the transformation of Western Civilization. We grasp desperately for the past the more we see it passing away.

We have been warned. Just as the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel warned the children of Israel and Judah to turn from sin lest they be carried into a Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 29:10- 13), so Christian leaders and theologians have warned us over the centuries not to accept the imposition of state-sponsored and tax-subsidized public schools in our nation. For the first 220 years of American history, from 1620 to around 1840, we had an entirely private, Christian, parochial, and homeschool model for educating our children. From 1837 to 1840, the state of Massachusetts under Horace Mann set up the first public-school model. The system spread rapidly, and by 1900 was the dominant K-12 education model in America. Churches gradually gave up their “private” or parochial schools.

Presbyterian theologian R. L. Dabney warned the state of Virginia strongly in the 1870s not to accept the state-sponsored model for K-12 education, but he was not heeded. In 1887, Dr. Archibald Hodge, professor at Princeton Seminary, wrote: *I am as sure as I am of the fact 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 engineery 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.*



In the 1920-1930s, Princeton Professor J. Gresham Machen wrote, taught, preached, and spoke in favor of private Christian education. If parents continue sacrificing children on the altar of government schools, the future looks bleak indeed. But if they take back the role of guardians, a glorious future of restoration and healing is possible.

In 1926, he testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor against the proposed establishment of a Federal Department of Education. He was effective in stopping the proposal, and the United States did not create a Cabinet-level Department of Education until 1978. Machen was acknowledged in his day as America’s leading Protestant theologian. His testimony, sermons, and articles are compiled in *Education, Christianity and the State*, published by The Trinity Foundation. Also, the eminent John Taylor Gatto, New York City and New York State teacher of the year, wrote and lectured extensively on the problems with public education in modern times. His seminal work, *The Underground History of American Education*, was published in 2001. His other works include *Dumbing Us Down* (1992), *A Different Kind of Teacher* (2000), and *Weapons of Mass Instruction* (2008).

Now, 180 years on, all the toxic waste from this failed experiment with government schools is washing up on our shores. Christian families and churches are in shock and confused about what is to be done. The long-term consequences of government schools are ravaging our nation, our culture, and our children. What is to be done in such a desperate time? Already 70 percent of millennials are self-identified socialists. Higher education is deeply mired in leftist politics, and conservative and Christian faculty are being “cancelled” for speaking out against bias. About 80 percent of Christian and conservative families currently send their children to public schools, though those numbers are starting to fall. Andrew Breitbart noted that *“politics is downstream from culture.”* It follows that culture is downstream from religion and education. Only a strong religious revival, a spiritual movement with serious moral ambitions, can correct this problem.



Until now, both religious and conservative organizations have failed to protect vulnerable children from the anti-God secular schools. Before he died in 2008, Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Foundation and political godfather to the Christian Right, told me that *“conservatives and Christians had mostly invested in politics to effect the culture, but the left concentrated on winning the culture: controlling the media, K-12 and higher education, the arts.”* Thus, even when conservatives won elections, they still lost because *“culture always trumps politics.”* He added, *“Ray, you’re doing the right thing by growing Christian schools and home schooling.”*

A great new hope for a fundamental change in our national educational fortunes began in March 2020, when the government shut down public schools in the face of the COVID pandemic. Fifty-five million American children were sent home, a silver lining in an otherwise dark COVID cloud. The shutdown sent 1.37 billion students home from school worldwide.

Research done by Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute (www.NHERI.org) indicates that 10-15 percent of children will continue to be homeschooled and never return to public schools. In one year, homeschooling has nearly doubled, now serving five million students per year nationally. We will only know the final percentage of growth when all public schools reopen, likely in the fall of 2021.

A plethora of news articles in the Wall Street Journal and other mainstream media report on this astonishing sudden growth. Private and Christian schools have also experienced a substantial growth in numbers. We call this good news a “kairos” moment, Greek for “an opportune time,” because it represents a once-in-100-years opportunity for private, Christian, and home education to gain a significant number of children. If this shutdown of public schools had occurred in 1980, few organizations and ministries at that time could have accommodated such growth. But today, dozens of viable organizations and ministries assist in assimilating millions of new children into K-12 private, Christian, and home education, such as the Home School Legal Defense Association, Foundation for American Christian Education, RenewaNation, Alpha and Omega, Freedom Project Academy, Classical Conversations, Association of Classical and Christian Schools, Bob Jones University Press, A Beka, Apologia, National Black Home Educators, Public School Exit, and Exodus Mandate.

Should this shift to Christian and homeschooling continue, we could see a “tipping point,” a term popularized by Malcolm Gladwell in his eponymous book. Some scholars argue that if a hard-core and committed 10 percent hold to an idea or belief, that idea will eventually overcome and win the battle of ideas in the larger culture. The sudden popularity of the calculator or personal computer, rare devices before the 1970s, are examples. Already 70 percent of millennials are self-identified socialists.

Now, as state-sponsored public schools continue to fail and are rejected by a growing number of families, it is possible that a “tipping point” could occur for private, Christian, and home education. If a tipping point never comes, and American parents continue sending their children to public schools, the culture will sink into a dark age.



The late Marshall Fritz, founder of the Alliance for the Separation of School and State, was known to say, when challenged on such a development, *“Impossible things happen every day.”* Today, the mass exodus from government schools that once seemed impossible is happening.

One important part of the return to education sanity is the restoration of constitutionalism in education. The Founders and framers of the Constitution made no provision for an education policy at the federal level. Educational policy was left entirely to the states and to the private arena, such as private associations, families, and churches. On the floor debate in the first Congress of 1791, which adopted the Bill of Rights, James Madison addressed the “General Welfare” clause of the Constitution, saying: *If Congress can employ money indefinitely to the general welfare ...they may appoint teachers in every State, county, and parish and pay them out of their public treasury; they may take into their own hands the education of children, establishing in like manner schools throughout the Union.... Were the power of Congress to be established in the latitude contended for, it would subvert the very foundations, and transmute the very nature of the limited Government established by the people of America.* Madison clarified that there should be no education policy at the federal level, because such policy would be harmful to limited government as set up by the Founders.

Ultimately, getting the feds out of public education could be a useful precursor to ending state and even local government involvement. One way to accelerate that process is to continue showing parents and pastors why no child should be left to suffer in a government school. Rod Dreher, in his important book, *Live Not by Lies*, quotes social-policy expert Hannah Arendt: *“A totalitarian society is one in which an ideology seeks to displace all prior traditions and institutions, with a goal of bringing all aspects of society under control of that ideology.”* This has been the strategy of the Left in America since the time of Horace Mann in the 1840s. Mann was eventually superseded in the progressive era by John Dewey, professor of philosophy from 1904-1930 at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Conservatives and Christians have only in recent decades awakened to the reality of the danger of totalitarianism in our country. Like Rip Van Winkle, they are awakening from a deep slumber. But some powerful and hopeful trends are emerging that could lead to a new reformation in education and a fresh great awakening. This awakening about the evils taking place in government schools can and must serve as a precursor to a broader awakening — an awakening to America’s true history, the value of individual liberty, the incredible feats of Christian civilization, and so much more. If we are to win back this nation, it will require energy, determination, comprehension of the crisis, faith, and fervent prayers not exhibited by many conservatives or Christians in the recent past.



The eminent English parliamentarian Edmund Burke said, *“When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.”*

Is there a second act for America? Children have always been the future of every nation, for good or ill. If a happier future for America exists, it will require conservatives and Christians to awaken to the peril and begin again to train and educate the youth of the land in a new system of private, Christian, and home schools.

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