

Would Jesus be welcome in our Public Schools?

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The February 2, 2011 CBS Los Angeles website (<http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2011/02/02/lausd-school-says-song-has-too-much-jesus/>) carried the story of a 10-year-old boy who, as part of his school's talent show, wanted to do an interpretive dance to a song that included the word Jesus. The principal reportedly told the boy's mother that the song was "offensive" and violated the separation of church and state. Fortunately the Alliance Defense Fund came to the boy's defense and the school officials changed their minds. But it does once again, as so many times before, demonstrate how anti-religion our public schools often are.

The story corroborates so well the prescient writing of Dr. Gordon Clark who in 1946 elaborated on where a secular philosophy of education would take our public schools. Following the excerpts and comments I have included a brief biography of Dr. Clark - whose writings you would do well to read.

Excerpts from and comments on **A Christian Philosophy of Education**
by Gordon H. Clark 1946 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI
by Dr. Jerry Nelson

*"It is capable of exact demonstration that if every (authority) has the right of excluding from the public schools whatever he does not believe to be true, then **he that believes most must give way to him that believes least, and then he that believes least must give way to him that believes absolutely nothing, no matter how small a minority the atheists or agnostics may be. It is self-evident that on this scheme, if it is consistently and persistently carried out in all parts of the country, the United States system of national popular education will be the most efficient and wide instrument for the propagation of Atheism which the world has ever seen.**"* A.A. Hodge quoted by G.H. Clark 78-79

Worldview affects our educational philosophy.

The education of children is always of great concern to parents and it ought to be of great concern to all people who care about their country and culture. What many forget is that **our worldview affects our educational philosophy. This is seen first in our view of the nature of humanity.**

“The Biblical doctrine of inherited depravity, therefore, is the only adequate explanation of the universal state of man.” (73) “The non-Christian educator who believes that the child’s nature is inherently and positively good, or at very worst neutral, aims to develop that nature as it is...” On the contrary, “the Christian educator...believing that every child he teaches inherits an evil nature, praises self-control, rather than self-expression; he believes that the teacher, rather than the pupil, knows best what lessons should be studied... If this is admittedly true of practicing scales on the piano, it should also be admitted of the larger phases of life. The theological doctrine of human depravity, it is true, is not limited in its application to education; but it certainly has a definite bearing on the methods and aims of education; it is evidence that one’s religious views color the educational policy; and this is the point at issue.” (74)

It also ought to be self-evident that our educational philosophy affects our educational policies.

“It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the educational policies of any educator or school system derive their character from an underlying philosophy. Let the directors...of a school system claim they base their views only on experiment and observation apart from an a priori philosophy or theology (and they will quickly demonstrate) their claim is untrue. Experimentation in psychology and pedagogy may indeed improve the technique of teaching, but it cannot choose ends or goals... In philosophic language pedagogy is not a descriptive science, it is a normative science. It deals not so much with what is, but with what ought to be. And views of what ought to be do not come, as some educators envious of a scientific reputation claim, from observing how children learn. Views of what ought to be depend on the underlying philosophy.” (75)

Non-Christian too often means anti-Christian.

“The early American colleges were distinctly Christian institutions. But the public school system, unlike the colleges, was not so inspired. On the other hand, the public schools were not intended to be irreligious. In the readers (books to teach reading) of our grandparent’s time God and Jesus were mentioned. Today no such references can be found in the books of the public schools. The reason is not hard to find. The public schools were founded with the idea of not favoring one Christian denomination over another; of not favoring one religion above another; and the result is that they now favor no religion at all. They are completely secularized. 76

“Originally the public schools, while not supposed to favor one Christian denomination above another, were not intended to attack Christianity. The idea was that they would be neutral. And because the majority of Protestant believed the promises of the schoolmen that they would not attack religion, the Protestants did not found primary school as the (Catholics) did. Now it is clear that the (Catholics) adopted the wiser course of action because the promises of the schoolmen were soon to be broken.” 76

“Today Christianity is attacked all through the public school system. Reports from parents say that the evolutionary denial of the creation of the world by God is taught (to children of every grade). How can a child of seven or eight stand up against an organized attack on the theistic worldview? ...The public schools make no pretense of being neutral in religious matters, and when a parent protests, he is promptly ridiculed and squelched.... Teachers can deny creation and denounce Christianity but the law forbids them to read the Bible.” 77

“The Protestants generally were deceived by the specious promises of the public school people. They thought that if they maintained Christian colleges, the primary schools could be entrusted to the state. But not all the Protestants were deceived by these false promises... The Lutheran and Christian Reformed people early established primary schools for their children. They believed that the influence of the Christian home and the preaching of the Christian church should be strengthened by a Christian school system.” 78

Supposed Neutrality in things religious actually results in an anti-religion system.

Even before 1890 A. A. Hodge wrote, *“A comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separated from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove an appalling (instrument) for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of the anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen.. It is capable of exact demonstration that if every (authority) has the right of excluding from the public schools whatever he does not believe to be true, then **he that believes most must give way to him that believes least, and then he that believes least must give way to him that believes absolutely nothing**, no matter how small a minority the atheists or agnostics may be. It is self-evident that on this scheme, if it is consistently and persistently carried out in all parts of the country, **the United States system of national popular education will be the most efficient and wide instrument for the propagation of Atheism which the world has ever seen.**”*

78-79

“What A.A. Hodge did not see, at least what he did not explicitly say, is that although the irreligious have seized the right to exclude Christianity, the Christians are denied the right to exclude attacks on Christianity. There is no neutrality.” 79

*“Obviously the schools are not Christian. Just as obviously they are not neutral. The Scriptures say that the fear of the Lord is the chief part of knowledge; but **the***

schools, by omitting all reference to God, give pupils the notion that knowledge can be had apart from God. They teach in effect that God has no control of history, that there is not plan of events that God is working out, that God does not foreordain whatsoever comes to pass. Aside from definite anti-Christian instruction, to be discussed later, the public schools are not, never were, and can never be, neutral. Neutrality is impossible. Let one ask what neutrality can possibly mean when God is involved. How does God judge the school system which says to him, ‘O God, we neither deny nor assert your existence; and O God, we neither obey nor disobey your commands; we are strictly neutral.’ Let no one fail to see the point: ***the school system that ignores God teaches its pupils to ignore God, and this is not neutrality; it is the worst form of antagonism, for it judges God to be unimportant and irrelevant in human affairs – it is atheism.*** ⁷⁹⁻⁸⁰

So-called “neutral” schools teach that religion is irrelevant.

“Unfortunately the elementary system of education through which nearly all children pass provides no instruction in the things of God and his revelation. **Through grammar and high school the growing child is given the idea that God and education have nothing to do with each other.** A family may have its religion for Sundays and church business, but education is a totally separate matter... The schools by their silence teach that there is not room for intellectual matters. **Thus because the public schools ignore God, it is not difficult to persuade the college student that Christianity is unworthy of consideration.**” ⁹⁰⁻⁹¹ Chapter 5 of the book gives illustrations of how unbiblical and even anti-biblical ideas are subtly (even if unwittingly) included in our “neutral” public education. See especially pages 104-108. **Some may consider this argument (about philosophy) irrelevant at the (elementary) school level saying, “Arithmetic and spelling of the grammar grades are so innocuous that the thesis here defended is inapplicable.’** Further study, however, reveals that the thesis is equally applicable to primary education and scarcely less prominent” than at the college level.” ⁽⁷⁶⁾ Illustrations of this are given below from p90 of Clark.

A fool’s errand: Clark considers it a fool’s errand to attempt to argue the existence of God or a divine revelation from a naturalistic worldview. A worldview that denies the very possibility of God or of divine revelation cannot be expected to produce a God or a Bible divinely inspired. An unbeliever needs the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate him in order for the unbeliever to see the truth. There is no common ground between Atheism and Theism. “A Christian philosophy of education therefore must be

*elaborated against the background of a theistic worldview and on the basis of such pertinent principles and norms as are found in Scripture. **Now the basic question of education is, what is education, and what is its purpose? To this question the Bible gives a definitive answer. As the chief part of knowledge is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7) so the aim of education is the glory of God.***

165 “It takes God to give man value.” ¹⁶⁶ A materialistic worldview does not give such value and a humanistic education is thus seriously truncated or worse.

Observations: I can only hope and pray that Christian parents will sooner rather than later come to understand how powerfully influential a “secular” education is on the minds and hearts of our children. For 13 of the child’s formative years in our government schools it is (wittingly or unwittingly) demonstrated that God is, at best, irrelevant. Are we so foolish as to think that is overcome by 15 minutes a day of family devotions and 3 hours a week of Sunday school and other programming?

Who is Gordon Haddon Clark?

John Robbins writes, “Carl F.H. Henry thinks Clark is “one of the profoundest evangelical Protestant philosophers of our time.” Ronald Nash has praised him as “one of the greatest Christian thinkers of our century.” He is a prolific author, having written more than 40 books during his long academic career. His philosophy is the most consistently Christian philosophy yet published, yet few seminary students hear his name even mentioned in their classes, much less are required to read his books. If I might draw a comparison, it is as though theological students in the mid-sixteenth century never heard their teachers mention Martin Luther or John Calvin... As theological students ... you ought not consider yourself well educated until you are familiar with the philosophy of Gordon Haddon Clark... Clark was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and the Sorbonne. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Reformed Episcopal Seminary, Wheaton College, Butler University, Covenant College, and Sangre de Cristo Seminary. Over the course of his 60-year teaching career, he wrote more than 40 books, including a history of philosophy, *Thales to Dewey*, which remains the best one-volume history of philosophy in English. July-August 1993 *Trinity Review*