



FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE

How to Pick a "Good" Government School



John E. Stoos
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"In the state of California, if I had a child there, I wouldn't put the youngster in a public school... I think it's time to get our kids out." Dr. James Dobson on Focus on the Family Radio, March 2002

With that comment, Dr. Dobson started quite a stir among thousands of people who are now joining the campaign to "separate school and state." The government schools have added a lot of fuel to the fire by having Planned Parenthood sponsor skits in class that single out and embarrass Christian students. Disturbing too is the new policy in Hayward, California schools that encourages homosexual teachers to "come out" in the classroom and asks them to invite their partners to join them for the follow-up discussion.

Is there any hope for the government schools? More importantly, how can you decide as a Christian whether they might be a good place to send the child that God has entrusted to your care? First and foremost, I believe that parents must understand the nature of the battle that has been waged in the government schools during the past one hundred years.

During a recent Dialog on KFIA radio, the discussion revolved around some of these recent troubles in the government schools. It did not take long for a very "concerned" caller to say that if there was any place where he thought the so-called separation of church and state should be maintained, it was certainly in the schools!

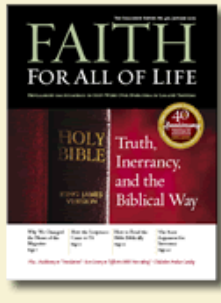
Now if this caller meant that the schools were not intended to be churches I would agree, but sadly this is not the case. What the modern intends is to continue the expulsion of all things Christian from our schools: not just the morning prayers or Christmas songs, but all references to God and certainly all traces of the Christian worldview upon which our great nation was founded and most of Western Civilization was built.

Not long ago, these Christian foundations impacted all areas of American life including the government schools, a fact which I remind my listeners about as often as possible. My lovely bride Linda discovered one of the best examples of this influence as she worked to home school our children. While searching for good resource materials, she discovered an 1847 training manual authored by David P. Page used to instruct government schoolteachers. *Page's Theory and Practice of Teaching* was for many decades the standard textbook for training government schoolteachers. In the introduction to the 1899 reprint that my wife obtained, E.C. Branson said, "Although more than half a century old, there is hardly a judgment in this book that needs to be revised. It is a wise book — a book for all time. 'It comes nearer being a classic than any other book on teaching ever written in America.'" (Hinsdale) A teacher who has not mastered his *Page* will some day be as ridiculous as a lawyer who has not thoroughly thumbed his *Blackstone*."

Now we all know that Mr. Blackstone has been long forgotten in most legal circles, but I will have to leave that discussion for another article. Today let me suggest that if you wanted to find a "good" government school, you would have to look for one that has teachers who have "mastered" what Mr. Page had to say. Here is just a small sample of the wisdom that Mr. Page wanted to impart to the *government* schoolteachers of his day:

Page on Education

Education of the heart is confessedly too much neglected in all our schools [Mr. Page wrote this in 1847!]. It has often been remarked that "knowledge



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is power" and as truly that "knowledge without principle to regulate it may make a man a powerful villain." It is all-important that our youth should early receive such moral training as shall make it safe to give them knowledge. (51)

Page on America's Christian History

We live in a Christian land. It is our glory, if not our boast, that we have descended from an ancestry that feared God and revered His word. Very justly we attribute our superiority as a people over those who dwell in the darker portions of the world, to our purer faith derived from that precious fountain of truth the Bible. Very justly, too, does the true patriot and philanthropist rely upon our faith and practice as Christian people for the permanence of our free institutions and our unequaled social privileges. If we are so much indebted, then, to the Christian religion for what we are, and so much dependent upon its life-giving truths for what we may hope to be, how important is it that all our youth should be nurtured under its influences! (55)

The Separation of Church and State

When I say religious training, I do not mean sectarianism. In our public schools, supported at the public expense, and in which the children of all denominations meet for instruction, I do not think that any man has a right to crowd his own peculiar notions of theology upon all, whether they are acceptable or not. Yet there is common ground which he can occupy and to which no reasonable man can object. He can teach a reverence for the Supreme Being, a reverence of His Holy Word, for the influences of His Spirit, for the Character and teachings of the Savior, and for the evil of sin in the sight of God, and the awful consequences of it upon the individual. He can teach the duty of repentance and the privilege of forgiveness. He can teach our duty to worship God, to obey His laws, to seek the guidance of His Spirit and the salvation by His Son. He can illustrate the blessedness of the divine life, the beauty of holiness, and the joyful hope of heaven, and to all this no reasonable man will be found to object, so long as it is done in a truly Christian spirit. (55)

David Page on the "Responsibility of the Teacher"

The school is no place for a man without principle; I repeat, THE SCHOOL IS NO PLACE FOR A MAN WITHOUT PRINCIPLE. Let such a man seek a livelihood anywhere else; or, failing to gain it by other means, let starvation seize the body and send the soul back to its Maker as it is, rather than he should incur the fearful guilt of poisoning youthful minds and dragging them down to his own pitiable level. If there can be one sin greater than another, on which Heaven frowns with more awful displeasure, it is that of leading the young into principles of error and the debasing practices of vice. (53, 54, emphasis in the original)

Perhaps somewhere in the United States, there may yet be some rural school districts that still use *Page's Theory and Practice of Teaching*. Perhaps not. Perhaps somewhere there are groups of parents willing to do the hard work of winning school board elections and fighting unions and bureaucrats to establish local schools that will apply Page's principles and provide a good education for the children attending there. Perhaps. But until such battles are fought and won, may I suggest a good private school or home schooling as the better, if not Biblically obligatory, alternative?

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