

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy, A Word of Introduction

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 11, 3/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

To discuss the subject of government subsidy of non-public schools hardly needs any justification today. In the realm of things educational, there is hardly an issue that is more in the news and more under discussion everywhere than this one.

In the State of Michigan there are at least three proposals for some kind of state subsidy of non-public education, two of which are already before the legislature in some form, and one of which has been publicly proposed by an influential member of the State Board of Education but not yet formally introduced to the legislature. Every day the newspapers carry items about this subject and about various public meetings for discussion and debate of the issue.

In other states the Christian school movement is not numerically as large as in Michigan; but in some of these the Roman Catholics claim a large number of students and are clamoring for financial help from the government. In Illinois, for example, this is the case. In that state the Roman Catholic schools presently enroll 20 per cent of all the state's elementary and high school age children. In the City of Chicago the Roman Catholic schools enroll more than 35 per cent of the children of school age. The school system of the Archdiocese of Chicago is the nation's fourth largest, exceeded in size only by the public school systems of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. According to a recent report in the *Chicago Tribune*, it is plagued by financial and personnel problems which, if unchecked, threaten to be fatal for half of its 515 schools within a decade. And recently the bishops of that state have bluntly stated that only the state could preserve the Catholic school system.

And so it goes. Similar problems and proposals are arising in other states. Besides, the federal government is already deeply committed to aid non-public schools from the college level down; and it bids fair to become more deeply involved.

Sooner or later parental Christian schools everywhere, including our own parent-controlled, covenantal schools, are likely to be faced by the necessity of giving a *Yes* or *No* answer to the offer of some kind of government subsidy. Or, in areas where the public school forces hold more

complete sway numerically, and where government help may therefore not become a real option, Christian schools may find themselves the victims of a squeeze-play which threatens their very existence in a different way. This, I understand, is increasingly the situation in Iowa, where there is a move afoot to make it difficult for Christian schools to exist by exerting the pressures of various technical requirements.

Hence, we must be ready! Our school boards must be ready to take the proper stand. But more than that, our societies and parents must be ready to make a proper decision. For this is not an issue that can be decided by any board all by itself, nor would I expect that any board would even want to bear the responsibility. Our schools belong to the parents and the parent-societies. And therefore we all must know what this is about, and must be able to make a well-founded decision.

Moreover, we must be prepared to face this issue strictly on the basis of Christian and, more specifically, Reformed principles. It is not a pragmatic question of the half-plus-one, the majority, the "voice of the people." It is only to be regretted that here in Michigan all kinds of pressure groups, both for and against state aid, are being formed,—in most cases utterly without regard to any real principles. Protestant and Roman Catholic and Lutheran and Jew, Christ and Belial, the world and the church seem to be able to form all kinds of alliances either to advance public education or to advance aid to non-public schools. And it is nothing less than appalling to behold the spectacle of those who are supposed to be Reformed leaders joining in these unprincipled movements and even trying to be heard as spokesmen.

Nor is it a question of state or federal constitutions. For legislatures and courts this is indeed a question; and the constitutional provision of the "non-establishment of religion" is proving to be a knotty problem for proponents of school aid. However, it may very well be that in the future this problem will be either solved legislatively or resolved in favor of school aid by the courts of the land, which tend to be rather pragmatic any way in recent years. The legislative and judicial trend seems to be in this direction: But just because government subsidy may be declared constitutional does not make it permissible for us as Christians. While we abide by the constitution of the land, let us remember that we have a higher and controlling loyalty, that of the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

Nor, surely, is it a question of money. This is what it has become in the public mind to a large extent,—a clamor for funds. It is precisely this aspect which is tempting many to join in the hue-and-cry for government subsidy. And because both the love of money and the littleness of faith with respect to the morrow so readily plague us as imperfect children of God, the danger is not small that we are blinded to the real issues by the dollar signs in our eyes. And we can be deceived by slogans about justice and about a "fair share" of the state's coffers into which we pay our taxes, *et cetera*. I have written about this in the past; and I shall have more to say about it. But by all means, let us keep our Christian bearings, and not allow ourselves to be tempted by the lure of dollars into deciding our stand on this issue without regard to our Christian principles. Then we might better close our schools right now, rather than wait for them to die a slow death through lack of real commitment.

No, for us this issue is one of principle. And it is on this basis alone that we must take our stand. If government subsidy is right, then we must not only wait for it to come and accept it when it is offered. Then we had better get on the band-wagon and work for it—always, of course, on the basis of principle. If it is wrong, then we *may not*, before God, accept it, even though the majority might succeed in making it available, as I expect they will. And let us remember: we are not

accountable to men, nor to ourselves, but to our God, Who has charged us with the training of our children in the fear of His name. In this series of articles, therefore, I purpose to study the entire subject of government subsidy of non-public education, particularly with respect to our own Christian schools. There are principles involved here: principles of justice, principles of government, principles of education. And when I speak of principles, I mean principles which can only properly be spelled out from a Reformed point of view and on the basis of Scripture. In these articles, I shall also attempt to be factual and informative. I have been watching the various developments being reported and have been gathering information about the proposals in Michigan especially; and for the most part my discussion of any concrete proposals will be concerned with the situation in Michigan. But the problem and the principles involved will, I trust, be generally the same everywhere.

Meanwhile, I invite you, the readers, to do two things. In the first place, send to me any information you can, especially from and about other states. Some have already done this; to them my thanks. In the second place, I welcome any questions which you may have on the subject, or any questions which my articles may occasion. I will do my best to answer them.

### *The Proposal of the Joint Legislative Committee*

When what has been nicknamed Parochiaid failed to get through the legislature last year, a Joint Legislative Study Committee on Aid to Non-Public Schools was appointed "to conduct an in-depth study of the present status of non-public schools and, as a result of that study, to report its findings to the 1969 Legislative session." (Report of the Joint Legislative Committee, p. 1; hereafter referred to as RJLC). This committee of 5 state senators and 5 state representatives investigated, conducted hearings, listened to supposed experts, and prepared a report and recommendations. Obviously the committee was from the outset bent on coming up with some kind of formula for state aid; at least their report never mentions the possibility of rejecting state aid altogether, but only reports on several possible courses of providing aid. And after narrowing down the possibilities to four, the committee recommends the fourth, which I here quote in full (RJLC, pp. 25-27):

*Purchase of educational services with amount determined by a percentage of public school aid*

*The committee carefully examined the following approach for consideration. Concepts of this legislative approach are as follows:*

- 1. State aid to non-public schools would be related to a percentage of the state aid formula for public schools. Funds would be paid out of the general fund for the purchase of secular educational services.*
- 2. Money would be appropriated to each Intermediate School District based upon a membership count of non-public school pupils on the fourth Friday after Labor Day.*
- 3. The amount of money should be based on the existing average net full-time membership allowance to public schools. The proponents recommended amount for 1969-70 would be 50% of that average allowance. In inner city target areas to be designated by the State Board of Education, the full average membership allowance should be granted for 1969-70 and every year thereafter.*
- 4. The Intermediate School District, establishing a separate account, would purchase*



*under supervision of the State Board of Education, from boards of education, associations, or corporations operating non-public schools, legislatively specified educational services (such as guidance and counseling services, library and audio-visual services, and professional teacher services) for the benefit of pupils in membership.*

*5. The Intermediate School District would pay professional persons (who would be required to be state certified or meet minimum state standards) rendering such services upon written certification by non-public school authority that such services had been provided. Such persons would not be considered employees of the Intermediate School District and would never receive all of their wages from the Intermediate District. Therefore, no money would be paid directly to the institution.*

*6. No Intermediate Board of Education would purchase any educational services in courses of instruction in religion.*

*7. In order to assure that the state was receiving appropriate services for state aid, the State Board of Education should annually test pupil achievement in courses of instruction purchased in order to determine the secular effect and whether the secular educational legislative purposes are being achieved. 8. The State Board should require audits (similar to those required of public school districts) of the financial and child accounting records of the nonpublic schools as they pertained to the purchase of services.*

The Report goes on to comment on this proposal as follows, p. 27:

*Such legislation can be carefully drafted in order to meet constitutional tests and to safeguard the interests of the state in the use of public funds. Administration by the State Board of Education through existing intermediate structure (the vast number of local school districts would make administration through such districts far more unwieldy and more costly), with no money going directly to non-public schools, would provide safeguards.*

*Yet the non-public schools of this state would be able to maintain their identity while continuing their contribution to the general welfare, to public education, and to the general tax-paying public.*

*The Legislature could determine, through testing, whether or not this approach was meeting the secular legislative purpose.*

Now I do not intend to criticize this proposal in any detail at this time. Let me merely point out some notable features:

- 1) Inherent in the proposal is the religious-secular distinction in education which plagues all who try to find a way to provide state aid.
- 2) This proposal rather deviously tries to avoid any form of *direct* state aid to non-public schools:
  - 1) By making payments *indirectly* through the Intermediate School Districts.
  - 2) By so-called "purchasing of educational services" rather than outright subsidy.
  - 3) By attempting to stipulate that those whose services are purchased are nevertheless not employees of the Intermediate School District, though payment would go to the persons, not to their schools (a rather novel way of



redefining the term *employee*.) 3) The State would already have its fingers into the internal affairs of the schools by testing pupil achievement in courses of instruction for which it pays and by requiring audits of the schools' records.

Finally, I wish to point out that the entire approach of this proposal is financial and utilitarian. The committee was concerned with but one thing: the financial problems of the non-public schools. And ultimately the motivation is the protection of the economic welfare of the state and of the public schools. This is evident throughout the report, but it is rather bluntly stated in the following section from the Summary (RJLC, p. 28):

*We find that the existence of non-public schools provides the state with valuable education resources and results in vast financial savings annually to the general public.*

*The non-public schools are faced with severe financial problems. This is evident by the enrollment loss of 46,000 students from non-public schools during the past four years due to fiscally induced closures and cutbacks.*

*This transfer of students from the non-public sector to the public sector is already costing the taxpayers \$30 million this year. At a time when our public schools are having financial problems of their own, the state cannot afford to lose any available educational resources.*

*The financial problems of non-public schools are most severe in our metropolitan inner cities in the very areas where our public schools face the greatest problems.*

*The Legislature should act on the principle that partial investment in non-public schools will prove to be more economical to the general tax-paying public than paying the full cost through state and local taxes of educating these children in public schools.*

### *Other Proposals*

The proposal of the Joint Committee was to have been introduced in the Legislature during the first part of February. Meanwhile, other proposals have been made.

One bill has already been introduced which provides for a tax exemption for those tax-payers who send their children to non-public schools. Not much is being said about this bill at present, the reason probably being that it will not provide adequate financial aid to non-public schools. Besides, it will have the effect of reducing the state's income and its support of public schools at a time when the state is looking for more income to meet a higher budget. And while I doubt that this proposal has much chance of passage, there would still be the question whether this would be a no-strings-attached exemption with respect to the matter of religious-or-secular education.

Still another proposal was aired by a member of the State Board of Education, a proposal which might be presented in modified form to the legislature. Apparently the proposal was deliberately made in order to restrict subsidy of non-public schools as much as possible. For its author, a. Dr. Augenstein, admitted that probably many of the state's parochial schools would elect not to participate; and he rather frankly stated that "I do not feel public funds can be used for the indoctrination of specific values—whether they be mine or someone else's." This proposal

involves issuance of a voucher to any student to pay for his education so long as the school he attends meets the following criteria: 1) Proper certification of all teachers and curriculum. 2) Selection of faculty on a nondiscriminatory basis. 3) Prohibition against imposing discipline upon the basis of creed. 4) Optional religious training and no religious symbols in the school. 5) Acceptance of all students up to a school's capacity, no matter what their race or religion. Supporters of government aid, needless to say, have already expressed strenuous objections to this plan.

Finally, I may briefly mention the suggestion of former Governor George Romney in his farewell address. I mention it not because it is considered a real option in Michigan, but because it was in a way more honest than diplomatic. The governor, who has somewhat of a reputation for foot-in-mouth disease, bluntly proposed that the non-public schools and the churches get completely out of the business of education in so-called secular subjects, and leave this education to the public school system. The church-related schools would then serve only to furnish direct religious instruction.

I call this proposal honest, because it simply carries the distinction between religious and secular education, — a distinction which everyone has been making, — to its logical consequences. But you should have heard the cries of anguish, and even of outrage, arising from almost every quarter, especially from the proponents of state aid who have constantly been talking about the secular subjects taught in Christian schools. It was rather amusing how the governor put certain people on the spot!

Next time, D.V., we shall begin to examine the issues at stake.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-word-introduction>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (2), A Question of Justice or of Money?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 12, 3/15/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

In this discussion of what has been nicknamed "parochiaid" I have intentionally phrased the subject as you find it above, "Our Schools and Government Subsidy." By "our schools" I mean our parentally established and operated covenantal schools; and I have in mind especially our school *societies*, upon whom rests the privilege and responsibility of operating the schools, and with whom rests the obligation to take a responsible decision about any eventual government support, a decision based upon Scriptural and Reformed principles. To subsidize, whether at state or federal level, is to aid or promote a private enterprise with public money; and a subsidy is a government grant to assist a private enterprise which, obviously, is also deemed advantageous to the public. And my phrasing of the subject is designed to express that the decision ultimately rests with our schools, and that these must be prepared to express their attitude toward and acceptance or rejection of such subsidy. To assist in the latter is the purpose of these editorials.

## The Justice or Fairness Argument

It is well known that one of the arguments adduced in support of the drive to obtain adherence for government support of non-public schools, both among the people and with our lawmakers, is that of justice, or fairness. In fact, with some this appeal to what is right and what is fair as far as the disbursement of tax money is concerned is virtually a slogan. In one form, it is an appeal to the "freedom" concept, so that this idea of freedom (which is supposed to be so thoroughly "American") has even found its way into the name of an organization like "Citizens for Educational Freedom." In another form, this argument embodies supposedly an ordinary sense of what is fair and equitable: accordingly, so it is argued, if we all pay taxes on an equal basis, we should all have an equitable return, a fair share, when government money is disbursed.

Now no one will deny that some of these slogans and campaign arguments have a certain popular appeal, and even have an appearance of rightness. And especially in our day of emphasis upon such ideas as that of "equal rights" it is rather easy to be attracted-I would say "misled"—by these battle-cries. In fact, these very slogans are calculated to make the supporters



of non-public schools feel that. they play the part of the persecuted, under-privileged, unfairly treated underdog. They are calculated to give the movement which is campaigning for government subsidy the image of a kind of holy crusade.

Personally, I am always a bit skeptical about such claims, and especially about a movement which tries to have the public image of a holy crusade. And I believe that I have objective reasons for some healthy skepticism. In the first place, any movement of this kind is going to claim that it has right and justice on its side. You may depend on this. What else would one expect? Surely, no movement is going to advance its claims for this or that (especially in the political realm), and at the same time openly admit that those claims are *contrary* to right and justice and that the claims are made *in spite of* this fact. This would be political suicide! All of which means that before we allow ourselves to be stampeded into backing any such movement and accepting its claim that justice is on its side, we ought to take a calm, hard look at those claims and their alleged justice. In the second place, I am unfavorably impressed by the clamor and the pressure tactics and the "hard sell" of the entire movement. These, to my mind, do not belong to the image of a movement that is solidly based upon justice and righteousness, upon principle. Apart from anything else which may be wrong with that organization, a group like the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools is a *pressure* group. There has been campaign pressure applied to our legislators. Last year the schools were in some cases used to distribute literature to the parents urging them to exert pressure upon government officials,—not, mind you, the pressure of a simple and quiet appeal to justice and principle, but the pressure of a concerted letter campaign, the pressure of a pile of letters, the pressure of numbers. This year it has been publicly charged in the daily newspapers that the forces in favor of government subsidy have been organized into a well-organized and well-oiled political machine, with campaign strategy well-planned and even with the date of a victory celebration already set. Now all this does not leave the impression upon me of a genuinely holy crusade and of a movement that is dedicated to principle and that rests its case purely upon justice. On the contrary, it leaves the impression that some people have learned well a lesson in worldly politics, have learned to "know the ropes" as far as political in-fighting and political maneuvers are concerned. They have learned the lesson that if you make enough noise and organize enough voters into a group and exert enough pressure, you might well succeed in gaining your goals by persuading legislators that it is politically expedient to listen to your demands. And when I observe these phenomena, then I am inclined to conclude that there is very little solid principle and real justice at the foundation of this movement and its claims. The claim of justice is belied by the clamor and the political pressure-tactics. It is an attempt to justify and furnish with a cloak of respectability that which is not really concerned about principle and about justice whatsoever. From a Christian point of view, if our claims are a matter of principle and justice, then we should quietly and firmly make our case and let justice and principle speak, let the outcome rest with God the Judge, and not imitate the world and its methods.

It is considerations like those stated above which make me very reluctant to accept at face value the argument that government subsidy is a matter of justice and fairness.

Nevertheless, because this argument has been raised in the past, and because it is still used and defended, I want to examine it as thoroughly as possible, in order that we may discover just how much justice and principle, if any, is involved.

The argument which appeals to what is fair and just takes several forms. Let me mention some of the chief points which are made in this connection.

1) Private school supporters as well as public school supporters are compelled to pay taxes on the same basis; therefore, if tax money is used for education, private school supporters are entitled to a fair share. Private schools, in the eyes of the government, should be on an equal footing with public schools.

2) Since education is compulsory, and since private schools are legitimate educational institutions, therefore they should be financed by the government just as well as the public schools.

3) Since private schools through their education contribute to the general public welfare (whatever that may be, HCH), therefore it, is legitimate and proper that they receive government subsidy.

Perhaps there are other versions of this fairness argument, but these are the main ones; and the others will not be essentially different. I will overlook the fact that to these arguments is frequently added the attempted economic "squeeze play" to the effect that if private schools are not granted subsidy, there will be a drain of private school pupils to the public schools, and thus the public school costs (and therefore the taxes) will increase. This, surely, is not justice, but coercion. For the time being, I will also pass by the questionable concept of freedom which speaks of a pluralistic society and pluralistic education. Perhaps we can return to this item at a later occasion. Neither of these two items is germane to the justice argument as it deals with the present system of government financed public education in our country today.

This is the argument made by the Legislative Study Committee in Michigan. They state (p. 4, RJLC):

*The Committee finds that our non-public schools serve a very valid public purpose and make a real contribution to the general welfare. These schools not only serve as a very valuable resource in assisting young citizens to receive a secular education, but these schools also make a tremendous financial contribution to the general tax-paying public.*

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-2-question-justice-or-money>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (3), A Question of Justice or of Money?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 13, 4/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

## *Not Justice*

The question whether the parochiaid movement is a question of justice or a mere quest for money we began to consider in the last issue. I have tried to present the various claims and arguments made by representatives and supporters of the movement as objectively as possible and to document this presentation by means of quotations.

In this installment I will try to present an evaluation of the movement's claim of justice and right and to present reasons for what I contend should be the position of our covenantal schools with respect to these claims.

Let me state from the outset that it is my firm conviction that the parochiaid movement, considered from the viewpoint of our Reformed principles, cannot be upheld as a movement that is founded upon principles of justice and right. And to me this leaves the other alternative: it is a clamor for money, for a government subsidy, without regard to and in violation of true principles. I have several reasons for this conviction; and in presenting them I will move from the less important to the more important.

## *Sundry Considerations*

In the first place, there is the fact that the parochiaid movement only seeks government *aid*, or subsidy, and then only *partial* aid and at only one level of government involved in education. The current proposal before the Michigan legislature is for 50% of the average net full-time membership allowance to public schools (100% in inner city target areas). And this concerns, of course, only *state* funds, not local school funds. Now this is a very strange way of doing for a movement which is supposed to base its claims on justice and fairness. Certainly, right is right! If I am accused of the crime of murder and am innocent, then I am not going to plead that I receive a 10-year prison term instead of the electric chair. I am going to insist that I should be declared innocent and should receive no penalty whatsoever. Thus, too, if private schools are rightfully



entitled to government support, then they should insist upon such support on an equal basis with public schools as a *matter of principle*. Moreover, they should insist that this same principle be applied at the local level. But this they dare not do,—as a *matter of utility*. They know full well that a proposal for an equal share of all school money at local, state, and federal levels would be laughed right out of the halls of government. In fact, they are aware that some legislators already fear that eventually they will be demanding 100% subsidy. To me, all this does not leave the impression of being a movement dedicated to high ideals of justice and righteousness. On the contrary, it leaves the impression of being a movement motivated by expediency and probably of being a movement capable of engaging in some political horse-trading. If my case is based on principles of justice, then I should make my case on that basis, plead it on the basis of what is right and just according to the Word of God; and then, if those in authority will not heed me, I can do nothing but rest the case with the Lord, the right righteous Judge.

In the second place, in close connection with the preceding, the whole movement gives every indication of being a pressure movement, of trying to gain a place under the sun as a power-structure. Last year, as I reported, pressure was exerted upon parents through the schools. This same kind of pressure has been exerted on legislators. Now it may be argued, perhaps, that this is the only language the world understands and that this is the kind of tactics which must be employed to get the legislature to pay attention and to vote your way. But this does not make it right. This has only too often been the failure of would-be Christian organizations in various areas of life. They seek worldly power, the same kind of power which the world employs in its organizations to gain its ends. A Christian movement, which is based on justice and righteousness according to the Word of God, should be ashamed to employ such tactics. Its proper power is not the power of a power-structure, not the power of numbers, not the power of the majority, but the power of the Word, the power of the truth, the power of the Spirit. True, you will not "succeed" with such methods; you will go down to defeat in this world, just exactly because the world does not recognize such methods. But if "success" is the criterion, then you have already conceded that it is not really a question of justice and righteousness, but one of utility.

In the third place, the advocates of parochialism, both within and outside of the legislature here in Michigan, have themselves by their own arguments made the issue one of money. This is also true in other states where government subsidy of schools is being discussed. On the one hand, they claim that they will not be able to keep their private schools open without government subsidy. On the other hand, they point to the fact that the closing of private schools will cost the state more money to operate public schools. They take pains to point out how many students have already transferred to public schools and how many may be expected to transfer to public schools in the near future. And they take pains to point out how many more millions of dollars this is going to cost the state. Again, this does not sound like a justice-movement to me. Nor does it sound to me like the language of those with whom Christian education is a matter of deep conviction and principle. I assure you that if this had been the outlook of covenant parents in the days of the Great Depression of the 1930's, all the Christian schools would have closed their doors. I assure you that if this had been the outlook of our fathers in the beginning of the Christian school movement, no schools would have been started. I assure you that if it had been a mere question of money, our Protestant Reformed school movement would never have gotten off the ground: No Reformed Christian educator or parent should want to have any part in a movement which makes our schools a matter of dollars and cents or that lumps our schools together with a movement which does this. (I am well aware, of course, that this whole dollars-and-cents argument concerns chiefly the Roman Catholic schools which in many places are in deep financial trouble. This does not change the fact that the Christian school movement has

very much involved itself in the fight for parochial aid and has joined organizations which employ this kind of argumentation. For this they should be thoroughly ashamed!) And certainly our Protestant Reformed parents can lend no support to a movement of this kind.

In the fourth place, it is, of course, very easy to turn the arguments used in favor of parochial aid around. The argument about an equal or rightful share of the taxes can be turned around as follows: every tax-payer has the full right to make use of the public schools which the government provides with those taxes; if he chooses not to do so, but to send his children to the Christian school, he is free to do so at his own expense. And the argument which claims that private schools educate, that they serve the same educational purpose as the public schools, and that therefore they are entitled to state money can also be turned around. If it be true that they serve the same educational purpose and thus serve the general public welfare even as do the public schools, then why did they open in the first place? Besides, such duplication of effort is expensive, whether it be public or private. Of course, everyone will recognize that there is something fallacious about this whole argument. Either there is a complete denial, of the true character of Christian education when you make a statement like this, or there is a devious cover-up of the divergent character of Christian education "Education" in the public schools and "education" in the Reformed Christian school are two completely divergent concepts.

I have intentionally left out of the picture any question of the constitutionality of government subsidy of parental or of parochial schools. Personally, I do not believe that either the state or the federal constitution allow such aid, especially when I consider the fact that government subsidy of a Roman Catholic (parochial) school would be direct subsidy of the Roman Catholic Church. And I think it requires a considerable amount of devious legal reasoning in order to get around constitutional provisions. But in the changing judicial climate of our day it is entirely possible that legislatures and courts may somehow manage to justify such subsidy some day. And therefore I have not pressed this matter. To me, it makes not a particle of difference whether the state allows it or not; and the constitution is not decisive of the issue for me. I believe the entire movement is principally wrong; and we as Christians should have no part of it.

---

My space is already more than used up for this issue; and therefore the rest of my arguments, the more basic arguments, will have to wait until next time.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-3-question-justice-or-money>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (4), A Question of Justice or of Money?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 14, 4/15/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

## *More Basic Considerations*

As stated last time, the *Standard Bearer* editorially takes the position that the present proposals for government subsidy of private schools are not based on justice. Certainly, a study of the Joint Legislative Report of the Michigan legislature reveals that the entire approach to the question is not one of justice. It is rather the approach of utility. It is argued that the financial load on the public school system will be too great if the private schools must shut down. It is argued that therefore it would be folly not to render some aid to private schools. It is also argued that the striving to build up the educational level of the inner cities will be hampered if the private schools in those inner city areas are not helped financially. One looks in vain in this report for a good, solid argument which proceeds from righteousness and justice. In fact, here in the Michigan legislature the whole question of parochialism has become one of money; and also the foes of parochialism are arguing either that the public schools will be deprived of funds or that there simply is not enough money available to pay the added \$40 million which parochialism will require.

The same is true of the two organizations which support parochialism in Michigan, the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools and Citizens for Educational Freedom. As might be expected when we judge from the very names of these organizations, about which there is nothing Christian, one looks in vain in all the argumentation which has appeared for any hint of Christian principles of justice and righteousness with respect to government or with respect to education. These movements present strictly secular, that is, carnal arguments. They have a secular conception of freedom. They have a secular conception of education. When they speak at all of the place of religion in education, they assume either a neutral stance (and speak of non-public schools) or they assume an all-embracing stance (and speak in general of religious education).

Even in the light of the above, I cannot understand how the Christian can in good conscience accept any government subsidy obtained or granted on such a basis.

But it is my contention that the entire concept of government subsidy is also *positively wrong*,



contrary to Christian principles of righteousness and justice. In support of this contention I offered sundry arguments in the April 1 issue. In the present article I begin to offer more basic considerations.

*The first such consideration which I offer is that the whole concept of government subsidy is contrary to the fundamental principle of parental education of covenant children.* The positive implication of this principle is that it is the duty and responsibility and privilege of the parents, and of the parents only, to educate the children which the Lord has given them. The negative implication of this principle, for our present discussion, is that it is not the duty and responsibility and privilege of the government to educate our children.

This has long been recognized among Reformed people as the formal principle at the basis of Christian education. We are distinct in this regard, certainly, from the public schools. But we are also distinct, let us not forget, from those who hold to parochial education, the system of church schools. It is true that this principle has been compromised by some, so that it is claimed, for example, that if the parents fail in this duty, then the government may step in; but this I consider a compromise and without any Scriptural foundation. It may even be questioned, in the light of this principle, in how far the government has any right before God to exercise any control whatsoever over the education of our children. By what right, before God, does the government stipulate, for example, that a high school education is compulsory? However this may be, the fact remains that everywhere Scripture places the responsibility of education upon the parents; and also our Baptism Form places the responsibility there in its third question to the parents.

Now let us remember that this is not an unimportant matter. We call this the *formal* principle of education in distinction from the *material* principle, which is concerned with the fundamental spiritual direction and the content of education. But let us not be deceived by that term *formal*. There are no mere formalities before God. This principle implies that God Himself, our covenant God, holds us responsible for the education of our children. That responsibility you and I *can* never abdicate, even though we may attempt to escape it. The Lord our God still holds us responsible. Even when parents band together to establish a covenant school, they are held responsible for the education of their own children. Even when they elect a school board, they cannot "pass off" that responsibility to that board. Even when they hire teachers, it is ultimately not the teachers but the parents who are responsible before God. Let us never forget this. We do well, in fact, to bear this in mind in the actual life and operation of our covenant schools. I am afraid that sometimes we tend to think that we can "pass the buck" and shed our responsibility when we have a school and elect a board and send our children off to school for the biggest part of the day. But this is never the case. And our schools must always remain very really and very actively *parental*.

But the question confronting us is: what, in the light of this basic principle of Christian education, must be our attitude toward government subsidy of our schools? Shall we campaign for such government subsidy?

Shall we tacitly consent to it by accepting such subsidy if the legislature approves of it? This could only be done by either openly or tacitly denying this principle of parental responsibility and by admitting that the government either must or may share that responsibility with us. Mind you, I am not talking now about the danger of government control on the part of a government which shares financial responsibility. I am only speaking of the principle of parental responsibility which is at stake. This is a sacred principle, one which may not be sacrificed on the altar of the dollar.

If we desire to let our Christian testimony go forth, a testimony founded on what is right before God, then let us testify to the government that it should get out of the business of education altogether. Let us testify to the government that it has only the God-given authority to rule in the sphere of things civil and to wield the sword, that it has no calling to operate schools. You say, perhaps, that such a proposal is preposterous? You object that those who occupy the seat of government would laugh hilariously at such a proposal? You point to the fact that public education is part and parcel of the American system, guaranteed by the law of the land? I remind you that we are talking about principles and about living from principle, not about the question whether our sacred principles will find favor in the eyes of the rulers of this world. And if, then, we, are going to accept the fact that public education is part of the American system and that we cannot succeed in changing that system, let us also be glad that this same system still allows us room as people of God to hold to and to practice our principle of parental education. Let us exercise that right as long as it is possible to do so. Let us not engage in self-pity about the great expense and the tremendous sacrifice involved. By all means, let us not exchange our heritage for a mess of dollars. Let us rather be glad and thankful to our God that we may still exercise this parental responsibility. Let us count it a privilege as well as a sacred responsibility!

This, to me, is living from principle.

(to be continued)

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-4-question-justice-or-money>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (5), A Question of Justice or of Money?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 16, 5/15/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

Our editorial department in the last issue lacked space for further treatment of the subject of "parochiaid." We now continue our discussion of "More Basic Considerations" which was begun in the April 15 issue.

## *More Basic Considerations* (continued)

The second consideration which I offer in support of the contention that the entire concept of government subsidy is wrong, that is, contrary to Christian principles of righteousness and justice, may be stated as follows: *It is wrong before God to act on the basis that government subsidy is an issue of private (or non-public) schools versus public schools, wrong to make common cause with enemies of the Reformed faith on that basis, wrong to seek financial support for enemies of the Reformed faith and their schools, and wrong to allow ourselves to be treated on that basis by the state and to accept aid on that basis.*

Let me remind you that this second consideration is based on an assumption, an "if." That *if* is: if it were right for the government to be in the business of education at all! This, you recall, we presented as our first objection of a basic nature. Assuming now that this is right for the government,—which we deny,—then the whole concept of government subsidy would still be principally wrong on the basis of the second basis consideration, stated above.

Notice, in the first place, that the nature of the entire parochiaid- movement is such that it puts its adherents and its schools on a broad common denominator about which there is absolutely nothing Christian. This is evident from the very names of the two organizations which are pushing for government subsidy here in Michigan. The name of the one is "Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools." The name of the other is "Citizens for Educational Freedom." These names point up the nature of the entire movement. Parochial and parental and private, Roman Catholic and Lutheran and Jewish and Christian Reformed and—supposedly—Protestant Reformed schools and their supporters,—all are lumped together without regard to principle and fundamental differences. All are lumped together and make common cause simply on the basis



that they are "non-public" or "private." All supporters are supposed to work together simply on the basis that they are "citizens" and that they are for "educational freedom" (a freedom, remember, which is not defined in Biblical terms, but simply in terms of a secular political philosophy). I ask: is this right? Is this living out of principle? Is this living from the principle that we are called to walk in the midst of the world antithetically from the principle of regeneration? Let me remind you that this is indeed what is involved as far as principle is concerned. This is not only true as far as the active movement to gain such subsidy is concerned; on that score, any genuine supporter and adherent of covenantal education ought to be thoroughly ashamed to be part of a movement which so completely blurs and blots out the lines of the antithesis. But this is also true as far as the government is concerned. The government also simply views all non-public schools as exactly that, and no more, and if it grants aid, will grant it on that basis. And we may not allow ourselves to be treated on that basis. We may not allow ourselves, educationally speaking, to be lumped together.

No, if it is at all the business of the government to become involved in education, then let us have the courage of our convictions. Let us not say that we are colorlessly non-public, or private. Let us tell the government that we operate parental schools because we believe that is right before God; let us tell the government that we operate covenantal schools because we believe that is right before God; let us tell the government that we operate Reformed schools in which our Reformed, antithetical principles permeate all the instruction, because we believe that is right before God; let us tell them that in schools we offer the *only right education*, the only kind of education that before God has the right to be called education, inculcation of knowledge. And then let us tell them that this is the reason why, if they are a Christian government, they will support us and should support us exclusively. You say, perhaps, such speech would kill any chance of government subsidy? I agree heartily. But God forbid that we ever become so blinded by dollar signs that we forget the basic principles of our educational system and say anything else than the above!

You say, perhaps, that this is a very narrow position? I agree, again. But I ask: since when has the way of the Christian been anything else but narrow?

Notice, in the second place, that the government subsidy movement is emphatically not something neutral, but involves seeking financial support for *enemies* of the Reformed faith.

No, I am not now talking about so-called separation of church and state, though it is indeed difficult to understand how that idea can be maintained in the courts of our land in view of the fact that support of Roman Catholic schools would involve *parochial* schools, that is, schools that are directly the property and responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church.

Nor am I talking about the fact that the overwhelming *amount* of government subsidy, if granted, will go to such Roman Catholic schools. I could do so. For it is a fact that the whole parochial movement would founder and fail utterly except for the fact that the Roman Catholics, as a whole, are strongly behind it. This is true of every published instance of a drive for government subsidy thus far. It is a fact that the Christian school movement constitutes so small a minority that it would not stand a ghost of a chance if it were to seek such subsidy in the halls of government all by itself. It is a fact, too, which can be supported by published statistics, that the Roman Catholics are notoriously poor, in comparison with our schools, in paying for education and in charging and paying tuition. It is even a fact that in some cases they operate schools which are debt-free and which charge no tuition, and yet are clamoring for government subsidy. It is also a fact that it is chiefly Roman Catholic schools which are closing because of financial

difficulties and which are threatening to dump a large influx of pupils upon the public school system. And why, pray, even in this light should we be so foolish as to help fight their battle?

Nevertheless, what I am concerned about is that they are *enemies* of the Reformed faith. How is it possible for children of the Reformation to be in favor of government subsidy for a school system of our mortal enemies and a school system which stands to benefit more than any other from such subsidy? Does this not offend the sensibilities of any right-thinking son or daughter of the Reformation? It ought to! Or have we become so blandly "democratic" and "tolerant" and "ecumenically minded" that this makes no difference any longer?

---

### *Postscript*

As a matter of information, I may state that as of this writing a form of parochiaid is being sought also in the state of Indiana. The governor of Illinois has also proposed it to the state legislature. Here in Michigan the state senate has passed an education bill without parochiaid; it is reported that an effort will be made to tack it on in the house of representatives, but that it will probably be only a token amount this year, partly for the purpose of getting a test in the courts. The propaganda mills continue to grind, however.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-5-question-justice-or-money>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (6), Pluralistic or Antithetical?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 17, 6/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

The aspect of "parochiaid" which I am about to discuss, as well as the position which I will set forth in connection with it, could well have been considered under the previous question which I raised, namely "Justice or Money?" However, because the argument of a so-called "pluralistic society" is raised so frequently by advocates of government subsidy, and because this argument has the appearance of logic, and because it is an argument fundamental (at least in their own thinking) to the entire position of "parochiaid" advocates, I am devoting special consideration to this question.

A few introductory remarks are in order.

In the first place, we may note that this argument is employed by many advocates of government subsidy to non-public schools, not so much by legislative supporters of such subsidy. The latter usually argue on the pragmatic basis that non-public schools are in danger of closing because of financial troubles and that it is cheaper to give money to private schools than to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in expanding the public schools so as to absorb a threatened large influx of pupils from private schools. And they argue, further, that "non-public schools serve a very valid public purpose and make a real contribution to the general welfare." Now also in the latter idea there are principles of education involved, principles which one has to accept if he accepts any government hand-out. And I expect to return to this matter of the fundamental view of education involved in "parochiaid" at a later date. However, in the "Report and Recommendations of the Joint Legislative Committee on Aid to Non-Public Schools" of the Michigan Legislature one does not find this argument of a pluralistic society. It is employed rather by private school advocates of government subsidy, especially, I have noticed, by spokesmen of the organization known as Citizens for Educational Freedom, but also by others. These spokesmen have used this argument in their pleas to the government as well as in their pleas for public support of their drive for government subsidy. And they have made it plain on more than one occasion that this "pluralism" argument belongs to the very foundation of the entire "parochiaid" position,—even to the point that some legislators have become afraid (and justly so) that ultimately the principle of "parochiaid" will mean that private schools will have to receive equal government money with

public schools.

In the second place, I want to point out that the basic question in this pluralism-argument concerns the view of society involved in it. If you accept the view of society involved, then you must needs come to the conclusion that government subsidy of private schools (proceeding now on the basis that the government is rightly involved in the business of education) is not only allowable, but *mandatory*. And therefore it is necessary that we carefully study this pluralistic view of society; and I mean study it in the light of Scripture and our Reformed principles. One can also indeed ask the question—whether historically and constitutionally our state and our nation recognize such a pluralism.

But the fundamental question for us as Reformed people is a spiritual one. I cannot stress this too strongly. This is the sole question for us as people of God: is it right for us, before God, to advocate and to accept government subsidy of our schools? The question is not whether it is constitutional, or whether the legislature thinks it is right, or whether the courts approve it, or whether such subsidy will be made available to us, or whether all other Christian schools are going to accept it, or even whether the refusal to accept it will involve us in financial sacrifice and make it very difficult to operate our schools. The only question is: is it right before God? This is the sole question with respect to this pluralism-argument also. Is this view that society is pluralistic the right view,—right spiritually, right from a Reformed viewpoint? Then the question does not become one of a pluralistic versus a non-pluralistic society, or of a pluralistic versus a monolithic society and educational system. But the underlying question in all this talk about a pluralistic society is whether or not we are being blinded to the real character of society. Are we in this description of society as pluralistic being led to consider society merely from a formal point of view, from a purely secular point of view, from the point of view of what are really accidental characteristics, rather than from the point of view of its essential, spiritual character? For this reason I am discussing this subject under the question, "Pluralistic or Antithetical?"

### *The Pluralistic View*

Before we formulate an answer to the question posed, it is necessary to take a look at this view which holds that we live in a pluralistic society. What is this view? And it is but fair that we allow its advocates to speak for themselves.

One who holds to this pluralistic view of society is Dr. John Vanden Berg, vice president and dean of Calvin College. As an advocate of government subsidy for non-public schools, he prepared a statement for the record in connection with a public hearing by the Joint Legislative Committee on Aid to Non-Public Schools in Michigan. This statement was published in the *Banner* of Feb. 28, 1969. After arguing (correctly, but incompletely) that no education is neutral, that all education establishes "some position relative to the significance of God," he continues by arguing that "Given the compulsory and religious nature of education, I believe that an equitable sharing of the educational tax dollar is to be defended on the grounds that it will promote freedom of choice in education and in the process strengthen the cause of freedom in all phases of social life." This idea of freedom he then proceeds to press in connection with the point that the society in which we live is pluralistic. He writes as follows:

*In the field of education freedom is the opportunity to teach our children in a way consistent with our ideals and values. In our society, a pluralistic society of some two hundred million people, citizens have different ideals or values to which they are committed. It is inconceivable that these two hundred million people or the more than eight million people in the State of Michigan will all have the same views on*



education. Because of this it is essential that the independent or non-public school exist; for freedom requires alternatives from which to choose, including the alternative which is consistent with one's own commitment. A person who has no choice is not free. Public education is a free choice only if alternative choices are available, and only if these choices are available without economic penalty. Such freedom does not exist in the 'United States today.

In 1925 the United States Supreme Court stated in the *Pierce* case that "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 his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations."

Parents have the right to send their children to religiously-oriented schools, yet when they exercise this right they are deprived of all public educational benefits ("benefits" is used here in the sense of "funds," HCH). Professor Wilber G. Katz put it bluntly but correctly when he said that "we exact a price for the exercise of liberty."

Liberty at a price—this is not liberty. This is the suppression of liberty. A genuinely free society cannot impose on its citizens or demand from them, as a condition for receiving the benefits of public welfare legislation, any philosophic or religious creed. To do so would be to ask one to violate his conscience and religious convictions. It also places the government in a position to control the thought and belief of the people. Senator James Gray was absolutely right when at the August 21 hearing of this committee in Lansing he stated, "The power to educate is the power to control." This is precisely the issue. Who is going to be given the power to control? Is this to be the monopoly of the state or is it to be given to the parents who, in my judgment, have the prior right and duty to control the education of their children? Today parents are being deprived of their right to control the education of their children through the economic coercion of the state. For, to paraphrase Justice Hugo Black, "When the power, prestige, and financial support of the government are placed exclusively behind (one philosophy of education) the economic coercion" on all other philosophies of education is plain. In the field of education the government, in effect says: "Give up your notions that God is important in education, or forfeit your rights to the educational tax dollar."

All of this is spelled out a little more clearly and concretely in a "Testimony On Equity In Educational Aid" by the Christian Action Group of Western Michigan (Is this a branch of the Christian Action Foundation?). This statement appears in *Torch and Trumpet*, April, 1969, p. 11. In it we find the following:

We would remind our government, however, that full freedom and equality in education do not yet exist in fact. This problem has been intensified because American society today is both complex and religiously pluralistic. Social complexity has created the need for upgrading and extending compulsory education laws. At the same time, religious pluralism was increasing in both scope and intensity. As a result of these and other factors, the one and only system of education presently supported by government is required by Supreme Court decisions to aim at complete religious neutrality. We question whether education can ever be completely and consistently neutral in its religious values and commitments (only question it? HCH). But it is not

*our purpose to discuss this point in this statement. For what is absolutely certain is that schools which are required by law to attempt complete religious neutrality are compatible with the religious faith of only some groups of American citizens. Other groups of equally loyal citizens, although they accept and support compulsory education laws as legitimate and necessary, nevertheless cannot commit their children to such schools without denying some of the basic tenets of their religious faith. Such groups of citizens, be they Buddhist, Moslem, Jewish, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, or of some other faith, face a cruel and inequitable dilemma in education today. They must either suffer financial disability in paying the full cost of religiously acceptable education for their own children, or violate their religion and conscience by sending their children to schools which are required by law to aim at complete religious neutrality. This arrangement surely constitutes significant social injustice, and seems also to infringe upon constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion.*

The request which follows upon the above statement of position as a conclusion is as follows:

*We request, therefore, immediate action by government to ameliorate the present inequities and injustices in education. We ask that quality education be provided on an equitable basis for citizens of all races, religions, and social classes. We reemphasize that legislation to achieve this goal must provide maximum freedom of religion in education and equality of educational opportunity for all groups of citizens.*

This conclusion is then explained to mean that public schools and religiously oriented schools must be put on equal footing by the government and must have the same rights and opportunities. Strangely enough, however, in the last paragraph of their statement they do not press for government action to provide equal treatment, but what they call "greater equity." Now I do not profess to know what "greater equity" might be. To me, equity is equity; and it is a contradiction in terms to speak of degrees of equity. But it appears that this Christian Action Group of Western Michigan means not to press for equality of government support, but only for partial support.

One more brief quotation. This is from an article by Gordon Oosterman, of the National Union of Christian Schools; and it is quoted from *Christianity Today*, March 28, 1969, p. 7.

*The substance of the matter (tax funds for religious education, HCH) is whether our society wishes to have a monolithic system of education, akin to the established church of bygone centuries, or a pluralistic system, as we now have with our churches and press. . . . But when it comes to schools, well, that is different. Everyone gets taxed, but only those whose children attend the public—that is, the state—schools may benefit from their own educational taxes. Like the Dissenters, Baptists, and Covenanters of a former time, taxpayers have the choice of identifying with the favored established institution or making the best of their lot.*

Space does not permit an analysis of these statements in this issue. But let me suggest that the reader study these quotations for himself. Analyze them. Take note of the fact that the antithesis receives no mention, even when the opportunity to mention it is very obvious. And ask yourself the question: where are the lines of light versus darkness drawn in these statements?

*(to be continued)*



# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (7), Pluralistic or Antithetical?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 19, 8/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

## *Brief Reintroduction*

For some time we have been studying this subject of "parochiaid" and offering a critical analysis of the issues involved. Meanwhile this matter has been up before various state legislatures which were called upon either by some government official or by various pressure groups to enact legislation granting a measure of state subsidy to non-public schools. In the State of Michigan (and, if my memory serves me correctly, also in Illinois) parochiaid has been laid to rest for the time being. The issue is by no means dead, however. Not only are the advocates of government subsidy continuing to insist that in the near future the state(s) must provide such subsidy or face the prospect of many parochial schools closing and unloading their pupils on an already overloaded public school system; but the wheels of government itself seem to be turning slowly in the direction of state subsidy. In Michigan there is a commission to study and propose educational reform, for example; and one of the items to be studied is that of parochiaid. Generally speaking, the chief factor which prevented enactment of parochiaid legislation thus far has been a reluctance to raise state budgets and taxes in the face of already tight budgets and rising taxes. There does not seem to have been a great deal of principle involved in the failure to provide a measure of financial help to non-public schools from state coffers. The lack of favorable action has been pragmatically motivated.

What the outcome will be cannot be predicted with certainty. One thing is certain: the issue will be before the legislatures again. And while certain strong forces in the ranks of public schools have been given time, through this delay, to work against parochiaid and to rally their forces, nevertheless many are predicting that eventually some form of government subsidy is going to become law in more than one state.

A discussion of this subject, therefore, has not become outdated. On the contrary, this same legislative delay enables us to continue and complete our study and to become prepared in case parochiaid becomes a reality and in case we are faced by a choice of accepting or refusing such subsidy as might be proffered.



In the June issue we began a study of a popular argument in favor of parochialism, an argument based on the claim that we live in a pluralistic society with a pluralistic educational system. We quoted at length from the writings of three proponents of this argument, and promised an analysis of this position, concluding with the suggestion that the reader ask the question: where are the lines of light versus darkness drawn in these statements? This phase of our discussion we now continue.

### *Not Pluralistic*

First of all, it should be noted that even from a formal and legal point of view we do not have what may properly be called a pluralistic system of education in our country. The idea of pluralism is that there is a plurality of groups within our society, each having its own religious principles, each maintaining its own ideas and views of how its children should be educated in harmony with said religious principles, each entitled to establish and maintain schools which embody its ideas of education, and each having an equal right to government funds for its schools. But this is not the system in our country. As far as the official status of education in this country is concerned, we have a monolithic system, that is, one kind of education, that of the public, or state-controlled educational system. And because of the prohibition against the establishment of religion by the government, this state-controlled educational system is supposed to be non-religious, or religiously neutral (something which is, of course, impossible, as we shall have occasion to note later). This one, state-controlled system of education is the going system in our country. It is set up by law and according to constitution in the various states. There is only one loophole with respect to this system,—a loophole which makes the system somewhat *dualistic*, but by no means *pluralistic*. That loophole is this, that citizens in our country *may* educate their children in *private* schools, whether they be church schools or society-controlled schools. Education is compulsory. And public education is compulsory for all who do not voluntarily choose to educate their children in private schools.

This is the extent of freedom of education in our country. Dr. Vanden Berg may complain that this is not liberty because it is liberty at a price. Mr. Oosterman may try to say that it is a question whether our society wishes to have a monolithic system of education, akin to the established church of bygone centuries. The fact of the matter is that this is the system that is established by law. It is constitutional. It is not a question whether we have a monolithic system; we have one, with the single exception that private education is also *permitted*. Nor does the government require anyone to "forfeit his rights to the educational tax dollar." Everyone has the right to send his children to the public school, as far as the government is concerned; if he nevertheless chooses not to do so, it is his obligation to provide private education. This was the situation when our forefathers came to this country and began to establish Christian schools; recognizing this situation, and for principle's sake being unwilling to let the state educate their children, they chose the alternative which was by law open to them, namely, private education in schools in harmony with their principles. And they did so at great financial sacrifice, too! For them it was a matter of principle, not of dollars and cents.

This, in fact, has been the system in our country especially since about 1835. In "Course of Study for Christian Schools," pp. 375, ff., Mark Fakkema describes the development of this system as follows:

*There are two events that have profoundly influenced our country. The first concerns a radical change in the government that overruled our several States; the second concerns a radical change within the government of each State. The first momentous*

*event consists of the establishment of a new, centralized government over all states. This implied the rejection of England's rule over us. This event occurred in 1776 when our country declared its independence. The second momentous event was the establishment of centralized educational control as a "distinct branch of (State) government." This implied the rejection of the principle of local educational control. The movement toward State control in education had its beginnings in the convention that framed the Michigan State Constitution in 1835.*

*The first event (1776) is celebrated each year as a national holiday. The second event (1835)—which I believe has wrought the greater radical change in our country—is practically unknown and is never as much as mentioned in the ordinary school histories. Whereas before 1835 education in the main enjoyed the freedom which it had inherited from the common law of England, after this date American education increasingly conformed its educational policy to a State controlled educational system imported from Prussia.*

Fakkema then describes the consequences of this change in the following language:

*As soon as the State took over the educational reins, the State (public) schools, in transmitting the heritage of the past to the rising generation, gave free passage to that which was secular and regarded that which was religious contraband. The inevitable result was that the life for which these schools prepared increasingly became secular, that is Bible-less, Godless, Christ-less, Atheistic, immoral, lawless, corrupt. How significant the deflection of educational control from private to political hands!*

*We of course realize that many and varied immediate factors have contributed to bring about our present moral corruption, social chaos, and economic bewilderment; but whatever the immediate contributing causes may be, the ultimate cause is departure from God and His Word. When God and the teaching of His Word are intentionally and systematically ruled out of preparation for life, then such life's preparation may well assume the lion's share of the Godlessness and Bible ignorance of ensuing generations. To secularize instruction and to deny responsibility for the secular character of the instructed is education disowning itself.*

Next the question concerning the reason for this "secularization" of schools under State control of education is faced; and Mr. Fakkema answers as follows:

*What makes secularization inevitable in our State-controlled system is the fundamental law of the land which deprives religion from State-controlled institutions. It is important to note that in transplanting the Prussian educational system (which was religious) from Germany to America, education lost its religious character. How was this brought about? (1) Whereas in Prussia the federal or central government had charge of education, in the United States educational control—for constitutional reasons—passed by our Federal government and lodged itself in the governments of the several states. (2) When our several State legislatures took over the task of educating the youth they—also for constitutional reasons—had to divest education of its religious ingredient.*

While I may not agree with every formulation in the above quotations, nevertheless I think Fakkema furnishes a rather accurate description of the historical development and character of the American educational system. Officially we have a monolithic educational system; and that

established governmental system of education is saddled with the constitutional prohibition against establishment of religion. The only loophole is that those who do not like the state schools are free to establish their own schools with their own funds. Accepting the proponents of parochialism, for the moment, on their own basis, what is the conclusion? If we grant for the moment that we live in a pluralistic society, what follows as far as education is concerned? In the first place, the proponents of pluralism should not try to get government funds *in spite of* the fact that this country has a monolithic school system. Nor should they try to take a back-handed slap at the monolithic system along financial avenues. No, even on their own basis *they should try to change the system itself*. This would, of course, be extremely difficult; and any success in such an attempt would be highly improbable. But even on the basis of the pluralistic view of society and of government's relation to it, this would at least be honest and straight-forward.

In the second place, it would appear to follow on the basis of a pluralistic view, and on the basis that the government has any business whatsoever in education, that the proponents of pluralism should not merely insist that all the different segments of society receive money on an equal basis with the public schools, but that the government itself should be charged with the responsibility of operating a totally pluralistic system. Not only should they insist on strict equality as far as money is concerned. Money, or subsidy, is after all only one factor in so-called equality of education. Granting that pluralism is right, and granting that it is the business of government to educate, the logical consequence is that the government should be called upon to *operate* a pluralistic system. If, for example, there are a thousand different religious segments in our society, each with its own ideas of education, then the government should set up a thousand different schools for each of these segments. This is absurd, you say? Impossible? I agree. But putting this aside, surely the very least that the proponents of pluralism can advocate is 100% equality as far as the financing of education is concerned. They must not ask for *partial* support, for some *help*, or for so-called "greater equity." They should insist—again, taking them on their own basis, with which I do not at all agree—on total payment for private schools by the government, on an equal footing with the public schools. To my knowledge, no advocate of parochialism has to date publicly endorsed such an idea. It is too preposterous. Practically it would mean the certain defeat of parochialism. But it is a logical consequence of the pluralistic position. And some public school opponents of parochialism have already seemed to sense this, have feared it, and have (from their point of view) rightly sensed that here is a dire threat to the public school system.

In the third place, the alternative to the above (again, on the basis of pluralism) would be that the government pull out of education completely. Then all education would be private. Then no taxes would be collected for educational purposes, nor any money handed out by the government for education. Perhaps the only function of government would be to insist that all children receive an education. But it would then be up to each segment of society to establish and maintain its own kind of school. Obviously this is also an impossibility; the clock cannot be turned back, and to attempt to do so would lead to chaos. But again, this would be the logical consequence of pluralism.

All of this, however, does not get at the root of the problem.

Negatively speaking, that root of the problem is that our society is not basically pluralistic. When anyone characterizes our society as pluralistic, he is looking at what is only an accidental characteristic of society, not at an essential characteristic. The question is not whether our society is made up of Buddhist, Moslem, Jewish, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian, Atheist, and hundreds of other "segments." This



might be a question as far as "Americanism" and democracy are concerned. It might be a question for a government which is supposed to be devoted to the principle of the non-establishment of religion. This might be a question when we think in terms of and glorify so-called freedom of religion and freedom of worship (which, by the way, is not true freedom at all, but a certain toleration of all religions, both true and false). I do not write these things because I do not appreciate the fact that in this country we have the opportunity to worship God and to educate our children according to the true religion, that is, according to the Word of God (not according to our "conscience"). I certainly do appreciate this. But I write thus because I am afraid that gradually we become accustomed to a certain wrong way of thinking about these matters. We begin to equate Christianity and democracy. We begin to glorify so-called religious freedom or tolerance as something highly Christian. We begin to think of a country and a government which claims to be religiously neutral or only generally religious as somewhat of a Christian country and government. We begin to think of "equality in educational opportunity" for "all races, religions, and social classes" as some kind of Christian principle. We begin to think of every kind of education as being at least somewhat good. After a while even Christian school opponents of parochialism, who supposedly stand for the antithesis, can wish the public schools God's blessing. And before we realize it, we think of all different kinds of education (our own covenantal schools included) as somehow standing on an equal footing, all somehow fighting for the same goal of education, and all striving to get and entitled to a "fair share" out of the governmental "pork barrel."

What has happened when we begin to think this way? We have somehow lost our bearings in a very fundamental sense. And we are in danger of losing, sooner or later, all that we have ever stood for as far as education is concerned.

Until next time, think it over. What is wrong with so-called pluralism?

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-7-pluralistic-or-antithetical>



# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (8) Pluralistic or Antithetical?

**YEAR:**

1969

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

45/1969

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 21, 9/15/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

## *Not Pluralistic, But Antithetical*

What is wrong with pluralism, that is, with the view that American society is made up of many different religious segments, each possessing and entitled to its own peculiar ideas of education, each to some degree engaged in or capable of engaging in the work of education, all somehow fighting for the same goal of education, and all therefore entitled to a fair share of government funds for education?

This is wrong, in the first place: it fails to recognize that the official and legally adopted position of our government with respect to education is not merely that of "public," better called "state" education, nor that of a religiously neutral education (which is an impossibility), but that of what M. Fakkema (in, the citation quoted in my last article on this subject) calls "secular, Bible less, God less, Christ less, Atheistic, immoral, lawless, corrupt" education. In other words: education which is anti Christ and anti God, education which is of the darkness, not of the light, education which proceeds out of the gates of hell. Not only is this the education to which the vast majority of our American society is devoted; but it is the education to which our government is officially devoted.

In the second place, it fails to recognize the fact that such education is not, before God, true education, but the opposite, the perversion of education, and that as such it has no true right of existence before God. It fails to recognize that the only true education is education in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, and that only such education has a real right of existence before, God. It fails to recognize that in the deepest sense of the word no one has the right to educate his children in any other way than in the fear of the Lord.

In the third place, it fails to recognize that in the most real and basic sense of the word all society is divided not into all kinds of religious segments, but only into those who are of the light and those who are of the darkness, those who are of the truth and those who are of the lie, the righteous and the wicked, the spiritual and the carnal, the regenerate and the unregenerate, and

that as far as the true character of society is concerned any other characteristics are merely accidental, not essential. In other words, it fails to recognize a principle which is embodied in the constitution of more than one of our Protestant Reformed school societies: "Our Sovereign, Triune Covenant God has from eternity chosen and in time forms a people unto Himself, that they may stand in Covenant relationship to Him, and live to His praise in friendship and loving service in all spheres of life, in the midst of a sinful world."

Now, assuming for the moment that the government even has any business whatsoever in education, what shall we say to the government with respect to funds for education? Shall we say,—I mean, before the face of God,—that the public (Bible less, anti God, anti Christ) schools are engaged in education, and that therefore they should have some government support? Shall we say that every other non Christian or even nominally Christian and erring sect is also educating its children, and that therefore they should also receive some support? And shall we say that we, like every other segment of society, are also engaged in education, and that therefore we also should have some support? Indeed, this might be considered good democracy. It might be sound secular reasoning.

But is this proper argumentation for the people of the antithesis? I deny it. I claim that a Christian, antithetical testimony would be that the government, before the face of God, has no right to give support to schools which are anti God and anti Christ, that it has no right to give support to any nominally Christian schools of any religious group which is not devoted to education which is in harmony with the pure truth of the Word of God. A Christian testimony would be that we, God's covenant people, are *the* people, that our covenant children are *the* children, and that an education of those children to follow their life long calling to reveal the glory of God in a life lived from the principle of regeneration by grace is *the* education, the only education that is before God worthy of anyone's support.

You say, perhaps, that it would be hopeless to get any funds with such a testimony? I agree. But I immediately add: this is not surprising. Did not the apostle John write to the saints, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him (God) not?" And I hasten to ask: would you deny your antithetical position for the sake of a few paltry dollars?

### *Some Practical Implications*

In this connection, I want to point out some of the practical dangers connected with this drive for government subsidy.

We ought to realize that the public school forces are in control in this country. Given the occasion and the impetus to unite, they could at any time they wish very easily make private education of any kind impossible. Not only so, but the public school forces more and more evince a lust for power. In the second place, let us remember that the public school forces are principally inimical to Christian education. True, they seem to lump together all religiously oriented education. True, they sometimes must concede the high quality of private education and even of some of our Christian schools from an academic point of view. True, we are presently being tolerated on the educational scene,—though it is no more, remember, than toleration. But, in the third place, in the light of the Word of God we know that the time will come that even this toleration will end, and God's people will not be permitted to educate their children in the fear of the Lord. That time can come and may come very shortly.

However, we need not hasten that time unduly; on the contrary, we should labor while it is day,

ere the night comes in which no man can work. Besides, let not this toleration be brought to an end merely in a fight for dollars; let it be clearly for the sake of principle. Yet this very drive for parochialism is stirring the public school forces to action and to unity against what they see as a common enemy, the forces of Private and religious education. Already voices are being raised to make public school education mandatory for all. Do not imagine that this is far-fetched. An attempt at this was made a few decades ago in the Wayne County Amendment in Michigan. Former Governor Romney had already suggested something of this kind. More than one foe of parochialism in the public school forces has already suggested that private schools and government support of them are divisive and separatistic and hate-teaching. If public school forces can reach sufficient unity, they could easily legislate our covenant schools out of existence,—either by making public education mandatory, or by requiring complete secularization as the price for parochialism. Let us, therefore, as long as the Lord in His providence makes it possible, take advantage of the opportunity to have and to maintain our own schools, and not invite disaster for the sake of dollars. Disaster, that is, persecution, will come soon enough; but let it come solely for the sake of principle.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-8-pluralistic-or-antithetical>

# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (9) Parochiaid And Control

**YEAR:**

1970

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

46/1970

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 1, 10/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

There are two very closely related aspects of government subsidy to non-public schools (and particularly to our Christian, covenantal schools) which we must still consider. One aspect is that of any possible government control which might be involved; the other aspect, inseparably connected, is that of the principles of education on which the theory of government subsidy is based and to which it gives expression and to which it will inevitably lead those schools which accept any proffered subsidy.

While these two aspects may be distinguished, they are nevertheless very closely related. And the relationship is this, that government control will enable the government to enforce its ideas of education upon those schools to which it provides subsidy.

The theory is the well-known one: he who holds the purse-strings calls the tune.

The question is, in the first place, whether this theory is applicable to the situation at hand. That is, will government subsidy lead inevitably, or even most probably, to government's having a share and insisting upon a share in "calling the tune?" And, in the second place, if the answer to the first question is affirmative, the question then is whether such governmental "calling the tune" is wrong and not to be allowed.

Before proceeding to answer these questions, I must make a couple of additional introductory remarks. The first is this, that even if the answer to the first of the above questions should be negative, this would not, in my opinion, justify parochiaid. Not only are there other reasons for this, some of which I have already presented; but there also are other very serious questions concerning the very idea of government subsidy. For example, just how much has the modern trend toward socialism governed the thinking of the advocates of parochiaid? Just how much has "welfare state" philosophy and the desire for a hand-out motivated the drive for parochiaid? Or to phrase the question from a spiritual, ethical point of view, just what part does simple covetousness play in this drama? What part does a lack of conviction, deep-seated conviction, conviction for which we are willing to sacrifice if necessary, with respect to covenantal education



play in this clamor for subsidy? What part does *faith* play in this? How much of Christian *contentment* is there in it? How much of a Christian sense of values is there in it? I am well aware that there are those who "see red" when questions like these are asked or even suggested. And it always strikes me that this very fact could be a give-away. But it also strikes me as very strange that in this "affluent society," even taking into account the pressures of inflation and the wage-price squeeze, and even taking into account the fact that there are those who find it really difficult to meet the costs of covenantal education,—that in such an age as this the clamor for parochial aid should arise. I could perhaps understand it if in the depths of the depression, when our parents had to scratch and scrape to get together \$2 per week for school money for an entire family, there would have been difficulty in meeting school expenses, with the result that people began to look in the direction of government for aid. But today? By and large, there is today no *financial* reason why *any* cause of the kingdom, our schools included, should have to beg and lead a hand-to-mouth existence. If only the conviction and the will is there! Hence, I say, even apart from the question asked in the preceding paragraph, we all do well to pay attention to the morals involved in seeking and accepting government subsidy.

And my second introductory remark is this, that we must examine the right or wrong of any government control not from the point of view of any particular political philosophy, but from the point of view of Christian principle. Specifically, the question is: is it right or wrong for covenant parents to allow any other person or body to control, either wholly or in part, the schooling of their God-given covenant children? If it is wrong, principally wrong, then no amount of utilitarian reasoning can justify it. Principle must rule.

And now we turn to the questions.

### *Does Government Subsidy Involve Government Control?*

It would appear that the answer to this question for anyone who considers government subsidy in its various concrete forms, and not merely in the abstract, must be an unqualified Yes. Seldom, if ever, does any branch of government appropriate funds for any project whatsoever without at the same time exercising control over the manner and time and purposes for which the money is to be spent. It does not authorize the spending of funds without some kind of string attached. This is true of city government. It is true of public school districts. It is true of state government, also in so far as it turns any state funds over to other arms of government, whether to the cities, to the counties, or to the school districts. It is just about axiomatic with respect to the federal government, so that there are even political battles fought about preserving "states' rights" while at the same time accepting federal funds for various projects. And, indeed, this is reasonable from the government's point of view; it may be expected, and even demanded, that when a government authorizes the expenditure of its money, that same government which holds the purse strings has the right to say something about how and for what the money is spent. It may also be expected that the granting and withholding of such funds is made dependent upon compliance or non-compliance with the restrictions imposed, so that there is a built-in enforcement device in such grants. It may also be expected that the government which grants the funds makes provision for investigation as to whether or not the restrictions are observed. And it may even be expected that the law will provide penalties in case of disobedience to the restrictions imposed. And, as I indicated, it is rather well recognized that the federal government has in all these respects become like a giant octopus, reaching into almost every phase of life in today's society.

But we are concerned especially with education.

Speaking generally, we all know that the federal government is at this very time using the granting and withholding of federal funds in an attempt to enforce desegregation of schools in various states. We all know, too, that in the various states, when financial grants are made to local or county school districts, the state exercises rather strict control upon the manner in which such money is spent, so that local public schools must live up to various state requirements in order to obtain state funds. This is true in Michigan, and I would guess that it is true in other states as well.

But speaking specifically of government subsidy to non-public schools, I have yet to see either a law or a significant proposal for government subsidy (federal or state) to a private institution of learning which does not involve some degree of government control.

As far as federal funds (grants and loans) to private colleges are concerned, there are definite restrictions, for example, in the 1963 Higher Educational Facilities Act. This bill provides for federal loans and grants to colleges for facilities such as library, science, physical education, and classroom buildings. And the law provides that such facilities (including equipment and materials) may not "be used for sectarian instruction or religious worship, or primarily in connection with any part of the program of a school or department of divinity." And there have been religious-oriented colleges which have come into conflict with this provision; some have bowed to the restrictions (and it is still a question how far these restrictions extend), and others have attempted to get out from under the restrictions by paying back the federal funds. But the fact remains that federal funds involve federal control and restrictions.

The same is true of state subsidy.

It is significant to get the thinking of public school supporters and anti-parochial forces on this score. For even though these forces might not succeed immediately to get all the restrictions which they want, you can depend on it that they will work until they succeed in getting what they want. Remember, too, that the public school forces are in the majority. Here is a sample of their thinking in my state of Michigan. State Senator Gilbert Bursley was a member of the Joint Legislative Committee on Aid to Non-Public Schools which drew up the report referred to in earlier articles. Already early this year he was reported by Associated Press to have said, ". . . acceptance of public funds by nonpublic schools would ultimately lead to loss of control over their schools by nonpublic authorities." Recently he was reported to have listed "three standards which now apply to public schools which he feels should be extended to private and religious units." According to the *Grand Rapids Press* of Sept. 9, 1969, these standards were:

- Require nonpublic schools to accomplish consolidation and reorganization. "It would be totally wrong," Bursley said, "to require the small inefficient public school districts to reorganize and then to subsidize small, parochial schools without requiring the same compliance with reorganization guidelines." (Can you imagine what would happen to our little Prot. Ref. schools under a restriction like this? HCH)
- Require nonpublic schools to submit full financial and budget reports to the State Department of Education and Appropriation Committees of the legislature.
- Provide that teachers of secular subjects in nonpublic schools be employees of the intermediate school district, a public agency, and not the employees of a religious body. (In other words, the intermediate school district would control our teachers. HCH)

This is a sample of the thinking of a foe of parochiaid; and there are many such foes, who, if they finally must grant parochiaid, will do their utmost to write in such restrictions.

Here is a sample of a proposal for parochiaid from a Dr. Leroy Augenstein, member of the State Board of Education in Michigan. *The Grand Rapids Press* reported that he proposes that each school-age child would be given a voucher for sufficient funds to insure him an adequate education, with the voucher being redeemable at schools that:

- Provide for proper certification of all teachers and curriculum.
- Select faculty on a nondiscriminatory basis.
- Make religious training optional and remove all religious symbols from the classroom.
- Accept all students regardless of their race and religion.

Talk about controls! True, this is not a legislative proposal, much less a law, as yet. But it is a significant sample of the thinking of an official in an influential position.

The proposal of the Joint Legislative Committee (which was actually under consideration in the Michigan Legislature last spring) had the following controls written into it, p. 27:

6. No Intermediate Board of Education would purchase any educational services in courses of instruction in religion.
7. In order to assure that the state was receiving appropriate services for state aid, the State Board of Education should annually test pupil achievement in courses of instruction purchased in order to determine the secular effect and whether the secular educational legislative purposes are being achieved.
8. The State Board should require audits (similar to those required of public school districts) of the financial and child accounting records of the nonpublic schools as they pertained to the purchase of services.

House Bill 2424 (the parochiaid bill before the last session of the state legislature) had similar language in it.

There are other proposals brought up and mentioned in the news occasionally. But every proposal of note which is considered to have any chance of serious legislative consideration has restrictions written into it. Generally, the restrictions take two forms: 1) a restriction in the very nature of the subsidy, based upon a secular-religious distinction in education. 2) various restrictions designed to enforce the restriction under "1".

And it is not difficult to see: 1) That any school would be virtually tied hand and foot by these laws. 2) That there would be great pressure on a school board and teaching staff to make its curriculum and instruction measure up to "the secular educational legislative purposes." 3) That once subsidy is accepted by a school, the fear of having to get along without subsidy would have the effect of inducing a school to accept even more restrictions and certainly would have the effect of making a school very reluctant to do anything which might entail loss of subsidy. Subsidy is like dope. Once you accept it and become addicted to it, it is extremely difficult and painful to

break the habit. This is history's lesson.

But the question remains: is such control good or bad, right or wrong?

To this question we shall address ourselves next time.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-9-parochial-aid-and-control>



# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (10) Parochiaid And Control

**YEAR:**

1970

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

46/1970

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 4, 11/15/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

Scripture References

**Book:**

Deuteronomy

**Chapter:**

6

**Verse:**

6

In our previous editorial on this subject we found that the answer to the question whether government subsidy involves government control is affirmative. This, in the first place, is the history of all government subsidy in general: whatever the government pays for it also controls to some degree. In the second place, we found that already there are severe restrictions attached to federal funds granted to private schools under the 1963 Higher Educational Facilities Act. And, finally, documentary proof was adduced to show that state subsidy of private schools in Michigan would involve real government control, under every proposal thus far made. Incidentally, news reports of current proposals in the state of Michigan also report various controls which will be involved in any parochiaid passed by the current session of the legislature.

There might conceivably be the possibility, however, that such government control would not necessarily be bad. Hence, we must also face the next question. *Is Government Control Good or Bad, Right or Wrong?*

In speaking of the right or wrong of government control of our schools, I wish to make it clear, in the first place, that my viewpoint is not that of the political right or wrong. There may indeed be room for criticism in this area. For it is a fact that, there is a growing trend toward socialism and toward the welfare state. And as government reaches its long fingers into almost every phase of life, it is not difficult to understand how, eventually, the kingdom of Antichrist will exercise

complete control of people's lives and will try to exercise such controls also over the lives of the people of God. But it is not my intention to discuss this broader question.

In the second place, let me emphasize once more that we are concerned about the question whether so-called parochialism is *principally* right or wrong. Is it right or wrong *before the face of God*, and therefore, *in the light of His Word*? This is the question,—really the only question. And let us clearly see the implications of this question. It means that if government subsidy is principally right, then no amount of practical arguments can make it wrong. And if, on the other hand, it is principally wrong, then no amount of practical considerations may move us to consider it right and to favor it and accept it. We must be men and women of *principle*, not of utility. Hence, the question which we are now facing is this: is it principally right or wrong to allow the civil government to control our schools?

And then my answer is that there is indeed a principle involved here, and that this principle makes it impossible for us as Reformed people to favor and to accept government subsidy because of the government control which is involved.

What is that principle?

It is the principle of parental control, or, better stated, the principle of parental authority and parental responsibility for the education of covenant children.

This is sometimes called the formal principle of our system of schools, in distinction from the material principle, that of the Word of God as the foundation of all education. We do not believe that it is the calling of the government to educate our children. Nor do we believe that it is the calling of the church institute to educate our children (parochial schools). But we believe that it is the calling of the *parents* to educate the children given them by God, to train them in the fear of the Lord according to the demands of the covenant and in harmony with the Word of God. Hence, our schools are established by societies of like-minded parents who band together in order to accomplish unitedly what they are unable to accomplish individually. The society elects a board to administer the affairs of the school, a board which is beholden to the society for its authority and responsible to the society for its actions. And this board, in turn, appoints a staff of teachers to teach in harmony with the principles which that society of parents wish to have expressed in the instruction. Again, that staff is not an independent body, nor in any sense the controlling body of the school. The faculty are the servants of the society, to do its bidding as expressed and implemented by the board in harmony with the constitution and in harmony with the will of the society. This, briefly, is the idea of parental schools.

It may very well be that we lose sight of this in various ways. It probably is true that parents only too often abdicate their responsibility, imagining that when they enroll their children in a certain school, they simply give their children over entirely to the board and faculty of that school. The fact that parents frequently do not participate only to the point of attending the annual meeting of the school society is, I think, a lamentable symptom of such a frame of mind in parents. It is probably also true that school boards upon occasion transgress this principle and begin to think of themselves as the supreme authority of the school, able to act independently of the society after the annual election, and able to determine policy and principle without consulting the wishes of the society. If that is their frame of mind, they err seriously. Not the board is supreme, but the society. And personally, I think it a lamentable circumstance that our society meetings have largely degenerated into meetings where board members are elected and an annual operating or capital expenditures budget is adopted. The same is true of teachers and staff. The moment a

staff begins to think that it is "in the driver's seat" in any school, they are on the wrong track altogether. The moment a staff begins to think of itself as a group of "professional educators" who independently set policies and determine the content of the education in the school, while "this people (board and society) that knoweth not the law is accursed," at that moment you have a staff which is in fundamental rebellion against the school society and against the whole principle of parental education. Covenant parents ought to feel very strongly about this; and our parents and boards ought to work very diligently to keep our schools parental schools in a very real sense of the word.

You see, while we sometimes speak of this (properly, in a way) as being a "formal" principle, it is much more than a coldly formal thing.

Mind you, this is not our educational policy because we Dutchmen are rugged individualists, who value our freedom and do not want to have it infringed upon by state or by church.

No, it is a *Biblical* principle.

Always the Word of God lays the calling and responsibility for the instruction of the covenant seed squarely upon the *parent*, not upon the government or upon the church institute. This is the plain teaching of a passage like Deuteronomy 6:6-9 <sup>[1]</sup>: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." These words, frequently quoted in connection with covenant education, are significant not only with a view to the question *what* our children must be taught (namely, the precepts of the Lord), but also with a view to the question *who* is responsible for the instruction. And the plain implication is that the authority to teach and the responsibility for the instruction is *parental*. Instruction must proceed from the home! And no matter how that home attempts to carry out that injunction to instruct its children, the inescapable responsibility for that instruction continues to rest upon the home. Abdication, before the face of God, is really impossible; and when parents nevertheless attempt to abdicate and to shift the responsibility, it is sin. Whether that instruction is given directly in the home, or whether that instruction is given through the agency of a hired teacher or group of teachers, it remains the parents who are answerable to God for that instruction; and the responsibility can never be shifted.

Now to the extent that, under the various provisions of parochial legislation, the parents of parental schools would surrender the control of their schools to the state, to that extent they themselves lose the control. And to the extent that they lose control and surrender authority, to that extent they are attempting to abandon and abdicate the position of authority in which they have been placed by God Himself. And to the extent that they attempt to abdicate their position of God-given authority, to that extent they *sin*.

This is the wrong of accepting parochialism from the point of view of the "formal" principle of covenantal education. To put ourselves in the position of continuing to be responsible for the education of our children before the face of God while we ourselves have willfully surrendered the control (or even part of the control) of that education is to put ourselves in an intolerable position. For remember: no matter how much control you give up, you can never escape the responsibility!

With all this, we have said nothing yet about the dire practical results involved. For government subsidy and control and the concomitant abandonment of parental control and responsibility work like a cancer. Or perhaps it would be better to say that they work like dope addiction. Gradually but inevitably, more and more government subsidy is craved. With such increased subsidy goes increased government control. With increased abandonment of control by parents goes a decreasing sense of responsibility. And with a decreasing sense of responsibility goes a decreasing interest and concern. And with decreasing interest and concern goes decreased financial support, which, in turn, leads to increased dependence upon subsidy. The final result is a large degree of dependence upon government money and an equally large lack of both control of and interest in what takes place in the school. Into the vacuum thus created steps a coalition of government bureaucrats and so-called educational experts; and when a school association, or some members thereof, wake up to the fact that there is something wrong with the school, there is neither the power nor the spiritual interest and impetus to stop the trend and turn back the clock. It is too late! The school has been wrecked! Something like this, according to reports coming from the Netherlands, has happened in a school like the Free University of Amsterdam, which is now 90% subsidized. True, that is not a grade school or a high school. But it is a school established and operated by an *association*. And the principle is the same. And therefore, don't say, "It can't happen here." It can! And it *will* happen if ever our schools choose to accept parochiaid.

But there is still another aspect to government control. It involves the material principle of our system of covenantal education. For every proposal for parochiaid thus far has spoken of a distinction between *secular* education and *religious* education. This is a distinction which our system of education does not recognize. But it is also a distinction which strikes at the very heart of our educational system. And therefore I hope to devote separate and special attention to this aspect of government control in a future editorial.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-10-parochiaid-and-control>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Deuteronomy+6:6-9>



# Our Schools and Government Subsidy (11) Parochiaid And Our Philosophy of Education

**YEAR:**

1970

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

46/1970

**AUTHOR:**

Hoeksema H.C.

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 5, 12/1/1969

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Editorial

Scripture References

**Book:**

I Peter

**Chapter:**

3

**Verse:**

5

Parochiaid seems to be on its way to a trial in the State of Michigan. A one billion dollar "School Reform Bill" has been passed by the state senate; and in this bill, which included many of the items recommended by Michigan's Governor Milliken, is an item calling for \$25 million worth of parochiaid. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the house of representatives will also approve this bill. But predictions have been that this, or a very similar bill, will be passed, and whatever form the final law will take, it will include some form of parochiaid. If and when the aid bill is passed, according to news reports, the state legislature itself will seek a State Supreme Court ruling on its constitutionality. If the latter test is met, parochiaid will be a reality in Michigan. It makes no essential difference that the initial amount will be relatively small,—only \$25 million. The main question is that of the principle. Besides, if the principle is upheld in the legislature and in the courts, it may be expected that the amount of aid will soon be increased; in fact, there are some already who have openly claimed that nonpublic schools are entitled to *total* government support, and should press for such financial equality with the public schools. I report this development in order to underscore the fact that sooner or later this parochiaid issue will confront our schools in very concrete fashion; and we should be ready to make our decision and give our answer. Moreover, that answer should be "an answer concerning the reason of the hope that is in us," I Peter 3:15 [1]. To this end the *Standard Bearer* has been furnishing a detailed study of the entire subject of parochiaid.

We have seen in recent editorials that parochialism, in whatever form it has thus far been proposed, allows the government in various ways to wrap the tentacles of state control around our schools. And we criticized such state control and made the claim that our school societies *may not* permit it. The basis of this claim, you will recall, does not lie in the fact that we prize individual liberty over against the socialistic trend of government control. But it lies in the fact that we believe, on the basis of the Word of God, that education of our covenant children is the prerogative and duty and responsibility of the *parents*, not of the state and not of the parents and the state jointly.

Closely connected with the whole matter of control is the fact that parochialism and the acceptance thereof involves one in a denial of the very principles of education for the sake of which we have established our schools. There are not only the mechanics of government controls written into these parochialism proposals; but there are also various built-in controls, limitations, stipulations, conditions, written into these proposals, concerning the *kind* of education which the state will subsidize. These latter stipulations not only *imply*, but literally *express* a philosophy of education which is diametrically opposed to ours. And it is a foregone conclusion, therefore, that the moment we would accept parochialism as it includes these stipulations, at that moment we would fundamentally deny everything that our schools stand for.

This I want to demonstrate in the present editorial. *Parochialism—With Conditions*

There are especially two conditions attached to parochialism. These conditions are closely related. And both of them strike at the very heart of covenantal education.

The first concerns the purpose of education. Various parochialism proposals have given expression to an alleged purpose of education in various ways. But all of these expressions agree. House Bill 2424, which was before the last session of the Michigan legislature, spoke of the "public good and the general welfare of the people of this state." Last year's report of the Joint Legislative Committee on Aid to Non-Public Schools sought to justify parochialism on similar grounds and referred frequently to a "secular educational purpose."

Now these high-sounding phrases may seem to be rather vague, and even rather harmless, at first glance. But that first glance is deceiving, probably because we ourselves sometimes do not think as antithetically as we ought to think. The language of public school authorities abounds in phrases of this kind. Without entering into the details of what may or may not be included in this "public good and general welfare" and this "secular educational purpose," let us note at once that all such language points to a purpose of education which is purely *humanistic*. According to this language, the purpose of education lies in *man*. Education is man-centered. It is this-worldly. It is without God and His glory. It has nothing to do with the kingdom of Christ. It has no purpose which is at all concerned with the world which is to come. It is as it states: secular. That word "secular" comes from a word which means "a race, age, the world." It means: "of or pertaining to the worldly or temporal as distinguished from the spiritual or eternal." The term rather correctly describes the educational goal of the public educational system. But remember at the same time that education which is without God and without Christ is in fact *anti-God* and *anti-Christ*. Such is the nature of public education in our land; and the fact that in recent years religion and the Bible have been expressly prohibited has not really changed the nature of public education; it has only given formal and legal expression to what was already a fact.

Now it is this same "secular educational purpose" which is one of the conditions attached to parochialism. To accept the latter is to accept the former. To allow the state to give our schools subsidy is to allow the state to declare the purpose of that subsidy, and thus to declare the

purpose of education in our schools.

The second condition attached to parochial aid is inseparably tied to the first. It concerns the subjects for which the state would be willing to subsidize nonpublic schools.

Sometimes these subjects are simply defined as those which serve a "secular educational purpose." Sometimes they are called "non-religious subjects." Thus, according to news reports, the bill just passed by the Michigan senate provides \$25 million to be used toward the salaries of teachers in non-public schools who teach such non-religious subjects. Sometimes these subjects have been specified as including: mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, English, humanities, social sciences, physical education. Notice that this includes the entire curriculum of a school with the exception of courses such as Bible and Church History.

The important fact to remember about these subjects is the fact that they are classified as *non-religious* and that as such they *serve a secular educational purpose*.

Now it has been argued that this condition and the distinction between religious and non-religious subjects which it makes is not really so harmful. The argument is that the purpose of this terminology is only to distinguish between subjects which are directly of a religious nature (such as Bible and Church History) and subjects which are not directly of a religious nature (all the remaining subjects). To say the least, however, it is very doubtful whether this argument holds water. In the first place, last year's bill even provided for tests to determine whether the "secular educational purposes" were being achieved in the teaching of so-called nonreligious subjects to the children of non-public schools. In the second place, I believe this argument presupposes too great a degree of ignorance as to the real issues on the part of legislators and educators. In the third place, however, even if this argument is factually correct, we should remember that the distinction made by this language is a false distinction. Whether the legislators are aware of this or not, we know that there are no secular subjects in the curriculum of a Protestant Reformed school. We know that all the subjects are "religious." How, then, could we possibly accept subsidy for the teaching of "non-religious" subjects in one of our schools? We should simply be accepting their false educational philosophy, according to which our schools are institutions in every respect like the public schools, except that in our schools there are also "religious" subjects taught.

Again, effort has been made in the bill just passed by the Michigan senate to prevent the expenditure of any parochial aid funds except upon such schools as have been totally denuded of their distinctive character. Foes of parochial aid intend to see to it that if private schools want government subsidy, then they will be reduced as much as possible to the status of the public school. And the reasoning makes sense from their point of view. In the first place, they do not want to pay for any school but their own kind of school. And, in the second place, once they have reduced private schools to the level of the public school and stripped the private schools of their distinctive character, there is absolutely no reason for private schools to exist any longer. Hence, a civil rights "rider" was attached to the current bill, adding to it a ban against discrimination on the basis of religion, creed, race, color, or national origin. Such a ban against discrimination on the basis of religion or creed would apply both to pupils and to teachers. Imagine what kind of staff one of our schools would have if our school boards in the hiring of teachers might not discriminate on the basis of religion or creed.

Once more, remember that these provisions are part of the whole parochial aid "deal." If you accept the money, you accept the strings attached. And the strings attached involve one's entire



philosophy of education.

### *Unconditionally Unacceptable*

My evaluation of such conditional parochial aid may be very brief. There can be absolutely no question for our schools about the fact that it is unacceptable.

In the first place, it is unacceptable because it is constitutionally impossible. I am referring now, of course, not to the state or federal constitution, but to the constitution of our schools. If parochial aid were in every other respect acceptable, it would be unacceptable in respect to the principles of education involved because the constitutions of our schools specifically state what their basis and purpose is. The only aid we could accept would be aid whose avowed purposes would be the purposes set forth in *our school constitutions*. The point is this: by accepting parochial aid as described above, we would in effect be changing the constitutions of our schools in an illegal manner. Still more, we would be changing those constitutions in respect to articles which are constitutionally unchangeable.

In the second place, it is unacceptable because of the very principles stated in the articles of the school constitutions to which I referred above. Those articles set forth the very principles of our system of education. They express the whole reason for which our schools have been brought into existence. To deny them is to deny the right of our schools to exist. To deny them is to deny any necessity of our schools. And if we do that, it will not do to play at having separate schools. Then we should honestly close our schools, dispose of our assets, and send our children to the public schools, to be assailed by all the devils of unbelief.

I need not belabor this point.

A simple comparison of the two articles concerning the basis and purpose of our Adams St. Prot. Ref. Christian School will make this abundantly clear to anyone who can read. Here they are:

"Article I—Basis. This organization is based on the following principles:

"A. The Bible is the infallibly inspired, written Word of God, the doctrine of which is contained in the Three Forms of Unity, and as such forms the basis for administration, instruction, and discipline in the school.

"B. Our Sovereign, Triune, Covenant God has from eternity chosen and in time forms a people unto Himself, that they may stand in Covenant relationship to Him and live to His praise in friendship and loving service in all spheres of life, in the midst of a sinful world.

"C. The training of the Covenant child in the school as well as in the home and in the church must serve to prepare him to follow his life-long calling to reveal the glory of his God in a life lived from the principle of regeneration by grace.

"Article II—Purpose. The purpose of this organization is to provide a system of education maintaining and developing the principles sketched in Article I."

From the above, it is plain: 1) That we know of no "secular purpose of education." 2) That we know of no non-religious subjects in our schools. 3) That the philosophy of education involved in parochial aid and that of our schools are totally divergent. 4) That therefore for our schools the



acceptance of parochialism on the state's basis is in the nature of the case impossible.

### *Conclusion*

This brings to a close for the time being our editorials on this subject. As the occasion requires, we will report any important new developments to our readers.

Yet I do not want to close on a negative note.

The positive side of this whole discussion, briefly, is as follows: 1) Let us highly esteem the fact that we may have separate, covenantal schools where we may, in harmony with our God-given prerogative as parents, as well as in harmony with our calling and responsibility, train our children in a distinctive manner. And let us—parents, boards, teachers—work at making a separate, covenantal education for our children more and more of a reality. I cannot understand the attitude of Protestant Reformed people who deliberately—for whatever may be the alleged reasons—turn their back on Protestant Reformed education in favor of the existing, Christian schools or even, in some instances, the public schools. Taking all the short-comings of our schools into account, the fact remains that in our schools we have something which we should esteem highly and which we should thankfully use. 2) Let us zealously support our schools, even to the point of sacrifice; and let us count it a privilege that they may do so. After all, it is folly to expect that the world is going to support our institutions for us,—whether that be the worldly state or the world in any other form. This is totally unrealistic. The world supports its own. Let us not be afraid to be separate. Let us not be afraid of the *cost* of being a separate people. Instead, let us count it a privilege. We know not how long it will be possible yet to have and to enjoy our separate position unmolested. All indications are that the time is short. But let us labor while it is day; the night cometh, in which no man can work!

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/our-schools-and-government-subsidy-11-parochialism-and-our-philosophy-education>

### **Links:**

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=1+Peter+3:15>