

Pilgrim or Puritan?

Reform or Create Biblical Model?

This is to explain my view on the idea of reforming the public schools vs. using our time and energy to build, create, strengthen, fund, market, pray for Biblical Christian education, either schools or homeschools. For one, it is a matter of opportunity cost. We all have limited resources. Where would God have us to use them?

Introduction

In the 1500's the Church of England had become corrupt. A group within the church realized this and debate ensued over what to do. The group split in two, based upon differing strategy to bring about reform of God's church in their nation. The separatists decided to not wait for the existing institution to reform slowly over time, but to separate and return immediately to the Biblical model. One group of the separatists became known as the Pilgrims. They wanted reformation without waiting a long time for it. The Puritans wanted to purify the church from within. If successful, this would happen gradually over time. The two groups agreed on the end goal, the reformation of the church, but disagreed on the strategy to accomplish this.

Today we have a corrupt state church known as public schools. Today, as in England four centuries ago, we have two possible strategies, reform from within or leave and create a Biblical education model.

The problems are well known but the solution is hotly debated. Since an estimated 85-90% of Christians have their precious children in government schools, it is a serious situation. Christian parents with school aged children have to make the decision of whether to stay in the government school system or to leave for Christian schooling or homeschooling. Some, due to financial or other circumstances are not able to leave, even if they so desire.

Those of us who are concerned about the state of education in our nation and want to advocate for solutions also have a decision to make. Will we be a Pilgrim or be a Puritan? Do we focus our efforts on school reform, or do we work to assist parents to leave, and then use our limited resources to build, expand, and strengthen Biblical Christian schools and homeschooling? Do we involve ourselves in efforts to help parents afford Biblical Christian education?

Always Reforming, Never Reformed

I have been an educator all my adult life. I remember the reform efforts of individuals like Norm and Mel Gabler back in the 70's. This couple, and many others like them, worked their entire lives to reform the government schools. But guess what? Things are much worse than when they started. Why?

Think about it. This is what the government educational system controls: the money (up to \$1 trillion per year), the education and training of the teachers and administrators, the certification process, the teaching license process, the teachers' continuing education, the boards of education, the local, state and federal educational departments, the curriculum writing and development. In short, the educational bureaucracy controls every aspect of the worldview (overall theological framework), philosophy (why we do what we do), the curriculum (what we use) and the methodology (how we teach). They control who will teach, what they will teach, and how they will do it. Yet, they pay for it with our tax dollars. They have the authority to control every aspect of the process. They even control much of the reform effort and budgets! What possible influence can the average person have over this?

You will have just as much success in trying to reform for example, the IRS, the Federal Reserve, the Department of Health and Human Services, or the Labor Department. These are government bureaucracies that have the money and authority to do what they do, and education is only slightly different. Granted, you may be able to have some impact as a school board member or an active parent in your child's school, but you will not be able to change the things at the root of the problem.

There have been government school reform efforts since the inception of government schools, yet these schools as a whole continue to decline both academically and most importantly spiritually and morally. If you want objective evidence of the established fact that government schools produce students with a humanistic/socialistic worldview, check out the worldview test results compiled by the Nehemiah Institute. However well intentioned, the reform movement of public schools only perpetuates the idea that they should exist in the first place. When will we realize that it is futile to try and reform something that is so blatantly anti-Biblical?

I do not question the sincerity and motivation of those advocating "reform public school" for they are very sincere. They truly want what is best for all children, teachers and administrators. I have many personal friends who have been and are part of the reform movement. I don't question their motives, but wish they understood and embraced the jurisdictional argument, that education belongs under the authority of parents, not the civil government. This would undoubtedly change their views on the efficacy of reform efforts.

Education: Who's Jurisdiction?

In brief, this is the jurisdictional argument for completely private, parent controlled education:

Education is the sole responsibility and proper jurisdiction of parents (Deut. 6:6-8, Psalm 78, Ephesians 6:4). Nowhere in the Bible or our Federal Constitution is the government mandated or even permitted to educate children.

Government education by definition is not in accordance with the principles of the Bible. The philosophy, curriculum and methodology of government education are all according to the "philosophy of the world and not of Christ" (Colossians 2:8). How can parents who are commanded to train up their

children in God's way and law, and to teach Biblical truth in every area of life, fulfill their obligation before God in this system? It is impossible.

Reform does not insure God's Model

Finances are often the main hindrance to parents removing their children from government schools and placing them in a Christian school or homeschooling them. Many parents feel trapped in government schools because they are already funding them through their taxes, and they lack the financial resources to make another choice. For these parents, government schools are the only option, so they believe that reforming them is their only opportunity to make a difference for their own children and for the children of others. School reform though, is not an ultimate solution to the problem.

Consider this analogy. Abortion should first be made unthinkable, then illegal. Until this happens it is ok to incrementally push back against abortion by insuring that women are protected against harm as much as possible in abortion centers. It is right to work for clean facilities, with well trained personnel who follow proper medical standards. However, the ultimate goal is not clean, safe, abortion centers, but the **elimination of abortion centers**. In the same way it is ok to work for some types school choice. The best three types of choice are those which remove authority and money from civil government and give it to parents: (1) state tax credit programs, and (2) educational savings accounts funded by private funds. But these **incremental steps are not the ultimate goal**. The complete privatization of education is the goal. That is what the Bible clearly teaches. For details on this point see chapter five of my book *Government Takes All...What's Left for Me?*

Israel Wayne, President of Family Renewal Ministries, summarizes:

"Many Christians feel that we need to reform the public school system. However, we can only justly "re-form" what Christ has formed. Some institutions, like the church and the family, should be reformed when they experience decay. Other institutions, like street gangs, brothels, and opium dens should not be reformed; they should be abolished. God never had anything to do with creating socialistic government-controlled schools. Trying to reform them is a work of futility. We don't need a more conservative form of socialism, versus a liberal form of socialism. The problem is with the socialism, not the degree."

One could also argue that the Christian teachers and Christian students in the government schools are what allow the system to be sustained. If all Christians in America would move from government to Christian education, the government system would either collapse, or be greatly diminished. Imagine if instead of the current 85% in government schools and 15% in private education, those numbers were reversed! We can ask God to hasten this vision.

Separation of School and State Needed

If the government school is based on a worldview (i.e. religion), and it is, then what we really need is not reform, but a separation of school and state.

Max Lyons, Ph.D.

This is the reform for which I labor. I also work to establish the best system of Biblical worldview schools, homeschool support groups and homeschooling that we can possibly have. I also endeavor to help find funding for those who want Christian education but cannot afford it. So I strive to promote church programs to provide scholarships for Christian education, for state tax credit scholarship programs and educational savings accounts funding by private monies. This I believe is the best use of my time and energy in God's kingdom.

Max Lyons, Ph.D.