

This Thinksheet's thesis is that as in the 4th c. the secular basilica became the sacred basilica in the Roman Empire--the Christian bishop literally moving into and taking over, by default, the building in which the secular power had centered --so now, in our cultural chaos parallel with the political chaos of that time, our public-school system has replaced church & synagogue as the community's primary place for the enculturation of the young in what the community celebrates as sacred. This shift, now beginning to be noticed (and noticed in this Thinksheet for being Constantinian), appears in the crescendoing question What's the school's job?

1. Well, what does the community, ie the USA, define as sacred? It's easier to answer "Who gets to define our sacred?" It's the country's highpriest, Reagan. He's highpriest not only as celebrant of the public mysteries (including "disinformation") but also, in the primitive sense, as our central teacher (the USA here being the megaschool of the public-school-establishment's minischools--roughly parallel, to continue our Western medieval analogy, to the cathedral in relation to its parishes). So ask Reagan about the curriculum, which (inasmuch as the nation-school is also the nation-church) functions as bible.
2. As national teacher, Reagan teaches the core curriculum (and its sanctional incentives) of the public-school establishment, of which he himself is a product. As priest he makes lugubrious speeches with sacred (sometimes sanctimonious) overtones. As prophet he proclaims the American truth (and in Iceland says, not for publication, watching G. on TV as G. arrived, "Gorby, if you'd give up your dream of world domination, we could make a deal"). And as king with (thank God!) limited powers he rules both domestic and foreign policy with at least as much clout as did Geo.III, whom we considered enough of a tyrant to cut ourselves free from in order to become "a nation with the soul of a church."....This thinksheet isn't a whine about Reagan or the Office of President. Rather, I'm trying (1) to point to the actual anthropological and sociopsychological present functioning of America's public schools and (2) to blow the myth that in America we have "the separation of church and state."
3. Insofar as the public school now functions as the nation's church, our culture is a form of the union of church and state. Now, intolerance is one of the characteristics of a culture that has a state church, ie a religious establishment. See p.2 (over) for a CCT letter of mine illustrating this (11Oct86, 7 days ago). Official churches have the power to coerce, and the PS is our country's only social institution with coercive power over the young (the family's legal coercive power over the young being in sharp decline). But as alienation--both of the young from both the culture and the schools, and of the society from the schools--increases, the PS' coercive power against truancy is declining: the dropout rate, for long above 50% in the innercity, is now rising (in both senses) all the way up into so-called upper-middle suburbs. And the laws have reduced PS discipline to docetism (ie, no pain, or even threat of pain, to the bod), thus eliminating holistic motivation.
4. Meanwhile, even the secular media are saying that the drug problem is spiritual, chemical highs being sad substitutes for the religious highs that are normal for humanity collectively and individually: we may be a nation with the soul of a church, but that soul is empty, an existential vacuum surrounded by abyss anxieties whose intensity can be momentarily reduced by neurochemistry. Substance abuse correlates with soul abuse, soul neglect, or rather the providing of the soul with junk food as undersatisfying to the spirit as it is undernourishing to the mind.

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What to do? Let's take a quick look at possibilities:

**A. Nothing.** Just muddle on. Cost: Steepening in decline of civility and quality of life, on which Nakasone put foot in mouth three weeks ago. Deepening spiritual-cultural-historical amnesia, deracinating the society & impoverishing the citizen. Increasing paranoia, good only for shrinks & Pentagon. The PS church more and more dug in with its own fundamentalist mentality; more & more parallel schools more & more public in the sense of serving more of the public, though remaining financially private.

**B. Enrich** our tax-supported schools by making them, as our culture is, pluralistic in religion (instead of, as at present, exclusive of all but the official religion--call it "secular humanism" or whatever). This would not be "putting religion into the public schools." It's already there. A religion is a way of seeing and living in the world, and that's just what the PS establishment is now providing. This is my proposal, and it's unintelligent to say (as many have to me) "It wouldn't work." What, I respond, wouldn't work? The democratic process of situation-defining, solutions-proposing, deciding, experimenting, refining the whole in light of feedback--where has this been seriously tried with full participation of the PS establishment? Are we to leave our children ignorant of their spiritual heritage just because it's difficult to figure out how to pass it on to them through public education? Our spiritual heritage, as developed on this side of the Atlantic, includes (1) respect for minorities but also (2) refusal of the tyranny of minorities. How might these two principles be honored in the public process of deciding how the tax \$ is to be used to pass on, as is now said "holistically," our heritage (of course in the context of the whole human heritage: down with both universalism & provincialism).

**C. Weaken** the PS establishment and therefore the dominance of its religion in the education of America's young. The PS' tax-monopoly can be broken up by either of the voucher plans:

(1) The family-voucher plan. Parents receive their per-child share of the local schooltax income and then enrol the child(ren) in whatever school(s) the parents choose. Chaos, yes; but increasing numbers of parents prefer it to the deadly cosmos, monopoly, now prevailing. Greatest weakness: Overdependence on parental quality.

(2) The school-voucher plan. In free-enterprise fashion, old & new schools compete for pupils and are paid by the local government on a per-child basis. Very American, like it or not.

## School hypocrisy and drug issue

Your splendid editorial, "Saddling Schools with Drug Issues," rightly points to our fragmented society's tendency to dump behavioral education on our public schools. You deal with the schools as victimized.

But you fail to touch on the schools as victimizers. Beyond the home, they are the only social institution with legal coercive power -- a situation that always, in human history, leads to the abuse of power and the resulting blindness and deafness to complaints and suggestions from the voluntary sectors of society.

For instance, look at the hypocrisy of the public schools in their complaint that the religious institutions ought to bear, with the home, the main weight of responsibility for the moral education of the young.

What happens when the religious institutions together -- for example, through the Barnstable Clergy Association -- ask the schools not to use Sunday morning, the only time during the week that churches and synagogues have, free of other community institutional pressures, to reach the young with any possibility that peer pressure will work for rather than against "moral education?"

What happens -- on Cape Cod and

across America -- is that public school administrators smile condescendingly on the churches and synagogues. That's all, folks. A smile. And public-school athletics, with its powerful peer-pressure on athletes in training, continues unabated.

Through that instance of hypocrisy, take a look at the current tendency in America to replace religion with sports as the "normal" Sunday activity and television entertainment. Then put that in the context of what you well call "a deeply troubled society on the run from ourselves and our feelings."

The present drug crisis, media hype and all, is a new good news of damnation. It calls on us to have a long, wide, deep look at the society we are in comparison with the society we were and the society we could become.

As Prince Charles said at Harvard, we do indeed need affective education. The press under-reported his statement that that is impossible without passing on the cultural values of "Western Christian civilization."

WILLIS ELLIOTT  
Craigville