

"DON'T CONFUSE RELIGION AND CULTURE"

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

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was the title I submitted for this here letter, which is addressed to the precollege-voucher debate now raging in many states, including mine. For me, only option #1 is out: The schools are doing well, and need support--not perestroika or even glasnost--to do better. Option #2: The voucher system (the parents given one voucher for each child to attend the school[s] of the parents' choice--not only to expand parental freedom but also, by introducing market-forces to break up the present tax-supported educationistic monopoly, to stimulate schools to better performance). My letter assumes my opposition to option #1 and expounds, against option #2, option #3.

1. The editor, with acceptable editorial license, has titled to flag my letter into another sector of the public-school controversy which in America today shows no signs of abating even with Wm. Bennett gone from the U.S. Department of Education. Note, however, a difference that's at the heart of the matter. "**Values**" is the educationese codeword for morality-in-abstracto-from-religion-and-specific-culture, an illusional notion for which Jn. Dewey is the most-quoted godfather. I thought I'd check this out in himself, and I found him closer to the central American tradition than to current secularistic-naturalistic ethical concepts. The reason I deny such "values" can be taught is that I deny their existence.

Letters

Values form basis of good education

The voucher system for education would expand parental freedom but increase social fragmentation. The ideal solution would expand freedom and increase social cohesion in our increasingly pluralistic society.

Do we have any model for this ideal? I suggest Groton, subject of a recent PBS television show.

While Protestant in foundation, as were our public schools, Groton informs about religion without indoctrination, promotes the founding values of our culture without demoting any other culture and honors particular students for their achievements without distinctions of gender, race, ethnic culture or religion.

It would not be simple to retool our public schools to the Groton model. But nobody in the know thinks renewing public education in America is going to be easy.

We could make a good beginning, I believe, by adding a term to the religion-morality debate. That term is "culture," which includes religion and morality but transcends the "separation of church and state" dilemma.

What culture? The culture behind, around and within our founding documents, our political structures, our jurisprudential processes, our primary social customs.

That culture is Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and every American should be thoroughly conversant with it no

matter his or her personal heritage and commitments.

Every human being should learn to embrace the species and the planet. But that general goal can be approached only through particular situations in life and in history.

Our public schools have been deluded by the phantasm of a values-free, morality-neutral, culture-universal, religion-absent philosophy, as though children could be educated as individuals in thin air rather than as people living in a particular common culture.

The schools have been captive to the illusion that they can produce world citizens while by passing the thorny, bottom-line issue of how to produce American citizens.

Culture, including ethics and morality, is "what" and religion is the "why."

The common answer to the questions of why schools should teach our common "values" (a code word for the fruits of our common culture) is that the basic business of public education is American citizenship, intelligent and responsible participation in our historical and common culture.

Underneath and supporting that, teachers should be free to speak of the deeper "why," the religious roots.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

3. Contrast, in my letter, the ethical locus in "the culture behind, around and within our founding documents, our political structures, our jurisprudential processes, our primary social customs," viz, "Anglo-Saxon Protestant," source of "**our common 'values' (a codeword for the fruits of our common culture)**." The major hurdle is the current educational establishment's prejudice against this culture, usu. called "white male Protestant." Such a curricular rush to "fill in" and "correct the distortions of" history with reds, blacks, women, Catholics, and deists (a category overlapping many of the others)!

4. Eg, **property** as an A-SP value. In THE RIGHTS OF MAN, Tom Paine (Protestant deist) declared it an essential right; & Tom Jefferson's first draft of the Declar. of Independence had it as the third example ("among which") of God-given rights ("life, liberty, and p."). Gorby's chief intellectual advisor holds that an increase in personal property will be necessary to motivate the peoples of the USSR to economic health. The ethical entailments of property as value are responsible ownership as virtue & all forms of theft, petty and grand, as vice--so to be taught in the schools.

5. My letter's last ¶ calls for more school-attention to religious **roots**.