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Abstract

In the last twenty years the Christian day school's enrollment has soared. There are many estimates as to the number of such schools and the number of pupils in attendance. Some schools are so independent they refuse to report enrollment and other related data to any church school organization much less to a state or federal education agency. The United States now has approximately five to six thousand Christian day schools with enrollment estimated over one million pupils (Reese, 1985).

WHY THE CHRISTIAN DAY SCHOOL PHENOMENON

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In the last twenty years the Christian day school's enrollment has soared. There are many estimates as to the number of such schools and the number of pupils in attendance. Some schools are so independent they refuse to report enrollment and other related data to any church school organization much less to a state or federal education agency. The United States now has approximately five to six thousand Christian day schools with enrollment estimated over one million pupils (Reese, 1985).

"The term 'Christian day school' has been used to describe those weekday educational institutions, many of which are of an interdenominational character, founded by evangelical Protestants since the mid-1960s" (Carper, 1983). The schools vary greatly in physical characteristics. The school may be in the basement of the local church or have a modern campus. The size of the Christian day schools are as diverse as their facilities with student populations ranging from one pupil to in excess of one thousand pupils (Ramirez, 1978).

The purpose of this study is to examine why parents are enrolling their children in Christian day schools as an alternative to public schools. Since the mid-1960's, evangelical Protestants have been establishing Christian schools, many of which are interdenominationally sponsored and attended, at a phenomenal rate. Not only do these institutions currently constitute the most rapidly expanding segment of formal

education in the United States, but they also represent the first widespread secession from the public school pattern since the establishment of Catholic schools in the nineteenth century (Carper, 1983).

Reasons For Withdrawal

Loss of Direction

There are those educators that look upon some entrepreneurs of Christian day schools as simple minded and of one vision. This conclusion may well be warranted: why were these planners of Christian day schools not satisfied with the public education system? At almost every turn, fundamentalists view educators criticizing education in America. Pullias (1982) speaks of education's loss of purpose or vision, and of nerve. "There is a spirit of defeatism and sometimes even cynicism among us" (Pullias, 1982, p. 2). Hechinger (1983) writes ". . . , the public schools currently find themselves beset by uncertainty, even crises. They are in a state of shock: Instead of dealing with the problems of growth and expansion, they are forced to come to terms with decline and retrenchment" (p. 31). Statements of this nature fuel the desire of disgruntled parents to enroll their child in an alternative to public schools. Ornstein (1977) concludes that teachers and schools have always been criticized by educators and laypeople. The majority of these people who voice their

opinions tend to affirm the negative and debate what is wrong with education.

At times public schools are their own worst enemy. Continually dwelling upon the negative aspects of public education leads people on the outside to believe there can be nothing of any good in such an institution. Educators who resent citizen involvement (Nickerson, 1985) by saying that the public does not trust the public school to do the right thing only continue to add doubt to the minds of already skeptical parents.

Segregation

Some educators believe the rapid growth of private church related schools in the South is closely related to the forced desegregation of public schools (Nevin and Bills, 1976). These schools were built with the sole purpose being to allow only white pupils to attend them. According to Reese (1985) many of these Christian academies and private day schools had no religious preference, but were in response to the civil rights movement.

There are many fundamentalists who do not believe in racial segregation. Falwell, Dobson, and Hindson (1981) stated "We must insist that equal education and employment opportunities are available to all Americans regardless of sex, race, religion, or creed. Fundamentalists have been woefully negligent in addressing this issue" (p. 206).

Federal agencies are also questioning the possibility of discrimination in private schools. Private schools that desire to keep their tax exempt status cannot discriminate. Religious schools rev up for new round with IRS (1980) reports that many private schools that were started or expanded during local desegregation are being investigated.

The article Creed and Color In the School Crisis (1970) states that Christian schools continue to have segregation because of the tuition each student must pay. Maeroff (1981) disputes this reasoning. He maintains that the average income of the families with children in Christian day schools is dropping, revealing the appeal of private schools to middle-income groups.

The South is not the only area of America where Christian day schools are used by parents to segregate their children. In some metropolitan areas of the North parents withdraw their students from public school to escape socialization with the economically deprived elements of the city. Other parents enroll their students in Christian day schools to prevent contact with Hispanic children (Foreman, 1982).

Secular Humanism

Early founding fathers of our nation were convinced that education was vital to the stability of our republic. Smith (1967) concludes that though education was a state initiative it was unimaginable without religious auspices.

Protestant leaders, for the most part, urged their followers to accept state control over education. There were only a few elements in the Protestant faiths that built competing parochial school systems (Reese, 1982). Protestant influence in the early public schools was abundant. Hunt (1984) points out that Horace Mann sought to maintain Christianity in the public schools by featuring the reading of the King James version of the Bible. America's first schools were avowedly religious, not secular (Wood, 1972).

Carper (1982) writes that the Christian day schools ". . . are not only protesting the 'secular humanistic' nature of public education, . . . but also expressing disapproval of the society which sustains the educational enterprise" (p. 282). Teachers in Christian day schools (Bayly, 1980) wish to remove the unbiblical distinction between those aspects of life that are sacred and those that are secular.

There are fundamentalists (McBrath & Dolan, 1983) who believe that since secular humanism is in conflict with the Bible it is therefore a sin to send children to public schools. A general confusion seems to exist in the basic belief and philosophy of some Americans. Pullias (1982) writes "Many of us seem to have lost confidence in the Judeo-Christian principles around which our civilization was built, and which gave energy and direction

to both our personal and professional lives" (p. 3). According to Reese (1985) many Christian school enthusiasts see secular humanism as having overwhelmed public education.

Through the fundamentalists' eyes, America has evolved from a land dominated by Puritan thought (Lindner, 1975) to a country in which the supreme court has declared secular humanism a religion (Seiferth, 1985). This latter development is often scoffed at by many. According to Foreman (1982) one of the most often cited reasons for withdrawing their children from public schools is the anti-Christ humanistic philosophy found in the schools.

Moral Values

The Protestant fundamentalists, once strong supporters of mass public education, now attack public schools for undermining traditional values. Modern Christian school activists view today's public schools as being hostile to religion (Reese, 1985). A lack of moral tone (Cooper, McLaughlin, & Manns, 1983) is often named as a cause for the deterioration of our public schools. Foreman (1982) wrote "When asked how public schools had changed since they attended, most parents spoke of a deterioration in discipline and morality" (p. 65). Clayton, cited in Maeroff (1981), stated that many Christian day schools were opened in response to the severe moral and spiritual upheavals in our American society.

There are Christian educators who justify religious instruction by claiming it gives practical guidance on behavior and induces moral conduct (Cox, 1966). Many Christian day school enthusiasts believe that a child should be indoctrinated with a set of moral values. In justification of this belief, fundamentalists quote Proverbs 22:6 which admonishes followers to "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Holy Bible, 1945, pp. 687-688). Fundamentalists are in direct opposition to educators who utilize the values clarification approach. According to Lockwood (1975) educators who advocate value clarification oppose authoritarian, indoctrinatory approaches to attempt to foist upon students a particular set of right answers to value questions. This is in complete opposition to students of many Christian day schools who are instructed to search the scriptures as the final authority for value judgements (Carper, 1983). Protestants in many cases feel a conviction that the church should become responsible for educating its young people (Carper, 1982).

Discipline

Discipline, Maeroff (1981) states, ". . . is the public's chief concern with regard to education" (p. 14). Parents who disdain the lack of discipline in a public school will often seek the more regimented educational style of a Christian day school. The public schools are by design obliged to offer

an education to everyone. This often includes pupils who have no desire to learn and whose parents see no future in an education for their child. With this type of attitude there is no question why discipline becomes a problem in public education. Parents of Christian day school pupils who have voluntarily enrolled their children and paid the required tuition fees are inherently concerned about their students' education. These parents take an active role in the students' learning experiences, which has a positive influence upon the learner.

Christian day schools are characterized by strict discipline. Pupils are required to wear uniforms in some schools. Often girls must wear dresses of conservative length and boys are not permitted to have long hair. Teachers can spank unruly pupils, something that some schools have outlawed (Ramirez, 1978). Behavior such as profanity, smoking, lying, fighting, and cheating, is considered grounds for corporal punishment and even expulsion (McGrath et al., 1983). There are those parents who feel some of the Christian day schools go too far in the area of discipline. One parent, Ramirez (1978) writes, was bitter towards the Christian day school because of what he termed too much spanking going on.

Academics

Some parents wishing to upgrade the academic preparedness of their children have enrolled them in Christian day schools. One major advantage of the Christian day school in academics

is the class size or the student/teacher ratio. Landsmann (1985) writes "Private education offers other things that public education does not: small classes, individualized attention, teachers who can teach reading and writing for the sake of overall proficiency rather than in order to take the standardized achievement tests" (p. 71). Ramirez (1978) writes that one especially important reason that parents send their children to private schools is the small class size and individual attention.

Proponents as well as opponents of Christian day schools have raised questions concerning the quality of the education provided (Carper, 1983). Many critics of Christian day schools have cited the poor academic standards of these institutions. In some schools there are no teachers, only supervisors who keep order and help students with assignments (Woodward, and Shapiro, 1983). There are many Christian day schools which operate without certified personnel (Clapp, 1982). In some of these religious schools the children work basically from workbooks and grade their own work (Woodward, and Shapiro, 1983).

Conclusion

Since the 1920's, it has been an accepted fact that parents have the right to secure a private education for their children (Seiferth, 1985). With few exceptions, most public educators would not deny this basic right of parents. Opponents of Christian day schools often view the private school programs as

being academically unsound. One Christian day school founder, Donald R. Howard, has marketed a complete educational system. In Howard's system, the key is his belief that teaching is not important (Woodward, and Shapiro, 1983). Howard's educational methods have students working in individual cubicles and mastering exercises in workbooks.

Violations of state compulsory school attendance laws are on the increase. Parents who send their children to nonaccredited Christian day schools break the laws of many states. Parents risk being jailed or paying fines if their children do not attend accredited schools (Plowman, 1981). Lines (1982) writes "But despite the serious personal consequences for parents and for children, violations of state compulsory school attendance laws appear to be rising dramatically, presenting policy makers with one of the most serious issues facing them today" (p. 119). Attempts by the states of Ohio, Vermont, and Kentucky, to regulate the curriculum and teacher qualifications in Christian day schools have been stopped by the courts (Plowman, 1981). In the state of Michigan a judge found no overwhelming evidence that showed teacher certification insured competency (McGrath, and Dolan, 1983). Most recently in Iowa new regulations are under consideration to allow Iowans to have their children taught in private schools by unlicensed teachers until 1991 (Witosky, 1986).

Public schools in America are viewed by many as an extension of American society. The rejection of public schools according to Reese (1985) is a wholesale rejection of the liberal policy and philosophy of America.

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