

# **The School should be secular - that is, it should promote no opinion on religion or atheism in schools**

*We don't force Christians to teach science in their churches so it would be appreciated if they didn't bring their faith into our public schools.*

*The Divine Default. JJ Dyken.*

## **Concerns**

We must remember that the command to love God with all we have suggests that the godly society including schools needs to be religion all the time even implicitly.

Too much time may be given to teaching religion.

Preaching is not educating for each religion preaches contradictory things and there is no way to check religious claims.

Children who do not believe in a particular religion are in danger of being treated second-class or excluded altogether.

There is no intrinsic right to faith schools for faith formation can be done in other ways.

Religion that claims to be better than another religion is a problem. Christianity claims to be the true faith.

Not all religious teachers are safe and some are extreme and bigoted or on the verge of becoming so.

## **What we need**

Schools should not be allowed to preach the faith or any faith. Debating things is a way of teaching and learning. Schools could teach about religion through helping pupils to debate about it. The program should be delivered in an ethics or sociology class. This would be a good way of avoiding accidental indoctrination. If religion class is about teaching about religion but not teaching religion it still lends religion credibility it is not entitled to. It suggests it is something that maybe you should take seriously. The debate method would avoid making religion seem credible. Credibility opens the way the way for pupils to be brainwashed and radicalised at home.

The other question about teaching about religion is, "Who do you take as an authority on what the religion teaches and stands for?" If the class is about say Catholicism, then consider this. If it is true that the papacy was not started by God to teach his word and to govern then the pope has no authority over what you believe and do though he imagines he has. So you cannot really use the pope as a measure to decide what Catholics are to believe or what Catholicism is. He is not a true servant of the Church at all. Now what do you do? Do you turn to experts who are not speaking in the name of the Church but who may be stating the truth about what it stands for though it is on the opposite side of the fence about what Catholics say Catholicism is? The fact remains that if experts say that Mormonism is best called a fraud rather than a religion and the experts are right, then Mormonism's self-declaration that it is a religion does not matter one bit. It is a fraud not a religion. So you heed what the experts say Mormonism stands for not the Church. Classes about religion teach popes and prophets and sons of God as authorities on what the religion is. That is biased. The point I am trying to make that religion class or classes about religion are letting bias in favour of the religion being truly divinely inspired creep in in some fashion or to some degree. How can classes be more neutral? Is it possible?

## **What we aim to prove**

We need to refute the common perception that if the state schools promote religion it is up to the state to make sure children have or can have an education that is free from religious or Christian indoctrination. The problem with it is that a decent religion should respect children enough to suggest itself as an option for them but take care to avoid controlling the schools or the children or filtering information so that the religious "education" is too one-sided. Religion should be telling the state to do something about it. It just takes advantage.

Children have a right to attend pluralist and secular schools.

We are arguing against state funded faith schools. If religion makes schools of its own, let it and let it pay for them.

Secularists and atheists are accused of believing only what they understand. Understanding isn't everything. But beliefs you understand ought to be valued more than ones you do not. Therefore they need to be given prime place in school against religions allegation that its doctrines come first.

The state must not fund the promotion of religion or religious doctrine in schools. It is okay to promote honesty but a school should not be telling children that priests can turn bread into Jesus and call that educating. The parents and the Church should have their own self-funded system for evangelising.

The state shall not make it legally obligatory for schools to deliver classes about - as opposed to promoting - religion either. It might be good if it does but it should not have to.

Schools are for helping parents in the education of their children. A school that does not cater for the children of non-religious parents is discriminating. It does not follow however that the school should assist parents in the religious "education" of their children.

Many think that the Church should create and have a say in faith schools as it subsidises them. In fact, in many countries such as the UK it does not.

All children should be able to access publicly-funded schools which have no religious ethos. A religious ethos means that the beliefs and attitudes of a particular religion permeate the school life and are not restricted to religion classes.

Secularism requires that children of every faith and none should be educated in the same school. To separate children from children of a different faith or none just because you want a school that teaches them your religion is to tell them plainly that other faiths are somehow dangerous. It is by luck if that does not result in serious sectarianism for it should.

Religion argues that faith in religion and God is personal but it is not private. That is its answer to those who demand that religious indoctrination be kept out of school.

What if the child does not want to be taught religion?

The child must not be taught religion. If the parents disagree that is their prerogative but they have no right to force religion on a child.

### **Religion should not be promoted in public schools**

Religion must not be taught in an evangelistic way in state schools. To teach children about religion is not the same as preaching religion to them and trying to make converts of them. Let there be an end to religion running state schools and using the taxpayer's money to enforce its ethos. It is wrong for the state to pay for religious education that has a view to promoting the religion. There is no need for religion to be taught in schools at all. Other ways to teach religion can be set up. The parents can do it.

If religion wants schools, let it fund them itself. State funding rightfully belongs only to schools that exist by the will of the state and schools that exist for an educational purpose only. Indoctrination of children is not educating them. We can all be indoctrinated but children are particularly vulnerable.

To encourage a child to believe what others say about right and wrong is to stop that child being her or his own person. It is taking advantage. Far wiser and more effective to help the child find her own answers. Anything else is demeaning the child.

Religious education is dishonest. Education in what is not verified is not education. And especially if the children are not informed that the religious doctrines they are taught are really just a matter of opinion. The Church has people getting paid to non-teach.

### **Respecting the Tax-Payer?**

We are told: "Most taxpayers in the country are Christians. Thus the state should fund Christian schools."

The Catholic hierarchy in Ireland claims that as most taxpayers are Catholics that the state has a duty to provide their children with an education that produces believing Catholic of them. This is actually a humanistic argument. It is an insult to the Catholic faith. It suggests that if most taxpayers are atheists who hate religion then the state is under obligation to ensure they have schools in which to spread their religion of vicious secularism.

Even if it is a religion's members who are paying taxes to run those schools, that does not prove that the taxes must be spent on promoting the religion. If we disagree, we have to ask ourselves do we expect the state to let itself be dictated to by a religion just because it is that religion's followers who fund and pay taxes to the state? In any case, the members of the religion may not be aware of the sinister doctrines of the religion and so would not be making an informed choice if they wanted schools to indoctrinate. And most members would not want their child to become perfect believers in a religion that refuses to see the truth. They are more interested in the child belonging to a religious society than in the child letting the religion do the thinking for her or him. In other words, they want the benefits of the religion rather than the religion!

If religion wants religious schools, let it pay for them itself. Suppose most tax-payers in a nation are Catholic. That still does not suggest that the state should provide them with Catholic schools. It is like saying there should be Catholic doctors for the Catholic if the state pays for medical care. There is no need for religion to be taught in an evangelistic way in schools at all. Catholic parents can come to some other arrangement for the religious indoctrination of their children. Catholic schools that exclude children for not being baptised are discriminatory.

The Church might say that in a country like Ireland, the vast majority of the taxes are paid by Catholics thus it is only right that the vast majority of the schools must be dedicated to a Catholic ethos. Irish Catholics say they have the right to have their kids given instruction in Catholic doctrine at school for the schools are paid for with mainly Catholic taxes. This is asking for something based on their own rights. But if they should love God with all their hearts - as they say - then they should demand it for his rights not theirs.

There is an argument that the state should pay for indoctrinating schools because they turn out good citizens. That is hardly true for believers and unbelievers end up jail at the same rate. And the argument implies that as all religions are not the same that they want special treatment for the schools of some religions but not others.

The argument that Christian taxpayers proves that the state should fund Christian schools argument is often spouted by religious hypocrites. The Churches still demand state-funded schools in countries where Christianity is in the minority!

Does the Church want the state to fund only atheist schools in communist countries just because the taxpayers are mostly communists? What about Muslim extremist countries?

We would not like to think that when religion sets up hospitals these hospitals should be special treatment. So why do we buy what religion says about the schools?

### **State should not finance religious indoctrination**

What is the point of the state financing and supporting religious schools when most of the pupils will grow up to fall away from religion? They will consider most of what they have learnt in religion to be nonsense. What should be taught, if anything, is why they should not steal and rape and take drugs. They should be taught psychology so that they can take care of their own needs.

The better a nation is in terms of medical care and providing for its people, the less religious the nation becomes. People feel the system protects them reasonably well so they don't feel a huge need for a protector God. Studies show that the more secular a nation becomes the happier it becomes.

Secularism helps to keep the nation reasonably happy. Allowing religious propaganda in schools is trying to undo the happiness that secularism brings. It is not right even though chances are that the children will grow out of the religious influence.

When one religion has rules and laws about morality and the next religion disagrees strongly with its standards, this gives people the feeling that religious morality is arbitrary and they resent anything that imposes it on them. That is no basis for good citizenship.

Religion could be taught but must be optional and non-dogmatic. It should be about different religions and their teachings but not taught with intent to convert.

Integrated schooling without religious indoctrination should be the norm.

### **APPENDIX**

Paul Pearsall in *The Last Self-Help Book You will ever Need* writes that "more than three hundred states have written more than 170 statutes that codify the promotion of self-esteem".

Self-esteem is based on the recognition that rather than loving your neighbour as yourself you must love yourself and then you will be able to love your neighbour. Love your neighbour as yourself assumes that you love yourself but it does not command self-love. It commands love of neighbour. It is other-centred. The doctrine that we must esteem God more than ourselves is decisively rejected.