

Secular Education Must Produce Godless Scepticism

In 1872 C H Spurgeon said, “An education purely secular is the handmaiden of a Godless scepticism.”

This prophetic comment made in Spurgeon’s magazine *The Sword and the Trowel* of that year related to the imminent exclusion of the Bible from state schools in England. He identified both the trend that would lead to godless schools and their outcome. He underscored the obvious: “Education cannot be dissevered from religion, and therefore does not come under the province of government.”

Godlessness, he saw, came progressively: “With few exceptions the men who were the foremost leaders in the crusade against national and secular education, have accepted the former, and now contend for the latter. Given a national system, it must of necessity be secular – there can be no compromise between national and secular, on the one hand, and voluntary and religious, on the other.” In Spurgeon’s day as in ours, one must either support a voluntary, non-national system of education in which parents may teach their children within their faith, or a national system and excludes Christianity in all its forms. In the 19th Century the clamour for state involvement led inevitably to godlessness, and so it must in ours. Those who support a national system of education – either by calling for state intervention or working in state schools (including integrated schools) must give way, sooner or later, to secularism.

Spurgeon contended that such an education must give birth to a generation of godless sceptics. If he were to visit us today he would find little comfort in the accuracy of this prophecy. Ours is the most educated generation in our history, and it is the most godless.

He was familiar with the arguments Christians used to excuse their support of godless education. There were those who claimed the study of much of the curriculum could be neutral. His response: “Will not the children of ordinary parents grow up in utter ignorance of religion? And is not this the infliction of grievous wrong? Why should it be possible for a teacher to give an oral lesson on the Darwinian theory of the descent of man, and not allow his scholars to read even the Mosaic account of the creation? Is it rational to concede the liberty to the teacher of instructing the children in every cosmogony accepting the only inspired one contained in the book of Genesis? Educate the young in all the philosophies, ancient and modern, the classic lore of Greece and Rome, the antiquities of Egypt and Assyria, and the rise and fall of modern empires, if you will; you will only reach the intellect.”

But a godless education does more than leave the heart untouched while it fills the intellect with distortions of reality: “Will not the proscription of the bible from the school weaken the artless faith of children in its divine origin and authority?” OF course it will! Exclude the very rule of life and wisdom, and children will imagine they can live and have wisdom without it.

Some argued that parents would be able to compensate by giving good religious instruction at home: “Is it not unreasonable to attempt to supplement the secular teaching of the day-school by religious teaching of an evening, when the strength and patience of the children are exhausted?” The simplicity of the obvious appears too hard for some to comprehend: if

children spend their best hours, and the greatest part of their day, under secular instruction, how can parents correct this in the limited time and with limited resources available at home? How can they do this when children are at their least receptive?

Perhaps, it was argued then as now, the Churches through Sunday Schools can make good five days a week of five hours intensive secular instruction? “Would not the time at command prove altogether inadequate? If the children read the Bible in the day-school, the knowledge thus acquired prepares their mind for the religious teaching of the Sunday-school. If the whole devolves on the Sunday-school teacher, the limited time which he has at command will reduce the religious teaching of the nation to an almost inappreciable quantity.”

The answer was for Christians to flee from the idea of a national system of education, and to run from secular education. “Let Christian men of all denominations originate and maintain, in a high state of efficiency, popular schools in which the Bible shall be read and taught in its integrity, and thus avert the disastrous consequences to the thought and life of the nation, which must inevitably result from a system which ignores divine revelation.”