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## The Movement Away from God in American Education

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*The Declaration of Independence (1776): We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.*

(Frohnen, 2001, p. 189)

*The Northwest Ordinance (1787): Article 3, Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.*

(Frohnen, 2001, p. 227)

*The Constitution of the United States: Bill of Rights (1789): Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*

(Frohnen, 2001, p. 349)

## The Christian Classical Tradition in America

The Americas were colonized by European nations the cultures of which had been deeply informed by Classical Christian education. Colonists from Spain, France, Portugal, and England brought with them an intellectual tradition founded upon the liberal arts of the Greco-Roman world and completed by a Christian theological perspective. The moral and religious convictions of the Greeks and Romans, who understood that religious piety was an essential virtue, had been redefined within Judeo-Christian monotheism which also understood that honoring the Divine played an important role in the success or failure of a society (Potter, 2013). For European Christians of all stripes religious piety was considered an essential component in the maintenance of individual morality in a healthy, unified society or was even considered essential to the maintenance of a good relationship between an entire polity and the Divine (Gregory, 2013; Gummere, 1963; Haefeli, 2013; Hudson, 1981). Among the philosophers of the

18th century it was an affirmation of natural law, and the God who established such a law, that informed their understanding of an ordered universe as well as the rights due to all human beings (Caspar, 2014; Richard, 1994). Hence, at the core of education in all the colonies there resided a conviction that religious study and piety or certainly an affirmation of a divinely-established natural law was essential in the shaping of young hearts and minds. This philosophy of education was very much the norm in the English colonies of North America in all the grammar and secondary schools as well as the universities established during the early decades of the American republic (Elias, 2002; Fischer, 1989; Richard, 1994).

By the turn of the 21st century the dominant philosophies shaping school cultures and curricula had not only rejected Christian piety but had also rejected any expression of devout Christian faith within the walls of the public schools. Studies in history and literature were expunged of references to positive Christian influences in culture (Edmondson, 2006). While students and teachers were often encouraged to study non-traditional religions, Christian piety and, indeed, all expression of serious religious commitment came to be, for all intents and purposes, forbidden in American schools. In just under three centuries the Christian Classical tradition was gradually pushed aside in favor of highly secularized philosophies of education (Kern, 2015; Marsden, 1997).

An account of this transition is as complex as it is unique. However, substantial insight can be found in the shift towards an exclusion of the Divine in American education through a study of the pedagogical convictions of those philosophers and judges who, in the 19th and 20th centuries, defined local and national educational policy. On the whole, the various 18th-century Founders of the American political culture envisioned a free citizenry informed by intelligence and faithful virtue, yet unburdened by the weight of state-legislated religion. Over the decades that followed, this perspective was radically reinterpreted through secularizing lenses by those of Progressive convictions. Subjects for study in schools understood to be “necessary” by the Founders for the health of American political culture would, by the mid-20th century, be deemed “unconstitutional” (Flowers, 2008; Jeynes, 2007).

## **Education in the Colonies and the Early American Republic**

The English colonials brought to their new communities the social, political, religious, and philosophical traditions as well as tensions that had defined English and European life. The Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the wars that attended them, as well as tensions regarding the monarchical and aristocratic political structures of English and European life were transported to the colonies. The peculiar culture of each colony reflected a unity as well as a great variety among their inhabitants. Puritans dominated the New England colonies. Georgia was Methodist. Virginia tended to be aristocratic and Anglican, while a Catholic contingent established themselves first in the colony of Maryland. Yet, the founding

documents of every colony, beginning in 1620, acknowledged an allegiance to both the King as well as to the Christian faith (Gregory, 2013; Gummere, 1963; Hudson, 1981).

Also shared among these colonies was an approach to education that was consistently informed by the Christian Classical tradition. Young students were taught to read so that they might participate in commerce, in the political life of their community, and, above all, to read Holy Scripture (Elias, 2002; Fischer, 1989; Gummere, 1963; Jeynes, 2003). The first public schools in the colonies were found in the North, among the Puritans. The laws of Massachusetts required every town to maintain a school (Richard, 1994). In New York, private schools were established for the poor (Jeynes, 2007) while private schools for others could be found in every colony. In the South, education was predominantly private and was often dominated by aristocratic families. David Hackett Fischer (1989) writes that for Virginia, "... literacy was an instrument of wealth and power in this colony, and that many were poor and powerless in that respect" (p. 345). The Quakers of Pennsylvania, who would also establish public schools, often emphasized the "practical" while many schools sought to add the knowledge of commerce, farming, accounting, sailing, and other vocational skills to the dominant Classical curriculum of the day (Elias, 2002). John Winthrop (1538–1649), a Puritan and an advocate of early study in medicine and the sciences, pushed for the introduction of laboratory work (Gummere, 1963). On the whole, however, young men who attended colonial grammar schools were trained in nearly identical subjects, and sent to colleges or universities (in England and in the colonies) that expected in each student a uniform foundation in the liberal arts as well as in Christian thought. The religious focus in these schools was understood to be essential and the reading of Holy Scripture was an integral part of daily study. The ideal education in the English colonies included the study of the Bible as well as the study of Latin and/or Greek, of logic, mathematics, rhetoric, and grammar (Richard, 1994). Quakers stressed the free movement of the spirit within the believer as well as a practical application of faith in daily life and work. Hence, William Penn (1644–1718) taught that "much reading is an oppression of the mind" (Fischer, 1989, pp. 530, 534), and felt a "useful trade" to be more important than useless ancient languages. Yet, his own education was Classical at its very core and so he could never quite escape its positive influences (Gummere, 1963). And even among the Quakers their variation never emphasized "electives." Among the Quakers discipline and rigor remained the rule (Elias, 2002). Similarly, though his pedagogical methods may have differed from the Christian Classical tradition, Roger Williams (1603–1683), in July of 1654, wrote, "It pleased the Lord to call me for some time and with some persons to practice the Hebrew, the Greeke, Latine, French, and Dutch" (Gummere, 1963, p. 60). The more typical school, such as the Boston Latin School, not only applied traditional methods (large amounts of memorization and good, sometimes heavy, discipline), but also required "Cicero's orations, Justinian [Roman Law], the Latin and Greek New Testaments, Isocrates, Homer, Vergil, Horace, Juvenal, and dialogues in Godwin's Roman Antiquities, as well as turning the Psalms into Latin verse" (Gummere, 1963, p. 57). Hopkins Grammar School of New Haven and the Penn Charter School of Philadelphia are two further examples of a tradition that was well-established

throughout the colonies by the 1750s. Schools in the colonies were rooted in a Christian and Classical approach to education.

The norms to which all colonial students were expected to adhere is best found in those entrance requirements established by the American colleges. A student at Harvard in his first year reviewed “the classic authors learned at [grammar] school,” and was expected to, “understand Tully, Virgil, or any such Classical authors and readily to speak or write true Latin in prose and have skill in making Latin verse, and be completely grounded in the Greek language.” Applicants were also required to show evidence of their Christian faith and “blameless life” (Gummere, 1963, p. 6; Jeynes, 2003; Richard, 1994). John Witherspoon (1723–1794) of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University) seemed the most adept at making young colonial men ready for public service to the states and nation. Richard Gummere (1963) writes that, “More than any other American educator, he made Greek and Latin a functional part of the nation’s literary style, as well as a vital element of training for both pulpit and public service” (p. 71). Witherspoon believed that a man was incomplete as a scholar without the close study of both Greek and Latin. John Adams (1735–1826), an admirer of Witherspoon, carried with him an anthology of Cicero’s orations as well as a copy of the New Testament. James Madison (1751–1836), one of Witherspoon’s top students, studied Hebrew in an extra year of school work at Princeton and, in his own writings, gave indication of the influence of Aristotle and Plato, not to mention a deep study and devotion to the Holy Scriptures (Richard, 1994). Throughout his work, Witherspoon addressed divine rights, natural rights, the nature of Greek city-states, and the fate of the Roman Republic. Witherspoon’s students reflect well the breadth and depth of the Christian Classical tradition in the colonies as they entered into the life of a new nation. As a measure of Witherspoon’s influence, he acted as a vibrant member of the New Jersey legislature and in 1787 served on the state convention to ratify the federal *Constitution*. He was an educator and an actor on the political stage who held the great respect of his peers (Gummere, 1963). Among Witherspoon’s students were 9 of the 55 men at the Federal Convention in the summer of 1787, and in the early republic one president (James Madison), 39 congressmen, 21 senators, 12 judges, including three on the Supreme Court, and 50 members of the early state legislatures (Gummere, 1963; Richard, 1994; Sandoz, 1998). He was, by far, one of the most important Christian and Classical educators in the new nation. He held his students to high standards of intellectual excellence and piety. And it is not an overstatement to assert that Witherspoon represented a perspective that informed both the universities and schools of early America.

Among the necessary lessons learned in these studies was a healthy fear of tyranny, or of abuse at the hands of evil monarchs and of demagogues (Richard, 1994). The democracy of Athens (6th–5th centuries B.C.), the philosophers of Greece (particularly Aristotle, 384–322 B.C.), as well as a heavy dose of reading in the history of the Roman Republic (8th–1st centuries B.C.), served as wells of inspiration for the generation that would rise in rebellion against English rule. And alongside these Classical models were necessary biblical lessons that spoke to the duty of obeying a just government while opposing oppressive human kings or tyrants. The preachers and the leaders of the era understood that the, “... gift

of freedom to do right and live truly carries another possibility, rebellion and rejection” (Sandoz, 1998, p. xviii). Expounding upon biblical admonitions to, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Romans 13:1) and to honor God’s governance of the world through human institutions, the colonials held to the belief that rebellion was a sin. However, when kings and tyrants themselves broke the law and disturbed the divine or natural order of things then rebellion was not only a good, it was a duty. Samuel Cooper (1757–1840), on October 25, 1780, preached a sermon to Governor John Hancock (1737–1793) and the legislature of Massachusetts celebrating the new *Constitution*. In that sermon, he reflected the general concern of the day to train young people to be intelligent, faithful, and loyal citizens. Cooper stated that,

Neither piety, virtue, or liberty can long flourish in a community, where the education of youth is neglected. How much do we owe to the care of our venerable ancestors upon this important subject? Had not they laid such foundation for training up their children in knowledge and religion, in science, and arts, should we have been so respectable a community as we this day appear? Should we have understood our rights so clearly? Or valued them so highly? Or defended them with such advantage? Or should we have been prepared to lay that basis of liberty, that happy *Constitution*, on which we raise such large hopes, and from which we derive such uncommon joy? (Sandoz, 1998, p. 648)

At the very foundation of the American Revolution and the founding of the United States lay a tradition of education that lent itself to the development of a citizenry that was sovereign over the state. Indeed, state power was equally, if not more, suspect than the power of a religious sect. Essential to this education was a study of both the Classical and biblical texts, as well as of ancient history and literature as a whole. A secular tone was never the norm, nor was the belief that religion should be kept out of either private or public schools (Jeynes, 2003).

## Thomas Jefferson and His Contemporaries

It is a certainty that the leaders of the Revolutionary generation held to a variety of religious convictions. And so it is a great mistake to take any one view as “the” perspective of the American Founders and of their opinions regarding religious study or practice in schools. Such men as Patrick Henry (1736–1799), James Madison, Charles Carroll (1737–1832), and John Witherspoon, even as Protestants and Catholics with a variety of doctrinal disagreements among them, were decidedly dedicated to a more orthodox understanding of the Christian faith (Gregory, 2013; Sandoz, 1998). The convictions of Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), and Thomas Paine (1737–1809), however, lay closer to Enlightenment thought. Their ideas leaned away from traditional Classical and Christian foundations. As one example among many, Franklin had rejected the Puritanism of his family. He understood education in more pragmatic, practical terms; as a means of preparing the young for citizenship

and for their professions. Hence, ancient Classical languages were not of great importance to him (Edmondson, 2006). However, Benjamin Franklin understood the inculcation of moral virtue to be an essential aspect of education. He encouraged the young, in particular his daughter Sally, to attend church and to pray. He held to the conviction that “public religion” was a necessity. In his autobiography, he illustrated the continuing influence of the Christian Classical tradition on his own life by writing that Socrates and Jesus were his models of virtue. These Classical and biblical models were common among the Founders and like his peers Franklin thought that the study of ancient sources of history was essential due to a good effect on the morality of children (Cappon, 1959, p. 344). He wrote,

The general natural tendency of reading good history must be to fix in the minds of youth deep impressions of the beauty and usefulness of virtue of all kinds, public spirit, fortitude, etc. (as cited in Woody, 1931, p. 168)

To be sure, American revolutionaries like Franklin favored the avoidance of a “state church” at both the national and state levels. They were against the creation of a culture of religious oppression and of doctrine established by force of law. And this was informed, in the new nation, by a commitment to a significant amount of religious toleration (Gregory, 2013; Haefeli, 2013). However, the overwhelming evidence from throughout this generation also suggests a common belief that *religion* and *morality* in education were not simply to be recommended, they were (as stated in one of their signature pieces of legislation, *The Northwest Ordinance of 1787*), “... necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind” (emphasis mine; Frohnen, 2001, p. 227). At the beginning of the American Republic a definite religious pluralism emerged and more so than that which had existed in colonies such as Maryland and Rhode Island (Haefeli, 2013). This pluralism brought about a wave of disestablishment legislation across the states that ensured an openness to a variety of religious expressions that were, at their core, of Christian conviction. For Americans throughout the new states it was assumed that this religious study and practice was an important factor in the unity of the nation. To be sure, there was also a stated desire to allow an openness to the local practice of Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam (Gregory, 2013; Haefeli, 133). However, the unifying religious practice across all of the states was one that upheld a traditionally Christian set of beliefs. This was the “religion” and “morality” that the Founders deemed “necessary” to good government.

In the 20th century, a great deal of the debate over God in American education has focused on the thoughts of Thomas Jefferson. As the primary author of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776), Jefferson’s place among the most important leaders of the revolution is without question. This Virginian was well-read and trained in the Classical tradition. During the American Revolution he played a crucial role in representing the Continental Congress in France. In both Virginia and at the federal level, Jefferson was influential in the successful transition from the *Articles of Confederation* (1781) to the establishment of a federal government. As a leader among the Republicans, Jefferson was keen to promote individual and states’ rights over and against what he understood to be a potentially dangerous move towards a centralization of power supported by the Federalists

and represented by such leaders as Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804) and John Adams. His initial, positive opinion of the French Revolution (1789–1799) brought criticism upon Jefferson and, in the election of 1800, it was used against him by the supporters of John Adams (Cappon, 1959; Ferling, 2005; Larson, 2007). Among the accusations leveled against Jefferson was the claim that he was anti-Christian and, perhaps, atheistic in his opinions. An impression was created that Jefferson stood contrary to essential American convictions. However, Jefferson was more complex in his thoughts than these election invectives would suggest (Ferling, 2005). He and his contemporaries were far more complex in their thoughts regarding religion than that which is found in the modern Progressive interpretation of Jefferson (Edmondson, 2006).

Of great importance, of course, to this study is Jefferson's letter, as president of the United States, to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut (1802). Following the election of 1800, this letter represented an important affirmation by the president that federal power would not be used against these Christians. In the study of this missive, it is important for the reader to take note of Jefferson's closing where he writes,

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association assurances of my high respect & esteem. (Padover, 1956, pp. 518–519)

Here, Jefferson not only receives the prayers of the Danbury Baptists but reciprocates, as president of the United States, with a promise of prayer on their behalf. Reminiscent of Jefferson's call in the Virginia House for prayer as they considered the passing of the *Constitution* in 1789, or of Ben Franklin's call for prayer in the Constitutional Convention, this serves as a reminder that such use of prayer by a public official in a presidential missive or in a legislative session was assumed appropriate by Jefferson and his contemporaries. While Jefferson's offer of prayer might be taken as a bit of custom or of simple good will towards this group of Christians, it may just as easily stand as a genuine statement of religious belief. In his personal copy of the Bible, Jefferson had written, "I am a Christian, that is to say a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus" (Jefferson, 1803). And, one of many instances when Jefferson stated a belief in God can be found in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) in which he reflected on the practice of slavery. Fearing God's judgment he wrote,

And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just. (cited by Edmondson, 2006, pp. 71–72)

Continuing with his letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Jefferson is also indicating respect for this association. He is communicating to a particular group of persecuted, non-traditional Christians that they had no cause for concern as to

their place in the new nation. In the body of the letter, Jefferson's response to the Danbury Baptists is that the state had no right to interfere with their practice of the Christian faith. He writes,

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;" thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. [Congress thus inhibited from acts respecting religion, and the Executive authorised only to execute their acts, I have refrained from prescribing even those occasional performances of devotion, practiced indeed by the Executive of another nation as the legal head of its church, but subject here, as religious exercises only to the voluntary regulations and discipline of each respective sect.] Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties. (Padover, 1956, pp. 518–519)

In this letter, Jefferson expressed his understanding of the 1st Amendment separation of state power from religious practice. It does not appear, however, that he is advocating anything like an elimination of all religious expression from the public sphere, only that the *Constitution* of the United States allows the "free exercise" of all religious expression. In Jefferson's mind, the Danbury Baptists cannot be kept from expressing their religious sentiments. He expresses a principle that the Christian faith should be set free to be at its best rather than controlled or promoted by legislation.

Also crucial to any discussion of Jefferson's perspective on religion and state power is his *Second Inaugural Address*, in which he stated,

In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the constitution independent of the powers of the general government. I have therefore undertaken, on no occasion, to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it; but have left them, as the constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of state or church authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies. (Peterson, 1977, p. 318)

As in his letter to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson here assured the nation that his intention was to uphold the limits set on federal authority by the *Constitution* in the area of religion. In his mind, such things are left to the states and church authorities; to local powers. Reminiscent of the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions (1798 and 1799), his *Second Inaugural* was a strong reflection of the republican principles which were applied by him in all areas of national life, whether religious, economic, or political.



Jefferson's *Second Inaugural Address* stands in contrast to the Federalist approach taken by George Washington who was willing to establish a day of Thanksgiving in his *Proclamation* of October 3, 1789 in which the first president used his authority to call the American people to prayer that they might offer thanks to "Almighty God" (Allen, 1988, p. 534). These varied presidential statements give an indication of the divided opinions that existed among the American Founders regarding the role of government in religion. However, what unifies them is a careful avoidance of sectarian expression and of strictly secular principles. And so no, definitive, statement can be made suggesting a united opinion of these presidents except that neither promoted the establishment of either a sectarian or secular society.

To understand Jefferson's approach to God in American education as well as the thoughts of his contemporaries on the subject, it is instructive to consider Jefferson's communications regarding the establishment of the University of Virginia. Jefferson was a driving force behind this effort and his intention was to create a university that was "modern, non-denominational, basically secular, republican and capable of teaching advanced studies" (Elias, 2002, p. 128).

His approach to education was decidedly Classical. After their reconciliation following the election of 1800, Jefferson wrote to John Adams that, "It should be scrupulously insisted on that no youth can be admitted to the university unless he can read with facility Vergil, Horace, Xenophon, and Homer: unless he is able to convert a page of English at sight into Latin: unless he can demonstrate any proposition at sight in the first six books of Euclid, and show an acquaintance with cubic and quadratic equations" (Cappon, 1959, pp. 482–483). For Jefferson, the Classical virtues and principles as they were communicated through Greek and Latin models remained essential. In 1827 such schools as Brown University would completely abandon Classical requirements (Hillhouse, 2004). But, for Jefferson, to throw these aside would, in his mind, lower the standards of the proposed institution. It would become, "a mere grammar school" (Gummere, 1963, p. 65). John Adams was not clear in his own thoughts regarding the subjects that might be studied. Nevertheless, he advised Jefferson,

Grammar, Rhetorick, Logic, Ethicks, mathematicks, cannot be neglected; Classicks, in spite of our Friend Rush, I must think indispensible. Natural History, Mechanicks, and experimental Philosophy, Chymistry etc at least their Rudiments, can not be forgotten. Geography, Astronomy, and even History and Chronology, ... Theology I would leave to Ray, Derham, Nicuenteyt, and Paley, rather than to Luther, Zinzindorph, Sweedenborg, Westley, or Whitefield, or Thomas Aquinas, or Wollebius. Metaphysics I would leave in the Clouds with the Materialists and Spiritualists, with Leibnits, Berkley Priestley, and Edwards... (Cappon, 1959, pp. 438–439)

Though their friend Benjamin Rush (1746–1813) understood Classical languages to be impractical, Adams's recommendations clearly favored Classical studies. Adams was also clear about his religious views. Elsewhere, Adams showed a significant devotion to the teachings of Jesus in the "Sermon on the Mount" and to those moral precepts found in "The Ten Commandments." He

understood these particular portions of Holy Writ to be the ones which “contain my religion” (Cappon, 1959, p. 494). Lester Cappon (1959) writes that,

Religious issues occupied Adam’s thoughts much more than Jefferson’s, but both men were especially outspoken on the subject. Deploring the lack of free inquiry which still prevailed, Adams condemned the Christian world for conveying the impression that Christianity would not bear examination and criticism. ... Both regarded religious belief as a very personal and private affair, “known to my god and myself alone,” insisted Jefferson. (p. xlvii)

Both Jefferson and Adams were anti-Catholic and skeptical of orthodoxy; a position held among Enlightenment philosophers as well as separatist Protestant thinkers. Nevertheless, neither Jefferson nor Adams could completely abandon the moral principles established by the Christian Classical tradition in which they had been trained.

In his advice to Jefferson about the new university, Adams recommended joining the traditional liberal arts and Classical studies together with the sciences and history. Of interest here is Adams’s inclusion of theology, clearly a field of study he believed Jefferson would or should consider for the new university. Adam’s choices were not the traditional theological lights admired among the traditional Christian denominations in America. He could not recommend Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Martin Luther (1483–1546), or John Wesley (1703–1791). Rather, he preferred John Ray (1627–1705), a scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge University who had conducted studies of the natural world and related them to theological understanding as in his discourses, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691). Adams recommended William Paley (1743–1805), a Christian apologist who emphasized natural theology and the evidence of God in the natural world as in his work, *Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802). And, finally, among the scholars that John Adams recommended for readings in metaphysics, he suggests the Puritan philosopher Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) who, like the other Christian thinkers recommended by Adams, was keen to use the study of nature to find evidence of the existence and attributes of the God of the Bible. It should be noted that in this letter to Jefferson regarding the founding of the new university John Adams by no means advocates for a secular education of citizens.

In his thoughts on education, Adams steered well clear of the established theological minds which might be seen as divisive and sectarian. And yet his understanding of education included studies in religion and an understanding (in line with Classical tradition) that the study of the natural sciences were not to be compartmentalized from theological and philosophical study. One can easily postulate that students at such a university envisioned by John Adams will have had the same preparation in grammar and secondary schooling as was necessary for Harvard, Yale, or Princeton. These studies included a knowledge of Holy Scripture as well as a belief in the reality of a Divinity whose work and existence could be perceived in nature.

In Jefferson's communication with Joseph Priestley (1733–1804) regarding the university, he stated that,

We wish to establish ... an University on a plan so broad & liberal & modern, as to be worth patronizing with the public support, and be a temptation to the youth of other states to come, and drink of the cup of knowledge & fraternize with us. ... I will venture even to sketch the science which seem useful & practicable for us, as they occur to me while holding my pen. Botany, Chemistry, Zoology, Anatomy, Surgery, Medicine, Natural Philosophy, Agriculture, Mathematics, Astronomy, Geology, Geography, Politics, Commerce, History, Ethics, Law, Arts, Finearts. (Hofstadter and Smith, 1961, pp. 175–176)

Clearly absent from this list was the study of theology as it was found at Princeton and all other colleges and universities in the new nation. As for Joseph Priestly, he would have agreed with Jefferson's focus on the modern as well as his idea that education ought to have a utilitarian or practical element. However, Priestly would have decidedly disagreed with Jefferson on two points. First, he did not see a need for the study of the Classical languages ardently promoted by Jefferson. And, second, Priestly was a champion for the study of "primitive Christianity" in schools. In his *Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life* (1765) as well as his *Lectures on History and General Policy* (1788) Priestley argued that the education of children should keep in mind their future, practical needs. He argued against Classical education, but Priestley's view of teaching history was decidedly Christian and providential arguing that religious study gives students insight into the natural laws established by the Creator as well as an understanding of God's hand in human history. Priestley was decidedly in favor of teaching theological insights to children in the schools. Though Jefferson would eventually establish a secular university, the advice he received from Adams and in communication with Joseph Priestley reflected the religious interests of other thinkers in this age. This generation of civic and academic leaders was not, by any means, devoutly or exclusively secular. Indeed, of those who took part in this discussion Jefferson was alone in leaning toward the direction of a secular pedagogy and, even then, not an entirely secular view of education.

James Madison (1751–1836) and James Monroe (1758–1831) also lent their hands to the establishment of the University of Virginia. Both men shared Jefferson's goal to create an excellent university as well as his commitment to religious pluralism. Madison worked with Jefferson on the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (1786) and was an ardent advocate of religious liberties for Baptists and other Christian groups. As a member of the Virginia legislation of 1786, he was instrumental in the creation of the Episcopal Church in America which separated from the Church of England (a state-sponsored church). Related to his national legislative work after the War was Madison's participation with Harvard graduates Nathan Dane (1752–1835) and Rufus King (1755–1827) in the writing of the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787*, the document which affirmed unequivocally that religion is a "necessary" aspect of education. While he certainly warned against a state affirmation of a particular Christian denomination

or sect, Madison's work on the *Constitution* of the United States (1789) in no way affirmed a secularization of the nation, rather the rights of citizens to enjoy religious freedom. In 1812, as president, he signed a federal bill providing economic aid to the Bible Society of Philadelphia in its efforts to distribute the Holy Scriptures in the propagation of an essential, non-sectarian Christianity. Madison understood Holy Scripture to be an invaluable text for public life in America as well as in the nation's schools. Taking into account these acts as well as his work in support of the College of William and Mary (the first Anglican, and then Episcopal college in America), it must be said that Madison's vision for education (and understanding that he had been trained under Witherspoon at Princeton University) was decidedly in favor of encouraging religious study in schools (Jeynes, 2007). As for James Monroe, there is evidence of personal prayer as well as membership in the Episcopal Church. However, little is known of his religious sentiments apart from a belief in God, which some identify as a Deistic understanding of the Divine (Jeynes, 2007). With the inclusion of Jefferson in this mix, these men give evidence not of a single perspective but a varied set of convictions regarding religion in schools. None of these men indicates definitive evidence of decisively secular convictions (Gregory, 2013).

## **Benjamin Rush to Henry Adams**

The seeds for the dominant secularizing pedagogy in the public schools of the late 20th century were planted not so much in the 18th century, but in the 19th century. In the early part of that period the commitment to Classical and Christian education in America began to give way. Utilitarian trends had always played a modest role in American schools, but these now grew in strength through the Jacksonian era (1820–1845) in which Classical education came to be viewed as elitist (Hillhouse, 2004). The industrial revolution challenged a once dominant agrarian life, creating significant urban challenges for educators. The immigration of 30 million people, including a large number of Catholic immigrants, to the United States between 1815 and 1915 challenged the English and Protestant consensus that defined much of early American education. The theories of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) also began to take hold in this century. Centralized, state- (rather than local) controlled school systems began to emerge as educators and legislators moved away from the old Jeffersonian republicanism seeking to create schools in which a uniform, non-sectarian, and productive citizenry might be shaped for the leadership of, or service to, the state. The Progressive, utopian ideals that emerged following the American Civil War very much defined a cultural movement towards greater state control of society in general and schools in particular. By the close of the century new pedagogical perspectives sought to denude American education of any religious, particularly Christian, convictions. Among many others, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Horace Mann (1796–1859), and John Dewey (1859–1952) each played a role in this transformation (Elias, 2002; Jeynes, 2003).

Benjamin Rush earned a degree from John Witherspoon's College of New Jersey (Princeton) and studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He was a signer of the *Declaration of Independence* and served as a member of the First Continental Congress. Regarding education, Rush supported the creation of a uniform system of schooling for the new nation. In his essay *Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic* (1786), Rush wrote that Latin and Greek should be studied. But in schools they should be second to the more practical study of French or German. The time spent on ancient languages could now be spent on the study of the sciences, as well as the study of English, mathematics, history, agriculture, manufacturing, "... and in everything else that is necessary to qualify him (the citizen) for public usefulness and private happiness." Even the "amusements" introduced to children should be those "proper for young people in a republic" (pp. 82–89). Women, thought Rush, ought to have a suitable education in preparation for the instruction of their children and for the management of their households. His address *Thoughts upon Female Education* (1787) was decidedly advanced for its day as he taught that men and women should all be trained in the basic principles of republican life. Rush, an abolitionist, argued that slaves were no less capable of education than any other man. He was, in many ways, a herald of the social and political trends that would define American schooling in the 19th century.

With an emphasis upon the cultivation of a republican culture, Benjamin Rush argued that citizens should be raised to maintain "a supreme regard for their country" that would "render the mass of the people more homogeneous" (Rush, 1786, pp. 82–89; Jeynes, 2003). Hence, he proposed an education superior to private schools with their sectarian emphases, one that would produce "wise and good men" trained for, "... the peculiar form of our government" (pp. 82–89). Designed to leave behind—indeed, to forget—European traditions, his approach would prepare citizens to operate in a "progressive" nation that represented a new era in human history (Jeynes, 2003). He not only recommended a common educational system throughout the nation but one upon which the nation, he hoped, would lavish liberal amounts of financial support in order to attract the very best teachers. This position taken by Benjamin Rush was one that departed in important ways from the provincial, and Classical traditions that had defined education in the American colonies. His position would help lay the foundations of a more centralized, national, and state-dominated perspective regarding the education of children.

As with Jefferson and Adams, Benjamin Rush rejected the idea of a state church and questioned various doctrines found in the established Christian denominations. He participated in the separation of the Episcopal Church from the Church of England, the creation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and explored Unitarian as well as Universalist thought. While historians dispute his denominational affiliations, Rush leaned towards Calvinism, placing him consistently within Presbyterian circles. He wrote to John Adams in April of 1808 that his faith was a "compound of orthodoxy and heterodoxy" (Butterfield, 1951, pp. 2: 962–963). Yet, in spite of the fluid nature of his doctrinal convictions, there can be no doubt that Benjamin Rush understood the success of the American

Revolution and the establishment of the *Constitution* to be manifestations of God's providence. In a letter to Elias Boudinot, dated July of 1788, Rush stated,

I do not believe that the Constitution was the offspring of inspiration, but I am as perfectly satisfied that the Union of the United States in its form and adoption is as much the work of a Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament. (p. 1:475b)

In support of the new nation, Dr. Rush held a strong conviction that the Bible was essential reading for all American students. In his essay, *In Defence of the Use of the Bible in Schools* (1830) Benjamin Rush wrote,

The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in Religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments. (p. 1)

And,

...the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government (is)...the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible, for this divine book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and all those sober and frugal virtues which constitute the soul of republicanism. (pp. 2–5)

Rush spoke of Christianity as the most perfect of religions and of the Bible as the only place where the moral precepts of the Christian faith are to be found. In his mind, the wisest nations on earth including Scotland and, in the colonies, New England contained populations that were “most enlightened in religion and science” and upheld “the most strict morals” because of their study of the Bible (Rush, 1830, pp. 2–5). Like many of his contemporaries, Benjamin Rush taught that the evidence, doctrine, history, and precepts of the Christian faith and Holy Scriptures should be taught via specific courses in schools and that the American republic as well as the morality upon which it was built would not survive without this essential course of study (Jeynes, 2003). Dr. Rush wrote that,

... Our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government. ... the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in RELIGION. Without this, there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments. ... But the religion I mean to recommend in this place is the religion of JESUS CHRIST ... Far be it from me to recommend the doctrines or modes of worship of any one denomination of Christians. I only recommend

to the persons entrusted with the education of youth to inculcate upon them a strict conformity to that mode of worship which is most agreeable to their consciences or the inclinations of their parents. (Rush, 1786, pp. 9, 22)

Rush was a founder of the Pennsylvania Bible Society, helped establish Sunday schools for the poor, was an abolitionist, and argued on behalf of temperance. In support of his convictions, he proposed that America would be well-served if the federal government provided a Bible for every family. And all of this work, like his recommendations on education, was designed to instill and realize the republican virtues upon which the nation was founded (Brodsky, 2004). The idea found in the *Northwest Ordinance* that “religion, morality, and knowledge” were *necessary* to “good government and the happiness of mankind” is better understood in light of the opinions expressed by Benjamin Rush, one of the primary authors of the principal document created for the establishment of new states.

While Jefferson’s opinions in later decades would be the most cited of the American Founders’ regarding religion and schools, it must be understood that he was not the only active or the only authoritative participant in the early discussions surrounding the nature of education in the United States (Edmondson, 2006). To be sure, Rush was a crucial participant in moving American schools away from their Classical roots and away from local control. But in no way was Rush one who would support the secularization of American schools. In fact, he was quite the opposite.

As a member of a modest farming family in Massachusetts, Horace Mann (1796–1859) experienced little formal education. Much of his reading was accomplished through the use of the local library as well as studies at home (Messerli, 1972). Remarkable personal discipline earned Horace Mann a degree (as valedictorian) from Brown University in 1819. And, having studied the Classical languages, he tutored Latin and Greek and then pursued a successful study of the law. Throughout his life, Horace Mann was involved in movements to encourage public charities, to promote temperance, to suppress lotteries, and for the abolition of slavery (Jeynes, 2003). He rose to political prominence in Massachusetts, serving in the state legislature, as a state senator, and as the president of the state senate. Many of his efforts in the Massachusetts legislature were focused on the streamlining of the state legal codes as well as on infrastructure. In 1848, Mann was elected to Congress to fill the vacancy left after the death of John Quincy Adams (1767–1848). As a member of the Whig party, he promoted the abolitionist cause as well as policies focused on a modernization of the nation. In 1852, after a failed bid to become governor of Massachusetts, he accepted the position of president of the newly established Antioch College in Ohio. He would serve in that post until his death in 1859 (Messerli, 1972).

Of all his work, Mann’s most substantial legislative efforts in Massachusetts and then throughout the nation were focused on education reform. In 1837, he was made the first president of the state board of education, the first American to hold such an office on the first state board of education in the United States. It was in this office, which he held until 1848, that Mann first took a profound interest in questions touching on education. During these years, he set the state

on a path towards the creation of Common Schools throughout Massachusetts as well as a Normal School system designed to train professional teachers (Jeynes, 2003; Messerli, 1972). Mann visited every school in the state and established the *Common School Journal* which would take on national as well as international influence. More than any other American of his day, Horace Mann would set the tone and direction for American education well into the 20th century (Jeynes, 44; Messerli, 1972).

In 1843, Mann toured European schools, with particular interest in the Prussian system and the work of the Swiss school reformer, Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827) (Jeynes, 2007; Messerli, 1972). Upon his return, he recommended that American schools follow the Prussian system which included eight years of primary education in reading, writing, music, science, technology, as well as optional courses in higher mathematics and calculus. Prussian teachers were trained in specialized colleges. As a result, they would earn state certification as well as substantial pay. Begun as a private system, by 1843 this approach had become compulsory in Prussia. National testing was introduced for both girls and boys which reflected a prescribed national curriculum and determined a student's progress towards a university education or towards a trade. This system allowed for the education of students in every community and in every economic group. Public funding in the Prussian system, as Horace Mann saw it, meant greater control of quality as well as a more homogeneous education for all citizens. Mann's interpretation of the Prussian system would be adopted in Massachusetts and then spread to New York State and beyond by way of the Common and Normal Schools.

In Massachusetts, public education—with a decidedly Puritan stamp—had been the norm (Gummere, 1963; Hudson, 1981). The Puritans were determined to educate all children in the Christian faith and from a Calvinist perspective (Jeynes, 2007). Among the Puritans, the Bible was to be studied and read as a matter of course by every citizen as it was with the vast majority of Americans. Raised with Unitarian with Calvinist roots Mann's religious views were not, like Benjamin Rush, considered typical. However, he also never promoted a secular education. He wrote that public schools should not act as “Theological Seminaries,” as they were not to teach the particular doctrines of any one Christian denomination or sect (Flowers, 2008; Jeynes, 2003). Rather,

... our system earnestly inculcates all Christian morals; it founds its morals on the basis of religion; it welcomes the religion of the Bible; and, in receiving the Bible, it allows it to do what it is allowed to do in no other system,—to speak for itself. But here it stops, not because it claims to have compassed all truth; but because it disclaims to act as an umpire between hostile religious opinions. (Mann, 1848, p. 116)

In light of this approach, no books supportive of any one Christian denomination was to be read in the Common Schools of Massachusetts. Rather, the Bible was to serve as that text which united all denominations and contained the



foundations for all Christian morality. Horace Mann recognized that this was something of a balancing act. He wrote,

... it may not be easy theoretically, to draw the line between those views of religious truth and of Christian faith which is common to all, and may, therefore, with propriety be inculcated in schools, and those which, being peculiar to individual sects, are therefore by law excluded; still it is believed that no practical difficulty occurs in the conduct of our schools in this regard. (Mann, 1845, pp. 14–15)

Informing his recommendation that the Bible be read in schools was Horace Mann's conviction that the universe was governed by natural law. An idea shared by the majority of those involved in the founding of the United States, this law could be known through human reason and experience. Indeed, natural law was made evident in the study of the sciences (Richard, 1994). And the Bible was an important source of affirmation regarding the existence of natural law as well as the Creator who brought it into existence. For Mann, the reading of Holy Scripture and the study of science were complimentary as both pointed the student to the existence and understanding of natural law. In these studies, students learned to do more than simply read and write. They came to understand that those things which cannot be measured are the most important and the most meaningful (Edmondson, 2006). In his *Annual Report on Education of 1846* Mann wrote,

I believe in the existence of a great, immortal, immutable principle of natural law, or of natural ethics,—a principle antecedent to all human institutions and incapable of being abrogated by any ordinance of man. (pp. 533–534)

As for the reason why education is to be pursued in the first place, Horace Mann understood that it exists to improve a person's ability to reason and, therefore, to become more human. Ultimately, the goal is to shape an excellent person in both private industry and community affairs. But, more than this, he believed that education should train the intellect to perceive truth as well as inspire a love of truth. The whole person, being trained in his education to understand the laws of nature, then aspires to high principles and, beyond himself, to the improvement of society as a whole. Like Ben Franklin, Mann understood that learning about the "follies of the past" from history is useful in the preparation of the young citizen for a moral life (Mann, 1845, p. 228). To lose sight of these things, to lack in education, will produce citizens who are "ignorant, weak, erring, tossed hither and thither on the waves of passion" (Mann, 1845, p. 230). In Mann's estimation to cease teaching "the accumulations of knowledge of almost six thousand years" was to doom the society to starting over, from the barbaric" (Mann, 1845, p. 321). Education was, therefore, necessary for the maintenance of a republican form of government. In fact, Mann understood that the American Revolution brought about a unique opportunity for the development of citizens with a republican character previously unknown in all of human experience. In his speech of 1839, *The Necessity of Education in a Republican Government*, he said,

... the cause of education lays claim to our mind and heart and strength, as one of the most efficient instruments prepared by the Creator for the welfare of His creatures and the honor of Himself. ... I venture, my friends, at this time, to solicit your attention, while I attempt to lay before you some of the relations which we bear to the cause of Education, because we are the citizens of a Republic; and thence to deduce some of the reasons, which, under our political institutions, make the proper training of the rising generation the highest earthly duty of the risen. (pp. 60, 61)

While Mann's approach varied from the more explicitly Christian position of Benjamin Rush, he never rejected the idea that education included a study of natural law, the knowledge of which was necessary for the maintenance of a free republic. As with many educators, both Rush and Mann had rejected the study of Classical languages in favor of studies they felt more practical (Hofstadter and Smith, 1961, pp. 275–276). Both also asserted that republican government relied upon an educated as well as Christian (moral) citizenry.

The greatest difference with Rush lay in Horace Mann's belief that states should establish a strong hold on the schools within their borders. They were responsible for the education of every citizen whose right it was, regardless of background or status, to receive an education that would make them productive workers and excellent citizens. Mann had been deeply influenced by the Prussian system of education with a strong emphasis on national identity. And so there is in Mann's approach the beginning of an emphasis on state power in education. It would also be in the schools, which participated in the shaping of young citizens, that temperance and anti-slavery ideals would be taught for the betterment of American society (Edmondson, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Messerli, 1972). Following the Civil War, his Common School became the overwhelmingly dominant model throughout the North and in some Southern states as was the practice of establishing Normal Schools for teacher training (Jeynes, 2003). Mann's influence was substantial in his day and well into the 20th century.

Resistance to Mann's proposals came from a variety of directions. Schoolmasters opposed his recommendations to soften disciplinary codes. Parents often opposed the idea that teachers would take a lead in moral education (Jeynes, 2003; Messerli, 1972). Educators, schools, and parents with sectarian religious convictions also struggled with Mann's approach to the teaching of doctrine, with specific opposition to his Unitarian convictions from those with Calvinist convictions as well as from Catholic and Lutheran denominations. For these Christians, a simple reading of Scripture, without doctrinal guidance or commentary, was insufficient. Mann and his Common Schools were seen as subversive to essential Christian faith and so were opposed by many traditional Protestants and Catholics (Flowers, 2008). In 1844, riots broke out in Philadelphia concerning tensions over the use of Protestant Bibles in schools attended by Catholic children. In response to these problems, private Protestant and Catholic parochial school systems were developed throughout the 19th century and would continue in strength until the middle of the 20th century (Flowers, 2008; Jeynes, 2003).

There were also those who viewed Mann's commitment to Federalist or Whiggish principles as questionable; that it was, in the republican tradition of Jefferson, not state governments but for local communities and parents to determine the content and tenor of education (Jeynes, 2003). Southern states and Democrats in general were resistant to what appeared to be a uniform system of education that ignored local culture. Mann answered all of these complaints with assertions that his approach was meant to continue, not ignore, Christian moral training in the schools. He hoped that schools would affirm aspects of the Christian life and faith shared by all denominations. In fact, his goal was never to establish a secular education that would ignore Christian morality. Rather, it was to lay the intellectual and moral foundations necessary for citizens of the various states in a free republic. This was a new experiment in government in a new land and so a new form of education was needed, a new system by which the states and nation could be assured citizens—equally educated—with republican virtues that included those taught within the Christian faith. In his educational philosophy, Mann seemed relatively consistent with the recommendations of the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787* that “religion, morality, and knowledge” remain “necessary” subjects of education.

Alongside Mann, others played important roles in the education of American children. Noah Webster (1758–1843) was an advocate for the traditional Classical and Christian education that informed early America, particularly later in his life when he took on a commitment to Calvinistic orthodoxy (1808). Webster showed a great concern regarding the effects of the Second Great Awakening and of Jacksonian Democracy on American culture in general, and upon schooling in particular (Hillhouse, 2004). Webster was an abolitionist who understood slavery to be an immense sin. And through his works, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1783–1785), *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), and his apologetic work, *The Bible and Christianity* (1834), Webster hoped to encourage not only sound learning but also a strong moral and Christian foundation for American children (Jeynes, 2003).

Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), father of Harriett Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), was, like Webster, an abolitionist who agreed with Horace Mann that education might become a means of uniting both the North and the South as well as a means of establishing excellent schools in the Western frontier regions (Jeynes, 2003). Compared to Mann, however, Beecher's commitment to religious training and education was decidedly more profound and decidedly sectarian. He was staunchly anti-Catholic and believed that only a Protestant-dominated education would suffice in the spread of the American republic. In Beecher's mind, “true” religion ought to be taught in the schools. In his pamphlet, *A Plea for the West* (1835), he wrote,

The thing required for the civil and religious prosperity of the West, is universal education, and moral culture, by institutions commensurate to that result the all-pervading influences of schools and colleges and seminaries and pastors and churches. When the West is well-supplied in this respect, though there may be great relative defects, there will be, as we believe, the stamina and vitality of a perpetual civil and religious prosperity. (p. 2)

William Holmes McGuffey (1800–1873), the author of the famous *McGuffey Readers* was also active in this era (Jeynes, 2003). McGuffey was a Presbyterian minister, an abolitionist, president of Cincinnati College, Ohio University, and Woodward College as well as a professor at both Miami University in Oxford, Ohio as well as at the University of Virginia. He quoted Scripture throughout his *McGuffey Readers* and, like the others of his era, understood that the Christian faith was essential to the moral foundations of the United States. In his, *Duties of Parents and Teachers* (1836), McGuffey wrote that,

... The Christian religion, is the religion of our country. From it are derived our prevalent notions of the character of God, the great moral governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions. (p. 138)

Through all of the changes underway in the United States at the time, these leaders and their works remained deeply influential as the nation passed over into the 20th century. Yet, even as Webster, Beecher, and McGuffey attempted to strengthen a commitment to the Christian foundations of education in America, the Classical Christian tradition was quickly losing its privileged position (Hillhouse, 2004; Howe, 1983).

By the turn of the century, the local Common School model began to give way to “school districts” in which multiple schools, now under the control of state legislatures and of a professional class of educators, were organized—it was argued—for greater curricular consistency, for greater economic equality, and for a greater assurance of an educated citizenry. These changes were well beyond the scope recommended by Mann. Also beyond the goals of Mann, schools had begun to come under greater secularizing influences pressuring them to abandon Christian foundations. His minimalist approach to religion in schools—a simple, non-sectarian reading of the Bible—would not hold up against the growing religious diversity of the nation as well as the growing influences in American culture of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx. Curriculum and pedagogy in American schools began to undergo a distinct transition that would create the secularized schools of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Whereas In 1800 a majority of United States Senators had been trained in the Classical Christian tradition, by the end of the century few had received a Classical Christian education. The Classical subjects had been dropped due to a lack of conviction that ancient languages and texts were practical either in everyday life or in the study of law (Hillhouse, 2004). Tens of millions of immigrants had transformed American culture and just as the horse was being replaced by the automobile and the candle by the lightbulb the older, traditional forms and subjects of education were often viewed as similarly obsolescent. There were, to be sure, those in this century who made an effort to accommodate themselves to the challenges of the age, including the introduction of Darwinism. The future president James Garfield (183–1881) was trained both in practical trades as well as in the Biblical and Classical languages. He converted to Christianity early in life and, as a graduate of Williams College, served as a professor at Hiram College

and as a preacher before he was drawn into political life in the Republican Party. Adam Goodheart writes,

History, the young professor firmly believed, was a sublime process of Nature. Everything he had read so far convinced him that it was so, that it must be so: not just the annals of human civilization but also the heavy tomes of political science, the Greek and Roman classics, the Old and New Testaments, the latest theories of geology and paleontology. (He had eagerly purchased one of Ohio's first available copies of that controversial new book by the English naturalist, "*On the Origin of the Species*")... Generations of men strode the earth like the mysterious behemoths of past ages, then sank into extinction, their fossilized bones forming strata of bedrock on which future generations would build. All moved in accordance with the majestic and inexorable laws of nature's God. All brought mankind closer and closer to a state of perfect freedom. All was part of a divine plan (Goodheart, 2011, p. 93).

Men like James Garfield built upon the perfectionist and progressive ideals rooted in America's Second Great Awakening and in the aftermath of the Civil War. They sought to advance greater social reform using religious ideas not disconnected from those of their predecessors.

However, there were also those in this era who found themselves unable to cope with theories that so thoroughly rejected both Classical and Christian convictions. Henry Adams (1838–1918), son of John Quincy Adams (1767–1848) and grandson of John Adams, documented his personal experience of these changes in his Pulitzer Prize winning autobiographical work, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918). Written for friends and in the third person, the work was published after his death. In it, Henry Adams gave a rambling account of his thoughts regarding the cultural, technological, political, and intellectual transformations taking place during his lifetime. He was convinced that the Classical and Christian education he had received in his youth ill-prepared him for the age that had come into being. He expressed something of a lament over the passing of the old order, a force found in "Woman" (Goddess), which had once ruled supreme—symbolized by the Virgin Mary (pp. 384–385). And in the rise of the Dynamo, the new engine that created immense heat and force—the symbol of the new order—Henry Adams found that he was very much adrift amidst the new theories, technologies, and ideas that were then reshaping European and American culture (pp. 379–380). He wrote,

At that moment Darwin was convulsing society. ... Adams was content to read Darwin, ... but he was hardly trained to follow Darwin's evidences ... Henry Adams was a Darwinist because it was easier than not, for his ignorance exceeded belief ... Unbroken Evolution under uniform conditions pleased everyone—except curates and bishops; it was the very best substitute for religion; a safe, conservative, practical, thoroughly Common-Law deity. To other Darwinians—except Darwin—Natural Selection seemed a dogma to be put in the place of the Athanasian creed; it was a form of

religious hope; a promise of ultimate perfection. Adams wished not better; he warmly sympathized in the object; but when he came to ask himself what he truly thought, he felt that he had no Faith ... He was a Darwinian for fun. (pp. 224–225, 231–232)

And,

By rights, he should have been also a Marxist, but some narrow trait of the New England nature seemed to blight socialism, and he tried in vain to make himself a convert. (p. 225)

In the mind of Henry Adams, there was little that might be used to oppose these new theories, and so he acquiesced to them due to their sheer strength (force) of impact on the society as a whole. He felt that, "... the nearest approach to the revolution of 1900 was that of 310, when Constantine set up the Cross." For Henry Adams this was a revelation of a "mysterious energy" like that of the cross of Christ and equally transformative. This was a new faith; a new religion that now commanded the American landscape, including the nation's schools (pp. 382–383).

For the future president Garfield as well as the son and grandson of presidents, Henry Adams, the tensions that emerged from changes in the culture were reflected in personal responses. A sign that these significant changes were also shaping law was reflected in a position taken by another president, Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885), who endorsed a Constitutional amendment that would have banned the use of public money in the support of any sectarian school as well as create a Constitutional requirement of free public schooling for all children in the United States. Grant was a product of the age. An abolitionist by conviction, he was also somewhat anti-Catholic and, perhaps, anti-Semitic. In regards to education, Grant was also concerned with the influences of "paganism" and "atheism" in America's schools (Green, 2010). He viewed the non-sectarian, Common School approach as the best answer for the challenges that faced the nation in its training of young citizens.

Building his agenda upon President Grant's proposal, James G. Blaine (1830–1893), a Republican congressman from Maine, in 1875 proposed a Constitutional amendment that would have interpreted the 1st Amendment restrictions on the state establishment of religion to mean that no sectarian control of public schools would be allowed (Green, 1992). The amendment read,

No State shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; and no money raised by taxation in any State for the support of public schools, or derived from any public fund therefor, nor any public lands devoted thereto, shall ever be under the control of any religious sect; nor shall any money so raised or lands so devoted be divided between religious sects or denominations. (Green, 2010, p. 296)

Blaine himself had presidential aspirations and sought the support of Catholic communities which had experienced sometimes serious troubles within the

Protestant-dominated culture of American schools. While the amendment was not written in such a way as to apply an outright ban on teaching the Bible in schools the amendment would ultimately be used in support of such bans as well as in support of anti-Catholic efforts in many states (Green, 2010). The amendment failed to pass at the federal level, but versions of it were passed in nearly every state of the union, with additions, through the 1970s. The efforts of Grant and Blaine in the late 19th century represented a growing intrusion of federal efforts regarding the regulation of religious expression in America's schools which had, to this time, been regulated by the states and local school officials. These efforts represented a movement away from the *Northwest Ordinance*, the law upon which many of the "Blaine Amendment" states had their origins.

Finally, in the late 19th century, the fear of sectarian conflict in America was a reality. Whether these tensions involved Catholics and Protestants, traditional Christian orthodoxy and new religious movements, or tensions regarding traditional American convictions and the rising impact of Darwinian and Marxist theories, the schools in America were viewed by everyone involved as the vital institutions necessary for the preservation or transformation of the culture. The views of Grant and Blaine as well as those who opposed their extension of federal power into American schools would serve to define the debate from this point forward.

## John Dewey

Born in Vermont, John Dewey studied at the University of Vermont as well as Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. After a brief stretch as a high school teacher, Dewey went on to teach philosophy and psychology at the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, and at Columbia University. He held a strong commitment to activist, egalitarian political thought which expressed itself in a commitment to social democracy, to communism, and to a deep hostility toward capitalism (Casparly, 2000; Edmondson, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Westbrook, 1993). Dewey was instrumental in the NAACP, in the women's rights movement, as well as in the labor movement. In his work, *Ethics of Democracy* (1887), Dewey wrote that, "Democracy and the one, ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonymous" (p. 248) and in his work *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey wrote,

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. ... Obviously a society to which stratification into separate classes would be fatal, must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms. A society marked off into classes need be specially attentive only to the education of its ruling elements. (p. 98)

Like Mann, Dewey had traveled in Europe and drew from his experiences in the development and confirmation of his approach to education (Jeynes, 2003; Westbrook, 1993). He was as an apologist for Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) against

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) and the Stalinist regime. Though he admired state-sponsored industry, he opposed the idea of a communist takeover of the labor movement and assisted in the CIA-funded group, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Westbrook, 1993). A product of the liberal, Progressive sentiments that were dominant at the turn of the 20th century Dewey became the most prominent philosopher of Progressive education in America. In 1953, the Canadian historian Hilda Neatby (1904–1975), an important critic of Dewey and of Progressive education, complained of Dewey’s rise to prominence saying, “Dewey has been to our age what Aristotle was to the later Middle Ages, not a philosopher, but *the* philosopher” (emphasis mine; Neatby, 1953, pp. 22–23).

As a philosopher and psychologist, John Dewey applied theories of pragmatism and functional psychology to the education of children. These theories were best defined in his works, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and *Experience and Education* (1938). They were, early in his career, put into practice at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools founded by Dewey in 1896 and became prominent works on education throughout the United States and Europe.

While, in Dewey’s mind, education was to be an active experience for the student with a great deal of experiential and “hands-on” activity (centered on the student’s shaping of himself), he was not entirely “child-centered” as the student does not have a command of content and so must be taught by the professional teacher. He wrote that, “... the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction” (Dewey, 1902, p. 16). Though Dewey decidedly rejected traditional instruction and content, he was keen to make sure that teachers, professionally trained, guided and instructed the students in the process of self-discovery.

Also central to his work was Dewey’s argument that a school is a social institution which should be used to promote social reform. He argued that the purpose of education is not only the acquisition of knowledge, or of a set of abilities drilled into a student, but it is the realization of the full potential of the person and then the use of that realization for the common good. The preparation of a person for life as a citizen means to,

... give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of his capacities. ...” and education is a “... regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction (Dewey, 1897, p. 90).

School, for Dewey, was a setting in which one gains knowledge and learns how to live; it is a context in which a child’s morality is developed. In certain respects, there are agreements between Dewey and Mann. It was understood that schools prepare children for citizenship in a free society. Only now, Dewey eschewed any hint of Classical or Christian foundations. Rather, in *The School and Society* (1899) and *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey argued that schools should



prepare students not for obedience to authoritarian political structures or to outdated norms, but should be encouraged to pursue individual as well as communal growth (Edmondson, 2006; Westbrook, 1993). In Dewey's mind, students arrive at social truths through critical discourse with one another and with highly-trained, professional teachers who are, themselves, the prophets of the "true God" (Dewey, 1897, p. 95; Jeynes, 2003). For Dewey, schools play an important role in the creation of a democratic society. He believed that complete democracy was to be obtained only by creating a mature, fully-formed agreement among citizens on public opinion. And it was in the schools that this public opinion would first begin to take shape and, ultimately, to which the individual would be fully acclimated (Edmondson, 2006). In *Democracy and Education* (1916), he stated that the end of education was to,

... take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them. Wherever social control means subordination of individual activities to class authority, there is danger that industrial education will be dominated by acceptance of the status quo *Democracy and Education*. (p. 82)

It was in his concept of shaping public opinion through public discourse, with little or no reference to tradition and antiquated norms, that John Dewey was most involved in the transition towards the secularization of schools. He was skeptical, at best, about the study of the Liberal Arts, of a canon of literature, of history, and of anything that might be considered impractical or might cement outdated ideas and orthodoxies in a student that would hinder social (revolutionary) change (Dewey, 1944). The content of school instruction and, therefore, the material upon which public opinion would take shape was to be only that which was verifiable. In his *Experience and Education* (1938), he wrote that the uncertain "chaff," should be "sifted" from the scientifically verifiable "wheat" (pp. ix–xx). As with Marx, Dewey taught that students should see things as they "really are," without reference to the metaphysical (Dewey, 1929; Edmondson, 2006). And he understood the theories of Charles Darwin to be the model of the new approach to knowledge. He wrote,

The conceptions that had reigned in the philosophy of nature and knowledge for two thousand years, the conceptions that had become the familiar furniture of the mind, rested on the assumption of the superiority of the fixed and final ... the "Origin of the Species" introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion. (Dewey, 1910, pp. 1–19)

Religious arguments and explanations were, therefore, outdated and should be thrown aside for a new understanding of the cosmos and a new way to be human (Edmondson, 2006; Westbrook, 1993). As for religion, "Schools," says Dewey, "serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification" (Dewey, 1908, p. 800; Jeynes, 2003; Westbrook, 1993). By virtue of their neutrality and a

focus on homogeneity, schools would put aside the fantasy as well as divisiveness of doctrine. These institutions can create, in his mind, a unity of thought as well as social action which is truly religious. In his lectures, *A Common Faith* (1934), Dewey explained,

If I have said anything about religions and religion that seems harsh, I have said those things because of a firm belief that the claim on the part of religions to possess a monopoly of ideals and of the supernatural means by which alone, it is alleged, they can be furthered, stands in the way of the realization of distinctively religious values inherent in natural experience. For that reason, if for no other, I should be sorry if any were misled by the frequency with which I have employed the adjective “religious” to conceive of what I have said as a disguised apology for what have passed as religions. The opposition between religious values as I conceive them and religions is not to be abridged. Just because the release of these values is so important, their identification with the creeds and cults of religions must be dissolved. (pp. 42–43)

And, in *Religion and our Schools* (1908), he had written,

If one inquires why the American tradition is so strong against any connection of state and church, why it dreads even the rudiments of religious teaching in state-maintained schools, the immediate and superficial answer is not far to seek. The cause was not, mainly, religious indifference, much less hostility to Christianity, although the eighteenth century deism played an important role. The cause lay largely in the diversity and vitality of the various denominations, each fairly sure that, with a fair field and no favour, it could make its own way; and each animated by a jealous fear that, if any connection of state and church were permitted, some rival denomination would get an unfair advantage. ... Our schools, in bringing together those of different nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assimilating them together upon the basis of what is common and public in endeavour and achievement, are performing an infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unit out of which in the end genuine religious unity must grow. (p. 801)

Building upon these definitions of “religion” and “religious,” Dewey understood schools to be institutions where a “religious substance” without the “conventional badges and machinery of religious instruction” might be used in the formation of a “state consciousness,” (Dewey, 1908, p. 807). His ideal of a united, common public opinion in service of a true democracy was to be absent of traditional “religion,” as it was commonly understood, but not of “religious” action. This was beyond the “Social Gospel” trends of the era, which played a role in most mainline Christian denominations and so had maintained a doctrinal element. It was also well beyond the thinking of Horace Mann, who understood the biblical text (without doctrinal guidance) to be essential for the creation of

republican virtues in the citizenry. For Dewey, the Bible was replaced by public consensus as the authority which guided the morality of the citizenry.

It is in his argument in support of a “state consciousness” that Dewey redefined the American Revolution and, of significance, the views of the American Founders regarding the study of the Bible and of religion in schools. Whereas, in his mind, the American Founders were aware of the opportunity that they had launched into something new, even Progressive, they did not go far enough in leaving behind the old world. The old divisions of class and of religious sectarian thought had not been expunged. He argued that,

... there was a deeper and by no means wholly unconscious influence at work. The United States became a nation late enough in the history of the world to profit by the growth of that modern (although Greek) thing—the state consciousness. This nation was born under conditions which enabled it to share in and to appropriate the idea that the state life, the vitality of the social whole, is of more importance than the flourishing of any segment or class. ... Our fathers naively dreamed of the continuation of pioneer conditions and the free opportunity of every individual, and took none of the precautions to maintain the supremacy of the state over that of the class, which newer commonwealths are taking. ... But the lesson of the two and a half centuries lying between the Protestant revolt and the formation of the nation was well learned as respected the necessity of maintaining the integrity of the state against all divisive ecclesiastical divisions. Doubtless many of our ancestors would have been somewhat shocked to realize the full logic of their own attitude with respect to the subordination of churches to the state (falsely termed the separation of church and state); but the state idea was inherently of such vitality and constructive force as to carry the practical result, with or without conscious perception of its philosophy. (Dewey, 1916, p. 85)

While Dewey believed that the American Founders (he called them a generation of “giants”) had failed to pursue the establishment of the state consciousness to its modern extent, he did identify certain early Americans as helpful to the Progressive agenda (Edmondson, 2006; Westbrook, 1993). John Dewey, of course, had a great admiration for the work of Horace Mann. He frequently referenced Mann as an inspiration on politics and the nature of schools. In his work, *The Challenge of Democracy to Education* (1938), he called Mann the “patron saint of progressive education” (p. 181). Mann, he felt, understood the necessity of free education in a democracy and for the maintenance of the republic. And so Dewey understood Mann’s creation of the Common School as a necessary institution that was a “curative” and an “antidote” to the problems that faced education and the powers that made it sectarian as well as economically divided (p. 185). Yet Dewey’s perspective was not at all in line with Mann’s. Mann believed that “truth” should be sought and found in the study of history as well as of ancient texts. Horace Mann understood that a study of the ancients helped to bring a greater moral

understanding to the citizen. Mann's perspective was decidedly not in line with that of Dewey (Edmondson, 2006).

More than any of the other early leaders, however, Dewey believed it was Thomas Jefferson who best understood the Progressive project as expressed in Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers (Edmondson, 2006; Westbrook, 1993). In his works, *Freedom and Culture* (1939) and *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson* (1941), Dewey painted Jefferson as the one man among the Founders who stood as an exemplar and who understood the "... popular sovereignty and natural equality of the people" (Dewey, 1941, p. 18). He wrote that Jefferson's, "... deep-seated faith in the people, and their responsiveness to enlightenment properly presented, was a most important factor in enabling him to effect ... 'the revolution of 1800'" (Dewey, 1941, p. 18). And, of great importance too, was Jefferson's preference for a study of the sciences in contrast to authority found in doctrine and Holy Scripture (Edmondson, 2006). He identified in Jefferson a man who, like Dewey, sought to "leave behind the retrograde and superstitious habits of the past" (Dewey, 1941, p. 19). In short, Dewey redefined Jefferson in late-19th century, Progressive terms.

As with Dewey's use of Mann, the limitations of using Jefferson in support of Dewey's Progressive ideas are clear (Edmondson, 2006; Kern, 2015). While Jefferson certainly had an anti-clerical bias and rejected sectarian disputes, he supported the study of Classical languages, the study of ancient literature (including the Bible), of the Liberal Arts, of philosophy, the sciences, and of ancient history (Edmondson, 2006). His belief in Natural Law, in an unchanging human nature, as well as the shaping of morality and intellect through the study of ancient literature and history all stood in stark opposition to Dewey's educational philosophy and project (Caspar, 2014; Richard, 1994). Indeed, the central idea within the *Declaration of Independence* that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator" with rights suggests an eternal permanence that was entirely incongruent with Dewey's way of thinking. Dewey suggested that the principles which informed the *Declaration* had "gone out of vogue" and that, "Self-evident truths ... have been weakened by historic and by philosophic criticism" (Dewey, 1939, 156). Dewey was decidedly not an heir to Jefferson's republicanism which in no way demanded the type of uniformity Dewey envisioned (Edmondson, 2006). Dewey's system was a revolution against the "idolatry of the constitution," and it was a rejection of 1776 (Dewey, 1939, p. 158). While Jefferson viewed education as a means of raising up patriotic, moral, and intelligent citizens, he would not have viewed as desirable either the strictly secular or anti-republican "state consciousness" as it was defined by Dewey (Edmondson, 2006). Regardless of these differences, John Dewey and those influenced by him used a Progressive reinterpretation of Jefferson in support of political and educational philosophies that would take root in the laws and court decisions of the 20th century. John Dewey represented that bridge across which American school culture would cross from the old Christian Classical model to a secular, Progressive approach in the education of American citizens.

## The Supreme Court and Secular Schools

The 20th-century debates regarding religion in schools moved dramatically from arguments waged in the academic, local, and state contexts to debates engaged at the national level and in cases argued before the Supreme Court. The only national legislation by the American Founders to touch on the subject, the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787*, clearly stated that “religion, morality, and knowledge” in schools were “necessary” for the education of citizens. This legislation was instrumental in the formation of states even after the *Articles of Confederation* were replaced by the *Constitution* in 1789. But it was the interpretation of the *Constitution’s* 1st Amendment that became the focus of national debate in the 20th century. And the greater focus in these 20th-century arguments was upon interpretations of that document not rooted in the 18th-century context, but in an interpretation very much influenced by Progressives like John Dewey and those who agreed with his philosophy.

Historically, American courts and legislatures had affirmed that prayer and the study of the Bible in schools were entirely Constitutional and appropriate. In 1844, the Supreme Court ruled in *Vidal v. Girard* that American schools ought to use the Bible in school since morality could not be taught without it. A number of cases not related to education affirmed that America was decidedly a religious and, specifically, a Christian nation (*Holy Trinity v. United States* 1892). That the National Teachers Association affirmed the necessity of the Bible for the teaching of morals in school (1869) and that the Florida State Legislature had made the Bible required reading (1925) are further evidence of the convictions that dominated American culture well into the early years of the 20th century (Flowers, 2008; Jeynes 2003). Following the dominant trends within the culture, early interpretation of the 1st Amendment emphasized the “free exercise” of religion within the schools over the fear that this might constitute an “establishment” of religion in classrooms. While sectarian doctrines were to be avoided, there was no sense that a proper reading of the *Constitution* produced the secularizing policy stating that a freedom “from” religion in classrooms was necessary. Even the amendment proposed by Blaine was, in its early applications at the state level, never designed to overturn the tenets established for schools by the Founders. By the middle of the 20th century, this approach had been supplanted by a centralization and secularization of schools well beyond anything that had been envisioned by Horace Mann or any other 19th-century leader (Flowers, 2008; Jeynes, 2003).

The rationale for a transition in the courts to a secular philosophy in schooling was complex. Sectarian tensions had emerged as a result of immigration, a growing skepticism towards Western societal norms had taken root in multiculturalism, economic disparities, and a growing confidence in Darwinian and Marxist thought had also transformed American academic life (Kern, 2015). The World Wars which defined the 20th century proved the limitations of Progressive thought and its attending faith in the powers of government, industrial progress, and the “state consciousness” proposed by such men as Dewey. Post-modernism would then produce a deep skepticism of all modern, utopian projects as well as all traditional approaches to knowledge. Yet, regardless of destructive conflicts and a pervasive disunity of thought in the century, there remained a consistent

belief that greater efforts towards a state centralization and secularization of schools would eventually produce the desired, utopian results promised by Progressive philosophers (Jeynes, 2006; Kern, 2015).

The concept that schools should be protected “from religion,” rather than allowing “free exercise,” was found in the Supreme Court’s opinion written regarding the decision of the justices in the case, *McCollum v Board of Education* (1948). In ruling against providing opportunities for religious instruction of students in school and during the school day, the justices wrote,

Designed to serve as perhaps the most powerful agency for promoting cohesion among a heterogeneous democratic people, the public school must keep scrupulously free from entanglement in the strife of sects. ... The development of the public school as a symbol of our secular unity was not a sudden achievement nor attained without violent conflict. While in small communities of comparatively homogeneous religious beliefs, the need for absolute separation presented no urgencies, elsewhere the growth of the secular school encounter the resistance of feeling strongly engaged against it. But the inevitability of such attempts is the very reason for Constitutional provisions primarily concerned with the protection of minority groups. (Flowers, 2008, p. 584)

Here, the Court had expressed an entirely secular view of schooling that was out of step with nearly all of the opinions, both legislative and judicial, that had preceded it. This was a new direction in educational theory that viewed Bible reading and religious instruction as not only unnecessary, but somewhat dangerous. Religion no longer had a role in the development of the republican morality of children or in the unity of citizens around certain religious ideals. This represented not only a transformation in educational theory, but a transformation in Constitutional theory as well as in the definition of the nation itself. This judgment was a clear indication of the success enjoyed by John Dewey’s political and pedagogic legacy.

In another case, *Zorach v Clauson* (1952), the practice of “Release Time” during the school day was allowed, against strong complaints from the dissenting justices. In his dissent, Justice Black wrote,

Here not only are the State’s tax-supported public school buildings used for the dissemination of religious doctrines. The State also affords sectarian groups an invaluable aid in that it helps to provide pupils for their religious classes through use of the State’s compulsory school machinery. This is not separation of Church and State. (Flowers, 2008, p. 596)

Again, while the Court, in this case, ruled in favor of allowing “Release Time,” the idea that public schools, by virtue of the fact that they were now state entities, were by necessity required to be secular. Though the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787* viewed the study of “religion” and “morality” as “necessary” in schools, the opposite opinion was now promoted. And this opinion was not based upon a reading of the *Constitution* that was rooted in its 18th- or early 19th-century

contexts. Rather, this was a decidedly Progressive and modernist reading. The Supreme Court was in the process of changing the definition of “unity” among citizens of the United States as well as that which was considered “necessary” in the raising up of young citizens.

Finally, in *School District of Abingdon Township v Schempp* (1963), the Court ruled against both the daily reading of the Bible in schools as well as against school prayer. The complaint was supported by atheist activist Madalyn Murray O’Hair (1919–1995), among others, against Pennsylvania and Maryland statutes (1959) that prescribed daily Bible readings (without sectarian comment) and the recitation of the *Lord’s Prayer* (which had frequently been used in American schools as a prayer acceptable to most religious sects) over the public address system at the beginning of each school day. The court struck down these practices saying, “The reading of the verses, even without comment, possesses a devotional and religious character and constitutes in effect a religious observance” (Flowers, 2008, p. 613). And, while the Court confirmed that “... religion has been closely identified with our history and government,” the justices also wrote that, “... religious freedom is not likewise as strongly imbedded in our public and private life” and so,

... the constitutional prohibitions encounter their severest test when they are sought to be applied in the school classroom. Nevertheless it is the Court’s inescapable duty to declare whether exercises in the public schools of the States ... are involvements of religion in public institutions of a kind which offends the First and Fourteenth Amendments” (Flowers, 2008, p. 613).

The Court also argued that,

... our religious compositions makes us a vastly more divers people than were our forefathers. They knew differences chiefly among Protestant sects. Today the Nation is far more heterogeneous religiously, including as it does substantial minorities not only of Catholics and Jews but as well of those who worship according to no version of the Bible and those who worship no God at all. ... Whatever Jefferson or Madison would have thought of Bible reading or the recital of the Lord’s Prayer in what few public schools existed in their day, our use of the history of their time must limit itself to broad purposes, not specific practices., ... devotional exercises ... offend the First Amendment because they sufficiently threaten in our day those substantive evils the fear of which called forth the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. ... our interpretation of the First Amendment must necessarily be responsive to the much more highly charged nature of the religious questions in contemporary society. (Flowers, 2008, p. 622)

And so, in this ruling, effectively ending the reading of the Bible and of the saying of prayers in American schools, the Justices in an 8-1 decision stated clearly the transformation that they perceived had taken place and that now required a radically new approach to education. This ruling was one of many in the 20th

century that would push all religious study, particularly Christian study and practice, out of the schools. In further cases, written prayers would be abolished and individual prayers by students would be limited as in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962). The posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms or schools would be prohibited in *Stone v. Graham* (1980), as would prayers offered by clergy in school ceremonies in *Lee v. Weisman* (1992). These prohibitions extended even to student-led prayers at football games as found in *Doe v. Santa Fe Independent School District* (2000). Though government officials in local, state, and federal legislatures continued to open meetings with invocations and while the Supreme Court upheld the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance in the case, *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow* (2004), American students were not to be exposed to anything but a secular philosophy in the nation’s public schools.

Not stated in any of these cases was the Court’s view of exactly what ought to be taught in school curricula and what, if anything, of a religious nature might be discussed in the classroom. The belief that the sciences and verifiable facts alone should be taught (Dewey’s separation of the “chaff” from the “wheat”) emerged as an ideal among educators. Also growing in importance was the notion that the school should serve as a training ground for social action (Dewey’s “religious” action). The development of a “state consciousness” and a unity of opinion lay at the foundation of the idea that students were to become agents of social action rather than citizens. And so, while American political culture had been established with an understanding that a “Creator” and “Nature’s God,” not the State, had established the rights of the individual, there was now a movement underway to expunge any mention of such things in public school curricula. The ideals that had driven the American Revolution, the writing of the *Constitution*, the abolitionist movement, and the American Civil War were no longer understood to be relevant. In their place was an entirely secular understanding of the universe and, by extension, of the human person.

Perceptions regarding the success of these transitions were varied. Though most of the NASA scientists who worked on the space program were trained before the 1960s, an argument was made that the students of the United States were now taught the “hard sciences” more effectively than in past eras, hence, America’s success in putting a “man on the moon.” Arguments were also made that greater cohesion could be found in the nation’s classrooms and that an emphasis upon social action was introducing positive changes in race relations, the rights of women, and in economic equality. Contrary to these assertions were the arguments that many of social changes were actually rooted in the ideals of the *Declaration* as well as the religious commitments of those who supported ideals of equality. It was argued that many of the social changes served to undermine marriage, family, economic vitality, and social cohesion. Indeed, whatever unity was found in religious expression across the nation was eroding due to a secular philosophy now prominent in the schools. Parents found that teachers and schools had not remained neutral in this transition, but actively agitated against faith and religious commitments. In all, the success of this Progressive transition could be doubted (Jeynes, 2009; Kern, 2015).

Research that followed upon the Supreme Court decisions of the 1960s indicated that student tests, reflecting a lack of academic rigor, entered into a



period of discernable decline (Jeynes, 2009). Student behavior in schools as well as an overall sense of security and meaning in the culture of schools were also shown to be in a severe state of deterioration (Jeynes, 2009; Kern, 2015). Efforts by the federal government through the Department of Education (founded in 1975) to legislate positive academic results (as found in the Clinton era “Goals 2000” initiative or the “No Child Left Behind” legislation of the George W. Bush administration), proved to have limited success. The “Common Core State Standards” (2010) of the Barak Obama administration proved to have similar limitations (Kern, 2015; Moore, 2013). The idea argued by Benjamin Rush, Horace Mann and supported by the American Founders that religion in school helped to produce intelligent and virtuous citizens appeared to be confirmed by the 20th-century rejection of religious study and prayer in the schools. William Jeynes writes,

The evidence that is ostensible regarding the influence of religious faith and a moral orientation on student behavior and achievement indicates that Americans should encourage and not discourage the practice of religious faith. Moral education and religious faith appear to influence a wide spectrum of behaviors and practices. ... The evidence appears undeniable that the United States would benefit from moral education and a greater religious freedom in the schools. (Jeynes, 2009, p. 27)

## A Resurgent Classical Christian Movement

The response to this situation was robust. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many secular Classical schools were established in the form of charter schools which could expect greater academic rigor, a disciplined classroom culture, and an open arena for the discussion of the principles established by the American Founders in the *Declaration of Independence*. By way of this movement the concept of natural law was reintroduced into American schools (Kern, 2015). A return to a non-sectarian study of the Bible in schools also took hold in many states where state legislatures were willing to create legislation that avoided secularizing restrictions (Jeynes, 2009). Homeschooling movements, by which parents took education into their own hands, emerged in the 1980s and became a significant movement by the early years of the 21st century (Kern, 2015).

And, of great importance, was the emergence of private, Classical and Christian schools in numbers greater than at any other time in the nation’s history (Jeynes, 2003; Kern, 2015). Inspired by the writings of scholars such as C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), and his work *The Abolition of Man*, as well as Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957), and her article “The Lost Tools of Learning,” a wide array of Protestant and Catholic leaders established schools across the nation designed to resurrect a traditional model of rigorous schooling informed by a strong Christian religious commitment. Some of these schools were shaped by specific Protestant and Catholic doctrinal loyalties while many held to broadly Christian, ecumenical commitments. Many Catholic and Lutheran schools were created in direct opposition to their

own Progressive parochial systems. Consistent throughout all of these Christian schools was a return to ancient sources of learning, a commitment to academic rigor, a strong sense of purpose, as well as a strong dose of moral instruction along the lines of that which was once recommended by the American Founders (Kern, 2015). Studies have shown that these private schools produce higher test scores among their students than charter or traditional public schools (Jeynes, 2012). And present in all of these schools is a strong sense of patriotism, a commitment to the creation of wise and intelligent citizens, an appreciation for the significant virtues of Western civilization, as well as a close study of the *Constitution of the United States* and the *Federalist Papers* written by the American Founders in defense of the *Constitution*. That these schools now reach students across religious, economic, and racial boundaries suggests that this model is well-suited to serve the purposes of raising civil, unified, intelligent, and moral citizens (Jeynes 2006; Kern, 2015). Indeed, these schools bear a strong resemblance to the schools envisioned by the American Founders. Andrew Kern writes,

According to the classical tradition, the true, the good, and the beautiful are the soul's nourishment. Furthermore, as Image of God, a person is able to know them. ... Christian classical education cultivates ... wise and virtuous souls. ... (Kern, 2015, p. 14)

And,

Classical schools educate for citizenship. Without an education in wisdom and virtue, citizens give way to alienation, apathy, and intemperance and this leads to family and neighborhood disintegration, crime and political corruption. Modernism and postmodernism can scarcely speak to such concerns with a straight face. ... wherever classical education has been tried, students have learned to think broadly, deeply, and creatively. They have learned to live up to their responsibilities and to recognize the possibility of greatness ... (Kern, 2015, p. 114).

In early America, religion was as much a unifying factor in American life as it was divisive. While the Founders sought to limit sectarian conflict, they understood the positive and, in their words, “necessary” contribution of religious instruction as well as of prayer in schools. There is little evidence that they found prayer to be a great detriment to students or that school children were to be kept “from” religion. A significant departure from these convictions in American schools represented an abandonment of many of the most important foundations of American political culture. This was a movement not intended by the Founders and, indeed, inimical to schools and to a homogeneous society. Unintended by their advocates, the turn away from these foundations has also spawned a renewal of the Founders’ vision in the Christian Classical school movement. An unintended consequence of the secularizing forces has been the profound reintroduction of that aspect of education they had hoped to suppress.

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