

Rejoinder

It is truly ironic that a paper, written out of a sense of futility and meant to be a 'parting shot' at an issue to which the writer has tried unsuccessfully for a decade to bring sense and reason, should bring forth not one but two responses, forcing thereby still another plea for an end to hypocrisy. For such this rejoinder must be, though it is sad indeed to find that within the academy of all places there are still individuals who would maintain at this late date that Christians are capable not only of an objective approach to religious education (which would preclude the specific propagation of theism), but of actually cooperating in the enterprise (which would presume an end to Catholic public and separate schools and private denominational establishments, all of which, in Alberta at least, enjoy state aid). The matter of intra-Christian bigotry is a matter of historical record and I did not think that in a learned journal it was necessary to recite events as familiar as the Arian controversy, the realist-nominalist disputes, the burning of John Hus, Giordano Bruno, Michael Servetus, and the Oxford martyrs (to be only highly selective), the Thirty Years' War in Europe and the Civil War in England, the Puritan theocracy in New England and the later attempt to establish an Anglican theocracy in British North America, and today's contest for church membership in the Canadian north and anywhere else where people are still primitive enough to engage in religious disputes. Instances of the inability of Christians to work together are legion and their disinterest in a liberal education which frees the human being to define his own philosophy of life (as distinct from a programme of studies which leads the individual into a prescribed set of beliefs and practices) is writ large in every church-sponsored school, college, or university that has ever existed. Otherwise, what indeed distinguishes such institutions from state-sponsored institutions, and why should the former exist if their purpose is the same as that of non-denominational institutions of learning, a question which the original paper asked (p. 149) but which both respondents chose to ignore.

The original paper also gave many reasons why the Protestant remnant in education, the so-called public school, has shown itself incapable of dealing with religion from anything but the theistic standpoint, whether classic monotheism or Christo-centric theology, a distinction which Friesen introduces without showing how teaching either would be justified in a public school, or indeed what difference the distinction makes at all. But as both respondents insist that evidence be provided of Protestant indoctrination in the public schools, a few samples will follow. "Teacher using class time to make religious converts" — such was the recent headline in the *Edmonton Journal* (June 4, 1970) over the interesting letter below from "STUDENTS" to two teen advisers:

There's one teacher in our school who is supposed to be teaching history but who uses the period to give us lessons on religion and to try to make converts for his church.

He is an elder there and he won't be satisfied until we all join up.

I am not exaggerating when I say he spends four-fifths of the time talking about God and his church and sin and hell. Then we have to do a mountain of outside reading to catch up so we can pass the tests. We are being cheated out of an education but don't know what to do.

The advice, in reply, to behave like vigilantes, was equally frustrating:

Organize, and for one full week, ask each student to take complete notes on exactly what "Brother" is teaching. Then take the accumulated notes to the history department chairman or if Brother holds that job, take your notes to the principal.

If change isn't forthcoming, do a second week's notes and send them via a parents' delegation. That should do it.

In such a situation the interesting subject matter associated with concepts like God, church, sin, and hell goes by the boards, along with a goodly portion of the STUDENTS' education.

Now, I admit that one swallow does not a summer make, but there is more. Early in June (1970) my wife and I, as parents, were invited to an 'operatic' rendition of "The Story of Hansel and Gretel," presented by the Grade V and VI's of our nice, new, suburban, middle class, neighbourhood 'public school,' — a performance complete with "the Lord," heaven, angels, and prayer (and it wasn't even Christmas!) The play ended with an observation from the children's Papa (the scene, you may recall, is set in Europe) which would have done justice to a medieval morality play:

"Look, children, the witch has been caught in her own snare. When our need is the greatest the Lord stretches out His hand to us." This was followed with the interesting couplet (sung for the second time):

When our grief we cannot bear
God the Lord will hear our prayer.

Earlier, the whole chorus (our ten-year-old daughter was the narrator), with Hansel and Gretel's hands folded in the manner of a Christian at prayer, sang about fourteen angels (who subsequently alighted complete with wings!), the last two with power to "guide my steps to heaven." I suppose Friesen and Orteza y Miranda would find all this very elevating and non-sectarian and continue to give the particular school public school status. To me, however, the whole thing was Protestant propaganda at an age level at which the concepts could have little meaning (and they were not, in fact, discussed in the classroom but merely accepted as realities). The whole thing reminded me of the equally 'non-sectarian' kindergarten from which the daughter of a friend of mine (also an agnostic) came away with the following ditty:

Running over, running over
My cup is full and running over

The Lord saves me, I'm happy as can be
My cup is full and running over.

Then there was the student-teacher observed by the writer some years ago who quoted several passages from the King James version of the Bible at the end of a Grade VII science class in astronomy to underline the glories of God's handiwork. Admittedly he was a fundamentalist and could not see that the use of the Bible in that particular context was inappropriate in a real public school, but the fundamentalists have a right to their religious views as well as to teaching certificates, and a tripartite school system would give them scope for their particular ideas of teaching without having to apologize to anyone. Christians who would prefer a liberal approach to the study of Christianity free of ethnocentric commentary about other philosophies of life could send their children to the religiously neutral school system proposed, which would delay the study of religion until about Grade X when meaningful comparisons could begin to be made and universal elements gradually isolated.

One could, I suppose, go on to relate of Unitarian parents who have to cope with the unquestioned divinity of Jesus, of Jewish parents who need to neutralize the school's Christian overtones at Christmas and Easter, and of secular philosophers from India who, though landed immigrants awaiting citizenship, need to rescue 'false idols' like the bust of Socrates from being smashed by enterprising children under the spell of their devout first-grade Christian mentors. And if such admittedly generalized instances fail to impress, perhaps more weight will be attached to the Committee on Religious Education in Schools of the Department of Christian Education of the Canadian Council of Churches which has no illusions about what ought to be the metaphysical orientation of the so-called public schools and urges parents to encourage 'public school' teachers "to give definite Christian instruction . . . both in teaching the literature of the Bible and in their social studies¹."

In any case, as with that famous Christian aphorism (paraphrased roughly, as I am no authority in such matters), "For him who has faith, no proof is necessary; and for him without faith, none is sufficient," so with the matter of providing "sufficient, verified, and relevant evidences," requested by Orteza y Miranda, regarding Protestant sectarianism and the public schools. Only a non-Christian can appreciate what hurts a non-Christian in the publicly-supported institutions of a democratic nation which mixes religious and secular matters. All the casuistry of Christians about social integration, or about what is mere ceremony and ritual, or about the use of a term like God inexplicably ("somehow") as an instrument will not hide the fact that, like the Soviet Union, the Canadian state has a metaphysical orientation which the state-aided Catholic and private Christian schools openly acknowledge and which is ever-

¹Department of Christian Education, *Religious Education in Schools in Canada* (Toronto, [1921], p. 21.

present in the so-called public schools to be trotted out at the teacher's discretion, to the chagrin of humanists of all varieties and the occasional embarrassment of professors of education wedded to a nineteenth century concept of the public school as a common school — a concept which the evangelism inherent in Christianity has clearly shown to be untenable even in our time of growing secularism.

Turning to specific objections, neither professor is much at home with the issue. Friesen's first difficulty is with the Soviet analogy which was not meant "to suggest [to quote him] to Canadians that unless the present state of affairs regarding religion and education in this country is radically transformed, we will become like the Soviet Union," but that we *already* are like the Soviet Union in the way we allow a particular religious stance to officially permeate the institutions of our society, while hypocritically proclaiming religious freedom for all.

Religion is a private affair in the sense that no public official, including the school teacher paid out of public funds, is to tell any Canadian citizen what he is to believe regarding God, heaven, or hell. This means that the teacher can discuss the significance of religion without confining it to Christianity, just as he can discuss economics without confining it to private enterprise, or political democracy without confining it to the Liberal or Conservative parties. As for total neutrality encompassing even the well-known tenets of the democratic way of life, I submit that such tenets are not in the same category as religious tenets, because the latter are much in dispute whereas who would seriously challenge beliefs such as "The dignity and worth of every human being must be respected," or "Equality of opportunity must exist for all," or "Government must rest on the informed and freely given consent of the governed," or "Each individual must be free to speak, to read, to write, and to worship according to his conscience." Such social principles are simply not in the same category as the personal beliefs which make up religious systems. And if Friesen finds the term 'neutrality' difficult as applied to family, politics, and economics, I would suggest he substitute 'descriptive' for 'neutral' and he will understand the type of school advocated in the paper. Only the democratic tenets need not be taught in a purely descriptive manner. Commitment to them would hopefully follow once understanding was established because they constitute the consensus at the basis of the democratic way of life. The school, however, would provide the opportunity to discover the gap between democracy in the abstract and democracy as it is experienced in Canada. In a sense, then, Friesen is right when he states (p. 4) that the neutral school is "a school of a particular philosophic position," for it is a school in which the teacher's moral authority is the democratic creed and his intellectual authority, the scientific method — and who would have it otherwise in a *real public school*?²

²Based on M. Lieberman, *Education as a Profession* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1956), Chapters 2 and 3, "The Problem of Professional Function," "Authority in Education," pp. 19-36.

Finally, one can only wonder where Friesen has been in the 1960s when private post-secondary religious institutions like Camrose Lutheran College, Collège St. Jean (now the Université Collège St. Jean), and Concordia Lutheran College became university affiliates with easy access to Alberta's public treasury. Moreover, there is no telling where the movement (momentarily stalled as a result, in part, of opposition voiced in 1964-65³) may yet end, now that the college principle has entered the University of Alberta's organizational framework for the first time, that state aid to private religious colleges is on the increase, and pressure to increase the offerings of the second-year programmes of certain faculties continues unabated. While it is true that values and mores are usually established by early adolescence, the main reason for favouring public post-secondary educational institutions is that outside the protective cloisters of family and today's 'public school' these values and mores fortunately do not stay fixed for long in the kind of public university described in the paper. The problem, as Friesen well knows, is to obtain that kind of university and to abolish tuition fees so that mere economics does not deprive anyone of access to such institutions.

Orteza y Miranda resorts to the nit-picking technique of philosophic analysis, the current rage in philosophy of education, and the result is a good example of pouring old wine into new bottles. Prayers and religious oaths at state functions, we are told, "are not intended to convince or persuade people to believe in a particular God." How does she know *that*? What does happen, however, is that belief in God (however interpreted) is reinforced officially, and why should the state be any more interested in that belief than in its opposite? But the naiveté of the whole approach is pointed up in the discussion of the meaning of God. In our society every one, with the exception perhaps of the odd philosophy graduate, does understand (and is expected to understand from years of conditioning) that the God referred to is, in fact, "exclusively . . . the Christian God of the Old and New Testament, identified historically with the person of Jesus Christ." Other gods are false gods: this is practically part of the subconscious of anyone raised in western civilization; and it is the impression which such prayers and oaths leave on the masses (to whom men like Dewey are atheists, if heard of at all) that is an important concern in the original paper, not what a few philosophers think. The 'public school' enrolls all people's children and its religious content and meanings reflect and reinforce the lowest common denominator of metaphysical understandings; otherwise, the school would be a continuing centre of public controversy, a condition seldom conducive to learning. Only a tripartite school system can handle religion honestly, for only a religiously neutral school system could explore the whole range of religious content and meanings without public outcry.

³See the controversy in the *Edmonton Journal*, November 10, 1964, through to about March 1, 1965; also M. R. Lupul, "Church and State in Alberta's Educational System," *The ATA Magazine*, March 1965, pp. 6-14.

For lack of space one will have to dismiss as sophistry statements like "The [religious] statements in question need not be taken for what they say or sound like but rather how they are used and what function they perform," or "No one should be bothered by something which he does not believe exists . . . Has anyone been offended or hurt by a unicorn?" The first begs the question of content and I submit that the truth of something is as important as the method by which it is discovered or the way it is used. The second is clever, but even unicorns can hurt when belief in them is officially encouraged, however subtle the means.

It is difficult to say whether a religiously neutral school would work; it has never been tried. However, there are, I think, many individuals in our society who would support a school committed to providing a genuine liberal education — the kind of education currently being discouraged by the taboos of conventional religion. The existing 'public school' is unable to use the approach of the original paper because a vigilant and vociferous minority within the Christian spectrum — the fundamentalists — will not cooperate. It is not necessary, I think, to outline their literal position on God, the Bible, and Truth. They and their teacher-spokesmen in the 'public schools' are "blinded" by their faith; but it does not follow that atheists and agnostics are similarly blinded — they have no such divine mission to turn out atheists or agnostics as do the fundamentalists to produce 'true' Christians (Matthew, 28: 18-20).

But the sentence in the original paper which bears the burden of most of Orteza y Miranda's reply is "Intra-Christian bigotry has made religion a very touchy subject in the schools." It brings forth all the finely honed tools of philosophic analysis — unnecessarily. For the claim is not, in fact, the professor's logical deduction "that theists (the public school) are incapable of teaching religion like any other subject matter" (p. 6). The claim is far simpler and more basic: the bigotry and absence of compromise among Christians (which is an historical fact, well-known to all) has made it impossible to produce an institution common to all in which religion could be handled like any other subject. It is possible there are theists who could handle religion like any other subject, but there is no institution at present in which they could do so, and the purpose of the original paper was to propose the need for such an institution and to present something of its nature; it was not to trot out a philosophic analysis of bigotry.

M. R. Lupul
University of Alberta