

INAUGURAL WILLIAM E. DRAKE LECTURE

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**THE AUTHORITY OF LAW AND THE FREEDOM OF THE
INDIVIDUAL IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

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The purpose of this paper is to point up the significance of the social foundations of education in the American culture, especially as a requirement in the certification of public school teachers. Our failure to make this requirement may well be the reason why the public school has failed to produce the free-thinking citizens that democracy demands. Our present practice of thinking of the teacher as a conduit of facts must give way to the idea of the teacher as a leader in the community. Placing the teacher in the category of a hired hand with little power and no social influence, subject to the whims of parents and power politicians, can only result in a breakdown of the general welfare. What we have created is the narcissistic individual without a pattern of meaning and value or, stated otherwise, without a public philosophy of education.

It is only through a knowledge of our cultural heritage that we can develop insight into why public schools have failed to achieve their purpose. Even as teachers, we remain ignorant of the foundations of our heritage. This ignorance of our cultural past may in part be attributed to the fact that most of our people do not have an Anglo-Saxon cultural background, but this is only a poor excuse for our anti-intellectualism in matters of a social nature.

If we continue to follow the same cultural pattern that we have followed since 1900, we will move into the most critical period our country has faced since the War Between the States. This crisis is developing for three reasons: 1) We are living in a schizophrenic cultural pattern in which two patterns of meaning and value are in conflict with each other; 2) we are continuing to neglect the significance of the social foundations of education in a culture devoted to life in a free society;

and 3) we are not coping intellectually with the problems that have been generated by our change from an agrarian way of life to an urban, technological, industrial society.

Our Schizophrenic Culture

Those who settled the thirteen colonies have been characterized as feudal-minded Medievalists in their religion, economy, politics, and social values. It is ironic that we should speak of them as freedom-loving, for their basic intolerance was expressed not only in their religious dogmatism, but in their allegiance to economic slavery, to primogeniture and entail, to their social aristocracy and devotion to the Crown, and to their church-state alliance. Their Protestant Christianity was super-natural and other worldly, totally indifferent toward the worldly needs of people. As a result, the women remained totally illiterate, and only the property holder could vote and hold office. In truth, the fundamentalist Christian of today is geared to the same pattern of thinking as those who first settled this country, to the Bible as the word of God, to Christ as a man-God, and to the existence of a human soul. This closed system of thought is as dogmatic, if not more so, than Leninist Communism.

Neglect of the Social Foundations of Education

Out of the American Revolution and the thinking that came out of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, we get a second pattern of meaning and value. Take the thinking of John Cotton, who is referred to by V.L. Parrington as a New England Divine, and compare his thinking with that of Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Jefferson. Here is John Cotton, the first teacher of the Church of Boston speaking:

Now if it be a Divine truth, that none are to be trusted with public permanent authority but Godly men, who are fit for church membership, then, from the same grounds it will appear, that none are so fit to be trusted with the liberties of the Commonwealth as church members.²

Compare this statement with the thoughts expressed by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, and you find yourself in a different kind of world. In this respect, the Revolution of '76 was more than a war against the other-worldliness of Christianity and against the allegiance for church and state. From 1776 to 1832, the foundation stones of our free way of life were laid. Here, in addition to the Declaration of Independence, we find the first statute for religious freedom (1779), the federal Constitution (1787), and the first state university (1795). Until 1832, those who took the leadership in the Revolution of '76 were in control of the federal government, all of them coming from the State of Virginia except the Adams family. Of

particular importance is Benjamin Franklin's statement of a public philosophy of education, enunciated in 1727 for members of his Junto:

- 1) Have you any particular disrespect for any present member?
- 2) Do you sincerely declare that you love mankind in general of what profession of religion soever?
- 3) Do you think any person should be harmed in his body, name or goods for mere speculative opinion or his external way of worship?
- 4) Do you love truth for truth's sake and will you endeavor impartially to find and receive it yourself and communicate it to others?

The charter of the first state university, says that the University of North Carolina was founded to promote civic liberty "for there never was a nation which preserved freedom without being enlightened by the ways of Science" (that is, knowledge). In order to promote the Social Duties of Life, five professorships were established:

- 1) Moral and political philosophy and history
- 2) Natural philosophy, astronomy and geography
- 3) Mathematics
- 4) Philosophy of medicine, chemistry, agriculture and mechanics
- 5) Modern languages and the classics

The core of this curriculum was to be in the sciences, English and history. The classics were optional as compared with their requirement in the colonial church college. The following comes from a letter written by a Princeton College scholar to the President of the university:

It is to be hoped . . . that the rays of light from your university, The Sun of Science will illuminate the darkness of society, and chase away ignorance and vice. . . Presbyterians and Arians, Infidels and Roman Catholics. Bless me what a collection. The Age of Reason has surely come. Superstition and bigotry are buried in one common grave. Philosophy and charity begin to bless the earth. Transporting thought. What a glory to the University of North Carolina that in her sacred⁴ seats they have first appeared.

What amazes me about this letter is that so few of our college professors, much less our public school teachers, know that a clear-cut public philosophy of education was announced by those who took the leadership in the Revolution of 1776. The difference between this philosophy of public education and that of the Protestant denominations of the two preceding centuries is the difference between the free-thinking individual and tyranny of the mind.

What is most disturbing in our present day and time is that television evangelists are able to convince many of our citizens that what they preach is a doctrine of freedom and liberty, and that secular humanism is communistic rather than a product of the Revolution of 1776 and the core of our heritage of freedom. Throughout the evolution of western culture three patterns of meaning and value have been created. The first of these, the **MAN-GOD RELATIONSHIP** is still dominant in our western culture with the exception of the Soviet Union. People of this mentality settled the thirteen colonies and remained dominant until the coming of the eighteenth century Age of Reason and Enlightenment. The second frame of reference, **THE MAN-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP**, had its origin in the Renaissance of Western Culture and came into prominence in the eighteenth century. The third frame of reference is the **MAN-MAN RELATIONSHIP** which had its origin ideologically in the Communist Manifesto (1848) but became a reality in 1917 with the establishment of the U.S.S.R. in 1917. In time, as these frames of reference tend to overlap each other, vested interests and dogmatists created forces of opposition against one or the other. In lacking an ethical sense of justice, the sense of unity in a nation is broken down by greed, ignorance, and self interest. This is exactly what happened in the United States in the period from 1820 to 1860 which led to the War Between the States.

In the historical sense, a look at what went on in the American culture after 1820 clearly points to the thinking of those who led in the founding of the United States and those who reverted back to the pattern of thinking that dominated the Colonial Era. In doing so, they must be held responsible for the Civil War, as well as for the poverty, ignorance, and bigotry of our present-day cultural activity. There is no doubt of Jefferson's awareness of the cultural trend that was taking place in and after 1820. After the Missouri Compromise, Jefferson said, "I tremble for my country when I think that God is just and that his justice will not sleep forever." When John Adams lay dying on July 4, 1826, he said, "Thank God Jefferson still lives." But Jefferson had died a few hours earlier.

Now let us turn to our third point, that we are not coping intellectually with the problems which have been created by our urban, technological, industrial society. In failing to do so, we seem to have forgotten that it was the majority will of the people that had Jesus of Nazareth crucified. Also, we have forgotten that it was the same majority will of the people that forced Socrates of Ancient Athens to drink the cup of hemlock. Yet, in the evolution of the human mind, it is the man Jesus who best symbolizes the role of ethics in human relations. Likewise, in the evolution of the human mind, it is the man Socrates who best symbolizes the role of knowledge in human development. All of which indicates that, whether it be the will of the majority of the people or of a despotic king, without ethical commitment and enlightened knowledge, power ends up in some form of tyranny. This is the lesson we should have learned as a result of the War Between the States, but seemingly we have not learned as we are now confronted with

a growing social crisis. That we should have a President, who is very popular with orthodox Christians, but who relies only on the power role in human relations, brings to mind the ancient Romans who also relied solely on the power role in dealing with the forefathers of these same Christians.

Our Anti-intellectual Bias: The Revolt Against Reason

By 1832, the anti-intellectual bias in the nation had become so pervasive that Jefferson was being attacked as an elitist, and Free Masons as a product of pagan philosophy. The attack being made on the state universities was particularly dirty. At their annual meeting, many of the orthodox church groups were attacking these universities as atheistic and godless institutions. By the close of the century, Theodore Roosevelt was saying that Thomas Paine was a rabble-rousing atheist. What is ironic about all of this is that Benjamin Franklin was not only the founder of the American Philosophical Society and served as chairman of the federal Constitutional Convention in 1787, but that he was also the first Grandmaster mason in the new world. The Freemasons organized the Committees of Correspondence that kept the colonies together during the Revolution. Along with the pen of Thomas Paine, there were Freemasons such as Robert Burns the poet and LaFayette of France who helped with the war against the English Crown.

After 1820, as the Congress of the United States moved toward a Politics of Power, the New England states shifted toward national unity, while the states in the South moved toward secession. During this period, the elementary and secondary public schools were established, first in Massachusetts and then in Pennsylvania. This was largely achieved because Protestants feared that the Catholics would receive public tax money. Here freedom was viewed not as freedom of the mind but as an opportunity of the poor to be educated without paying for it. This mandated Protestant control of public schools, especially on the same philosophical base as the colonial church schools. Now Christians took the place of the Jews as God's chosen people, especially in killing the Indians. The Old Testament was followed to justify such actions.

In Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America we gain additional insight into the marked characteristics of the people in the northeastern part of the country during the period from 1830 to 1860. Tocqueville wrote, "No sooner do you set foot on American soil than you are stunned by a kind of tumult, a confused clamor is heard on every side, and a thousand simultaneous voices demand satisfaction of their social wants."

It would appear from Tocqueville's remarks that the people's idea of liberty called for 1) a sense of independence, 2) participation in political life, and 3) equal rights for all. The diffusion of these three elements determined their concept of liberty. In these respects, it appears that the people put equality above liberty, or a duty to

one's self, to one's community, to one's fellow man, and to one's God. From all of this it is very evident that Tocqueville's opinion makes the people very vulnerable to dangers such as 1) power politics, 2) laissez-faire individualism, 3) tyranny of the majority, 4) demagogic voices, 5) primary interest in material wealth, and 6) the gospel of personal success. It is obvious, too, that Tocqueville saw in the character of the American people what we now see in the non-thinking of our present-day citizen.

Protestant control of the public schools from the time of their establishment until after the First World War points to the lack of a public philosophy of education such as that which had been outlined at the time of the Revolution of 1776, and a substitution of the Protestant Ethic which prevailed throughout the colonial period. As a result, all of the weaknesses which Tocqueville saw in the American character have continued to prevail. Today there is general agreement that our public schools have failed to achieve their common purpose, but few of our citizens seem to know why. By investing power over the mind of the teacher in the local school boards, what else could have been expected?

Throughout our entire history, the ministers of God have remained supreme over the control of the minds of the people in our local communities. By making the teacher the servant of the state or local community, you do not have freedom of learning, but a form of intellectual slavery. It was a policy of this type over the mind of the university professor which led to the organization of the American Association of University Professors in 1911. To a large extent this organization has forced boards of regents to limit their actions largely to the external affairs of the institution, leaving internal affairs to the faculty and the administration. Without power, teachers can never have a significant influence upon the life of the community. It was Jefferson's conviction that the state should defend the teacher in the exercise of professional responsibility, not to define it.

At no point between 1832 and 1860 is the practice of the Politics of Power more evident than in the drift toward the War Between the States. In rejecting the Role of Reason in Human Affairs, we substituted vested interests and greed for that sense of unity and purpose so carefully worked out by our Revolutionary Fathers and established in the Constitution of the United States. Charles A. Beard, asking in The Rise of American Civilization whether the North or the South was responsible for the Civil War, said, "The pot cannot call the kettle black."

Our Twentieth Century Cultural Crisis

It is becoming increasingly evident that we must stop living on and glorifying our past. The reason for this conviction grows out of the fact that since 1900, when our society was 90% agrarian, we have become 90% industrial, urban, and technological. As a result of this change, we have accumulated new and various human-relations problems but have

failed to face up to any one of these problems either intellectually or socially. Among these problems are: 1) the breakdown of rural family life, 2) chaotic family-life relations and the abuse of children, 3) the failure of public education, 4) continuing massive unemployment, 5) increasing violent crimes involving dope, AIDS, and alcohol, 6) loss of a sense of ethical commitment to the general welfare at the upper levels of government and industry, 7) increasing excessive national indebtedness, 8) an increase from 36,000 millionaires in 1940 to 700,000 in 1986, 9) continued practice of the Politics of Power in the face of nuclear war, 10) manipulation, expediency, and vested interests with little or no concern for the general welfare, 11) a population shift where the majority of the people have no American cultural background, 12) the rise of nihilistic terrorism on the right and the growth of communist socialism on the left.

In the historical sense, I would say that our nation has gotten into these problems because of the rejection of the educational implications of the Age of Reason and Enlightenment. What I specifically refer to is the lack of a public philosophy of education and our continued adherence to a pattern of religious dogmatism.

Looking at our present situation, we must bring to an end the practice of the Politics of Power which did not end with the defeat of the South in 1865. What followed in the so-called Reconstruction Era had future implications more vicious than the war itself. While the southern states were forced to wallow in poverty and degradation, the Robber Barons, with no power to oppose them, established the corporate pattern of capitalism by amending the federal Constitution. In such a system, you have a mechanism based on the law of supply and demand with no moral or ethical sense of responsibility to the general welfare. For example, it was a general practice and belief that you could not run a coal mine without a machine gun. Also, Charles A. Beard quotes one industrial baron as saying, "We own this Nation, and by God we are going to keep it."

Our present narcissistic individual could be said to be a product of this laissez-faire individualism with its motto, "Each man for himself and the devil take the rest." Under corporate capitalism, as John Dewey expressed it, individualism had now replaced the idea of individuality and growth in human development. In a sense, it could be said that we had sacrificed our birthright for a mess of pottage.

Our rejection of the need for social intelligence in our thinking is probably best indicated in the way we have dealt with the Soviet Union. To take a positive attitude, rather than to follow the negative policy we have continued to pursue, would be the mark of freedom and intelligence, not of fear and aggression. What is tragic about this negativism is that we have not only practically bankrupt our government in the process of trying to defeat them, but we have also generated hatred rather than love in the process. A negative attitude hurts ourselves, for it leaves us ignorant of the truth. Surely they have the

right to work out their own destiny, just as much as we have the right to work out ours. Yet, only one President of the United States since 1917, Franklin D. Roosevelt, seems to have recognized this. The fact that we have tended to align ourselves with all the right-wing governments of the world is proof of our intellectual bankruptcy. We forget that it was this communist-socialist government that saved the western world from the madness of the Nazis at the battle of Volgograd. While there is much on which their governmental officials can be criticized, no government is perfect, even our own. Here are a number of actions on their part which are definitely in their favor:

- 1) They have freed themselves from the tyranny of the Romanoffs.
- 2) They have brought their people from 85% illiteracy to a free educational system from the cradle to the grave.
- 3) Today they have no unemployment, while all health services are free.
- 4) More than anything else, there is an integration of their philosophy with the every-day lives of the people.
- 5) A high level of professional qualification for holding public office from the city level to the head of the U.S.S.R.
- 6) The implementation of the social foundations of education.
- 7) As to their concept of human rights, it is doubtful that their experiment could have succeeded in an open society.
- 8) Unlike our politics of power, they have chosen to capitalize on the role of social intelligence through the Communist Party.
- 9) In spite of all the negativism which these people have received from the western world, they have been able to enhance the quality of their every-day life.

As one of the two major world powers of today, if we are to gain the respect of the peoples of the world as a peace-loving nation, 1) we must orient our pattern of thinking to be more consistent with that of our Revolutionary Fathers. 2) We must integrate the physical and the social sciences into a functional public philosophy of education based on the ethical premises of a society of free men and women. 3) We must elevate the quality of public education at all levels by a selective teacher-education program of no less than seven years. 4) We must have a quality of professional independence from the dictation of the local school board in which the state defends the teacher in the exercise of his or her professional responsibility. 5) We must demand a high level of professional qualification, both ethically and intellectually, from the city level to the President of the United States. 6) A nine-hour program in the social foundations of education is imperative for all professional educators, both administrators and teachers. The means of

education are no substitute for the ends. Classroom teaching, from the kindergarten through the four-year college, must be placed on a par with the research scholar. 7) There must be a respect for the authority of laws that are just and based on an ethical commitment to the general welfare.

At the present time there are two concepts of freedom prevailing in the United States: 1) the right to promote one's religious dogma, the traditional concept that has prevailed throughout the history of our culture, and 2) creative thought and the love of scientific truth as distinguished from the dogma of belief. In the final analysis, it is our meaning and value frame of reference that determines whether the authority of law is justified and the freedom of the individual is abused. Just as the authority of law is no better than the people who enforce it, so is the quality of freedom no better than those who insist upon one's individual rights. Surely the role of the teacher in our culture is more than that of being confined to the classroom. His or her role as a leader in the culture is imperative for the common good of all.

On a personal note, for many years, dating back to my early childhood, I have lived with an ingrained fear of the role of authority. Could this be a product of Southern Baptist dogma which has continued to prevail in the cultural pattern of my community? I must say, however, that not all of my early childhood religious teachings were negative. In my insecurity without an earthly father, I found in the symbol of a living Jesus who loved me the needed strength to go along with the love of my mother, my kindergarten teacher, and my first grade teacher. In my high school days and in my college years, symbolically speaking, it was my friends, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, who gave me strength. What I am saying is that it is the quality of human relations that makes the world go around. That is why the SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION ARE SO VITALLY IMPORTANT IN THE EDUCATION OF OUR TEACHERS.

In a fundamental and practical sense, let me refer you to an example where we are failing our young people in a very tragic manner, an example which gives the lie to much of what we say about our free way of life. The fact that we are failing our young people is clearly evident in the number of suicides being committed annually by our youth. What they need and are crying out for is a place in our culture where they truly realize that they count for something. They need hope for the future, a recognition of the need for their services in the market place, a challenge for their services, and in identification with a nation that is at peace with itself. The neglect on the part of the powers that be of the general welfare points to nothing more than a dogma of free enterprise where having an opportunity to become a millionaire is more important than the recognition of the real worth of the individual and the full employment of the laborer. In the final analysis, there is no substitute for productive labor in the life of an

individual, and for a purpose in life that calls for the best that we have to offer to one another.

NOTES

¹Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. I (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, Inc., 1930), pp. 27-75.

²William E. Drake, The American School in Transition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1955), p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 116.

⁴Ibid., p. 140.