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## **Training Children As They Should Go? Evaluating Government Education Standards That May Impact Lutheran Elementary Schools**

A review essay of

Quist, Allen. *Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum*. Foreword by Phyllis

Schlaflly. St. Paul, MN: Maple River Education Coalition, 2002.

Quist, Allen. *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*. Chaska, MN: EdWatch, 2005.

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### **Introduction**

As a U.S. history professor, the husband of an Elementary Education major, and a Christian father, I had many reasons to devote close attention to two recent books by Allen Quist. *Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum* (2002) explores the implications of the Goals 2000 Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the Improving America's Schools Act (each passed in 1994) by tracing the history of their implementation through the restructuring of state education standards. In *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (2005), Quist recaps the principal conclusions of *Fed Ed*, discusses additional developments resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, and leads readers into a deeper investigation concerning the manner in which moral relativism, pantheism, and neo-Marxism, among other contested ideologies, receive privileged treatment in federally subsidized and state-mandated curricula. A chapter entitled "Home Schools and Private Schools" reveals that parents seeking an alternative to public schools may not be able to insulate their children from these recent education

reforms as effectively as they may suppose. His argument therefore has obvious relevance for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), which presently operates eleven preschools/kindergartens, thirteen elementary schools, one liberal arts college, and one theological seminary in the U.S. Several ELS congregations also have partnered with Wisconsin Synod churches to fund and manage area Lutheran high schools. Moreover, the ELS resolved at its 2005 convention to establish, under the guidance of Lutheran Schools of America, two new elementary schools per year for the next half century.

In this review essay, I shall first summarize Quist's history of the "education standards" movement during the past decade and a half. Because some his claims are rather startling, I also shall provide citations to original sources that substantiate those claims, based on my own efforts to check the accuracy of Quist's account. I shall next identify and evaluate the chief concerns that Quist raises concerning the new federal curriculum, comparing Quist's evidence with some of my own. Finally, I shall suggest some useful applications of Quist's insights for Christian home schools and Lutheran elementary schools, such as those being founded through Lutheran Schools of America.

Before beginning, a few points deserve mentioning. First, Quist has in recent years served as a lay delegate on the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. That committee presently is preparing a study of postmodernism, based in part on the research by Quist that is being reviewed in this essay. That committee's work, obviously, involves explicit reference to Holy Scripture as the authoritative norm by which to judge the merits and demerits of postmodernism. Quist's books that are here being reviewed, by contrast, were written for the public square. Properly refraining from commingling church and state, Quist draws upon natural law principles as God's guides for civic affairs without appealing to Scripture. Remembering that natural law and biblical morality have God as their common author, readers of this article may choose to apply Quist's insights in either church or state, though any applications intended for congregational use would be improved by incorporating the Scriptural principles that the Doctrine Committee presently is exploring.

### **Historical Background**

In 1994, Congress passed and President Bill Clinton signed three significant bills that laid the groundwork for a *de facto* federally standardized curriculum. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act

established a framework for competency standards that were to be expected of all American students at grades 4, 8, and 12.<sup>1</sup> The Improving America's Schools Act, an education funding bill, required that schools receiving federal dollars conform their curricula to the Goals 2000 standards.<sup>2</sup> The School-to-Work Opportunities Act provided a framework for integrating classrooms and workplace environments, in order that public education may benefit the employment sector more directly.<sup>3</sup> These U.S. laws served, in part, to implement the Framework for Action to which the U.S. committed itself when President George H. W. Bush signed the UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All in 1990. (The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—UNESCO—exists to recommend, among other things, global educational policies.) The UNESCO Framework for Action called upon all nations of the world to establish educational standards and implement testing programs to ensure that outcome benchmarks were met by all the world's students across the full socioeconomic spectrum.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1990s, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, National Council for the Social Studies, and similarly named organizations for other disciplines developed standards that would soon be incorporated under both the federal Goals 2000 Act and corresponding state legislation.<sup>5</sup> American textbook publishers, in turn, aligned their scope and content to fulfill the objectives identified by those standards. Tests, both textbook-based and standardized, similarly were rewritten to adhere to the new standards. The U.S. Dept. of Education reported to UNESCO in 2000 that both textbooks and assessment instruments had largely completed the transition called for by the 1990 Framework for Action.<sup>6</sup> In 2002, President George W. Bush

<sup>1</sup> Goals 2000 Act (1994) [www.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/index.html).

<sup>2</sup> The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (H.R. 6), [frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103\\_cong\\_bills&docid=fh6enr.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103_cong_bills&docid=fh6enr.txt.pdf), p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994), [frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103\\_cong\\_bills&docid=fh2884enr.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=103_cong_bills&docid=fh2884enr.txt.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and Framework for Action (1990), [www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed\\_for\\_all/background/world\\_conference\\_jomtien.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/world_conference_jomtien.shtml).

<sup>5</sup> A directory of sixteen curriculum-standards organizations is provided in Allen Quist, *Inside the New Federal Curriculum* (St. Paul, MN: Maple River Education Coalition, 2003), 28–30.

<sup>6</sup> Quist, *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (Chaska, MN: EdWatch, 2005), 68–69, quoting from "A Report of the United States to the International Consultative Forum on Education for All," Jan. 2000, [www2.unesco.org/twef/countryreports/usa/contents.html](http://www2.unesco.org/twef/countryreports/usa/contents.html).

signed the bi-partisan No Child Left Behind Act that further imbedded these national standards into local school curricula by requiring districts to demonstrate their students' ability to meet those standards in order for schools to maintain federal funding.<sup>7</sup>

Although the standards ostensibly had been developed by private, non-governmental organizations, Quist documents numerous similarities between UNESCO documents and U.S. standards, suggestive of more than mere coincidence. In 2003, U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige reported to UNESCO that NCLB had brought into being a nationwide curriculum in keeping with the 1990 Framework for Action; as Quist demonstrates, NCLB also accorded with UNESCO's more recent Dakar Framework, which President Clinton signed in 2000.<sup>8</sup> Quist is alarmed by the fact that NCLB mandated a specific non-governmental organization—the Center for Civic Education—to create educational standards concerning America's founding political principles. The act did not permit the Dept. of Education to consider other organizations' bids on this federally subsidized project, nor did the act call for an independent scholarly peer review process that would evaluate the resulting curriculum.<sup>9</sup>

Equally disturbing, discussion and debate among the parents, teachers, and school board members whose students must now meet the new standards were largely absent from the political process that brought the new standards into being. In a report submitted to UNESCO in 2000, the U.S. Dept. of Education acknowledged that had the American public been informed that the recently developed state-level curriculum standards resulted from any sort of federal mandate (not to mention a UNESCO mandate), "political backlash" would have been "unleash[ed]."<sup>10</sup> Quist objects not only to a procedural bypass of the "consent of the governed"<sup>11</sup>; he also warns that the substance of the new

<sup>7</sup> No Child Left Behind Act (2002), [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html).

<sup>8</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 64 (quotation of Paige), 65–66 (Dakar and NCLB comparison). For the original report, see Rod Paige, "Statement of Secretary Paige at the UNESCO Round Table of Ministers on Quality Education," 3 Oct. 2003, [www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2003/10/10032003.html](http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2003/10/10032003.html).

<sup>9</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 89–90.

<sup>10</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 69, quoting from "A Report of the United States to the International Consultative Forum on Education for All," Jan. 2000, [www2.unesco.org/twef/countryreports/usa/contents.html](http://www2.unesco.org/twef/countryreports/usa/contents.html).

<sup>11</sup> The Declaration of Independence (1776), para. 2, states that governments are legitimate based on the "consent of the governed." President Abraham Lincoln similarly emphasized the importance of "government of the people, by the people, and for the

education standards—a *de facto* federally mandated curriculum—has dubious academic and pedagogical merit and functions politically to undermine numerous values that mainstream Americans traditionally have held dear.

### Chief Concerns

*Natural Law and Human Rights.* Quist, an adjunct professor of political science and former Minnesota legislator, draws special attention to the federal curriculum's departure from America's natural law foundation for human rights. Quist repeatedly highlights the distinction between the U.S. Declaration of Independence (1776) and U.S. Constitution (1787), on the one hand, and the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), on the other hand.<sup>12</sup> The Declaration of Independence asserts that fundamental human rights are grounded in natural law: "all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights [including] ... life, liberty, and [property]." The U.S. Constitution defines, separates, balances, and limits the powers of government in an effort to maximize the protection of those natural rights. This is in accord with the claim in the Declaration of Independence that "to secure these rights governments are instituted among men."<sup>13</sup>

The U.N. Declaration, by contrast, reverses the relationship between the people and their government with respect to human rights. It defines rights as privileges created by government, rather than defining government as an instrument created by the people's consent to protect their pre-existing, natural rights. Having reduced "rights" to government-created privileges, the U.N. includes "rights" to a paid vacation and government-subsidized compulsory elementary education on equal par with "rights" to free speech and religious liberty. Despite some lip service to "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family," the U.N. Declaration concludes that "These rights and freedoms [i.e., all of those listed in the document] may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United

Nations."<sup>14</sup> That limitation, argues Quist, is functionally equivalent to the following passage from the socialist constitution of Cuba: "Citizens have freedom of speech and of the press in keeping with the objectives of socialist society. Material conditions for the exercise of that right are provided by the fact that the press, radio, television, cinema, and other mass media are state or social property and can never be private property. This assures their use at exclusive service of the working people and in the interests of society."<sup>15</sup> Quist seems to have a point. The flight of hundreds of thousands of Cubans to Florida suggests that government-owned media agencies have not adequately served "the working people." By the Cuban constitution, Cuban citizens have no real right to free press or speech, a fact that has drawn criticism from international human rights organizations.<sup>16</sup>

On the question of human rights, the federal curriculum conforms to the U.N. Declaration, rather than to America's founding documents, despite the long-standing refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the U.N. Declaration and a recent decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals insisting that the U.N. Declaration lacks any binding force whatsoever within the United States.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. civics curriculum developed under

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<sup>14</sup> U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), art. 24 (paid vacation), art. 26 (education), art. 19 (speech), art. 18 (religion), Preamble ("inalienable"), art. 29 (limited to U.N. purposes), [www.un.org/Overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html). See also Quist, *America's Schools*, 92–93; *Fed Ed*, chap. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Cuba (1992), art. 53; trans., [www.cubanet.org/ref/fidts/const\\_92\\_e.htm](http://www.cubanet.org/ref/fidts/const_92_e.htm). See also Quist's discussions in *Fed-Ed*, 57, and *America's Schools*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Joseph Kraft, "Missing the Boat on Castro," *World Affairs* 143, no. 1 (1980), 68–70; S.S., "Cuban Refugee Crisis: Quick Test for New Law," *American Bar Association Journal* 66, no. 7 (1980): 826–27; Human Rights Watch, "Cuba," *World Report* 2002, [www.hrw.org/wr2k2/americas5.html](http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/americas5.html).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Galey, "Congress and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," panel presentation sponsored by the International Relations Committee of the League of Women Voters, 14 Oct. 1998, [www.dcnatch.com/twvdc/twv9811b.htm](http://www.dcnatch.com/twvdc/twv9811b.htm); *Flores v. Southern Peru Copper Corp.*, 343 F.3d 140 (2d Cir. 2003), [www.frdmlaw.com/data2/circs/2nd/029008p02.pdf](http://www.frdmlaw.com/data2/circs/2nd/029008p02.pdf). The *Flores* precedent has been cited favorably in other recent federal cases. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is merely a resolution of the United Nations [as are other, similar, international agreements, which the U.S. likewise has never ratified]; none is binding on the United States or on this court," *Feng Hsin Chen v. John Ashcroft and Luis Garcia*, U.S. Ct. of Appeals (10th Cir. 2004), <http://www.kscourts.org/cat10/cases/2004/01/03-2078.htm>. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is aspirational, not binding, and is not recognized as law in the United States," *Bertram Sacks v. Office of Foreign Assets Control*, U.S. Dist. Ct., W. Dist. of Wash. at Seattle (2004), 7, [www.scn.org/copi/ofac/JudgeRobartDecision22Oct04.pdf](http://www.scn.org/copi/ofac/JudgeRobartDecision22Oct04.pdf). Curiously, the CCE reproduces the U.N. Declaration without mentioning that it is a United Nations document, rather than a U.S.

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people" in his Gettysburg Address (1863). Quist laments that "the entire federal curriculum is a violation of this principle" (*America's Schools*, 116).

<sup>12</sup> See esp. Quist, *Fed-Ed*, chap. 9, and *America's Schools*, Appendix F.

<sup>13</sup> Declaration of Independence, para. 2.

federal dollars and federal mandate, by the process outlined above, treats the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution as quaint historical artifacts produced during a bygone era when people used to believe in natural rights. “As fundamental and lasting as its guarantees have been [not “are,” but “have been”],” reads the Center for Civic Education’s *We The People*, “the U.S. Bill of Rights is a document of the eighteenth century, reflecting the issues and concerns of the age in which it was written.” The CCE encourages today’s students to consider alternative political principles. “In many Asian countries, for example, the rights of the individuals are secondary to the interests of the whole community. Islamic countries take their code of laws from the teachings of the Koran,” and so forth.<sup>18</sup>

The CCE thus presents historical truth (the Bill of Rights was an eighteenth-century document, and emerged from that historical context) mixed with a political agenda (whether the Bill of Rights should be dismissed in favor of more contemporary alternatives is debatable). I agree with Quist that the CCE takes out of context certain late-eighteenth-century reflections concerning the Bill of Rights. The founding fathers are said to have considered the Bill of Rights “of little importance,” and James Madison, its chief author, is said to have thought the process of adopting the Bill of Rights was a tiring and “nauseous project.”<sup>19</sup> If not properly explained, this quotation easily can be misconstrued to support the historically false idea that the founding fathers did not value the protection of natural rights. To find the CCE’s explanation of Madison’s statement, one must page back to an earlier chapter, which explains that some of the framers assumed the federal government would not have any powers except those that were specifically listed in the Constitution. For example, since the Constitution nowhere states that the federal government would have the power to censor the press, it seemed unnecessary to have freedom of press listed in the Bill of Rights. “There is no reason to lists rights that the government has no power to violate.”<sup>20</sup>

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document; its placement between Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Martin Luther King’s Birmingham jail letter gives the false impression that the U.N. document is quintessentially American. See Center for Civic Education (CCE), *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, 7th printing (Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 2000), 247–49.

<sup>18</sup> CCE, *We the People*, 207; also quoted and discussed in Quist, *America’s Schools*, 90–91; and, Quist, *Inside the New Federal Curriculum*, 6–7

<sup>19</sup> CCE, *We the People*, 100; quoted by Quist, *America’s Schools*, 94.

<sup>20</sup> CCE, *We the People*, 90.

That might explain why some of the founders supposedly regarded the Bill of Rights as being “of little importance,” but the CCE neglects to teach America’s children a very profound reason for early opposition to the Bill of Rights—a reason fundamental enough to make Madison’s task of securing congressional approval for the Bill of Rights “nauseously” difficult. It all comes down to the nature of the rights themselves. As I emphasize in my American history courses, many leaders in the founding generation worried that a listing of rights in the U.S. Constitution might give the false impression that the government could *create* (and therefore also *destroy*) rights, rather than only *protect* what are in fact inalienable, natural rights.<sup>21</sup> To explain more accurately the natural law basis of inalienable rights that the founders had in mind, the CCE could (but does not) quote the following passage from Thomas Jefferson’s Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, passed by the State of Virginia in 1786: “we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted [i.e., for religious freedom] are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.”<sup>22</sup> The founding fathers disagreed on many things, and both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights resulted from political compromises, but their disagreements generally dealt with how the state and federal governments ought to best protect people’s inalienable, natural rights, not whether inalienable, natural rights exist in the first place.<sup>23</sup> Noah Webster—who was on the opposite extreme of the political spectrum from Thomas Jefferson—felt just as certain that natural rights pre-existed governments, and therefore could not be created or destroyed by them. Webster satirically proposed the following amendment to demonstrate how absurd it seemed to list obviously natural, inalienable rights in the Constitution: “Congress shall never restrain any inhabitant of America from eating and drinking, at

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier, *Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitution of 1787* (New York: Ballantine, 1986), 339.

<sup>22</sup> The Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom (drafted, 1779; adopted, 1786), [religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/vvaact.html](http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/vvaact.html).

<sup>23</sup> Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 316–18. For a clear statement of the natural law philosophy commonly accepted during the era of the American Revolution, see William Blackstone, *Commentary on the Laws of England* (1st American ed., 1771), Introduction, Section 2, [www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/blackstone/blacksto.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/blackstone/blacksto.htm).

seasonable times, or prevent his lying on his left side, in a long winter's night, or even on his back, when he is fatigued by lying on his right."24

The process of writing, revising, and ratifying the Bill of Rights may have nauseated Madison, but the *substance* of those rights, together with the notion that governments exist not to create or destroy rights, but only to protect them, was the very lifeblood of eighteenth-century Whig political thought and the American Revolution that it produced.<sup>25</sup> Consciously or not, the CCE has made a political choice to favor the recently developed U.N. model ("rights" that amount to privileges created or destroyed by government) over the historic British-American model (natural rights, to be protected both by and from government). Moreover, the CCE claims that the natural rights asserted by the founding fathers were of little value in comparison to the "rights" (or "privileges," as often has been the case) established by twentieth-century Supreme Court decisions.<sup>26</sup> In other words, what the government creates and destroys matters more than what the Creator has embedded into human nature itself. If future generations are to preserve the founders' natural law foundation of fundamental rights, they will be indebted to Quist's research that has exposed the federal curriculum's subtle but effective dismissal of the Bill of Rights as a quaint document that even its old-fashioned contemporaries supposedly found "nauseating."

The misunderstanding of American political foundations conveyed by the popular textbook *We the People* finds an echo also in the halls of a public elementary school in my district. In celebration of Constitution Day 2005, the principal announced to the students, falsely, that the Constitution is the document by which the government tells the people what they may and may not do. Two centuries earlier, the framers and ratifiers had been so certain that the Constitution would be the document by which We the People tell the government what it may do (e.g., enact tax laws, regulate trade, declare war, and make peace treaties) and may not do (e.g., abridge the people's free speech and religious liberty rights, or deprive a criminal defendant of the right to a jury trial).

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<sup>24</sup> Rakove, *Original Meanings*, 330.

<sup>25</sup> Jack N. Rakove, *Declaring Rights: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1998), 19–21, 23–26; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enl. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 184–89; Edmond S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763–1789*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chap. 5.

<sup>26</sup> CCE, *We the People*, 100–1. See also Quist, chap. 10.

**Radical, Multicultural Morality.** The federal curriculum, argues Quist, "views morality, modesty, human rights and the family as being mere constructs," subject to reinvention by each culture. Under the influence of a postmodern rejection of transcendent moral truths, an otherwise beneficial emphasis on "cultural pluralism" has been degraded into "radical multiculturalism." The "radical" approach, as Quist calls it, elevates tolerance of diversity above natural law morality. For example, in Quist's own state of Minnesota, the Department of Health's *School Health Guide* includes homosexuality as an instance of diversity that should be affirmed as benign.<sup>27</sup> In a recent conference presentation, Quist identified numerous examples in which storybooks specifically recommended for fulfillment of the federal standards actively devalue objective morality and celebrate characters who pursue alternative, subjective value systems. A recurring theme is that homosexual "families" are normal and healthy.<sup>28</sup>

Although Quist focuses on the curriculum studied by students, my own analysis of the curriculum that trains future teachers quickly reveals a corresponding postmodern rejection of objective morality. For example, a textbook prepared for future language-arts teachers offers the following advice: "Often, story characters are placed in situations that require them to make moral decisions. ... Regular experience with these types of stories can help young people to formulate their own concepts of right and wrong."<sup>29</sup> Significantly, the author encourages children to formulate *their own* morality, rather than to discern *objective* distinctions between right and wrong; no criteria are provided for evaluating the merits of the child's invented morality.

The teachers themselves, however, are to have particular moral outcomes in mind for their students. This can be seen in the way that another teacher-training text recommends a cross-disciplinary promotion of multicultural diversity: "Adding the book *The Color Purple*

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<sup>27</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 38–39, referring to *Minnesota School Health Guide* (1998), chap. 12, [www.health.state.mn.us/dires/ht/mcht/schoolhealth/guide/chapter12.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/dires/ht/mcht/schoolhealth/guide/chapter12.html).

<sup>28</sup> Allen Quist, "Dealing with Constructivism and Pantheism in School Textbooks," presented at the Confessional Christian Worldview Seminar, Trego, WI, 30 June 2005. The proceedings of this conference are presently in press, under the editorship of Curtis A. Jahn, at Northwestern Publishing House. Cf. *America's Schools*, chaps. 6–8.

<sup>29</sup> Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson, *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005), 5.

to a literature unit.”<sup>30</sup> This novel, published by Alice Walker in 1982, portrays the emotional struggles of an impoverished black girl named Celie, who is raped by her father and later suffers sexual abuse from her husband. She learns to find comfort by explicitly rejecting the God of Scripture (for being too masculine) and embracing both lesbianism and solitary masturbation. The book concludes with Celie’s acceptance of pantheism, which at least one literary critic finds far more satisfying than Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), in which the viewpoint character triumphed by turning from Christianity to the Black Muslim movement, rather than to pantheism.<sup>31</sup>

These examples are not isolated instances. When learning to design effective lesson plans, teachers-in-training are asked to favorably consider the following model for sex education among middle school children. Ten-year-old boys role play as the fathers of their ten-year-old female classmates, explaining to those girls the kinds of changes that their bodies will undergo as puberty commences. Class discussions include the topics of “anal sex, transvestites, incest, birth control methods, and the like.” Photographs of “external and internal sexual organs” may be passed around the room, and students also may be directed to “view themselves in front of a mirror.” This multifaceted lesson plan ultimately aims at fostering “healthy love relationships,” apparently as defined by a combination of students’ own preferences, the teacher’s admonitions concerning “sexual exploitation,” and advice received from representatives of Gay Alliance, who visit the class to answer students’ questions about homosexuality.<sup>32</sup>

I discovered the preceding examples by briefly skimming the texts used by Elementary Education majors at Bethany Lutheran College—one of the least likely campuses for such literature. To find postmodern assaults on biblical and natural law morality imbedded even in Bethany’s curriculum suggests that Quist’s data in *Fed Ed and America’s Schools* are not anomalous, but rather are linked to a far-

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<sup>30</sup> Sharon Vaughn, Candace S. Bos, and Jeanne Shay Schumm, *Teaching Exceptional, Diverse, and At-Risk Students in the General Education Classrooms*, 3d ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2003), 279.

<sup>31</sup> Stacie Lynn Hankinson, “From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*,” *The Midwest Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 320–28. See also Linda Abbandonato, “A View from Elsewhere: Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine’s Story in *The Color Purple*,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 106, no. 5 (Oct. 1991): 1106–1115.

<sup>32</sup> John D. McNeil, *Curriculum: The Teacher’s Initiative*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 73–74.

reaching development in our nation’s educational system, from kindergarten through college. This is not to imply that Bethany’s own professors have compromised the Christian mission of the college. Rather, it is to acknowledge the special challenge faced by the college’s Elementary Education Department, which selects textbooks that must sufficiently conform to government standards for graduates to receive state licensure as teachers. A professor can, of course, use a textbook as a negative example rather than a positive example. Bethany professors are expected to address all topics—whether state mandated or not—from a Christian perspective, training their students to distinguish carefully between what is worthy and unworthy of their acceptance. When handling standards that would compromise the Christian faith, one professor has told me he takes the following approach: “I ‘cover’ such standards by teaching against them.” As the next section indicates, some of those standards have begun to operate in favor of pagan theology.

**Pantheism.** A series of twentieth-century court cases supposedly separated religion from public schools.<sup>33</sup> As noted above, the cultural influence that natural law and biblical morality once held over American classrooms is now largely missing. What has replaced it, however, is not the spiritual void of secularism, but rather the spiritual diversity of pantheism.<sup>34</sup> As Quist documents, the National Council of Social Studies

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<sup>33</sup> The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment’s religion clause should be interpreted according to Jefferson’s concept of a “wall of separation between church and State” (*Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 16 [1947]). Consequently, public school teachers may not lead their students in prayer, no matter how vague the reference to God is (*Engel v. Vitale* 370 U.S. 421 [1962]). Nor may daily Bible readings or a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer be conducted in public schools (*School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* 374 U.S. 203 [1963]). A state government may not prohibit the teaching of evolution in public schools if motivated by a concern for citizens who for religious reasons reject the theory of evolution (*Epperson v. Arkansas* 393 U.S. 97 [1968]). A governmental action may support religion only if the purpose and primary effect of the governmental action are thoroughly secular, and the resulting secondary support for religion is not characterized by “excessive entanglement” between church and state (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 [1969]). A state government cannot require public school science classes to teach creation science along side the theory of evolution, since creation science apparently is religiously motivated, even if its scientific formulations contain no specific references to God (*Edwards v. Aguillard* 482 U.S. 578 [1987]). The texts of these rulings may be found online: [supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/name.htm](http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/name.htm).

<sup>34</sup> The endorsement of pantheism in public schools may also be connected to a growing trend to replace mid-twentieth-century secularism with polytheism, in which multiple religious beliefs are to be equally tolerated. See Alvin J. Schmidt, “Polytheism: The New Face of American Civil Religion,” *The Anonymous God: The Church Confronts Civil Religion and American Society*, ed. David L. Adams and Ken Schurb (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 193–217.

recommends children's literature books (for a cross-disciplinary approach to social studies) that advocate environmentalism in pantheistic terms. For example, *Aani and the Tree Huggers* romanticizes Indian villagers who pantheistically regard trees as their brothers and therefore wrap their bodies around the trees to protect them from developers. In *Give Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message*, preschool children are provided with a model of prayer offered to Mother Earth.<sup>35</sup> In Quist's analysis, teachers, even if as unwitting agents of the curriculum designers, "are indoctrinating our youngest and most vulnerable citizens with pantheism, and most of the time the parents have no idea what is happening."<sup>36</sup>

As in the natural rights controversy, Quist identifies the United Nations as a key source of the pantheistic ideology. The U.N. has promoted pantheism at its Earth Summits and articulated it in its position documents and treaties. The U.N. Earth Charter (approved by UNESCO in 2000) advocates "sustainable development" based upon "the spiritual wisdom in all cultures," and especially the "spirituality" of "indigenous people," which is singled out for special government protection. The Earth Charter promotes a "kinship with all life" during the course of "life's evolution," with the understanding that "peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth [not "the earth," but a personified "Earth"], and the larger whole of which we are part."<sup>37</sup> Quist explains that the U.N.'s Biodiversity Treaty, which was narrowly defeated in the U.S. Senate in 1994, "in effect says that the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are destructive to environmental concerns because these religions treat God and nature as being separate. The religions of indigenous peoples, by contrast, are pictured as being environmentally friendly because they believe that God and Nature are one and the same."<sup>38</sup> Though Quist does not identify specific historical ties between that treaty and the children's literature sampled above, the ideological parallel invites curiosity. Once more, the language employed in certain U.N. documents closely corresponds with the language of

subsequent U.S. policies.<sup>39</sup> Whether by coincidence or conscious planning, the fact remains: children's curricula increasingly promote pantheistic environmentalism, rather than a biblical or natural-law stewardship of creation. As the next section reveals, Quist is concerned that secular alternatives to pantheism also can be problematic.

*Neo-Marxism.* Quist argues that just as some parts of the federal curriculum foster pantheistic theology, so also other parts promote a quasi-socialist political economy. Quist, a strong advocate of private property and a skeptic of centralized planning, warns that the federal curriculum's civic lessons avoid terms such as "free market" and "free enterprise," and instead use the more ambiguous term "market economy," which can include free enterprise and socialism alike.<sup>40</sup> Quist does not, however, devote much space in his books to a critique of Marxism, since he acknowledges that neither "socialism, in the classical sense" nor "traditional communism" finds many supporters in our post-Cold War era. The neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, by contrast, continues to challenge the foundations of American freedom.

Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian political theorist, agreed with Marx that all human problems could be traced to the division between haves and have-nots, and that therefore an equalization of their power would bring lasting peace. Marx understood power in economic terms: the goal of communist revolutionaries was for the poor to claim for themselves the means of production owned by the rich. Quist explains that Gramsci understood the power struggle in terms of culture, not economics. Thus, Gramsci advocated "transformational education," a recipe for changing the existing culture by training the children to be different than their parents. Gramsci called for an education that would de-construct the present culture (thus dismantling any of its claims to absolute truth), redefine the teacher as "friendly guide" rather than an expert (compare the slogan heard today, "a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage"), emphasize group projects (thus promoting "mass consciousness," said Gramsci), and merge college preparatory training with vocational training (to counteract the social inequalities perpetuated by the two-track model).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 53-54. See also Quist, *Fed Ed*, 68-73.

<sup>36</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO, Earth Charter (2000), [www.earthcharter.org/files/charter/charter.pdf](http://www.earthcharter.org/files/charter/charter.pdf); also reprinted in Quist, *America's Schools*, appendix D (quoting pp. 188-89, 192, 193, 195) and discussed in chap. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 49-50.

<sup>40</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 114.

<sup>41</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, chap. 4. For a recent analysis of Gramsci's educational program, see Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg, and Peter Mayo, eds., *Gramsci and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

Quist suggests that Gramsci's neo-Marxism has influenced the formation of the federal curriculum, both directly (President Clinton reportedly admired Gramsci<sup>42</sup>) and indirectly. As noted earlier, the CCE's civics lessons dismiss the natural law foundation of American government as being quaintly old-fashioned, which would fit Gramsci's model of deconstructing cultural authorities to make room for alternatives. In a chapter entitled "Integrated Math," Quist claims that the federal curriculum's emphasis on group projects in math "are not intended to improve academic performance. They are about changing the child's view of what it means to be a person."<sup>43</sup> Though never a fan of group work during my own student days, it would seem to me an overstatement to claim that any group activity necessarily represents a Gramscian agenda. My own cursory reading of the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, however, uncovered some examples that suggest, once again, that Quist's investigation might be on to something: recent trends in education serve not a pedagogically effective agenda, but a politically narrow one.

For example, researcher Eric Gutstein taught a mathematics class designed to develop "sociopolitical consciousness," a "sense of agency," and "positive social/cultural identities" among his mostly Mexican-American grade school students. These objectives were integrated with more traditional mathematics-related aims, which is to say that the latter were diluted by the former. Gutstein used a life-situation-based textbook that "let me [Gutstein] develop projects with a focus more on the social justice aspects and less on the mathematical ones." (One of his assignments asked students to write a letter to the Educational Testing Service raising questions about the relationship between family income and SAT scores.) Gutstein argues that "all practice (including teaching) is

inherently political."<sup>44</sup> Quist, by contrast, "rejects the view that political themes should be taught in math and science."<sup>45</sup>

Quist's suggestion that such subjects should be taught *politically* resonates with the dichotomy he sees between the politically biased "transformational education" of yesteryear's Gramsci and today's federal curriculum, on the one hand, and Quist's own preference for "traditional" or "academic" education, on the other. I question, however, whether there might be more continuity here than Quist admits. Social engineering is not a new objective of educators, nor is it limited only to the political left. Abraham Lincoln knew as well as Gramsci that "The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, advocated a curriculum for women's schools that would specially prepare students to become the wives and mothers upon whom the new republic would depend.<sup>47</sup> And Yale's professors, when seeking to preserve the time-honored ideal of a liberal arts education in 1828, argued that sound education does not merely convey knowledge; it more importantly molds people's character.<sup>48</sup> Thus, I do not think the federal curriculum is flawed simply for serving a social agenda. I am not ashamed to admit my own agenda, as a history professor desiring to offer a comprehensive perspective, when I assign students to read both the Mayflower Compact and the autobiography of colonial slave Olaudah Equiano, or both the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy and the speeches of civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., in contrast to contemporary textbooks that promote a more constrained notion of "diversity" by excluding the classic works of white Americans.

On closer inspection, Quist is really faulting the new standards for two deeper reasons. First, the federal curriculum seeks to remove

<sup>42</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 29. Quist cites Tal Brooke, *One World* (Berkeley, CA: End Run Publishing, 2000), 109. No entry for "Gramsci" is provided in the index to Bill Clinton's recent autobiography, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), but the linkage between Clinton and Gramsci to which Quist alludes is suggested also by William F. Jasper, "The Clinton Administration's Terrorist Connections," *New American* 12, no. 24 (25 Nov. 1996): 4, [www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1996/vo12no24/vo12no24\\_clinton.htm](http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1996/vo12no24/vo12no24_clinton.htm); William Norman Grigg, "Toward the Total State," *New American* 15, no. 14 (5 July 1999): 4-6, [www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1999/07-05-99/vo15no14\\_total.htm](http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1999/07-05-99/vo15no14_total.htm); John Fonte, "Why There Is a Culture War: Gramsci and Tocqueville in America," *Policy Review* 104 (Dec. 2000-Jan. 2001), [www.policyreview.org/dec00/Fonte.htm](http://www.policyreview.org/dec00/Fonte.htm); and Charles Hill, "The Europeanization of the United States," *Hoover Digest* 2 (2001), [www.hooverdigest.org/012/hill.html](http://www.hooverdigest.org/012/hill.html).

<sup>43</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Gutstein, "Teaching and Learning Mathematics for Social Justice in an Urban Latino School," *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 34.1 (2003): 37-73, quoting 44 (objectives), 65 (social justice), and 49 (political).

<sup>45</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 151.

<sup>46</sup> [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamlin133687.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamlin133687.html).

<sup>47</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 210-21.

<sup>48</sup> *Reports on the Course of Instruction in Yale College, by a Committee of the Corporation, and the Academic Faculty* (1828), [www.yale.edu/yale300/collectiblesandpublications/specialdocuments/historical\\_documents/1828\\_curriculum.pdf#search=%20report%201828](http://www.yale.edu/yale300/collectiblesandpublications/specialdocuments/historical_documents/1828_curriculum.pdf#search=%20report%201828).

American culture from its natural law moorings; that is to say, it serves a social agenda that is inconsistent with the nation's own social past (hence "radical" and "transformational"). Second, it does so under government auspices but without the informed consent of those who are thereby governed in a nation whose constitution is founded upon the principle of popular sovereignty. If these objectives are denoted by the term "transformational education," then Quist rightfully sounds the alarm.

### What Next?

Quist concludes Part I of *America's Schools* with three calls to action for those who, with him, believe that the new federal curriculum must be either reformed or discarded. First, inform others. Second, organize a national network of organizations, such as EdWatch, his publisher. Third, contact elected officials to urge policy reform. (Grass-roots organizations have had some success in Minnesota at reversing the recent trends in social studies standards.<sup>49</sup>) Part II of *America's Schools* offers useful frameworks applicable to all three of these objectives, namely, criteria by which to distinguish the good from the bad in current curriculum standards and guide the formation of new standards.

Current teachers, students training to be teachers, and parents—including home school parents—would be wise to read the chapters of Part II. People who do not agree with Quist fully will still benefit from his careful discernment between "transformational" and "academic" models of education. Specific chapters address history and geography, civics and government, language arts, and math and science. The learning objectives that Quist outlines may serve as benchmarks for selecting textbooks, adding supplementary material to compensate for deficient textbooks, revising existing state standards for each discipline, or developing alternatives to public schooling.

As Quist notes, "private school teachers are not trained to identify those truths that are missing from the educational materials," and "it is the unusual private school teacher who has the time and background to supplement the textbooks being used."<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, many of the textbooks marketed at private schools and home schools conform to the same federal standards of the public schools that parents seek to avoid by having their students taught at home or in a private

school.<sup>51</sup> Reading Part II of *America's Schools* can prepare parents and teachers to recognize the dangers of America's dominant curricula. The task of avoiding curricular pitfalls once they are recognized may, however, prove nearly impossible. For example, a former Lutheran elementary schoolteacher has confided to me that he resigned from his call when he realized that his efforts to teach around and against the published curricula were as futile as they were exhausting.

Quist's books deserve careful reading by parents, teachers, and taxpayers who are funding the federal curriculum, if for no other reason than prudent caution. Quist has adopted the challenge of identifying the nature, the causes, and the likely results of recent educational trends while the process is still underway. He therefore lacks the luxury that historians like myself have when we read the archived correspondence of participants in political debates from long ago. For Quist's topic, not all of the secrets are out yet, but he has pieced together presently available information into a much-needed report of what is happening and what likely will happen if those who share his preference for traditional education do not act soon. By indicating that the federal curriculum emerged from a myriad of factions forming opportunistic alliances, not a unified group of planners, *America's Schools* offers a more carefully nuanced account than *Fed Ed*, though both books leave some questions unanswered. Which policy makers had the greatest sway in the creation of the federal curriculum? Were their original goals realized, or do even they feel compromised by political forces beyond their control? And have local teachers absorbed the changes unawares, or did they recognize—and perhaps actively support—the curricular innovations? I look forward to the day when more information will become available concerning the behind-the-scenes maneuvering that has resulted in what Quist terms a "radical transformation" of American education. Much light could be shed by a series of case-study histories focusing, for example, on the recent Profile of Learning debates in Minnesota, employing personal interviews of legislators, teachers, and parents throughout the full political spectrum. Meanwhile, Quist's research can be appreciated as the starting point of a discussion that deserves to be continued.

Readers who feel tempted to dismiss Quist's books as radical, right-wing alarmism should at least test his claims by visiting their local

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<sup>49</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 91.

<sup>50</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, 101.

<sup>51</sup> Quist, *America's Schools*, chap. 15. Standardized tests, required also of private school students, conform to the federal standards. Quist, *Fed Ed*, chap. 6.

elementary school.<sup>52</sup> Are math students studying math, or being trained as social activists—and if so, for the full diversity of the political spectrum, or only for a narrow segment of it? Are children’s stories promoting natural law morality—as Aesop’s fables once did—or postmodern subjectivism that invites every second-grader to make up his or her own set of rules? Are civics lessons teaching the government’s role of protecting its citizens’ inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property, or promoting social entitlements according to a special interest group’s latest menu of options? Are public schools serving society as religiously neutral institutions, or indoctrinating students in pantheism? My own inquires concerning schools in my district reveal a mixed picture: we may simultaneously thank God for his Fourth Petition blessing of “good government,” including some aspects of public schooling, while also becoming concerned about the same troubling patterns identified by Quist.

Of course, the more important question is not whether schools are in fact teaching the sort of “transformational” curricula that Quist describes, but whether Quist is wise in urging that they should be prevented from doing so. Some of the issues involved fall beyond the scope of a clear Scriptural mandate and are better addressed in the political arena than in the church. Other trends—such as the advocacy of pantheism and the denial of natural law morality—pose dangers to both church and state, and properly may be addressed within each of these “kingdoms” by employing their respective God-given tools of Scripture and human reason. Leaders in both kingdoms would be wise to heed Solomon’s advice: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Pr 22:6) History abounds with examples of the misfortunes that befall a society which fails to do so. Lutheran Schools of America, as it works toward the goal of establishing 100 new Lutheran elementary schools by 2055, has a special opportunity to make a difference for both kingdoms. Insights gleaned from Quist’s research may provide helpful guidance in accomplishing that work.

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that the American homeschooling movement originated among liberals, not conservatives, and continues to include families from a broad political spectrum, including many families who have chosen homeschooling for pedagogical, not ideological, reasons. See Esther de Waal and Tinie Theron, “Homeschooling as an Alternative Form of Educational Provision in South Africa and the USA,” *Evaluation and Research in Education* 17, nos. 2-3 (2003): 144-56; and, Michael H. Romanowski, “Revisiting Common Myths about Homeschooling,” *The Clearing House*, Jan./Feb. 2006, 125-29.