



CHARLES GLENN

# CONTRASTING MODELS OF STATE AND SCHOOL

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*A Comparative Historical Study of Parental  
Choice and State Control*



## **Contrasting Models of State and School**



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**A Comparative Historical  
Study of Parental Choice and  
State Control**

*by Charles L. Glenn*



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To my children: Joshua, Patrick, Peter, Matthew,  
Laurie, Elizabeth, and Lydia, and to Mary



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## *Introduction*

This book is about four countries that, although closely related in culture and in many respects sharing a common historical space, have come to illustrate very different ways of conceiving the relationship among Society, State, and schools.

Although I seek to offer an accurate historical account of the development of popular education in Germany, Austria, The Netherlands, and Belgium, my concern is not with school attendance or literacy rates, but with the ways in which schooling has been promoted and controlled in these countries over the past three or four centuries, and what this says about evolving concepts of the purposes of education and the role of families, Society, and the State.

I write as a specialist on comparative educational policy, concerned for many years with three interrelated questions: how the freedom of parents to choose how their children will be educated can be balanced with the opportunity for educators to create and work in schools with a distinctive character, and how both of these in turn should be limited by some form of public accountability to ensure that all children in a society receive a generally comparable and adequate education.

With a Belgian colleague, I published in 2004 a multivolume study of how this balance has been worked out in forty different national education systems.<sup>1</sup>

What our account of current laws and policies could not answer is how the particular arrangements in the various countries, all of them responding to basically similar needs, came to be so distinctive. The present study seeks to answer that question by looking at four of these systems in historical context. For heuristic purposes it has seemed useful to separate them into two pairs of countries, exaggerating somewhat the differences between them. The differences which concern me in this book are not variations in the structure of secondary schooling or the process by which individuals become qualified to teach, but what the arrangements for the provision of schooling tell us about how each country conceives of the roles of the State and of Society in educating the young and thus in shaping the future.

In Germany and Austria, I will argue, a long historical tradition sees education as a function of the State, while in The Netherlands and Belgium it has—as a result of political struggles in the nineteenth and again in the twentieth century—been entrusted primarily to civil society institutions.

In order to illustrate why this question is important it will be useful to introduce a concept unfamiliar to Americans but important in policy discussions in the European Union since it was incorporated into the founding Treaty of Maastricht, that of “subsidiarity.” The classic statement of the principle of subsidiarity appeared in the papal encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991), concerned with social questions in the modern world. Pope John Paul II wrote:

Malfunctions and defects in the Social Assistance State are the result of an inadequate understanding of the tasks proper to the State. Here again the principle of subsidiarity must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in [public] spending. In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbors to those in need. It should be added that certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need.<sup>2</sup>

The principle, which has passed into secular political and legal doctrine, has been taken to mean that central government (including that of the EU) should not make any decisions which can be made more adequately at a lower level, nearer those directly affected. This is often called vertical subsidiarity, and resembles administrative decentralization, though without the implication that the authority is simply “loaned” from the center to the periphery. Thus the extent to which individual schools enjoy autonomy within an educational system is a measure of vertical subsidiarity.

Horizontal subsidiarity is a further development of this principle, arguing that the freedom and dignity of citizens requires entrusting “the human care of human beings,” so far as possible, to the “third sector” of voluntary associations and other civil society institutions.<sup>3</sup> Privatization of spheres of activity like education and social work and youth services which had been absorbed

into the Welfare State is in some sense a precondition for enlisting the energies of civil society in solving problems which government has not been able to address successfully. New forms of competition are likely to result from such a devolution of responsibility from government to civil society associations and institutions, and this could produce efficiencies, though this is not the main purpose behind horizontal subsidiarity.

The conviction behind the strategy is, rather, that “mediating structures . . . are the principal expressions of the real values and the real needs of people in our society. They are, for the most part, the people-sized institutions. Public policy should recognize, respect, and, where possible, empower these institutions”<sup>4</sup> and, in so doing, will ensure that social services and education are provided more effectively. Market forces are incapable of generating the sense of moral obligation which is essential to good education and effective social services.<sup>5</sup> Thus subsidiarity in education is concerned not only with organizational forms and dynamics but also and more centrally with the spirit and the values which may animate schools. What they do and how they treat those entrusted to them is, for good or ill, the expression of deeply held beliefs about human life. As ethicist Helmut Thielicke pointed out, “the state—if it is not to be an ideological and totalitarian state—dare not have a specific view of man.”<sup>6</sup> But arguably a school which does not have such a view, shared by all or most of its participants, cannot be fully effective or claim to educate.

It was his recognition of the dynamic and sustaining role of civil society associations that led Wilhelm von Humboldt, two centuries ago, to write that “the best efforts of the State should . . . aim at bringing men into such a condition by means of freedom that associations would arise with greater ease, and so take the place of political regulations in these and many kinds of similar instances.”<sup>7</sup> This theme was reiterated by Tocqueville in his account of American society for a European audience which had grown—he argued—too dependent upon the State to solve every problem. In France, where Jacobin excesses had reinforced Ancien Régime absolutism, he warned, “it is the government alone which has inherited all the prerogatives snatched from families, corporations, and individuals; so the sometimes oppressive but often conservative strength of a small number of citizens has been succeeded by the weakness of all.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, there was no sphere within which freedom and civic virtue could be practiced in the interest of that “social prosperity” which depends upon “the collective force of the citizens,” not “the authority of the government.”<sup>9</sup> “What political power,” Tocqueville asked,

could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which associations daily enable American citizens to control? . . . The more government takes the place

of associations, the more will individuals lose the idea of forming associations and need the government to come to their help. That is a vicious circle of cause and effect . . . The morals and intelligence of a democratic people would be in as much danger as its commerce and industry if ever a government wholly usurped the place of private associations. Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another . . . If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads.<sup>10</sup>

If decentralization and school autonomy are the expression, in education, of vertical subsidiarity, parental choice of schools that are civil society institutions rather than government agencies is the expression of horizontal subsidiarity. The right of parents to have access, for their children, to schooling other than that provided by the State was established in international law after the Second World War, and in part in response to the use of schooling by fascist regimes. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1966, was intended to set an international legal standard. Paragraphs (3) and (4) of Article 13 of the Covenant was specific about the rights of parents and also the rights of those who establish nongovernment schools.

(3) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools—other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

(4) No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in Paragraph 1 of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.<sup>11</sup>

More succinctly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (also adopted in 1966) provided that “The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”<sup>12</sup>

Unresolved in these provisions was the question whether this language about educational freedom was intended simply to restrain the State from

infringing upon the rights of parents, or whether it imposed an obligation upon the State to take measures to make it possible for parents to choose schools providing “religious and moral” education consistent with their own convictions. If only the former, it is obvious that many parents would not be in a position, for financial and other practical reasons, to act upon their choices.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations addressed this issue in 1999 in a lengthy *General Comment* on the Right to Education as spelled out in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This includes a significant set of four characteristics that an educational system should possess, one of which was,

Acceptability—the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g., relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents.<sup>13</sup>

While the other three criteria are the sort of standards that educational experts might be called upon to measure, the criterion of acceptability gives a sort of Copernican twist to the process of determining whether a particular country is meeting its obligation to ensure that its citizens enjoy their right to education. Only the pupil and his or her parents can decide whether the schooling provided is acceptable.

As we will see, the educational systems of The Netherlands and Belgium are an especially striking example of horizontal subsidiarity; the large role played by civil society institutions in providing schooling contrasts with the central role of the State in education in Germany and Austria. How these contrasting models developed historically is the theme of this book.

## WHY GERMANY AND AUSTRIA?

Germany and Austria, I will argue, have for the past several centuries and still today understood popular schooling as an instrument by which the State can extend its influence among the common people, creating political loyalty, and civic and economic virtues such as steady application to tasks and obedience to rules. During certain unhappy historical periods, this subordination of school to State has lent support to authoritarian and even totalitarian regimes.

It will not do to exaggerate; both Germany and Austria have been the cradle of some of the most original alternative schools and (unlike the United States) provide public funding to many nonpublic schools chosen by parents. There will be no suggestion in these pages that there is anything like a Germanic propensity toward totalitarian control of the minds of children.

Nor, in a formal sense, is the educational system in Germany and in Austria as centrally controlled as are those in France and Italy, to take two examples about which I have written elsewhere. The federal system of control of schools by the *Laender* in Germany, in fact, is currently only an aspiration in Italy, where the national Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca retains detailed control over schools despite recent constitutional changes that open the way to assumption of responsibility by regional governments.

What makes Germany and Austria especially appropriate, however, as examples of the dominant role of the State in popular schooling is that the evolution of this role can be traced over more than three hundred years in Prussia and in Austria. Unlike in France, where the aspiration for State control of schooling had been articulated for as long a period, but where constant political instability largely frustrated that aspiration until the 1880s, there is something inexorable about the enduring role of the State in German and Austrian schooling.

It is also significant for the development of the government role in education in other countries that the Prussian model was frequently cited admiringly by reformers in France, England, and the United States. North American educational reformers during the nineteenth century looked enviously at the dominant role in education of the various German-speaking governments, in contrast with the American and Canadian growth of schooling from the bottom up, through local initiatives only lightly guided and supported by government. Prussia, in particular, seemed a prime example of how a vigorous government could set about transforming society through schooling the young.

One of the earliest American visitors to express admiration for Prussian popular schooling was future president John Quincy Adams. While serving as diplomatic representative in Berlin, he traveled extensively and in an 1801 letter to his brother praised "the earnestness with which the King of Prussia laboured to spread the benefits of useful knowledge among his subjects."<sup>14</sup>

In subsequent decades an increasing number of bright and ambitious young Americans began to study at German universities. One of them, the son of Yale University President Timothy Dwight, published a comparative study of schooling in Protestant and Catholic areas of Europe after extensive visits to Prussian schools in 1825. "It may be said with truth of Prussia," wrote Henry Dwight, "that it is one of the most enlightened countries in the world; for among the younger of the population, it is rare to see an individual who cannot both read and write." While noting that the government was thoroughly authoritarian, Dwight wrote that the king "is still not afraid of the general diffusion of intelligence among his subjects. He is here

laying a broad foundation for the future prosperity of Prussia, and it is to be hoped also, for the future liberty of the nation.”<sup>15</sup>

It was above all the report on Prussian popular education by a French philosopher, Victor Cousin, published in Paris in 1833 and in English translation in London in 1834 and in New York in 1835, that galvanized attention on what had been occurring in what was still considered a backward part of Europe. Cousin placed special emphasis on the provisions in Prussia for teacher training in *Lehrerseminaren* since “the state has done nothing for popular education if it does not watch that those who devote themselves to teaching be well prepared.”<sup>16</sup> Creation of a network of teacher-training *normal schools* would thus be a key element of the Elementary Education Law adopted by France under the leadership of Cousin’s ally François Guizot.

Cousin’s report was widely influential; the Massachusetts and New Jersey legislatures had it reprinted and distributed to schools. As an American visitor to Germany wrote,

[t]he attention of many intelligent and distinguished men in England and America, was now much excited, to investigate more fully, the statements of these reports. The very fact, that the head of a military despotism had set on foot a system of instruction, designed to benefit every subject in his dominions . . . in a word, that for forty years he had been engaged in promoting the moral and intellectual improvement of all his people, and that these efforts had been crowned with unexampled success.<sup>17</sup>

A Massachusetts clergyman, Charles Brooks, became an enthusiast for Prussian schooling and especially its teacher-training institutions in 1834. “I fell in love with the Prussian system; and it seemed to possess me like a missionary angel. I gave myself to it; and . . . I resolved to do something about State Normal Schools.”<sup>18</sup> Brooks lectured and organized conferences on this theme with such success that a few years later his ally Horace Mann was able to establish the first state-operated normal schools to train teachers in the United States.

This was followed by a report to the Ohio state legislature by Calvin Stowe (husband of Harriet Beecher) in 1836, which was in turn reprinted and distributed widely by the legislatures of Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Stowe expressed special commendation for “the religious spirit which pervades the whole of the Prussian system,” since “[w]ithout religion—and, indeed, without the religion of the bible—there can be no efficient school discipline.”<sup>19</sup>

Admiring American visitors did not come only from New England, with its strong tradition of popular schooling, and from the frontier of New England

settlement in Ohio; Benjamin Smith made an extensive study of German schools in 1836 and reported on them to the Virginia legislature, as usual with a particular emphasis on Prussian arrangements for teacher training. He noted of the Prussian normal schools that “[t]here could scarcely be devised a more efficient means of promoting the cause of common school education, with the same amount of money.” Nor was the educational progress limited to Prussia:

[I]n its practical operation, the system has advanced to a greater degree of perfection, perhaps, in the kingdom of Wurtemberg, and the duchy of Baden, than in Prussia itself. Bavaria is by no means behind it, and the kingdom of Saxony is in some features of her system superior. In the stronghold of legitimacy and despotism, Austria, we find an edict by the emperor, with characteristic arbitrariness, stating, that “no person shall henceforth be permitted to marry, who cannot read, write and cypher.” He is, however, benevolently providing means, by which all his subjects may comply with these requirements.<sup>20</sup>

Horace Mann, already celebrated on both sides of the Atlantic for his work revitalizing the common schools of Massachusetts and his persuasive writing about the mission of those schools, made a honeymoon trip to visit European schools in 1843, and devoted one of his highly influential annual reports to his findings. In an editorial the next year in his *Common School Journal*, he wrote that “the most interesting portions of the world in regard to education are the Protestant states of Germany.” Mann’s ally in Connecticut (and from 1867 to 1870 the first national commissioner of education), Henry Barnard, was equally admiring.<sup>21</sup>

Canadian education official Egerton Ryerson went on an extended visit to Europe and, in his influential *Report on a System of Public Elementary Instruction for Upper Canada*, provided a detailed, though selective, description of the school systems of Ireland, Prussia, France, and Massachusetts.<sup>22</sup> This report, under his guidance, led to the enactment of a new school law for what would later become Ontario in 1846, but its results remained unsatisfactory to Ryerson and his allies: too much was still left up to local initiative and judgment. While, in 1826, as a Methodist minister, he had opposed the claims of the State to take over the direction of schooling from the churches, by 1846 he was commenting favorably on mandatory school attendance laws in Prussia and other European countries.<sup>23</sup>

English visitors to German schools were also impressed and envious. Joseph Kay, author of a comprehensive study in the 1840s of the weaknesses of schooling in England, noted of Bavaria that “perhaps there is no country in

Europe which possesses such an admirable and minutely considered series of enactments on the subject of national education.”<sup>24</sup> Poet, essayist, and school inspector Matthew Arnold reported admiringly on German schools in 1858 and 1865.<sup>25</sup>

While the initial fascination with Prussian popular schooling declined as the American states and Canadian provinces developed their own systems of government oversight and teacher preparation, an official survey of European school systems commissioned by the American government in 1867 continued to express the perception that “Prussia is fully entitled to its present rank as first in the educational world.” As late as 1891, an American school official from New York State, after an extensive study of education in France and Germany, concluded that a “careful observer of the work done in Prussian elementary schools . . . will return to this country with the feeling that Prussia is far in the lead of us.” Similarly, a school superintendent from Massachusetts, in a book on comparative methods of instruction and school organization published in 1897, concluded that “our schools are poor in comparison with the schools of Germany.”<sup>26</sup>

Foreign visitors thus came to admire the organization of popular schooling under government control in German states and the system of state-sponsored teacher training which seemed, to them, to guarantee uniform results. The impulse for American state and Canadian provincial governments to take the leading role in promoting and regulating education owed a great deal to the German example, so much in contrast with that of England, where local and voluntary efforts predominated.

In tracing the historical development of the distinctive German and Austrian understanding of the role of the State with respect to schooling, we should thus be aware of how significantly this influenced North American and British thinking about how government should use popular education as an instrument of control and reform.

## WHY THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM?

The Netherlands and Belgium (especially Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region) offer a different sort of model, one in which most schooling is entrusted to nonpublic schools sponsored by organizations and associations of the civil society. Among the world's nations with universal schooling, the Dutch can justly claim to provide the most freedom to parents to choose schools which correspond to their convictions about the most appropriate education for their children; Dutch laws and policies sustain the most pluralistic school system in the world, with dozens of models of education enjoying full public financing.

As a result, apart from the French-speaking area of Belgium, only about 30 percent of all pupils attend schools owned and operated by government. Freedom of education is guaranteed, under Dutch law, in three forms: nongovernmental groups have the right, within quality standards set by the government,

- to establish schools (*vrijheid van oprichting*);
- to give these schools a distinctive religious or philosophical character (*vrijheid van richting*); and
- to organize schools as they wish, included the choice of materials and teachers (*vrijheid van inrichting*).

These freedoms were won during the course of a seventy-year struggle of Protestant and Catholic “little people” against the dominance of an urban elite that sought to use popular schooling to impose its understanding of enlightenment and liberal religion.

The Belgian educational system is not as lavishly pluralistic as the Dutch, but it provides similar guarantees of parental choice and school autonomy, with nearly as high a proportion of pupils attending nongovernment schools. Educational freedom has been one of the pillars of the Belgian legal, political and social order since the country gained its independence from The Netherlands in 1830–31. The independence movement itself was inspired in part by Catholic and Liberal resistance to measures, first under French and then under Dutch occupation, to impose a state-controlled educational system in which religious instruction was turned into nonconfessional moral instruction.

Belgian patriots saw a close connection between political liberties—freedom of association and of the press—and freedom of conscience to provide confessional schooling. As a result, they anchored educational freedom in their new Constitution, and this guarantee is maintained in the present version. Intermittent political conflict over the independence and public funding of Catholic schooling during the late nineteenth and the twentieth century were finally laid to rest by the School Pact of 1958, an interparty agreement that continues to serve as the framework for law and policy. Secularists and Catholics put aside their struggles for hegemony and returned to the earlier emphasis upon freedom, establishing a *Schoolvrede* (school peace). The focus was no longer on protecting the rights of the Church or of the State but instead on protecting the rights of parents to determine on what philosophical basis their children would be educated. Belgians are guaranteed the right to establish and operate nonstate (‘free’) schools that meet quality standards set by public authorities, and to choose such schools for their children.

Perhaps even more remarkable than the strong legal and policy support for educational freedom in the two countries is the general lack of political controversy over the system of public subsidies for the costs of schools that are not operated by government. This has not always been the case, however; in fact, both Belgium and The Netherlands experienced bitter political struggles over the right to operate nongovernment schools and, once this right was won, over the right to receive public funding for these schools. In both cases, the issue was entwined with controversies over the role of religious instruction in public schools. The Belgian situation is complicated, in addition, by continuing tensions over language.

How did these two educational systems, models of educational freedom and school autonomy, emerge from many decades of conflict? It was, on the one hand, the “enlightenment” of the common people through schooling which inspired the successful Dutch efforts to create an effective system of near-universal schooling during the early nineteenth century, and it was, on the other, the growing resistance of these *kleine luyden* (little people) to the worldview promoted by the schooling offered in public schools that led eventually to the present system. In Belgium, as in The Netherlands, the controversies were about elementary schooling until at least the second half of the twentieth century.

Ironically, the Dutch educational system was celebrated, during the first half of the nineteenth century, for its apparent success in bringing together children from different religious confessions in a single common school. During the period when The Netherlands formed part of Napoleon’s empire, Dutch schools were the object of a formal inspection in 1811 by a pair of French officials, one of them the distinguished scientist Georges Cuvier. Their enthusiastic report attracted great attention in France.<sup>27</sup>

This was only the first of many favorable reports by foreign visitors to Dutch schools over the next several decades. Just after the end of the Napoleonic wars, for example, a distinguished American scientist visited Dutch schools and praised their provisions for the education of poor children.<sup>28</sup>

The visitors noted especially the uplifting moral character of Dutch schools, their consistent emphasis, in all details of instruction and discipline, on morality and natural religion. These schools, they pointed out, were under the control of public authorities rather than of the churches, and thus avoided denominational instruction.<sup>29</sup> They were instruments of national purpose, as French philosopher Victor Cousin would write after his visit to Dutch schools in the 1830s: “Undoubtedly, government is made for society, but it is government alone which makes society function; if you want to organize a society, begin by organizing its government; if you are serious about the

education of the people, be well aware that the essence of this education is in the government which you give it.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus government itself should be educational in intention as well as effect, and naturally the schools were a primary focus of government activity. Whereas in France, even after the Guizot reforms of the 1830s, the control of schools was still very much in the hands of local “notables” with only limited oversight by government inspectors, in The Netherlands supervision by government officials was already well established, and foreign observers found in this the primary explanation for the generally high level of literacy as well as social morality. Characteristically, they missed the greater role played by social context: a popular piety which placed great emphasis on reading the Bible and devotional works.

Popular schooling in The Netherlands—like that in Prussia—was frequently praised by foreign visitors during the first decades of the nineteenth century, as other countries like the United States, France, and England sought to create effective educational systems. Benjamin Franklin’s grandson, for example, admired the way the common people in The Netherlands were served by schools under the supervision of school inspectors, and the method used in nonsectarian religious instruction:

While the necessity of religious instruction has been strongly felt, it has been made to stop short of the point at which, becoming doctrinal, the subjects taught could interfere with the views of any sect. Bible stories are made the means of moral and religious teaching in the school, and the doctrinal instruction is given by the pastors of the different churches on days appointed for the purpose, and usually not in the schoolroom.<sup>31</sup>

Henry Barnard, then secretary of the Connecticut Board of Education, wrote to his Massachusetts counterpart, Horace Mann, to ask whether he had read this report. “Our school systems on this side of the water,” Barnard noted, “look very disjointed and imperfect” when compared with those Bache had visited in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

A description of Dutch and German schools by an English Quaker was also read with interest and excerpted in Mann’s *Common School Journal* in March 1841. Hickson concurred with other visitors in attributing great virtues to the system of school inspection in The Netherlands, and noted the importance of neutral religious instruction as a key to the popular support which the Dutch schools enjoyed.<sup>33</sup>

Other visitors who were loud in their praise of Dutch schools included Horace Mann himself, Matthew Arnold of England, and Ramon de la Sagra of

Cuba. Dutch elementary education seemed to have accomplished what other nations were seeking with more limited success to achieve for themselves. Arnold wrote in 1851, "I have seen no primary schools worthy to be matched, even now, with those of Holland."<sup>34</sup>

While Prussian schools were also visited and admired, it was regarded as a fault in their case that separate schools served children of the different Christian confessions. Unitarian minister Charles Brooks, addressing "the schools and citizens of the town of Quincy" on July 4, 1837, quoted Dutch education leader Adriaan van den Ende's insistence that "the primary schools should be Christian, but neither Protestant nor Catholic. They should not lean to any particular form of worship nor teach any positive dogmas; but should be of that kind that Jews might attend them without inconvenience to their faith."<sup>35</sup>

It is one of the ironies of educational history that Mann and the other reformers of the 1830s looked to The Netherlands as the leading example of how a common school could serve a religiously diverse population. It was only a few years later that bitter conflict would break out over the demand of both Protestant and Catholic parents to have confessional schools, conflict that (as we will see) led to the present Dutch system, the world's leading example of subsidized diversity and educational freedom.

Belgium, through a different but often parallel process of conflict and compromise, arrived at arrangements for the organization of schooling which, in practice, have substantially similar effects in guaranteeing parental choice among schools and protecting to a considerable extent the distinctiveness of those schools.

Again, we must not exaggerate. The Dutch national government and the governments of the language-based regions in Belgium are very active in guiding and regulating schooling, and they fully fund almost all nonpublic schools. American private-school leaders might be appalled at the extent to which their counterparts in Holland or Flanders are regulated. Nevertheless, there is a basic principle in Dutch and Belgian educational policy, that each nonstate school has a right to its own distinctive character based on religion or philosophy or pedagogical theory, which government may not violate.

## OVERVIEW

As we will see, the different direction taken by Belgium and The Netherlands, in contrast with Germany and Austria, can be traced to specific developments and decisions at various points in the nineteenth century. There was no obvious reason, before mid-nineteenth century, to expect that they would have

followed a different course; reformers in both countries had called for an expanded State role in providing and managing popular schooling. Nor is there an obvious explanation in their religious make-up. The Netherlands, like the much larger Germany (and like Prussia), was a Protestant-dominated society with a large Catholic minority which became politically mobilized in the late nineteenth century. Belgium, like Austria, was a strongly Catholic society and all the more so because in the sixteenth century their Protestant movements had been suppressed by the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

This account begins with a brief overview of popular schooling before and after the sixteenth-century Reformation, and a somewhat more extensive account of schooling under the influence of Pietism and during the period of enlightened absolutism followed by the Romantic nationalism of the early nineteenth century. In each of the countries the State took the lead in promoting systems of popular schooling, and controversies ensued.

Two chapters are then devoted to the completion of State control of popular schooling in Germany and Austria, and the contrasting reduction of the role of the State in Belgium and The Netherlands as political conflict led to new arrangements protecting the role of civil society institutions in providing popular schooling. These are followed by a chapter describing how totalitarian regimes—first National Socialist, then Communist—in Germany used schooling as a means of ideological control. The final two chapters describe developments between World War II and the end of the twentieth century.

What lessons can we draw from this long and complex experience? One is clearly that state control of schooling can bring it to a high degree of efficiency and uniformity, the qualities which foreign visitors admired so much in Prussia during the nineteenth century. Another is that giving the State a powerful instrument to shape the minds of children and youth poses dangers to families, to individual freedom, and to societal diversity.

As we will see, the post-war educational policies in each of these countries (extended to the former East Germany after reunification) have sought to find the appropriate balance between the Social Welfare State (including now the super-State of the European Union) and the free associations of individuals. Vertical and especially horizontal subsidiarity continue to be central to the policy debate in education.

## *Chapter One*

# **Background**

The minor and occasional role that the state played in education in antiquity—apart from Plato’s imaginary realms—vanished entirely in the Middle Ages. Apart from some gestures on the part of Charlemagne around 800, any education available was either under religious auspices or by local initiative. Wealthy families, naturally, employed tutors for their children. Most schooling, though, was under Church sponsorship. Religious orders provided for the schooling of their postulants and novices to ensure that they could join in the daily and yearly cycle of worship, and it was not uncommon for well-born children whose parents did not intend to devote them to such a vocation to receive some basic schooling in a convent or monastery. Periodically, Church leaders called for basic schooling at the parish level for boys who might become priests or serve in other capacities, and by the twelfth century many cathedrals provided schools which offered more advanced instruction, sometimes free to poor children.

As city life re-emerged, first in Italy and then in northern Europe, municipal governments began to take an interest in the adequacy of the schooling available, though schools continued to be what we would consider “private,” generally owned by a local parish or a guild, a charitable foundation or an individual. Already in the fourteenth century, in the commercial cities of Germany and the Low Countries, a new type of school had developed, often private enterprises by individual teachers which over time might receive guild or city subsidies. These “writing and reading schools” taught the skills necessary for business without any pretense of offering higher culture.

The distinction continued to exist between schools that instructed through the vernacular, preparing boys, or in some cases girls (but seldom both together), for employment or domesticity that did not require a mastery of the

classical languages, and Latin schools. The former were “slowly progressing from the stage where the chief purpose was to give catechetical instruction,” and toward the end of the sixteenth century there were an increasing number of schools whose “purpose . . . was to give special preparation to such boys as expected to enter the service of the state or [local] community in the capacity of clerks, secretaries, and the like.”<sup>1</sup> Latin continued to be taught even to boys who were not destined for the priesthood or for learned careers because it was the language of law and international communication.

The goals of municipal schools were usually quite different from those of Latin grammar schools intended to prepare for university. In the latter,

that part of mathematics now found in arithmetic books . . . was regarded as a practical art, useful chiefly to tradesmen. Reading meant the ability to read Latin words. The (grammar) school had no use for the former, and it very frequently expected the pupil to bring the latter ability with him, just as he brought the ability to talk.

The growth of commerce, however, made a very different sort of schooling necessary.

The origin of the elementary school as such is to be found in the demand made by commerce and industry for junior clerks and for workmen who could read and write the vernacular and, in fewer instances, make out or at least understand a bill. Such schools, quite distinct from grammar or song schools, grew up in the great commercial and industrial centres during the fourteenth century in Italy and in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

As long-distance commerce developed in the later Middle Ages, merchants required new skills, or wished their sons to acquire them, to deal with administrative and business documents and with increasingly complex accounting. There was a growing demand for schools which would prepare for worldly occupations. The ground had been prepared in northwestern Europe—especially in the Low Countries and along the Rhine in Germany—by the Brothers of the Common Life, founded in the fourteenth century in The Netherlands to encourage an intense spiritual life on the part of both clergy and laity, inspired by the enormously popular devotional work *Imitation of Christ*, attributed to Thomas à Kempis (c. 1378–1471). Soon the movement began to provide schools that emphasized a warm devotion to Christ and the formation of habits and dispositions that would sustain a godly life in the world, rather than in the shelter of a monastery.

In The Netherlands and Flanders what we would call primary schooling—reading and writing Dutch and a little arithmetic—was provided by privately

owned and usually very small schools, while preparation for commercial careers was then continued in “French schools,” where that language and sometimes German or English were learned as well, or in schools operated by the guilds, with a strong practical emphasis.<sup>3</sup>

## THE REFORMATION

The Reformation of the sixteenth century gave an impetus to fundamental changes in the provision of schooling. One effect was to give these essentially vocational schools an additional, confessional mission which had not seemed so urgent when confessional differences did not exist.<sup>4</sup>

The churches had to undertake massive pedagogic campaigns, which they conducted via preaching, education, printed propaganda, church discipline, and revamped rituals. In all these areas Protestant reformers broke new ground. They made the sermon the centerpiece of Protestant worship. They required that children receive elementary religious instruction, either at school or through special catechism classes. They released torrents of printed propaganda and encouraged ordinary Christians to read scripture. They established new institutions and procedures to supervise parish life.<sup>5</sup>

Another effect of the Reformation, in those areas which became Protestant, was to transfer responsibility for the schools operated by religious orders or supported by church endowments to town authorities, since the orders had been dissolved and the endowments confiscated. While schools for the children of the urban elite had already developed, the emphasis of the Reformation upon literacy as a precondition for reading the Bible, catechisms, and hymns led also to the spread of popular schooling.

Problems arose in those territories where princes and municipal authorities confiscated the religious endowments which had supported schools, and many parents, impressed by Luther’s condemnation of the existing monastery and cathedral schools as “devil’s training centers,” decided to withdraw their children. To make matters worse, the Reformation slogan of “the priesthood of all believers” convinced some that no training was required for the ministry. Luther wrote to an ally, in 1524, warning that “the neglect of education will bring the greatest ruin on the gospel.” He felt obliged to respond to misinterpretations of his intentions, in an open letter to municipal officials lamenting that

we are today experiencing in all the German lands how schools are everywhere being left to go to wrack and ruin . . . it is becoming known through God’s word

how un-Christian these institutions are, and how they are devoted only to men's bellies. The carnal-minded masses are beginning to realize that they no longer have either the obligation or the opportunity to thrust their sons, daughters, and relatives into cloisters and foundations . . . "Why," they say, "should we bother to have them go to school if they are not to become priests, monks, or nuns?"

'Twere better they should learn  
a livelihood to earn.<sup>6</sup>

Such views, Luther argued, were a trick of the devil to persuade parents to neglect their children. In fact, a true understanding of the Gospel should lead to a renewed commitment to education, from municipal officials as well as from parents:

We are on the alert against Turks, wars, and floods, because in such matters we can see what is harmful and what is beneficial . . . Even though only a single boy could thereby be trained to become a real Christian, we ought properly to give a hundred gulden to this cause for every gulden we would give to fight the Turk, even if he were breathing down our necks . . . My dear sirs, if we have to spend such large sums every year on guns, roads, bridges, dams, and countless similar items to insure the temporal peace and prosperity of a city, why should not much more be devoted to the poor neglected youth—at least enough to engage one or two competent men to teach school?<sup>7</sup>

This could easily be done, Luther argued, by using the money that individuals were saving by no longer paying for "masses, vigils, endowments, bequests, anniversaries, mendicant friars, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, and similar nonsense." They should instead "contribute a part of that amount toward schools for the training of the poor children."<sup>8</sup> Fatefully, Luther was calling for assumption by secular government of what had been until then the self-assumed responsibility of either religious organizations or private initiatives. In effect, this was secularization of the organization, though not in any respect of the content, of schooling.

Luther argued that parents were generally not competent and could not be expected to educate their children themselves, and that, if the younger generation was sinking ever further into ignorance and uselessness, it was the fault of the municipal authorities, "who have left the young people to grow up like saplings in the forest, and have given no thought to their instruction and training."<sup>9</sup> He advocated and took steps to establish schools for girls as well as boys, since women were under the same obligation to study the Bible

for themselves. In his sermon “Keeping Children in School” (1530), Luther used especially strong language, even for him:

I maintain that the civil authorities are under obligation to compel the people to send their children to school, especially such as are promising . . . If the government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle, to mount ramparts, and perform other martial duties in times of war, how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil . . . The Turk does differently and takes every third child in his empire to educate for whatever he pleases [here Luther refers to the tribute of Christian boys to be trained as Janissaries]. How much more should our rulers require children to be sent to school, who, however, are not taken from their parents, but are educated for their own and the general good.<sup>10</sup>

Luther’s more tactful colleague Philip Melanchthon urged in 1528 that “preachers should exhort the people of their charge to send their children to school, so that they may be raised up to teach sound doctrine in the church, and to serve the state in a wise and able manner.” He conceded, however, that “in our day there are many abuses in children’s schools,”<sup>11</sup> and personally engaged in school inspections before proposing, with Luther, a plan for establishing and maintaining schools.<sup>12</sup> The rulers of the newly Protestant states of Germany frequently called upon the reformers for help in writing regulations for the schools under their jurisdiction. Melanchthon did so in at least nine cases, including Nuremberg (1526) and Saxony (1528), as did Luther in other towns and regions.<sup>13</sup>

The summons by these and other Reformers did not pass unheeded; more than a hundred school ordinances were adopted in Protestant cities and territories in Germany during the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In 1559, for example, the Duchy of Wuerttemberg in South Germany adopted an ordinance providing for “German” schools in villages, to provide instruction for children of the common people.<sup>15</sup> In many territories the laws establishing and regulating churches included provisions for schools, including detailed provisions for controlling curriculum and instruction.<sup>16</sup>

Luther’s great contribution to popular education in Germany was less through such exhortations than through his hymns and his Bible translation, which greatly increased the interest in being able to read, though this would not reach full force until the Second Reformation of Pietism. The results of his innovation in educational policy—calling upon public authorities to take responsibility for schools, while insisting that the religious instruction provided continue to be a concern of the clergy<sup>17</sup>—lay in the future.

Luther made necessary what Gutenberg made possible: by putting the scriptures at the center of Christian eschatology, the Reformation made a technical invention into a spiritual obligation . . . If the Reformation is not the sole origin of this change [in literacy], it was certainly the most spectacular sign of it, a revolution in society even more than in the Church. The proof is the rapidity with which the Catholic Church adapted itself to the new socio-cultural conditions: to respond to the Protestant challenge, it had to accept the battlefield of its adversary, fight the Reformation with the Reformation's weapons.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, it was often in areas where Catholics and Protestants were in juxtaposition that Catholic efforts at popular education were most vigorous, with Catholic authorities unapologetically adopting many of the reforms pioneered by their Protestant rivals.<sup>19</sup>

Although many ordinances providing for popular schooling were adopted during the sixteenth century, there were, unfortunately,

a great many forces that operated against the fullest fruition of these good laws . . . Life in the country was crude and stagnant; economic resources were extremely deficient, an effective teaching personnel was lacking, and the arm of the central authorities was weak. The law was put into effect in some localities, while in others it was neglected, but even where schools were established, they remained, with the outstanding exception of a few states, in a state of miserable inefficiency until well into the eighteenth century or even beyond.<sup>20</sup>

In the flourishing commercial towns of the Low Countries, where there was already a good provision of schooling, the Reformation led to a greater emphasis upon religious instruction. This was inevitably the case in communities where (unusually for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) schools operated by different religious groups were tolerated. A study of Rotterdam, for example, describes how Catholic schools and several varieties of Protestant schools were permitted alongside the schools affiliated with the majority (Calvinist) Reformed Church.<sup>21</sup>

In 1618 the Synod of Dordt, a sort of constitutional convention of the Dutch Reformed Church, stressed that the responsibility for religious instruction of youth was shared among the family, the school, and the church. Dutch municipalities were already reasonably well supplied with schools, but the synod called for the extension of schooling into rural areas as well. "Schools, in which the young shall be properly instructed in the principles of Christian doctrine, shall be instituted, not only in cities but also in towns and country places where heretofore none have existed." Magistrates were urged to ensure