

Educational Secularism: The Origins

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When a nation has ceased, not to feel the religious instinct, but to believe; when primary education relaxes the bonds of union by teaching children a habit of merciless analysis, a nation is dissolved; for the only ties that are left to bind men together and make them one body are the ignoble ties of material interest, and the dictates of the selfish cult created by egoism well carried out.

—Balzac, *César Birroteau*

I

IN 1270, during his last stay in Paris, Thomas Aquinas wrote a work titled *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists*. Seven years later, Etienne Tempier, then Bishop of Paris, formally condemned large segments of Averroist teaching, including the doctrines that man possesses two separate and distinct modes of knowledge—the rational and the religious—and that philosophy is anterior and superior to religion, the latter being truth adapted to the limited understanding of the people. The Averroists tended to pursue philosophical and scientific speculations and to let religion take care of itself. Secular learning was held to be essentially unrelated to religion, and in time the Averroists became advocates of the separation of church and

state, and hence of the separation of religion from any education that might be maintained by the state. Aquinas' treatise destroyed the principal basis upon which the Averroists justified their penchant for secular-oriented rather than religiously oriented schooling. Tempier's proscription was deemed necessary because Averroism had won many adherents in the thirteenth century, including some among Aquinas' own order of Dominicans at the University of Paris. But Averroism continued to flourish: throughout the fourteenth century, Jewish and Christian as well as Moslem followers of Averroës were to be found in many, perhaps in most, of the intellectual communities of Europe, North Africa, and the Near East.

Several years prior to his critique of the Averroists, Aquinas had rebutted the mil-

lenarian speculations of Joachim of Flora.¹ Joachim's fervid perfectibilitarianism, which anticipates that of Teilhard de Chardin, had given rise to views and practices the Church regarded as dangerous and soon adjudged to be heretical.²

Aquinas no doubt thought of his refutations of Averroism and Joachimite eschatology as two unconnected events. But subsequent history was to establish an important junction: both Joachim and Averroës would inspire secularist philosophy in general and secular education in particular.

A certain biographical detail reminds us that secular education was by no means foreign, let alone hostile, to Christian civilization even at its most conservative epoch: Aquinas had studied at the secular University of Naples. Within the context of the Middle Ages the term "secular education" is meaningful in two senses: schools with secular charters or lay masters (or both) existed; and medieval education implied instruction in secular as well as in sacred subjects—both the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* consisted wholly of "natural" or secular studies (conducted, nonetheless, by lay faithful if not by clerics). Yet the obvious importance of secular studies—rhetoric, music, arithmetic—and the existence of secular schools by no means warrants the claim that a religiously oriented civilization whose schools are secularized poses no contradiction. Hypothetically the religious vitality of a Christian state might be sustained through religious education in home and church even though the schools were strictly secular. But airy hypothesis must yield to experience, and history shows clearly that what follows upon the pervasive secularization of the schools is a post-Christian era. Once a society has begun to persist in promoting secular schooling at the *de facto* expense of religiously oriented schools, it is obvious that a secular outlook has become so fashionable and formidable that the homes and churches, which are supposedly free to continue to support the faith, are also feeling the attractions and pressures of the increas-

ingly secular world. The very parents who are "free" to acquaint their children with religious values and knowledge have already in fact elected to establish and support religion-free schools. On the whole, people watchful to keep religion out of the schools are not likely to be keeping it in the home—even if their daily rounds of television and social climbing leave them the time. There is, after all, a fact upon which all historians of education are agreed: "schools do not lead social changes, but follow them."³

Within the traditional Christian society, then, secular schooling existed but *secularism*—the secularist *Weltansicht*—did not: radical secularism was the anti-tradition. The historical development of secular education to the point where secularism has become the dominant modern outlook does not represent simply a physical or quantitative expansion of the traditional and legitimate secular interests and institutions encompassed by orthodox Christianity. Rather, these came under the power of extra-traditional and anti-traditional forces whose unchecked thrust would eventually devitalize and decimate the tradition.

Aquinas' failure to put an end to the influence of Joachimite and Averroistic heterodoxy was emblematic: later champions of orthodoxy were to fare no better. The secularization of experience is now so advanced that the secularist version of education is accepted as the norm and is not often challenged forcibly or hopefully. Indeed, challengers take their reputation and their security, if not their lives, in their hands, for the secular empire is so puissant that "in most countries even when other systems than the State system of schools exist, they exist on sufferance."⁴ Under the circumstances, it is possible that the very substance of the classical case against educational secularism will be forgotten. In what follows, I shall touch upon some of the more salient points of that case. My main object, however, is to recapitulate in broad outline the intellectual origins of modern secular education. Historical analysis dem-

onstrates that the secularist outlook from which the modern enterprise of secular education developed is the disintegrating agent or counterforce to the great civilization developed in Europe and passed on, at least in part, to the New World. Secularism is no longer widely recognized as an anti-traditional force; it is praised and recommended, even by persons who believe themselves to be Christian, as "neutral" and "objective." Yet even the most cursory examination reveals the heterodox origins of educational secularism: Averroism, Renaissance worldliness, Protestantism, and millenarism of the type descended from Joachim. The historical development is a vast topic. I shall attempt nothing more than an outline of it.

II

IN CHRISTIAN as in Jewish tradition the schools—whether in the form of institutional classes or private tutoring—were linked with religion. Eventually, as Kane says in his study of European education, "State governments began to enter upon the direct organization and management of schools" and the new secular school was to oppose the traditional one "in overwhelming numbers, with vast financial support, and with the sanction of large masses of the people in all the Western nations who had abandoned all definite belief and religious practice."⁵ The two extremely important points here are, first, that in practice modern secular education is virtually identical with *state* education; second, that the tremendous expansion of secular education reflects the growth of disbelief and religious indifference among modern populations. Secular education is in the control of the state, and states are founded upon the principle of self-perpetuation and self-interest. How, then, can the state guarantee that education will be characterized by truth, honesty, and universal receptiveness? The secular—state—schools may be expected to reflect the values and emphases of the secu-

larist society. Charles Duell Kean illustrates this difficulty nicely:

... if our general culture is informed by the theory of economic man, what else can we expect from formal education than vocational training, with an added culture element on a "pay your money and take your choice" basis. If the basic verities to which society generally gives allegiance are economic, the verities that religion and philosophy may draw from other sources are necessarily elective. An educational system cannot exist in a social vacuum, nor can it have an orientation fundamentally different from that of the society which it serves.⁶

The state system has not grown, as is sometimes claimed, because secularism promotes objectivity and fairness, but simply because it is the system that naturally appeals to and absorbs those great numbers of modern people who have become hostile or indifferent to religion (if not to all its residual values and habits) and particularly, in the West, to Roman Catholic religion; it has the added advantage of tax money that allows popular prices. Essentially out of touch with religion, modern populations drift into the public schools and state universities; there, for the most part, the secularism of the students is confirmed; and as this process continues from one generation to the next, few but state schools remain.

Four major historical tributaries have run together to form the modern secularist confluence: medieval Averroism; Renaissance worldliness in both senses of the term—the Renaissance overvaluation of purely secular or "natural" interests, and the concomitant cult of sensual self-indulgence; the Reformationist commitment—the Protestant hostility toward Roman Catholicism and the determination to educate children outside the framework of the Church; finally, Joachimite enthusiasm, that is, the millenarism that continually gathered momentum in the intellectual centers of Europe from the thirteenth century onward.

These were interacting rather than discrete developments, but to trace their interaction is, for present purposes, a luxury rather than a necessity. One must also note that the particulars of the historical development of secular school systems differ somewhat from one country to another and sometimes even from one period to another within the same country. But these matters too have only a marginal bearing on my present object.

III

FIRST it may be well to recall the salient features of that great tradition from which our secular civilization is a radical deviation. What sort of thing was it that existed manifestly and solidly *before* the "modern age"?

The order that had built up for a thousand years was Catholic and monarchic, and on the whole it was not only content to remain, but insisted upon remaining that way: the medieval hierarchic social-political order was regarded as sacralized, so that deviation from its fundamentals was regarded as sin, an affront to the divine Orderer. The conservatism of medieval society extended even to the lowest levels of the third estate, where the rootless poor showed sporadic and sometimes intense dissatisfaction with their hard lot. But the now expanding, now subsiding restiveness of segments of the third estate ought not to cause us to lose sight of two important points: the dissatisfaction seldom took the form of an attack upon the medieval theory of hierarchy; and even when it did repudiate the hierarchic structure the insurgency originated among those least qualified to consider the probable long-range consequences of their demands and acts. In other words, hard lot or no hard lot, the medieval radicals were typically "the famous masses . . . ready for the kill." Unlike modern society the medieval *ordo* was neither ideological nor self-conscious. Time, not parvenu ideologies and paper constitutions, had legitimized it. Its class structure and

the primacy of religion and aristocracy within that structure had been inherited from ancient prototypes. The medieval folk did not yearn for "democracy," universal schooling, indoor plumbing, and electrical amenities. The point needs to be stressed: otherwise we distort reality by indulging our natural tendency to impose twentieth-century values, habits, and expectations upon medieval people, who might in fact very much resent our sentimental—and arrogant—solicitude, just as national and ethnic groups of "underdeveloped" areas today resent the witting or unwitting assumption of superiority in the developers.

Schoolchildren learn that medieval people were "otherworldly": the sciolists of modern education have heard of medieval ascetic practices and know the phrase *contemptus mundi* if not its context. But we are far mistaken if we infer that medieval people were generally of dour or unhappy demeanor or were unacquainted with or unappreciative of the good natural things of life. *Le moyen âge* was a period of great vigor, animation, and variety. For any man born with energy, initiative, and adventurousness, even the "Dark Ages" had a bright side: from the earliest period, the feudal system gave, as Bémont and Monod observe, "vast scope to individual energies and heroic virtues."⁸ Medieval society consisted of a folk, and a folk is always less self-conscious, more imaginative, and more freely expressive than our deracinated modern populations. The *Volk* were somewhat childlike and took a child's delight in life. They were unrepressed, scot-free of the repression demanded today by the hypertrophy of ratiocination on the one hand and the exigencies of a highly competitive and utilitarian economy on the other. They had the active hope of eternal life before them, and all around them was a world of unspoiled nature—clean air, streams with fish and swan in them. The months were full of feast days and the twelve days of Christmas had not yet been reduced to one. Pageantry and formal beauty abounded. The trades and crafts were full of variety and general-

ly kept the workers in touch with the outdoors, and the work typically gave the worker important satisfactions: he participated with his whole body, made a whole product himself, and fashioned it somewhat according to his individual taste, so that the medieval, like the ancient world was filled with inspiring variety in homes, furniture, utensils, hardware, clothing, ornaments, bridges, and bread loaves. And by way of contrast with the uniformity and monotony of modern places and habits the traditional order was a world in which local textures, customs, and emphases varied enormously. Milan had not become disconcertingly like New York City; people whose taste did not run to the loaves or taxes or local ceremonies of Angoulême would find a quite different situation at Poitiers, only a few miles down the road. Medieval society was ridden with defects but its stability and *élan* are unmistakable and can be accounted for only by the supposition that the triumph of the human spirit is not dependent upon the abolition of classes and hard work or upon the proliferation of technological amenities.

The social order was based upon the personal obligation and loyalty of individuals one to another and upon the mutual responsibilities and cooperation of clearly defined classes. The disadvantages of a conservative, hierarchic, and essentially agrarian society are well known, but we shall do well to note the advantages: in the Middle Ages people knew where they belonged, what was expected of them, how to behave; the slow pace of change, the permanence of familiar features of landscape and construction made for personal psychic stability and cultural continuity. Physical mobility was limited, and as a result the individual did not feel himself in the midst of a vortex. He did not spend his days in the exhausting and anxiety-ridden effort to strike down new roots and form new friendships: friends generally did not move on, and no city planner sent forth arrays of wreckers and bulldozers to replace neighborhoods with freeways and shopping cen-

ters. The society also maintained a certain balance of psychic forces: intuitive or poetic as well as discursive knowledge was universally accepted as valid; one did not feel the pressure to expunge from one's personality all that did not apply to the proliferation, consumption, and extension of mechanistic processes and technological fabrications. Individuals were not lost sight of in the collectivist abstractions and collectivist movements with which we have grown familiar in the twentieth century. Medieval workers were spared the experience of seeing, as we are seeing, the concept of *equality* degraded into that of *interchangeability* and hence of the *expendability* of the individual. In our highly rationalized, collectivized, utilitarian world people are increasingly identified not as individual persons but as mere *functions*, aspects of specialized and highly mechanical work processes.

Modernity has been characterized by massive social fragmentation: fiercely competitive self-aggrandizement among individuals, classes, ethnic groups, and nations has resulted in the *disintegration* of the family and in the erosion of the individual's sense of identity. If this age of ideology, of mass "parties" and class and party warfare, is coming to an end, perhaps it is being succeeded by the age of exhaustion: by indifference, depersonalization, and deculturation. By contrast, there existed the medieval *community* of values, activities, and symbols,⁹ and that community overarched local and national differences; it would be found in the Ireland of 900, the France of 1100, or the Bavaria of 1300. What followed was the deluge of *isms*: Protestantism, rationalism, industrialism, technologism, scientism, progressivism, parliamentarianism, republicanism, egalitarianism, capitalism, socialism, liberalism, syndicalism, communism, fascism, anarchism, nihilism. The differences among these ideologies and developments do not obscure their common ground: all are averse or indifferent to the essentials of the old order.¹⁰

IV

HAVING been made by God, the physical creation (including man's body), though fallen, was necessary and good. This orthodox premise validated man's interest in natural phenomena. Study of them, however, should be referenced to specifically Christian ends; education should tend toward salvation. Devotional exercises were ultimately more important than arithmetic. Among formal studies the *arbiter* was theology. It provided the ranking and the direction of the other disciplines, including philosophy. We may be sure that Aquinas regarded the hymns he composed for Corpus Christi as more important than the answers he constructed for his *baccalaureatus* examinations, and his knowledge of the early Fathers as more vital than the botany he learned from Albertus Magnus.

The later Middle Ages and the Renaissance witnessed the expansion and increasing autonomy of secular studies and schools, and the gradual subordination of theology to philosophy. Much of the impetus for this change was supplied by Averroism.

To pursue their main interests—philosophy and science rather than theology and devotion—the Averroists required secular, not monastic schools. The continuing prestige of Averroës, together with the brilliant contemporary performance of Averroist-oriented institutions like the University of Padua,¹¹ lent credibility to the notion that education should look more to the state and less to the church. Furthermore, the internal degeneration of Scholasticism in the fourteenth century created the right situation for the burgeoning of secular schools. The Averroist fervor for the natural sciences and philosophy proved attractive to men grown weary of internecine, often repeated, and often merely vain and formulaed scholastic contentions. In the company, then, of Averroists working away in naturalist directions were non-Averroist Nominalists and thinkers inclined toward Nominalism—the Nominalist fas-

cination for *particulars* usually meant receptiveness to empirical investigation. Also in the company were thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa, Albertus Magnus, and Aquinas himself: they were neither Averroists nor Nominalists, and they did not advocate secularity in education, but they greatly enhanced the prestige of science and of intensive erudite ratiocination applied to scientific topics. In short, among all those men who were more and more inclined to turn away from theology and devote their first energies to secular studies, the Averroists led the way and the lead was important.

Enthusiastic and influential Averroism preceded the dramatic increase in the power of the late medieval *bourgeoisie*. As the consolidation of enormous bourgeois influence occurred it created in turn a climate favorable to the further consolidation of the secular educational enterprise. The newly heightened mercantilist power and status aroused a hunger for yet greater satisfaction in the same kind. To prospering merchants and their sons, law, mathematics, and the engineering sciences were obviously desirable; theology and meditation were of more dubious value.

The context of the Renaissance, of the humanist enthusiasm for classical—or otherwise pagan—ideals, is the profitable “traffic” of the bourgeois and the tangible profitableness of advancing secular studies. The common denominator of neo-paganism, advancing commerce, and secularity is worldliness: this is the essence of the *esprit de la renaissance*. The process of secularization was, like most social processes, circular: at a certain point, growing and conjoining secular interests achieved dominance in the society and created a particular worldview; the worldview then became an *esprit*, an aegis which furthered the secular interests that gave rise to it—and secular education was one of these.

The Renaissance fast set, the *viveurs*, developed a really swinging type of worldliness, one with such style, such *savoir faire*, that henceforth the world would not

willingly let it die. At the same time, the vigorous intellectual activity of the period gave birth to multivarious intellectual-philosophical rationales and apologias for worldly focuses and preoccupations. It was in the Renaissance that the European intellectual community began to be captured by men for whom the practice of the faith and the condition of the Church were strictly secondary considerations, if that. In time, the capture of that community would mean the capture of instruction and administration in many school systems.

Copernicus, Bacon, Harvey, Kepler, Brahe, Descartes—the Renaissance scientific efflorescence continued into the ever more rapidly oncoming scientific discoveries (and recoveries) and technological inventions of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, mediated by the brilliant but destructive skeptical rationalism of thinkers like Pierre Bayle,¹² contributed to the secularist outlook mainly by increasing its militancy: the educational secularism of the *philosophes* was one logical outgrowth of their doctrine of the separation of church and state, which in turn was a reflection of their characteristically aggressive and proselytizing unbelief. Protestant rationalists, to whom the institution of the traditional *magisterium* was anathema, often found themselves, of course, allied with the *philosophes*. I need not develop these points; we are not now in any danger of underestimating the extent to which Enlightenment optimism, emboldened by the scientific and technological advances of the late Renaissance and early modern era, carried forward the Renaissance's "new definition of human wisdom as power"¹³ and enormously strengthened the dominance of the secularist worldview.

V

THE FOUNDING of Protestant schools helped prepare the way for massive secularization. The progress of the Reformation meant that with each succeeding

generation more and more children were educated outside the Church of Rome. Thus, distinct alternatives—the denominational schools—to traditional schooling were ubiquitous by the end of the sixteenth century. Protestantism established a precedent for breaks of a more radical kind: if non-Roman but still Christian schools, why not also non-Roman and areligious schools? The context of the Reformation was the Renaissance: Averroists, Nominalists, pyrrhonists, and worldly humanists were on hand and ready to do more than ask the question.

We must remember, too, that for more than a few people in those as in subsequent times Protestantism was not an attractive alternative to Catholicism; the choice for some had to be Catholicism or no church at all. Furthermore the great schism tended to discredit Christianity itself; not only particular dogmas but the whole faith was shaken.¹⁴ The road away from Rome led to nowhere in particular as well as to Geneva and Wittenberg. Attended with so much vacillation of policy, bitter contention, and violence, the schismatic movement shattered the psychic unity of Christendom, and this situation played right into the hands of overt and covert secularists on all sides.

Important in preparing the way for pervasive secularization was the metamorphosis of denominational schools into pan-Protestant institutions. In the United States, for example, the dominant school system came to be set up in such a way that the schools were not officially denominational but were part of a statewide or nationwide pan-Protestant system. To avoid showing partiality or giving offense to any particular sect, these overwhelmingly Protestant but nondenominational schools were naturally obliged to stress the secular rather than religious material and to treat the latter in only the most general terms. In the United States the constitutional prescription of separation between church and state quite soon tended to reinforce this religious *laissez-faire* policy. As might be expected,

the public schools in this situation tended to create the impression, first, that secular matters were at least as important as religious ones; second, that particular dogmas and differences of emphasis were not of much consequence. In other words, the overall effect of the non-denominational school was to maintain or heighten the prestige of secular concerns and at the same time to reduce the content of the actual Protestant substance to a rather vague and incoherent, well-meaning, essentially *social* generality. From this situation it was but a short step to the virtual elimination of religious content and the acceptance of the main body of secularist principles.

This is precisely the pattern that obtained in the United States, where, under the constant and constantly increasing pressure of the rationalist or Enlightenment forces which play so great a part in the American heritage, the public schools at last accepted a quite absolute interpretation of the doctrine of the separation of church and state. This pressure, which resulted in total secularization, stems from two sources, both of which derive in turn from the values and emphases of the Enlightenment. On the one hand, rationalist ideologues carry the battle by means of secularist propaganda and court tests; and on the other hand many people who are themselves by no means antipathetic to religion carry the day for an ever more secular, ever more pragmatist commitment by the argument from present reality, *i.e.*, in our intensely utilitarian, intensely political and crisis-ridden century it is pointless and even irresponsible to allot time and energy for the cultivation of the soul through religious study or devotional exercises.

The emergence of "economic man"—the consolidation of the national states and their transformation into competitive money-power structures—resulted naturally enough in the state's desire to increase its control over the education of its citizens: people with religious scruples might object to an unscrupulous tariff or military

provocation; Germans must be educated to know and detest the vices of the French; Christian education makes a place for poetry, a thing that brings no revenue into the treasury. It was in the state's interests to apply constant pressure to the religious bodies which maintained the schools, to insinuate itself, to persuade, to entrap, to force, until the schools were *in fact*, if not always on paper, the state's own instruments. In this situation the Protestant sects—most of whom wished to preserve their denominational schools—had put themselves at a historical disadvantage: all along, in the local or national Reformationist states, the Protestants had courted the favor of the state, and even acquiesced in becoming subservient to it; it was the price they were willing to pay to obtain the state's support in the battle against Catholicism.

Finally one must take into account the fact that, on the whole, Protestantism itself represented, even from the outset of the Reformation, a structure which developed in some ways along lines parallel to the structure of secularism. A simplifying or stripping-down process was at the very heart of Protestantism. The Reformation leaders tore large segments out of what had been regarded for a thousand years as the Faith. The sacraments were reduced from seven to two, and in many sects even those—baptism and the Lord's Supper—were regarded as symbolic rather than real carriers of grace. Religious orders were done away with; devotion to Mary and the saints was denounced as idolatrous and fell into desuetude; bodily involvement in the communion or service was reduced to a minimum, at the expense of beauty, mystery, and imagination; the church edifice and the ceremonial were pared down, often to the barest bones. The attitude, in short, was that much that had long passed for religion was not "true" or at least not essential. The attitude of the religiously indifferent and of the militant secularist was that the stripping process should go farther: religion itself was not true, or not essential.

In its thrust toward simplification, Protestantism was to de-emphasize the Catholic mystical-sacramental perception of experience, that aspect of the faith which leads to contemplativeness and sometimes to the monastic life. The Reformationist preference was for dynamic activities—reforming, evangelizing, constructing, experimenting. The mystical and contemplative element of the traditional faith is, obviously, its least practical element; but unbalanced by the contemplative spirit, practical engagement runs the risk of becoming absorbed into and indistinguishable from activity unreferenced to noetic and super-natural ends. Protestant activism in one generation often became an essentially secular activism in the next. In this way too Protestantism served, however unwittingly, as a matrix of the secularist worldview.

The barren intellectualism into which fourteenth-century Scholasticism degenerated contributed to the rise of secular schools. Likewise the moral laxity of many of the clergy of that century tended to discredit the assumption that education inevitably benefits from religious control or direction. Yet these facts must not be allowed to obscure the essential point: the secular educational alternatives which were to evolve and proliferate derived, on the whole, from heretical movements and from religious indifference or antipathy. As the edifice of Scholasticism grew shabby and began to fall, the Renaissance worldlings and Reformation heresiarchs were ready in strength to erect new and different structures. The default of a Christian structure by no means confers Christian status upon the structure that replaces it; vigor is desirable, and so, sometimes, is novelty; but neither quality is self-baptizing.

VI

A GREAT MANY of the Protestant and skeptical rationalist intellectuals of the Renaissance were immanentist millenarians. Their immanentism played a major role in the secularization of the schools.

Christian thought developed an eschatology or doctrine of the last things. In this orthodox understanding of reality, human nature was fallen and would remain so to the end of history; man's historical experience had always been and would always be a *struggle beset with error*—with passivity, remissness, and malevolence. The Atonement was not understood as having mitigated the human propensity for errors some of which would have disastrous and long-continuing consequences for individuals and society. "Man's historical experience has been one of steady failure and there are no grounds for supposing that it will ever be anything else."¹⁵ The noblest civilizations rise but also fall; magnificent art and thought that should endure go unheeded or are allowed to vanish; amidst perennial hopes for peace, wars continue to break out. Orthodox Christianity is pessimistic about history, but in this case pessimism is realism, that is, the honesty and courage to see things as they really are. Christianity thus incorporated, as Eric Voegelin puts it:

the oldest wisdom of mankind concerning the rhythm of growth and decay which is the fate of all things under the sun. . . . What comes into being will have an end, and the mystery of this stream of being is impenetrable. These are the two great principles governing experience.¹⁶

The ultimate meaning of any individual's life or of human history is an insoluble mystery whose context is the infiniteness of God and His works, and the finiteness of the mind of man.

A Cistercian abbot who died in 1202 and whom our children never encounter in their history books profoundly challenged this traditional understanding of reality. The immanentist and evolutionary speculations of Joachim of Flora have been continuously influential from his own day; most of the ideological movements of the modern world are modified forms of the Joachimite interpretation of history. Capitalist progressivism, utopian socialism, Nazism, and

Marxism alike owe their debt to Joachim even though most progressives, socialists, Nazis, and Marxists have never heard of the man who brought the flame that set the fires of their enthusiasm and fanaticism.

In the orthodox or Augustinian scheme reconfirmed by Aquinas the essence of salvation was a personal conversion; what Joachim envisioned was a mass-historical advance toward perfection *on earth*. Salvation would come *within* history, not *after* it. The transformation of the human spirit, hitherto viewed as the salvation of individual souls, was to become a communal event: the human community will see a "common evolutionary advance . . . a wholly spiritualized status."¹⁷ In the future lies a terrestrial order that will not pass away, a *final realm* of idyllic human happiness in which classes, the Church, and even law, being unnecessary, have disappeared. Furthermore this third realm is about to begin: it will take form under the direction of a spiritual leader or *dux*.

Third realm, new order, *dux*—the terms have a familiar ring. Hitler called his construct the Third Reich and the New Order. He was *der Führer*, the Leader. Mussolini was *il duce*, the great *dux*, as Rienzi had been in the fourteenth century and Frederick II in the thirteenth. The sixteenth-century Anabaptists of Holland and the German states set up their *New Jerusalems*. The Puritan, Evangelical, and Rationalist founders of the United States inaugurated a *novus ordo seclorum*. "Le jour de gloire est arrivé," thundered the French revolutionists. The energumens of the *front populaire* looked forward to "*lendemains qui chantent*," and the Bolsheviks of 1917 promised a "classless society," a realm of freedom.

"Men desire to hear good tidings," says Paul Tillich, "and the masses listen to those who bring them." They listened to Joachim and to his intellectual descendants. The message was not only "good tidings"; it solved the very mystery of existence. It revealed the shape of the future; it relieved us of the anxiety of uncertainty and of de-

pendence upon faith; it promised power and control and thus satisfied our "lust for massively possessive experience."¹⁸ It was, in short, the most charismatic of visions. Its gradual secularization and multivarious adaptations according to the varying needs of particular men and events make an involved story. Suffice it to say that there is scarcely a corner of the modern world that has not felt the repercussions of the "great enterprise of salvation through world-immanent action."¹⁹ "Modernity" implies a heterodox but pervasive immanentism in the form of a belief in the progression of history toward a condition of perfection to be brought about by social-political action under the hegemony of science and technics—or of New Left pastoralism or New Pacifist "love." The extent of our superiority to the past and the degree of perfection we are going to achieve have occasioned arguments within the ranks of modernity, but the spirit of "salvation through world-immanent action" remains the definitive bond.

The emergence of secular variants of the Joachitic fantasy provided a powerful new incentive for working toward the establishment of "free compulsory education": the way to usher in the final Third Realm was to acquaint everyone with its nature and its desirability.

VII

IN 1806 Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Jena; he proceeded to humiliate them by the severe terms of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807. The Prussian response to this disaster was to organize "a national school system as the chief instrument in building up a national spirit."²⁰ The state schools, in other words, were inspired not by the belief that a secular state system would constitute an increase in fairness, objectivity, and omnireceptiveness over the denominational private and parochial schools, but by the desire to present the students with a nationalist curriculum and to instil a fervor that would look forward to a future that

contained no more Jenas. Such instances of the formation of secular school systems to mold a definite set of biases could be multiplied at will.

By 1854 the anti-Christian and anti-religious character of instruction in the Prussian state schools from the primaries to the universities was so scandalous that Frederick William IV ordered new regulations which would permit religious instruction in the schools once again. It was fortunate for the Prussian people, who were preponderantly Lutheran, that the king happened to hold views somewhat different from those of the typical schoolmasters and professors.

In France the forces working against religion achieved permanent supremacy in the government by about 1870. French secularists "realized that a complete destruction of religion in France depended primarily upon its destruction in the schools."²¹ In 1881 under education minister Jules Ferry the nation's elementary schools were made secular. The next year a law requiring compulsory attendance was passed. A law of October 30, 1886 forbade clerics to teach in any state school. French Catholics turned to the private schools, but between 1902 and 1904 the state suppressed more than 6,000 private schools. In 1904 the government drove all teaching congregations out of France.

History will not support the impression which contemporary secular liberals are usually so eager to create: namely that secular education is more honest, more fair, and more effective than denominational or parochial education. Only the naive can suppose that secular—state—schools are, on the whole, seriously committed to objectivity or neutrality. With few if any exceptions the secular states of the contemporary world are largely expressions of one variant or another of the values and goals of the naturalism, scientism, and progressivism that evolved out of Joachimite millenarism and the *esprit de la renaissance*. For that matter, no value-free state has ever existed or is ever likely to exist. A

given state is the political articulation of a specific people with a particular character and particular values; and of course "pluralism" is itself a value, one choice from among the possibilities. In most states the entire educational system is directly or indirectly controlled by the state legislature and executive and is thus subject to political considerations. Money can be granted or refused; it can be allocated to this or to that; and the state has of course the privilege of setting up whatever curricula and special programs it—or some pressure-group—deems advisable.

What are the typical biases—are they not in fact dogmas—of the contemporary state schools of the North American continent? Democracy rather than aristocracy; pedestrianism rather than dignity or elevation; egalitarianism rather than hierarchy; anti-intellectualism rather than the exploration of differences and distinctions; gregariousness and collective action rather than individual formation; social-political activity rather than the *via contemplativa*; naturalism rather than supernaturalism; experiment rather than experience; prose rather than poetry; permissiveness rather than discipline; extraversion rather than introversion; group discussion rather than lectures; intellectual pride rather than humility; "self-expression," not modesty; affluence, not constructive poverty; contemporaneity, not tradition; "pop," not classical art; jargon, not simple English; showiness and garishness, not modesty and conservatism; the cult of youth rather than a balanced view of the phases of life.²²

Educational secularism is an articulation and a matrix of values. It originated in and continues to carry the thrusts of Averroism and Renaissance worldliness, Protestant activism and anti-traditionalism, and Joachimite millenarism. The line of historical development may be recapitulated briefly as follows: the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the gradual subordination of theology to philosophy—and in this development the removal of the centers of intel-

lectual activity from the monastic communities to the urban universities, as at Naples and Padua, was both symptom and cause; in the eighteenth century philosophy itself became subordinate to natural science; and the trend in the twentieth century has been toward the subordination of science itself to technics. If one views the secularization of experience as being essentially a manifestation of *materialism*, a preoccupation with *materia* oriented toward physical power, comfort, and indulgence, and attended by a corresponding and necessary neglect of the soul, this whole development is a straight and logical line. In this spiritually regressive evolution, education would be expected to orient its activities more and more toward the attainment and extension of material and political power; and this is exactly what has happened: modern education revolves around the axis of politicized scientific-technological utilitarianism, i.e., scientism. How secularist education might escape the fate of coming un-

der the control of the fiercely rival money-power groups and militant ideologies that dominate all other areas of modern life is a problem to which the Enlightenment optimists gave insufficient attention. But that a lasting marriage would be made between secular education and political-economic power was foreseen by the prophetic Balzac, whose reactionary legitimism enabled him to see modernity in perspective.²³

Secular education has evolved, as I have said elsewhere,²⁴ as an alternative—and a hostile one—to the great tradition of Catholic monarchic Europe. I have provided a few illustrations of the militancy which the secularist enterprise has shown all along. Such militancy alone demonstrates that the contemporary educational establishment is not some benevolently neutral form that has evolved by divine appointment, but is the embodiment of a distinct worldview competing with and, when necessary, contending aggressively against a view that developed in and bore witness to an age of faith.

²³*Summa Theologiae*, qu. 106, a. 4. The rebuttal is both succinct and incisive.

²⁴Joachim's views on the Trinity were condemned by the Lateran Council in 1215; in the middle of the thirteenth century the Commission of Anagni, established by the Pope, issued a thoroughgoing condemnation of Joachim's speculations. The work of Teilhard de Chardin has, to date, drawn a monitum or grave warning (issued through the Holy Office, June 30, 1962): the work abounds "in serious errors" that "offend Catholic doctrine."

²⁵W. Kane, S. J., *A History of Education* (Chicago, 1935), p. 183.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 516.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 476.

²⁸C. D. Kean, *Christianity and the Cultural Crisis* (N.Y., 1945), pp. 177-78.

²⁹Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, 1952), p. 176.

³⁰Charles Bémont and G. Monod, *Medieval Europe from 395 to 1270*, translated by Mary Sloan (N.Y., 1902), p. 546.

³¹It is important to notice that the medieval community, unlike that which obtained in certain other conservative societies or groups—for example, in the Spartan, Albigensian, and Hutterite enclaves—was racially and nationally open and was a broad, rich, lively and motley affair. It gives every indication of not having experienced

either the pervasive guilt-neurosis which seems to characterize quasi-manichean conservative groups like the Hutterites, or the anxiety-neurosis typical of our own "open" or "pluralistic" society, The "schizoid man" whom Rollo May finds ubiquitous in modern society would also have been a rarity in the medieval milieu.

³²The social embryo out of which the new order would grow was the third estate, especially those segments of it that were bound up with commerce and industry. The "bearers of the industrial effort. . . . Craftsmen, artisans, traders, artists, free professions had an interest of their own that had nothing to do with or ran counter to theological and feudal forms" (J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: the Romantic Phase*, N.Y., 1960, p. 49).

³³Averroism had been sanguinely introduced at Padua by Pietro d'Albano (1250-1316). Two hundred years later the Averroist enthusiasm was still going strong under the direction of the many-sided Pomponazzi.

³⁴Bayle's *Pensées diverse* (1682) presented a case for the idea that a moral society can exist without religion. From this position it was a short and logical step to advocate secular education. Bayle's view was adopted at once by the early philosophes like La Mettrie and D'Holbach.

³⁵Ira O. Wade, *The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1971), p. 647.

¹⁴Prior to the Reformation the Church of the Middle Ages had already been weakened, of course, by the scandalous quarrels between Pope and Emperor.

¹⁵Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, translated by George Reavey (Cleveland & N.Y., 1962), p. 170.

¹⁶Voegelin, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-67.

¹⁷Erich Kahler, *The Meaning of History* (N.Y., 1964), p. 110.

¹⁸Voegelin, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁰Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 481.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 487.

²²A simple test for the political bias imparted by the public schools is to ask students to state a few of the classical arguments advanced in favor of aristocracy over democracy; the next words will be the instructor's. A related test is to ask for a discussion of Galileo's harrassment or of the phrase "Liberty, equality, fraternity." Even in our advanced state of deculturation a few students will hit close to the target; change the topics and *none* will know that Lavoisier—as great a scientist as Galileo—was guillotined for the heinous

crime of having been born with a title, or that there is a counterpart to the revolutionary tricolorists' slogan: the émigrés' motto, *Mon âme à Dieu, Ma vie au roi, L'honneur à moi*.

²³Balzac was the first unquestionably great creative writer of modern times to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the social-political architectonics of the modern world; because of his passion for fairness it is significant that he comes out squarely as an enemy of modernity and the secularist worldview. He dramatizes the whole panorama, from the death of the *ancien régime* to the years of Louis-Phillipe, with real "justice for all": his animadversions against the parvenu secularist order are thus well earned, not merely petulant or splenetic. In the dedication of *La Rabouilleuse* he notes that the way out of the new "society based on money values, on the glorification of success as an end to be obtained by fair means or foul" is through "the teachings of religion rather than those of a secular university."

²⁴R. Beum, "Facts, Fancies, and Faculty Handbooks," *Thought*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 189 (Summer, 1973).

Prosser Hall Frye:

Conservative Humanist

R. D. STOCK

No man may quarrel with his age with impunity. Contemporaries may be in error, but to break with them is not only to lose his one chance of spiritual catholicity and to invite material defeat; it is also to introduce a principle of infection into his own *morale*.

—P. H. Frye, "Jonathan Swift"

"IN PRIVATE conversation," writes Thomas M. Raysor of his colleague and friend Prosser Hall Frye, "the loneliness of his intellectual position sometimes betrayed him into defensive sarcasm, but as far as I can remember his conversation this was nearly always redeemed by the flashing zest of his wit and a kind of exuberant playfulness."¹ Whether Frye, in alerting us to a "principle of infection," was also admonishing himself cannot now be known. Certainly he quarreled with his age, and if, as Raysor suggests, this act failed ineradicably to smudge his soul, yet it partly accounts for his present neglect. To be sure, his most important book, *Romance and Tragedy* (1922) remains available in paperbound, and his other major volumes, *Literary Reviews and Criticisms* (1908) and *Visions and Chimeras* (1929) may be had in expensive hardbound reprints. His separate essays on Dryden, Shakespeare, Corneille and many others are still often cited in bibliographies, though his posthumous *Plato* has lapsed into obscurity. In view of the renaissance interest in his friend Paul Elmer More, the time is perhaps ripe

for a reconsideration of this less prolific but equally incisive critic.

Having received his A.M. from Trinity College in 1892, Prosser Hall Frye traveled west to the University of Nebraska, where he taught in the rhetoric department—then separate from the department of English literature—from 1896 till his death in 1934. He proceeded systematically through the ranks from instructor to adjunct, assistant, associate and full professor, and by 1910 was head of the department of rhetoric. The teaching of composition at all levels was his usual enterprise, although the old catalogues show that he also taught courses in modern English versification, theory of composition, English romanticism, literary criticism, the eighteenth century, and "comparative criticism" centering on the drama. In his last year he undertook a course in the "comparative study of classic and romantic tragedy." His pupils remember him as a vigorous but not uncompassionate teacher whose disheveled office, thick-strewn with books and student themes, contrasted sharply with the discipline and formality of his class-