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## **State-Run Schools: The New Caesaropapism**

**by Lawrence M. Ludlow**

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After two and a half years of the so-called war on terror, it is disturbingly clear that the attacks of 9/11 were the result of an immoral U.S. foreign policy and that the government's inability to prevent the attacks represents a massive and inexcusable failure.

Nonetheless, faith in government reached epidemic levels in the aftermath of 9/11. Instead of wholesale firings of public employees and a rethinking of government and its role in our lives, Americans passively accepted more of the same nonsense that spawned terrorism in the first place, while witnessing an erosion of liberties and legal protections against tyranny.

We justifiably demanded restitution from the corrupt leaders of WorldCom and Enron, who caused not a single fatality, but we remain silent about government misdeeds. Federal officials, like children, the senile, and the insane, are not held accountable for their actions, but we apply a different standard to private individuals. How can this be?

How — except by reference to a cult-like worship of the state — can we explain this weird disjunction between promise and performance, myth and reality?

To a great degree, the answer can be found by examining the role played by government-controlled schools in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of today's Americans.

### **The new caesaropapism**

In many ways, today's state-controlled schools have replaced caesaropapism — or state-controlled religion — as a means by which rulers enforce their hegemony over citizen-subjects. Historians may disagree about the degree to which caesaropapism

prevailed in medieval Europe or tsarist Russia, but it is nonetheless true that the ability to control ideas was a powerful weapon in the hands of rulers seeking to strengthen their grip on the people.

In medieval Europe, for example, secular rulers and church authorities had an ambivalent relationship: at times they cooperated but they frequently acted as independent, counterveiling forces to limit each other's power. When secular and religious authorities disagreed, citizens played them off against each other. When secular leaders dominated the religious hierarchy, however, they found it much easier to commit atrocities, pursue wars of aggression, and impose taxes to pay for these wars. During such periods, they depended on the clergy to reassure people that their policies were in harmony with God's will and should be obeyed without question, upon pain of eternal damnation for disobedience.

In the past several centuries, state-controlled educational institutions have replaced many religious foundations as centers of learning and of the inculcation of ideas. At the pinnacle of this trend, the 20th century furnished ample proof that state-controlled institutions of learning can be used to provide the stamp of approval for cruel schemes, including human experimentation and torture. The politically correct theories of "Aryan science," for example, were used to justify bizarre anatomical experiments in Germany and the creation of vast networks of prisons and concentration camps.

Even in the United States, human subjects were unknowingly subjected to the ravages of syphilis while researchers dutifully recorded the progress of the disease (the Tuskegee experiment). Without consent, others also were injected with plutonium (a Cold War program), administered hallucinogens (the CIA), and sprayed with bacterial agents (San Francisco Bay) as part of government-sponsored research. These are the fruits of an incestuous relationship between state-sponsored academics and politicians.

#### Playing games with terror

Some of the most devastating episodes in history were the result of an incestuous relationship between religious and secular authorities. Among these are the 12th-century crusades against Muslims, the 13th-century Albigensian crusade to exterminate heretics in southern France, and the 16th-century Spanish Inquisition in the Netherlands.

Similarly, two and a half years ago the president declared his intention to eradicate "evil doers" worldwide. Obeying his orders, American soldiers slaughtered thousands of defenseless noncombatants — from wedding parties to hapless children. They call it "collateral damage." Meanwhile, Osama bin Laden remains at liberty. At least the crusaders against the Albigensians achieved some of their misguided goal; George W.

Bush succeeded only in alienating much of the civilized world and inspiring a new generation of terrorists.

The president's zeal for "doing good," however, can be measured in other ways: while he and the military hierarchy were trivializing the horrors of war by issuing decks of "playing cards" depicting 55 Iraqi bad guys, they were responsible for killing tens of thousands of innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq — enough to create a deck of cards nearly 17 feet high. If we add the hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by sanctions levied against Iraq since 1991, the deck becomes significantly higher.

The point is that governments annually murder 100 times as many people as terrorists. Modern caesaropapism's death grip on the thinking process, however, guarantees that citizens remain blind to state-sponsored terrorism and other crimes committed by its minions.

#### Creating a cult in the classroom

It is not enough merely to define and identify modern cae-saropapism. It is just as important to discover how state-controlled schools came to dominate the American scene after the 1850s and how they helped to transform Americans into the passive and obedient beings they have become.

To begin, it is essential to understand that state-controlled schools are not a natural phenomenon. Instead, they represent a government takeover of vibrant, private-sector initiatives that were voluntarily funded by parents and willingly undertaken by children eager to learn. Furthermore, the state takeover of schooling, which began in Massachusetts during the 1850s, failed to improve the quality of learning. Even Sen. Edward Kennedy admits as much. In a paper released by his office, he acknowledged that the literacy rate in Massachusetts was 98 percent before compulsory education became law. Since that time, the literacy rate has fallen — never to exceed 91 percent again.

There is a vast difference between the lifelong process of learning and what goes on in state-run schools. In fact, state schools serve a purpose very different from mere learning: they serve to mold minds and create obedient subjects. Over the centuries, this purpose has been expressed in various ways. For Martin Luther, writing in the 1524, the purpose of state schools was "warring with the devil" — in other words, learning to guard against Catholics, Jews, infidels, and Protestants who held views different from Luther's.

John Dewey, whose thoughts on public education were used as a blueprint for schools in the United States, expressed his disdain for independently acquired knowledge in his book *The School and Society*:

The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning.

It was not surprising that after visiting the Soviet Union a few years after Stalin solidified his grip on that nation's throat, Dewey openly praised the educational system he found there in his 1929 book, *Impressions of Soviet Russia*:

The Russian educational situation is enough to convert one to the idea that only in a society based upon the cooperative principle can the ideals of educational reformers be adequately carried into operation.

That a man of Dewey's towering intellect could make this statement is a testament to his fallibility or his ruthlessness. Why?

Because Stalin's was clearly the bloodiest regime of the 20th century, claiming 42 million victims, according to R.J. Rummel (*Death by Government*). Only Mao Zedong (37 million victims) and Adolf Hitler (20 million) came even close to committing "democide" on this scale. Once we realize that state-run schools create and reinforce the habits of complacency and conformity — while instilling only the most rudimentary skills as a way to justify their existence — we can understand why a cult-like obedience to the state is so firmly entrenched and why it is so dangerous.

#### Indoctrination and conformity

Instead of promoting the separation of school and state as a concept vital to a free society (the modern corollary of separation of church and state), conservatives and liberals alike have sponsored the contamination of the learning process to achieve social-engineering goals.

The result is a system of doctrinal inculcation reminiscent of the dystopia depicted by George Orwell in the novel 1984. Widespread acceptance of the mindless slogan "United We Stand" is an indicator of this change. To a skeptical mind, this phrase is an attempt by cowardly politicians and their adherents to hide themselves in a crowd — using other citizens as "human shields" to protect them from the violent blowback directed against the American empire and its expansionist foreign policy. It pretends that no other viewpoint exists. Even worse, it is not so much an appeal to unity as a demand for conformity — substituting blind nationalism for a shared devotion to freedom.

Liberals must understand that the state's near-monopoly control of the educational process has arrested the development of children as free moral agents. Instead of

producing genuinely thoughtful and caring citizens who cherish key aspects of decent human behavior such as the libertarian prohibition on the initiatory use of force, the educational system churns out partial automatons. They can spit back the latest political slogans on command but they are unable to utilize the faculty of reason to arrive at a deep understanding of what it means to not harm others. They are unable to treat others with the respect that is due to beings who are “ends in themselves” (just as *they* are) instead of objects to be used against their will.

Moreover, they do not value integrity of thought, which requires a working knowledge of valid and invalid argument forms. These tools of thinking and peaceful living cannot be nurtured in an atmosphere where the goals of the current regime are given primacy.

Furthermore, it is difficult for students to absorb important moral lessons as long as they are inextricably linked to the hypocrisy and brutality inherent in the tax-based funding mechanism that lies at the heart of state-run schools. This mechanism requires nothing less than the coerced submission and victimization of one set of human beings by a powerful special-interest group comprising teachers’ unions, politicians, and parents.

No collection of good intentions, excuses, or exception-making can outweigh this violation. When you tax, you steal, especially when the money taken is to be used to feather someone’s personal nest. When you initiate aggressive war, you murder. When you lust after and plan to seize foreign oil, you covet.

### Separating school and state

The system of state-funded, state-run schools places a huge developmental roadblock in front of children. It blocks intellectual development because its content is politically determined and it sidesteps the benefits of market competition. It blocks moral development because the corrupt funding mechanism of universal taxation (instead of voluntary fees and donations) is a study in hypocrisy that undermines moral development by its bad example.

Halfway measures such as magnet schools and vouchers do nothing to remove the rot at the heart of this approach. While retaining a tax-based funding mechanism, magnet schools simply siphon off one group of students into a target location, leaving the rest to rot in the bowels of an unworkable system. School vouchers may be even more insidious. Like magnet schools, they do nothing to eliminate the immoral funding mechanism, and they cause further damage by coopting those few honest and independent parents who have taken financial responsibility for their children by enrolling them in private institutions or engaging in home-schooling. In effect, they corrupt America’s most

desirable parents — making them part of the sordid system of government-run schools and placing their children under the thumb of the state.

The proposals of liberals and conservatives carefully avoid the only solution that solves both the moral and performance-related challenges presented by state control of schools: total separation of school and state. Instead, their false solutions mirror a trend that has become obvious to impartial observers. The fact is that both liberals and conservatives — when handed the levers of power — seem unwilling to promote *any* movement in the direction of liberty and morality. Instead, once they have a controlling majority, they focus their energy on legislation that increases the power of the state in a direction that they favor instead of dismantling existing programs that they oppose.

For example, although the liberal President Clinton declared that the era of big government was over, he had attempted a takeover of health care, increased the level of surveillance on Americans, and continued the interventionist foreign policy that led to the 9/11 disaster.

Similarly, despite having congressional dominance in the mid 1990s, conservative Republicans failed to reduce government spending in any significant way, and instead larded America with social-engineering legislation and pork-barrel defense spending.

The hostility to liberty shown by federal and state governments is only a mirror of the low esteem in which true freedom is held by many Americans. Having graduated from state-run slogan factories, Americans have no philosophical grounding in the importance of liberty and its intrinsic connection to morality.

Furthermore, large segments of the population do not even possess the thinking tools by which to lift themselves out of this condition. Even those who are well educated usually limit their use of high-level thinking to professional tasks in the workplace. They never apply these thinking skills to the political and moral environment that surrounds them. This failure to question, to assess, and to measure the social fabric in which they live is the ongoing legacy of state-controlled schooling — the new caesaropapism.

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