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# *Christian Schools in a Pluralistic Society?*

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**ABSTRACT:** The central question of this article is whether separate Christian schools are defensible in a pluralistic liberal democracy. This question is answered from the perspective of Christian parents and based on the premise that these parents want to send their children to separate Christian schools. We argue that Christian education and separate Christian schools can be compatible with civic education of children towards a liberal democratic citizen, but that for some Christian communities this will not be easily achieved.

**KEYWORDS:** Christian education, civic education, separate Christian schools, interreligious schools, public schools, (ultra-) orthodox Christians, liberal Christians, critical thinking, conception of the good.

## *Introduction*

Most countries in Western Europe have changed from uniform into pluralistic societies, in which many different cultural groups have to find new ways of coexistence. The Netherlands is an interesting example, because our country has changed radically from one kind of pluralistic society into another. From the beginning of this century on, our society was totally segregated along denominational and world view lines. This division, that we in Holland call *pillarization*, resulted in an almost complete separation between the diverse groups having their own organizations and institutions. Due to the influences of secularization and individualization, during the 1960s and 1970s the depillarization of the Dutch society began. The overall impact of the church diminished in public and political life, and many organizations merged across denominational lines. Simultaneously with the increasing intracultural plurality, the Dutch society became more plural because of the immigration of people from other cultures.

In our pillarized society our school system was differentiated along denominational lines as well. Protestant children went to Protestant

schools, Roman catholic children to Roman catholic schools, and children of socialistic parents to public schools. This freedom of choice is considered highly important in our country. Parents have a constitutional right to send their children to the school they prefer. They even have the constitutional right to found a school on denominational grounds. With the increase of other cultures, differentiation of denomination schools also expanded resulting in for instance Hindu schools and Islamic schools. Thus, it is still common practice that children of specific denominations go to schools of their denomination. This increase of separate denominational corresponds to the segregated society we were. Is this still a defensible system in our new pluralistic society, where different capacities and norms are demanded from citizens?

This question can be answered from different angles. In this article we will describe the stance Christian parents in this pluralistic society could take. To be able to answer this normative question thoroughly, we will use the first part of this article for analysis and description. Only in the last section will we explicitly describe our own point of view regarding the question. First we will deal with the more general issue of education in a pluralistic society as this forms the context of the question of this article. Second, we will describe aims of civic education. Third, we will illustrate the aims of Christian education with the proposals of some Christian philosophers of education. Fourth, we will discuss the relation between the mentioned Christian educational aims and the given civic educational aims. Finally, we will focus on the way in which the schools can be organized in a pluralistic society. We will especially address the options of a segregational school system, interreligious school system, and a totally public school system.

At the end of this introduction, we must mention the restrictions of the scope of this article. First, this article is written from a pedagogical point of view. Second, we will mainly consider one institution in which Christian education can take place, namely the school. Next to the school, the family, and the church also provide Christian education. Though the family is undeniably the most important environment for Christian education, the question of Christian education in a pluralistic society is likely to be most pregnant in the school. Third, we will focus on the primary school. This is a purely pragmatic choice. Due to reasons of the length of this article, we cannot deal with all levels of education. And especially the justification of Christian primary schools is different

from Christian secondary schools. Finally, as this topic is clearly normative in nature, we must reveal our own convictions. In regard to our religious conviction we consider ourselves liberal Protestant. As for our political ideas, we welcome the plurality of our society and presume that a liberal democracy provides the best possibilities for plurality.

### *Education in a Pluralistic Society*

Education in a pluralistic society should consist of two elements, namely initiation into a specific conception of the good, consisting of values and ideals, which is either religious or nonreligious (see De Ruyter & Miedema, 1996), and initiation into the public tradition of citizenship in a liberal democratic society. The first is distinctive for each child or group of children, the second is common for all. These two elements are the subject of the following two sections.

#### *Initiation into a Specific Conception of the Good*

Initiation in a coherent primary culture is necessary for the development of a child's identity. A child needs values and ideals with which it can identify, or which it can reject in the formation of her or his identity. Though at a later age the child can (should) be stimulated to think critically about the (belief)tradition she or he was raised in, in order to make a choice for herself or himself whether the child upholds the belief or not, a stable ground to jump from is necessary. So, the child has to be raised within a situation in which parents and teachers hold values and ideals, live according to them, and share those with the child. Within a pluralistic society it is even more important that children are provided with a framework within which they can form their identity. A lack of relatively stable convictions combined with an excess of choices will impair one's ability to make choices (see Frankfurt, 1993, p. 19).

Though no pedagogue or developmental psychologist will reject the necessity of a stable primary culture, the extent of the primary culture can be debated. We think there are two reasons for including religion in the primary culture. The first is more pragmatic, the second more fundamental. Parents have a right to freedom of religion (which of course does not in itself imply the right to educate their children religiously) and thus, they have a right to practice this religion as well. They go to church, pray, read the bible, and so on. If religion has to be excluded from the primary culture, this implies that children are shut

out of these practices. Instead of being a tie, faith forms a crack in the family. Thus, in religious families, religion is to be considered part of the primary culture (cf. McLaughlin, 1994). The second reason is the one already given. Religion, in whatever form, gives a meaning to life. It provides ideals, values that one can live up to. As children need ideals and values to start a meaningful life, these should be offered by the parents. These can of course be of various kinds, though as Christians with a more humble stance will say: the Christian ideals and values are not among the worst to be educated in.

#### *Civic Education*<sup>1</sup>

Civic education is necessary for a flourishing pluralistic society (Tamir, 1995; Walzer, 1995). In a pluralistic society the interaction between different groups having specific ways of life and values and norms is not easy. A communication based on respect is only possible if citizens keep the necessary rules and hold certain norms. These rules and norms are learned within civic education. In the following we will describe what we think are the most important aims. These aims are based on the idea that a fair pluralistic society is a liberal democratic society.

First, children should acquire knowledge about the way in which a democratic society functions and the laws that underlie it (see Walzer, 1995). Children must know their rights and duties as a citizen of a democratic society. With this, children should also learn to be able to reflect on the laws, practices, and attitudes, for a democratic society can only function properly if the citizens play a constructive and critical role. In learning the laws that underlie a democracy children learn the principles and rules of public morality. Of course, they not only have to know these, they also have to acquire the disposition to keep those rules. Public morality in a liberal democracy consists of basic rules and basic rights. Basic rules are the necessary foundation of every liveable community and society. In order to be able to live well together, people have to follow basic rules like: not to steal, not to murder, to help people in distressing situations if the costs are not detrimental to the helper's situation. Basic rights are constitutive of a liberal democracy. They include the classical civil liberties, for instance the right to freedom of speech or the right not to be discriminated against as well as the basic political democratic rights, like the right to vote and the right to run for public office (cf. Spiecker & Steutel, 1995).

Second, children have to learn to tolerate and respect other people who have different values and traditions (see Tamir, 1995). Children have to learn to respect others as equals in their being members of the political system. This means that children must learn that in the eye of the state all citizens are equal and that they, as citizens, should also take that stance. Children also have to learn that having respect is restricted. Only opinions and beliefs that are reasonable<sup>2</sup> and meet the standards of public morality deserve respect.

Third, children must be taught that critical thinking and public argument are the appropriate means of political justification (Macedo, 1995). Like Tamir, Macedo strictly separates the public, political terrain from the private.<sup>3</sup> He holds that educators must realize (and teach the children) that critical thinking is necessary for political reasonableness and good citizenship and that questions of religious truth should be left aside. Religious differences must be respected (1995, p. 226).

Thus, in civic education children are taught public principles and to understand, tolerate and have respect for citizens having different conceptions of the good. They have to share the commitment to have a fair culturally and religiously plural society and thus keep the basic principles of public morality. This commitment is necessary for a just society in which people with different traditions live in solidarity.

### *Christian Education*

The term 'Christian education' is not univocal. In this article the term refers to the practice of assisting children to acquire and deepen Christian beliefs, attitudes, values, and the dispositions to act in a Christian way.

Dealing with the aims of Christian education in general is almost an impossible task if one does not want to stay at a too abstract level. As stated in the introduction of this article, the Netherlands is not only plural in terms of its interreligious differences, but also in terms of its intrareligious differences.<sup>4</sup>

I will start with a description of general Christian educational aims, which are highly formal, and thus probably valid for all Christian educators. In fact, they are formulated in such general terms that an exchange of the adjective 'Christian' into another religion is unproblematic: a) Christian beliefs – that, understanding and knowledge; b) Christian beliefs – in; c) Christian attitudes and values; d) Christian emotions and feelings; e) Christian experiences; f)

Christian moral actions; g) Christian religious actions; h) Christian theological reflection and criticism (Astley, 1994b, p. 106). As stated, this list is highly formal and thus not very informative. To give a list that is more specific in content is highly subjective and will differ from community to community. As an illustration of the wide range of possibilities we will describe three views, one of orthodox Christians,<sup>5</sup> one of liberal Christians and one of a middle position.

An example of an orthodox Christian opinion can be found in the right-wing Reformed churches in Holland. Aarnoudse (1994), for instance, describes following the characteristics of a Reformed school. This school is based on the Holy Scripture as the infallible word of God and the Three Forms of Unity. With this he considers it of the utmost importance that teachers know and children learn the creeds. These creeds are born out of inner force, led by the Holy Spirit. They form a pure summary of the Word of God. The aim of education flows from this foundation. This includes teaching children to set their hopes on God: They should not forget His deeds and should keep His commandments. The aim of Reformed education must be to be a means in God's hand, so that children come to the right relationship with God, through the belief in Jesus Christ. The power of Reformed education should lie in the power of God's spirit (pp. 86-89).

In the orthodox Christian community critical thinking or open-mindedness is considered as undermining the child's faith. Thus, these capacities are not regarded as aims of Christian education. They will say that they underwrite the eighth aim of Christian education of the list just given. But we think it is correct to say that they will take a fully critical stance towards outsiders, but that it is highly restricted when it comes to internal criticism. A totally different stance is taken by liberal Christian educators. They claim that critical thinking is included in Christian education. Astley, for instance, states that the Christian tradition is itself creative, reconstructive and self-transforming. In his opinion: "the true message of the gospel, passed on with the rest of the Christian tradition, thus provokes and catalyzes our critical reformation of that tradition" (1994a, p. 93).<sup>6</sup>

Another philosopher of religious education who argues for critical openness is John Hull.<sup>7</sup> A critically open person is able to think for herself or himself, is open to the call of reason, and finally has the disposition of humility, meaning "able to recognize that there is something to be learned and that it may be worth learning" (Hull, 1994,

p. 254). Hull claims that critical openness is encouraged in the Old and New Testament by the prophets and by Jesus; the critical spirit of testing is advocated throughout the Bible. There are two essential components of critical openness, namely "an attentive (loving) receptivity to the wondrous world that is in principle without limits" and "the will and the skill to distinguish the true from the merely plausible" (p. 268). Hull takes his ideas of the limits of critical openness quite far. According to him the entire content of Christian faith can be subdued under critical openness.

Thiessen, an avowed Christian, argues for an orthodox Christian liberal education.<sup>8</sup> He adheres to the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith but states that he does so "in a rational, open-minded manner, humbly acknowledging that I may be wrong, and respecting those who differ from me" (1996, pp. 295-296). In his view education should combine teaching for commitment (= teaching into a religion) with the encouragement of respect for others who differ, and an awareness of human fallibility and finiteness. In his book *Teaching for Commitment* (1993) he describes several suggestions Christian parents and teachers could follow. We want to mention some of these concerning the teacher. "The Christian parent and teacher, as well as the Christian church and school, will [therefore] boldly and openly initiate and socialize into the Christian tradition" (p. 253); "The goal of Christian parents and teachers for Christian nurture should be both Christian commitment and normal autonomy" (p. 255) "they [the children] will be taught and nurtured toward an eventual 'independent' choice for or against Christian commitment" (p. 257); "Christian parents and teachers should actively promote cognitive growth with respect to the Christian faith" (p. 259).

Christian schools should offer a broad curriculum, initiating students into all the traditional forms of knowledge, thus satisfying the breath requirement of liberal education. However, each of these forms of knowledge can and should be interpreted as a revelation of God's truth. (p. 267)

We want to end this section with our own stance. Christian education aims to educate the whole person, including her or his critical powers. Thus, Christian education implies raising children into mature persons who can decide for themselves which conception of the good they strive after in their lives. This does not imply that Christian parents are not allowed to set their hopes on their child becoming a Christian adult. This stance is beautifully described by Rabbi Fleg who wrote a letter to



his grandson ending as follows: "Will you accept my faith and pass it on to your children? You might want to give up the faith. If you would do so, let it be for a greater truth. If that exists" (Ter Linden, 1996, p. 113).

### *Christian Education and Civic Education*

Having described civic education and Christian education separately the question now arises to what extent Christian education and civic education are compatible.

The answer to this question of course fully depends on the position one holds in Christian education. For liberal Christian educators, like Astley and Hull, there is no conflict in their aims of Christian education and civic education. In their view critical thinking is an inherent aim of Christian education as well as virtues like toleration, humility, and respect. In this view Christian education is compatible with or adjusted to the new situation of a pluralistic society governed by liberal democratic principles. Also for orthodox-liberal Christian educators like Thiessen common civic education is compatible to their Christian education.

Orthodox Christians seem to have more problems. Civic education can be in tension with their Christian educational viewpoints. We will give two examples. A first incompatibility can arise in relation to the teaching of the liberal democracy's basic rights. For instance, some see the emancipation of women as highly problematic and opposing the bible. They argue against the view that inequality of women in public positions is discriminatory. Girls, in their view, should be taught the capacities and dispositions they need for their future position as a mother and housewife, thus certainly not those of a career-striving, political person. A more problematic point is the demand on citizens to be respectful. Though orthodox Christian educators will teach their children the virtue of tolerance, respect for others sets up higher demands. Respect implies minimally that the stance of other persons is taken seriously, that one is willing to investigate its merit as well as that of one's own conviction. This in their view will be a step too far: The Christian tradition is the only right one. These persons will take a strategy different from that of liberal Christian educators. They will close themselves from society.<sup>9</sup>

Both these answers are given from the Christian perspective. We think it is also desirable to describe an outsider's view, because Christians could be biased in favour of the compatibility of Christian

education and civic education. Strongly desiring Christian education to be defensible in a pluralistic society could make us blind to some objections. Some liberals and libertarians claim that parents do not have the right to raise their children within a specific (religious) tradition, because the aim of education is autonomy. Education within a religious tradition can threaten a child's development into an autonomous person, because the child will be biased from an early age (see for instance Callan, 1985; Gardner, 1988). Exclusive religious education also hinders the child to learn about the diverse opportunities of a plural society. Therefore, these philosophers argue that parents have no right to raise their children religiously (for a discussion of these issues see Snik & De Jong, 1994). Against this standpoint many arguments have been brought forward. For example, it is argued that initiation into a tradition is a necessary step for critical thinking: One has to have a content about which one can be critical, being critical about nothing is impossible. Initiation is also argued to be necessary from a psychological point of view: children are not able to reflect critically about subjects until a later age. Finally, one could claim, as we did in the second section, that it is pedagogically necessary: children need a stable primary culture, a firm ground while being young. Only when children are older, it is responsible for encouraging children to be critical about the things they take for certain.

In conclusion, as we have already stated in the second section, Christian education in a pluralistic society should be complemented by and not be in contradiction with civic education and the values of public morality. These two elements can be interpreted as two separate spheres with separate demands. As already stated, it is defended that civic education teaches the child to think critically about the public morality though not necessarily about his or her private morality. Hull fiercely disapproves of this stance:

Since the young Christian is now given to understand that he or she may think for him or her self in every area except that which is expected to be his or/her deepest commitment. Such a policy will not attract worthwhile young people for more than a few years, nor will it deserve to. (1994, p. 259)

On the other hand, ultra-orthodox Christian educators will reject the commitment to liberal democratic plurality. This is a conclusion with regard to content. But what answer can be given concerning the school system?

*Primary Schools in a Pluralistic Society*

Three possibilities come to mind for a school system in a pluralistic society: a segregational school system (separate religious schools and public schools), interreligious schools in combination with public schools, and public schools for all children. These options can be distinguished at three points.

First, although in all three options the specific conceptions of the good of children can be respected, it is respected differently in these options. In a system of segregated schools the pluralism of society is a characteristic of the system, not necessarily of a particular school (Walzer, 1995, p. 185). In public schools, as well as in interreligious schools, the pluralism of conceptions of the good is a characteristic of the school itself.

Second, (inter)religious schools<sup>10</sup> and public schools differ in respect to the way in which religious education is approached. For this difference we can refer to a distinction between two types of religious education, namely teaching into versus teaching about. Characteristic of teaching about Christianity is that Christianity is offered as a scholarly topic without any evangelical intentions of the teacher. The teacher deals with the topic in as neutral a way as possible and teaches her or his pupils about the Christian tradition, the bible, the rituals, and even about the Christian morality. Though complete neutrality is impossible, we can say that when a teacher teaches about Christianity, the teacher does not have the intent to stress the unique values of Christianity. She or he takes a more descriptive than prescriptive stance. In this interpretation teaching Christianity can be compared to teaching languages: teaching English or German is not teaching to become an Englishman or a German, but acquiring knowledge about the country and its history and skills to speak the language (cf. Holley, 1994; Sealey, 1994). When religious education is thought of as teaching about several religions, it is of course possible to implement this subject into the curriculum of all schools, like history and geography. In fact, every primary school in Holland is obliged to teach their pupils about the major religions or world views. Characteristic of teaching into Christianity is that the teacher or parent has the intention that the child becomes a committed Christian adult. This is explicitly not neutral. On the contrary, the educators think that the religion they are teaching the child into is the best and most worthwhile and they hope the child will share this opinion.<sup>11</sup> In public schools religious education

is conceived as teaching about and in interreligious schools as teaching into.

Third, the options differ in respect to the distinction between small identity and broad identity (Miedema, 1994). In the case of small identity the specific religious identity of a school can be located only in religion-related practices such as worship, assemblies, and religious education. In such a school children are taught into the specific religion, but religion is not permeated through the whole school, for instance in the pedagogical stance of the teachers, and the sphere of the school. In schools where this is the case, we speak of broad identity. This distinction is useful for the difference between Christian schools and interreligious schools. Where in Christian schools broad identity is in principle and in practice unproblematic, this is not the case in interreligious schools.

Typical of a system in which schools are separated on basis of world-views is that the religious schools are free to teach the children into the relevant religion. Hence there is a plurality in options of schools out of which every one can make a choice.

Though this system is at first glance the most comfortable for Christian educators, it is not without demands. They at least have the duty to make the school a distinctive religious school. For Christian schools this means that they should educate the children within a Christian tradition, thus ideally Christianity must be part of the broad identity of the school.<sup>12</sup> Teachers in such a school must be able to give a Christian answer to questions of the meaning of life and the purpose of knowledge. The Christian way of life must dominate. If Christianity is only visible in the small identity of the school, it must clearly be presented as teaching into and not teaching about.

The first advantage of separate schools is that there is a coherence between the tradition in which the children are nurtured in the family and in which they are taught in the school. In our opinion, children of primary school age have an interest in a coherence<sup>13</sup> of the primary culture they are raised in at home and the primary culture of the school. This assumption needs empirical evidence, but knowledge about the difficulties of children growing up in two totally different cultures leads us to this conclusion. Though coherence can be guaranteed in other kinds of schools as well, in Christian schools this is obviously the case. The second advantage is that a conception of the good is explicitly present in such a school. The third advantage concerns the parents and

the communities. In a system of segregated schools parents have a possibility to send their children to schools in which children are influenced into the direction of their preference. As education in schools is a continuation of nurture in the family, parents naturally want to have a say in that as well. Specific religious schools give them the option to choose the framework they want their children to be raised in. Thus, next to pedagogical considerations they can also bring in religious considerations.

There are several possible disadvantages of a segregational school system mentioned in the literature (e.g. Hirst, 1985; Snik & de Jong, 1995). One of these is that educating a child within a specific religion is incompatible with the aim of autonomy. It will restrict the choice of the children by confining the influence of other religions present in society. If in a pluralistic society it is in a child's interest to become autonomous, then religious schools are detrimental to the child's interest. Another disadvantage mentioned is that separate schools can lead to a fragmented, segregated society of fairly closed groups, which diminishes the integration of groups into an open democratic society. This was of course the situation in our pillarized society and it was thought of as favourable in those years. But the decline of the pillars has emancipated people, and autonomy instead of heteronomy has become the aim of education.

The second option is a middle position between segregated schools and public schools, namely a combination of interreligious schools and public schools. Andree, a Dutch theologian, argues that all groups in society who think that spirituality in education is important should establish interreligious schools. "This should be done in true dialogue, with respect for each group's uniqueness, searching for connections in the realization of our human dignity and our mutual responsibility to lay a new foundation for a truly humane multi-religious society" (1995, p. 30, translation provided by author).

In interreligious schools several religions are prevalent and the intention of those schools can be described as a multiple teaching into a specific religion. All the children of a specific religion are to be taught into that religion. Thus, there are several specific teachings into the religions present in the school. But simultaneously the teaching into for one specific group of children must be presented to the other children as teaching about. This immediately shows the problem of interreligious schools. A school in which religion is educated separately is better

described as segregated education within one building. In a truly interreligious school children have to engage with each other in the specific religious practices, traditions, and opinions, where some children at that moment taught are into that religion while others are only taught about it. One might opt for another kind of interreligious education where the main ideas that are similar to all the religions present in the schools form the content of religious education. This however is problematic if one takes diversity seriously. Another problem concerns the broad identity of such a school. It is impossible in an interreligious school that implements all the present religions fully into the school to have a coherent broad identity. In such a school religious education cannot be but part of the small identity of the school.

Interreligious schools must comprise at least two religions. In the Netherlands there is one officially acknowledged interreligious school in which the Islamic and Christian faiths are prominent. The extent of the religions is dependent on the population of the school and the compatibility of the religions. We could think of a Hindu, Islamic, and Christian interreligious school. The religions the children are taught into and about are the religions of the children present.

Interreligious schools have several advantages. In our view one of the major advantages is that children learn from a young age on to live and work with children with other faiths. Andree (1995) claims that segregated schools lead to segregation and hampers the integration of a generation who has to give form to its future in a new society. Moreover, the children experience very closely what the other religions mean to the other children. The second advantage is that the religion of the children is explicitly recognized. A third advantage can be defined from a more general viewpoint: In a society that is becoming more secularized, religious education in schools is harder to justify. By working together in interreligious schools, groups of parents who want to have their children educated within a specific religion can guarantee that the education into a specific religion that would otherwise disappear in schools has a good chance of survival.

As for the disadvantages, we have already mentioned some problems. These can be seen as a challenge, but also as a disadvantage, because it is highly questionable whether these problems can be solved. An interreligious school that wants to avoid the trap of segregated education within one building, demands a lot of (intellectual) capacities of children as well as of teachers. John Hull has however shown that it

is possible to educate children interreligiously from Kindergarten age on. He has developed an interesting curriculum for interreligious education in which the children of a particular faith are indeed taught into the religion whereas children of another faith are only taught about it.<sup>14</sup> The second disadvantage concerns the realizability of such a school. Interreligious schools are only valid if there are children as well as teachers of the specific faiths the school wants to represent. The mentioned Dutch interreligious school has for instance a problem finding Islamic teachers.

In public schools the approach to faith is different. It is explicitly not faith oriented. It is however plural in character. Because no child can be refused admittance to a public school, these schools need to be aware of the diverse world views represented by the children visiting the school. Not one world view is to be directive for the process of introduction into cultural, moral, and religious meanings. The public schools are considered neutral regarding the diversity of world views.<sup>15</sup> This approach to the diverse religions or nonreligious conceptions of the good is one side of public schools. On the other side there is a strong accent on the education of common matters (McLaughlin, 1995). Unlike the approach in the matter of diversity in world view matters, the obtaining of common values and so on is striven after in a non-neutral way.

The major advantage of public schools is the same advantage as we mentioned for the interreligious schools. Children learn to live and work with children with other faiths and world views. Being respectful and tolerant is brought into the arena immediately, so that it is not an intellectual but a real-life undertaking. As McLaughlin argues,

Public schools will be well placed to educate children with regard to the shared values and sensibility needed for a stable and just democratic political and civic order, and to combat the various forces which threaten this .... With regard to diversity, the public school may play a major role in fostering respect and understanding. (1995, p. 244)

The major disadvantage of public schools for Christian education is that these schools are not faith oriented, by which Christian education as it was defined ceases to exist. A problem that McLaughlin mentions for public schools is that these schools have to teach their pupils a kind of moral bilingualism, and to teach them to be conscious of this. The schools have to find the right kind of openness to diversity and guard that the children do not confuse the civic respect they in principle owe to others as citizens and the respect they owe to the specific views of

others. That is, they have to learn that persons as citizens should be treated respectfully and as equals which does not mean that they have to respect the views these persons take. These public schools also have to take care that the children are able to make a connection "between 'public' moral language and the 'non-public' moral language of pupils if they are not to become schizophrenic (1995, p. 250).<sup>16</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Which option is favourable for Christian parents? Having said that Christian education is valuable for and in the interest of Christian children and parents and that it is not (necessarily) against the interest of a liberal democratic state, public schools are not the best option for Christian parents. Not in the least because in public schools Christian education cannot take place in the way we described Christian education. Of course one could argue that Christian nurture in the family is sufficient, thus that Christian education at schools is not necessary for the development of children into committed Christians. This is defensible, but if parents can choose for schools in which their religion is explicitly endorsed, we think the parents would favour these. In Christian schools their children are educated into the religion in which they raise their children at home and the values and norms they themselves hold will be brought into the school as well. For other advantages we would like to refer to the ones we mentioned in the above section.

As for the choice between interreligious schools and segregated Christian schools, we think that for many Christian parents this will be less a choice of principle than of practice. The most important advantages regarding Christian schools are also valid for interreligious schools. They are, therefore, from a Christian point of view both defensible. This of course presupposes that the problems we have mentioned for interreligious schools can be solved.

We have written in the introduction that this article focuses on the stance of Christian parents, but we will end with a remark about the extent of the options of Christian parents. From the perspective of ultra-orthodox parents, separate Christian schools corresponding to their faith are favourable. But there is a limit. As we have already stated several times, education in a pluralistic society must consist of two elements, one of which is civic education. Not only can one say from the perspective of the state that civic education must be brought into these



schools as an obligatory subject. But also from the perspective of the child, who has an interest in civic education as a future citizen of a liberal democratic society, we must say that civic education is required in every Christian school. In our opinion both these interests override the interest of ultra-orthodox parents to have their children educated in ultra-orthodox schools. We can only endorse (ultra-)orthodox schools if in these schools civic education is implemented and taken seriously.

We think that three arguments can be offered for this position. The first is that parents do not and should not have the exclusive responsibility in the education of children. The state has interests in its children becoming democratic citizens. As this interest is fundamental, that is, as a liberal democracy is only possible with liberal democratic citizens, the state can claim educational responsibility. Additionally, as the state should act *in loco parentis* if parents do not educate their children according to the children's interest, the state can claim it can oblige schools to give civic education because of the child's interest.

Secondly, we underwrite the following argument by Amy Gutmann: "The same principle that requires a state to grant personal and political freedom also commits it to assuring children an education that makes those two freedoms both possible and meaningful in the future" (1987, p. 30).

Finally, we want to offer an argument given by Spinner (1994). Spinner makes a distinction between partial citizenship and full citizenship. In answering whether children should be obliged to be educated in liberal values we should examine the way in which the community is related to society. Is it separating itself from society almost completely, like for instance the Amish community, or does the community take part in democratic processes and make use of societal and democratic possibilities? He claims that communities that do not have any intention in participating in our civil society – communities that in his words do not want to be accorded the full respect and dignity that comes with full citizenship – that do not become involved in the political process, nor rely on the institutions of civil society, cannot be forced by the liberal state to embrace liberalism. However, this reference to partial citizenship does not apply to many communities. They are politically active and try to influence public opinion, laws and regulations and thus make use of means based on liberal morality. In this case, the children of that community should be obliged to learn liberal civic virtues. As the children will participate in the democratic

process, they have to know which rights they have as individual citizens and also which duties are laid upon them.

Concluding this article, we claim that separate Christian schools are defensible in a liberal democracy, but only if in these schools the values of a liberal democracy are endorsed. We think that most Christian schools will meet this obligation. Only the ultra-orthodox Christians will have a problem. But we believe that they cannot turn their backs on the arguments just given. We hope they take the challenge to engage in a reasonable and rational discussion about the justifiability of Christian schools that do not meet the interests of their children nor the society they participate in.

#### NOTES

1. According to Rawls, citizens in a liberal democratic society should have two moral powers. The first is having a capacity for a sense of justice, that is the capacity to understand, to apply, and normally be moved by an effective desire to act from the principles of justice as the fair terms of social cooperation. The second is having a capacity for a conception of the good, that is the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally pursue such a conception (1993, p.19). From this one could argue that civic education comprises education within a conception of the good. However, the state must take a neutral stance against the content of this conception. This should be left to the private communities. The only influence a state can claim is that a conception is offered.
2. Rawls describes three features of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, namely a) it is an exercise of theoretical reason; b) an exercise of practical reason; c) it belongs to, or draws upon, a tradition of thought and doctrine (1993, p. 59).
3. Political liberalism makes a strong distinction between the public and private sphere. Only values and capacities belonging to the public domain can be required of citizens. For a critical discussion of this distinction I would like to refer to an article by Amy Gutmann (1995).
4. What struck me again, however, while reading on Christian education from different backgrounds is that taking the Bible as one's source gives every position the possibility of claiming to have the right position. As much as I treasure the richness of Christian faith in that it speaks to that many different people, I also loathe the way in which it has lead and still leads to feelings of superiority and highly un-Christian fights.
5. More extreme examples can be found in proposals for Christian schools and Christian education by Christian fundamentalists.
6. He also gives a more pragmatic defense: "The church as a whole, however, desperately needs more critical education." (Astley, 1994a, p. 87). He states that "If Christianity is to survive and develop as a lifestyle and as a belief system into the twenty-first century it must undergo continual re-

formation spurred on by continual critical evaluation from within the household of faith" (p. 87).

7. Also Westerhoff seems to take a critical position according to Astley. In Astley's view Westerhoff suggests that "in learning the church's ways, ... we learn to liberate and re-form the world – and the church." (1994, p. 92).

8. This combination can also be found in an article by Edward Hulmes (1988, p. 88). He states that Christian education has three essential features:

- 1) it establishes faith in Jesus Christ as the foundation and guide for correct thinking and right action;
- 2) it is integrative, that is, it serves to harmonize elements which may otherwise tend to be fragmented in individuals in society;
- 3) it enables individuals to decide for themselves whether they will believe or not, by exercising their capacity for reason as well as faith.

9. This is for instance advocated by Aarnoudse. This stance can be respected in liberalism. Liberals can respect other cultures and see multiculturalism as a valuable tool for learning about others as well as about themselves. Yet for defenders of illiberal cultures such encounters are much less welcome, because they see those reflective ventures as threatening. Exposure to cultural exchanges is therefore not mutual (Tamir, 1995).

10. Interreligious schools must not be confused with interdenominational schools. In the last type of schools two or more Christian denominations are brought into the school, for instance the Protestant and Roman Catholic denomination.

11. The most obvious objection to teaching into Christianity is that it is indoctrinary. For reasons of space, I can only mention this problem. Indoctrination can be said to have four characteristics, namely a) the educator has to have the aim or intention to indoctrinate; b) the educator uses specific methods, for instance suppressing critical thinking and installing fear; c) the content of indoctrination is (religious) doctrines; d) the consequence is that the indoctrinated has irrational emotions, and is unable to think critically about the doctrines he or she believes in (see Spiecker & Straughan, 1991). Teaching into Christianity can be indoctrinary if this education can be characterized by the given characteristics. However, if critical thinking and open mindedness are characteristic of Christian education, Christian education is by definition not indoctrinary. (See for a discussion on Christian education and indoctrination E.J. Thiessen *Teaching for Commitment*, 1993).

12. In Holland some schools remain Christian in name, although in practice they are not Christian anymore.

13. We use the term 'coherence' instead of 'correspondence,' because we do not think it to be necessary that the religious ideas and ideals in the school are exactly the same as the one of the parents. The resemblance should however be greater than the differences. That is, the ideas and ideals must not contradict, but there is room for diversity.

14. In 1995 John Hull gave a lecture at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in which he described this method.

15. Neutrality can however be interpreted in two radically different ways (Miedema & De Ruyter, 1996). The first interpretation of neutrality can be described as 'passive neutrality.' In this conceptualization teachers must refrain from influencing pupils regarding conceptions of the good in any possible way. The conception of every pupil in the school is respected, and from the idea that this should be respected fully, the teacher is not allowed to influence the pupils with her or his conception of the good possibly being different from the pupils' conceptions. Thus, conceptions of the good that are specific in character are only brought into the school as a subject of knowledge, as a part of the subject-matter of the curriculum. The second conception of neutrality can be described as 'active neutrality.' In this conception the teachers must give attention to all the conceptions of the good that are prevalent within the school. By refraining from influencing the pupils with her or his own conception and by giving attention to the different conceptions of the pupils, respect is shown actively. Both interpretations of neutrality have, however, in common that they are not faith-oriented.

16. This is of course also a difficulty in Christian schools in which civic education is brought in.

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