

ETHICAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PRESENTED TO THE WASHINGTON ETHICAL SOCIETY

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OPENING WORDS

"Is it not ironic that in a planned society of controlled workers, given compulsory assignments, where the press is controlled and all media of communications censored, where a puppet government is encouraged but denied any real authority, where great attention is given to efficiency and character reports, and attendance at cultural assemblies is compulsory, where it is avowed that all would be administered to each according to his needs, but performance required from each according to his ability, and where those who flee are tracked down, returned and punished for attempting to escape; in short, in the milieu of the typical American school, we must teach children to be creative members of a democratic society."

-- Royce van Norman

ADDRESS

My purpose today is a little different from most Sundays. I want to place before you a specific proposal for your participation. I want to state the case for why we, as members of the Ethical Society, should take action to see that morality is taught in public schools.

I have a sense that this issue is not so much one that I have chosen, but that has chosen me. Continually over the last few years it has kept coming back to me, asking the question, are you going to do something? I began thinking about this when this Ethical Society was deliberating on whether we should have a high school here, and in trying to make that decision, I began to read Felix Adler and the people who founded the Ethical Society back in the 19th Century. They took the position that civilization depends on our learning how to teach ethics in schools, and they saw a need for Ethical Societies to start schools, to experiment and work in this area.

I was asked to do a keynote address at the 100th anniversary of the Philadelphia Ethical Society,

and they asked me to choose what I thought was a very important issue for Ethical Culture in the coming 100 years. There are so many things to choose from, but I surprised myself, and perhaps everyone else, by choosing this issue, morality in the schools, as one that was specifically important to Ethical Culture because of our unique position and heritage.

I also learned fairly quickly that I was not all alone in my interest in this topic. The State of Maryland formed a commission on values composed of liberals, conservatives and moderates, and they published a report of 40 or 50 pages long. I read that report, and I found out that either they were reading my addresses or my addresses sounded like they were based on their report.

Then some months ago I was on a radio program, and one of the other guests was Edd Doerr from Americans for Religious Liberty. Afterwards we had lunch and I started telling him, with some energy, about the research I had done on morality in the schools and how I thought it was important. He reached into his briefcase and began handing me articles which he has had published in recent months covering the same material, coming to some of the same conclusions I did. And we began to talk more.

Edd serves on many interreligious boards and he encouraged me that the views that I held were not all that unique. They were just not very publicized. He suggested that we could form a coalition to support the teaching of morality in schools among Catholics and Protestants and Jews and education groups, and that it was an idea that needed initiating.

So I'm coming today to ask you, should we do this? I'd like to state what the issues are, and at the end, ask for your response.

Let me begin by recalling the obvious, perhaps and that is how important schools are. When I look at my own development and personality, my life as it is now, I'd have to say that it was more influenced by my schooling than anything else, except perhaps my family. I recall that in ninth grade they offered a public speaking course which ended in a competition and I won the Edward J. Wheelan Cup. I wonder if that had anything to do with how I earn my living now.

Schools are the ladders on which I think our personalities grow, but also the ladders on which society grows. Schools train workers, certainly citizens, and ideally, human beings.

The greatest lever, I think, for creating a

future is education. Notice that societies that don't have education suffer from stagnation and starvation deriving from their illiteracy. Societies that have incomplete education fail in the economic and political competition in the world. And societies that fail to educate morally lose that common moral ideal, the common discipline that allows them to collectively face the major issues that history gives them.

In our time, we're talking about the fact that we're faced, in our nation and in other nations, with a deprived, very often hungry, poor, undereducated underclass, which is growing in the world and in our country. What kind of collective response do we have to that? I think without a moral ideal and moral discipline, we don't find a collective response.

How to combat war and oppression and what to do about it in our foreign policy? How to control pollution? How to use scarce resources? We can't deal with these problems in society without some kind of common morality.

Now to resolve questions through common action, we need a common language. Schools, I think, are the heart of our society. So I'm very concerned about the moral education that American children are getting.

Schools already teach morals. The Hastings Center for Ethics, in a 1980 report, concluded this: "Perhaps the strongest reason for teaching ethics is that moral values and ethical principles are being communicated in the classroom and in schools, in a casual, ad hoc form, not subject to standards."

The State of Maryland's Commission said: "There is, in fact, a hidden curriculum that strongly influences students. One must recognize that prejudice and stereotyping is heavily imprinted by the daily classroom experience. The question is not whether schools teach values, but how."

Think about the kind of hallway ethics that you learned in school, in the classroom culture and also in the kid culture. The opening quote dealt with the classroom culture, where authorities set the rules and resolve conflicts. It teaches students that their role is usually to beat the system, to be outside the system, as if the highest value is doing what you can get away with. I don't know if you think that fairly summarizes the kid culture. I think it does.

When your value system is founded on a conception of self pitted against society, then the traditional ethics, as religions know them, in which

ethical principles are designed so that the self and society can be creatively integrated; all of those principles do not follow.

Imagine if literature were taught by the grapevine -- that you had just word-of-mouth recommendations to great books. You could say well, religions have churches to teach morality. Or we have libraries, let them go to the library, without any teacher giving intelligent consideration to the content of literature. Well, that's how ethics is taught now.

The Maryland Commission writes: "Thus, there is an enormous vacuum. There is no common faith, no common body of principle, no common moral discipline. Yet the graduates of these modern schools are expected to form a civilized community. They are expected to govern themselves and they are expected to have a social conscience. We require children to take driving lessons, cooking and shop; they have to at least try out math, science, art, music and sports. But we let them have babies, jobs and run the country without any formal knowledge of ethics and morality."

So why isn't morality taught in schools? Well, the answer is that fundamentalist Christians are keeping it out. I'll defend that point.

In 1923, a National Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary and Educational Schools concluded: "The greatest need of our boys and girls is character education." In 1953, the National Education Association Report stated: "We must subordinate all other considerations to those concerns, moral and spiritual standards." In 1981 the Carnegie Foundation called for addressing in the schools the present condition of civic illiteracy.

In 1984, 27 of America's most renowned educators, representing liberals, conservatives, humanists and theists, signed a 30-page statement urging the teaching of ethics in the public schools. The Washington Post quoted from it: "Efforts to raise the academic quality of American schools are unlikely to have long-term effect unless the schools also take major steps to develop good character in their students."

Support is not limited just to educators. According to the Gallup Poll, 80 percent of parents responded Yes to this statement: "I support the instruction in the schools that deals with morals and moral behavior." Eighty percent support that.

Now you may believe that morals are not taught because of the problem of separation of church and state. Well, that's not so. And you may question whose

morals are going to be taught. We're so used to hearing about the differences in religious traditions -- we hear the debates over abortion and birth control and homosexuality and public school prayer and capital punishment -- the public is inclined to assume that there are irreconcilable differences between religions. But in fact, there is enormous agreement. Every religion has a code of ethics. They are remarkably similar.

The legislature in Maryland was concerned enough about the issue that they set up the commission I referred to to study: Is there a common ground, is there a way of teaching moral education without violating church and state? They assigned to this commission, formed in 1979, liberals and conservatives, fundamentalists, theists, humanists. For three years they disagreed, and finally in 1983 they produced their report. In it they unanimously recommend the teaching of 18 values in the public schools. An the values are such things like truth, honesty, justice, kindness, generosity, freedom of choice, freedom of speech, right to be an individual, equality, courage, duty to self, family, school, and democratic government. Not exactly controversial stuff.

The report addresses what principals should do, what school boards should do, what teachers should do, what curriculums should be about. It addresses virtually all the issues. The Post did a follow-up on what's happened since the report, and they found out that there isn't any school anywhere that has increased its emphasis on ethics.

They asked superintendents of schools in different counties why, and they replied: "Because of church antagonism. There is no public support out there. Nobody is clamoring for this, except the Maryland legislators. But as soon as we put anything in, we get a very strong fundamentalist response against it. We don't need this aggravation. We ignore it."

Now I'm not talking about vague public opinion. When I say that fundamentalists are keeping it out of the schools, I'm talking about an organized effort, a campaign to harass school boards, principals and teachers.

I'd like to read from a form letter prepared by the Maryland Coalition of Concerned Parents on privacy rights in public schools. People are encouraged to send it to their school board presidents with a copy to the principal. In the body of the letter it requires that every teacher that teachers your student get a copy

of this letter. And it claims to be about the Hatch Act of 1984, requiring that written parental consent be given to teaching a number of things.

We don't have time to read all the things that are listed. I'll just pick out a few. These are the things which they want not to be taught to their children:

"No examinations, tests or surveys about attitudes, habits, traits, opinions, beliefs or feelings of an individual or groups, values clarification, use of moral dilemmas, discussion of religious or moral standards, role-playing, open-ended discussions, situations involving any moral issues, any discussion of abortion, euthanasia, suicide, death or dying, alcohol or drugs, nuclear war, nuclear policy, one-world government, globalism, interpersonal relations, attitude towards parents or parenting, human sexuality, divorce, population control, roles of males and females, evolution -- including the idea that man has developed from a previous lower type of living things -- political affiliation or anything autobiographical."

Now if you are a school board president or a principal or a teacher and you receive this letter from one or more parents, I would say that it's rather intimidating. The letter, at the bottom, points out that the Hatch Act requires that if this voluntary remedy is not followed, federal funds will be withdrawn from your school system. A substantial response is expected from the principal, and copies of both are to be kept in the child's file.

There is no similar campaign to support the teaching of ethics and to support principals and boards and teachers who want to teach ethics in the schools.

Right now in the State of Alabama, a group of citizens has filed suit claiming that secular humanism is taught in the schools. Well, Governor Wallace, who fortunately is retiring, pleaded nolo contendere, which basically admits the charge; secular humanism is being taught in Alabama schools, so go in and examine the teachers, the books and the curriculum and get it out.

Now individual school boards must be willing to stand up against not only the courts in Alabama, but the government itself in Alabama to prevent that. And we don't know what the different school boards are going to do.

Pressure groups are attacking books, creating hit lists. Mark Twain is on the hit list, a number of his books -- books like "Huckleberry Finn." Best-selling author Judy Bloom is on the list. "The

"Scarlet Letter" is on the list, because it promotes witchcraft. And a number of elementary school readers are on the list because they show things like boys standing in front of a stove and girls reading books, which the opponents think is programming "role reversal."

The fundamentalists are conducting this organized campaign to keep morality from being taught in the public schools, despite an enormous common ground. They also are publishing their own textbooks here. This is an example of a textbook that you can examine. It's kind of a science book. Here are some of the titles -- I won't read them all. Chapter 1 is "Life: How Did it Start?" Chapter 2 is "Disagreements about Evolution: Why?" "What Does Genesis Say?" Then "Letting the Fossil Records Speak." This is a balanced textbook compared to the ones we're using now. "Mutations: Is that a Basis of Evolution?" "Why do Many People Accept Evolution?" And finally, at the end, the book has a chapter called "What Choice Will you Make?" This is the textbook that they would like put in the schools.

Why are fundamentalists doing this? You have to look at the history. What we now regard as the religious right has not always, through American history, been religious right. It was the religious center through most of our history. Until the 1950s, 90 percent of school superintendents in the United States were Protestant Christians who believed in a literal translation of the Bible, with great prejudice, actually, against certain people, such as Mohammed, Buddha, Moses and the Pope, who was very unpopular.

The Protestant Christian values were the backbone of American schools. The "McDuffy Reader" taught Protestant values, just as you were learning to read. As late as 1953, each school day, as some of you may recall, began with the ringing of the bell, followed by the words, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

Well, since the United States Supreme Court forbid the use of public schools to promote religion, Christianity has been evolving away from a literal Bible translation, thus creating in its wake a fundamentalist reaction. The fundamentalists now have their back against the wall because since that position has been taken out of the public schools, it is fast fading into history. Fundamentalism is no longer in the center stage. We even call it the "right" or the "extreme right." We do not see it as being what mainline religion is about.

It's not at center stage in secular society, but even in religious circles, it's not center stage.

Increasingly, ministers and priests are becoming more rational and less superstitious. If you belonged to a church when you were growing up and if you go back now to that town and go to that church, the chances are very good that the minister is talking psychology and politics; he's using knowledge and insight that he doesn't gain just from the Bible, but from much broader sources. Ministers today are drawing from a far wider body of knowledge in their sermons.

God, as an image of a "man in the sky," is increasingly disappearing among theists. They're beginning to see "the man in the sky" as a somewhat idolatrous idea. Many theists now are not seeing God "out there" ruling the universe, but a god within, a spirit, a consciousness, a way of being. Many theists regard God not as a man but as an experience, a principle. How often now do we hear that God is love, or God is goodness, or of God as the life force?

Theism is moving away from concrete imagery. Many theists now respond to God as a metaphor., as an epic poem which they choose individually, and collectively as whole denominations -- an epic poem that they choose to live within, because it's important aesthetically, it leads to peace of mind, it leads to understanding ethical principles.

I was speaking with a minister a few months ago and he said, "You know, my basic beliefs are very similar to yours at the Ethical Society; I'm not a believer." And you know what he meant by that. I said, "But what do you do when you talk on Sunday morning?" And then he got really hot under the collar and said, "I won't give in to those people in my parish who want me to stop talking God. I won't give in to it. I'm going to use God on Sunday morning and they're not going to ever prevent me. I'll leave if they try to stop me."

I said I don't understand that, and he went on to explain that it's his tradition, it's his heritage, it's his poetry. He wants to be able to say things like "Place yourself in the hands of God, who gives you strength." "Feel God's love in your heart and let his love radiate through your being into those around." He said there's no way of communicating more powerfully than that. I don't believe in the man-god, but I believe in that kind of communication. It's important to people's spiritual well-being.

Students of religion know that religious traditions -- like Christianity or Catholicism -- are not monolithic. Catholicism changes, generation after generation, as all Christianity has. You know, in the

first 400 years, Catholics and Christians believed that Heaven was going to be something that happened here on earth, that the State was going to crumble. You would have congregations that would meet on a Sunday morning and say, "Look what's happening in the world, it's terrible. Today's the day that the world is going to end, so let's all march to the hills so it doesn't crumble around us." And the whole congregations would march out of town. But the city didn't crumble, and they would come back. And the church fathers found it very embarrassing, after centuries and centuries of this, so we began to conceive of Heaven as being the hereafter. That's an enormous change.

The change that we're living through today is a switch from a literal interpretation of the Bible to a much more abstract and aesthetic interpretation. Fundamentalists, though, are fighting to keep morality out of the schools because they want to preserve their literal culture -- which I find very understandable. I feel sympathetic.

Fundamentalists want fundamentalism, not morality, to be taught in the schools. They believe that all you have to do is to give yourself to God, and morality automatically comes; whereas I believe that ethics is a body of knowledge that has to be taught.

Without the support of public schools, theism continues the evolution towards ethical idealism, and this is just what Felix Adler predicted when he founded Ethical Culture back in the 19th Century. He wrote: "As the popularity and power of supernaturalism declines, ethics must gain its rightful independence, or else the ethical culture of Western civilization will fail to keep pace with intellect and industry. The challenge of religion and science is to stand ethics on its own as a standard of conduct for one and for all."

Why will Catholics and Jews and educational groups and Protestant groups like the National Council of Churches -- why would they want to be part of a coalition for teaching morality in the schools? There are two reasons.

One, on the most sincere level, religions have had the greatest interest in promoting morality of any institution in history. Religion has been our ethics teacher.

Second, these groups, especially the Catholics, have had a long history of keeping fundamentalism out of the schools. They are the ones -- the Catholics, not the humanists, not the Ethical Culturists -- it is the Catholics primarily who created

the vacuum of ethical education in the schools that the fundamentalists keep pointing to.

In the 19th Century, anti-Catholicism in the United States was very, very strong. You probably heard of it as anti-Irish or anti-Polish or anti-Italian, but what all of those people had in common was that they were Catholic, and they were living in a Protestant world.

Edd Doerr, in one of his articles, cites a number of examples where on a Sunday morning in a Protestant church, it was asserted that immorality was going on in the convents. Why else would they have those convents? People would rise up out of their churches and their bigotry would boil over and they would sack convents and burn churches.

Although Catholics, Jews, blacks and liberal religious groups at that time lined up against organizations like the No-Nothings and the American Protective Association and the Ku Klux Klan -- all of which were thriving -- the Catholics were most upset about the public schools. It was in the public schools that their children were being barraged with Protestantism, and a heavy dose of anti-Pope and anti-Catholicism.

The Catholics at that point were divided into two groups: those who thought they should start their own school system because "we'll never change the public school system," and those who continued to fight the public school system. Of course that's where we get parochial schools. Until the court cases in the 1960s stopped religion in the schools, there were up to 5 million students in those schools. Now it's back to 3 million, because people don't need the protection anymore.

But let's follow those who tried to change the schools. They strove for more than 140 years. Finally in the end, they were joined by the Jews and Unitarians and humanist groups, and they were successful in the Supreme Court in 1948, '62 and '63. The courts held that religious instruction in the public schools was unconstitutional.

The Catholics and Jews and the majority of the Protestant Catholics now, today, have to see the danger of ignoring fundamentalists' attacks on the schools as being a continuation of this same struggle. They must be aware that there are two very important converts to the fundamentalist cause. They are William Bennett, the Secretary of Education, and Ronald Reagan, who continually call for the return of religion in schools

and for books like this on an "equal access" basis.

The evidence of anti-Catholicism is getting stronger. There is a comic book series out of California, and here are two cover stories. One is about "Alberto". It's called "The Salvation of a Priest". I'll read you the promo: "As a Jesuit priest, it was his job to infiltrate Protestant churches and destroy ministries. But when he read the scriptures, Alberto River saw that Catholicism could not save him." And there's a sequel called "Double Cross". "After his conversion, Alberto becomes a hunted man. No Jesuit can leave the order and live. . . . He reveals the infiltration of Protestant organizations and warns of a false brethren in our midst." Another one is called "The Godfathers." It's about the Pope.

This kind of thing is mounting, and suggests a continuation of the struggle to keep the schools free.

Edd Doerr recently wrote a piece called "The Quiet Invasion of the Classroom" that documents the overall issue rather well. Jerry Falwell, of course, has been accusing the Supreme Court of being a bunch of secular humanists who threw God out of the schools. He has a very noisy school prayer campaign. But the purpose of the campaign is to mask a rather quiet invasion into the public schools by a horde of evangelists, missionaries, proselitizers and youth ministers. Falwell told the Philadelphia Inquirer about a year ago: "We knew we couldn't win on school prayer, but equal access gets us what we wanted all along." This legislation allows student groups to bring in nonstudent missionaries and proselitizers.

A 1983 study by Education Week found that there were 4,500 outside missionaries operating within the public schools. The missionaries hang around the school cafeterias and the halls and invite students to come to off-campus meetings. They conduct religious-oriented school assemblies and they volunteer to work in the athletic program, where they do evangelizing. Virtually all of the missionaries were fundamentalists or evangelists. None were Catholics, Jews, mainline Protestants, liberal Protestants, Unitarians or humanists.

In Falwell's own paper, The Fundamentalist Journal, he says that the public schools are "the largest missionary field we have, larger than most countries".

Among the most successful evangelists today is a man named Jerry Johnston from Shawnee Mission, Kansas. He claims to have addressed 2 million students

in 2,000 different public schools. He says, "I offer half our assembly programs on drug and alcohol abuse and teen suicide." He says, "I choose a neutral secular theme that is relevant and valid to develop a rapport with students by my presentation, and then later I invite them to gospel services." In Tampa Bay, Florida, Johnston got county officials to let him conduct a half-hour assembly program in eleven public schools. It dealt with, as usual, drug and alcohol abuse and teen suicide, but it ended with a persuasive invitation to come to a free pizza blast to be held the following Thursday at the Clearwater Jack Russell Stadium. Four thousand students showed up and when they got there, they found out that they had to sit through a two-hour revival meeting; fill out cards that ask for name, address, grade, school, church affiliation; give donations; and be part of the final day of a five-day revival that Trinity Baptist Church was having -- and then they got their pizza.

Pressures like the letter that I showed you, like the textbook, like the evangelists going into the schools -- this is an organized campaign. I don't know if you've been following how much money we're talking about, but Jerry Falwell has in the basement of his church 100 volunteers who do nothing five days a week, eight hours a day, but open envelopes that bring in \$75 million a year. That's a million and a half dollars a week. I think it would be a kick just to volunteer to open those envelopes. And he's not the largest. There are eight or nine evangelists who bring in \$75 to \$150 million apiece. We're talking about a well-financed, well-organized campaign.

Let me turn to another question. What would schools teach about morals? Imagine if we had no background whatsoever in science, math or history -- never took a course in school in science, math and history. It would be difficult to appreciate that there would be anything of substance in these fields to offer in a school if we ourselves have no idea about what was in those fields.

Well, that's the position ethics is in. People don't think there's anything to teach in ethics because we've never had a course in ethics. For a full review of that, this study is an interesting place to start for learning ways that we could teach it. Let me give a few examples.

The field of ethics has come quite a way in the last few decades. At our book table you can get a book called "Raising Good Children," which is fairly

typical of the knowledge that we've gained. In the education end of it, we are aware that children go through cognitive stages of development. At a certain age we teach them arts and crafts and motor skills and memory things, but we don't try to teach them to read or to do math because their brains haven't jelled on that level yet. Later on, after six years old, their brains like to grapple with concepts and numbers, so that's what we teach them.

Similarly, moral development goes through stages. The youngest kids don't comprehend rules. You can give young kids two, three or four years old all the rules you want -- they're not going to obey them because their brain doesn't hold rules. You can punish them all you want; you can reward them all you want. They're not going to remember the rules. They respond to hands-on direct training, to repetition.

But when they get to be about five or six years old, they like rules; they love rules. They create games. They want to learn the rules. And you try to give them this hands-on training and you're going to get punched in the nose. It's insulting. It's humiliating to them. They absorb rules and when there are no rules, they make the rules up. At this point in education, we ought to be telling them rules.

When a child gets to adolescence, he wants to know the principles. That's when their brains start thinking about principles, and if there is no principle articulated to support a rule, goodbye rule. It's at that point that our education system should be talking about basic principles that support rules.

None of this happens now in our school system. It doesn't happen in our churches. We're failing to draw on an incredible body of knowledge that we have about how human beings work morally.

The question you might raise is: what principles? Let's take truth, which is one that's always on the list. It seems so obvious on the one hand. Many people believe all you need is a good intention to tell the truth. Adler's position was that that's not true. You need two things. You need intention and you need education. The best intentions, of course, are what pave the road to hell, because if you don't have any conceptual grasp of why one has a value like truth, there's no reason to defend it.

Let me give you a defense of truth, the kind of material that could be covered in a course. Truth is something on the one hand that you can't fully know. But you can know what you think is true, and that's

valuable to you. You also can know when you choose to deceive. You may not know whether or not you're telling the truth, but you always know if you decide, "I'm not going to tell the truth right now."

If you want to commit yourself to truth, you can just agree with yourself, "I'm not going to decide to deceive anybody." But if you decide that it's a good idea to shape the truth a little bit, that it would serve some higher good, you're going to find that it's hard to remember. That was Gracie Allen's great contribution to ethics. She said, "I never tell lies because they're too hard to remember." And there's truth to that, isn't there? I remember as a kid, struggling with that problem. But you know how to get around it, right? You just tell yourself that it really is true and you act as if it's true inside yourself, and then you don't make mistakes outside yourself. Very simple.

Except what you're doing, of course, is feeding yourself a self-delusion, which you begin to have to live in order to defend a lie.

The other problem is that the fact is, people aren't fooled that easily. You could kid somebody once or twice or three times, but pretty soon people realize that you shape the truth a little bit in that way or a little bit in this way and they begin discounting what you say. Politely -- they don't confront you with it, but they discount you a little bit. Just think about the people in your life whose behavior and statements give them away -- you know it's a little exaggeration in this way or a little in that way, and you just make your adjustments.

Misrepresenting reality always has its costs. If you don't know the cost, if you think there is no cost, that's when you're really self-deluded. If you think there is no consequence, you are not going to recognize the consequence when it strikes you. And you're going to think that you're in some kind of trap; you're victimized by these things that keep happening to you, not recognizing that it is your own self-delusion that keeps you walking into walls. We have to believe that the wall keeps coming and hitting us.

The truth will set you free because it frees us from all the self-delusions, the mazes that we create around ourselves. Knowing I am living in truth is quite a feeling. It feels like my feet are on the ground. I'm confident. I don't have to hide anything. I can be here now. I don't have anything to protect. It's a wonderful, wonderful feeling.

But wait a minute. Telling the truth is not all that easy. To tell the truth to people inevitably brings up conflicts. They may not see it that way. Or maybe they want to keep a certain illusion going. What do you do when it brings up conflicts? Do you surrender to them? Do you overpower them? Do you just isolate yourself so you don't have to face these conflicts? Well of course, now we're getting into the next ethical issue: how do you deal with ethical conflict? And so it will go.

I believe there is important material that is active in everyday life on these issues. We often see it as so idealistic, honesty and truth or whatever, but kids are dealing with these things day in and day out, and it's possible to give them the proper educational support without risking the church/state separation.

I propose that we make, as a special mission for Ethical Culture, the forming of a coalition of education and religious groups who want to seek some independent basis for the teaching of ethics in schools. To ignore teaching morality, educators say, will be disastrous for us as a country. To allow fundamentalists to use the schools as virgin territory for missionaries, as they put it, will damage our civil liberties. To only defend our civil liberties is to remain defensive. It means we'll be putting out fires in every school district in Michigan and Maryland and Alabama.

Standing against fundamentalism is a weak strategy that doesn't make the point that we want to make at all. I think standing for the teaching of morality in the schools is our purpose. Developing a popular consensus for teaching morality in schools must be our goal.

My proposals are specific. They are that we negotiate a formal relationship with Americans for Religious Liberty, which is headed by Edd Doerr; that we work with them for the purpose of approaching Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and educational organizations, asking them to form a coalition. I don't see that Ethical Culture, with our relatively few numbers, ought to be, should be or can be the leader of this. I think at best we might be a catalyst to this effort.

Secondly, I think something we can do right here is to institute a series of dialogues between denominations, between some of these groups, and perhaps more importantly, between fundamentalists and humanists, on the subject of teaching morality in the schools. Find out what their concerns and their issues are and

where we stand. I see us starting this in a very simple way -- 10 or 12 people sitting around. But I think that as we understand the dialogue better, we might invite representatives from different groups, including the fundamentalist groups, and invite the media to come in to listen to this kind of dialogue. That's a second proposal.

A third is, there are a number of curriculums out there on morals and ethics. Some of them are doing a very good job. They do things like documenting objective measurements, like levels of vandalism before and after the curriculum was put in the schools, and they have some wonderful documentation.

I would like to see us catalogue all the different curriculums that are being offered and encourage school systems to see it, to use it. To do this would require a team of people interested enough in this issue: writers to write up the material that I've been talking about this morning into articles and position papers. It would need organizers, people to find these dialogue speakers, to arrange the meetings between church groups, to gather together these curriculum books that accomplish this end.

But this morning, I'm asking for something much more close to home, and that is your response, your consideration, your doubts, your support. Is this project something that you personally and you, in terms of the Ethical Society, think that we ought to initiate?

Thank you for your time and attention.

CLOSING WORDS

"Throughout human history, the power of ethics has been sanctified as the will of God. Through a greater knowledge of ethics, people experience the moral ideal. As the eye longs for beauty, the human spirit yearns to experience justice and love, no greater energy can be known, no greater confidence or pleasure, than to experience the inner harmony of one's spirit and the harmony of one's private and public relations."

--Felix Adler

[This transcript was produced with the editorial assistance of Charlie Osolin.]