The National Association of Christian Educators and other organizations that seek to bypass the democratic process—which members of our society must place about our personal religious and moral convictions—jeopardize their own basic freedoms.

The National Association of Christian Educators (NACE) presents itself as an organization concerned "that the children of our nation receive the very best education possible in both academics and in moral and spiritual values." Robert L. Simonds, who organized NACE in 1983 and is its current president, also presides over a companion organization, Citizens for Excellence in Education. According to Simonds, CEE was organized because the 500,000 born-again Christians that NACE claims are employed in the public schools are "limited" in their activities by "job security considerations." The citizen members of CEE, on the other hand, are not so limited in pursuing the NACE/CEE goal of "returning academic excellence to our public schools." In reading such language, one might be misled into agreeing with the CEE brochure, which declares that theirs is the "voice of reason in education."

According to Simonds, public education is a stronghold of the devil, and the children of our country must be saved from the "death throes of atheism and immorality." The only way to reclaim the public schools, Simonds asserts, is by taking "complete control of education." Simonds combines extremist goals, inflammatory rhetoric, convenient Biblical quotations, standard political strategies, and centralized organizational structure to mobilize and arm his followers in a campaign to replace democratic institutions with theocracy. In the introduction to the teachers' manual, Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom, Simonds is explicit about the intentions of his organizations:

There is a great war being waged in America—but not on the battlefield of conventional weapons. This battle is for the heart and mind and the very soul of every man, woman, and especially child in America. The combatants are "secular humanism" and "Christianity." Atheism, in the cloak of an acceptable "humanitarian" religious philosophy, has been subtly introduced into the traditional Christian American Culture through the public school system. The battle is for the minds of our youth.

The enemies, according to Simonds, are "atheist groups" such as the National Education Association (NEA), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and People for the American
Way (PAW). Simonds charges that these organizations not only espouse "secular humanism and extreme left-wing socialism" but that they are also "totally committed to eliminating all of the Christianity and morality in our schools and government." These are strong words, but war is a serious business. Simonds keeps the dollars for defense rolling in from his followers by describing just how high the stakes are and how insidious the enemy will be. In a handbook for parents, *As the Twig Is Bent*, Simonds exhorts, "We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, the spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil." In his frequent appeals for money, Simonds makes it clear that the "only thing standing in the way of the complete recovery of the Christian community's control of our local school system is the lack of funds to make the contacts." Establishing himself as God's spokesperson is a key element in his appeals for money to mobilize his "mighty Christian Army." He tells his supporters that "being on the cutting edge of society is what God has called me to do for you." He further divulgés to them that God has given them a clear-cut plan:

Reclaim our public schools to a Christian morality and elect Christians to public school boards (and all other government offices). A big job? Sure. Impossible? Absolutely not. We're not talking about a petty church dispute... Forty-four million innocent children are at stake along with our entire nation and our form of government.

The threat, according to NACE/CEE, is so great and the consequences, should they lose, so dire that nothing but complete victory will suffice. Simonds claims that all the secular humanists who are in positions of authority must be removed. His case rests on his own interpretation of Biblical quotations:

Proverbs tells us "with good men (the righteous) in authority the people rejoice; but with the wicked in power they groan" (Proverbs 29:2, L.B.). God's instructions are clear—those who know the living God and possess eternal truth (Bible) must be in authority (run for office) if a nation is to be happy. Removing anti-God, anti-Christian forces from office (secular humanists) will only be done by Christians becoming responsible citizens and voting them out.

We have the truth...

No Neutral Ground
If one accepts Simonds' claim that he is an infallible emissary from God, it is an easy step to believing that anyone who opposes him is an enemy of God. Although Simonds denies any interest in creating a theocracy, he also claims that "government and true Christianity are inseparable."

Simonds' misunderstanding of the constitutional relationship of church and state is even more blatant in his accusation that "the aggressive efforts of liberal groups to foist the myth of separation of church and state upon the general public have resulted in the destruction of religious freedom for many Christian students." There is a not so gentle irony in his egregious manipulation of "religious freedom" to mean denying freedom to all but those who follow him. He claims that religious freedom is being denied by "secular humanism which is self-proclaimed one-world religion. It has complete control of public education. They are the church state right now."

In Simonds' view, the world is divided into two warring camps. One is either a member of the "Mighty Christian Army" ready to follow his interpretation of God's plan to take over the schools, or one is a member of the secular humanists who Simonds believes are agents of Satan. If one is not for them, one is against them.
There is, therefore, no possibility, in Simonds' view, that a secular, nonsectarian education can be anything but anti-Christian.

In *Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom*, Simonds presents the view that "neutral education is impossible. Teaching knowledge without God is the religion of Humanism." 17 It is not, in Simonds' view, possible for schools to be neutral regarding religion, regardless of what the Supreme Court has said about the First Amendment. Granted, the wording of the Constitution creates a narrow path of neutrality for schools to follow. 18 Balanced precariously between the prohibition against promoting religion on one side and the prohibition from hindering the free exercise of religion on the other, schools are vulnerable to those special interests that believe schools are veering too close to one edge or the other. Simonds has exploited this delicate territory by denouncing every attempt at neutrality as an attack on Christianity. In this country, where there is no state religion, it is only by preserving this delicate balance that the spectrum of religious belief and practice, including Simonds', is protected.

Simonds seems bent upon destroying this balance by declaring that neutrality itself is a religious belief perpetrated by a religion that Simonds calls "secular humanism." 19 If he succeeds in this mission, there will indeed be religious warfare. If neutrality on the issue of religion is not a viable position, and if the First Amendment does not protect our freedom from religion as well as our freedom of religion, then we have invited warfare among all religions for exclusive control of government as a means to their self-preservation. If "no religion" is now to be considered a religious belief, then the distinction upon which the First Amendment was written will be erased.

Simonds laments that America is pluralistic:

... we wish it were all Christian, but living together in tolerance of others' views—such as humanism—does not mean we will be neutral. Satan's use of the word neutral is phenomenal. The ACLU calls for...

"neutrality" in public schools—translation: No Christian religion or belief is allowed—only the neutral philosophy of "irreligious" secular humanism. Those who would follow neutrality in any life situation are spiritually immature. For Christians neutrality does not exist. 19

At best, this statement implies reluctant tolerance of the religious diversity in our society. At worst, it declares that they will tolerate others only until such time as they can take over and control the schools and the government.

**Strategy for a Takeover**

Bringing public education under the control of his brand of Christianity is Simonds' interpretation of the "Lord's plan." The strategic importance of taking over the schools is revealed in Simonds' belief that education is the key to "controlling national opinion." 20 The key to controlling education is electing their people to the school board. The way to elect their people to the school board is to establish active Christian Parents' Committees in all of the 15,700 school districts in the country. Simonds claims that local CEE committees can take control of the local school boards, which "... would allow us to determine all local policy. ... Select good textbooks, good curriculum programs, superintendents, and principals." 21

The techniques that Simonds outlines in *As the Twig Is Bent* for gaining control of the schools are based upon sound organizational principles and an understanding of political strategy. Simonds directs parents to begin by establishing a basis of support through local CEE committees to which local fundamentalist and evangelical Christians are invited. At these banquets, an official of the National CEE organization—Simonds, CEE Executive Director Eric Buecher, or another representative—gives an inspirational address, identifying the enemy, the threat, and the necessary call to action. In order to maintain centralized control, the local committees are told that they must use the name "Citizens for Excellence in Education" and that the officers must all be members of the National CEE. They are required to use the name because it is a "friendly name to the school board. No one is against citizens or excellence or education." 22

To elect their candidates to the school board, CEE activists are instructed to focus their information and resources on getting their followers to the polls. Their success depends, to a large extent, on voter apathy regarding school-related elections. If there is little public interest, the CEE-backed candidates can win by maintaining a low public profile and getting their supporters to the polls. Although capitalizing on voter apathy may not represent the highest ideals of a democratic society, other tactics recommended by Simonds re-
Perhaps one of the greatest dangers posed by Simonds and his allies is that conscientious Christians of good faith will assume that this is the only religious voice speaking out about religious matters. Fortunately, such is not the case.

E elect even less faith in the open discussion of issues. For example, he recommends that they “divide the voters along ideological lines. Do not try to ‘educate’ the voters on such complex areas as secular humanism. . . . After you win you can educate and advocate.” In a similar vein, he advocates that his followers not run an “all positive campaign.” You must give the voters a reason to vote “against” the opposition.” Above all, he says, it is important to have a “handpicked” candidate who must meet their ideological standards. Electing their candidates to the school board may be the most certain route to control of public education, but short of such wholesale victory, CEE members are provided with resources that assist them in influencing school officials and policies on a host of individual issues. Besides the Citizens’ Manual, CEE publishes a newsletter, Education Newsline, and numerous personal letters from Simonds, which report news from the front lines of the battle with evil and instructions regarding a range of issues. In 1983, Simonds printed and distributed Humanism in Textbooks, which contains advice from Mel Gabler of Educational Research Analysts about how to have objectionable materials removed from the school. In another message, he told supporters how to gain the friendly ear of the school administration by sponsoring a school beautification project. Still another message provided an effective strategy for preventing a school district from establishing a health clinic in the school.

To Restore Excellence in Education
If secular humanism is Simonds’ ideological enemy, and organizations such as the NEA and the ACLU are the enemy’s armies, then what are the specific targets of his offensive? A casual reader could be misled into believing that Simonds’ organizations are concerned with educational issues. For example, a CEE brochure attempts to gain readers’ sympathetic attention by quoting this highly publicized excerpt from A Nation at Risk: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.” The brochure ignores the actual content of the report and proceeds to exploit the title by claiming that “America is at risk because”:

1. The educational establishment has adopted secular humanism as the mind-set for all children.
2. Christianity and the Bible and absolute values of right and wrong have been outlawed from the schools.
3. Students are being brainwashed by moral relativism.
4. Sex education courses teach deviant sexual behavior.
5. Violent and depressing films and textbooks are used to teach sexual promiscuity, death education (child genocide and euthanasia), abortion, rape, suicide, murder, hate, and cultism. Role-playing is incorporated to desensitize children to morality.
6. Peripheral and supplemental courses in Global Education (International Studies), Nuclear Education, etc., have crowded out the basic subjects of English, math, history, etc. These “new basics teach anti-Americanism, one-world government, one-world police and military force . . . .

To bring excellence back to education means eliminating these abuses from public education by eliminating objectionable material and practices from the schools. The CEE brochure assures its prospective members that this can be accomplished by organizing a local committee of Citizens for Excellence in Education that will elect a majority to the school board. Although teachers have less latitude in how actively they can support Simonds’ view, he has nevertheless provided them with a manual, Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom. The manual includes a major section comparing the Christian world view with secular humanism and instructions in “How Teachers Can Witness in the Classroom” and “How Students Can Witness in the Classroom.” On a very practical level, the manual assists teachers who wish to start Bible study
groups, distribute religious literature, or engage students in these activities. Teachers are given detailed instructions and summaries of current court decisions relative to the rights of activist Christian students and teachers. It is also telling that the manual provides the address of the American Legal Ministries, should teachers wish to resort to legal measures to achieve their ends.

Although the goals of the two organizations are anathema to the democratic system, the CEE and NACE leadership have become sophisticated about using the political tools of the system to further their cause. The political tactics and strategies used by NACE and CEE belie the extremist goals of these organizations. Most of the political methods described in their publications are solid organizational methods that have been used effectively by politically active organizations everywhere.

If a local CEE committee were to follow the detailed guidelines provided for them, they could become very influential in local and state-level educational matters. For example, the CEE Parents' Manual includes instructions in "How to Start a Parent Group," "How to Deal with School Boards," "How to Elect School Board Members," "Tips on Writing a Good Press Release," and "Planning a Course of Action." Other chapters provide assistance in removing objectionable materials from the school and information about parents' rights.

A Look at the "Enemy"

Is there a war going on, or is NACE/CEE tilting at windmills, creating hysteria in its members in order to raise money to keep the organization and Simonds alive? Do Simonds and the rest of the fundamentalist radical right Christian movement have reason to be fearful and vigilant? Is public education in the hands of a godless enemy?

Even a cursory review of the position statements of major national educational organizations is sufficient to refute the extremist claims of NACE/CEE. For example, the National Council for the Social Studies issued a position statement declaring that "knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity." The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has published Religion in the Curriculum, a report that not only acknowledges the dearth of religious information in texts and classrooms but recommends several steps that should return the study of religion to the public schools. An examination of NEA resolutions does not reveal any of the anti-Christian bias of which Simonds accuses them. The NEA positions that relate to religion range from believing "... that the Constitutional provisions on the establishment and free exercise of religion in the First Amendment require that there be no sectarian practices in the public school program" to believing "that legislation and regulation that mandate or permit the teaching of religious doctrine and/or groups that promote anti-public education agendas violate both student and teacher rights."

Other Religious Voices

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers posed by Simonds and his allies is that conscientious Christians of good faith will assume that his is the only religious voice speaking out about religious matters. Fortunately, such is not the case. The National Council on Religion and Public Education has issued a statement that says they support "ways of studying religion which are educationally appropriate and Constitutionally acceptable to a secular program of public education."

Even among people who declare themselves to be fundamentalists, there are reasonable voices. At a Christian Congress for Excellence in Public Education in 1986, Charles Glenn, a self-proclaimed fundamentalist and an administrator of the Massachusetts Department of Education, laments that his colleagues do not understand why he is "so upset." He goes on to say that we need to recognize that we evangelicals are a minority in an area in which no group is a majority. We need to break the habit of saying we represent America. Even where we are a majority, we must be careful not to be an oppressive majority. It may be significant that NACE/CEE was not represented at the meeting.

Fostering the Debate

Public education in this country is structured in such a manner that it provides an arena in which educational issues can be debated and a process through which decisions can be made. There are many school-related issues about which there is ongoing and legitimate debate. Values clarification, sex education, and the role of religious values in education are all candidates for discussion. It is also important and legitimate that people with opinions about how those issues should be resolved be free to express themselves and to work to influence the public policy on these and other educational matters. But it is an attack upon the very foundations of our democratic institutions for any group to attempt to limit the ability of any other group to participate in the debate.

What we ask of ourselves in this democratic society is that everyone place our democratic institutions and processes above our moral beliefs on any particular issue. For example, regardless of how strong one's stand on abortion, immigration, or taxation...
might be, we ask that the democratic processes not be sacrificed to see them realized. Because American public schools represent our most deliberate form of human instruction to a largely captive audience of young people, they will always be a target for any group that wishes to bring about change in American social or political structures. Also, there will always be those groups that advocate a philosophy or practice, which, if they were successful, would be inimical to the democratic institutions that we cherish.

The universal, free public school system that we inherited from Horace Mann's Common School was to be a "wellspring of freedom," a place where children from all economic conditions, all religions, and all races would learn the tools and the civic virtues that are necessary to prevent popular self-government from becoming tyrannical. If we still cherish this mission for our schools, we will foster the debate and encourage participation—and we will safeguard the freedom.

2. Letter from Robert L. Simonds, President, NACE/CEE (undated).
3. Citizens For Excellence in Education membership brochure.
7. As the Twig Is Bent, p. 7.
12. As the Twig Is Bent, p. 6.
13. Ibid., p. 72.
14. Education Newsletter, undated, p. 5.
15. Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom, p. 66.
18. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Excerpt from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
20. Ibid., p. 68.
22. As the Twig Is Bent, p. 8.
23. Ibid., p. 31.
25. Education Newsletter (June/July 1986).
26. Education Newsletter (October/November 1986).
28. CEE brochure.
29. Communicating a Christian World View in the Classroom, Table of Contents.
30. The American Legal Ministries was founded by David Llewellyn, Jr. The teachers' manual contains a copy of Llewellyn's Student Guide to Religious Association and Expression on Public High School Campuses.
34. Ibid., p. 37.
35. In AASA, Religion in the Public Schools, p. 27.

Editors' note. We invited Robert L. Simonds to respond in writing to this article. An associate discussed the matter with us by telephone but declined to send a reply. We welcome readers' comments.

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