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Attorney General Barr Engages in The Battle for The Faith of Our Students

While you may have heard that Attorney General William Barr delivered a noteworthy speech at Notre Dame Law School about the erosion of Religious Freedom in the United States, you may not have heard that his speech had much to say about the public schools. I hope that my summary here will whet your appetite to either watch the [40 minute video of the speech](#), or read the [transcript](#).

AG Barr began his remarks with a well-constructed argument that our founders designed the Constitution to provide maximum freedom to citizens. They realized this required that the public ascribe to the type of moral values that flow from “a transcendent Supreme Being.” He cited the familiar quotation from John Adams, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

Barr then explained that Judeo-Christian principles, starting with the two great commandments, “to love God with your heart, soul and mind,” and “to love thy neighbor as thyself,” formed the basis of a social order that, “instills and reinforces moral discipline.”

Bringing this forward to the current day Barr contended that religion has been under increasing attack for the past 50 years and suggested that this has led to greater social ills including higher numbers of children born into single parent homes, record levels of suicide and mental illness, increased violence, and the terrible rise in drug abuse. He noted that the current attack is particularly virulent because it has, “marshalled all the force of mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values.”

Barr noted that this new secularism is driven by the State and has replaced religion:

Christianity teaches a micro-morality. We transform the world by focusing on our own personal morality and transformation. The new secular religion teaches macro-morality. One's morality is not gauged by their private conduct, but rather on their commitment to political causes and collective action to address social problems. This allows us to not worry so much about the strictures on our private lives, while we find salvation on the picket line.

The AG then focused on the most immediate problem, declaring, "Ground Zero for these attacks on religion are the schools. To me this is the most serious challenge to religious liberty." He identified the most intense battle ground in the public schools as curriculum: "Many states are adopting curriculum that is incompatible with traditional religious principles according to which parents are attempting to raise their children. They often do so without any opt out for religious families." He cited as examples a recent New Jersey law requiring public schools to adopt an LGBT curriculum and similar laws in Illinois and California. He also noted that the Orange County, California Board of Education issued an opinion that, "parents who disagree with the instructional materials related to gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation may not excuse their children from this instruction."

It is bad enough that these types of policies make many parents feel like they have no other option than to send their children to private religious schools. But Barr pointed out that these same forces are also attacking private school options. State laws are being promoted to disallow the use of any public funds to support religious education—even the secular aspects of it—and state laws requiring "religious schools to adhere to secular orthodoxy are being promoted."

AG Barr is a committed Roman Catholic and his focus was primarily on Catholic private education. However, Protestant and Catholic Christians alike should view his speech as a call to arms. As Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said in [his review of the speech](#), "American evangelicals in the year 2019 ought to be the first to get in line to say a hearty "Amen" to the speech given by the attorney general of the United States at the University of Notre Dame."

It is unfortunate that Barr failed to mention the work that so many of you do as Christians in the public schools. Many of the state laws that Barr commented on will also stifle your ability to speak of your faith as employees in the public schools. However, it is no accident that you are there. Even with legal limitations on what you can say, your witness through the life of faith that you live in front of your students and your prayers for their salvation and sanctification will be used by the Lord. And there will be some who feel called by the Spirit to speak out against

school policies and state laws that they believe force them to contradict what their faith teaches as truth. This is a battle worth engaging with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is also a blessing to know that William Barr, the highest law enforcement officer in our country, said in the opening of his speech that he has established a task force to “keep an eye out for cases or events around the country where states are misapplying the Establishment Clause in a way that discriminates against people of faith, or cases where states adopt laws that impinge upon the free exercise of religion.”

Please share your thoughts on this column that you would like other readers to see by entering them in the form below. Personal comments can be sent to JMitchell@ceai.org. John Mitchell is the Washington, D.C. Area Director for Christian Educators Association International.

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