



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 8, 2012

## Education in Nazi Germany: Modern-Day Parallels?

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith both immediately took issue with the bishop's remarks. Barry Morrisio of the Eastern Pennsylvania/Southern New Jersey's anti-Defamation League stated,

We respect the Bishop and his position in the Church. We appreciate his commitment the education of children and the viability of Catholic schools. However, he should not be making his point at the expense of the memory of six million Jews and millions of others who perished in the Holocaust.



The Holocaust was a unique experience. It does not lend itself to inappropriate analogies. We have an obligation to protect the memory of those who suffered because of it from those who would distort it and undermine and trivialize the history of the Holocaust, however inadvertently. Our role should be to honor those who fought to defeat the murderous Nazis, and not to inappropriately draw reckless comparisons.

Andy Hoover, legislative director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania, called the bishop's remarks "completely inappropriate."

Bishop McFadden, however, has not backed down. On the diocese website, the he did have this to say: "To those who may have been offended by my remarks, I apologize to them assuring them that I purposely did not mention the holocaust." But he did not retract his main point:

The reference to dictators and totalitarian governments of the 20th century which I made in an interview on the topic of school choice was to make a dramatic illustration of how these unchecked monolithic governments of the past used schools to curtail the primary responsibility of the parent in the education of their children. Today many parents in our state experience the same sort of lack of freedom in choosing an education that best suits their child as those parents oppressed by dictators of the past.

I used the example of the dictators merely to explain how an absolute monopoly in education, where parents do not have a right or ability to choose the education that best suits their children due to economic circumstances or otherwise, runs counter to a free and open society. Our support of a school voucher program has the goal of giving parents something that dictators never would, a choice in which school their children attend by being able to control the portion of the tax dollars that is designated for the education of each child.

Writers during WWII noticed particularly how Hitler had tried to force conformity and, especially, to end all religious schools in Nazi Germany. Gottfried Benn wrote in his textbook at the time:

During 1936, despite the provisions of the concordat of 1933, the government continued its efforts to enlist all Catholic schools. By pressure upon the parents the Nazis succeeded in



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reducing registration for Catholic schools in some parts of southern Germany almost to the vanishing point." He also observed, "In June, 1937, it [the Nazi regime] went so far as to dissolve the hundreds of Catholic schools in Bavaria, converting them into secular institutions. Seven months later the Bavarian minister of education announced that the closing of the church elementary schools was to be followed by the closing of the secondary schools.

In late 1938, Benn observed, "The de-Christianization of the schools was being constantly carried through." Moreover, parents who wanted to keep their children out of German public schools faced terrible risks. The teaching of Christianity by parents in the home was forbidden. Wallace Deuel described what happened to devout Christian parents: "In November of 1937 two more cases were decided by nazi courts in much this same spirit. In the first case, a divorced woman was deprived of the custody of her children because she wished to educate them in Catholic convent schools. This, the court held, was 'in no way in the children's interest.' In the second case, a court in Waldenburg, in Silesia, took children away from their father and mother because the parents were members of the International Bible Students' organization."

Oxford Professor E. R. Micklem, a close observer of totalitarianism, noted that children were taken from their parents if the parents sent them to private schools. He also related that at the Adolph Hitler School in 1939, all boys were compelled to say, "We, Adolph Hitler pupils, are pledged only to the Führer, but not to the Jewish-evangelical philosophy or church. We cannot serve two causes, the Führer and his greatest enemy. Therefore ... I announce my resignation from the Evangelical Church."

In 1939, British Professor Robert William Seton-Watson wrote of education in Nazi Germany,

... where school textbooks have been re-written in a strictly party sense, where the teaching of education has become a mere machine for inculcating German patriotism, where entire youth movement are in the hands of party agitators, and where all religious teaching, save a glorification of pagan myths, is deliberately excluded from the teaching.

In 1942, expatriate Professor Alfred Wiener described Nazi education: "It is less a non-Christianity — it is anti-Christianity. And the Germans are thoroughly educated to believe in this anti-Christianity and to despise and hate Christianity.... But not only that, these educators of German youth deny Christianity, they teach a hatred to our religion — a hatred which is hard to believe; they use a language against Christianity which cannot be described by the mere word 'blasphemous.'"

Also in 1942, the pamphlet "Footprints of the Trojan Horse" observed: "Between 9,000 and 11,000 Catholic schools have been liquidated." That same year, Harry Flannery, who replaced William Shirer as the CBS correspondent in Nazi Germany, wrote of the "closing of religious schools" in the country.

In 1949, John Rath explained how Nazi textbooks described Christianity in history: "Jews had already become the ruling group everywhere in the empire, while the Christian religion, with its emphasis on the differences between Christians and heathens, and not on national 'racial-national or social difference' between people, was spreading the Jewish religious and moral convictions throughout the Roman World."

The Nazification of the public school system and the compulsion of parents to place their children in those schools was a grim fact of Hitler's Germany. The voucher system supported by Bishop McFadden is one method of fighting modern totalitarianism and preserving parental choice in the values present-day American children learn in school.

Photo of Adolf Hitler



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