

POINTS OF VIEW

Obeisance, censorship by 'parents' move north

The answer came in a book sent to me by a West Bloomfield reader, a lady I knew from grade school but hadn't seen in umpteen years.

The question: Why was Clark Durant, the buck private who became commanding general of the State Board of Education his first day on the job, so obsessed about parents, parents, parents in the rambling Vision, Philosophy and Mission statement he ramrodded on Jan. 19?

What Johnny Shouldn't Read — Textbook Censorship in America was written in 1992 by Joan Delfattore, professor of English at the University of Delaware. The author has been honored by the American Educational Research Association and the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Roundtable.

Starting with the discovery that high school anthologies had checked out 300 lines of Shakespeare's immortal *Romeo and Juliet*, Delfattore explores three federal court cases in which groups of parents complained that schoolbooks violated their fundamental religious beliefs.

Familiar names like Pat Robertson, Donald Wildmon, the LeHayes and Phyllis Schlafly stirred up the pots. What's of interest here, however, is that small groups of parents have the notion God gave them the knowledge and duty to overrule state boards of education, local school boards, teachers and other voters.

"The children are obeying their parents. They are submitting to our authority," said Bob Mozart, a fundamentalist minister in Tennessee and head plaintiff in one case.

The *Diary of Anne Frank*, used in an eighth grade reader, came under attack because, in the play text, Anne says, "Oh, I don't mean you have to be Orthodox. I just mean some religion. . . it doesn't matter what. Just to believe in something." It was dreadful, said the parents, that kids should know someone else in the world doesn't see life their way.

Using reason and imagination were seen as acts of rebellion. Don't think. Just obey your parents and your minister. Wives, obey your husbands. Don't try to understand things you're not supposed to understand. Obey.



TIM RICHARD

According to a sectarian magazine that encouraged home teaching, the rote method "simply means that children learn by repetition. . . drill, drill until they know the material. They are not expected to understand it. They are expected to know it."

Delfattore's cases came from Tennessee, Alabama and Louisiana. What do they mean to Michigan taxpayers and voters?

Summarizing one plaintiff's rambling testimony, Delfattore writes: "When (Rebecca) Frost first brought up the idea of teaching Sarah herself, the school officials asked what credentials she had. She replied that she was

a mother, and that should be enough. The plaintiffs' anti-intellectualism . . . also prevented them from being concerned about teaching qualifications."

Have you heard anyone in high Michigan office knocking teacher certification laws?

William R. Coulson, a psychologist, testified in a case attacking home economics texts. He said they taught "little children" (ages 16 to 18) to think independently and violate parents' rights. How? By discussing career choice as part of growing up. Coulson said it "kind of undercut that family's own enterprise for the book to say authoritatively: You must decide for yourself what role to take. I would imagine a father saying, not in this family."

Coulson, in case you hadn't noticed, has popped up at fundamentalist rallies in Michigan.

Delfattore reports the savage attacks of fundamentalist parents on any literature that discusses any possible flaw in a clergyman. So what went on at Pinckney High a few months ago but a savage attack on a play called *Dark of*

the Moon in which rural Appalachian clergy are depicted in less than flattering terms. The attack included a proposal that local parents and clergy help the principal and drama teacher select future plays.

In the Tennessee case, the parents who felt their religion was offended wouldn't consider sending their kids to parochial schools. "What they wanted," says Delfattore, "was a little private school within the public school, where taxpayers' dollars would have been used to prevent the protesters' children from learning that other people think differently from their parents."

You think it can't happen in a sophisticated industrial state like Michigan? Think again. What do you suppose is the motivation behind the "charter academy" effort? Why are right-wingers drafting constitutional amendments to allow parochial? Why is Clark Durant so obsessed by parents, parents, parents?

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

LETTERS

Against the flow

To: Gov. John Engler. Re: gambling.

My prayers are for you. The weight, I am sure, is heavy. The drums are starting to beat. No doubt you have prayed also.

Mr. Governor, all eyes are looking toward you. You are expected to make decisions that are healthy and good for the people of Michigan.

You have three daughters. God willing, some day they will pick husbands. Will you in good conscience recommend to them they make their hobby gambling?

Stand up and say, "You are a Christian. You wish to remain so. That you must also live with yourself. That you cannot say or agree with anyone that gambling is good for Michigan when you feel it is not good for yourself and family."

At Easter, we are reminded of our Master. He also was tempted before His crucifixion. He said, "Man does not live by bread alone."

We are not to make gold our God. A Catholic lady once said, "Honey, do not do today that which tomorrow you will be sorry you did today."

A customer of mine lost her husband. I expressed my sympathy to her. She said, "Really, I am better off now after he is dead than when he was living." Tell it to Michigan that you do not wish to bring or encourage such situations to the wives of our state.

In obedience to our Master, we must be willing to go against the flow of society. As we follow Jesus, our motives, values and habits are bound to be different from those who are not Christian.

Peter wrote, "They think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil

of you." (1 Peter 4:4.)

When we are marching to the beat of a different drummer, of course, we will be out of step with people around us. This takes conviction, courage and courtesy. But by God's enabling grace we can be disturbingly different — and effectively different too.

Some will hate you, some will love you; Some will flatter, some will slight; Cease from man and look above you, Trust in God and do the right.

Leslie E. Swanson, Farmington Hills

Why he's running

Thank you for the story (Observer, April 13), announcing my candidacy for the first elected mayor in the history of the city of Farmington Hills.

I hope that the election of a mayor

instead of appointment by members of City Council brings out several candidates and a lively discussion on the future of our city.

My reasons for running are to provide leadership for strengthening the City Council's partnership with the residents, to lend a sympathetic ear to the concerns of citizens, to give top priority to the growing traffic problems, and to work to lower density in the development of the remaining open land.

While I supported the establishment of an elected mayor, I will strongly adhere to the other charter provisions which limit the scope of the mayor's office.

If someone is looking for a power base or stepping stone to higher office, this is not the office to seek. I recognize the city manager as the administrative officer of the city as provided for in the charter. I had good relations with the city manager in 1991, the year I was

mayor, and will do so in the future if I am elected mayor.

To alleviate the concern that this election will result in large sums being spent for an office that pays \$2,700 a year, I will suggest a voluntary limit on expenditures among all the candidates in the range of the average spent in the past on council races.

Another concern of mine about contributions to candidates is that no money should be accepted from developers or others doing business with the city.

I will propose that all candidates make public a monthly report of contributions so that voters can decide whether there is a real or perceived conflict of interest.

The required late October report does not give voters the information they need to properly assess who is financing the various campaigns.

Aldo Vagnozzi, Farmington Hills

Politics shows real motive in school standard changes

The education forms the common mind; Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined. — Alexander Pope

What children learn in school helps define what they are when they grow up.

And that's why the current battle over educational standards in Michigan is only partly about schools. Despite protests, it's also about hard-ball politics.

Here's an example:

Under the leadership of Clark Durant, the State Board of Education is currently on the cutting edge of conservative politics in our state. At its meeting this week, the board intends to hire Michael David Warren to review the Michigan School Code and make recommendations for change to the board. (Remember, Gov. John Engler called for repeal of the School Code in his January state-of-the-state address.)

Who is Michael David Warren? What are his credentials? How did he get this sensitive job?

In an interview with him last week, I learned Warren is a young lawyer who received his B.A. in history from Wayne State University and his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1992. He clerked for Michigan Supreme Court Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley and now works for a Detroit law firm. He has never taken an education course nor taught children in a classroom.

Warren was recommended to Durant by Gov. Engler's deputy legal counsel, Michael Gadola. Now, Gadola is also president of the Michigan chapter of the Federalist Society, which Warren calls "a libertarian-conservative society of attorneys that develops conservative policy and debates liberals."

Guess what: Warren was the vice chair of the U-M chapter of the same Federalist Society. In other words, this bright and personable young man is part of the right-wing farm team.

OK. That's politics. Anybody you hire has to come from somewhere.

So what does Warren want to do in his new job?

He thinks "there is room for change in the School Code." He's undecided about whether



PHILIP POWER

there should be statewide assessment of what kids actually learn "because some of the questions in the MEAP test (the current statewide assessment vehicle) are value laden." Which ones? He couldn't remember without looking through his files.

He wants to develop a code that "empowers parents, teachers and children to get the highest possible educational quality." This phraseology is often used on the right as a way of saying that there should be no educational standards in Michigan schools beyond what parents want.

So here we have an enormous debate taking place largely in a media vacuum about the future of our schools and our kids. And we have the very political head of the State Board of Education selecting for a pivotal job a product of the right-wing farm team. Don't tell me that this debate is not political to the core!

Public education in Michigan today is at very great risk.

The people who want to eliminate statewide learning standards and (maybe) spend public funds on private schools are smart, tough politicians. The folks who want a mandated statewide model curriculum are all too often fussy-headed educational theorists or marginalized representatives of the Michigan Education Association with no political credibility.

The people in this state who believe that a world-class public school system of statewide assessment had better start speaking up. The hour is late.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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