

THE WAR ON HOMESCHOOLING

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Collectivists and egalitarians, by which I mean those who embrace a left-wing ideology, have always hated the family. They see it as the source of inequality, a problem in dire need of a corrective. That corrective, of course, is the state.

Their analysis is correct. The family, the smallest cell in society, is the heart of inequality: men typically have held more power than women; parents have more power than children; older siblings have more rights than younger ones; and inheritance spawns wealth differentials.

To those who value parental rights, none of this is a problem. Indeed, it is no more of a problem than observing that men are typically taller than women. Therefore, no remedy is needed. But to collectivists and egalitarians, all manifestations of inequality are a problem. The only power strong enough to “fix” this problem is the state.

This is not a new phenomenon. Plato wanted children raised collectively, maintaining they were “common property.” Children do not belong to their parents—they belong to the state.

Today’s enemies of the family know they cannot literally take the kids away from their parents—though they would like to—so they settle for laws that weaken parental control. They are particularly incensed over parents who are devout Christians and who espouse conservative values. They are the enemy that must be defeated.

Enter Elizabeth Bartholet, professor of law at Harvard Law School. Her recent article in the *Arizona Law Review*, “Homeschooling: Parent Rights Absolutism vs. Child Rights to

Education & Protection," has garnered much attention. It should. She delights in making the case to crush homeschooling, and much more.

Currently, 3-4% (close to 2 million) children are being homeschooled. Moreover, as many as 10% of all students are homeschooled at some point; the numbers are growing. Bartholet wants this to end.

She deeply resents the "near-absolute" power that parents exercise. The legal argument upon which parental power rests, she says, "is based on a dangerous idea about parent rights—that those with enormous physical and other power over infants and children should be subject to virtually no check on that power."

Of course, if children are to be reared by adults who are not their parents, those persons would, necessarily, have "enormous physical and other power" over them. But that kind of power imbalance is okay with her: it's the child's parents who are the problem. She objects to their "monopoly," as though this were somehow unfair. She believes it is.

What is really angering Bartholet is the fact that conservative Christians do most of the homeschooling: they are at least a majority and may account for as much as 90%. She calls them "religious ideologues." If the homeschoolers were secular left-wing ideologues, like her and her colleagues at Harvard, that would not be a problem.

She accuses these homeschooling Christian parents of "isolating their children from the majority culture and indoctrinating them in views and values that are in serious conflict with that culture." What they need, she contends, is "exposure to the values of tolerance and deliberative democracy."

Herchutzpah is astonishing.

It is certainly true that many parents who homeschool their children seek to protect them from the rot that marks much of the dominant culture: internet pornography, violent video games, obscene lyrics, anti-Christian fare, and the like. They also seek to provide an alternative to school curricula that teach their children to disdain our Judeo-Christian heritage and lie about our nation's historic fight for liberty. Moreover, it is not the parents who are promoting the sick idea that we can change our sex—it's the nutty ones in academia.

As I pointed out in *Common Sense Catholicism: How to Resolve Our Cultural Crisis*, there are more bizarre ideas taught in the colleges and universities today than at any time in history. It is so crazy, in some quarters, that there is very little difference between the asylum and the academy. As for the need to teach tolerance, there is less of it on the average college campus today than there is in any institution in our society. That is why Bartholet's interest in teaching tolerance to homeschoolers is risible.

Bartholet maintains that parents who homeschool their children are a threat to their safety. Parents can "subject them to abuse and neglect free from the scrutiny that helps protect children in regular schools." She really needs to do her homework before sounding so sophomoric.

To those who have written about this subject, as I have, we know that the public schools not only tolerate unspeakably high rates of sexual abuse, they have resisted, via their unions, the establishment of a nationwide data bank. It is this which allows molesting teachers to be moved from one school district to another—it's called "passing the trash"—ensuring even further abuse.

The Catholic Church went through this problem from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. Fortunately, it has made enormous progress. But the public schools are still stuck in neutral.

Bartholet seems oblivious to all this.

"Teachers and other education personnel have long been responsible for a significant percentage of all reports to CPS [child protective services], larger than any other group." This flies in the face of all the evidence. She is apparently unaware of the U.S. Department of Education studies, and the reports by the Associated Press and *USA Today* on this subject.

Bartholet can get downright nasty. She says families that choose to homeschool their children do so "because it enables them to escape the attention of CPS." In other words, not only do these vile Christian parents abuse their children, they choose homeschooling *because* they want to abuse them with impunity.

I say she is nasty because the source she cites does not support her outrageous claim. The source she names in a footnote says that "anecdotal evidence" shows that "some abusive parents...have taken advantage of lax homeschooling laws to hide their children from mandatory reporters." That is very different from what she said. She said families deliberately choose to homeschool their children so they can escape scrutiny.

Bartholet really looks like an amateur when she cites *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg as a source showing that abuse and neglect in homeschooling is on-going. When Goldberg was in college, she advocated violence against innocent persons. To be specific, when she was at SUNY-Buffalo she wrote a piece for the campus newspaper urging readers to "do your part and spit at [pro-life students]. Kick them in the head."

Bartholet also cites a book by Michael and Debi Pearl, homeschooling advocates, accusing them of promoting child abuse. For instance, their book recommends spanking. But they explicitly say this should never be done when a parent is

angry. The fact that a few irresponsible homeschooling parents who read their book and abused their adopted children hardly proves Bartholet's point. Not only that, the Pearls specifically recommend against adopting children from foreign countries. The abused children in question were from foreign countries.

The recommendations made by Bartholet are rich with hyperbole. We need to rid ourselves of homeschooling, she contends, because of what it allows. "Parents can choose to beat their children, starve them, or chain them up, free from scrutiny by any who are required to report suspected abuse and neglect." Her hatred of Christians is palpable.

To top things off, it is striking to read a Harvard law professor rail against the U.S. Constitution. She calls it "outdated and inadequate by the standards of the rest of the world." Most people worldwide, she fails to say, live under tyrannical regimes. What bothers her are negative rights, such as "Congress shall pass no law." She wants this model supplanted by positive rights, such as "Everyone must." A better prescription for tyranny could not be found—it's why dictators love to dictate.

Bartholet wants to bestow children with positive rights. So when children are given rights, they can claim that their parents accede to their interests. This has always been the dream of radical egalitarians.

Her number-one recommendation is that there should be a "general presumption against homeschooling." The burden, she says, must fall on parents who need to justify their request. She allows for "exceptions," but in those instances the parents need to jump through an array of hoops, all of which are designed to weaken their status and enhance the power of the state.

Parents must submit their "intended curriculum and education

plan"; offer proof of their credentials; submit to testing "on a regular basis"; allow "home visits by school authorities"; allow background checks, etc.

In other words, if they make the cut, parents who are permitted to homeschool must give up their parental rights and bow to the edicts of the state.

This is just the beginning. Bartholet wants to extend the reach of the state to police the private schools, singling out religious ones. "Religious and other groups with views and values far outside the mainstream operate private schools with very little regulation." This means, she says, they are being deprived of "exposure to alternative perspectives."

Translated this means that Christians who homeschool their children are not teaching the values Bartholet wants to instill in them.

This would surely mean, for example, that these children are being deprived of learning that it is a pregnant woman's right to have her child killed in utero by someone who is not a doctor. The children would also learn that it is okay for boys and girls to rebel against their nature and switch their sex by adopting the services of someone who will mutilate their genitals.

Bartholet is upset because kids who are homeschooled are beyond the reach of the state and are being given values she abhors. She knows better than their parents what values they should have, and wants to subject them to her tutoring. This is the mindset of a despot.

This all boils down to one thing: In the mind of radical egalitarians, the number one enemy is the family. The family is the heart of inequality and the source of traditional values. It must therefore be weakened, if not annihilated.

Parents have every right to homeschool their children. To be

sure, there is a role for the state to play, but it must be focused, reasonable, and limited. What Bartholet wants is to eliminate homeschooling and crush religious schools. The exceptions she offers are a ruse, designed to make her appear conventional. If she were the only one making this argument, it would not matter, but the fact is there are many like her walking the halls of academia.

Parents who do not homeschool need to vigorously support those who do. At stake is much more than the right of parents to homeschool their offspring—at stake are the rights of all parents.

Egalitarians seek a world run by social engineers. Indeed, they see themselves as possessing godly powers and brook no compromise. They need to be resisted and defeated at every turn.