

# ARTICLES

## The Cincinnati Bible War (1869-1873) and its Impact on the Education of the City's Protestants, Catholics, and Jews

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### Introduction

A gesture of good will led to a momentous clash of principles in post-Civil War Cincinnati. In the late summer of 1869 there were indications that the Catholic Church might be willing to merge its parochial schools with those of the City's Board of Education. The board formally voted to enter into discussions with representatives of Archbishop Purcell. To demonstrate the good faith of the public schools, board member Samuel Miller proposed

That religious instruction and the reading of religious books, including the Holy Bible, are prohibited in the common schools of Cincinnati, it being the true object and intent of this rule to allow the children of the parents, of all sects and opinions in matters of faith and worship, to enjoy alike the benefits of the common school fund.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholics withdrew almost immediately from conversations with the board, but Miller's proposal was fiercely debated and, in late fall, passed. Injunctions, court cases, and ultimately a decision by the State Supreme Court (1873) ended the proceedings by permitting the board to ban Bible readings. The dispute itself was never completely resolved.

This essay will examine Cincinnati's Bible War and trace the educational implications for Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and freethinkers in its aftermath.

## The City and its Population

Cincinnati, the Queen City of the West, could boast of a population of two hundred and sixteen thousand in 1870. Among the ten largest cities in America, it had grown from a river town of less than ten thousand fifty years earlier to the leading commercial center of the West in the years before the Civil War. By 1870 its status was being eclipsed by Chicago and St. Louis, but it still remained a significant commercial, publishing, educational, and religious center. Cincinnati's growth was fueled by European emigration, especially from German-speaking lands, and Ireland. Originally settled by Easterners from Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, as early as 1840 about 45 percent of its population was foreign born, 60 percent of whom were German. In 1870 the German population of Cincinnati was estimated to be over fifty thousand, or 23.2 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> The small, relatively homogeneous founding population (as measured by national background and religion) had grown rapidly and become far more variegated.

There is no good estimate on how the city's population was distributed among Catholics and Protestants in 1870. Protestants probably still outnumbered Catholics, although the latter were gaining rapidly. German immigrants were the most religiously mixed of the major population groups: the majority were Catholic, but there were also substantial numbers of Lutherans and an estimated eight thousand German Jews (3.7 percent of the population).<sup>3</sup>

Another way to look at the diversity of the city's population is to examine in which schools children were enrolled. The *Annual Report* of Cincinnati's Common Schools for the year ending June 30, 1870, compared enrollments in 1857 to 1868. In the earlier year 24.4 percent attended church schools, 12.2 percent private, and 63 percent public. In 1868 the proportions has changed to 34 percent church, 4.5 percent private, and 60.8 percent public. As church enrollments were nearly all in the Catholic schools of the city, Board President H. L. Wehmer concluded that

these facts could seem to indicate that a greater effort should be made to make the Public Schools less objectionable to the Catholics if we desire to avoid an irrepressible conflict. That some way can be found by which the conflicting elements of our population may be brought together upon a common

platform is certainly possible.

Raising the competition for students to the level of national survival, he argued,

Let the friends of the Common Schools remember that these schools are part of the bulwarks of our Republic. Let them stand shoulder to shoulder in time of danger and resolve whatever minor differences may divide them that the Common Schools must be preserved.<sup>4</sup>

Inclusiveness, however, ended at the line of race. Cincinnati's freed African Americans were restricted to "colored schools," which were run by the Board of Common Schools.<sup>5</sup>

In the school year 1869–70 public schools enrolled twenty-seven thousand. However, the more significant figure is the average daily enrollment of the public schools of nineteen thousand five hundred and fifty. The Catholic schools were believed to have enrolled over twelve thousand in the same school year, and their numbers had been growing more rapidly than public school enrollments. Of special significance, over half of all public school attendance was in its "German department," ten thousand four hundred and forty—or 53.4 percent. These highly acclaimed bilingual programs, what would today be called dual language programs, continued through primary school.<sup>6</sup> As the board noted, "these [data] show that almost the entire growth of the schools is due to the increase in numbers in [the German] department. During the last ten years the number of children who study German has increased from 4,788 to 10,440, an increase of nearly one hundred and twenty per cent."<sup>7</sup>

German Catholic parishes that supported parochial schools were also responsive to their congregants, providing German language programs. The Jewish day schools in Cincinnati in the 1850s and 1860s all provided German language and culture in their regular curricula. Unlike public schools in other cities with significant German and other immigrant populations, however, the public schools of Cincinnati also were sensitive and responsive to the cultural and linguistic wishes of residents.<sup>8</sup> The actions, along with the expressed concerns, of the board underlined that Cincinnati's public schools were committed to enrolling all of the city's white children in

its common schools, regardless of language or religious background. This needs to be kept in mind as we review the events of 1869, Cincinnati's Bible War.

### **Bible Reading in Cincinnati's Public Schools**

Reading the Bible in Cincinnati's schools most probably began with the formation of the city's common schools in 1829. It was not so much a formal board decision as a continuation of the Protestant roots and practices of American schools prior to the rise of free, public common schooling. In 1842, however, Cincinnati's Roman Catholic Bishop (later Archbishop) John Baptist Purcell, then serving as a public school examiner,<sup>9</sup> raised the objection that Catholic children were required to read from the King James version of the Bible and that schoolbooks included passages offensive to the Catholic Church. In response the board unanimously approved the following resolutions:

That the President of the Board be requested to inform Bishop Purcell, that he is invited by the Board, to examine the books used in English Common Schools, and the German Common Schools, or to cause them to be examined, and all obnoxious passages pointed out.

[and]

That no pupil of the Common Schools be required to read the Testament or Bible, if its parents or guardians request that it be excused from that exercise.<sup>10</sup>

These resolutions apparently were neglected in practice. Hence, in 1852 the Bible-reading issue was raised again, this time by a Catholic member of the Board of Education, Dr. Jerome Mudd. He proposed that each child be free to use the version of the Bible selected by his or her parents, rather than the exemption from listening to or studying the King James version, as passed in 1842.

Vehement debate followed. At first it appeared that the King James would still reign as the only authorized Bible. But after more than two months a compromise was finally reached "which allowed for the use of Catholic editions of scriptures as long as notes and commentary were not read publicly..."<sup>11</sup> Catholic children were permitted to use the Catholic-authorized Douay-Rheims English

translation of the Bible. But did the prohibition against reading the authorized interpretation of the text, as explicated in notes and comments, satisfy Catholic concerns? We shall return to this issue below.

Regardless of the new board policy, Catholics still pressed politically for a share of public tax dollars for Catholic schools. The ongoing efforts to get the state legislature to rewrite the education law to permit the allocation of public funds to religious schools failed repeatedly. Protestant Ohio could beat back the political power of Cincinnati's Catholics. The greater the Catholic effort, the stronger the resolve of Protestants, evangelical and reform, to prevent public support of Catholic schools. It reinforced the Protestant commitment to retain what they believed to be the proper religious atmosphere in nonsectarian common schools by opening the school day with Bible reading (from the King James version of the Bible, without note or comment), recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and singing of hymns. Catholics were perceived as the archenemies of public nonsectarian education, lacking commitment to American institutions and practices, and as aliens pledged to a foreign ruler who dictated the beliefs and practices of his American followers.

### **Bible-Reading Controversies in New York City and Philadelphia**

In 1840 New York City's Catholics petitioned for public support of its parochial schools, arguing that the so-called public schools, run by the Public School Society (PSS), were, in essence, sectarian. They used schoolbooks which portrayed Catholics in negative ways and read aloud each day from the King James Bible, a practice unacceptable to Catholics.<sup>12</sup> Bishop John Hughes of New York lost his petitions at both the city and state levels and was unable to have law or practice changed in order for Catholic schools to share in the common school funds. His efforts, however, did lead to the establishment of a "public" Board of Education (1842) and the ultimate demise of the PSS (1853). As the religious affiliations of New Yorkers became increasingly diverse, the petitions and political pressure of Catholics, Jews, Unitarians, and freethinkers led to revisions in the state education laws (1853) which, in effect, permitted local option with regard to Bible reading. In New York City that meant that in the local Wards the Boards of School Trustees made the decisions, and in heavily

immigrant Wards, populated by immigrant Irish, Germans, and Jews, Bible reading at the commencement of the school day was dispensed with quietly. Bible supporters would not concede defeat, nor control, of public schooling, and in 1859, led by a strongly pro-Bible school superintendent, the Bible reading at the start of the school day was once again made compulsory (by Board of Education regulation rather than by state education law mandate).<sup>13</sup>

Philadelphia experienced perhaps the most bloody battles over Bible reading in the schools. The Bible Riots of 1844 bear witness to the intensity of feelings and Protestant-Catholic antagonisms in the City of Brotherly Love. The Protestant-controlled Board of Education was more interested in retaining the purity of Protestant-infused common schooling than in the incorporation of all segments of the city's population into its schools.<sup>14</sup>

In both the New York and Philadelphia cases it is impossible to disentangle the immigrant versus religion factors in assessing the actions of their respective Boards of Education. In both cities there was a commitment to enrolling the children of the poor (into which class most immigrants fell) in order to shape their characters and to Americanize those for whom this was a new homeland. In both cities, however, there were strong nativist and anti-Catholic feelings and little receptiveness to Catholic appeals either for religious tolerance in public schools or public funding of Catholic schools. On their part, however, it was not clear if the Catholics wanted their children to be included in the public schools or instead wanted to demonstrate the inequity of their treatment in so-called public schools. They condemned public schools as Protestant if Bibles, prayers, and hymns were included or godless if these were excluded. Either way, they could use unacceptable public school practices to justify petitions for public support of separate Catholic schools in which the Bible, when taught, included interpretations of a biblical text authorized by the church.

The cities of Philadelphia, New York, and Cincinnati, and their struggles over religion and schooling, are linked in the person of New York's Archbishop John Hughes. Hughes's first parish upon graduation from St. Mary's Seminary at Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1826 was in the Diocese of Philadelphia, where he was ordained at St. Joseph's Church. It was in Philadelphia that he first earned his spurs as the great defender of Catholic interests. As debater, public speaker,

and essayist he confronted the Protestant establishment at each and every point where he felt the Catholic Church was under attack. He was witness to the harsh feelings between Catholic and Protestant communities but appeared to be respected as much by his theological foes as his fellow Catholics. He left Philadelphia in 1838 to assume the post of coadjutor bishop of New York.<sup>15</sup> His attitude toward public schools initially was shaped by what he perceived to be anti-Catholic policies enforced by the Philadelphia School Board. His active, some said pugnacious, defense of Catholic interests was shaped by his bruising theological encounters in Philadelphia. His later physical defense of New York City's cathedral and Catholic churches in 1844 was in direct response to the Philadelphia riots of 1844 and what Hughes perceived to have been the far too forgiving and defensive policies of Philadelphia's Bishop Kenrick.<sup>16</sup>

Hughes, while still in Philadelphia, had been considered for the office of bishop of Cincinnati, which was given in 1833 to his fellow seminarian and life-long friend, John Baptist Purcell. They corresponded regularly over the years, seeking practical as well as theological advice from each other, and after Hughes's elevation to bishop, they traveled to Rome together on several occasions, permitting time for more extensive conversations. Early in Purcell's near fifty-year tenure as bishop of Cincinnati, he wrote to Hughes seeking advice on how to proceed with a public school Bible-reading issue. In a letter dated June 17, 1837, he invited Hughes to Cincinnati to discuss various issues, in particular an

important matter on which I long to talk with you is this: The College of Teachers, which meets in the first week of October, annually, in Cincinnati, has named my humble self and Dr. Aydelotte, an Episcopal pastor and president of our Woodward High School, a committee to report on the propriety or impropriety of introducing the Bible, as a school-book into our schools. The ground then taken can, I hope, be maintained before prejudiced judges and as this same college of teachers is likely to prove a powerful engine for good, or for evil, I think we should take it in hand, ourselves and work it. We could purge out much of the old leaven, if we mixed more with the Mass. *The only difficulty is how to mix with it and retain our religious identity.*

He urgently sought Hughes's advice and if Hughes could not travel to Cincinnati to discuss the issue with him directly, begged for "a copious letter containing the necessary suggestions and...a connected and developed argument on the Catholic side of the question."<sup>17</sup>

Hughes responded in a letter on June 27, 1837, setting forth his personal position, which eventually was adopted by the Diocese of New York when he assumed the bishop's seat and by Purcell in Cincinnati. It displayed Hughes's strong antipathy and distrust of Protestants in general and those seeking favors in particular. The Protestants'

enmity to Rome is their great overruling passion, which they are willing to gratify in every degree, and by every means. With this conviction on my mind, you will not be surprised that I have no confidence in their religious friendship; that I dread their favors.

In religious coalition they have *nothing to lose*, whatever may be the effect of the experiment. Their creeds, so called, are so ambiguously defined that the addition or subtraction of half-a-dozen dogmas cannot destroy their identity—except, perhaps, one of the tenets adopted should be atheism!

They know that we have a creed which cannot exist but *in its integrity*.<sup>18</sup>

Hughes concluded that Catholics could not meet Protestants on equal grounds. Their bad faith, numbers, and resources would be used to harm rather than help Catholics. Catholics, he argued, could not compromise on any aspect of religious education, nor delegate such instruction to others. Hughes's defensive stance vis-à-vis the American Protestant establishment, his wariness of the intentions of Protestants, the anti-Catholicism he had observed in America, and his complete commitment to his own church led him to support and promote a separatist, self-segregating educational program for American Catholics. The education of Catholics had to simultaneously protect the church from its enemies and authentically educate the faithful within the church.

There are certain outworks in the discipline of the Church, which are conservative of her integrity and safety. These keep her enemies not only from entering her gates, but also from approaching too near her walls *outside*. One of these is to prevent the uneducated, the children, and the faithful at large from receiving any of the things of religion through any other channel except the Church herself exclusively. Hence the Bishops in Ireland never pronounced a wiser decision than when they refused to allow their people to receive the *Catholic Scriptures, with Catholic notes, explanations, and approvals*, from one of those rascally [Protestant missionary] societies that hit on this last expedient to obtain access to the Catholic people.

In these coalitions there is no advantage. If we join them for instance in education, they will not expunge their abominable books. And if they should yield to correct some things, they will retain others. What has been excluded will be more than compensated by the *implied* sanction of what will be retained.<sup>19</sup>

Hence Hughes's advice in effect was not to participate in the proceedings of the College of Teachers, but be leery of cooperative or collaborative ventures with Protestants. It is interesting to note that with regard to reviewing schoolbooks to identify anti-Catholic passages, both Hughes and Purcell, in their respective cities, raised objections, and both were invited to review the texts but neither did so either directly or through subordinates. Hughes's argument regarding *implied* sanction of what remained after offending passages were removed to his mind far outweighed the elimination of selected offending sections. Hughes later argued that it would evolve into an endless task as each new edition or new book had to be reviewed, leading to endless friction and confrontations.

Hughes also raised interesting pedagogical questions related to Bible reading.

With regard to the Bible as a school-book, I think the selection one of the worst possible. The style is not good. The subjects treated of are sometimes such as, if they were found in any

other book, would be considered as immoral and injurious to the minds of youth. The sacredness of the book renders it unfit for the levities and sometimes profaneness of schools. Its meaning too, far about the scholar and the teacher—the version also—every thing makes it in my opinion objectionable as a common school-book.<sup>20</sup>

After Hughes's partial victory (defeat of the Public School Society) and partial defeat (no legislation to permit state funds in support of Catholic schools), he did not mount another campaign to make public schools more acceptable to potential Catholic students. He did not participate in the heated debates in New York City in 1844 regarding compulsory reading of the King James Bible in the public schools, advanced by a zealous school superintendent but quashed by the Board of Education. Given his position recorded above in favor of Catholic Church control of the education of all Catholics and his disapproval of Bible reading as an appropriate school activity, his lack of involvement is explicable. As his first biographer, Hassard, suggested, "the Bishop's silence was perhaps partly owing to a feeling that it would be imprudent for him to interfere while the public were still excited by the Native American movement, and partly because he had made up his mind to have nothing more to do with the State schools, but to get schools of his own without further delay."<sup>21</sup>

The extent to which Hughes became an opponent of public education can be seen in a January 1852 letter he wrote to Archbishop Blanc of New Orleans, who had solicited his advice on the school question. Archbishop Blanc was then challenging his state's school laws in an effort to gain state support for Catholic schools. Hughes conceded that his efforts a decade earlier in New York had led to considerable improvement for Catholics, even though "I took good care never to express myself satisfied with the change, altho' it was much for the better." Before his campaign, education was in the hands of a private philanthropy "composed of bigots. Now it is open, and Catholics have the power to be and to appoint their own school commissioners, according to their numbers in the different wards..." Hughes, however, was still pressing for public support of denominational schools which he saw as a means to support Catholic education and to save all of American education as well.

This dragon of education is, in my mind, devouring the hope of the Country as well as of religion. As at present conducted it is socialism, Red republicanism, universalism, infidelity, deism, atheism, pantheism—any thing, every thing, except religionism & patriotism.

Fight against by all means in the name of God, & of the U.[nited] States. You may, probably will, be defeated. But no matter. Something will have been done.<sup>22</sup>

Hughes advised Blanc to argue for tax support of religious schools on the grounds of right, not on the basis of requested privilege. Hughes firmly believed that a child had a right to religious education consistent with his or her faith and that Protestant-leaning or secular schools denied this right to Catholic children. Hence they were entitled to a free, tax-supported education offered and controlled by the Catholic Church, which, he argued in equity, would place Catholics on equal footing with their fellow citizens who were Protestant.

Purcell chose to participate in the 1837 sessions of the College of Teachers, seeking to arrive at a compromise so that Catholic children would not be asked to use Protestant Bibles and that a form of “released time” for religious instruction be instituted so that each denomination could instruct its children in the Bible, religion, and morality. The college, however, “opted for the religious use of scripture without comment, violating the Catholic stand that only a Catholic edition of the Bible with appropriate notes was suitable for Catholic children.”<sup>23</sup> As in 1842 and again in 1852, Purcell sought to protect the children of his church from Protestant practices and Protestant Bibles by pressing the Cincinnati Board of Education to make changes in its Bible-reading policies.

### **The Cincinnati Bible War of 1869**

Preliminary discussions regarding some form of merger between the public and Catholic school systems took place during the summer of 1869, initiated by F. W. Rauch, a new school board member who was Catholic. Board members and Catholics, led by the Rev. Edward Purcell, brother of the bishop, participated in conversations which

held out hope for positive action. Rauch and the nine other Catholic board members set forth a six-point agenda for incorporating Catholic schools into the public, including the purchase of all parochial school houses, and a provision that "no religious teaching, or the reading or circulation of any religious books, papers or documents shall be permitted in them."<sup>24</sup> Twenty-seven board members signed the proposed plan that was presented to Father Edward Purcell. As Helfman pointed out, with twenty-seven votes, "more than a majority of the board of education, were willing to bargain the banning of Bible-reading in the classrooms of Cincinnati in exchange for the return of Catholic children to the local public schools."<sup>25</sup> Father Purcell, in tentatively agreeing to the proposal, asked for two concessions: that teachers in the parochial schools already licensed by the board be permitted to retain their positions, and that the former parochial schoolhouses could be used for religious instruction on weekends.

Hence, with a preliminary agreement reached, at the meeting of the Board of Education on September 6, 1869, Mr. Rauch proposed the following:

*Whereas*, There is a desire, on the part of various members of the Catholic Church, to unite certain schools, under the control of the Church, with the Public Schools, and to place such schools under the control of the Board of Education; therefore

*Resolved*, That a Committee of Conference, consisting of five, be appointed by the Chair, who shall report, at an early day, to this Board, upon what basis said schools can be consolidated with the Public Schools; Also

Resolved, That the President and Vice President be added to this Committee.

Board member Samuel Miller then moved to amend the forgoing by adding the following:

*Resolved*, That religious instruction and the reading of religious books, including the Holy Bible, are prohibited in the

Common Schools of Cincinnati it being the true object and intent of this rule to allow the children of the parents of all sects and opinions, in matters of faith and worship, to enjoy alike the benefit of the Common School Fund.

Resolved, That so much of the Regulations on the Course of Study and Text Books, in the Intermediate and District Schools (page 213, Annual Report) as reads as follows: "The opening exercises, in every department, shall commence by reading a portion of the Bible, by or under the direction of the teacher and appropriate singing by the pupils," be repealed.<sup>26</sup>

The Rauch and Miller resolutions were severed and treated independently, although conceptually they were all of one piece: the prior working toward the structural integration of the two systems, and the latter extending an olive branch signifying the good faith of the board and the intention to make the common schools religiously neutral, acceptable to adherents of all religions (or no religion).

The reaction to these proposals, especially Miller's, was immediate and highly vocal. Defenders of the Bible saw it as a devilish Catholic plot to remove the Bible from the public schools, leaving the students of these godless institutions devoid of moral direction and religious instruction. A few calmer heads saw it for what it was, a practical plan to incorporate twelve thousand or more Catholic children into the city's public schools, for which their parents already contributed their taxes, and not to violate their freedom of conscience by forcing the Protestant Bible on them.<sup>27</sup> Pro-Bible petitions were circulated, meetings held, and petitions made to the board.

At the next board meeting on September 13, Archbishop Purcell, by means of a letter of the same date, indicated his willingness to participate in the merger discussions, stating in a most backhanded fashion that

He [Purcell, speaking of himself in the third person] is perfectly satisfied with the Catholic schools as they now exist, but he thinks, as every honest man may, that it is unjust to impose restrictions, such as in conscience they and their natural guardians must ever resist, on the rights of Catholic children to the benefits of the District Schools. He is quite

prepared for a vote against the exclusion of Sectarianism from the Public Schools. The public will then see who are the exclusionists and the intolerant.<sup>28</sup>

A week later, however, Purcell withdrew from discussions, leaving both Catholic board members and other supporters of the merger out in the cold. His letter stated in unambiguous terms that Catholic youth cannot be educated in public schools.

The entire government of Public Schools in which Catholic youth is educated cannot be given over to the civil power.

We, as Catholics, cannot approve of that system of education for youth which is apart from instruction in the Catholic faith and the teaching of the church.

If the School Board can offer anything in conformity with these principles, as has been done in England, France, Canada, Prussia and other countries, where the rights of conscience in the matter of education have been fully recognized, I am prepared to give it respectful consideration.

The board's negotiating committee, in conveying Purcell's letter, added that "[Bishop Purcell] further states that he will use every effort whilst in Rome, to procure such modification of the rule as may remove all obstacles to their attendance [in public schools]."<sup>29</sup>

This latter comment needs to be placed in context. Purcell was traveling to Rome to participate at the First Council of the Vatican called by Pope Pius IX, which would be asked to pass on the doctrine of papal infallibility. For anti-Catholics this was what they had warned: decisions of the Catholic Church in America were dictated by the Pope in Rome, a foreign potentate—anti-republican and pro-monarchical, and that the followers of that church were required to follow papal decisions. Michael Perko places the significance of Purcell's exit line to both Protestants and Catholics in clear relief.

To understand the symbolic importance of [the doctrine of papal infallibility] for Americans, it is necessary to recall the basic tenets of the American Protestant ideology. Evangelical Protestants prided themselves on freedom from both political and religious oppression, and on their fostering of personal

liberties. Perhaps no theological issue of the era more divided Protestants and Catholics, as a result, than that of infallibility. For ultramontane Catholics, it served as a visible symbol of the church's strength and mission as the only valid interpreter of the gospels. For Protestants, infallibility was the most prominent expression of Catholic ignorance and superstition.<sup>30</sup>

Thus ended the effort to merge the public and Catholic schools in Cincinnati. Rather than bringing about a rapprochement between the two communities, it intensified divisions. It reinforced the Protestant view that the church was the enemy of the great American common school, unable to compromise its own particular interests for the good of the whole.

The question arises as to why the Catholic Church entered into these discussions in the first place. The theological position of the church regarding religious education had long been enunciated. Hughes and others had been ardent boosters of parochial schooling. The parochial schools in Cincinnati were highly popular among Catholics and growing rapidly. This, in fact, may have been the root of the diocese's problem and the proximate stimulus to enter merger talks with the board. Father Edwin Purcell, the key Catholic figure in early discussions, was the vicar general of the diocese, the administrative arm of his brother, the archbishop. The cost of supporting a rapidly growing Catholic school system must have placed a heavy financial burden on the diocese. The number of Catholic immigrants showed no signs of decreasing, and Father Purcell may have felt that it was worth making some concessions in return for the full funding of the education of Catholics. The archbishop, however, decided otherwise and withdrew to a more doctrinally orthodox educational position.

Although the merger talks were now dead, the Miller resolutions were still before the board and public attention was firmly focused on the proposed Bible ban. The mass rally held at Pike's Music Hall on September 28, 1869, illustrates the sense of the outrage felt by the pro-Bible forces. George R. Sage, a speaker at the rally and a lawyer who would be a member of the legal team that represented the plaintiffs in a suit to enjoin the board from banning Bible reading, argued that the ban

means...not merely the exclusion of the Bible, but the expurgation, from every text book in the Common Schools, of every religious sentiment. It means the abolition, from the text books of the schools of Cincinnati, of every recognition of Christianity, or God Almighty, or conscience, or of accountability to the Supreme Being. It means to put it in a single sentence to make the schools of Cincinnati schools of atheism. And I say, my fellow citizens, that it is the most outrageous and damnable proposition that has ever been made in respect to our Common Schools."<sup>31</sup>

The pro-Bible forces saw the ban as an attack on public education itself. Rufus King, former school board president, prominent lawyer, and later a member of the plaintiffs' legal team along with Sage, was a leader in the forces seeking to preserve Bible reading in the schools. He argued that

If this coalition which now seeks to expel the Bible from our public schools shall succeed in the real object which they are gradually coming at, *the crushing out of all religious instruction*, what will be the result? Who does not see that righteous men of all sects and creeds will then unite to tear down such a system. It will be far better, as one of the parties in this scheme proclaims, to have no public schools at all, than that they should be the 'godless' institutions which they would thus become.<sup>32</sup>

King came close to accepting the argument that Archbishop Hughes had advanced: If Americans were confronted with "godless" public schools, they would prefer a revised system of schooling that permitted public support of denominational schools in preference to secular, godless institutions.

To give a sense of the arguments of the anti-Bible-reading forces, we need to turn to perhaps its most eloquent advocate, German-born Judge J. P. Stallo, a lawyer, scientist, and diplomat who served as a member of the defense council in the suit to enjoin the board from implementing its Bible-reading ban. He heatedly contested in court the plaintiffs' argument that America was a Christian nation, that the Bible was the essence of the moral teaching of that religion, and that

its removal from the schools would spell an end to moral instruction and ultimately an end to public education. He also contested the claim that Bible reading, without note or comment, was nonsectarian.

What will the Catholic say to this claim? He will say that the relation of the Bible, in any version, to his faith, is wholly different from its relation to the faith of a Protestant; that the Catholic seeker after religious truth turns to his church and not to the Bible, which is only one of many sources of religious truth...the practice of reading the Scriptures without comment is an essentially Protestant practice, and a symbol of the Protestant faith. More than this, the Catholic apprehends danger from the uncommented and indiscriminate reading of the Bible, not only to what he regards as sound religious doctrine, but also...to good morals.<sup>33</sup>

Stallo pointed out the theological problems teachers confronted in remaining denominationally neutral and yet abiding by Bible-reading requirements. "The teachers in our public schools...are not abstract non-denominational Christians; they are...Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Trinitarians, Unitarians, etc. Each one has religious bias, of which he will find it difficult to divest himself when he comes to read the Bible,"<sup>34</sup> favoring some portions and avoiding others, and in the process highlighting or submerging doctrinal affirmations or biases.

In the end, Bible reading fails to achieve its avowed ends. According to Stallo,

If the whole body of Protestant Christian faith (and such the Bible is claimed to be by most Protestants, as I am told) is placed in the hands of the teachers and children in the public schools, these schools inevitably become denominational schools, though of the poorest possible sort. I say of the poorest possible sort, for what religious culture can be imparted by the hurried, mechanical 'dog-trot'... mumbling of scriptural passages, translated from writing which, granting that they are inspired, nevertheless embody, or at least reflect, the imagery and modes of thought of other ages of various degrees of remoteness, and of races and nations whose mental physiognomy is as strange to us as their physical aspect?<sup>35</sup>

In his arguments he addressed the case of that "large body of citizens who are not Christians, the Jews, and those persons whose faith is not formulated in the writings and professions of any of the Christian sects, those who have lately been indiscriminately denounced as atheists and infidels...If they have equal civil rights with the orthodox Christians, the Bible must of necessity be excluded from the State schools, and sent to the Christian houses, Sunday schools, and churches."<sup>36</sup> There are no civil rights exclusive to Christian believers, nor any rights, including the right of conscience, that they legally can be denied.

Stallo closed his defense with a spirited plea for universalism and equality before the law. "I want to bring the children of Protestants, Catholics, Jews,—yea, of unbelievers,—together in the common school-room..." The world will not end, nor will immorality run rampant, he assured those in opposition to the ban.

The spires will point to the heaven, the unmuffled church bells will speak of God, as before; the 'free Bible' will have free sway, but in a free State, in free churches or religious schools, by the side of free secular schools. And I hope my friend will not regard it as a calamity if the son of a Presbyterian or Methodist, after his intercourse with the child of a Jew, Catholic, or unbeliever, should turn to the Scriptures with the feeling that the truth is broader than the leaves of any book...<sup>37</sup>

After a fall season of skirmishes over the Miller resolutions, on November 1 they were passed by a vote of 22-15.<sup>38</sup> The next day Bible proponents went to court seeking an injunction to restrain the board from implementing the ban. Judge Bellamy Storer, himself a former president of the school board, as presiding judge of the Superior Court granted a temporary injunction on November 2. At the end of the month a three-judge panel convened to hear arguments for a permanent injunction in the case of *Minor v. Board of Education of Cincinnati*.<sup>39</sup> In court the city and nation were treated to eloquent presentations on both sides. Plaintiffs' lawyers were all prominent attorneys and their number included a future president of the University of Cincinnati. On the defense side, George Hoadley became governor of Ohio, Stanley Matthews, a U.S. Supreme Court

associate justice, and Judge Stallo, U.S. minister to Italy.

By a split decision, Judges Storer and Marcellus Hagens supported a permanent injunction, with Judge Alphonso Taft in dissent. The decision, handed down February 15, 1870, was appealed by the board to the Ohio Supreme Court. In February 1873 it handed down a unanimous verdict reversing the lower court's decision, effectively adopting Judge Taft's dissent, and permitting the board to suspend Bible reading in Cincinnati's public schools.<sup>40</sup>

The serious nature of the controversy and the confusion wrought by bans and injunctions against bans still permitted a lighter side. At the February 21, 1870, board meeting, the first following the issuance of a permanent injunction, board member Johnson proposed that a committee be formed to decide what religion and what religious books would be taught in the schools, as the court provided no guidance in these matters. The Superior Court had cited the requirement of the Ohio Constitution that religious instruction be provided and that religious books be read, but went no further in directing the board on how to achieve these ends. Hence he offered the following tongue-in-cheek resolution:

*Resolved*, that A.D. Mayo, Thomas Vickers, Abner L. Frazer, Henry Mack, J.P. Carberry, and Merman Eckel be appointed a Committee on religious books and religious instruction, and that said Committee be required to agree, and report at the next meeting of this Board, what religious books and what kind of religious instruction shall be so furnished, and that in the mean time until such report of said Committee and the action of the Board thereon, each Principal, according to his own religious belief, (if he has any,) shall cause religion, (as he understands the same,) to be taught to all the pupils in the schools in his charge, and, in case any such Principal has no such belief, the duty hereby imposed shall be discharged by his assistant, or in case said assistant Principal has no such belief, then by the teacher, senior in age in said schools, who shall be found to be possessed of such belief.<sup>41</sup>

Although the resolution failed, it claimed ten votes out of twenty-six cast.

## The Jewish Position in the Bible War

The Jews of Cincinnati sent their children to the city's common schools from the time of their founding in 1829. In 1849 the first Jewish day school was established, Talmud Yelodim Institute, connected to the city's second oldest synagogue, Bene Yeshurun. By 1860, along with three other schools, it is estimated that fewer than two hundred and fifty of the city's more than twelve hundred school-age Jewish children attended Jewish day schools. "The other eighty percent of the Jewish children attended the city's public schools, thereby assuring ever more rapid acculturation and assimilation within the community."<sup>42</sup>

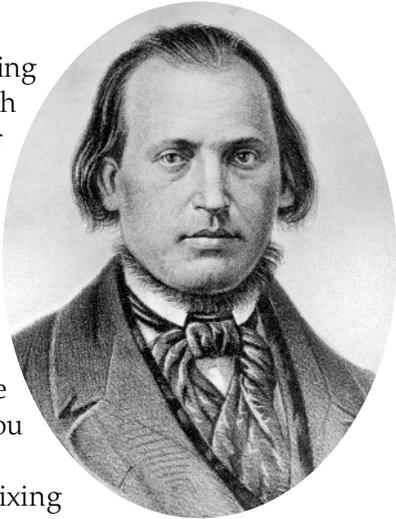
Bible reading in the public schools, along with the Lord's Prayer and Christian hymns, however, were objected to. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, Bohemian-born and educated, arrived in Cincinnati in 1854 to become rabbi of Bene Yeshurun and eventually the leading figure in the establishment of American Reform Judaism. He founded *The Israelite* (1854, after 1874 called *The American Israelite*), a weekly newspaper that became the press organ of the movement. In its first year of publication Wise addressed the Bible issue, albeit in an ironic voice. Responding to a politician's support of Bible reading in the public schools "without note or comment," which was claimed to keep it free of sectarian influences, Wise responded that "we agree to having the Bible in the common schools, but this is not the case... There is in the public school a mere translation of the Bible." The translations differed among sects, hence any one version was sectarian—the same argument made by Catholics. Wise suggested that if the Bible were to be used in the public schools, then it must be in the original Hebrew and Greek.<sup>43</sup>

In January 1869, in an episode that foreshadowed the Cincinnati Bible War, Louis Schaefer, a member of the Canton, Ohio Board of Education, "proposed that no religious matters should be brought into the public schools." This was strenuously opposed by Protestant clergymen. Schaefer argued that schools were for all citizens and could not be used for church purposes. He argued that the clergy "forget that it is neither anti-Christian nor anti-Jewish to say nothing on the subject of religion."

In support of Schaefer's position, Wise wrote that

We are of the opinion the school is established to teach the practical sciences and arts as far as the citizen needs them. All that can be done is to retain the point in which we agree and drop that to which either is opposed." [Leave religious instruction to church or synagogue.] It is a shame that those Reverend gentlemen can not attend to their own business, to teach religion to their flock, and want the teacher of the public school to assist them, to do the business for which they are paid.<sup>44</sup>

Wise clearly enunciated the prevailing Jewish position: separation of church and state, religious and secular instruction. The common schools must be acceptable to all, which requires religious neutrality. The state is responsible for secular learning and "claims but thirty hours weekly for its public schools. This gives you plenty of chance to educate your folks in that religion which you prefer."<sup>45</sup>



Wise argued strongly against mixing religion with public schooling. Bible reading in the schools, rather than promoting the good, would cause harm "because the main moral of the school is to educate citizens to perfect equality and friendship. You can not throw the seed of religious discord in schools, without upsetting the system on which they are based...."<sup>46</sup>

Wise, in characteristic fashion, acted decisively on his beliefs. He felt strongly that Judaism as a religion must distance itself from its national roots. Jews were to be perceived as adherents of a religion, not members of a distinct nationality. To promote this view, Wise believed fervently in American public schools as Americanizing agents. They could make Jewish youth knowledgeable in, and comfortable with, American civic and social culture and promote the process of civic integration. Hence, as superintendent of Talmud Yelodim, he abruptly closed the day school in 1867, although his board

opposed the school's closing, and converted it into a supplementary religious school that met on evenings and weekends. He encouraged the parents of his day pupils to enroll them in Cincinnati's public schools.

Talmud Yelodim Institute was by no means on the verge of collapse. In its final year of operations as a day school, although housed in temporary quarters because its building had been judged too small and was sold the prior year, had strong enrollments, and its board was actively seeking to purchase a new building or land on which to build a new school. Wise, however, seized this moment of temporary homelessness to close his school and advance his plan to Americanize Judaism.<sup>47</sup> Wise's full embrace of Cincinnati's public schools explains why his voice increasingly was raised in the late 1860s in opposition to Bible reading and other religious practices in the schools.

Dr. Max Lilienthal, who came to Cincinnati from New York in 1855, was the prime Jewish spokesman for public education and its relationship to the city's Jewish community. Born and educated in Germany, an educational reformer among the Jews of Russia in the 1840s, he came to New York in 1845 as rabbi to three temporarily united German Jewish congregations and as head of a "union" Jewish day school. He founded a private Jewish school in the 1850s and, when called to the pulpit of Bene Israel in Cincinnati (1855), he established a private school in that city. But shortly after his arrival in Cincinnati, he was elected to the Board of Education and served either on the elementary or high school board until his death in 1882. He was also a founding director of the University of Cincinnati (1872), as well as of Hebrew Union College (1875) (teaching at both these institutions) and served as president of the city's medical college. His embrace of public schooling was complete.<sup>48</sup>

In December 1869, during the Bible War, Lilienthal wrote two articles on the dispute for the *Jewish Times* of New York. He raised the question whether schools should be free or sectarian. Anticipating a favorable decision on the part of the court in Cincinnati, he wrote that

if decided, as everybody expects, in favor of our nonsectarian school system, then the agitation of inserting an acknowledgment of God into our constitution will be silenced, the aspiration of the Catholics for the supremacy of their

church will be at least legally frustrated; the separation of state and church will be gloriously vindicated, and the brightest gem in the American diadem, "Religious liberty and freedom of conscience," will have been put beyond the reach of any kind of fanaticism and bigotry.

Lilienthal, who guessed wrong as to the Court's decision, but ultimately right when the Ohio Supreme Court reversed the lower court on appeal, singled out the Catholics for particular attack. He had crossed swords before with Archbishop Purcell and the hierarchy of the Cincinnati church and was particularly opposed to their separatist tendencies, as well as overt discriminatory attacks on the city's Jews.<sup>49</sup>

The Catholics, or rather the Catholic clergy, are the sworn enemies of our free schools. The laity of the Roman Church would live with their fellow citizens in peace, as heretofore. But the clergy gains daily a stronger hold over them, and misleads them to their hearts' content.

For more than nine months the *Catholic Telegraph*, the official organ of the Reverend Mr. Purcell, the archbishop of this diocese, has attacked the public schools of our city [calling them godless, corrupt, warning Catholics from sending children to them, and denying the right of the City to tax Catholics for their support].<sup>50</sup>

Lilienthal, like Wise, wished to strip Judaism of its national element, preserving its religious aspects, most particularly its moral and prophetic voice. He was an unabashed American patriot and believed Jewish children needed to be brought up as committed American citizens. He expressed his sentiments at the dedication of congregation Bene Israel's new temple in 1868:

We owe no longer any allegiance to Jerusalem, save the respect all enlightened nations pay to this cradle of all civilizing religions. We cherish no longer any desire for a return to Palestine, but Proudly and gratefully exclaim with the psalmist, "Here is my resting place; here shall I reside; for I love this place."<sup>51</sup>

A letter Lilienthal wrote to a friend and mentor in Europe shortly after his arrival in New York in 1845 shows how quickly he had responded to the atmosphere of America, and explains his embrace and support of its institutions.

Oh, it is necessary that you breathe this free air of Columbia in order that you may be able to understand the pride and joy of her children; you must have shaken off the centuries dust of the old Jewish oppression in order to appreciate to the full the feeling, 'I am a man like every other': you must see here our Jewish brethren, the persecuted emigrants of persecuting Europe, in order to become convinced how worthily the Jew co-operates with his Christian brethren here...<sup>52</sup>

To Lilienthal and Wise, the American public school was seen as the natural place to realize the project of Jewish emancipation, so begrudgingly offered, but as quickly rescinded in the cramped world of Europe, where both church and state conspired to limit the civil and social lives of Jews. Full freedom, however, was best guaranteed by clear separation of church and state. This meant that within the walls of public schools, secular learning would be provided, and all children, regardless of faith (or lack thereof), would reside and participate as equals. Religion and religious instruction was a private matter of conscience, beyond the walls of common schools.

Lilienthal's commitment to this ideal is evident in his work with the board, as recognized by his fellow members. In a tribute which appeared in the *American Israelite* at the time of his death, his board colleagues wrote that he evidenced "by his position and services as a member of this body his thorough assimilation with the free public school ideas of this his adopted country." Board member Brown added to the official statement that "although he is a Rabbi of the Jewish Church, his views were broad enough to harmonize with all ideas tending to better the world."<sup>53</sup>

### **Aftermath of the Cincinnati Bible War**

More than two years after the Miller Resolutions were passed, the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio confirmed the board's power and

authority to determine the curriculum of the Cincinnati schools, including the power to ban the reading of the Bible. While not outlawing Bible reading in the schools (permitting local boards to ban it if they so decided), Judge Welch's decision was a major precedent in the legal separation of church and state. He denied that Christianity was the religion of America and argued for a "hands-off" policy in the relations between religious and civil realms.

Legal Christianity is a solecism, a contradiction of terms...Its laws are divine, and not human...United with government, religion never rises above the merest superstition; united with religion, government never rises above the merest despotism; and all history shows us that the more widely and completely they are separated, the better it is for both.<sup>54</sup>

Welch argued that the state had no right to tax a person for the support of religious instruction and advised that

the state not only keep its own hands off, but let it also see to it that religious sects keep their hands off of each other. Let religious doctrines have a fair field, and a free, intellectual, moral, and spiritual conflict.<sup>55</sup>

Evangelical Protestants were unhappy with the State Supreme Court's decision, overturning what they perceived to be the legitimate Christian basis of common school education. They feared that children, exposed to secular learning in a godless environment, would not learn to love and fear God, which would undermine the moral character of children. Infidelity would be promoted and hopes for salvation sacrificed.

Nonetheless, evangelical Protestants stayed in the public schools, albeit with their faith in common schooling greatly undermined. Many never gave up the fight to return God to the schools by bringing back the Bible and prayer. Their struggle persists to our day. But why didn't they leave the schools as the Bible was ushered out the door? They still saw Cincinnati's public schools as "our schools" and had hopes of returning, triumphant, to a reformed, God-infused school system. Secondly, there were virtually no alternative schools to which they could turn. They clearly were not going to turn to Catholic

schools, run by those they accused of undermining the public schools in the first place and whose theology and practices were regularly excoriated in their home pulpits.

The common schools, in their initial incarnation, had been a compromise position among the various competing Protestant sects—we will come together to form a nonsectarian Christian-infused school system to which we can all send our children. Instruction in doctrine and creed would be reserved for pulpit and Sunday School. It was only with the arrival of the unassimilable “other,” the Catholics, that the nonsectarian compromise no longer served. Evangelical Protestants could not forgo the Bible to make public school acceptable to Catholics, and Catholics could not accept the Protestant nature of public schools, Bible or no Bible, for the education—secular and religious—of their children.

Jews, while not happy with Protestant practices of the public schools, seemed able to “tolerate” these practices, as long as schools refrained from overtly proselytizing their children. In a strange way, the nonsectarian compromise worked well for Jews in that no single sect predominated, and hence the offsetting presence of several sects reduced overt attempts to convert the children of infidels.

Finally, since very few Protestant schools existed, the financial challenge of creating new schools would have been formidable. Free public schools were attractive to many, especially to the many Protestants who may not have held the same deep-seated convictions as those who led the opposition to the Miller Resolutions. Hence Sunday Schools, well developed in Cincinnati at this time, assumed the primary burden to provide religious education to Protestant youth.<sup>56</sup>

Catholics were not greatly affected by the court decision. Those in the public schools—a large but unknown number—most probably remained there and were most probably more comfortable without the Bible, Lord’s Prayer, and hymns. Those in Catholic schools remained and the Catholic school sector was revived by the recently concluded battles. Catholics could now inform their parishioners that public schools were, in fact, godless, now that the Bible and religious practices had been removed. This religious neutrality, fought for by many Catholics, was now cited as grounds for condemning the public schools and promoting Catholic schools, which integrated secular and religious studies consistent with Catholic beliefs.

Catholics, however, still confronted financial problems. Although the diocese continued unsuccessfully to press for a share of school funds, virtually all the expenses of Catholic schooling had to be raised within the community. The continued growth of the Catholic population exacerbated problems that reached crisis proportions several years later when the diocese went into bankruptcy as a result of financial mismanagement.<sup>57</sup> However, after the halting and failed efforts at merger in 1869, the Catholic system never again sought to join the public system. It stayed the course and prospered as a parallel system to the public schools.

Perko argued that

The Cincinnati Bible War furthered the alienation of those unable or unwilling to subscribe to the dominant pan-Protestant ideology and, as a result, had the indirect effect of furthering the development of the city's parallel systems of parochial and public common schooling. In this regard, it was a microcosm of what happened nationwide.<sup>58</sup>

This is true, in part, but the dominant pan-Protestant position also was defeated (or at the very least crippled) in the court battle. The "liberal" or secular position won, at least in the medium term.<sup>59</sup> The split developed along secular-religious lines, with Catholics unable to

accept, or unwilling to accept, a religiously neutralized school zone, fearing perhaps a loss of the "socializing" function of schools run under the direct administration of the church and which merged religious and secular instruction consistent with church doctrines. The Evangelicals, on the other hand, were alienated from "Godless" schools, believing that *their* schools had been stolen from them, that children would be brought up in ignorance of revealed truth, and that moral decay and political chaos would follow. The Bible War served to redouble their efforts to save children by bringing God back into the schools and



Plum Street Temple  
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)



*Rabbi Max Lilienthal*  
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)

deepened their dislike and distrust of Catholics, who were unable to accept the public schools with the King James Bible in what they believed was its rightful place, and whose agitation against it forced the Bible and with it, God, from the schools.

The Catholics' solution to the Bible question was to call for public support of denominational schools. The Evangelical Protestant solution: bring Bible and prayer back into the public schools. Both policies are still being pressed today as they were in the 1870s.

Freethinkers, liberals, and Jews were pleased with the judicial outcome. The schools became common ground for all religious, national, and political factions. Such an open-door policy was needed to ensure that *all* children would be welcomed. As Samuel Lewis, the first Ohio state superintendent of schools, wrote, in a democracy sovereignty resides in the people.

*These children about your streets, who cannot even speak your language, are your future sovereigns. Is it not important that they should be well educated [to know your constitution and laws, to read the daily press, to wisely select their representatives]?<sup>60</sup>*

If such children could not be reached by the common schools, then the nation faced the possibility of anarchy and the assumption of power by a tyrant able to impose order. For liberals, religiously inclusive schools furthered the goal of reaching all children.

For Cincinnati's Jews, many "reforming" in their religion, and congregants of Wise or Lilienthal, secular public schools were perfect complements to their plans for an Americanized Judaism and American Jews. In addition to Lilienthal, Reform Jewish lay leaders such as Henry Mack and Bernhard Bettman were active, long-time members of the Cincinnati Board of Education.<sup>61</sup>

Lloyd Gartner, in his study of the education of American Jews in the mid-nineteenth century, concludes that by the 1870s most

American Jews believed that “attending public schools and guarding them from sectarianism was the interest and patriotic obligation of American Jews. Their equality was manifest, and their children’s future within American society was assured, by public schooling as defined in these terms.”<sup>62</sup>

German-American Jews, committed to denationalizing Judaism and to the Americanizing influences of public schools—the paramount institution for the cultural, linguistic, social, and political integration of immigrants—actively directed the great wave of East European Jewish immigrants who started arriving in the last decades of the nineteenth century into the public schools in cities across the United States. They used their philanthropic organizations, political clout, and professional know-how to discourage separatist Jewish schools while fostering public education.<sup>63</sup> They acted, in effect, in an inverse fashion to the practices of American Catholics, who encouraged new immigrants to retain their faith and commitment to Catholicism by enrolling in parochial schools.

Did the end of Bible reading affect moral education in Cincinnati’s schools? The Committee on Moral Instruction of the Cincinnati Principals’ Association was formed in 1873 to explore what was and ought to be done in the way of moral education. They found that little had ever been done.

It was ordained that moral instruction should be given in the schools; and, for reasons apparent to them, though not to us, Bible reading was made a part of the exercises. That the *moral department* of our public schools has existed for years only in name—that it has failed in accomplishing that good which the Trustees intended, must be acknowledged by every one acquainted with the facts.<sup>64</sup>

The committee applauded the court’s decision and argued that Bible reading in the schools had been a failure and “that Bible reading forced by state or city authority will fail as a reformatory measure.” They argued that

School children are *good, bad, and indifferent*; Bible readings are either *proper* or *improper*; among the teachers of the land are many careless *Christians*, rationalistic *Jews*, and quibbling

*infidels*. Can any one, after considering the matter, affirm that forced Bible reading, in a city like ours, can subserve either morality or the sacred claims or religion? We think not...Bible reading before mixed assemblies, by careless or irreligious teachers, is a measure without any Scripture warrant neither Moses nor the prophets, neither Jesus nor the apostles, ever advanced or advocated Bible reading in the public schools of Jerusalem, Athens, or Rome.<sup>65</sup>

They did not want to hide behind the Bible ban to duck the issue of moral instruction in the schools. "We want morality taught in the schools, and we want religion taught in the churches and Sunday-schools."<sup>66</sup> They proposed that principals set forth a course of moral instruction for their assistants. Setting forth a list of thirty-six traits that ran from amiability and ambition to truthfulness and temperance, they claimed that "with a character made of these, our names are known in Heaven—our lives are blessed on earth; without them we



*Plum Street Temple, foreground; St. Peter's Cathedral at left background; City Hall at right background; and Vickers's Unitarian Church to right.  
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)*

are criminals or objectless mediocres floating through just contempt to everlasting oblivion!"<sup>67</sup>

To the end of advancing the moral education of students, the committee recommended an outline of a "morning lesson," which, in effect, substituted Bible reading, prayer, and hymns with school song, reading of moral selections, recitation of maxims, and "on Friday Evenings Dismiss with the Recitation of The Golden Verse of Pythagoras."<sup>68</sup> How readily the new and improved comes to reflect the old and abused. The school day would no longer be framed by God and the good book, but by elevated moral sentiments and good intentions.

Cincinnati's Bible War highlighted the lines of religious cleavage in that city, it had not created them. The physical representation of these divisions could be seen in 1869 at the most important intersection in the city, Plum and Eighth Streets. On the southwest corner was perhaps the most impressive structure in the city, St. Peter's Cathedral, built by Archbishop Purcell and completed in 1848. Across Plum Street stood the Plum Street Temple (1866) of Congregation Bene Jeshurun, Wise's synagogue. The Unitarian Church of the Reverend Thomas Vickers<sup>69</sup> occupied the northeast corner. Facing the Unitarian Church was the massive stone structure of City Hall, representing civic culture.

In Cincinnati's Bible War the Plum Street Temple, the liberal Unitarian Church, and City Hall aligned to support the public schools and promote a common civic culture. The cathedral stood apart. However, they all shared the city's most prominent crossroads, each was cognizant of the other, each responded to the actions of the other, and, in the final analysis, all had to work together, along with the evangelical churches (represented just off the corner, next to the Unitarian Church, by the Scots Presbyterian Church), and share one city.

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NOTES:

1. Cincinnati Board of Education, "Cincinnati Public Schools, Minutes, Ledger Book, [handwritten] July 7, 1868, to September 26, 1870, meeting of September 6, 1869, 303. [Ledger held at Board of Education headquarters, Cincinnati.]

2. Stephen G. Mostov, "'Jerusalem' on the Ohio: The Social and Economic History of Cincinnati's Jewish Community, 1840-1875," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1981), table 3.1, 68-69.

3. *Ibid.*, table 3.1, 76.

4. Common Schools of Cincinnati, Forty-First Annual Report for the School Year Ending June 30, 1870, Part First (Cincinnati: Board of Common Schools, 1870): 19-20.

5. See Common Schools of Cincinnati, Annual Reports, for enrollments and other information regarding colored schools.

6. "Our city, notwithstanding the various attempts made in the East and West by many of the larger cities to furnish German instruction, can boast this day of having the largest and best organized German Department in the United States...At a recent convention of the German teachers of the United States in Louisville, it was admitted that Cincinnati was the only city where it was impossible to establish a private German school to compete with the Public Schools." *Ibid.*, 13.

7. *Ibid.*, 13.

8. See, for example, James W. Sanders, *The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975): especially chapter 6.

9. It seemed to have been a practice of the board to invite religious leaders to serve as school examiners who would visit public school classes to assess the scholastic achievement of pupils. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise of Congregation Bene Yeshurun and the informal leader of Cincinnati's Jewish community also served as an examiner, as did several prominent Protestant clergymen.

10. *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of School Trustees and Visitors* (1853), 11-12, cited in F. Michael Perko, *A Time to Favor Zion: The Ecology of Religion and School Development on the Urban Frontier, Cincinnati, 1830-1870* (Chicago: Educational Studies Press, 1988): 126. Perko provides a full discussion of the early Catholic-public school encounters and of religious school development in Cincinnati from the early nineteenth century through the period of the Bible War. See especially chapter 4, "Roots of Conflict," 97-153.

11. *Ibid.*, 135.

12. For the New York City Bible War, see Stephan F. Brumberg, "Public Schools Encounter Religious Diversity: The Case of NYC's Jewish Children, 1840-1860," presented at the History of Education Society Annual Meeting, Chicago, 1998; Vincent P. Lannie, *Public Money and Parochial Education: Bishop Hughes, Governor Seward and the New York School Controversy* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968); J. W. Pratt, *Religion, Politics and Diversity: The Church-State Theme in New York History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967): especially chapter 7, 158-203; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973* (New York: Basic Books, 1974): chapters 3-7. The petition submitted by the Catholics was joined by the two Hebrew congregations in the city and the Scots Presbyterian Church. But it was perceived by all as a Catholic initiative, and Hughes at one point argued that the Jews and Scots Presbyterian congregation joined in order to undercut his

argument and to raise the fear that if Catholics got a share of the school fund, everyone would jump in for their share. Hughes's later championing of denominational schooling, however, would seem to be in support of all religious groups that wanted to share proportionately in the state school funds.

13. Brumberg, 29-30.

14. Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840 [sic]," *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 8 (Spring 1968): 44-106.

15. For the life and writings of Hughes, see John R. G. Hassard, *Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., First Archbishop of New York: with extracts from his private correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866); Rev. Henry A. Brann, D.D. *Most Reverend John Hughes, First Archbishop of New York* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1892); *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Prepared at Catholic University of America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. 7; entry on "Hughes, John Joseph," 196-98.

16. For Kenrick's attitudes and policies in the Philadelphia Bible Wars, see Lannie and Diethorn, "For the Honor and Glory of God." For Hughes's response, see Hassard, chapter 16.

17. The prior year Purcell had spoken at the "College" against the use of the Bible as a schoolbook. He wanted to argue the same position again. Purcell to Hughes, Cincinnati, June 17, 1837, Purcell Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of New York, St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York, typescript of original document in the Henry Browne Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, emphasis added. For a full account of Purcell's encounter with the Western Literary Institute & College of Teachers, see Perko, 116-25.

18. Hughes to Purcell, Philadelphia, June 27, 1837, in Hassard, 176-78, emphasis in original.

19. *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Hassard, 281.

22. Archbishop Hughes to Archbishop Blanc of New Orleans, New York, January 3, 1852. Henry Browne Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, Box #6. Photographic copy (white on black) of the original letter. There is no notation of where original may be housed.

23. Perko, 124-25.

24. *Cincinnati Gazette*, August 27, 1869, as quoted in Harold M. Helfman, "The Cincinnati 'Bible War,' 1869-1870," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, 60 (October 1951): 369-86, 371.

25. *Ibid.*, 371.

26. Cincinnati Public School Minutes, 303.

27. Helfman, 374-75.

28. Cincinnati Public School Minutes, 309.

29. *Ibid.*, Meeting of September 20, 1869, 315.

30. Perko, 161.

31. "The Bible in the Public Schools. Proceedings and Addresses at the Mass Meeting, Pike's Music Hall, Cincinnati, Tuesday Evening, September 28, 1869, with A Sketch of the Anti-Bible movement" (Cincinnati: Published by the Committee in Charge of the Meeting, Gazette Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1869): 24.

32. *Ibid.*, 12.

33. J. B. Stallo, "The Secularization of Public Instruction." Superior Court of Cincinnati, *John D. Minor et al. v. The Board of Education of the City of Cincinnati et al.* Argument for the Defense (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1870): 10.

34. *Ibid.*, 11.

35. *Ibid.*, 12.

36. *Ibid.*, 17.

37. *Ibid.*, 51.

38. The final vote became 22-16 when the board permitted a member absent at the November 1 meeting to cast a "no" vote at a special meeting held on November 3. Cincinnati Public School Minutes.

39. For a full transcript of the proceedings as well as an introductory overview of the case, cf. *The Bible in the Public Schools. Arguments Before the Superior Court of Cincinnati in the Case of Minor v. Board of Education of Cincinnati (1870) with the Opinions of the Court and the Opinion on Appeal of the Supreme Court of Ohio*, with a new introduction by Robert B. McCloskey (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967).

40. For full reviews of the court proceedings, see McCloskey's Introduction, *ibid.*, and Perko, 176-91.

41. Cincinnati Board of Education Minutes, 441-42. Mayo and Vickers, both Unitarian ministers, were highly antagonistic toward each other. Mayo was the more conservative and a staunch supporter of Bible reading in the schools. Vickers was a very liberal clergyman who supported the Bible-reading ban.

42. Mostov, 176-77.

43. *Israelite*, September 28, 1855, 92.

44. *Ibid.*, January 8, 1869, 4.

45. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1869, 4.

46. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

47. For a discussion of the final year of the Talmud Yelodim Institute as a day school, and the controversies which swirled around Wise's decision to close as reflected in its board minutes, see Yechiael Lander, "Jewish Religious Education in Cincinnati as Reflected in the Minutes of Talmud Yelodim Institute, 1849-1885," Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, May 20, 1964 [American Jewish Archives, Small Collections, Box# 2542]. For a full discussion of Wise's efforts to Americanize Judaism, see Sefton D. Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise, Shaping American Judaism* (Oxford: Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1991), especially his discussion of *Minhag America* [the American Rite], the prayer book published by Wise and others in 1857, defining an American practice in synagogue worship (rather than Sephardic, German, English, or Polish), 149-56.

48. For a life of Lilienthal, see Bruce L. Rubin, "Max Lilienthal: Rabbi, Educator and Reformer in Nineteenth Century America," (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1997); see also David Philipson, *Max Lilienthal, American Rabbi: Life and Writings* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1915).

49. In 1860 priests at Cincinnati's Philomena Church refused to hear the confessions of some servant girls who worked for Jewish households. The rite of absolution was finally granted on the condition that they leave their employ. Lilienthal responded by an open letter to Archbishop Purcell, published in the city's *Daily Times*, on April 11, 1860 (later republished in *The Occident*, a prominent national Jewish weekly published in Philadelphia). Citing this offensive action as "an act of

bigotry, and insult to our American institutions," and contrary to efforts to form a common brotherhood, he threatened to form a league of Hebrew merchants who will be asked to discharge their Catholic employees ("these men will only comply with the command, issued by your clergy in the confessional chair"), unless the abhorrent practices at Philomena were halted. He requests that Purcell intervene to avoid such a calamity. The church did stop the practice, and no one was fired. Lilienthal made his point, but it is unlikely that Purcell forgot the embarrassing position to which he had been exposed.

50. Philipson, *op. cit.*, 474–75. Originally published as two letters to the Jewish Times, December 10 and 17, 1869.

51. *Israelite*, September 3, 1868, 8.

52. Philipson, *op. cit.*, 203.

53. *The American Israelite*, April 14, 1882, 333.

54. *The Bible in the Public Schools*, 248.

55. *Ibid.*, 250–51.

56. For a full account of the origins and evolution of the American Sunday School Movement, see Ann M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

57. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, Paul K. Meagher, OPTSM, Thomas C. O'Brien, and Sister Consuelo Maria Aherne, SSJ, eds., (Philadelphia: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia & Washington, D.C.: Corpus Publications, 1979), vol. O-Z, entry "Purcell, John Baptist": 2936–37.

58. There is some evidence to suggest that the Bible was returned to the Cincinnati schools in 1895 when the board decided to reintroduce Bible reading. See Morris U. Schappes, *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States, 1654-1875* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1950): 535.

59. *Remarks on Common Schools*, Appendix to Calvin E. Stowe, *The Prussian System of Public Instruction, and its Applicability to the United States* (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1836): 98–99.

60. See Michael W. Rich, "Henry Mack: an Important Figure in Nineteenth-Century American Jewish History," *American Jewish Archives*, vol. 47, n. 2 (Fall/Winter 1995); and Bernhard Bettman Archives, American Jewish Archives, ms. coll. #473.

61. Lloyd P. Gartner, "Temples of Liberty Unpolluted: American Jews and Public Schools, 1840-1875," in Bertram W. Korn, ed., *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus* (Waltham, Mass.: American Jewish Historical Society and KTAV Pub., 1976): 182.

62. See Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (New York: Praeger, 1986); especially chapter 4, 52–70.

63. "Report of the Committee on Moral Instruction before the Cincinnati Principals' Association, November 1, 1873. Together with the Decision of the Supreme Court of Ohio, on the Late Bible Controversy" (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1873) [Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County]: 3.

64. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

65. *Ibid.*, 6.

66. *Ibid.*, 13.

67. Ibid., 15.

68. Vickers's church was liberal Unitarian, whereas the Rev. A. D. Mayo's Unitarian Church was conservative. Both were members of the Board of Education: Mayo had been a leader of the pro-Bible forces, and Vickers of the Bible-ban members. Another prominent actor in the Bible War, Judge Alphonso Taft, was a prominent member of Vickers's church.