



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

- 📖 Raising Resident Aliens  
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 11-19)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 When Education Comes Home  
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 71-75)
- 📖 Teaching about Religion in Public Schools  
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 71-75)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Raising Resident Aliens

As Christians we are also “citizens” of another kingdom. If faithful disciples experience life as “aliens and exiles,” then a good Christian education must help children and young people understand as well as practice what it means to be resident aliens.

## Prayer

**Scripture Reading:** Philippians 3:17-21 and 1 Peter 2:9-12

## Reflection

Because “we enter the world as strangers not knowing who we are,” we need guidance to discover our identity, Perry Glanzer observes. When we are young, schools play a major role in shaping our identity – what we think about ourselves and the world, and what we desire. Perry and his wife notice this in the public school experience of their son who has dual Canadian and American citizenship. “Canadian identity has simply not been addressed or nurtured,” he writes. “We recognize that the cultivation of his Canadian identity will take a special effort.”

Christians face a similar challenge in learning their identity as disciples. Our “citizenship” is in God’s kingdom (Philippians 3:20), and so we live as “residents and aliens” in the world (1 Peter 2:11). “Education can inform children of their identity but it can also warp their self-understanding,” Glanzer warns. “One study of high school texts books found, ‘The underlying worldview of modern education divorces humankind from its dependence on God; it replaces religious answers to many of the ultimate questions of human existence with secular answers; and, most striking, public education conveys its secular understanding of reality essentially as a matter of faith.’ Young resident aliens may lose their identity unless parents and the resident alien community, the Church, carefully cultivate it.”

Schools help students cultivate and prize a national identity through the subjects they teach and practices they share.

- ▶ *The public school curriculum focuses on inculcating national identity.* “More than simple teaching about basic reading skills or social studies takes place,” he notes. Children study American history, the American Constitution, and American heroes. They memorize the Pledge of Allegiance, sing “The Star Spangled Banner,” and compose essays on “What makes you proud to be an American?” Older children take field trips to government buildings, study democratic practices, and memorize the names of past and present political leaders.

“Christians will need to teach their children about a whole different range of heroes such as the martyrs, the church fathers, and the saints,” he suggests. More importantly, Christian resident aliens need to learn about Christ, for “we gain the best insight about what it means to bear God’s image and be fully human through Christ. By imitating Christ’s sacrificial love, humility, servanthood, forgiveness of enemies, and acceptance, we learn how to be more fully human.”

- ▶ *Much of what it means to be a citizen is transmitted through a school’s ethos of symbols, icons, and calendars.* Presidents’ portraits, the American flag, and state flags are displayed; each day opens with



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a ritual saying of national and state pledges; and the school year revolves around secularized holidays.

“Resident-alien homes and communities must embody a whole different ethos,” Glanzer says. Practices of prayer and worship, daily lectionary readings, Christian artwork, structuring the year with the church calendar, and service to others can help young people find their identity as disciples.

When the identities formed in school conflict with Christian identity, how should parents respond? “Christians often discuss whether forming their own schools would be better for educating resident aliens,” Glanzer admits. “We should be wary about giving a simple answer to this question. After all, the Christian story reminds us that the corrupting influence of the Fall shows up in unexpected places, as does God’s special grace. In this regard, we can observe possible weaknesses with any form of education. Public schools may lead a child to love being a *resident* too much while home or private schooling may not adequately train students to live in this world (though as an *alien*).”

### Study Questions

1. What does Perry Glanzer mean when he says Christians are “resident aliens”?
2. Should public schools inculcate state and national citizenship and shared cultural beliefs, or should they try to limit the curriculum to teaching basic academic skills?
3. “Christian parents who send their children to public schools must seek to supplement the education their children receive from the state with education for another form of citizenship,” Glanzer writes. Do you agree? How can they do this?
4. What factors should parents consider when deciding whether to educate their child in public school, private school, or home school? Discuss Charles and Edna Christian’s experience with “homeschooling that...maintains a relationship of mutual support with the public school system.”

### Departing Hymn: “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” (vv. 1-2)

Savior, like a Shepherd lead us,  
much we need thy tender care;  
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,  
for our use thy folds prepare:  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
thou hast bought us, thine we are;  
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
thou hast bought us, thine we are.

We are thine; do thou befriend us,  
be the guardian of our way;  
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,  
seek us when we go astray:  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
hear, O hear us when we pray;  
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,  
hear O hear us when we pray.

Dorothy A. Thrupp (1779-1847), *Hymns for the Young* (1836)  
Tune: BRADBURY

# Raising Resident Aliens

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To discuss how Christian education should help children and young people to understand and practice what it means to live as a “resident alien” in this world.
2. To consider how public school education trains children in state and national citizenship.
3. To examine how Christian parents and communities can supplement public school education.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” locate the familiar tune BRADBURY in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ ([www.hymntime.com/tch/](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/)).

## Begin with a Story

“Identity-shaping stories do more than provide a sense of human worth; they also shape our affections and desires,” Perry Glanzer notes. He describes how his public school experience trained him “to *think* and *desire* like a citizen of this world and not a resident alien. For example, while pondering the overwhelming array of occupational options during my senior year in high school, I eliminated the alternatives with a simple question: What career will fit my interests, provide long-term job security, and generate a high salary? I decided upon engineering for the simple reason that there were numerous job openings promising plentiful pay. In retrospect, I cringe at the thought of my earlier reasoning. Why did longings about salary and security guide my decision about a college major? Fundamentally, I forgot who I was and how my Christian identity story should guide my life purpose and desires. Instead, I let myself be shaped by a different story. Neil Postman in his book, *The End of Education*, labels it the narrative of Economic Utility. ‘The story tells us that we are first and foremost economic creatures and that our sense of worth and purpose is to be found in our capacity to secure material benefits.’ I longed for financial success and security in this kingdom and not treasures in the kingdom of God.”

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for discernment as you prayerfully study how to educate our children as citizens of God’s kingdom.

## Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Philippians 3:17-21 and 1 Peter 2:9-12 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

In this pluralist culture where the goals, institutional forms, and content of education are deeply contested, how

can we humbly cooperate with others to discern the common good in education and advance it in ways that are consistent with our calling as disciples? Perry Glanzer invites us to approach this question by considering Christians to be similar to “dual citizens,” or to “resident aliens” whose citizenship in another country. (He illustrates this approach with the experience of his son, who is a dual citizen of Canada and the United States, in the American public school system.) As he explores how public schools thoroughly inculcate state and national citizenship, he considers how Christian parents and communities can teach citizenship in God’s kingdom. How can they best do this in concert with public schools? When should homeschooling and private schooling be considered as live options for some children?

### **Study Questions**

Perry Glanzer borrows the term “resident alien” from *Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon’s Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (1989) and *Where Resident Aliens Live* (1996). The metaphor is based on the scripture passages in this study guide. The basic idea is that Christians should not bemoan the end of “Christendom” – the long era in Europe and the Americas when Church and nation-states were more or less united in all of their purposes. They should not attempt to re-control government institutions like public schools. Instead, they should live as a distinctive people who realize their true citizenship is in God’s kingdom, and thus they are “resident aliens” in their nation-states.

Glanzer does not promote indoctrination that removes a child’s ability to internalize and choose the life of discipleship. He commends Jon Amos Comenius (1592-1670) as a model of “how resident aliens should approach education.” Because every child is created in God’s image, “with regard to the structure of education, he became one of the first educators to suggest the radical idea of ‘providing education to the entire human race regardless of age, class, sex, and nationality’ including ‘young and old, rich and poor, noble and ignoble, men and women – in a word, of every human being born on earth.’” He did not shy from teaching Christian children that “the ultimate end of man is beyond this life.”

1. Three curricular goals – teaching basic academic skills, inculcating state and national citizenship, and teaching widely held cultural beliefs – are remarkably interwoven in the curriculum and ethos of American public schools. A challenge arises for Christians when the inculcation of citizenship and teaching of widely-held cultural beliefs compete (or even conflict) with Christian practices, virtues, and beliefs.

In what aspects of the public school curriculum and ethos might Christian students encounter “identity conflicts” between being state and national citizens, members of the culture, and resident aliens? Some people suggest the best solution is for public schools to teach only basic academic skills. Is this really possible? Is it desirable?

2. Do members agree that children and young people *will not* and *should not* be trained to be Christian resident aliens by public schools? If so, where will this training happen? Is it the responsibility of individual parents, the local church community, or Christian educational institutions? Consider how congregation-based instruction (through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, catechism class, children and youth study groups, summer camps, mission trips, service work days, and so on) can supplement, interpret, and critique what students learn in public schools. Discuss the roles parents and older youth play in the home in raising children as resident aliens. Do you agree with Glanzer that regular worship, celebrating the Church calendar, and studying Christian saints are important?
3. Charles and Edna Christian evaluated academic, social, and spiritual aspects of education before deciding to homeschool their two sons. They wanted higher standards, varied experiences, and more focus on “practical living skills, self-care, and home management.” They desired that their children interact with peers from different economic, racial, and religious backgrounds. They wanted to incorporate their moral and spiritual values into their children’s education. To balance these three aspects, they participate in a public school-sponsored homeschool resource center and a church-based homeschool cooperative.

### **Departing Hymn**

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.