

# *The Roots of American Education*



*How American Education shifted  
from its Hebrew roots to a  
Graeco-Roman Foundation*

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# THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

## Introduction

### **American Education - Greek or Hebrew?**

History books abound that infer that the laws, government and education system of the United States rests deliberately upon the foundations of Greece and Rome. However, this is one of those myths that have devastating consequences. I intend to demonstrate that this is a false assumption that cannot be supported by accurate historic scholarship. The research has shown for centuries that it was the ancient Israelites functioning as a free nation between 1450 and 1050 BC that became the model for laws of liberty, constitutional government and universal educational literacy. The truth is, the origins of U.S. law, government and education reflect much more of Jerusalem than Athens or Rome.

*“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” – Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

Known as the Shema (“Hear!”), this passage is one of the most critical for both Jewish and Christian thought. It is also pivotal in understanding Hebrew education. As Marvin Wilson states *“A careful navigation of early sources suggests that Deuteronomy 6:4 must have been the first portion from the Hebrew Bible that Jesus committed to memory. According to the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 42a), Jewish boys were taught this Biblical passage as soon as they could speak. Since the Talmud specifies that ‘the father must teach him’ (i.e., the son), we may confidently assume that Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, was responsible for fulfilling this task.”*<sup>1</sup>

The first thing we must note about Hebrew education is that it was centered in the family and particularly in parental responsibility in training children. The father had a primary role as well.

Second, the goal of education is wisdom (obedience to God), not knowledge (achievement). In other words, education included both the heart *and* the head. Heart education without head knowledge is passionate and relational but lacks clear direction and focus. Head knowledge and intellectual pursuits without the heart will cultivate pride and arrogance and lead an individual astray through deception. Hebrew homes had no use for knowledge as a goal, it was a means to wisdom (application of knowledge), which required the heart’s involvement. These verses in Deuteronomy make it plain that unless the heart of the parent is captured by God, parents will settle for knowledge without reverence.

*“O that they had such a heart in them (the parents) that they would fear Me, and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever.” – Deuteronomy 5:29*

Third, education among the Hebrews was practical, and could be discussed at morning, noon and night or when the most teachable moments occurred during a day in the life of a child.

Finally, Hebrew education was extensive. It involved the three-fold operation of the mind as well as extending home education to tutors and teachers outside the home so children could apply truth to every

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, Marvin., *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith.*, Eerdmans Publishing Company and Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989, pages 122-123.

area of life and vocation. The mind is designed by God to reflect or roll something over and over again (bind them on one's hand), express it creatively (as frontlets between your eyes), and apply it to life (write them on the doorposts of your house.) The doorposts also represented the outward community that you equipped your children to serve. The Levitical priesthood were the teachers that extended the educational training beyond the sphere of the home.

So what does this have to do with American education? After all, we have been told for at least the past two centuries that it was the "great separation" of excluding religious premises from intellectual thought that developed the notion of individual rights, toleration of differences, limited governmental reach, and a desire for universal education. Historian Eric Nelson recounts this common thinking today that "*these innovations could not appear on the scene until religion had effectively been sequestered from political science.*"<sup>2</sup> He then states his premise that "*this book begins from the conviction that the traditional story I have just sketched puts things almost exactly backward.*"<sup>3</sup> In other words, it was the Biblical premises brought forth during the Reformation that formed European thought and eventually U.S. theories of law, government and education!

But *which* religious thoughts support these ideas? Consider for a moment the system of education suggested by Plato for the Greeks. "*While women played only a minor part in Athenian education, Plato recommended that, essentially, they should receive the same training as men. This was indeed a revolutionary suggestion, and it scandalized many of his contemporaries. He also recommended a communistic system of property sharing for the philosopher kings who were to have no individual possessions. He favored eugenics and recommended that infants who were unfit should not be allowed to live. His view of the family was extremely unorthodox. He considered the family an inferior institution, and he believed that marriage should be regulated by the state. Only slaves were to be permitted to lead an unrestricted family life. He also thought that nursing and the bringing up of children were important enough not to be left to the discretion of private individuals.*"<sup>4</sup>

Certainly individual rights, equality of men and women, free choice and limited government came not from this kind of thinking! Neither does the concept of universal education built on the inherent value of each individual child come from Plato's *Republic* either! Rev. E.C. Wines, who wrote his scholarly treatise *The Hebrew Republic* to trace the ancient Jewish roots of America's law, government and education, stated "*it is hence plain that Hebrew parents were required not only to teach their children orally, but also to impart to them the arts of reading and writing. There is reason to believe, that the ability to read and write was an accomplishment, more generally possessed by the Hebrews, than by any other people of antiquity.*"<sup>5</sup>

Education was universal in Israel because it was at the home level decentralizing its accountability into thousands of self-governing communities. Wines summary of his research states "*from a survey of the matter, the conclusion seems warranted, that the education of the Hebrew people, conducted mainly though, not wholly, under the domestic roof, was nevertheless a national education, and worthy of the imitation of other nations... The result was that the nation reached a high point of literary attainment and distinction.*"<sup>6</sup> Consider the high role of women in such a scheme of education as well for they were the primary educators in the home, and thus literacy was high among women!

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<sup>2</sup> Nelson, Eric., *The Hebrew Republic*, Harvard University Press, 2010, page 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, page 2.

<sup>4</sup> Mayer, Frederick, *A History of Educational Thought*, Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc. 1966, page 99.

<sup>5</sup> Wines, E.C., *The Hebrew Republic*, American Presbyterian Press, republished under the title of *The Roots of the American Republic* by Plymouth Rock Foundation, Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1997, page 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, page 51.

Though Rev. Wines’ premise would be challenged due to prevalent presumptions today, continuing scholarship asserts the fact that the education and literacy demonstrated during the time the nation of Israel was a Republic under God’s Law set a model and example for the nations. Consider Miles Jones, whose recent work documents this period of Israel’s history. He states “*my part in documenting the Exodus has been to date and translate the inscriptions found at the Rephidim and Sinai sites in Midian. These inscriptions are brief but telling. They are written in the oldest alphabet of letters (Thamudic) known to historical science. They date to the fifteenth century B.C., the time of the Exodus, according to experts at the Saudi Ministry of Antiquities.... My research into these inscriptions indicates the ‘writing of God’ (Ex. 32:16) engraved upon the tablets of Moses was the original alphabet of letters.*”<sup>7</sup>

Though historians have told us that the Phoenicians invented the alphabet (and thus the key to literacy), it was **Jehovah** that gave it to the children of Israel! Recovering the lost roots of each academic discipline has, for years, been my objective. Part of my life’s work is to understand, articulate and restore the Biblical roots of all the academic disciplines and how they were brought forth in history. To do this, we must see that the Old Testament Law, given to us initially in the Ten Commandments, and applied to every area of life, forms the center of the Hebrew curriculum – the only inspired curriculum ever to be developed.<sup>8</sup> It was this curriculum that prepared the Israelites for their 400 golden years!

The contrast of ancient Greek and Hebrew learning could not be more clear. Hebrew education was developed during the first 400 years of Israel’s existence (1450-1050 BC), and Greek education was developed largely from Socrates (469-399 BC), Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Hebrew Education	Greek Education
God created the heavens and earth Man made in the image of God Each child has intrinsic, equal value Education centered in the family Parental responsibility for a child’s education Goal of education is wisdom (obedience to God) Purpose of education is practical, to live well Education an individual responsibility (tutors) Productive methodology – reflect, express, apply	Nature creates “god” – Greek mythology God made in the image of man Children have value as imputed by the State Education centered in the community Community is responsible for a child’s education Goal of education is knowledge / achievement Purpose of education to redistribute property Education is the responsibility of the State Consumer methodology – respond to stimulus

### **Education in the Reformation (1400 to 1700 AD)**

The Great Reformation (from about 1400 to 1700 AD) is the greatest revival documented in history since the time of Christ. It affected virtually every civilization on earth, either directly or indirectly. Missionaries were sent virtually all over the globe. The Bible was translated into numerous languages. Biblical truths inspired all types of inventions and technology, beginning with moveable type. It inspired educational learning at such depth that we are still, six hundred years later, mining the depths of its productivity in expressing Biblical truths applied to virtually every area of life and culture. Lasting

<sup>7</sup> Jones, Miles R., *Evidence of the Exodus*, Faith for all of Life, March/April, 2013, page 6; [www.chalcedon.edu](http://www.chalcedon.edu); see also his book *The Writing of God*; [www.writingofgod.com](http://www.writingofgod.com)

<sup>8</sup> Jehle, Paul., *Go Ye Therefore and Teach All Nations, Volumes I-II*, Plymouth Rock Foundation, 2006. See in particular Volume II, chapters 37-47 for the Biblical and historic development of the Curriculum from a Christian perspective.

more than three hundred years, this great revival known as the Reformation even established a nation in the wilderness – *America!*

One of the individuals touched by this restoration of Biblical truth was Peter Ramus (1515-1672) of France. He became a Huguenot convert from Catholicism to Christianity, born not far from his contemporary, John Calvin. Though we are familiar with the theologians of the Reformation like Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Knox and others, we are often not as familiar with those whose gifts and callings were to apply that theology in practical areas. Ramus was an educational reformer whose calling was to “*save Christendom from the deadening weight of scholasticism and Aristotelianism.*”<sup>9</sup>

James Rose highlights the contributions of Ramus when he states “*The scholastics were medieval schoolmen who tended to be very intellectual but not very practical. In their thinking, reason and revelation are separate ideas and ought not to be reconciled. Scholasticism made a distinction between the theoretical and the practical; faith is one thing, but man’s reason is another. In sharp contrast to the scholastics, Peter Ramus, and subsequently, William Ames, believed that knowledge should be practical; that God gave man the capacity to reason from revelation; that learning and doing walk together.... Peter Ramus felt that Aristotle, the Greek philosophy, was inconsistent...*”<sup>10</sup>

Ramus was the reformed “father of Biblical logic” which would undergird the theology of William Ames who inspired Pilgrim Pastor John Robinson whose congregation founded Plymouth in 1620. Ramus’ books were in sharp contrast with Greek philosophy and reasoning, and laid the foundation to restore Augustinian Christianity – or reasoning *from* Biblical premises to other areas of life. In fact, Ramus laid the art utilizing Biblical premises of the syllogism in logic that expressed the two modes of teaching and learning illustrated by Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. Ramus influence can hardly be understated. Though educators today have heard of Aristotle and virtually no one can get a degree without studying Greek methods and pedagogy, hardly anyone has heard of Ramus who laid the foundations for Biblical reasoning practiced by the Pilgrims and Puritans, and later the other colonies, in teaching their children in the wilderness.

Another educator of the Reformation period is John Amos Comenius (1592-1671) of Moravia (now the Czech Republic). A Christian and ordained pastor, he established the structure and methodology of education from a Biblical perspective. He developed teaching by pictures for pre-school children, reading in one’s native tongue rather than Latin, and the introduction of simple and natural objects as the precursor for more complex concepts and ideas. His structure of the elementary school, secondary school, college and university has caused him to be dubbed the “father of American modern education.” If he is, why don’t we follow his philosophy to, as he stated “*let the Holy Scriptures be the Alpha and Omega of Christian schools. Let whatever is learned from Scripture be referred to the three graces of Faith, Hope, and Charity; and let these graces be taught with reference to practice.*”<sup>11</sup>

Though the theology of Comenius is virtually unknown, he is still given credit for being the originator of the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of American public education. He was actually asked to be President of Harvard University by John Winthrop, Jr. in the 17<sup>th</sup> century! He was beloved by Puritans such as Cotton Mather. Modern educators, however, if they know of Comenius, rarely study what he said:

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<sup>9</sup> Sprunger, Keith L., *The Learned Doctor Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism*, University of Illinois Press, 1972, page 107.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, James, *Peter Ramus and William Ames: French and English Precursors to The Principle Approach*, The Journal of the Foundation for American Christian Education, Volume VI, 1994-1995, page 14.

<sup>11</sup> Lowrie, S.S., *John Amos Comenius*, 1881, as quoted in Hobbs, Dayton, *Teaching Methods: The Scriptural Viewpoint*, Gospel Projects Press, 1984, pages 40-41.

*“Instruction is the means to expel Rudeness, with which young wits ought to be well furnished in Schools; but so, so that teaching be 1. True, 2. Full, 3. Clear, and 4. Solide.”*<sup>12</sup> So Peter Ramus is another educator that applied the theology of Biblical truth to the practical education of children. This is the kind of education, where the philosophy, methodology and curriculum were all developed from Biblical truth and put in great contrast with Greek and Roman thought, that established our nation.

The University was developed during the Reformation, and its philosophy of curriculum put Biblical Theology as the “queen of the sciences.” This meant that no matter what field you were to occupy, you had to have a major in theology first. Biblical truth was at the center, it was the unified world view of the curriculum – one view of every area of life – it was the essence of *Christendom*. The word education itself meant analysis and synthesis as recovered by Ramus and clearly given to us in Romans 12:2 – “*be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*” The renewal of the mind is built upon two modes of operation – reflection (pouring in) and creativity of expression (drawing out).

As I wrote more than two decades ago “*the word education, like most English words, comes from a Latin root. When going to the root of this word, we gain an understanding as to the modes or process of education implied by the word itself. Let us look at two important definitions here, one for the word, educate, and the other to its closer Latin root educe.*

*Educate – to instill the mind with principles of arts, science, morals, religion and behavior.*

*Educe – to bring or draw out; to extract; to produce from a state of occultation. (Webster defines occultation as a place of hiding).*

*Both of these words mean to lead. Thus, education is leadership, yet a leadership that operates in two ways. Education embraces a pouring in and drawing out mode of operation. An instilling, pouring in, instructing mode that sets absolutes for the mind of the child and then a drawing out, extracting (bringing out of hiding) of that which the child has been taught is imperative in order for teaching and learning to take place. Thus, education is a process of instruction and discipline, teaching and learning, a pouring in and drawing out.”*<sup>13</sup>

Noah Webster’s (1758-1843) definitions from his original 1828 Dictionary were Biblically based and etymologically researched from 28 languages. It is the best dictionary one can own for it bridges roots in Latin from which many languages are constructed and unites them with Biblical words and concepts. His definition of education is classic in this regard – “*the bringing up, as of a child; instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good education in manners, arts and sciences, is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.*”<sup>14</sup>

It is this definition that summarizes the classic roots of Biblical education from the Reformation. Parental responsibility, moral and religious premises, as well as the training of students to learn to think

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<sup>12</sup> Comenius, John Amos., *The Orbis Pictus*, C.W. Bardeen, Syracuse, New York, 1887, p. xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Jehle, Paul., *Go Ye Therefore and Teach All Nations*, Plymouth Rock Foundation, 2006, Volume I, page 154. I am also indebted to Ron Chadwick’s book, *Teaching and Learning*, Fleming H Revell, 1982, pages 5-36 where he develops the meaning of the word education from its Latin roots.

<sup>14</sup> Webster, Noah, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, republished in facsimile edition by the Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967 (see [www.face.net](http://www.face.net))

and be productive, independent learners became exemplified in the University of Medieval times during the Reformation. Leyden University in Holland was an example where Pastor John Robinson debated Arminian theology and where the Pilgrims learned to be productive in their thinking. This was why the Pilgrim church could come to America in 1620 and function without their Pastor under the able leadership of William Brewster. It is why Harvard could be established in 1636 as a college before any elementary schools were started. It is why those who founded Jamestown in 1607 extended education from their homes to Henricus School and College by 1619.

### **Colonial American Education (1607-1790)**

It is important to recognize that when the settlers came to Jamestown in 1607, Plymouth in 1620 and Pennsylvania in 1682, many were at the peak of a revival that had been going on for more than two hundred and fifty years! It was the norm to apply the Bible to every area of life, the differences were in *how* it was applied. The parents who traveled at the risk of their lives across the ocean to start a new life would have agreed with Martin Luther when he said *“I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s Word becomes corrupt.”*<sup>15</sup> As we peruse the philosophy, methods and curriculum of colonial education, we must review its roots as it was in the minds of the settlers.

Consider R. J. Rushdoony *“Not only does education find its foundation in religion, but the educational curriculum expresses the religious standards and expectations of a culture. The Latin word curriculum, from which the English word is taken without change of spelling, means a running, a race course, a chariot, and is cognate with the Latin verb, currere, to run. A curriculum is thus the chariot, race course, or vehicle whereby a culture expresses its religious faith and standards. The basic curriculum is called the liberal arts curriculum, ‘liberal’ from the Latin liber, free, and it is a course in the arts of freedom, or a vehicle in the arts of liberty. A liberal arts curriculum is thus a practical answer to the question, What is liberty? And, How does a man prepare himself to be a free man?”*<sup>16</sup>

They came here for freedom and wanted their children and succeeding generations to learn the arts of freedom of how to preserve liberty for the future. Though Puritan civil government in its early years often commanded obedience in theology and belief, over-stepping its Biblical jurisdictional bounds in its zeal to keep a pure society believing the right things, the enactment of the 1642 education law mostly followed the Biblical injunction to require parents to teach their children:

*Forasmuch as the good Education of Children is of Singular behoofe and benefit to any Commonwealth, and whereas many Parents and Masters are too indulgent and negligent of their duty in that kind; It is Ordered, that the Select men of every Town, in the several Precincts and quarters where they dwell, shall have a vigilant eye over their brethren and neighbours, to see, First that none of them shall suffer so much Barbarism in any of their families, as not to endeavor to teach, by themselves or others, their Children and Apprentices, so much learning, as may enable them perfectly to read the English tongue, and knowledge of the Capital Lawes; upon penalty of twenty shillings for each neglect therein.*<sup>17</sup>

The towns and their structure followed the guidelines of Exodus 18, with responsibilities coming after 50 families and 100 would move into an area. Ten families constituted a neighborhood, 50 a town and 100 would later be named a County, though in England, it was simply called the “hundredth.” The

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<sup>15</sup> Schultz, Glenn., *Kingdom Education*, Lifeway Press, 1998, page 30.

<sup>16</sup> Rushdoony, Rousas John., *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, Ross House Books, 1981, page 4.

<sup>17</sup> Massachusetts School Law, 1642 see <http://dictionary.sensagent.com/massachusetts%20school%20laws/en-en/>

Common School Law of 1647 made it abundantly clear that education was a priority for Biblical and moral reasons.

*It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so that at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded and corrupted with love and false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers; and to the end that learning may not be buried in the grave of our forefathers, in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors. It is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to fifty households shall forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read, whose wages shall be paid either by the parents or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general, by way of supply, as the major part of those that order the prudentials of the town shall appoint; provided those that send their children be not oppressed by paying much more than they can have them taught for in other towns. And it is further ordered, that when any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university, provided that if any town neglect the performance hereof above one year that every such town shall pay 5 pounds to the next school till they shall perform this order.<sup>18</sup>*

Though these laws in colonial New England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century have been used by modern educators to set a precedent for compulsory school laws, it is clear in their context that the primary responsibility was placed on parents and only secondarily on the local community in which they lived. Samuel Blumenfeld, in commenting on the context of these laws, stated the following:

*...the Massachusetts education laws of 1642, 1647, and 1648, which educational historians cite as the basis of American public education, must be understood in the context of the society that enacted them. They were the ordinances of a religious community upholding the orthodoxy of its doctrines and providing for its future leadership. None of the other English colonies, with the exception of Connecticut which had been settled by Massachusetts Calvinists, enacted such education laws.... By 1720 Boston had far more private schools than public ones, and by the close of the American Revolution, many towns had no common schools – as the public schools were thus called – at all.<sup>19</sup>*

Clearly, by placing the responsibility for education in the home, the structure of American education took on a decentralized “free market” of educational productivity, though the free market per se would not be adopted by Puritans in general until early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Though there were common schools, none were more famous than Boston’s Latin School begun in 1642, paid for at the expense of local residents. They were truly “public” or community (common) schools, run by school committees at the local level where representatives and parents had direct consent. In the colonies at large, even this much community control was unusual, for the vast majority of schools were parent run or a school with unique purposes that parents chose to enroll their child at their own expense.

Probably the best known and well-loved educator of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Colonial New England who taught at the Boston Latin School, embracing the philosophy, methodology and curriculum ideal of the Reformation, was Ezekiel Cheever (1614-1708). Born in London, and then receiving a classical education, Cheever arrived in Boston in 1637 at age 23. Two years prior to his arrival Boston Latin School had been founded. In 1638 he went to New Haven and began his teaching career. He taught in New Haven, Ipswich and Charlestown for 32 years, and then taught at Boston Latin for 38 more!

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1647.

<sup>19</sup> Blumenfeld, Samuel L., *Is Public Education Necessary?* Devin-Adair Company, 1981, page 18, 19.



Cheever taught three generations of New England's leaders. He made famous the three-fold methodology of colonial education (though he was not its originator). Taken from the testimony of his grandson as well as Cotton Mather, one of his more famous students, he was an extraordinary teacher. The copy-book served as an engine of productivity. Students would copy the work of their master teacher, and re-copy it if necessary. This insured that teaching would be productive, and not merely consuming information. Second, recitation (or the essay) was utilized. Here students would recite what was learned, and as they matured, produce essays on various topics. Finally, declamation (or the oration) would be stressed. Here students learned to express ideas with conviction, being cross-examined by their peers or their teachers.<sup>20</sup>

Ezekiel Cheever taught 70 years until his death at 93! Cotton Mather wrote of Cheever in verse:

*The Bible sacred grammar, where,  
The rules of speaking well, contained are.  
He taught us Lily, and the Gospel taught;  
And us poor children to our Savior brought.  
Master of sentences, he gave us more  
Than we in our Sententiae had before...  
With Cato's he to us the higher gave  
Lessons of Jesus, that our souls do save.*"<sup>21</sup>

*"Piety, Civility, and Learning seem to be the prominent themes of colonial education, according to Lawrence Cremin in his documented history. Piety stood for the religious and Christian inspiration to educate for the purpose of spreading the Gospel. Civility was the social theme and goal of producing individuals with good character who would bless both church and state. The advancement of learning involved all of the curriculum and methods utilized as tools to achieve these goals."*<sup>22</sup>

Cremin would state succinctly in summary: *"The Bible itself, particularly the Geneva edition of 1560 and the Authorized Version of 1611, is the single most influential primary source for the intellectual history of colonial America."*<sup>23</sup> As a result of this kind of education, no wonder England was shocked when she received well-reasoned papers from the wilderness of America resisting her unlawful and tyrannical schemes to bind the colonies! The dominant structure of education in America at the time of our Independence and subsequent ratification of the Articles of Confederation and United States Constitution was self-education, independence and the free market. Rosalie Slater writes about one of our more famous pioneers of American education, Noah Webster:

*"After the establishment of our American Republic, young Noah Webster began to write American Christian textbooks consistently teaching the Principle Approach. Why was the 'blue-backed' speller an all-time best seller in American Education? It set forth the principles of spelling which provided educational independence for each individual who mastered the principles. So successful was this method of teaching and learning that the Bible and Webster's speller continued across the continent as*

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<sup>20</sup> See Parker, Franklin and Betty J., *Ezekiel Cheever (1614-1708), New England Colonial Teacher*, Collected Original Resources in Education, XX, No. 2, June 1996. Also, see Ezekiel Lewis, Cheever's grandson, who is the probable author of the textbook known as *Cheever's Accidence* published in 1709 and outlines the methods used by him..

<sup>21</sup> Cremin., Lawrence., *American Education; the Colonial Experience.*, Harper Torchbooks, 1970, pages 190-191.

<sup>22</sup> Jehle, Paul., *Go Ye Therefore and Teach All Nations*, Volume I, page 426. See also Cremin's work above.

<sup>23</sup> Cremin., *American Education: the Colonial Experience*, page 587.

*Christianity expanded westward.*"<sup>24</sup> This kind of independent thinking gave rise to self-education. Slater again summarizes the productivity and example set by Noah Webster when she states:

*"He (Webster), like many of those men whom we designate as 'Founding Fathers', recognized that the success of the American Christian philosophy of government would depend upon the quality of education of each individual in our republic. But, unlike today, Noah Webster put that responsibility for education upon the family first and upon the individual. Independence was a basic quality of the American character and Noah Webster began to write textbooks, which were self-teaching, that is, they did not require a teacher. Through his 'Spellers', 'Grammars', 'Readers', 'Histories' any American could teach himself how to spell and write and learn the rudiments of American history and Constitutional government. It is good to remember that in America education has never depended upon the existence of schools. Most of the enterprising Americans who built America were self-educated. They learned the Bible and then related Biblical principles to every field. While schools and colleges were established from the time of our first settlements, they primarily continued an education already commenced in every home. Education in our colonial period was a life-time pursuit; it was education in depth."*<sup>25</sup>

At the time of the establishment of our Republic, Samuel Blumenfeld summarizes its independence and structure in this way: *"The fact is that the men who founded the United States were educated under the freest conditions possible. George Washington was educated by his father and half-brother. Benjamin Franklin was taught to read by his father and attended a private school for writing and arithmetic. Thomas Jefferson studied Latin and Greek under a tutor. Of the 117 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, one out of three had had only a few months of formal schooling, and only one in four had gone to college."*<sup>26</sup>

Though the home was the primary institution, adopting productive methods of teaching and learning, and schools existed as extensions, the church was a secondary one. The one who catechized (personally disciplined) youth was the Pastor. He had the largest library, was the best read individual in town, and spoke up to three times a week for two hours at a time! As Harry Stout observed in his monumental work on the role of the clergy inspiring the American Revolution *"The average weekly churchgoer in New England (and there were far more churchgoers than church members) listened to something like seven thousand sermons in a lifetime, totaling somewhere around fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening."*<sup>27</sup> In personal tutoring, he made sure each young person had heard the sermon, and then learned to analyze and synthesize it, putting it into practice. Some estimate that by the time a young person turned 18, he had received the equivalent of three college educations!

The examples of pastoral discipleship using the philosophy, methodology and curriculum of colonial education abound and directly influenced the American Revolution. Pastor Jonathan Russell of Barnstable tutored James Otis and his sister Mercy. James became the orator of the Revolution in the North, and Mercy became the historian of the Revolution. Pastor Samuel Cooper of Boston, a member himself of the Committee of Safety, had within his congregation John and Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Joseph Warren, James Bowdoin as well as highly influencing Benjamin Franklin and the liberated African-American Phyllis Wheatley. Their leadership of the Revolution is well documented.

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<sup>24</sup> Slater, Rosalie, *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History: The Principle Approach*, Foundation for American Christian Education, 1965, page 89 (www.face.net).

<sup>25</sup> Slater, Rosalie, *Rudiments of America's Christian History and Government: A Student Handbook*, Foundation for American Christian Education, 1968, pages 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Blumenfeld, Samuel., *Is Public Education Necessary?* p. 21

<sup>27</sup> Stout, Harry., *The New England Soul*, Oxford University Press, 1986, page 4.

Suffice it to say that the move toward independence was largely the work of Pastors through those they disciplined a generation before.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Golden Years of the American Republic (1790-1840)**

Historians have noted that the “golden years” of the American Republic were the fifty years immediately after the ratification of her Constitution. The copyright laws protecting entrepreneurs, property rights, and liberty, coupled with the free enterprise structure of American education, brought one of the greatest rises of national prosperity and prominence in a fifty year period in history. Even those nasty and sinful weeds of African slavery, Freemasonry, and the mistreatment of the American Indian were increasingly spoken against orally and in print. At the same time, there were factions among those designated as Founders to centralize education. Once such effort took place in Boston between John Adams and Samuel Adams. On one side, the democratic faction led by Sam Adams wanted to preserve local control, and on the other, the seeds of state control and more centralized power over educational training were supported by his cousin John. The year was 1789.

*The democratic faction won. Its success was mainly due to the efforts of its leader, Samuel Adams, the fiery revolutionary, who, on the matter of public education, differed with his cousin John only on the issue of control... the school committee would be chosen by popular vote. But if Boston had a public school system, it was hardly a comprehensive one. All primary education was still private, and a child had to be able to read and write to be eligible for the public grammar school at age seven. In addition, the public grammar schools had to compete with a large number of private schools for the school-age population.... The purpose of the city school system was not to insure literacy for all or to provide special educational opportunities for the poor. Its purpose was simply to perpetuate a government institution created in earlier times, which could now serve a socially useful purpose in the new political order.*<sup>29</sup>

Though during this fifty year period the seeds of socialism and centralization that would burst forth toward the end of the 1830's were being laid, the fruit of the educational philosophy, methodology and curriculum, inherited in large part from the Hebrews and adapted to the American Republic was the engine of productivity and prosperity. By 1830, when Alexis de Tocqueville toured America and wrote his treatise *Democracy in America*, Americans were living at the peak of liberty and prosperity and had become the envy of the world as immigrants poured in from everywhere.

Hardly anyone worked for anyone else – they were all self-employed. The original economic factory was the family, and largely during this time industries such as textiles and Mills, ice preservation, nails, rubber, agricultural equipment, water-power, the steamboat, and the building of canals and railroads.<sup>30</sup> De Tocqueville noted why:

*It cannot be doubted that, in the United States, the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of a democratic republic; and such must always be the case, I believe, where instruction which awakens the understanding is not separated from moral education which amends the heart. But I by no means exaggerate this benefit, and I am still further from thinking, as so many people do think in Europe, that men can be instantaneously made citizens by teaching them to read and write. True*

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<sup>28</sup> Jehle, Paul., *The Role of the Pastor in Establishing the United States*, a dvd documenting major events in American history utilizing the murals of the Boston State House, Plymouth Rock Foundation, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Blumenfeld, Samuel., *Is Public Education Necessary?* p. 23-24

<sup>30</sup> Sage, Henry J., *American Economic Growth 1820-1860.*, 2005-2006; see [www.sageamericanhistory.net/antebellum\\_america/topics/EconomicIssues.htm](http://www.sageamericanhistory.net/antebellum_america/topics/EconomicIssues.htm)

*information is mainly derived from experience; and if the Americans had not been gradually accustomed to govern themselves, their book-learning would not assist them much at the present day.*<sup>31</sup>

De Tocqueville understood that the self-governed local community, under parental consent and responsibility, utilizing the methods that reflected the way God designed the mind to be renewed, prepared individuals to be good, productive, citizens. It was not just the intellectual knowledge (for that would be Greek in both nature and substance,) but it was the “*moral education which amends the heart*” that made it so Jewish in nature and Hebrew in origin. So what happened? As Blumenfeld asks “*Why did Americans give up educational freedom for educational statism so early in their history?*”<sup>32</sup>

### **Progressive Education (1840-2016)**

It was a religious shift that ended up changing the free market education in the United States to one of a monopoly conducted by civil government. *New religious premises, when embraced by the most influential, resulted in the eventual change of external, traditional forms and structures of education.* Unitarianism in general, but specifically the doctrine of the original goodness of man, began to supplant the Calvinist notion of original sin.<sup>33</sup> Education would naturally, over time, emphasize the drawing out of expression more than the pouring in of absolute truth as a result of this change of premise. At first, the old notions of orthodox Christianity were brought into the new philosophy, and many Unitarian preachers continued to preach the doctrines of the Trinity and the fruits of what had been practiced for centuries. Eventually, however, *when one rejects the root, it is only a matter of time before new fruit begins to hang on the vine.*

Though the premise for a government school system supported by taxation was hidden from view (but actually religious in nature), the centralized control was subtly pushed as a necessity in order to save the failing private education system. After all, freedom is dangerous, and parents often do not teach their children as they ought to do it. A survey in 1817 by a sub-committee of the Boston School Board to “prove” how uneducated children outside of a public school system were, chaired by none other than Charles Bulfinch, revealed a surprising result. Only 16% of the school age population attended the eight public schools. 80% attended the 154 private schools scattered across the city; schools of all kinds for boys and girls. Only 4% did not attend school at all, and they had Charity schools if their parents wanted to send them. In other words, there was no need for a centralized government run public school system, reported Charles Bulfinch!<sup>34</sup>

It has always been a tactic for those who wish to implement radical change to do so more subversively if it doesn't work overtly. So it was to happen here. If one rejects the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as the standard, another mediator must be created. The new mediator would be the *State* and the means of change, transformation and implementation of this new statism would be the government school system. Based on the model of Prussia in Germany, James G. Carter began a series of letters to promote the same kind of education in Massachusetts as was practiced in Germany. Motivated and inspired by socialism, Carter argued that the poor could not afford the private schools (though only a small percentage were in such a condition). It was the education of children that would become the means by

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<sup>31</sup> Pahman, Dylan., *Alexis De Tocqueville and the Character of American Education*, November 21, 2012; <http://blog.acton.org/archives/45852-alexis-de-tocqueville-and-the-character-of-american-education.html>. See also De Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America*, Volume I, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/de-tocqueville/democracy-america/ch17.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Blumenfeld, Samuel., *Is Public Education Necessary?* p. 9

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pages. 30-40

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, page 43

which heaven could be brought to earth. In other words, Prussia should be exchanged for Jerusalem as the model for American education.

Carter explained *“when the cultivation of the head and heart shall be united, and form one distinct and dignified profession, drawing to its practice the greatest and best of men; we may then hope a proper direction will be given to the opening minds and expanding hearts of the young; and that all the deep and permanent prepossessions of childhood and youth, will be upon the side of truth and virtue.... The whole earth will then constitute but one beautiful temple, in which may dwell in peace all mankind; and their lives form but one consistent and perpetual worship.”*<sup>35</sup>

But “salvation by education” was not accepted by the common American in 1830. In fact, the *National Gazette* noted *“we have no confidence in any compulsory equalizations; it has been well observed that they pull down what is above, but never much raise what is below, and often ‘depress high and low together beneath the level of what was originally the lowest’...A scheme of universal equal education, attempted in reality, would be an unexampled bed of Procrustes...”* When confronted with the fact that some parents who are poor did not avail themselves voluntarily of the schools available to them the *Gazette* editorial responded *“we do now that it has been found extremely difficult to induce the poorer classes... to avail themselves, for their children, of our Common Schools.... The due encouragement of private enterprise would answer every salutary purpose.”*<sup>36</sup>

Horace Mann (1796-1858) would become the “father of the modern public school system.” Rejecting the Calvinistic Christianity in which he was raised, he embraced salvation by works and this would change the way he believed education should be conducted. Though Mann would retain many of the ideals taught him by Christianity such as reading the Bible, helping the poor, curbing alcoholism and helping the insane, he now did it by state coercion rather than voluntary consent. It appears easier to *require* people to do right from the outside rather than *inspire* them to do so voluntarily from within.

It was in 1837 that Horace Mann became the Secretary of the first State School Committee that would transform the structure of public education. What must be noted here, however, is not simply the external structural change, but the reasons for it. It was essentially a rebellion toward the improper way in which believers presented their faith to their children that caused a push to the other extreme. If parents require their children to believe rather than reach their hearts to embrace Christ, the next generation will respond negatively. As Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying *“the philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation is the philosophy of the government in the next.”*

Space and time does not permit me to tell the detailed story of how America changed its educational philosophy, methodology and curriculum. We will just highlight some of the key areas. When John Dewey (1859-1952) comes on the scene, he furthers the departure of American education from its Hebrew roots. It is the myth of our age that Mann and Dewey merely extended the original philosophy of education brought forth by Comenius and the Founders. For Dewey, it was all about experience.

*“In terms of his (Dewey) pragmatic or instrumental view of truth, things are good or true only in terms of their consequences; the absurdity of this idea Bertrand Russell has noted, pointing out that the consequences then can be evaluated only in terms of their consequences, so that no judgment becomes possible. But need we believe Dewey? Is he a pragmatist? Is not his demand that he be read as an*

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, page 64

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 91-92.

*instrumentalist an attempt to evade the devastating critique of metaphysical theory...?”<sup>37</sup> In other words, all philosophies rest on religious presupposition and Dewey was no exception.*

Clark observes that Dewey “*wished at all costs to be scientific; for him the processes of science are the most obvious and the most successful methods of knowing. Therefore if science neglects something, the something is nothing. Dewey rejects the meaning of experience as private and mental in favor of defining it as scientific method... this method is clearly distinguishable from that of rationalism with its logical deductions... Society should be reconstructed.*<sup>38</sup> Dewey would participate in the total transformation of education as Americans had known it.

But Dewey did not originate this theory, for much of the transformation of American education rode on the wave of socialism with the publication of Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* in 1849 and Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859. As noted by Lawrence Cremin “*Virtually every field of knowledge quickened under the influence of science in general and Darwinism in particular. Psychology, social theory, and philosophy were as deeply affected as physics, chemistry, and biology. And as new notions of man and society came to the fore, pedagogy too was inevitably caught up in the ferment.... If the revolution had a beginning, it was surely with the work of Herbert Spencer.*”<sup>39</sup>

Spencer was the one who applied Darwinism and the evolutionary theory to law, ethics and many other disciplines. It set the stage for transforming the methodology of the classroom from individual productivity of the child reasoning from absolute principles and truth to molding the child for socialism through manipulating him scientifically. It was, indeed, a form of natural selection by the experts that the favored opinions of others might rule the day. Rosalie Slater has summarized the transformation of educational methods during this time period when she states...

*“Secular methods have a psychological and behavioral base and they deal with the individual as though he were a higher order of animal. There are certain recognizable aspects to this approach to learning which need to be pointed out if the Christian educator is not going to use these same methods and thus contribute to the development of a socio-psycho-politico individual whose behavior will be responsive to the socialistic atheistic demand of our time.... There are a number of identifiable steps to what can be essentially described as behavioral conditioning through Stimulus-Response. These stem from the most notable experiment of our time in its influence upon educational programs in Russia and the United States. Pavlov’s experiment with a dog conditioned the animal to produce saliva with the ringing of a bell. The learning progressed to the point where the bell-stimulus would produce saliva without the presence of the food. There is much evidence to indicate that we in America have created a society in which a majority of individuals respond as they have been conditioned to specific stimuli – whether there is evidence of reality or fact.”<sup>40</sup>*

The psychological experiments of behavioral conditioning removed the educational pedagogy of notebooks (copy-books) where students wrote and reflected upon the productivity of their instructors. It also removed the essay requiring complete sentences and creative expression in their own words. Finally, it also separated vocational training from academic training, so that instead of naturally applying

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<sup>37</sup> Rushdoony, R. J., *The Messianic Character of American Education*, Craig Press, 1963, pages 144-145.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, Gordon H., *Thales to Dewey*, The Trinity Foundation, 1985, pages 519, 523, 524, 526.

<sup>39</sup> Cremin, Lawrence., *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961, pages 90-91.

<sup>40</sup> Slater, Rosalie, *Teaching and Learning America’s Christian History: The Principle Approach*, F.A.C.E. ([www.face.net](http://www.face.net)), pages 91-92.

one's education to practical areas of service, one chose either a vocational or an academic education and both became inefficient. In short, *we traded personal discipleship for impersonal transfer of knowledge*. Ask any employer today if the average young person has the character to work or the academic training to teach himself. We have become a dependent culture ripe for tyranny.<sup>41</sup>

As one modern teacher's textbook states it "*The purpose of education is not merely to contribute to the continuity of culture, but also to change peacefully and rationally the material foundations of civilization... Let us consider the difference between education and indoctrination. Indoctrination depends upon the closed mind and preconceived viewpoints, whereas education is open minded and accepts no absolutes. Indoctrination appeals mainly to our emotional biases, while education appeals primarily to our rational capacities. Indoctrination gives us only partial knowledge, while education seeks complete knowledge. Indoctrination is intensely subjective, whereas education tends to be an objective process. Dogmatism is the keynote of indoctrination, while tolerance is the watchword of education. The conclusions of indoctrination lead to rigidity and compulsion; the conclusions of education are subject to scientific verification and thus are tentative.*"<sup>42</sup>

Religion in general and Christianity in particular are misinterpreted as "indoctrination" rather than the teaching of absolute truth to be believed voluntarily by consent. The philosophy is well known here, but where does it lead? John Keats stated the root of the problem in the 1950's. His analysis of the root problem with America's modern educational philosophy was succinct and amazingly up to date for his time. "*There is no a priori knowledge; hence there are no eternal absolutes; no timeless objective goals. Everything, truth included, is relative. Moreover, the present is the only reality we can ever truly know and use.*"<sup>43</sup> We are thus trapped in the every downward spiral of increased mediocrity which makes us ripe for conquest.

When President Ronald Reagan commissioned a study of American education in 1980, the Department of Education, under Secretary Bell, summarized their findings in this dramatic way, utilizing the language of warfare when they stated: "*If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.*"<sup>44</sup>

In all three areas of education from its *philosophy, methodology and curriculum*, we have traded our productivity for a consumption of mediocrity that has had devastating consequences. Our nation's productivity has been the result of a philosophy of education that was once rooted in Christianity and moral absolutes which produced solid character. We have now traded this for ambiguity on the foundation of the sandy soil of amorality.<sup>45</sup>

The once solid pedagogue adopted by early Americans in the home and hearth as well as the school room that taught one how to think and reason has now been traded for psychological methods of transformation and deception. Thomas Sowell writes "*the school curriculum has been invaded by psychological-conditioning programs which not only take up time sorely needed for intellectual development, but also promote an emotionalized and anti-intellectual way of responding to the challenges facing every individual...*"<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 93-97.

<sup>42</sup> Mayer, Frederick, *A History of Educational Thought*, Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1966, page 8.

<sup>43</sup> Keats, John., *Schools Without Scholars*, Boston Houghton-Mifflin, 1958, pages 83, 85; as quoted in Sykes, Charles., *Dumbing Down our Kids*, 1995, page 13.

<sup>44</sup> Bell, T. H., Secretary of Education, *A Nation At Risk*, U. S. Department of Education, Washington DC, 1983, page 5.

<sup>45</sup> See Kilpatrick, William., *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*, Simon and Schuster, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Sowell, Thomas., *Inside American Education.*, The Free Press, 1993, page ix.

Finally, the curriculum that once centered on theology and absolutes, identifying principles that would equip young people to be productive in any area of life have been traded for self-esteem. An example of this is given by Sowell “*perhaps nothing so captures what is wrong with American schools as the results of an international study of 13 year olds which found that Koreans ranked first in mathematics and Americans last. When asked if they thought they were ‘good at mathematics,’ only 23 percent of the Korean youngsters said ‘yes’ – compared to 68 percent of American 13-year-olds. The American educational dogma that students should ‘feel good about themselves’ was a success in its own terms – though not in any other terms.*”<sup>47</sup> Maureen Stout has documented the self-esteem transformation of our modern American curriculum as well in her well documented book.<sup>48</sup>

So in conclusion, where do we go from here? How should believers in Christ pray and act? What should we do as a result of learning the roots of why we were once equipping generations of productive learners? Whatever happened to self-education, or placing the responsibility of learning back on the parent to inspire their children to desire to learn, regardless of good or bad teachers and schools?

### **How should we pray and act as Believers?**

We must strategically pinpoint the areas where the turning of the tides has taken place in our culture, directing ourselves and others to incrementally return to our Biblical roots that once influenced the landscape. In summarizing this brief overview of American education, let us highlight where we must focus so that we might see these truths manifesting through the voluntary choices of people.

**First, we must understand that the Church is in captivity in America.** Our job is now to heed the wisdom and instruction of Jeremiah similar to those who were taken captive in Babylon.

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.” – Jeremiah 29:4-7*

**Second, we must pray that parents from within the believing community restore their responsibility to teach their children.** As believers we must be convicted for abandoning our responsibility of overseeing and managing our children’s education. Our philosophy of education must return to the multi-generational model that will bless those who lead the culture as they see the results. It is an inside job, restoring obedience to that which we have neglected and ignored for so long. We must choose home and Christian school education at an increasing rate. Our liberties were not stolen, we have steadily given them away over a period of 200 years through passivity and the giving of our children to the ideas that were opposite from our faith.

**Third, we need to pray that home educators and Christian schools embrace Biblical methods** of analysis and synthesis that equip students to reason and produce, orally and in writing, so that a remnant of leaders can arise for our future.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, page 3.

<sup>48</sup> Stout, Maureen., *The Feel-Good Curriculum*, Perseus Books, 2000.



**Fourth, we need to pray that a thorough Biblical worldview, as it is expressed in every area of life (or the disciplines of a curriculum), will once again equip a generation to restore and preserve liberty.**

**Fifth, we must prepare to educate in the most creative of ways.** Our children need to prepare to teach their own children (underground if necessary), and schools must prepare for a decentralized approach if we should lose our buildings and our ability to conduct education as we know it now. In short, we must prepare to conduct self-education, where we are not dependent on schools or teachers and where individuals are inspired once again to teach themselves as it is based in God's Word.

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known. Our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born. That they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” – Psalm 78:1-7*