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Educating the “People of the Book”

Government reportedly has new programs and funding to help home-schoolers, provided that religion is not part of the equation. But for many Christians who home school their children, this makes no sense. They believe that *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.* (Pr 1:7)

According to Dr. D. James Kennedy, Christians have often been referred to as the “people of the Book,” which, he says, implies a literate people. Quoting Dr. J. D. Douglas, editor of *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Kennedy writes: “From its beginning the religion of the Bible has gone hand in hand with teaching...As Christianity spread, patterns of more formal education developed.”¹

Dr. Marshall Foster of the Mayflower Institute agrees, saying:

“It cannot be denied that the greatest universities, as well as literacy and education for the common man, were a product of Christianity. The Christian work ethic was the foundation of the free enterprise system and Capitalism, which have geometrically increased the wealth of the world. Representative constitutional government had its roots in the Old and New Testaments, not in ancient pagan cultures, and found its fullest expression in the Christian experiment in colonial America.”

“The biblical worldview of a created universe of order and design provided the basis for justice and peace that is still the wonder of the world. Christian conscience, preaching, and the Bible were central in the abolition of slavery, both in antiquity and in more modern times. With Christianity came a high regard for all human life, since it was destined for eternity, and the elevation of women as joint-heirs in God’s kingdom, not servants of men. Christ’s Samaritan example and Christian love produced hospitals, homes for the insane and orphans, and food banks for the hungry.”

“...The ancient world had no conception of education for the common man. Scholarship was the sole property of the class-conscious elite of Greece, Rome, and Egypt....Christians spearheaded the cause of literacy from the time of the early Church through the Middle Ages. Monasteries and schools were established and eventually the first universities were started for the purpose of Christian and classical training at Cambridge, Paris, and Bologna.”²

In America, the Pilgrims made no concessions to the forest, but in the midst of frontier conditions maintained schools and even established a college within 16 years of landing at Plymouth Rock. Seldom noted is the fact that 123 of the first 126 colleges formed in this country—were formed on Christian principles, and even up to the year 1900, it was rare to find a university president who was not an ordained clergyman.

But in 1837, a movement to blunt America’s classical Christian education began in Massachusetts under the tutelage of Horace Mann, since revered as the “father of modern public education.” Mann, president of the state legislature and chairman of the newly

formed “state board of education,” was a Unitarian who denied the Trinity and the deity of Christ. He did not believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible. He thought it deplorable that America’s education system was in the hands of the Church.

Critics of Horace Mann’s approach to education believe that his modern day disciples have thoroughly secularized our society through the schools and now have designs on the Church itself. Lawmakers have received complaints that new programs that financially entice parents and churches to consider a blend of home and public school instruction for their children, are nothing more than government sticking its nose where it doesn’t belong.

In a letter to State Senator Val Stevens, a constituent reported that “...*In the fall of 1997 our church...entered into a contract with the [local Public School District], leasing them approximately 1/3 of our church facility for use on Monday-Friday during regular school hours as a home school education support center. The home school parents bring their children to this ‘center’ for additional education in math, science, computer, art, etc. They attend five hours per week and one parent must be present during the instruction. These children are now considered ‘full time equivalent’ public school students and the...public school system receives \$3,600 per student in state funding...*”

“I see a major conflict brewing...Already we have had to remove Christian posters, signs, bulletin boards, etc. To appease our new renters, and the \$400 allotted to each student...curriculum must be ‘free’ of religious and sectarian content...I am very concerned about being unequally yoked with a value system contrary to ours and the legal ramifications that may result from it.”³

In response, Sen. Stevens wrote: “*The issue of ‘independent learning’ as it is referred to by Dr. Terry Bergeson, Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), is a real concern to me. As parents remove their children from the government education system...there has been a loss of revenue in the Public Schools.*”

“In the effort to regain some of the lost revenue and to seduce the home school parents back to the system, the SPI has implemented State Funding for Alternative Education Programs. Payment to parents by the government to draw the children under the control of the public system, is in my opinion, a red flag to any parent who has removed their child from the system in order to give them a better education at home.”

“Your comment regarding “unequally yoked” is well-founded and I share your concern. Your church, regardless of the Christian foundation, is providing legitimacy for a faulty concept. Parents who may have questioned placing their children under the teaching of a secular teacher will believe them safe at a Christian Church facility.”⁴

While the public school outreach to the home schooling market may be well-meaning, it is possible that compliance for Christians is similar to lighting a candle and hiding it under a bushel. And, where is wisdom in learning apart from our great Teacher, who said, *...Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.* (Matt 19:14 NIV)

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ Kennedy, D. James, What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?, 1994, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN, pg.40

² Foster, Marshall, Christian Home Learning Guides, 1997, Zane Publishing, Inc., pg.8

³ Letter dated 4/2/98 edited for space. Writer could not be reached by phone.

⁴ Excerpts of letter dated 4/13/98, edited for space and used by permission of Sen. Stevens.