

Chalcedon Special Education Report

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“Education for Christian Liberty”

By Ronald Kirk

God requires of His people a manner of life which reflects the work of Christ in us. To support and protect that life over time, Christians have increasingly expressed and applied their faith through action in the civil sphere. *Liberty under law* describes the highest expression of faith in Christ among men and serves as the primary Biblical principle of civil government. The slavish character formed of native sin can never long maintain free institutions. Rather, building, supporting, and maintaining civil liberty require a rather highly developed citizen. Such a citizen must individually exhibit the highest degree of Christian character and wisdom. Therefore, Christian educators ought to make the principles and practice of Christian liberty a fundamental part of the educational process.

The Constitutional Republic

Scriptures greatly emphasize liberty, as “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Corinthians 3:17 AV). In an age where God’s Word dominated the ordinary and extraordinary lives of the people, Biblical principles increasingly ruled civil life. Civil Christian liberty flourished under the principle of *liberty under law*. Civil liberty and a free market provide a foundation that Christians may fulfill their Providential potential and calling. Freedom to pursue the special activities of God’s calling and the capital to fund them are fundamental to the Gospel work. Therefore, the Biblical conception limits civil government to the protection of individual life, liberty and property. Otherwise, government tends to usurp authority and increasingly appropriate resources which rightly belong to God. America’s original federal republic established the prosecution of criminal law in towns, cities, and states. For protection and justice against foreign attack, the states formed a federal union to benefit from their combined strength. The Founding Fathers in the United States Constitution formed a complex of many limited jurisdictions at many lev-

els, in order to make it difficult for sinful men to collect power to themselves and undermine the principle of general liberty. Notwithstanding the genius of the American system, because it is based essentially on self-government and the willingness to practice godly justice, the free society requires a special kind of character and skill among the citizenry and their representatives.

The Ideal form

The ideal Christian republic builds upon the successfully self-governed individual. The individual enjoys general liberty, with no inherent limits except that imposed by Providence and by God’s Law. Protection of the rightful liberty of others comprises a principle limitation on anyone’s liberty. If I violate another’s life, liberty or property, I erode my own liberty by my poor example. Individuals, then, primarily establish civil order through personal self-restraint or *civil manners*. Biblically defined manners, under a free civil order, constitute the first sphere of civil government. James calls treating others rightly, in Gospel terms, the “law of liberty” (James 2:12). Only a society strongly influenced by the Holy Spirit

through believers can long remain free. God's gift of the Holy Spirit enables men to restrain themselves in a way which supports liberty. The strength and influence of Christian leadership, again by the power of the Spirit, enables the larger society to observe liberty in practice. This was manifestly the condition of early America. Dr. Rushdoony says, "The Constitution was designed to *perpetuate* the Christian order (emphasis in the original)."¹

Self-government or forced external government

God generally maintains societal order through a kind of spectrum of civil government. For the more licentious, selfish and slavish people, God provides for a more dictatorial government. At the extreme of depravity, God will destroy the very people: Judgment is the ultimate "government" over an ultimately depraved people (Genesis 6:7). Some, ignoring the reality of sin in the most sanctified among us, conceive a completely Holy Spirit governed people, therefore capable of perfect self-government and walking in perfect liberty, without the need for an external system of civil justice. In between these extremes lies the real need for earthly government. Early America represents perhaps the highest expression of institutional Christian liberty yet known in history. In a word, the more self-restrained a people are, the *less* external constraint of government is required. The less self-restrained a people are, the *more* external constraint of government is required. God gives the people the kind of government required to maintain societal order, an element of common grace and a provision for the protection of the saints. At this point in America's history, as governmental regulation grows wildly out of proportion and justice often fails, we must conclude we are increasingly incapable of self-government. How may we reverse this trend?

A Man for the Christian Republic

If the governed are the key to government, what does a Christian republic require of a citizen? For the educator, identifying the goal enables the planning of the curriculum. The complex of general liberty, limited jurisdictions of governmental authority and

disciplined prosecution of justice needed to support institutional liberty require the following listed qualities of character, wisdom and skills. Rosalie Slater identified these traits as an integral part of the character of the American Christian Pilgrim.²

Live by Biblical Principle: Faith and Steadfastness

The self-governing individual must be capable of denying the desires of his flesh in favor of living by God's law-word. Such living constitutes a practical Biblical faith. For the sake of eternal life and the honor of God, the Christian reckons the old man dead, denies himself, picks up his cross and follows Christ in everything. Life is a living sacrifice. Thus, regardless of circumstances, external forces or internal desires, the self-governing individual stands for what is right according to God's Law. Difficulty, even unto death, will not dissuade the steadfastness required to live righteously.

Contribute to the Gospel and society: Diligence and Industry

God required man from the beginning to take dominion over the earth. Essentially, this means to apply oneself to the raw materials God provides to produce something of greater utility and value to mankind. Moreover, in order to fulfill the Second Commandment of Christ—to love one's neighbor—one invests hard and intelligent work and then trusts God to bring the increase. This godly productivity, rightly used, benefits society. Moreover, as the productivity to investment ratio grows, wealth grows. Increased capital availability allows ever-greater investment and productivity. To increase productivity, a godly imagination brought to bear upon the economic object is needed. This is the Biblical principle of invention. Consider how God chose the architects of the Tabernacle by name because of their ability for their "artistic" work (Exodus 31:1-5). Enterprise—the willingness to risk the capital of time, energy, raw resources, gratification and possibly safety—builds the economic foundations for personal and corporate exercise of the Great Commission. Enterprise therefore requires courage.

Exercise Liberty without license: Brotherly Love and Christian Care

God intends people to enjoy life. Christ came to give life and that more abundantly. Christ also requires that we prefer one another and that selfless love prevail (I Corinthians 13). God thus intends us to live and enjoy life, but with restraint, not offending neighbors. So as not to steal from our neighbors or our children, we produce materially through enterprise, but are conservative of resources.³ We do not unnecessarily pollute. We enjoy the fruit of our labor, but share with those in need (Galatians 6:7-10). God further requires that we embrace differences between us, not over the essentials of the faith, but of those things which distinguish us as individuals according to Christ's gifts (1 Corinthians 12). Brotherly Love is not merely kindness, but a means to cultivate inclusion and mutual friendship. While providential differences in economic and social condition are no good reason for societal unrest or revolution, godly friendship reduces the sinful tendency for such. Notwithstanding other possible factors, the Law of God requires the able to lend aid to the incapable. Such is love and God will reward it (e.g. Isaiah 58). A relatively secure and middle class founds free institutions. Voluntary and wise generosity contributes to that middle class

Vigilance and the Love of Liberty

At the same time, we must guard against ways which would usurp liberty (Galatians 2:4). The Christian citizen must be zealous to develop, protect, and maintain the foundational institutions of liberty. Freedom may fail in a single generation where the population has lost its love of God and therefore its love of liberty. An education for liberty in the home and schools is essential. Families must first practice the principles of Christian liberty at home if the citizenry will possess the wisdom and skill to practice liberty in greater spheres. The church, as the custodian of the Holy Oracles of God, must maintain diligence to teach the Word—the Gospel—and therefore the Law of Liberty. Business owners must practice godly commerce. They must fight to protect the free market place, possessing character to resist de-

sire for the false security of regulation and government “services”. Government's many strings will strangle liberty. Finally, every citizen ought to fight for godly, limited government, according to gifts, resources and calling. This means education in the principles of liberty. It means being active in the election process, not only in general elections, but as a fundamental part of the political process. It means running for governmental office so that Christians represent God and therefore His liberty. Moreover, appropriate action means learning and practicing Christian law, forming new law schools which teach the benign Law of God as normative of a free society. It means becoming teachers in schools and professors in the universities upon a strictly God-centered view of life, educational method, and the academic disciplines. Every human activity will tend to exalt God and His liberty, or by default will tend toward institutionalizing sin and spoiling the ground out of which the Gospel ought to grow.

Modern Education Is No Support to the Republic

Briefly, let us consider why modern education is useless, or worse, to the maintenance and furtherance of the republic. Where exceptions exist, they can be traced almost uniformly to a quality of family character, which enables accomplishment in even a de-based system. However, the present trend militates against even this mitigating factor. In a word, humanistic education has become so successful even Christian schools are at risk of its influence. Dan Smithwick of the Nehemiah Institute with its PEERS Test of applied Christian worldview declares that the trend toward humanism in the schools is so pervasive, that America can expect universally to revert to abject humanism, with a corresponding impending loss of liberty, by the year 2018 (though a small, strong Christian worldview minority is encouraging).⁴ Public schools show no sign of returning to traditional views which support liberty, much less the Christian faith which founded liberty in the first place. Consider some characteristics of modernism which makes this so:

Modern Education is Environmental

Because man is environmentally determined, according to the modernist, he merely reflects his environment. Attempted Character training is useless or worse. An overcoming faith has no meaning. External force from nature or the state is the only meaningful power. Therefore, the product of modern education is a compliant, useful, and slavish instrument of the state, or a slavish object in need of the state's benevolence. Unfortunately, this includes the incompetent and criminals, an apparently increasing result of modern education. Such environmentalism supports an all-consuming state, not liberty.

Self-centered

Despite the rhetoric of care from statist demagogues, the product of modern education is increasingly self-centered. This is so because man is naturally self-centered. Humanistic education, which puts man at the center of his own existence, provides more than sufficient encouragement towards selfishness. To be self-centered is to grow greedy, sullen, and lazy. Moreover, the self-centered one is complacent, desiring neither change nor improvement. In turn, selfishness eliminates the desire to seek others' good. The selfish one lacks thoughtfulness toward others, which as we observed earlier is a fundamental element of free institutions. Such a person is no support to liberty, as liberty requires a generous spirit, protecting others' rights as the most effective means to secure personal rights.

Socialistic

Modern education, in encouraging personal selfishness, produces a desire for governmentally provided care and security. The entitlement, something-for-nothing, easy-acquiring mentality breeds dependence. Society owes a job, a house, and cradle to grave security. Life's personal problems, like the ancient Greeks' attitude toward their gods, are someone else's fault. Solutions are someone else's responsibility, especially civil government's. Modern education's methods inculcate the view that the individual is only important as a contributor to the group. Thus, modern education encourages big, centralized government, and not individual liberty.

Principles of Education Needed for Self-Government

On the contrary, a truly Christ-centered education militates toward the support of Christian liberty. Consider how to teach and train the character and abilities for liberty. The term *teacher* used here applies to parents and professionals alike:

To teach faith and steadfastness

In order to teach *faith and steadfastness*, teachers assign difficult tasks, but with an appropriate level of aid leading to success. The teacher provides minute and careful instruction, to ensure mastery. Nothing is taken for granted, but the student learns all necessary content and skills through regular practice and review. The teacher provides examples and if necessary leads the student through every necessary step. As the student is able, the teacher requires increasing personal effort and stretching. The teacher constantly encourages the student to pray and trust Christ for help. The teacher never exacts accomplishment, but always the best effort by faith, which will produce success in Christ's time. Quitting is the only failure. In this life, learning is never finished, so the teacher constantly urges the student toward greater expressions of the excellence of Christ in us. Habits formed early in the young person will remain through life (Proverbs 22:6). Thus, teachers help students to practice and make corrections until good habits form. In this regard, the teacher is for a while the child's law, government, discipline, and wisdom. A balance between discipline and liberty, adjusted to the student's momentary capability for self-government, brings him little by little to greater capacity to walk in liberty. These practices encourage an overcoming faith leading to a practical apprehension that I, indeed, "can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

To teach diligence and industry

To teach diligence and industry, teachers stress the importance of every subject. Jesus created every subject for some Gospel purpose. Every subject has a wonder and glory all its own. No sugar coating or amusement need sweeten or prop up the subject. To

add such is to demean the subject in the student's eyes. Imagine an employer who must amuse employees to entice them to interest in their work! Mary Poppins is not a good role model. Christians long understood the need to separate duty from recreation so that the child may keep a balanced appreciation of both. The student learns diligence as an ordinary practice. Early frustrations elicit a persistent faith. The teacher encourages the attitude that a job well done is its own reward and glorifies God. Children should early have work responsibilities, chores, to inculcate a love of work and the sense of belonging to and contributing to the family. Two or three year olds can collect the trash and empty the dishwasher. The teaching process requires various levels of government in sequence. First, the teacher demonstrates the fulfillment of the task. Then he assists the learner, offering as much assistance as needed, but no more. Then he supervises the student's work. Lastly, the student, walking in liberty, governs his own work, with perhaps only occasional inspection as needed.

Cultivating both a godly imagination and problem solving ability establish an enterprising and productive life. Accepting and correcting the results of one's efforts, in either success or momentary failure, build practical wisdom for future efforts. Creativity comes from recreating the thinking process of successful inventors and artists. Studying others' accomplished works and emulating them cultivates creativity. Noah Webster said that education is overcoming intellectual difficulty. Mathematics is an excellent means to teach problem solving. The curriculum should give large place to teaching the *principles* of problem solving and training generalized methods. Word problems are key. Science classes with hands-on opportunities to tame nature teach the difficulty of real-world accomplishment, and therefore perseverance. Lab reports should faithfully document the work, such that it can be reproduced. Such workmanship grounds future accomplishment in the real world.

To teach brotherly love and Christian care

To inculcate brotherly love and Christian care, Christian teachers must practice these qualities. Parents

should carefully teach their children through word and deed that they are important to God and to the family because they *are*, not because of what they contribute or how compliant they are. No matter how much discipline a child requires, parents ought to give equal and exceeding, unconditional affection. At the least, this will remove a sinful excuse to rebel on the grounds the child can never be good enough. Moreover, it illustrates the fact that human life is inherently valuable because God made each of us in His image. No other reason is needed. Parents must love one another and require right treatment by children toward parents and toward those outside the family, and siblings toward one another. Manners are taught and trained, according to Scripture, not merely caught. Therefore, parents must study appropriate manners of conduct, and teach and practice them. Even a child's play should be governed so that playmates do not become each other's toys. So much of what commonly passes for play is really only one person tyrannizing another for entertainment. Emily Post's design in her *Etiquette* was not stuffy formal manners, but essentially to teach to love one's neighbor as oneself. Refined manners, which primarily consist in practical self-restraint, allow intimacy without presumption and therefore offense. Because bad company corrupts good morals (I Corinthians 15:33) and children's characters are not yet formed, the home and a community of carefully chosen friends ought to form the essential social circle for children. Peer socialization is the blind leading the blind and they all fall into a pit. Parents ought also to help young people choose their colleges very carefully for the same reason. Jesus said, "It is enough to become like your teacher." Competition encourages growth. "Iron sharpens iron." Nonetheless, competition ought essentially to be against oneself for improvement. Children should learn the balance between achieving excellence in competition and love for others. To over-emphasize competition is to encourage an "us-against-them" mentality. Christians are not to exult over a fallen enemy, let alone a vanquished friend. Sportsmanship is a Christian heritage, even in war, because victory comes not by the strong arm of the flesh, but by God's Spirit. Moreover, seeing

accomplishment merely in competition is to be man-centered and to lose sight of God's Providence over success. Teachers should inculcate a dependence on Providence through every difficulty.

To Teach the Love of Liberty

My experience has long proved that where the principles of liberty are self-consciously entertained and mastered in their application to ordinary relationships and stewardship, the love of liberty grows, even among the very young. Teachers who train children to work hard and to restrain themselves in love of their neighbors may thereby grant those children increasingly greater freedom. Children so taught quickly learn to love liberty. They do good by volition and not constraint. In due season, the Holy Spirit will fill the one thus prepared with a true and godly liberty from the very heart. Children should thus learn that the enjoyment of liberty is only to be found in relationship to, dependence upon and obedience to Christ.

Children should learn the rudiments of practical liberty—the covenant, federal and representation principles. Briefly, liberty forms around covenants or godly agreements. These are mutual promises of faithfulness before God. Christians must keep their word, even to their own hurt. The Scriptures teach that God makes a previous commitment the highest priority (Joshua 9; 1 Corinthians 7). The federal principle, arising from the vertical and horizontal relationships of the Two Commandments of Christ,

demonstrates that by nature some relationships are of authority, while peer relationships imply no inherent authority. Peer association or horizontal relationship is the norm. Thus, we ought to owe nothing but love. In vertical relationships, authority is always limited and is by agreement. I have long taught my children that they may play even rough games if they are by mutual agreement, but one should never *use*, let alone, abuse another. If I babysit my younger brother, I may not lord it over him. If my parents put me under my brother's authority, I must submit as if to my parents. These are but a few examples.

Conclusion

Mere political activism and power struggle will never serve the cause of Christian liberty alone. Politics address merely the external matters. Rather, liberty depends on its constituents who in the most fundamental way *are* the civil government. Therefore, the quality of child rearing in a community forebodes the quality of the future society. Selfish, childish, tyrannical children will yield a slavish and socialistic society. The fulfilled faith of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in believers carefully and well educated militate toward institutional Christian liberty, which, in turn, provide the foundations for the work of the Great Commission. The parental and educational trust cannot be over estimated and every effort to master the principles and practices of Christian liberty ought to be made.

For further reading, by Rousas J. Rushdoony: *This Independent Republic, The One and the Many, The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum, and The Messianic Character of American Education* (Ross House Books (209) 736-4365 or online at <http://www.rosshousebooks.org>.)

¹ Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books), p. 2.

² Rosalie J. Slater, *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History* (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1975), pp. 122-124.

³ Rushdoony, *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* (1981), p. 10.

⁴ Dan Smithwick, The Nehemiah Institute, "One Generation to Go, Then the End," February 21, 2002, (<http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/articles/index.php?action=show&id=18>).