



Principle Approach® Education

TEACHING CHILDREN TO BE FREE: *EDUCATION FOR THE HEMISPHERE OF LIBERTY*

by Carole G. Adams

John's Gospel proclaims our Lord's ringing phrase, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:32, 36)

'Free,' meaning to be at liberty, not under necessity or restraint, physical or moral, not enslaved or in a state of vassalage or dependence—being free is a state men have deemed worthy of dying for. Yet, moral, physical, civil, economic, and spiritual slavery afflict our children in nightmarish proportion all around us, often with our consent through education.

How do we achieve liberty for ourselves and for our children? Is our Western Hemisphere intended in God's providence to be a hemisphere of liberty? What does this mean to educators and statesmen, parents and students?

Being free comes by knowing the truth Christ teaches. Matthew Henry, who possessed a Biblical understanding of God, man, and government, thought governmentally about John 8:

The knowing, entertaining, and believing, of this truth does actually make us free, free from prejudices, mistakes, and false notions, than which nothing more enslaves and entangles the soul, free from the dominion of lust and passion, and restores the soul to the government of itself, by reducing it into obedience to its Creator. The mind by admitting the truth of Christ in the light and power, is vastly enlarged, and has scope and compass given it, is greatly elevated and raised above things of sense, and never acts with so true a liberty as when it acts under a divine command.

Teaching children to be free in the hemisphere of liberty begins with teaching children the truth of Christ. However, teaching and learning, which should be the purest and most natural activity of the human spirit, has become the most restricting and fallacious—a tool of Satan for enslavement. This fact long apparent to alert Christians became dinner table conversation nationwide when in 1983 a government commission warned us that our education system had put our nation at risk. The startling conclusion of the National Commission on Excellence in Education was not the high percentage of functional illiteracy, or our poor showing academically in comparison to other nations, to which Americans had resigned themselves since Sputnik and Why Johnny Can't Read days; what was truly startling is that



the national response to the commission's warning of loss of our freedom was broad indifference, more innovative and ineffective remedies from government, less true understanding, and continuing general apathy towards the root causes.

Americans with a heart for children are shocked to read the news of the world and to realize how many millions of children are subject daily to hunger and starvation, disease and death. Yes, conditions in America have oftentimes been difficult for many children. But never have children in such large numbers as are now being reported in the world press, perished from the earth.

We know that many of the above conditions are the result of political tyranny—a lack of freedom for individuals, families, and nations. America constantly addresses herself to such challenges in the world, but ultimately the solution to such problems is not political—it is Biblical, then governmental

In America today we are subject to some of the most subtle tyrannies of the mind, heart, and body, as have ever prevailed in our nation. As American Christians we know that the INTERNAL realm of government, precedes the EXTERNAL or civil sphere. So, while we despair at the invasion of politics into family areas of life, we recognize that this has resulted from a FALLING AWAY in our HOMES, from those Biblical foundations of character and government which first established us “ONE NATION UNDER GOD.”

This is why we rejoice in the freedoms we still have to educate our children in “the paths of the Lord.” It will be up to our AMERICAN CHRISTIAN HOMES, CHURCHES, and SCHOOLS, to restore what “the locusts have eaten” in our nation of BASIC BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES. We must raise up renewed parents and teachers, to reach receptive child-hearts and to inspire student minds and lives for scholarship, statesmanship, and servanthood.

Freedom has many dimensions. Our American Christian schools and ministries are dedicated to the re-establishment of “that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” We know that is the beginning of all liberty and freedom in every realm. And because we have the original historical and Biblical blueprints as to how our nation was educated into liberty and freedom, we can accept this challenge with both the weapons and the tools which we have already proved to be successful in our day, as was Nehemiah and his workers in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Parents and teachers who love and serve Christ have no decision to make about whether they or their children may practice secular education. Their convictions preclude choices contrary to Biblical education. Accepting the challenge of teaching children to be free simply means identifying the means of educating children thoroughly in the Bible, making the Bible the major textbook of education, from the beginning years and throughout elementary and secondary education. Christian education is an ongoing process that requires the entire developing span of years of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. It is impossible to think that “getting the right start” in primary years will bring the full effect of right education when the child then is shifted to a secular system.



THE PRINCIPLE APPROACH®: BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL AMERICAN EDUCATION

It is a natural and wholistic approach to identify the source of every subject and all knowledge in the Bible. The blueprint for teaching children to be free has been documented in Rosalie J. Slater's Teaching and Learning America's Christian History as "The Principle Approach" of American Christian Education. She proposes:

The Principle Approach is America's historic Christian method of Biblical reasoning which makes the Truths of God's Word the basis of every subject in the school curriculum.

The Principle Approach begins by restoring the 4 R's to teaching and learning: 1st R: the Researching of God's Word to identify basic principles; 2nd R: the Reasoning from these Biblical principles to their identification in the subjects of the curriculum; 3rd R: the Relating of Biblical principles to each student, to Christian character, to Christian self-government, to the stewardship of God-given talents; 4th R: the Recording or the written record by each student of the individual application of the principles.

Does the Bible provide us with any precedent for reasoning from principles? Consider the following passages: Acts 17:2, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." Acts 24:25, "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." I Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

The Pilgrims learned Biblical reasoning from Pastor John Robinson during their twelve years in Holland. Thus they were prepared to extend Christian principles into civil government and to deal with the problems that confronted them in the New World. Challenged on the Mayflower by rebellious "strangers," they wrote the Mayflower Compact, so that every man might voluntarily share in making and keeping the laws. Confronted with distrustful Indians, they made a mutual pact and maintained a long—lasting peace. Faced with starvation, William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth Plantation, "had the courage and wisdom" to shift from "labor in common" to the responsibility of individual enterprise and private property. For more than twenty years the Pilgrims labored to repay their original debt to the venture capitalists in England who had financed the voyage of the Mayflower. There were many opportunities to escape from this responsibility but they held to the obligation as a matter of Christian conscience. The Pilgrims were consistent because of their application of Christian truths or principles.

The ability to reason from the Word of God and to relate its principles to every area of life was characteristic of the American clergy prior to the American Revolution. The ministers of the Gospel understood civil government because they knew church government. Their election and artillery sermons identified "the principles of civil government with principles of Christianity."

At the time of the Declaration of Independence the quality of education had enabled the colonies to achieve a degree of literacy from "70% to virtually 100%." This was not education restricted to the few.



Modern scholarship reports “the prevalence of schooling and its accessibility to most segments of the population.” Moses Coit Tyler, historian of American Literature, indicates the colonist’s “familiarity with history . . . extensive legal learning . . . lucid exposition of constitutional principles, showing, indeed, that somehow, out into that American wilderness had been carried the very accent of cosmopolitan thought and speech.” When the American State Papers arrived in Europe they surprised and astonished the “enlightened men.” Americans had been dismissed as “illiterate backwoodsmen” as, perhaps, “law-defying revolutionists.” But when these papers were read they were found to contain “nearly every quality indicative of personal and national greatness.”

Dr. Lawrence A. Cremin in his study of American Education from 1607 to 1789, credits the high quality of American education to the Bible, “the single most important cultural influence in the lives of Anglo-Americans.” The Bible “contained the means to salvation, the keys to good and evil, the rules by which to live, the standards against which to measure the conduct of prince and pastor.”

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 Christianity expanded westward.

America’s Biblical Education produced America’s Christian History and Constitution. The method was the Principle Approach. Let us restore the foundation of American Independence.

[Rosalie J. Slater, *Teaching and Learning America’s Christian History: The Principle Approach*, pp. 88–89]

As the true freedom of our children is subtly and systematically snatched from them through secular education, whether in the public or private or ‘Christian’ school that hangs on to the secular curriculum and methods while spouting a ‘Christian’ philosophy, so our nation is taken captive. Rosalie Slater admonishes American Christian parents and teachers with these penetrating words:

A nation which is humble enough to begin with its children in the constructing of its foundations for liberty may once again have the opportunity to lead nations to Christ.

TEACHING AND LEARNING THAT FREES

With the Bible as the foundation, the principles of every subject become the tools of liberty in the hearts and minds of students. The fishing rule applies to education just as pertinently as to evangelism. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and he will feed himself forever. Give a child facts and you inform him of a topic; teach a child principles and he has the tools to master all knowledge himself.



Proverbs 2:1, an admonition for reflective, principled learning, says:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to Wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you cry out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” [NIV]

The act of education described in these verses that leads to the knowledge of God could be restated thus: Learn the Bible, reflect upon truth, reason with your heart and mind upon its principles, seek to understand by thinking, reasoning, reflecting, applying, and keeping truth. This is the internalization of knowledge, not just recognizing the facts, taking the tests, and making the grade. This is Principle Approach® learning—reflective learning—life and character-changing learning.

Principle Approach learning means also that learning is not sterile of life; it is not limited to paper and pencil exercises. First of all, this kind of reflective learning requires interchange—verbal and experiential—it does not happen if confined to a notebook. It requires discussion, debate, oral presentation of research and reason. It requires close mentoring between teacher and student and continual dialogue to challenge depth and breadth in the interaction with the subject.

It also requires a whole view of the subject including the historical background, the cultural and political influences, the impact of Christianity on the subject, and the artistic expressions of the subject. Placing a subject on the ‘Chain of Christianity’® means identifying the place of the subject in relation to history, government, and the arts—literary and visual—to present the wholeness of the subject.

Enough can never be said about the role of literature in education. The nature of literature—the record of the soul of man, his ideals and values—makes it not only relevant to every subject but essential to “calling out for insight.” The monumental work of the Foundation for American Christian Education in providing the literature guides and resources to teachers and students gives us the ready tools to bring the literary dimension to every subject.

The “freeing” of our children through education requires, first, the Biblical light and life internalized, then, the principled study of every subject in its wholeness. The third most freeing ingredient is the expression of the arts in the education of every child. Music, drama, theatre, painting, sculpture, architecture, all the visual arts and dance, provide the aesthetic nurture and creative expression essential to the whole person formed in the image of the Creator of the universe. Without these expressions in a child’s education, he is malformed intellectually and spiritually, lacking the cultivation of his gifts and capacities.

The Principle Approach curriculum must include art, music, and drama minimally, and should include foreign language study from the early years, as well as each subject in its whole integrity—science, history, geography, literature, grammar, composition, and math.



Teaching children to be free means children learning the art of self-government—gaining knowledge of God, of whom they are an image, so that they can know themselves, their capacities through productivity and expression, and self-direction through obedience to the Word of God. Samuel Adams summarizes the topic thusly:

Let divines and philosophers, statesmen and patriots, unite their endeavors to renovate the age, by impressing the minds of men with the importance of educating their little boys and girls, of inculcating in the minds of youth the fear and love of the Deity and universal philanthropy, and, in subordination to these great principles, the love of their country; of instructing them in the art of self-government of societies, great or small; in short, of leading them in the study and practice of the exalted virtues of the Christian system . . . [Samuel Adams, as quoted in *Christian History of the Constitution* by Verna Hall, p. XIV]