

# Education, Liberty, and the Bible

Martin G. Selbrede • ©2008 Chalcedon Foundation • www.chalcedon.edu

January 11, 2010 • Rev. 4 • Compiled from both original and derivative sources (most of which are cited in Chalcedon publications)

## The turning point: the statist takeover of education

April 20, 1837 represents the end of Americans' commitment to self-government and education as the shift to centralized state education was set in motion. That day, Horace Mann, the father of public education, became the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, the first state-supported school system financed by property taxes. He was an acknowledged early architect of modern education and the push to make education compulsory, humanistic, and insulated from parental influence and control.

## Correcting the record on education

There is no compulsory education in Singapore, but their school attendance is 98% and their aggregate literacy shames America's. Prior to compulsory education in America, 100 million sets of Noah Webster's *Speller* were sold in the years after 1783 (this was also a time when scholarships for the poor were pervasive), and the six-volume *Eclectic Readers* by W.H. McGuffey sold 120 million sets during the decades after 1836. These are astonishing numbers given the US population during that era. Non-compulsory education once gave our nation its highest literacy rates, as documented not only by Alexis de Tocqueville, but also by the study Thomas Jefferson commissioned DuPont to conduct in 1800, which showed national literacy standing at 99.7% (compared to today's 80% figure for high school graduates, which *doesn't even include the one million dropouts produced every year*).

## Educational decline

The long downward slide of SAT scores began in 1965. By 1966 the average SAT score had fallen 11 points to 467. By 1970 it fell to 460, and by 1977 it was down to 429. The *Boston Globe* (8/29/1976) called it "a prolonged and broad-scale decline unequalled in US history" and said, "The downward spiral ... shows no sign of bottoming out ... Educators ... have tried to ignore or discount the significance of the decline. At a national conference of school administrators (the decline) was alluded to as the 'big lie' being perpetrated against education." Not surprisingly, SAT scoring was "renormalized" in the mid-1990s so that what was once a score of 450 is now listed anywhere between 500 and 550. William J. Bennett pointed out, "Our worst subject is history. People have heard *ad nauseum* ... the scores of our reading and math. Our kids actually do better in reading and math than they do in history, American history particularly." In contrast, *Christian and home school* students excel in reading and math and also understand American history and their place in it.

## Is it really a matter of adequate funding?

The myth persists that if parents want better state schools, this can be achieved by increased funding. However, many of the worst schools in the United States receive the largest amount of per-student dollars. The quality of education does not correlate with money spent on it. The reality is that private education is cheaper by far than state education – \$4,800/yr vs. \$10,000/yr per student on average. Between 1965 and 1968, the Title One program spent a record-breaking \$3 billion to compensate for the performance of 6 million disadvantaged children, with the result being that the gap between them and their classmates *only worsened*.

## What about school vouchers?

Because education is a parental function, not a state function (see *final section*), tax dollars should not be used to pay for it. There are at least eighteen *private* voucher foundations operating, which have increased supply when demand has risen. When government-funded vouchers were revoked in Milwaukee by court order several weeks into the 1995-96 school year, several million dollars were privately collected in less than a week to allow students to remain in private institutions: proof that private vouchers work. Had American schools been privatized in 1997, the resulting tax cut (\$316 billion) would have dwarfed the private vouchers needed (\$16 billion), which amounted to less than what Americans gave churches (\$100 billion) or higher education (\$31 billion). Privatizing schools in 1997 would have saved \$316 billion in taxes, released \$16 billion for private vouchers, allowing Americans to keep \$300 billion of their own money to build their families as they saw fit. Privatization fortifies education and families *and* allows *tax cuts*, which are politically more attractive than the tax increases called for by the NEA.

## Why public schools avoid competition

If a private school performed like a public schools, it would go out of business. That's why state schools seek illegitimate protections to prop up their eroding student base. Recent attempts to criminalize home schools in California were temporarily successful until overthrown on appeal in 2008. During trials in the 1980s, church schools were not permitted to enter into evidence the test results of its students on the *state's own tests* – the students out-performed state school students by several years. State schools are incapable of competing fairly in the market place; they can only play dirty.

## Accreditation & quality of education

The alleged intention of private school regulation is to insure *quality* of education. But this is simply not true. The state has *never been* interested in *quality*. Accreditation is a *ruse* used by statists to maintain *control*. H.L. Mencken stated that "The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed a standard citizenry, to put down dissent and originality." Public school teachers are required to pass a state approved training program in order to acquire a state license, and this training lacks all elements that established and maintained our strong, free and prosperous society for two centuries: unrevised history, Biblical Law, Biblical/Austrian economics & sound money. "Parents rebel against ... humanistic state schools. Christian Schools are started and flourish, but ... voices ... promote the need for accreditation, and they seek the approval of the same corrupt system they abandoned" (Rushdoony). It is enlightening to realize there *is no contract* between the public and the state concerning educational quality: *neither public schools nor their teachers can be sued* for delivering an abysmal education: *they're protected because they serve "a compelling state interest," and such cases will always be dismissed*.

## Compulsory state-run education & parental forfeiture

The highest percentage of Christian School attendance is from the ranks of the children of public school teachers, whom the

*Wall Street Journal* calls “informed consumers.” Samuel Blumenfeld wrote in 1994 that, “a state school is not a fitting instrument of a parent’s concern, only a parent’s indifference.” Herbert Spencer said state education leads to “annulling all parental responsibilities altogether.” He criticized John Stuart Mill’s distrust of parents: “this alleged incompetency of the people has been the reason assigned for all state interferences whatsoever.” The federal government’s Goals 2000 and Outcome Based Education promotes further intrusion into family life. John Taylor Gatto, New York State Teacher of the Year, exposed the underlying parental forfeiture: “No middle-class parents I have ever met actually believe that *their* kid’s school is one of the bad ones. Not one single parent in twenty-six years of teaching. That’s amazing, and probably the best testimony to what happens to families when mother and father have been well-schooled themselves.” Most parents take for granted that the state will educate their kids, without questioning what will be taught.

### **Control of education: key to the culture war**

The control of education by the state has a long, ominous history. Emperor Julian of Rome acted against the Christians by decreeing “the classics could only be taught by the pagans, which meant the introduction of pagan teachers into Christian schools. The curriculum had to include anti-Christian works. One such required text was an anti-Christian and forged *Acts of Pilate*, required reading for all schools” (Rushdoony). Humanists regard the classroom as *the* place to wage war, as John Dunphy admits: “The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new – the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of humanism, resplendent in its promise of a world in which the never realized Christian ideal of ‘love thy neighbor’ will finally be achieved.”

### **Do public schools promote liberty or merely control?**

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), held that “The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state.” Albert Jay Nock indicted how state education teaches “a superstitious servile reverence for a sacrosanct State,” because such schools were “a leveling agency, prescribing uniform modes of thought, belief, conduct, social deportment, diet, recreation, hygiene; an ... inquisitorial body for the enforcement of these prescriptions.” In 1948, Frank Chodorov asked, “Can the tax-paid teacher even hint at the immorality of taxation?” He concluded that “in the full sense of the word, a free school is one that has no truck with the state, via its taxing powers.... What is known as ‘free education’ is the least free of all, for it is a state-owned institution ... and cannot possibly be separated from political control.... Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin did not abolish the public school, but, rather, favored it as a necessary integral of their regimes.” In 1970, Frank L. Field said of state schools, “I am proposing: (1) that powerful control over individual behavior is not necessarily evil or antidemocratic; (2) that we already employ great controlling power in education; but (3) that we do so very ineffectively because we try to hide the fact even from ourselves; and finally (4) that when we clearly understand the need for power we will

gradually require less of it, because its application will be overt, direct, timely, and hence necessarily more efficient.”

### **Education for free individuals or state drones?**

Sweden’s Prime Minister addressed Swedish children thus: “You don’t go to school to achieve anything personally, but to learn how to function as members of a group.” Roland Huntford said of Sweden that “immense pains are taken to round up the independent and the unwilling.” The old totalitarians used physical coercion to control men; the new totalitarians use state schools for this. As N. M. Butler affirms, “the state is the completion of the life of the individual, and without it he would not wholly live. To inculcate that doctrine should be an aim of all education in a democracy.” Newton Edwards agrees: “Public education ... is of government. Power to maintain a system of schools is an attitude of government ... as is the police power or the power to administer or to maintain military forces or to tax... The primary function of the public school ... is not to confer benefits upon the individual ...; the school exists as a state institution because the very existence of civil society demands it.” It would be more honest to say the existence of totalitarian society demands it.

### **The biggest lobby in Washington: the NEA**

The NEA is a huge political force. In 1967, NEA executive secretary Sam Lambert said the “NEA will become a political power second to no other special interest group ... with power unmatched by any other organized group in the nation.” Dean Harold Benjamin’s 1950 *Report on the Enemy*, delivered to the NEA in 1950, *proves* the organization sees anyone opposed to state-controlled education to be *the enemy*. By 1984, the NEA’s enemies list grew to book size and included virtually every organization favoring capitalism, Christianity, and/or conservatism.

### **State schools simply cannot be fixed**

Well-meaning activists, unaware of the decay inherent in a state-run system, think of public schools as institutions worthy to be rescued. This is a fiction that plays into the hands of statist anxious to retain power over the education of our children. The state cannot reform education *because state involvement is part of the problem*. The only way to ensure the liberty that only a well-educated citizenry can maintain is to *return to the home/Christian school system* that gave us the 99.7% national literacy rate that America enjoyed in 1803.

### **What does the Bible say about education?**

The fact that many Christian pastors place their children in state schools, setting an example their flocks might follow, does not speak well for our situation in America. Deut. 6:6-7 makes clear that education is not only a parental function, it *must* be anchored in the Word and Law of God. This is what “raising your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) means, a command *also* directed to the father. In education, children are to be “under the hands of the father” (I Chron. 25:3,6). The phrase “to pass one’s children through the fire to Molech” (Lev. 18:21, etc.) refers to devoting one’s children to the state, to acknowledging the priority of the state, as Rome later insisted. The faithful of all ages reject such claims, proclaiming that “children are the heritage of the Lord” (Psalm 127:3), not wards of the state.