

# **A Transforming Vision**

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## **Introduction**

We continue in a millennia old tradition of the fathers of our faith when we choose to educate our children for God. From the ancient Hebrew people to the present Christian home school and day school movement, God's covenant people have obeyed His command to train up their children in the way that they should go and in doing so preserve faith and family and bring transformation to the broader culture. The modernist culture resists this traditionalist approach because it propagates the idea that only the new is good and that the old is outdated and useless. However we intend to continue this tradition and thereby transmit the Christian faith to the next generation and slowly reshape the world around us for the glory of God.

## **The Ancient Hebrews**

Two thousand years before Christ God initiated His purpose for a multigenerational continuity of the faith when He said to Abraham,

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.” (Genesis 17.7)

Again in the Shema, a verse of scripture that became the great confession of Israel's monotheistic faith, and the verses immediately following it the Lord said,

“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...” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-7)

Parents are to hear from God through His Word and then faithfully transmit the faith to their children. They are to do so across all of life as emphasized by the repetition when you sit, when you walk, when you lie down and when you rise up. In all of life for all of life, they learned to follow God's Word and His ways. Their practice of the ceremonies of worship, as well as law, commerce, economics, child rearing, war and agriculture were

prescribed by God to be followed in the Promised Land. They truly established a complete culture separate from and different than the surrounding pagan nations according to the Word of God. This was the transmission of a comprehensive biblical faith, a worldview to be practiced in all of life.

During the Hellenistic period as the Synagogal system was established throughout Palestine and the eastern Mediterranean, the Hebrew people began schools. These synagogue schools are clearly the precursor to the Christian schools of today.

### **The Early Christians**

The early Christians quickly understood from the Old Testament and the writings of Paul that they were to take responsibility for the education of their children. They developed simple creeds and later catechisms so that even young children could recite and understand the Faith. They could not expect the pagan public schools of the Romanized world to provide their children with teaching to transfer the Faith. Even Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Five Good Emperors and the epitome of Plato's concept of the Philosopher King, though a pagan himself, wrote in his diary,

“Thanks to my great-grandfather I didn't have to waste my time in the public schools but had good tutors at home instead and learned that one cannot spend too much money on such things.” (Marcus Aurelius).

The early Christians also established places where many a young convert could go to learn more fully his new found faith. With time and growing influence these early Christians came to develop a church and a practicing Christianity that reached to the borders of the Roman Empire. They birthed their own literature; developed fine art to support the spread of the Faith; through Ambrose successfully challenged the overreach of the Empress; wrote the first universal history, called *The City of God* by the incomparable Augustine; gained positions of military leadership; and, eventually filled the Emperor's seat itself. Their faith was comprehensive, and, with time, it made a difference in the broader culture because they taught their children from generation to generation.

### **Christians of the Middle Ages**

After Alfred the Great, the eighth century Saxon Christian King of England, saved Christianity for England by pushing the Vikings out of Wessex, after he developed a series of forts to defend the borders and a system of laws blending the Mosaic Law code and the traditions of ancient England, he established schools for the Christian education of the children. He and his people understood they could not expect to perpetuate or amplify Christian civilization unless they took responsibility to educate their own children for God. We enjoy the legacy of this work today in that our forbears brought

Christianity and the ancient legal tradition that formed the common law with them when they settled America centuries later.

In the fourteenth Century Gerard Groote was converted and gave up almost everything he owned as one of medievalism's elite and established the Brothers of the Common Life. The biggest impact of the brethren was in the area of education. They educated the children of common folk who could not afford the elite schools. They also produced a large number of famous pupils including Thomas a Kempis, author of *The Imitation of Christ*, and Erasmus, who became the greatest scholar of his age and an agent of reform. Likewise, such luminaries as Luther, Melancthon and Calvin were all educated in Brethren schools. Thus, Groote's efforts proved to be the seedbed for every significant reform that took place in Europe over the course of the next two centuries, earning him Luther's praise as the "Father of the Reformation." The ideas taught by the brethren had consequences as far reaching as the foundations of western religious, political and economic liberty. Their Christian schools transformed culture over the course of hundreds of years.

### **Early American Christian Education**

Shortly after the starving times the Pilgrim Separatists who clung to the coast of what is now Massachusetts started a Latin school for the education of their children. Of course there were no alternatives there in the early seventeenth century, but these literate Christians assured the intellectual development of their own children for God. The stories of the home-based beginning of the education of George Washington, Abigail Adams, Meriwether Lewis and others are treasured by those that are aware of them. The dozens of schools started by church planters in the south and the classical log colleges educated many of our founders.

Born in Scotland, educated at Edinburgh, and a leader among the Presbyterian Jacobites during the great Rising of 1745, John Witherspoon came to America in 1768 to be president of Princeton College. He has been called the most influential professor in American history, not only because of his powerful writing and speaking style but because of the vast number of leaders he trained and sent forth. Nine of the fifty-five participants in the Federal Convention in 1787 were his students – including James Madison. Moreover, his pupils included a president and a vice president, twenty-one senators, twenty-nine representatives, fifty-six state legislators, and thirty-three judges, three of whom were appointed to the Supreme Court. The Christian education of these men resulted in the formation of a government based on the principles of liberty found in the scriptures. They received an education with transforming power.

### **Our Legacy**

It was R. L. Dabney, the great Southern Presbyterian minister and chaplain under Stonewall Jackson that said,

“The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. It is the one business for which the earth exists. To it all politics, all war, all literature, all money-making, ought to be subordinated; and every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that next to making his own calling and election sure, this is the end for which he is kept alive by God – this is his task on earth.”

So here we are as mothers and fathers sharing a tradition as old as the Faith itself, strengthened by the knowledge that our forebears took responsibility for the education of their children for God in much the same we do. We will not be intimidated or tempted by the state to deliver our children up to be educated any way other than clearly and distinctively for God. We will not tire in our duty or lose heart when it seems difficult; rather, we will train up our children to love the Lord their God and to think His thoughts after Him regarding all of life. In doing so we will leave a legacy to our children’s children, and we will leaven the broader culture until it rises again for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian religion. For these children will become the mothers and fathers, the pastors, educators, philosophers, statesmen, doctors, scientists, inventors, tradesmen, artists and architects of the future. Although we may not live to see with our own eyes a culture more pleasing to God, now we know why we are kept alive by God – we know our task on earth. We will prepare our children. We pray our children and our children’s children will continue this tradition, that their words, their works, their lives will give glory to God and transform their culture for Christ.

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