

# The Blumenfeld Education Letter



"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.

"Without vision, the people perish."

## The Purpose of Education, A Manifesto for the Nineties

At the foundation of every school is a philosophy of education. You cannot have a school without one, whether it is articulated or not, for in operating a school many decisions have to be made: what to teach, how to teach it, what books to use, how should children be dressed, what form of discipline to apply, etc.

The philosophy that presently governs American public education is the "progressive" one formulated early in this century by John Dewey and his colleagues. They viewed education primarily as a socialization process, an instrument for social change, a means of changing America from a capitalist, individualistic, believing society into a socialist, collectivist, humanist or atheist society. This process entailed destroying the old order so that a new one could rise in its place.

### Radical Transformation

During the first four decades of this century all of public education was transformed to permit the schools to carry out the mandates of the progressive philosophy. The curriculum was

radically changed and teaching methods were altered. Intensive phonics was replaced by look-say, cursive was replaced by print script, arithmetic disappeared into mathematics, and geography and history were ground up into something called social studies. Even classroom furniture and decoration were changed. Immoveable desks gave way to moveable desks, chairs, tables, floor mats and bean bags, and pictures of George Washington were replaced by pictures of animals, Mickey Mouse, and other cartoon characters. As socialization was encouraged, classroom discipline went out the window. What was once called cheating was now known as "cooperative learning." And, of course, dress codes were abandoned.

Thus, what we have today in our public schools is the result of numerous decisions made in conformity with a well-articulated, painstakingly conceived, and deliberately implemented philosophy of education.

### The Tenets of Humanism

At the foundation of this philosophy are several important doctrines:

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(1) There is no God, no supernatural power that created the universe, therefore there is no sin. (2) Man is a product of evolution, an animal, descendant from other animals. (3) The purpose of life is self-fulfillment or self-actualization. (4) There are no absolutes in morality; ethics are situational. (5) Evil is caused by poverty, ignorance and social injustice; thus if you want to get rid of evil you must get rid of its societal causes. (6) Man is not innately depraved or sinful; his moral behavior is the result of environmental influences and education.

Probably the best summaries of the philosophy that undergirds American education today can be found in John Dewey's "My Pedagogic Creed" and in the two Humanist Manifestos. They spell out what has become the entire program of public education, and virtually everything that goes on in a public school today is derived from these doctrines and tenets.

## The Altar of Socialization

The reason why public education cannot be truly reformed is because no one in the education establishment, the federal or state governments, or the business community is willing to admit that such a philosophy exists and is the chief reason why excellence is unattainable. And so, as long as the progressives and humanists control what is taught in American schools, there will be no real academic improvement, and excellence will continue to be sacrificed on the altar of socialization.

But need it continue to be that way? Is there any reason why the progressives and humanists should have an exclusive monopoly on curriculum development in America? Who gave them that privileged position? Who gave them the power to dictate what is taught in every public school? Who gave them the mandate to destroy reading instruction, arithmetic, history, traditional values

and morality? Who gave them the right to do it?

## Our Abdication

We did. How? By default. By abandoning the field, giving them our children, acquiescing to "progress." Yes, there were voices in the wind warning of calamity and tragedy to come. But the progressives and humanists were clever enough to take full control of the institutions of power, and that permitted them to carry out their plans and finance them abundantly with the taxpayers' money.

True, their experiments began in private institutions financed by private foundations. But once they gained control of the public financing mechanism, they were assured of ultimate success. The result has been the totalitarianization of public education. Indeed, attempts by conservatives to introduce intensive phonics, arithmetic drill, or books that promote traditional morality have been met with hostility and ridicule. Such attempts are dubbed the work of reactionaries, right-wing extremists, censors, book burners, John Birchers, religious fanatics, etc.

## Can It Be Changed?

But need it continue that way? Need the vast majority of parents and taxpayers accept for eternity the intolerant dictates of a progressive elite, self-chosen, self-anointed, and self-elected to decide what all American children are to be taught?

Of course not. It is still within our power to change all of that. But to do so requires formulating a new philosophy of education on which to build a new American education system for the 21st century.

What kind of philosophy is needed to raise American education to the level of excellence most Americans

want? To find out, one must ask some very basic, simple questions: What is the purpose of education? What do parents want when they send their children to school?

## A New Philosophy

We believe that the purpose of education is to pass on to the younger generation the knowledge, wisdom and values of the older generation.

In other words, education is a function of child rearing and is conducted by parents and teachers to enable their children to become moral, productive, independent members of a free society able to pursue rewarding, satisfying careers and to raise families of their own.

True education creates a bridge between generations, not a chasm, not a gap. What better way is there to show love for one's children than by giving them a heritage of knowledge, wisdom and values?

## The New Curriculum

So what do we teach? What is the new curriculum?

We begin with knowledge. The first step in the process of formal instruction is to provide the child with the tools of learning, the academic skills needed to pursue knowledge. We call these tools the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. For reading we teach intensive, systematic phonics so that the child will master the mechanics of alphabetic reading and become a fluent, proficient, phonetic reader. For writing we teach cursive in the first grade so that the child acquires a facile writing skill for lifetime use. For arithmetic we use all of the techniques that help children develop automatic counting skills, for arithmetic is a memory system dependent on rote memorization for optimum use and efficiency.

With the tools of learning honed and perfected, the child is ready to take on the subject matter deemed important by his parents and teachers: geography, history, the physical sciences, economics, government, mathematics, etc. And having learned the mechanics of reading, the child must now develop his use of language, for language is the tool of thought. He must expand his vocabulary and develop his writing skills so that he can express himself clearly. A sense of accuracy and precision must be inculcated. Also, a second language and Latin are important ingredients in the development of high literacy.

## Acquiring Wisdom

Wisdom. How do we impart it? Wisdom is acquired through knowledge, experience, understanding, and suffering. But we don't want our children to have to suffer to gain wisdom. History, biography and autobiography are probably the best sources of wisdom for any purpose. We can learn from the sufferings of others. But suffering alone does not produce wisdom. Wisdom is the power to use good judgment, to choose the soundest course of action based on knowledge and understanding.

## Book Selection

And wisdom must guide parents and teachers in deciding what books are to be read by the students during their formal education. Book selection is more than a matter of taste. It's a matter of values. What do you want your children to get out of the books you require them to read? On their own, they will be able to read anything they wish. But, under your tutelage, would you prefer that they read a novel about middle-class neurotics, or one about a feeble-minded murderer, or the inspiring autobiography of a young Christian who spent twenty years in Castro's prisons and survived by dint of his spiritual strength? The humanists know which books to choose:

books by neurotics, degenerates, and perverts. Conservatives should choose books that reflect the moral, the heroic, the productive, the courageous in man's life.

The most important task in developing the new curriculum will be selecting the books the children will be required to read.

## Imparting Values

Values, of course, are inseparable from wisdom. Can one have wisdom without values? The values we must impart in our new curriculum are derived from our Judeo-Christian heritage, the Bible. If values are inseparable from wisdom, they are also inseparable from morality. By teaching the Bible we teach Judeo-Christian values and morality. The Bible, therefore, should be a central text of instruction in our new curriculum. It should be read for what it teaches us about God, man, the covenant between them, the purpose of life, the destiny of mankind.

The Bible is also a perfect introduction to history. R.J. Rushdoony has written:

"When we study history, we must recognize that the Bible is the only infallible history book: it is the word of God. All other history books are fallible, often in error, and subject to continual revision or replacement in terms of further study and research. The Bible thus is our key textbook to an understanding of history."

It is also our key source of moral wisdom.

## The Bible and History

Dr. Rushdoony writes: [T]he Bible gives us the history of man since creation, his revolt against God and God's redemptive activity to reestablish man in the covenant. . . .

"[H]istory is thus not only the story of the rise and fall of man and

of his civilizations in terms of this continual testing, but it is the struggle of two powerful forces to dominate history . . . the Kingdom of God versus the Kingdom of Satan." (World History Notes)

Thus, history is not merely a chronology of past events. It is a powerful spiritual value that conveys meaning to life, illuminates man's struggle against the forces of darkness within and outside himself, and reveals human experience in its full range of circumstances.

## Foundational Tenets

If we decide that the true purpose of education is to pass on to the next generation the knowledge, wisdom and values of the previous generation, then it becomes implicit that undergirding our philosophy of education are these important tenets: (1) God created the universe and created man in his image. (2) Man disobeyed God, choosing to determine what is good or evil for himself, thus taking on the burden of sin. As the old New England Primer states: "In Adam's fall we sinned all." (3) Man's sinful nature requires that he know God's law, as imparted in the Bible, if he is to lead a happy, productive and long life.

Once we accept our new philosophy of education, it becomes fairly easy to make the many decisions that must be made in devising a curriculum, selecting books, and running a school.

Can this philosophy of education be accepted by most Americans? We believe it can, for most Americans believe in God and adhere to our Judeo-Christian traditions and values. What's more, it will give us what we supposedly want: a moral, literate, competent, productive, freedom-loving younger generation.

## The End of a Monopoly

But just as humanists first implemented their philosophy of education in private institutions, so will we have

to do likewise. A philosophy of education which uses the Bible as its foundation will be seen as an establishment of religion if adopted by a public school. Never mind that humanism is a religion and is openly promulgated in the public schools. Never mind that humanism is the philosophical foundation of the public school curriculum, thus making the public schools an illegal establishment of religion. The vehement opposition of the liberals, progressives and humanists to this threat to their monopoly will make it unlikely that our new philosophy of education will be accepted.

But there is no reason why the humanists should have a permanent monopoly on curriculum development in America.

The time has come for a new American curriculum based on a new Biblically inspired philosophy of education.

And we pose this question to our readers: What books would you choose for children to read in the new curriculum? Let us hear from you.

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## **Prof. Debunks New Trends in Math, Advocates More Rote Learning**

The following letter, written by Edward G. Effros, professor of mathematics at the University of California, appeared in the New York Times on Feb. 14, 1989. It is worth reprinting in full:

"The way mathematics is taught and perceived in the United States needs a major overhaul because most students leave school without enough skills to meet job demands or to continue their education effectively, prominent mathematicians, scientists and educators said in a report today" (news story, Jan. 27).

The authors of the report, called "Everybody Counts" and issued by the

National Research Council, have concluded that educators should deemphasize rote learning, that current teaching practices should be replaced by systems in which students are encouraged "to work together to find solutions," and that there should be more extensive use of calculators and computers in mathematical education. They purportedly went on to state that the necessary changes would not require large amounts of additional spending.

## **Disaster for Mathematicians**

Some of the remedies suggested have been tried for the last 20 years and have constituted a disaster for mathematicians in this country. Where have the members of this committee been? As any accountant would have informed the participants, the reason adults can no longer successfully apply basic mathematical skills is precisely that they no longer have those skills to begin with.

One cannot master the applications of mathematics unless one can handle addition, multiplication and fractions completely automatically and by hand. The only way to get a sense of mathematical objectives, whether they be numbers, derivatives or tensors, is to handle them without the aid of calculators.

Every day we all run into clerks who haven't the slightest idea of what the numbers are that they are putting into their calculators. Anyone who has taught calculus knows how to recognize those who are failing an exam: simply look for the students who are pressing the buttons on their calculators. Calculators should be used only after one has an intimate and instinctive knowledge of numbers, which must, lamentably, be learned by rote.

## **The Aversion to Rote**

The aversion expressed by educational theoreticians to learning by rote and calculating has long puzzled

me. I fondly remember arithmetical calculations and contests from elementary school, and I have found that this is the case with many of my colleagues. Many past mathematicians have displayed a similar inclination: Karl P. Gauss reportedly memorized the table of logarithms to facilitate his computations. I have often wondered whether those who advocate avoiding computations have a distaste for mathematics itself.

The previous dodge for getting around rote learning, namely, the set theory that was so fashionable in the "New Mathematics," also served little purpose. The misguided authors of that fad introduced sophisticated methods to prove utterly boring and irrelevant facts (like "commutativity" and "associativity"). What was ironic is that the same individuals managed to gut plane geometry, the one topic in which students formerly proved beautiful results with simple logical ideas. Somehow the innovators trivialized that elegant subject with endless nonsense, such as worrying about when one point lies between two other points on a line.

### Collective Learning

The suggestion that mathematics should be learned collectively is also wrongheaded. It is the very essence of mathematical learning that to master a new mathematical technique, one must discover it for oneself, without the aid of tutors or other students. Working with others only intensifies lack of self-confidence in weaker students.

The stress on computers for teaching mathematics is yet another weakness of the report. Computer teaching methods simply constitute a procedure for predigesting the material for students. One hopes it will meet the same fate as the audio-visual techniques of the 1950's, and the teaching machines of the 60's. Of course, computers will be increasingly important, and students should be

exposed to them at an early age. But more often than not, they deflect mathematics students (and research mathematicians as well) from vital concepts into worrying about clerical trivia. At best, they transform the student into a spectator, rather than a creator.

### No Simple Fix

Perhaps this disastrous report was not completely the fault of the committee. From the information the Times provides, it would appear that the members were given a vague charge: to find a solution for the crisis in mathematics in this country. There isn't just one problem -- there are many, and they must be kept distinct. Solving the problem of mathematical illiteracy will require very different methods from trying to single out and encourage future mathematicians. Contrary to what the committee apparently concluded, there will be no simple and cheap fix for our problems.

### Peer Counseling Trains Kids To Become Psychologists' Helpers

Medfield High School in Medfield, Mass., has a Peer Counseling Program. The theory behind peer counseling is that troubled teenagers, who are alienated from or in rebellion against their parents and the adult world in general, will open up to their peers because peers are their friends and know their problems.

"We don't want students to be little psychologists or counselors," says Robert Myrick, an education professor at the University of Florida. "The idea now is to talk about feelings, explore attitudes and make referrals."

Peer counseling requires training. The following letter to Juniors, Sophomores and Freshmen at Medfield High describes the program:

"If you would like to apply to become a Peer Counselor; a person willing to be trained to listen, be of support to peers, as well as younger students; please complete the form below . . . .

"There will be credit given for successful completion of the program. That means attending fifteen training sessions as well as the follow up bimonthly meetings once the counselors are established and working for a one year period.

"Training areas will include: verbal and non verbal communication, listening skills, values clarification, decision making, community resources and problem solving. Specific topic areas will include alcohol and drugs, issues of sexuality, depression and suicide.

"The training will be group oriented but different approaches will be used to give the Peer Counselors the best preparation possible."

Comment: The blind leading the blind!

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## Signs of the Times

Barrow, AK: North Slope Borough voters OK'd a \$60 million school bond issue to replace the 25-year-old Ipalook Elementary school, damaged by '88 fire. (USA Today, 6/15/89) Comment: We know that the cost of living in Alaska is high, but that high?!

Christiana, DE: 60% of students at Christiana High drink alcohol, 57% are sexually active, almost 40% have thought of suicide, study found. Christiana School District will open a "Wellness Center" at school in the fall run by the Visiting Nurse Association. (USA Today 6/15/89) Comment: Another humanist solution to the students' spiritual and moral problems.

Seattle, WA: State officials say they'll review the sex education program at the Stanwood School District for possible violation of state laws.

Cited violation: program has a one-dimensional conservative tone. (USA Today, 12/19/88)

Flagstaff, AZ: Some Northern Arizona University students want to eliminate algebra from the required curriculum. Students say algebra isn't relevant. A school panel will discuss the issue in the spring. (USA Today, 1/3/90)

Little Rock, AR: Police are seeking youth who stabbed Central High assistant principal Ellen Linton in her office on the first day back after Christmas break. Last fall one student was injured and others were disciplined after a riot during a homecoming rally. (USA Today, 1/3/90)

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## Vital Reading

A World Without Heroes by George Roche, Hillsdale College Press, Hillsdale, Michigan 49242, 1987, 369 pages, \$12.95.

George Roche is president of Hillsdale College in southern Michigan, a unique institution that has managed to maintain its independence from government by not accepting any government funds. That has made George Roche a maverick among college presidents. He is not only a staunch believer in an economic free market, but also in the free market of ideas. And thus he writes about ideas with considerable passion.

In this fascinating book, Roche analyzes the ideas that have led to the decline of traditional values and the rise of secular humanism as the now prevalent faith in America. For Roche, the change in faith is exemplified by our culture's present disdain and contempt for the hero and the heroic action. As products of evolution, only interested in survival, humans are not supposed to be the stuff that heroes are made of, for heroes sacrifice their own lives for the sake of others.

That is why the liberals spat on our soldiers returning from Vietnam. There were many genuine heroes among those who served, men who died for their country, men who died to save other men, men who performed heroic acts and came back alive, men who fought to save the poor Vietnamese from the wretched fate that has befallen them. Can you name a single one of these heroes? (Have you heard Jane Fonda express sympathy for the boat people?)

The wall of sorrow in Washington, D.C., is not a monument to heroes, not an appreciation of their sacrifices, but a memorial to a bad time, bad leadership, uncertain convictions, and confused spirits. It's the kind of time liberals love America to be in so that they can rejoice in our failures.

As David Horowitz, a former '60s leftist, recently wrote: "The radical 'anti-war' movement did not want peace; we wanted victory for the other side."

How did America get to this? "These anti-heroic philosophies," writes Roche, "have been woven of scientific errors and prideful cravings, in rebellion against God. In sum, they constitute a sweeping denial of value and purpose to human life, setting us adrift in an existence without meaning or hope."

For Roche, the hero is not necessarily larger than life. He is a man or woman who "overcomes the ordinary and attains greatness, by serving some great good. His example tells us that we fail, not by aiming too high in life, but by aiming far too low. . . . The hero seeks not happiness but goodness, and his fulfillment lies in achieving it."

When one thinks of modern heroes, several come to mind: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Natan Sharansky, Armando Valladares, Mother Theresa, Oliver North. The only one the liberals dote over is Mother Theresa because she is old, quaint, and harmless. The Soviet

state tried to destroy Solzhenitsyn and Sharansky, Castro tried to destroy Valladares, and the Congress of the United States with the help of the liberal media tried to destroy Oliver North. You can judge the moral character of a society by how it treats its heroes.

Also, all five heroes are deeply committed to their religious faith, which should tell us something about the spiritual emptiness of a culture that is so anti-hero.

But Roche does much more in this book than merely decry the loss of faith and the loss of courage. He gives us a guided tour through the centuries, showing how this rebellion against God has manifested itself in the philosophies, sciences, and politics that have led mankind to this unhappy age.

His chapters on Darwinism provide a mind-boggling compilation of solid fact that argue relentlessly against the theory of evolution. In other chapters he deals with the corruption of language, the idea of egalitarianism, our education system, and the perversion of modern science. But the world is changing, the utopian philosophies have failed, and there is reason to be hopeful.

"As a historian," writes Roche, "I am convinced that there are times of historic change or crisis where everything we think or do takes on the utmost importance. These crossroads come but rarely, but there is every reason to believe we are in one now."

Who can doubt this? The events of 1989 prove once more that ideas have consequences and that the human spirit will not be denied. There were heroes among the students who were crushed by tanks in Beijing. There were heroes who rose up against the Romanian dictator and faced death. There are people willing to die for freedom. There are people who would rather be dead than red.