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National Home School Convention Casts Vision



HSLDA President J. Michael Smith, Doug and Jubilee Phillips, HSLDA board member, Dick Honnaker

The 2004 Home School Legal Defense Association national conference in Spokane, Washington was a *tour de force* of renewed vision for the home school movement in America. Four themes stood out:

First, the home school movement will remain blessed only as long as she remains distinctively and comprehensively Christian.

Because of their principled commitment to opening “the lost book of the law,” home educators have both been blessed and have been God’s vehicle for blessing the Church.

The Blessing on the Church: For nearly two decades, a quiet revival of family renewal has taken place in the American Church. Fathers have turned their hearts to their children. The biblical doctrine of honoring fathers and mothers, and the corollary principle of patriarchy and generational faithfulness, have been revived. Most recently, the efforts to unite the local church and family have resulted

in a helpful reformation of body life. While all of these great works of reformation are still in progress, great strides have been made. The Lord has used and blessed the home school movement as the vehicle for this great work of God.

The Blessing on Home Educators: The dramatic increase in the number of home educators over the last decade (Dr. Brian Ray indicates that as many as one million individual *families* home school multiple children) does not appear to be abating. The growth of the home education movement is in the hands of the Lord, but reasonable projections based on available data indicate that the home education movement has at least another ten years of rapid growth as more and more parents not only seek to avoid the spiritual, moral, and practical evils of government school education, but desire a better path than that found in the age-segregated, peer-driven education models which often define private school education of every stripe.

In addition, the disproportionately high fertility rate of home educators, coupled with a philosophical and spiritual commitment of many to pass on the principles of multi-generational living to the their children, means that home educators are on the verge of an explosion of socio-political influence. Bottom line: We are out-populating our cultural opponents.

Let the critics complain about children as a curse. Let them extol the blessings of full bank accounts and empty wombs. As for the home school movement, we will trust God, have lots of babies, adopt lots of children, and build armies for Christ.

A New Wave of Home Educators: On the other hand, the tremendous popularity and growth of home education also means a huge influx of new home educators, not all of whom share the core values that birthed the movement. Not only is secular home education on the rise, but there are increasing numbers of Christians joining the home school movement who see home schooling as little more than a choice of curriculum for a mother to implement in her home. They lack the vision, often because it has never been shared with them. They lack an appreciation for the value of their home school freedoms, usually because they were not called upon to sacrifice greatly during the early years of the modern home school movement. And no one has taken the time to teach them how God, in His providence, blessed and preserved home education. It's time for the movement to step up to the plate and win the hearts of these new families.

Jesus First: All of this to say — home education must be about Jesus. It must be about a biblical vision. It must be about Christ. If not, it is worthless. Home school leaders, now more than ever, must cast vision, present the big picture, and prevent their conferences from devolving into mere curriculum fairs.

Second, liberty must be pursued at all costs. This means that the break with government schools must be comprehensive. Vouchers and charter schools are anathema to freedom-loving families, not

only because they further the unbiblical, unconstitutional, and extra-jurisdictional intrusion of the state into the sphere of education, but because they open the family to regulation and state control. The trend (often promoted by conservatives and Christians who have bought into the fallacious “faith-based initiatives model” of the current President) for states to gain access to home school families by extending benefits to them, could be the undoing of the entire movement. This has already happened in states like Alaska where a large percentage of home educators are on the the state dole. But the temptation for home educators to accept government money or benefits must be resisted. Esau was wrong to exchange his birthright for a mess of pottage, and home educators are foolish to exchange theirs for a laptop computer.

Third, home educators must not be content to accept the peaceful status quo: Our mission must be total victory. We must not be content to live with benevolent slavery of statism (i.e., “reasonable” regulations). We must vigorously pursue total freedom. The state has no biblical or constitutional interest in the education of children. All laws regulating home education must be abandoned. In my view, even compulsory school attendance laws must be scrapped and education must be returned to the private sector where it belongs. (From a biblical perspective, it is jurisdictionally impermissible for either the state or the local church to run schools for children.) What a delight to talk to national home school leaders who not only believe this, but are actively (and with success) working within their respective states for total victory. Total victory also means that Christians must oppose President Bush’s intrusive, unbiblical, and unconstitutional “No Child Left Behind” policies, as well as all federal laws that promote the Big Mother and the nanny state.

Home educators must resist the unbiblical practice of infiltration and assimilation with pagan institutions, whether those institutions be the government schools or the Hollywood establishment. Not suprisingly, the philosophy of infiltrating systems which are root and branch corrupted by paganism is quite popular with those who earn their living off these systems. But you can test this theory by throwing a clean pig into a pool of mud. Does the mud get clean or the pig get dirty?

The implications of this principle include the fact that home educators should not be using government school athletic programs to meet their needs. We must build godly institutions God’s way. Over and over again home educators have proven they can do just this.

Fourth, we must not be afraid to break the unspoken truce over educational methodology. Our reasons for home educating are not preferential, but principled, being derived from God’s Word. Wrong educational methodology can lead a child to Hell (which is precisely what is happening as millions of students sit for 24,000 hours of their childhood in classrooms which were self-consciously built around the coed, age-segregated, peer-focused model of nineteenth century God-hating evolutionists, and drinking in the intellectual and spiritual

idolatry foisted on them by the high priests of America's only taxpayer-subsidized establishments of religion — the government schools).

This principle was masterfully articulated by Gregg Harris, a man whose influence on the home school movement has been extensive. During his memorable speech, Gregg argued that we must charitably and sincerely, but soundly, make the case for the superiority of distinctively biblical Christian home education. Failure to do so means that home educators will someday be picking up the broken pieces of a generation of children whose parents simply delegated away the duty to be the primary individuals to walk beside, disciple, and teach them the Law Word of God.

I believe that Gregg is spot on. And don't kid yourself: Both government and Christian school advocates vigorously make the case for the superiority of their own systems and methods. They actively attempt to evangelize Christians into sending children to their institutions. And let them do so. Bring on the debate. It's healthy. Methods are not neutral. Education is religion externalized. May God prosper all those who seek to make the Word of God the exclusive sourcebook both for the content and methodology for the training of their children.

Three Messages to Remember

In my view, the three most significant messages of the conference were delivered by Gregg Harris, Chris Klicka, and Mike Smith, each a giant of the modern home school movement.

Chris Klicka — whose courageous battle against multiple sclerosis has not slowed him down from preaching the Gospel, encouraging families, and standing for truth in states across the nation — provided a sobering but encouraging overview of home school freedoms in more than two dozen nations worldwide. It was thrilling to see that home schooling is now a global movement that is on the verge of exploding to new levels. Later, Chris and I reminisced about the old days when I was an attorney at HSLDA. I was able to share with him my observation that, through his dedication, commitment, and perseverance, the Lord has elevated Chris to the status of one of the most beloved and prayed-over men in the home school movement around the world.

In one of the finest messages to home educators I have heard in several years, Gregg Harris exhorted home school leaders to (1) avoid unholy alliances (with government schools); (2) avoid conflicts of interest which would cast doubts on our integrity or diminish our focus being on the purity of the Gospel message behind home education; and (3) break the unspoken truce over educational methodology (as discussed above).

Finally, HSLDA president J. Michael Smith delivered what I can only describe as a truly executive and inspirational closing message during which he urged state leaders across America to return to their

roots as a movement by living, breathing, and rejoicing in the principles of liberty. It was a thrilling message delivered with power and humility. In my view, it was Mike Smith (an extremely capable communicator) at his very best.

Other Highlights



Jubilee and I enjoyed visiting with our many friends including the McDonald family of *Home Schooling Today*, whose new book, *Raising Maidens of Virtue* (as featured in the upcoming 2005 Vision Forum catalog) is sure to be a best-seller. Family patriarch James McDonald has just led the clan in publishing a beautiful and much needed magazine called *Family Reformation* which I recommend to all of my readers.



During some spare moments, Jubilee and I took about a half-dozen rides around the Spokane carousel.





The Vision Forum team (myself, Jubilee, Tim Horn, and Wesley Strackbein) enjoyed happy conversations with Kevin Swansen of CHEA; David and Valerie Monk of AFHE; Dr. Brian and Betsy Ray of NHERI; Douglas and Nada Rothgaber of CHAP; Alan Sears of the

ADF; Dick and Dorothy Karmen of OCEAN; Gary and Denise Kanter of Consider Home Education; Daniel and June Mather of CHOH; Jeff and Anne Miller of HEAV; Joe and Sandra Adams of CHEK; Roy, Debra, and Angela Hanson of Family Protection Ministries; Susan Beatty of CHEA; Gregg and Sono Harris from Oregon; Hal and Melanie Young of NCHE; Philip and Evella Trout of CHEA; Eric Wallace of IUCH; Claiborne and Lana Thornton of THEA; Jim Werner of CCS; Ken and Mary Jo Patterson of GHEA; Hiro Inaba of CHEA of Japan; Jeff, Anne, and Ruth Miller of HEAV; Zan Tyler of SCAIHS; Kevin Lundberg of CHEC; Sandra Lovelace of Lifework Forum; Gavino and Ruth Perez of FEAST; Randy and Lorrie Flem of WATCH; Joyce Burgess of NBHERA; John and Wendy Tuma of MACHE; Pam Stauter of LEAH; Richard Guenther from SCHUZH of Germany; Rick Boyer of HEAV; Hal and Melanie Young of NCHE; Stephen and Cindy Byrkett from Indiana; and many other dear friends in state leadership across the nation. It was a special blessing to visit with old friends Chuck Hurst, Chris Klicka, Michael Smith, Dee Black, Suzanne Stephens, and Richard Honaker, all of HSLDA.

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