

**Education for the Kingdom of God**  
**“An Enterprise-Based Educational Method”**  
**For the *Chalcedon Report*, March 2003**

Ronald Kirk  
Created January 15, 2003  
Modified March 1, 2012

Educational methods properly grow from an educational philosophy with its particular goals. A Biblical educational philosophy, in turn, properly stems from a Biblical understanding of life. What does God intend to accomplish with human life in this world? How does He intend to do it? In order to design sound educational methods, Christians must understand God’s ways for us. Through faithful Biblical scholarship, we strive to know God’s purposes, true human nature, and how we must obey Him. God’s providential economy reflects His general gospel purpose. In turn, the gospel life depends on a faith- and character-based educational method to prepare for it.

### ***A Gospel Economy***

Salvation is the mere beginning of Christian life. The cardinal dominion mandate of Genesis reflects and supports the requirements of mankind’s redemption. God thus created a general economy in the earth to support His evangelical purpose. A life of faithful Christian adventure and enterprise builds faith and a character to support it, raises resources for the gospel, and creates opportunities for Christian influence to prepare neighbors’ hearts for Christ. Economic demands under the curse of the Fall, discipline men toward the requirements of Scripture. Since the Fall, enterprise has faced difficulty to a high degree. This difficulty reduces man’s leisure for sinful indulgence, and it offers an incentive for men to turn to Christ for help. Enterprise in a climate of economic severity produces, among other godly objectives, a spirit and character able to accept the hazard and pains of investment. Enterprise thus prompts faith. Its necessity spawns creativity and industry. Its prosperity inspires generous philanthropy. Economic competition and the need to create goodwill among customers provoke men to serve one another with goods and services. The hazards of enterprise encourage a system of civil justice and liberty to protect property and life. When Christians cooperate in the adventure — learning courage, toughness of mind, faithfulness of heart and absolute trust in God — the character for Christian leadership in these things grows! All these things discipline and quicken men toward dependence on Christ and good will toward men. But they discourage *slavish* dependence. Enterprise and a character of faith reinforce each other. Incidentally, socialism negates the evangelical benefits of enterprise.

### ***A Biblical Classroom Method***

If faithful enterprise should be a Christian way of life, then Christian education must inculcate a spirit of adventure — the hazard of comfort and ease — for the sake of exciting accomplishment. Education should build the firm foundations for a life of faith and Christian enterprise. We must build, through the educational process, a toughness of mind and an overcoming faith. These things are needed, because all accomplishment ultimately is a providential gift of God. Christians must learn to depend upon Him. The very methods we use to teach the child in the home and school should serve to prepare the foundations for a faithful walk with Christ.

Having established the basics of God’s economic system to accomplish His evangelical purposes, the identification of a Biblical method of education is almost embarrassingly simple: We attempt hard things by faith, with confidence in Christ. The teacher provides a task of carefully measured difficulty, which the student attempts. He perseveres. He trusts the Lord to bring the increase in due season. Success begets success, always building greater faith and character foundations for new endeavors. If God’s adventure of life and its various enterprises require a character of faith and courage to overcome difficulties, then we must train our children in these capacities.

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A word regarding the evolutionary view of development is appropriate here. In opposition to the Biblical one, the modern educational view routinely assumes in practice that nerve pathways develop naturally over time.<sup>i</sup> In this view, asking a child to attempt a task, before neural pathways have developed to support it, is cruel, because the task is impossible for him. We grant that certain foundational accomplishment must first be established to support a new skill. Yet we insist upon a Biblical view of development that the nerve pathways, scrambled because of original sin,<sup>ii</sup> form through persistent effort, over time. “Train up a child in the way he should go.” How old must one be before his nerve pathways naturally, sufficiently develop to enable playing the violin like Itzhak Perlman? It does not happen. Long periods of trial with eventual success are the pattern of God’s way for men. In my experience, the historic faith view of development typically yields the results all educators seek. If socialism undermines the benefits of enterprise, socialistic educational methods undermine its foundations.

If attempting difficult enterprise produces character and accomplishment, then we possess our basic educational method. Capability and skill result from effective practice by faith. We must not assume that because any particular thing is now difficult for the student, he is not capable. We must resist the pernicious view of atheistic psychology that environmental, in this case genetic, determinism rules.<sup>iii</sup> While rarely explicitly spoken, the idea that if a thing is not easily learned the student is not capable at all permeates all of modern education. But if he now has no capacity, how can we expect the child’s accomplishment? The answer lies in Christ. He gave our potential. He is the power of our success. Faith corresponds to God’s willingness to help in all things. We must believe this truth for ourselves and on behalf of our children. Quitting is faithlessness. For naturally disadvantaged learners or those who suffer from the results of poor methods, for such learners of all ages, this is a most particularly important principle.

***Corollaries to the Faith Approach***

Without assistance, the principle of overcoming difficulty by faith may appear as no more than Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” Biblical Christians must not adopt a sink or swim view of education. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, the *Parakletos* — the One called alongside to help. The comforter does not merely offer sympathy as we often think with the English word. Rather, to comfort is to strengthen, as with the related word *fortify*. In the same way, Christian teachers come alongside to help the needy. When we ask a child to do anything toward the accomplishment of his education, we must assume he has no present capacity whatsoever to do the thing we ask. Because the child may not now be able, we must provide the forms, like the forms that build concrete structures, to ensure the child’s success.

Teachers typically introduce a learning task, explain it, give some examples, and then tell the child to go work it out. We expect a child to stretch. Such is the essence of faith. For a well-prepared child, that next step is ordinarily not difficult. However, for a child without the necessary foundational abilities, the task may seem, and for now be, impossible. In such cases, we use what we commonly refer to as *hand-over* help. In this, the teacher is the child’s safety net of success. If we ask the primary level child to write an alphabet letter on the first day of school, we will make guidelines on the chalkboard and take the child through all the little details to form that letter. Then the child tries it. “Oh, Lord, this is awful,” we might pray when we see his first attempt. The scribbling goes from one part of the paper to the other. Rather than bang one’s head on the chalkboard, we smile, take the child’s hand, and help him form a proper

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letter. “See you can do it! Trust Jesus. Keep trying and in a little while you will do it for yourself.” The child tries once more. He needs help again. He tries again. The key to success is not mere practice, but corrected and directed practice toward a more and more excellent expression. The hand-over principle applies to every subject and every level of accomplishment, whenever a student becomes stuck. Moreover, the teacher must have compassion and patience during the time of groping and thrashing common to all great learning experiences. Impatience can torpedo a child’s delicate faith.

In addition to helping the student, we carefully organize the subject according to the most basic wholes—the rudiments—building upon them little by little. Repeatedly overwhelming the weak student encourages him to form a habit of short-circuiting and giving up. If a task does overwhelm the student, the teacher backs up and reduces the task to something more accessible. The teacher provides the structure of learning to ensure success.

For example, there are several important steps toward learning to read. First, a child must be capable of sitting still for some time and following simple directions. If he cannot do this, his parents should concentrate on teaching him the skills of attention and simple, obedient response. The child may assume certain simple responsibilities such as picking up his toys. Mom may read to him for longer and longer periods. Writing is a collateral skill to reading, so the child needs to know how to handle his pen. The teacher must instruct and guide its use. No playing is allowed. “The pen is a serious tool and you are ready to handle it for the Lord!” The teacher teaches the names, sounds, and characters of the letters. The student says them and writes them repeatedly until they recognize the phonograms by sight and sound, and are capable of forming them by voice and by hand. He begins phonetically to spell words of greater and greater difficulty. Governing rules provide the tools for assembling phonemes into words for writing, and decoding for reading. Practice with many particular words within the present vocabulary builds practical skill and confidence for reading new, unknown words. A sequence of techniques for decoding words and initial practice with limited vocabulary material quickly leads to early reading mastery.

Because learning is not linear (attempt it once and master it) the teacher must review constantly. While pressing ahead is important, patient and rigorous review and practice will produce mastery in due season. “Push ahead and fall back” marks not only George Washington’s military tactics, but sound educational method. It is all faith and courageous investment.

A child’s learning method preferences should not discourage the teacher from both feeding a student’s strengths, and disciplining him to overcome his weaknesses. The teacher must moreover guard against the student’s compensating and equivocating to avoid the learning process. Perfectionism, which insists on excellent appearances, is sin because it denies the element of faith, investment, and the day of small things.

The key to great Christian accomplishment is a tough, adventurous, enterprising mind, seasoned in facing difficulty by faith. Noah Webster, the Father of American Christian Education, said in the words of his son-in-law Chauncey Goodrich, “The great object of early trainings is to form the mind into a capacity of surmounting intellectual difficulties of any and every kind.”<sup>iv</sup> With this overcoming character and the skills of learning, nothing will discourage a child or adult from great accomplishment.

A faith- and character-based life depends on a faith- and character-based education. If we teachers will resist the temptation to conform to modern standards of psychology and learning theory, but rather

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diligently apply a Biblical framework to teaching method, we will see a revolution of learning that may match or even surpass the great accomplishments of our early American forefathers and mothers.

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<sup>i</sup> The psychological establishment has discarded the principle that a child’s development recreates the evolutionary process. Nonetheless, my assertions reflect over 20 years experience dealing with psychologically trained professionals, primarily in the medical and educational fields. Education professor Dr. Walter G. Lewke of Hillsdale College told me that while my assertions may be *widely* observed, the educational literature is essentially silent on the issue, and that internal dissent is systematically inhibited. I submit the reason for this silence is that the educational establishment religiously and monolithically *presupposes* a deterministic, evolutionary view of life.

<sup>ii</sup> Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), pp. 445-446.

<sup>iii</sup> While mainstream psychology may maintain a nice distinction between genetic and environmental causes, the evolutionary view requires that the environment determine both short term learning response and long term genetic development. Genetics result from adaptation to the environment over a long period of time. Both represent material and environmental determinism, and consequently reject the concept of the possibility of a fundamental change in character enable by a faithful response to God’s work in the individual.

<sup>iv</sup> Rosalie Slater, Ed., *Teaching and Learning America’s Christian History* (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1975), p. 294.