

What Education Ought to Be

by Ronald W. Kirk

For anyone who cares about the Gospel, true education is *critical*. Not a luxury. Not merely a nice blessing. Not merely a meal ticket. A comprehensive and Biblically faithful education is a necessity for the very life of Christianity.

Education and the Great Commission

Jesus Christ commands us in the Great Commission to make disciples. Disciples are *learners* and *practitioners*. They are not mere converts, not merely saved. Rather, born-again, Holy Spirit filled believers are ministers of reconciliation, kings and priests of God's kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:18; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). Truly Christian lives of godly fruit require knowledge, wisdom, and skill. How dare we presume upon God not to train superbly and with the utmost vision and purpose—as the best athletes or musicians, or any humanly accomplished person does—for the most holy life-mission required by the Gospel! Our lives should be extraordinary witnesses of the power of God to the world! Disciples make other disciples. We reproduce ourselves in the world—that is Christ in us—for His glory. How much more ought we to reproduce Christ in our children, our most holy trust! Such an extraordinary life requires extraordinary preparation. Again, how dare we neglect an extraordinary education in ourselves and in our children?

God promised His people Israel, if they would faithfully adhere to His ways, they would be the head and not the tail. Today, Christianity appears the opposite. Why would the unsaved world want to become like the contemporary church? We seem to be of little influence on our neighbors as we largely withdraw and live our faith as a counter-culture underclass. Abandoning our better roots about two hundred years ago, America experienced a growing movement toward mere personal holiness and spirituality—a primarily personal and metaphysical faith. We might even say a selfish faith. Insulated from the world to avoid its pollution, except for evangelism—itsself

now apparently in decline—the American church became inert. The Christian culture often is not much different from the world's culture. Such a view simply waits out this life until death or the Rapture. *Then* real life begins. As this Pietistic view mainstreamed, Christians became increasingly irrelevant.

The problem is that Christian influence is the means to prepare the *good soil* needed to receive the Good Seed of the Gospel (Matt. 13). Today, materialism and paganism have almost completely overrun America's Christian marriage, family, liberty, and justice. The salt has become *moraino moraino* (the Greek words translated *lost its savor or flavor*—Luke 14:34). *Moraine* is the word used for the rubble produced by glaciers. This seems an apt term for the general condition of the church. Perhaps we have had evangelical numbers, but what difference have we made in society? John the Baptist said the axe is already laid at the root of the tree that bears no fruit. No! The Christian life under King Jesus should rather exemplify an adventure of faith, pushing back personal, economic and societal frontiers in his name, by faith (Occupy—do business—until I come!—Luke 19:13). Could first century Christianity ever have grown as it did if it had produced the poor witness in the world the American church has now generally produced—lacking vision, commitment and engagement? The first century church thrived with grace, winning the world, even in persecution and martyrdom. In our relative ease, we have accomplished comparatively little.

In education, like the prodigal son, we Christians have settled. We have accepted the evolutionary determinism of today's behavioral-psychology-based, self-esteem oriented, and politically correct system. Once, Americans were at the top of every list in educational accomplishment. Today we are only average or worse.¹ Yes, a very few become competent. These are the elite whom the masses worship as experts. The masses often think of themselves as inferior junk, intimidated by the accomplished few, an excuse for laziness and victim-based entitlement. This is so because Christians do not teach them to trust God with an overcoming faith with signs following (Mark 15:17-18). Such weak, humanistic education does not generally produce great men and women of faith, but drones conditioned to serve a messianic, humanistic state. We do not speak only of state schools and statist

education, but Christian schools also! In over thirty years of searching, I have found only one or two college or university Christian education departments that did not primarily use evolutionary, behavioral psychology to ground its educational theories. The problem with this is that psychology walks by sight, not by faith. It views character and ability as predetermined over eons. Those who have it, have it. Those who do not are evolutionary throwbacks to be drugged or cast aside. Behavioral psychology is no prescription for the success of the Gospel! Again, no!

Throughout the Bible declares psychological truth (reality of the human soul). A Biblical psychology (science of the soul) says that God made men in His own image, receiving from Him an inherent worth, unalienable rights, and a gifted purpose. We need no longer accept the debased 20th century way. There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Behold! All things are new! Thus, we need only repentance and restoration. Now is the time to re-establish a vision for the fullness of the Gospel life, a life that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do all for the glory of God, by faith, with the expectation of fruit by the Holy Spirit. All we need do is reclaim our heritage and appropriate the Holy Spirit, ready to come alongside to help. This reclamation is eminently accessible if we will only sufficiently desire it and trust God for it.

A Renewed Educational Vision

Early in our history, Christian America deeply focused on education. As our forefathers lived on the frontier of a wild and savage country, they knew that reproducing their understanding of God, His ways, and the Biblically best of Christendom's civilization was essential to continuation of the Gospel. America's Pilgrim, Puritan and other Christians saw themselves as producing a new wineskin, a City set on a hill—the down payment of the work of Christ on earth toward eternity. Self-government with their representatives from among them, by covenant became the new civil paradigm (Deuteronomy 1:13; Jeremiah 30:21). They exalted a Biblical education as the foundation necessary to build and maintain a Christian culture—an expression of Christ's prayer, "*Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth.*" The Christian seminaries were to ensure a literate and capable pastorate. Pastors were

then the best educated among them, not limiting their studies to merely “spiritual” things, but to the sciences, literature and the arts as well. As the Bible itself teaches, every subject belongs to God and is worthy of study (e.g., Job 37:14; Psalm 85:11). *New England's First Fruits*, a circular to describe colonial progress among the Puritans, says of prospective Harvard College students, typically fifteen years of age:

When any Schollar is able to understand Tully, or such like classical Latine Author extempore, and make and speak true Latine in Verse and Prose...And decline perfectly the Paradigm's of Nounes and Verbes in the Greek tongue: Let him then and not before be capable of *admission* into the Colledge (emphasis added).

Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, *to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternall life*, Joh. 17.3. and therefore to lay *Christ* in the bottome, as the only foundation all sound knowledge and Learning.²

Imagine that kind of accomplishment! Once in the 1980s, I saw an advertisement for the Conservative Book Club. This ad, which included the original Christian edition of the McGuffey's Readers as a premium, asserted that when the average eighth grader had mastered the Fourth Reader, he had accomplished what is now a master's degree level of literacy. Have taught school using the McGuffey's Readers, I believe it! Mark Steyn, recently substituting for Rush Limbaugh on the radio, declared that an *eighth grade* education built America!

Daniel Webster, speaking of the Pilgrims, exhorted:

Finally, let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion.

They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence *through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary*. Let us cherish these sentiments, and extend this influence still more widely; in the full conviction, that that is the happiest society which partakes in the highest degree of the mild and peaceful spirit of Christianity (emphasis added).³

This is the vision American Christians held as they built their country. We must be ready again to share the hope of the better things that lie within us—for every area of life, here and to the world!

The Nature of Godly Education

True learning requires repentance—a complete change of mind, character and actions (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:8-9). Repentance must produce fruit. The Gospel means a completely new life with capabilities far beyond what pagan societies have produced. There has never been a generally blessed and happy society apart from the influence of God's people on their neighbors. Wherever paganism has dominated, ever has a tiny, elite minority lorded it over a poor and peasant, or completely enslaved underclass. Only where vibrant godliness has generally and truly exerted itself in the benign influence of God's love has a free, prosperous, content and just community emerged. Period! God expects fruit. Christians should make every effort to educate ourselves toward the character, wisdom, and skills of Kingdom living, including justice, liberty and successful economic investment—by faith.

Furthermore, the Gospel is all about influence. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is a power to exert influence on the world. He ministers His influence *through men*. The Good Seed of the Word must go into *good soil*. All good soil results from preparation. In human terms, this means the salt and light influence of real Christians' real lives,

products of Christ's grace and saved unto newness of life. Thus, our ordinary lives, lived extraordinarily are critical to the Gospel and Christ's kingdom.

Christians ought to be inventing a better mousetrap, and better fruit in every Christian endeavor. We should be producing brilliantly accomplished music, science, drama, farming, literature, and arts and inventions of every kind. We ought to be superb craftsman of industrial and consumer products. Everywhere we exercise ourselves unto excellence, by faith, becomes a sphere of influence to prepare the soil of future Christians' hearts. However, every accomplishment of excellence requires character, knowledge, wisdom and skill. To produce a more excellent influence for Christ in the world, Christian education should also (as it once did) blow the socks off the world's system with *its* accomplishment.

What content of education do we seek? If true accomplishment unto influence is our goal, true Christian education must produce character (Romans 5:1-4; *experience* or *character* here is *proven character*). It stands firm in any circumstance. It works hard and is generous. The solid foundation of character comes only through overcoming adversity, by loving faith. Godly child education introduces measured difficulty under careful guidance and under the self-conscious dependence on Christ for the increase.

Godly education must produce real ability through mastering a subject, including its requisite skills, and recognizing the nature of the subject God imposed on it. Such mastery can be the foundation for further contribution to any subject for the ones called to make it. Godly education must produce wisdom of the kind Proverbs teaches—a practical knowledge of God and His ways, so that we can be ready with an answer for the hope that lies within us. We must educate toward real economic productivity and participation in the civil sphere unto justice and liberty. Economic resources, personal liberty and justice are all three needed for the ability to exercise fully our callings in Christ. Again, producing the resources to support life,

institutional protection of life, liberty and property, and godly influence for the Great Commission are our goals.

Wisdom knows what God would have us do in various situations. Wisdom comes only from the experience of living. There is no checklist to gain godly wisdom. To give a head start on understanding wisdom, education must provide the best examples of wisdom in history. We must teach our providential, Christian history so that the educated person can discern where Christians were successful, and where we fell short. The wisdom of history viewed from a Biblical context guides the future.

The Future

Hopeful signs, of course, exist. Home schooling grows. Biblical worldview theology and active faith are making a comeback. My own educational work began in 1980 under the influence of such great educational leaders as R.J. Rushdoony, Chris Hoops, Martin Selbrede, Verna Hall, Rosalie Slater, Marshall Foster, James B. Rose, Mary Elaine Swanson and many others. If God's ways as revealed in Scriptures represent reality, there ought to be no gap between theory and practice for the Christian, save what faith requires. Psychology is no answer. Lazy spirituality is no answer. The Word of God is the answer! Craftsmanship by faith is the answer! Character and wisdom are the answer!

In the schools I founded, we practiced the Biblical notion that we make an effort in faith to learn and that God in due season brings the increase many fold. We thus experienced amazing educational success in the whole man after the fashion discussed here—in character, vision, hope, purpose, wisdom and skill—to live a productive life for Christ. We found success in wildly different social cultures, native gifting, and previous accomplishment or educational damage. We found that when we self-consciously seek God's revealed will in our educational efforts, not presuming upon Him that our ways are pleasing to Him, He brings success. We found that when we make a persevering effort in faith, He would indeed bring the educational increase beyond our expectations. Imagine even kindergartners capable

of self-government and liberty. Imagine children loving school and of educational accomplishment often years ahead of the average—with emphasis not on accomplishment itself, but on the learning process and faith! Imagine even young elementary students able to enjoy working hard by faith, and waiting on God for accomplishment. Imagine students enjoying the liberty of self-government!

Nonetheless, the Nehemiah Institute shows a trend that unless something substantial changes—self-conscious Biblical worldview education in particular—American Christianity could soon die out.⁴ We are no longer reproducing a vibrant, accomplished and influential faith. Before Christianity becomes completely incapable of reproducing itself—before the authority of pagan or weak Christian educators and the influence of the *world* destroys *us*—let us respond to Christ. Let us every one, allow the Holy Spirit to quicken our hearts to the true nature of and need for Biblical Christian education for the equipping of ourselves and our children, for the spread of the Gospel and its fruit, unto the salvation of our neighbors and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

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¹ The *Huffington Post* website notes American education is now merely average in the world. They cite, one study listing U.S. 15 year-olds as 14th place for reading, 17th for science, and 25th for mathematics, out of 34 countries. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/07/us-falls-in-world-education-rankings_n_793185.html)

² Slater, R. J., & Hall, V. M. (1975). Teaching and learning America's Christian history (American Revolution Bicentennial Ed.) (vi). San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education.

³ Hall, V. M. (2006). The Christian history of the Constitution of the United States of America, Vol. I. Christian self-government (Founders Edition) (248). San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education.

⁴ Dan Smithwick, "Where Are We Going?" online article on the Nordskog Publishing Website, September 28, 2010 (<http://publisherscorner.nordskogpublishing.com/2010/09/where-are-we-going.html>).