

Education for the Kingdom of God

“Cultivating Generosity toward the Kingdom”

For the *Chalcedon Report*, September 2003

Ronald Kirk
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Longtime readers and friends of the Report know that over the years these pages have roundly censured the contemporary American view of the Christian faith as “fire insurance.” The Barna Research Group notes that in the year 2002 among Americans who claim to be born again only 3% tithed at least 10% of their income to their local church, down from 8% previously.¹ Bi-vocation among God’s faithful ministers seems to be growing in defiance of the admonition that the church should not “muzzle the ox.” Conversely, we note, for example, how Psalm 110 boldly outlines God’s plan for His kingdom and our marching orders as Christians. Why has the American church grown so passive and ineffective? What is the remedy? It may be, as is often the case (citing the old comic strip *Pogo*), “We have met the enemy, and he is us!” Consider the need to cultivate generosity toward the kingdom of God as an essential educational element.

Psalm 110 and the Spirit of the Kingdom

Psalm 110 speaks of the Lordship of Christ, ruling in resurrected glory at the right hand of the Father until his enemies are defeated (v. 1). The Father places power in the hand of the Son. While the kingdom continues to grow in a wicked world, He rules in the middle of His enemies (v. 2)! None of this should surprise us regarding the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. What might surprise the uninitiated is the implication of verse 2 taken with verse 3. This passage clearly refers to the present age, the time between the Cross and Christ’s return. Verse 3 declares that this is the time of Christ’s *power*. The instrument of His power is His willing people, His volunteers. These according to the AV are the “dew of Thy youth.”

Dew is that gentle but ubiquitous covering of the whole earth upon the morning. The dew is a freshening and vivifying element, replenishing the earth. The Eastman’s Bible Dictionary speaks of the dew as a refreshing multitude. The New American Standard Bible translates the text, “Thy youth are to thee as the dew.” Recognized for his theological accomplishments and optimistic eschatology, Chalcedon friend and Board member Martin Selbrede, in his hymn “Psalm 110” renders the passage,

Your people will offer themselves, freely in the day you lead your host,

From the womb of the morning, your soldiers like dew will come unto You

Exponential growth seems the rule of Biblical growth. The church is now clearly in the early part of the Kingdom’s exponential growth curve. The exponential curve seems to show no growth at all for the longest time. Nonetheless, the curve, like compound interest, will eventually yield great riches of increase. Therefore we ought not to despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). Someday, Christians will be as abundant and influential as the dew. Yet after 2000 years of church history including phenomenal eras of Christian progress, what now hinders us?

Early American Kingdom Orientation

In accordance with the spirit of Psalm 110, the early American Puritan saw himself as a child of God’s promise, the City on the Hill. He saw himself as a self-consciously active participant in God’s plan. He was no revolutionary, but rather a patient husbandman of the plot of land God gave to oversee for Him. The American Pilgrim, according to Governor William Bradford, saw this continent as belonging to Christ, though the Pilgrims themselves be but stepping-stones unto others in so great a work. Pilgrim

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and Puritan alike therefore knew simultaneously how to keep hand to the plow and eye on eternity. The theology and way of life of the Pilgrim and Puritan became America’s mainstream of culture and politics, particularly with respect to the Biblical principle of liberty under law. Our forefathers saw education as essential to the propagation and maintenance of the kingdom.

Deuteronomy and the American Decline

Often providentially exemplary, America seems now to have largely forgotten her Lord. Remarkably, this decline began soon after the establishment of a government designed to protect the liberty, justice, peace, and economic endeavor of its people. Then again, perhaps it is not so strange.

In Deuteronomy, God, through Moses at the end of his ministry to ancient Israel, counsels the people to heed God lest in their prosperity they forget God, resulting in the horrible curse of Chapter 28.

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 warns:

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest *when* thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt *therein*; And *when* thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Deuteronomy 28 further declares the blessings of obedience and the curses of neglect of God. Obedience promises life, prosperity, and peace for heeding God, while disobedience promises adversity and trouble unto destruction.

America’s early form of government supported the enterprising character of its people upon decades of solid Bible-centered life. However, with prosperity, America quickly fell prey to the temptations of wealth. Americans became disaffected with homespun products and culture. We looked back to Egypt (Europe) for “upscale” fashions of all kinds. We sent our children to the Philistines (Europe) to be educated. We should hardly be surprised with the development of Unitarianism and adoption of the humanistic Enlightenment and French Revolution philosophies. Mainstream Christianity then quickly fell into a personal, mystical, and pietistic practice.

Though we have not yet seen the horrible judgment of Deuteronomy 28, the lively outgoing faith of early America has all but vanished. The Biblical answer to such a state is to restore a renewed vision of Christ’s rule from heaven, making ourselves willing volunteers, the generous instruments of Christ’s hand.

Restoring Obedience in a Decadent World

In a world dominated by either rampant selfishness and materialism or poverty, it may be difficult to envision a fulfilled Psalm 110. Yet we know that great change begins with one or a handful of courageous individuals, willing to practice obedient Biblical generosity. Through personal influence, such courage grows from person to person until a *movement* becomes the mainstream. Where but the home of the faithful does godly conviction best grow to reality? The most effective influence occurs between family members, especially parent and child. Thus, child education is a key to reproduction of

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the kingdom vision. This principle is hard for men, because the harvest appears so far away. In the short term, education is all investment. Yet God is gracious, as with economic investment, to bless faithful work with great reward. Fine education, particularly with respect to character formation, is worth the effort.

Several important elements constitute education for kingdom generosity. First, a Christian worldview consistent with Psalm 110 and the Biblical message of victory is essential. Every family should cultivate the importance of self-conscious, individual contribution toward God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven, and with the meek inheriting the earth.

Children must learn generosity in practice. Parents should teach children to prefer others, including siblings and parents with respect to personal comfort. Who gets the biggest slice of pie? Who goes first?

Christian enterprise is the means to wealth sufficient to share abundantly. The widow’s mite is important with respect to the principle of giving, but that mite in itself does not go very far in buying-power. Wealth for sharing depends upon sound economy. Sound economy spends less than it produces. It saves to build capital. The first fruits of increase properly go to the Lord and His purposes. Children should learn to work now, then wait for the blessing. Investment helps build faith for both temporal and eternal purposes. Then, accumulated wealth becomes capital for the kingdom, not largesse to spend upon oneself, though God is gracious to make us benefit from His hand upon our economic endeavors.

Tithing (and more) produces directed, discretionary resources for the building of the kingdom. In addition to a monetary tithe, every able Christian should consider Biblically study and practice an economic or ministry discipline, either vocationally or avocationally.² I like to call this tithing one’s life. Every endeavor, in some small way, will tend to either hinder the gospel or further it, depending on the quality of its conduct.

Civics education is critical. Few Christians understand America’s larcenous (in concert with the rest of the world) money system. Its false measure is an abomination to the Lord. Every Christian should be aware of the need to restore a sound standard to our money.³ Protecting free economic exchange without regulation and prior restraint, but with appropriate penalty for coercion, theft, and fraud, is the Biblical standard for civil government.

We must exalt, as our Puritan forebears did, the place of godly education. According to the Biblical principle of specialization (1 Cor. 12), God makes special calling upon those who teach or produce educational resources. True Christian education must be supported. Those worthy souls who sacrifice to serve as researchers, writers, curriculum developers, and teachers deserve support. Worthy educational institutions of all kinds deserve support.

Conclusion

He who lays down his life for Christ’s sake will gain it. The church should once more become militant and not weary in well doing for the kingdom of God. Christians should liberally distribute personal wealth for the kingdom. The Christian home should learn to see itself as a spiritual Christian economic entity designed to fulfill its kingdom destiny. Parents must teach their Children to understand their calling as Psalm 110 volunteers and train them for the responsibilities of kingdom support and contribution. Christians must become strategically generous toward the kingdom. If Christian families

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will rise again to this calling, we may yet witness world change and blessing like that of the Apostolic Era, the Reformation or the great early American experiment. The greater the generosity of investment, the quicker the return.

¹ Barna Research Group, Ventura, CA (<http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=139&Reference=F>).

² See Ronald Kirk, “Toward Learning Any Subject Biblically,” *Chalcedon Report*, November 2002.

³ See Tom Rose, “The Federal Reserve,” *Chalcedon Report*, August 2002.