

*This book is a great example of learning from the mistakes and successes that we find in church history. It is a much needed corrective to the unbiblical views on education that dominate the church of today. Even many homeschool curricula that are sincerely seeking to promote "excellence in education" are unfortunately pushing approaches to education that have already been tried by Church Fathers and found wanting. Learn why we need to once again be convinced that the Bible is the "key of knowledge" (Luke 11:52) and not just an add-on to what the world has to offer.*

*This survey through church history reinforces my own conviction that if we are to be successful in helping our children to "think God's thoughts after Him" it is essential that parents themselves have thoroughly biblical and Christocentric presuppositions, philosophy, methodology, context, and goals for the education/discipleship of their children. Cornelius Van Til once said that since God created all things by, for, and through Christ (Col. 1:16), and since He sustains all things (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), it would be "impossible to interpret any fact without a basic falsification unless it be regarded in its relation to God the Creator and to Christ the Redeemer." There are thousands of books that try to integrate the Bible with secular thought, but very few books that challenge us to have a radically Biblical approach to every subject. It is my hope that this historical survey will open the hearts of readers to engage in the hard work of developing a more Hebraic view of education."*

**PHILLIP G. KAYSER, PH.D.**, *Pastor, Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, NE*

*Many can see the problems before us, yet few can explain why these evils abound. The status quo has blinded the masses into thinking that this is the only way things could ever be. They seem unable to think outside the box, let alone climb out of it. Christians are not immune from this paralyzing effect. Is there a cause for this widespread ignorance? The major contributing factor is education.*

*The social engineers of the past century had a vision for the destruction of the Christian faith and the American economy. They saw how the two were related, and constructed a plan to destroy them. Education was their tool of choice. By their educational schemes, they set out to destroy the Christian mission of discipleship in the Faith. But these social engineers had to own the process so as to determine the outcome. The Church tried to hold on to discipleship, while handing over the education of their children to the state. In the end, the wicked plan of the masterminds worked. We are living in their vision because they have successfully disciplined this nation through their education programs. If we will make any lasting change, we must repent of this sin against God, believe what He says about education, and return to making disciples of all peoples (Matthew 28:18-20). This includes our own children!*

**JASON YOUNG**, Pastor, Heritage Baptist Church, Phoenix, AZ

*Education is essentially a political and religious subject, which is why bringing up the subject of education in a conversation can have as volatile an effect as religion or politics. Yet this subject must be discussed, because Christians are losing their children to the world at a devastating rate.*

*It is understandable that the state would develop a standardized, equalized, and institutionalized method of education, but why should Christians subject their children to it? Yet not only laymen, but many well-respected and godly pastors, believe the government classroom is the best place to train the next generation. After all, they say, Christians have always educated their children this way, and we all went to the government schools and turned out "fine." They point out that Christians need to be salt and light in the world. This is where a strong grasp of church history is essential. Christians have not always educated their children this way, we didn't turn out fine, and we don't even realize how much we've been harmfully affected by our government education. We must understand our roots to realize just how far we have drifted from the Truth.*

**STEVEN GRUTZUIS**, Pastor, Christian Heritage Church, Orland Park, IL

*We live in a day when the church in Western Civilization has chosen the path of convenience over and against the path of uncompromising biblical truth. Contemporary theologians have conveniently sanded away at the issues that seemed too costly for the complacent Christian of our day. We have sacrificed the practice of full-orbed Christian education on the altar of convenience, declaring that we want to get our money's worth for the school taxes we pay. Shouldn't we leave the education of our children to the "experts?" Isn't education neutral? Isn't an exclusively Christian education for our children just too extreme?*

*Brothers and sisters, hear a resounding "NO!" The Bible repeatedly admonishes us not to copy the practices of the world. God wants us to be a holy people unto the Lord. The education of our children defines the path for future generations and it also says*

*something about this present generation – it show how serious we are about living as God’s holy people for His glory here and now.*

*While the Bible is clear about the absolute necessity of Christian education for Christian children (e.g., Ex. 10:2, Deut. 4:10, 6:7-9, Eph. 6:4, 1 Tim. 3:5, etc.), this book by Kevin Swanson looks at the history of Christian education and closes an important gap. We are called to look to the “cloud of witnesses” that has gone before us – learning from those who have shown themselves to be great teachers and examples in the church of Jesus Christ. May God bless you in the reading of this book and may He grant you the humility to learn from it.*

**SACHA WALICORD, PH.D.,** *Pastor, Knox Presbyterian Church, Mount Vernon, OH*

*Every Christ-honoring parent I know wants their sons and daughters to go further in the Christian faith than they did. In essence, they want their children to “stand on their shoulders.” When those children become adults and establish their own families, we hope that they will not only carry on the faith, but that they will be more knowledgeable and more resolute than their own fathers and mothers. This is called covenantal succession, or generational progress. By faith, we are trusting that God will raise up a righteous seed in our families and break the sinful patterns of previous generations (see Psalm 103:17-18; Psalm 112:1-10). The fundamental question is this—how will it happen?*

*The Lord gives us the basic tools. He calls us to be men and women of the Bible, He instructs us to bring all things before*

*Him in prayer, and He commands us to be connected to Christ's Church. Moreover, He has given us a method by which we may evangelize and disciple our children. He urges us to tell "the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that He has done" (Psalm 78:4). In short, we are to speak into the lives of our children and proclaim to them the Law and the Gospel. By faith we believe that God will open their eyes, ears, and heart to believe in the Gospel. In addition, we entrust them to God so that they will persevere in the Faith.*

*Kevin Swanson traces the faithful propagation of this method of Christian education throughout Church history. He also points out those times where Christ's Church has wandered away from biblical truth and embraced pagan philosophy. His book is a clear call to return to God's way of educating our children. This way is not formulaic—as if you could simply follow certain steps and be guaranteed that your children would be faithful Christians—but it is a way that is built upon faith. God's method of education is distinctly Christian; it is thoroughly saturated with biblical truth. This is the way Christ-honoring parents should go if they want their children to "stand on their shoulders."*

**MARCUS J. SERVEN, D.MIN.,** *Pastor, Covenant Family Church, Troy, MO*

*It is telling that the first conflict recorded in the Bible was a conflict over education. The serpent was contending for who would rule in the marketplace of ideas. It was a conflict over who would speak; who would have authority; who would be trusted; whose voice would be paid attention to. In Genesis 3:1-7, Eve was inquisitive and wanted the knowledge of good and evil. Satan waged war against the knowledge of God and said*

*to her, mocking the knowledge of God, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" This conflict has never ceased since that first battle. This is why we must ask in every generation, "Are any of my notions or traditions regarding education at war against the explicit commands of God?" This is exactly what Kevin Swanson does in this book. Further, he has done us all a favor by presenting to us a historical record of the resistance movement against ungodly principles and practices of education. The question is, are we willing to continue to wage the war that our spiritual forefathers fought?*

**SCOTT T. BROWN**, Teaching Elder, Hope Baptist Church, Wake Forest, NC

*When I was finishing public grade school, the national government was finalizing a document that would guide the remainder of my schooling, and that of all my descendants. The Behavioral Teacher Educational Project stipulated that all future U.S. curricula would focus "on pleasure cultivation and interpersonal relationships and other attitudes and skills compatible with a non-work world." So for students in the government schools, it would be goodbye to the real world and hello to the compulsory world of the immature and artificial social order. That curriculum had nothing to do with education. It directed all my schoolmates into mental, moral and intellectual paralysis.*

*I'm thankful to New York school teacher John Taylor Gatto, who retained the brain power during those years to describe just what was going on. "School cannot help anybody grow up," he said, "because its prime directive is to retard maturity." Gatto documented what the curriculum was training his students to do: "whining, treachery, dishonesty, malice, cruelty, and similar traits."*

*I can report first-hand what government methodology did to my peers and how it ruined the great enterprises of the planet. Schooling is not education. Throughout history, the slaves are the ones who are educated by their governments. American kids were taught to think this is how real learning happens. This is not how learning happens. Family education must be recovered by both parents and faithful children, who must work together to rebuild the orderly foundations of intellectual honesty, academic freedom, and the wisdom that flows from personal character.*

**GEOFF BOTKIN**, Elder, Christ the King Church, Centerville, TN

*How much are the souls of your children worth to you? Knowing the reality of Hell, what are you prepared to do to try to keep your children from it? When you are setting your priorities, stop and picture your child in the torment of eternal fire forever. If you are not prepared to make diligent use of the means that God has appointed, if you are not wrestling with them in discipline, and if you are not wrestling in prayer with the Lord for them, don't lie to them and tell them that you love them.*

*Being a parent is an awesome responsibility, and it can lead to fear and confusion as countless gurus offer some new plan or scheme in the battle for the souls of your children. Be careful of those who pretend they have everything figured out. I encourage you to ask three questions as you weigh what you do: Does it lead your child back to his knees? Does it lead him back to the Word of God? And, does it lead him back into fellowship with Christ's church?*

*Ultimately, you cannot change your child's heart. The only hope for any child is that, by the grace of God, he sees past the deeply*

*flawed example of his parents to the perfections of Jesus. But if your child rejects Christ, may it be in spite of your best efforts, rather than because of your faithlessness.*

**JASON WALLACE**, *Pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Salt Lake City, UT*



# *the* KEEP FAITH

*On Education*

## *Featuring*

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Justin Martyr Bede  
Polycarp Martin Luther  
Ignatius John Calvin  
Barnabas Richard Baxter  
Lanctantius Increase Mather  
Didache John Wesley  
Eusebius A.A. Hodge  
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*Compiled by*

Kevin Swanson

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**MOSES, 1600 B.C.**

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (Deut. 6:6-9)

**THE APOSTLE PAUL, 62 A.D.**

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4)

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# Preface

By all reports, the Christian faith is not doing well in the Western world. In just the last generation, “more than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion—or no religion at all.”<sup>1</sup> And 25% of young adults (ages 18-29) are unaffiliated with any particular religion, compared to 8% among those 70 and older.<sup>2</sup> Regular church attendance in the UK dropped from 12% to 5% between 1970 and 2012, while the average age of the church attendee rose from 38 to 58.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the dominant Christian denomination in the UK endorsed homosexual weddings and the ordination of female bishops.<sup>4</sup> Church attendance in America has dropped off from 55% for the Silent Generation to 18% for the Millennial Generation,

1. <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

2. *Ibid.*

3. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03\\_04\\_07\\_tearfundchurch.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf)

4. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/28/anglican-church-blessings-gay-couples-pilling-report>

[http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/11/20/21551561-church-of-england-votes-in-favor-of-female-bishops](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/11/20/21551561-church-of-england-votes-in-favor-of-female-bishops)

## 2 ~ KEEP THE FAITH

according to Pew Research.<sup>5</sup> A recent poll conducted by The Barna Group found that only 0.5% of American young people (ages 18-25) hold a Christian worldview, as compared to 14% in the previous generation.<sup>6</sup> Incredibly, this amounts to a 96% apostasy rate in a single generation, assuming that a belief in absolutes is fundamental to a Christian orthodoxy. This severe apostasy is producing a dramatic change in the cultural, social, and political landscapes of Europe and North America. We are witnessing the indisputable signs of the dying of the faith in the West. While the European apostasy has reached full maturity, the American apostasy is just now coming of age.

The apostasy, however, is not total. Something still holds on hard and fast. Indeed, there are sincere and committed Christians who will retain something of this faith for future generations. We call this the “salvage operation,” and the prospects for success are strong.

How did Christian denominations come to endorse the most corrupted sexual proclivities, approving practices like homosexual weddings first advocated by Nero in the 1st century? Christian influence upon the ethical and cultural systems of the Western world has all but disappeared, and what is left of Christian orthodoxy is very much marginalized and derided.

5. <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>

6. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>



The Western world has undergone a paradigm shift over the last two centuries, in which the masses began to look at reality, truth, and ethics differently. This must have come about through the powerful, idea-disseminating mechanisms of school and media. While it is true that the heart of natural man is inclined towards rebellion and deceit, it is helpful to identify the path of his rebellion. It was these cultural and academic institutions that formed the juggernaut against the Christian worldview in the West.

It is generally accepted that education is important in forming the hearts and the minds of the next generation. Since Increase Mather lost the battle with the Latitudinarians over control of Harvard College in 1705, the conservatives and progressives (the right and the left), have continued to fight over all levels of education in this country. The right is almost always forced into the wilderness to start new schools. Year by year, the right is increasingly marginalized. The right loses.

Educational interests are powerful, and this is part of the problem. When the control of a nation's education system is placed in the hands of a centralized power, Christian leaders and parents should be concerned about the agenda and the worldview maintained by these few controllers. It should go without saying that the massive National Education Association and the U.S. Department of Education exert far more influence over the masses now than they did in the 1800s.

#### 4 ~ KEEP THE FAITH

If there is one thing that we ought to re-examine in light of the decline of the Christian faith and the ongoing generational apostasy, it is this matter of education. It is time to get back to the drawing board and ask the basic questions concerning the philosophy of education and child training. Now more than ever, we need to examine the wisdom of previous generations, particularly the teaching of those genuine Christian pastors and leaders who lived before the demise of the Christian West. If we would keep the faith for future generations, it would be prudent to root ourselves more solidly in the godly wisdom of previous centuries.

# The Historical Testimony of the Church Fathers on Education

In this age of secularism and Christian apostasy, where powerful leaders have employed educational institutions to work their own agendas, Christians are particularly interested in defining a distinctively Christian form of education. This can be obtained by the study of divine revelation—specifically, the book of Proverbs: a book dedicated to the subject of bestowing wisdom, knowledge, and understanding on young men and women. Also, a thorough search of every verse relating to children in Scriptures is in order.<sup>7</sup>

Sincere believers will also take interest in the wisdom left for us by the Church Fathers, who themselves faced principalities and powers, ideas and methodologies, that opposed the knowledge of God in Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

7. Specifically, I would recommend the following: Ex. 10:2, Deut. 4:10, 6:7-9, 11:19-21, 29:10-11, 31:12, Josh. 8:35, 2 Chron. 20:13, Neh. 12:43, Joel 2:16, Eph. 6:1-4, 1 Thess. 2:11, and 1 Tim. 3:5.

## LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to what we can derive from history because it is hard to determine exact statistics of enrollment, the sorts of “schools” available, the precise content of the studies, the character of the teachers, and the age and gender of the students during any particular period in history. Moreover, many of the Church Fathers may have received a pagan education themselves, and then spent the rest of their lives ridding themselves of the baggage of the Greek and Roman methods and philosophies. The same could be said of many of the Puritans and Reformers who themselves were trained in the rising secular universities of the day.

Also, we may note that there are marked differences between the pre-Constantinian Roman world and the modern Western world, chief of which is that the pre-Constantinian Christian church lived in a pagan society that was *becoming Christian*, while we live in an apostate Christian society that is *becoming pagan*. The Christians in the old Roman world were shedding themselves of pagan ideas and methods, even as these apostate Christian nations are busy putting these pagan ideas and institutions back on.

In this short book, I want to focus specifically on what the respected fathers of the church taught concerning the education of children and adults. What did these Church Fathers actually say about education in the corpus of their ministry work? The answer to this

question is of great value to the present discussion.

Above all, it is important that this study refer mainly to original sources, not to a historian's interpretive analysis. Therefore, extended quotations from the original works will be made available to the reader.

Too many in our present day have synthesized pagan and Christian forms of education, and they will cherry pick a few quotes from Augustine or Basil, while conveniently avoiding their warnings, qualifications, and careful nuances. Some have also avoided the vast corpus of information from Church Fathers who have dealt directly with the conflict between pagan and Christian thought. It is impossible to miss the antithetical distance between pagan thought and Christian thought among the Church Fathers. This should be obvious to the reader as the research unfolds.

In this study, it is important to retain a distinction between the education of children and the education of adults. What may be a good form of education for children living at home may be different from that of a grown man preparing for a career in plumbing, engineering, or pastoring.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREEKS IN ROMAN SOCIETY

Although the New Testament church grew up in the Roman Empire, the influence of the Greeks on the Romans is important to consider from the outset.

Of all the ancient peoples, the Greeks were among the most committed to their educational institutions, including both schools for the very young and the gymnasiums for young men. Moreover, it should come as no surprise to the modern reader that Greek culture undermined the family and frequently engaged in pederasty. In his scholarly book *Children in the Early Church*, W.A. Strange refers to the Roman satirist Juvenal in his comparison of Greek, Roman, and Jewish forms of education as follows:

“As in Jewish society, the original ideal of the Romans was that each child should be taught what they needed to know and understand by their parents, and the place of the father as his son’s instructor was highly valued by conservatively-minded Romans. In his fourteenth Satire, the Roman satirist Juvenal heavily labored the theme of parental influence for good and ill, and incidentally testified to the success of the Jewish community in passing its laws and manners within the family from generation to generation—even though he considered their customs pernicious (Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96 - 106).

By the first century BC, both Romans and Jews were experiencing the strong attraction of an alternative form of education: the Greek model. It took education out of the home and placed it in a new institution, the school. The role of the father as his son’s instructor was an aspect of both Roman and Jewish cultures which contrasted strongly with Greek society. A Greek father who spent too much

time with his children, away from the ‘proper’ companionship of other men, risked ridicule.”<sup>8</sup>

The Jews must have adopted the Greek form of education by the time Saul (later known as the Apostle Paul) was educated in Pharisaism at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). It is possible that young Saul was an adult when he received this instruction.

The minimal role of the family in education is rooted strongly in Greek thinking. In Plato’s *Republic*, the philosopher recommends a social system where professionals raise the children, and “No parent should know his child, or child his parent.”<sup>9</sup> Obviously, this sounds nothing like Deuteronomy 6:7-9 and the rest of biblical data on the family and education. A biblical social system is radically different from that of the humanist.

## THE EARLIEST WRITINGS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS ON EDUCATION

The Apostolic Fathers from the first and early second centuries offer a surprising number of references to children in covenant Christian families, while providing little descriptive or prescriptive advice on the education of grown men and women. Within the 300 or 400 pages of extant writings, we find a fair treasure trove of quotes concerning the education or training of children.

8. W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament, and the Early Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 25.

9. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H.D.P. Lee (London: Penguin, 1955), 212.

### DIDACHE (CA. 75 A.D.)

While leaving out any mention of child baptism and a thousand other possible topics, the abbreviated church manual from the first century known as *The Didache* was careful to enjoin parents to disciple their children.

“You shall not withhold your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God.”<sup>10</sup>

If documents like this intend to identify the top ten priority elements of the Christian life, then those who will perpetuate the Christian faith in our century should take note. The early church considered parental discipleship of children in the fear of God both fundamental and essential.

### CLEMENT I (CA. 99 A.D.)

Addressing the fathers directly in the Corinthian congregation in his first epistle, Clement I of Rome wrote,

“Let us fear the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us. Let us respect our leaders; let us honor the older men; let us instruct the young with instruction that leads to the fear of God. Let us guide our women toward that which is good: let them display a disposition to purity worthy of admiration; let them exhibit a sincere desire to be gentle; let them demonstrate by their silence the moderation of their tongue; let them show their

10. “Didache,” 4.9, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 3rd ed., trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 165.



love, without partiality and in holiness, equally toward all those who fear God. Let our children receive the instruction that is in Christ: let them learn how strong humility is before God, what pure love is able to accomplish before God, how the fear of him is good and great and saves all those who live in it in holiness with a pure mind.”<sup>11</sup>

Here Clement recommends that husbands lead their wives to that which is good. He wants them teaching their children the fear of God, humility, love, and holy living. There is no essential difference between what Paul told the churches at Ephesus and Colossae (Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:22), and what Clement presented to Corinth. Husbands and fathers were responsible for the spiritual nurture of their homes.

#### IGNATIUS (35-107 A.D.)

In these instructions, available to the bishops or pastors of the churches for the first four centuries of church life, it is important to note what was not communicated, as well as what was communicated. Ignatius offered a scriptural admonition to fathers regarding the nurturing of their children, but included no instruction to the church on conducting Sunday Schools and Youth Groups.

“Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and teach them the Holy Scriptures, and also trades, that they may

11. 1 Clement 21:6-8, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 53.

not indulge in idleness. Now the Scripture says, 'A righteous father educates his children well; his heart shall rejoice in a wise son.'<sup>12</sup>

Ignatius charged fathers with the responsibility to provide instruction from the Old and New Testaments. He advocated homeschooling, practical schooling, and biblical schooling. To Ignatius, this was the essence of a Christian view of education. If it was not biblical and if it was not practical, it was an academic training that would only yield a knowledge that "puffs up" (1 Cor. 8:1). The vision that he and other church shepherds presented was a biblical education, with an emphasis on integrating the knowledge that was learned into the life of the student.<sup>13</sup>

## THE MARTYRDOM OF THE HOLY MARTYRS & POLYCARP

In a very ancient document known as *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs*, one martyr Paeon is being questioned by the prefect Rusticus. It is a brief, but meaningful exchange for our purpose:

"Rusticus the prefect said, 'Who taught you?'

"Paeon said, 'From our parents we received this good confession.'<sup>14</sup>

12. Ignatius, "Epistle to the Philadelphians", Chapter 4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Phillip Schaff, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, et. al. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:81.

13. I have summarized these basic biblical principles for education in my book, Kevin Swanson, *Upgrade: 10 Secrets to the Best Education for Your Child*, 2nd ed. (Parker: Generations with Vision, 2010) available at [www.generationswithvision.com](http://www.generationswithvision.com).

14. "The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs", *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:306.

Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, also enjoined parental discipleship, in the only section of teaching directed towards children to be found in his writings.

“Then instruct your wives to continue in the faith delivered to them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all fidelity and loving all others equally in all chastity, and to teach their children with instruction that leads to the fear of God.”<sup>15</sup>

In this case, we can assume Polycarp was writing about young children (as his language is obviously not referring to adults or 14-year-old sons). He pointed out that the content of education must be based in the fear of God, which is the single most indispensable element of a Christian education according to Proverbs 1:7.

#### BARNABAS (70 -132 A.D.)

Yet another apostolic father Barnabas included a section on education in his short epistle. As he outlines “The Way of Life,” Barnabas includes the essential element of parental discipleship.

“You shall not abort a child nor, again, commit infanticide. You must not withhold your hand from your son or daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God.”<sup>16</sup>

Remarkably, there is almost no variation in the teach-

15. Polycarp, “Epistle to the Philippians”, 4.2, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 136-137.

16. “The Epistle of Barnabas”, 19.5, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, 196.

ings of the Apostolic Fathers concerning the education and discipleship of children. The principles of the other Apostolic Fathers are almost exactly the same as the principles outlined in the Epistle of Barnabas.

1. The early Fathers were universally opposed to abortion.
2. The early Fathers did not want a hard and fast distinction between education and discipleship of children.
3. The early Fathers were insistent that fathers and mothers should be faithful in teaching their children the fear of God, and presented it as the single most indispensable element of a Christian education.
4. This discipleship was parental, in that the imperatives on educating children were always directed to parents.

#### EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS (130 A.D.)

Mathetes provided a very succinct Christian theory of knowledge towards the end of his letter to Diognetus:

“For neither can life exist without knowledge, nor is knowledge secure without life. Wherefore both are planted closely together. The Apostle, perceiving the force of the conjunction, and blaming that knowledge which, without true doctrine, is admitted to influence life saith, "Knowledge puffeth up but love edifieth. . . but he who combines knowl-

edge with fear and seeks after life, plants in hope, looking for fruit.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, we find the early teachers in the church establishing the inseparability of the fear of God, life integration, and love with knowledge.

#### JUSTIN MARTYR (100-165 A.D.)

Justin Martyr contrasted Christian philosophy with Greek philosophy when he said, “The matters of our religion lie in works, not in words.”<sup>18</sup> There is much more to say about his apologetic in his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, but this should suffice. A Christian education is not satisfied with bare knowledge apart from life. What we are after is a knowledge that really transforms the lives of the men and women that we disciple. We insist upon a life-integrated, character-oriented form of education.

#### DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM (275 A.D.)

One of the earliest extant documents of the Christian church is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a Syrian church manual dating from the mid-3rd century. Much can be said for the value of this early document. Every elder and pastor should read its contents, cover to cover. Very important to this study is the fact that the writers chose to give one full chapter to the subject of raising Christian children. We read:

17. “Epistle to Diognetus,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:30.

18. Justin Martyr, “Address to the Greeks,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:288.

“Teach your sons handicrafts which are suitable and helpful to the fear of God, lest by means of idleness they serve voluptuousness, for not being educated by their parents, they wickedly do works like the heathen. Therefore spare them not, but reprove and discipline, and teach them, for by correcting them verily ye will not kill them, but rather ye will give them certain life, as also our Lord teacheth us in Wisdom and saith thus, ‘Chasten thy son because there is hope for him, for thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol.’ And again He saith, ‘Every one who spareth his rod hateth his son. . .’ Therefore chasten them with blows, and do not spare on account of their youth, by the word of the fear of God, and do not give them the power of rising against you, their parents; and let them do nothing without your advice; that they go not with those of their age to assemble and amuse themselves; because thus they learn vanity, and are laid hold by harlotry and fall. Should this happen without their parents, they and their parents will be themselves guilty in the judgment before God.”<sup>19</sup>

This counsel is worthy of careful consideration. According to these Syrian church leaders, the basic elements of a Christian Education are:

1. A Practical Education. “Teach your sons handi-

19. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac: Edited from a Mesopotamian Manuscript with Various Readings and Collations of Other MSS*, trans. Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 101.

crafts.” The Church Fathers recommended a practical education for young men here. The encouragement to pursue an “academic” liberal arts education is conspicuously missing. Instead, the Church Fathers expressed concerns that a purely academic education may promote idleness with young men.

2. An Education Rooted in the Fear of God. Again, the single most indispensable element in a Christian education is the fear of God. Whether the class is chemistry, history, or literature, the Church Fathers would weave into the material that which is “suitable and helpful to the fear of God” (clearly referencing Proverbs 1:7).

3. Parental Responsibility. These Church Fathers treated parental responsibility as primary, including a rather sharp warning of God’s judgment for negligent parenting.

4. Peer Groups Eschewed. These wise church leaders also warned against youth assembling together into “peer” groups or “youth” groups. This is the precursor to trouble, proven again and again in our own day as well.

5. Corporal Punishment. They recommend first the chastening and reproof of the Word, as well as the use of the rod (spanking).

6. Early Marriage. Finally, the Church Fathers recommended early marriage to avoid fornication “like the heathen.”

Further on in another chapter, *The Didascalía* warns of using “heathen books and philosophers” in the education of young people. The concern is that these books might tempt young people away from the faith.

“Keep far then from all the books of the heathen. For what hast thou to do with foreign words or with false laws or prophecies, which also easily cause young people to wander from the Faith? What then is wanting to thee in the Word of God that thou throwest thyself upon these myths of the heathen? If thou wishest to read the tales of the fathers, thou hast the Book of Kings, or of wise men and philosophers thou hast the Prophets, amongst whom thou wilt find more wisdom in Scripture than amongst the wise men and the philosophers because they are the words of God, of one only wise God; if thou desirest songs, thou hast the Psalms of David . . .”<sup>20</sup>

In summary, *The Didascalía* recommended an education that focused on the Scriptures, the fear of God, and practical life-integrated work conducted under the primary direction of parents. These early Church Fathers rejected the pagan “classics,” the “myths of the heathen,” and the “tales of the fathers” whether Greek or Roman. They much preferred that Christians study the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the core curriculum. Could this be the core of the battle for salvaging the faith in the 21st century, as it was in the 3rd century? Is this why young people have “wandered

20. Ibid. 5.



from the Faith” in 18th century Harvard College, and 19th century Yale College, and 21st century classical high schools?

The issues raised by the men who wrote *The Didascalica* mark the battle lines for Christian education and discipleship in the 21st century. Parental discipleship, corporal punishment, family economies and mentorship, education that rejects the pagan classics, and an education rooted in the fear of God are essential elements that must be recovered.

#### LACTANTIUS (240-320 A.D.)

In an extended treatise in Lactantius’ *Divine Institutes* this Church Father condemned all philosophy and teachings of the Greeks, because they sought enjoyment from philosophy and not utility or practical benefit. “Therefore philosophy must altogether be laid aside because we are not to devote ourselves to the pursuit of wisdom, for this has no limit or moderation; but we must be wise.” The philosophers, he said, contributed “no advantage to life.”<sup>21</sup> Taking on the “greatest” philosopher of all, Lactantius noted that Plato’s social system could only produce the unraveling of human society or the “overthrow of states,” (something which has been proven on a massive scale in our day). Speaking of Plato’s advocacy for women in the military, the Church Father writes, “Therefore he assigned to [women] horses and arms: it follows that he should have assigned to men wool and the loom, and the carry-

21. Lactantius, “The Divine Institutes”, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:85.

ing of infants. Nor did he see the impossibility of what he said, from the fact that no nation has existed in the world so foolish or so vain as to live in this manner.”<sup>22</sup>

Lactantius’ point was that the purpose of education and study must not be “enjoyment,” but the gaining of wisdom and character. He condemned humanist philosophies in that they were incapable of sanctifying men and culture. He recommends “a few precepts of God” over all of the books and nightly studies of the pagans.<sup>23</sup>

A biblical theory of education requires a focus on faith, character, and life application in accord with James 1:22ff. “He that heareth the word and does not do it is like unto the man that beholdeth himself in a mirror and straightway forgets what manner of man he was.” Where there is no useful application of knowledge, knowledge corrupts and becomes useless.

#### EUSEBIUS (263-339 A.D.)

In his famous historical survey, Eusebius mentioned the heresy of Paul of Samosata and his followers, pointing out that their education had perverted them. A man-centered rationalism appears to have constituted the main part of their apostasy:

“They have not been afraid to corrupt divine Scriptures, they have rescinded the rule of ancient

22. Ibid. 7:92.

23. Ibid. 7:96.

faith, they have not known Christ, they ignore Scripture but search for a logic to support their atheism. If anyone challenges them with a passage from Scripture, they examine it to see if it can be turned into a conjunctive or disjunctive syllogism. Abandoning the holy Scripture of God, they study geometry, for they are from the earth and speak of the earth and do not know the One who comes from above. Some of them study the geometry of Euclid and revere Aristotle and Theophrastus, and some virtually worship Galen. In using the arts of unbelievers for their heresy, they corrupt the simple faith of the Scriptures and claim to have corrected them.”<sup>24</sup>

This ancient father nicely summarizes the modern secular theory of education. In most academic classrooms today, Euclid is very much preferred over Moses, and Aristotle over Christ. We can trace this back to Thomas Aquinas, who drew a sharp line of distinction between Christ (sacred knowledge) and the academy (philosophical knowledge).<sup>25</sup>

Eusebius also pointed out approvingly that Origen

“decided that teaching literature did not accord with theological study, so he broke off lecturing on literature as a useless hindrance to sacred studies. Then, so that he might not be dependent on the assistance of others, he disposed of all the volumes

24. Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 183-184.

25. cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Book 1:1.

of ancient literature he had so cherished.”<sup>26</sup>

## THE ALEXANDRIAN SCHOOL

The well-known Alexandrian school led by Origen and Clement may have taught “secular” subjects, but in Origen’s words, “I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the Scriptures.”<sup>27</sup>

The focal point in studies for Origen is the Scriptures, and all of the “secular” studies were supposed to prepare the student for these studies. Of all the Church Fathers, it appears that Origen may have been the most syncretized with Greek philosophy and methodology in his thoughts on education.

## JEROME (347-420 A.D.)

The Latin scholar Jerome had this to say about pagan classical literature, in a letter to Pope Damasus:

“The food of the demons is the songs of poets, secular wisdom, the display of rhetorical language. They afford their readers nothing more than empty sound and the hubbub of words.”<sup>28</sup>

26. Eusebius, *The Church History*, 190.

27. Origen, “A Letter from Origen to Gregory”, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:393.

28. Jerome, “Letter XXI to Pope Damasus”, *Ancient Christian Writers: Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), 117.

The education of daughters appears to have been as important to Jerome as the education of sons. We see this particularly in his letter to a “homeschooling” mother Laeta. The entire letter is worthy of study for every mother, father, and pastor. First, the ancient Church Father explains to this mother how to teach her daughter to read.

“Get for her a set of letters made of boxwood or of ivory and call each by its proper name. Let her play with these, so that even her play may teach her something. And not only make her grasp the right order of the letters and see that she forms their names into a rhyme, but constantly disarrange their order and put the last letters in the middle and the middle ones at the beginning that she may know them all by sight as well as by sound . . .”<sup>29</sup>

Jerome left no room for doubt that a daughter’s education must be formed entirely upon the foundation of the fear of God. He continues,

“Thus must a soul be educated which is to be a temple of God. It must learn to hear nothing and to say nothing but what belongs to the fear of God. It must have no understanding of unclean words, and no knowledge of the world’s songs. Its tongue must be steeped while still tender in the sweetness of the psalms. . . Let her treasures be not silks or gems but manuscripts of the holy scriptures; and in

29. Jerome, “Letter CVII”, *The Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers: Series 2*, ed. Phillip Schaff, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, et. al. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 6:191.

these let her think less of gilding, and Babylonian parchment, and arabesque patterns, than of correctness and accurate punctuation. Let her begin by learning the psalter, and then let her gather rules of life out of the proverbs of Solomon. From the Preacher let her gain the habit of despising the world and its vanities. Let her follow the example set in Job of virtue and of patience. Then let her pass on to the gospels never to be laid aside when once they have been taken in hand. Let her also drink in with a willing heart the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. As soon as she has enriched the storehouse of her mind with these treasures, let her commit to memory the prophets, the Heptateuch, the books of Kings and of Chronicles, the rolls also of Ezra and Esther. When she has done all these she may safely read the Song of Songs but not before: for, were she to read it at the beginning, she would fail to perceive that, though it is written in fleshly words, it is a marriage song of a spiritual bridal. And not understanding this she would suffer hurt from it. Let her avoid all apocryphal writings, and if she is led to read such not by the truth of the doctrines which they contain but out of respect for the miracles contained in them; let her understand that they are not really written by those to whom they are ascribed, that many faulty elements have been introduced into them, and that it requires infinite discretion to look for gold in the midst of dirt. Cyprian's writings let her have always in her hands. The letters of Athanasius and the treatises of Hilary she may go through without fear of stumbling. Let her take pleasure in the

works and wits of all in whose books a due regard for the faith is not neglected. But if she reads the works of others let it be rather to judge them than to follow them.”<sup>30</sup>

Jerome made no mention of pagan literature in this early “homeschooling” manual for moms. Initially, the student must learn the Proverbs, the Psalms, and the rest of Scripture, and only then, should she move on to the great Christian writings available at that time (which included Athanasius and Hilary). Towards the end of the letter, Jerome offered himself as a tutor to help teach Paula.

Evidently, Church Fathers in pagan Rome grappled with both the danger and the value of a pagan education. Gonzalez offers this brief commentary:

“[Jerome] was an ardent admirer of classical learning, and felt that this love for an essentially pagan tradition was sinful. His inner turmoil on this score peaked when, during a serious illness, he dreamt that he was at the final judgment and was asked: ‘Who are you?’ ‘I am a Christian,’ Jerome answered. But the Judge retorted: ‘You lie, You are a Ciceronian.’ After that experience, Jerome resolved to devote himself fully to the study of Scripture and of Christian literature. But he never ceased reading and imitating the style of the classical pagan authors.”<sup>31</sup>

30. Ibid.

31. Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 201-202.

AUGUSTINE (354-430 A.D.)

While the hugely respected Church Father Augustine may have commended Plato as the “best” of the philosophers, he eventually acknowledged in *City of God* that Plato was a confused polytheist. Nonetheless, his magnum opus does not address the matter of education directly. His *Against the Academicians* (AD 386) was critical of the Greek philosophers. He further separated himself in his *Retractions* (1.1.1-4) from the learning of the Greeks with this important qualification:

“I also have reason to regret having praised Plato and the Platonic philosophers, or Academicians, to a degree not suitable to impious men—especially since Christian doctrine is to be defended against their errors!”<sup>32</sup>

In his earlier work, *On Christian Teaching* (Book 2), Augustine addressed the various academic disciplines in detail, sifting through the things that might be useful versus those things antithetical to a Christian education. To his credit, he tried to develop a “Christian” use of the educational tools formed by the pagan Greeks and Romans. His concluding statement is important:

“So it seems to me that the following advice is beneficial for young people who are keen and intelligent, who fear God and seek a life of true happiness. Do not venture without due care into

32. Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 171.



any branches of learning which are pursued outside the church of Christ, as if they were a means to attaining the happy life, but discriminate sensibly and carefully between them.”<sup>33</sup>

Augustine recommended “robbing the Egyptians” of their gold and silver, saying that all must be turned to Christian use.<sup>34</sup> He referred to mathematics, history, natural science, logic, dialectic, and rhetoric as useful subjects. He was highly suspect of pagan literature and astronomy. Augustine rightly commented that if the pagans had come upon any little piece of truth, this truth belonged to Christians, and the pagans had “unlawful possession” of it.<sup>35</sup> The devil is in the details with this, however. Throughout the corpus of his writings, he attenuated this statement.

Especially important for the purposes of this study are his comments on education in *Confessions*. His criticisms of Greek literature remain vital for the church, if we will retain a distinctively Christian education. Speaking of the classical education based on the writings of Homer and others, Augustine wrote,

“O torrent of hell, the sons of men are still cast into you and they pay fees for learning all these things! . . . These pagans attribute divine attributes to sinful men, that crimes might not be accounted crimes, and that whoever committed such crimes might

33. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.40.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

appear to imitate the celestial gods!”<sup>36</sup>

Augustine warned of courtly words that may hold unwholesome ideas. “Wisdom and folly both are like meats that are wholesome and unwholesome, and courtly or simple words are like town-made or rustic vessels—both kinds of food may be served in either kind of dish.”<sup>37</sup> It is true that the words, phrases, and syntax used by the great thinkers and writers share more than propositions. They portray attitudes, perspectives, carefully constructed systems of thought, and trajectories. Method and message cannot be separated.

Nowhere is Augustine clearer on his view of pagan literature than in *On Christian Teaching*, considered by James Halporn as “the founding charter of a Christian culture.”<sup>38</sup> The following extended quote sifts through the contributions of the pagans, rejecting many of their offerings in literature and art.

“But whether the fact is as Varro has related, or is not so, still we ought not to give up music because of the superstition of the heathen, if we can derive anything from it that is of use for the understanding of Holy Scripture; nor does it follow that we must busy ourselves with their theatrical trumpery because we enter upon an investiga-

36. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004) 1.16.

37. *Ibid.*

38. James W. Halporn, “Introduction”, Cassiodorus’ *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* and *On the Soul*, trans. James W. Halporn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 32.

tion about harps and other instruments, that may help us to lay hold upon spiritual things. For we ought not to refuse to learn letters because they say that Mercury discovered them; nor because they have dedicated temples to Justice and Virtue, and prefer to worship in the form of stones things that ought to have their place in the heart, ought we on that account to forsake justice and virtue. Nay, but let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master; and while he recognizes and acknowledges the truth, even in their religious literature, let him reject the figments of superstition, and let him grieve over and avoid men who, 'when they knew God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. . .'

"But when all these have been cut away and rooted out of the mind of the Christian we must then look at human institutions which are not superstitious, that is, such as are not set up in association with devils, but by men in association with one another. For all arrangements that are in force among men, because they have agreed among themselves that they should be in force, are human institutions; and of these, some are matters of superfluity and luxury, some of convenience and necessity. For if

those signs which the actors make in dancing were of force by nature, and not by the arrangement and agreement of men, the public crier would not in former times have announced to the people of Carthage, while the pantomime was dancing, what it was he meant to express,—a thing still remembered by many old men from whom we have frequently heard it. And we may well believe this, because even now, if any one who is unaccustomed to such follies goes into the theatre, unless some one tells him what these movements mean, he will give his whole attention to them in vain. Yet all men aim at a certain degree of likeness in their choice of signs, that the signs may as far as possible be like the things they signify. But because one thing may resemble another in many ways, such signs are not always of the same significance among men, except when they have mutually agreed upon them.

“But in regard to pictures and statues, and other works of this kind, which are intended as representations of things, nobody makes a mistake, especially if they are executed by skilled artists, but every one, as soon as he sees the likenesses, recognizes the things they are likenesses of. And this whole class are to be reckoned among the superfluous devices of men, unless when it is a matter of importance to inquire in regard to any of them, for what reason, where, when, and by whose authority it was made. Finally, the thousands of fables and fictions, in whose lies men take delight, are human devices, and nothing is to be considered more

peculiarly man's own and derived from himself than anything that is false and lying. Among the convenient and necessary arrangements of men with men are to be reckoned whatever differences they choose to make in bodily dress and ornament for the purpose of distinguishing sex or rank; and the countless varieties of signs without which human intercourse either could not be carried on at all, or would be carried on at great inconvenience; and the arrangements as to weights and measures, and the stamping and weighing of coins, which are peculiar to each state and people, and other things of the same kind. Now these, if they were not devices of men, would not be different in different nations, and could not be changed among particular nations at the discretion of their respective sovereigns.

“This whole class of human arrangements, which are of convenience for the necessary intercourse of life, the Christian is not by any means to neglect, but on the contrary should pay a sufficient degree of attention to them, and keep them in memory.

“For certain institutions of men are in a sort of way representations and likenesses of natural objects. And of these, such as have relation to fellowship with devils must, as has been said, be utterly rejected and held in detestation; those, on the other hand, which relate to the mutual intercourse of men, are, so far as they are not matters of luxury and superfluity, to be adopted, especially the forms of the letters which are necessary

for reading, and the various languages as far as is required—a matter I have spoken of above. To this class also belong shorthand characters, those who are acquainted with which are called shorthand writers. All these are useful, and there is nothing unlawful in learning them, nor do they involve us in superstition, or enervate us by luxury, if they only occupy our minds so far as not to stand in the way of more important objects to which they ought to be subservient.”<sup>39</sup>

Herein, Augustine gives examples of those things we may borrow from the pagans, such as coinage, honest forms of economic trade, and dress that maintains gender distinction. He prefers music over “theatrical trumpery,” and he has little use for the sculptures and fictional works produced by the pagans. He rejects the entertainment culture as “superfluity and luxury,” in favor of communication devices that help us to provide for the needs and conveniences of life. All devices must help to the “understanding of Holy Scripture,” which Augustine understands to be the preeminent business of education.

In his study of this seminal work of Augustine, James W. Halporn noted Augustine’s shift in pedagogy especially in his work *On Christian Teaching*. “If he had once hoped to raise a Christian philosophy on scaffolding supplied by the disciplinary categories of pagan intellectual culture, by the time he undertook this work, he

39. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Book 2.28, 38, 39, 40.

had come to believe in the theoretical autonomy of a Christian education centered on the Bible.”<sup>40</sup>

#### JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347-407 A.D.)

One of the most complete documents on child training and education that can be found in all of ancient literature is John Chrysostom’s *The Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children*.

Chrysostom addressed parents almost exclusively. Although he mentioned a “tutor” in several places, he recognized the parents as responsible for their children’s education, and their role was primary in his mind.

“To each of you fathers and mothers I say, just as we see artists fashioning their paintings and statues with great precision, so we must care for these wondrous statues of ours. Painters when they have set the canvas on the easel paint on it day by day to accomplish their purpose. Sculptors, too, working in marble, proceed in a similar manner; they remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking. Even so must you proceed. Like the creators of statues do you give all your leisure to fashioning these wondrous statues for God? And, as you remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking, inspect them day by day, to see what good qualities nature has supplied so that you will increase them, and what faults so that you will

40. Halporn, 32.

eradicate them. And, first of all, take the greatest care to banish licentious speech; for love of this above all frets the souls of the young. Before he is of an age to try it, teach thy son to be sober and vigilant and to shorten sleep for the sake of prayer... ”<sup>41</sup>

This famed preacher of 5th-century Byzantium placed biblical virtue far above academics:

“In our own day every man takes the greatest pains to train his boy in the arts and in literature and speech. But to exercise this child’s soul in virtue, so that no man any longer pays heed. I shall not cease exhorting and begging and supplicating you before all else to discipline your sons from the first. If thou dost care for thy son, show it thus, and in other ways too thou wilt have thy reward.”<sup>42</sup>

Chrysostom had little or nothing to say about training in academics, since faith and character were preeminent in his Christian view of education. He concluded his dissertation with a laser-like focus on the master principle, which is of course Proverbs 1:7.

“There is something more. Let us go to the master principle which keeps everything under control. To what do I allude? I mean wisdom. Here great labor is needed to render him sagacious and to banish all folly. This is the great and wondrous

41. John Chrysostom, *An Address on Vainglory and The Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children*, trans. Max L.W. Laistner (Cornell University Press, 1951)

42. Ibid.



function of philosophy, that he may know God and all the treasure laid up in Heaven, and Hell and the kingdom of the other world. 'Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 1:7).

"Let us then implant in him this wisdom and let us exercise him therein, that he may know the meaning of human desires, wealth, reputation, power, and may disdain these and strive after the highest. And let us bring words of exhortation to his mind: 'My child, fear God alone and fear none other but Him. . .

"By this means he will be a man of good understanding and charm; for nothing is as productive of folly as those passions. The fear of God and the power of forming such a judgment of human affairs as it behooves us to have are sufficient for wisdom. The summit of wisdom is refusal to be excited at childish things. So let him be taught to think nothing of wealth or worldly reputation or power or death or the present life on Earth. So will he be sagacious. If we lead him to the bridal chamber with a training such as this, consider how great a gift he will be to the bride."<sup>43</sup>

Elsewhere Chrysostom wrote, "Every house should be a church, and every head of a family a spiritual shepherd, remembering the account which he must give even for his children and servants."<sup>44</sup> Before the

43. Ibid.

44. Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 3:545.

breakdown of the family in the Western World and the weakening of shepherding in the modern church, there were no Sunday Schools and Youth Groups. Parental discipleship as Chrysostom described was normative.

From Chrysostom's 21st Homily on Ephesians 6:4, we find more of this well-developed conception of a Christian education, as contrasted with the worldly form.

“If from the very first [your son] is taught to be a lover of true wisdom, then wealth greater than all wealth has he acquired and a more imposing name. You will effect nothing so great by teaching him an art, and giving him that outward learning by which he will gain riches, as if you teach him the art of despising riches. If you desire to make him rich, do this. For the rich man is not he who desires great riches, and is encircled with great riches; but the man who has need of nothing. Discipline your son in this, teach him this. This is the greatest riches. Seek not how to give him reputation and high character in outward learning, but consider deeply how you shall teach him to despise the glory that belongs to this present life. By this means would he become more distinguished and more truly glorious. This it is possible for the poor man and the rich man alike to accomplish. These are lessons which a man does not learn from a master, nor by art, but by means of the divine oracles. Seek not how he shall enjoy a long life here, but how he shall

enjoy a boundless and endless life hereafter. Give him the great things, not the little things. Hear what Paul says, 'Bring them up in the chastening and admonition of the Lord;' study not to make him an orator, but train him up to be a philosopher [lover of true wisdom]. In the want of the one there will be no harm whatever; in the absence of the other, all the rhetoric in the world will be of no advantage. Tempers are wanted, not talking; character, not cleverness; deeds, not words. These gain a man the kingdom. These confer what are benefits indeed. Whet not his tongue, but cleanse his soul. I do not say this to prevent your teaching him these things, but to prevent your attending to them exclusively. Do not imagine that the monk alone stands in need of these lessons from Scripture. Of all others, the children just about to enter into the world specially need them. For just in the same way as the man who is always at anchor in harbor, is not the man who requires his ship to be fitted out and who needs a pilot and a crew, but he who is always out at sea; so is it with the man of the world and the monk. The one is entered as it were into a waveless harbor, and lives an untroubled life, and far removed from every storm; while the other is ever on the ocean, and lives out at sea in the very midst of the ocean, battling with billows without number.

"And though he may not need it himself, still he ought to be so prepared as to stop the mouths of others. Thus the more distinguished he is in the

present life, so much the more he stands in need of this education. If he passes his life in courts, there are many heathens, and philosophers, and persons puffed up with the glory of this life. It is like a place full of dropsical people. Such in some sort is the court. All are, as it were, puffed up, and in a state of inflammation. And they who are not so are studying to become so. Now then reflect how vast a benefit it is, that your son on entering there, should enter like an excellent physician, furnished with instruments which may allay every one's peculiar inflammation, and should go up to every one, and converse with him, and restore the diseased body to health, applying the remedies derived from the Scriptures, and pouring forth discourses of the true philosophy...

“For if a set of Greeks, men worthless as they are, and dogs, by taking up that worthless philosophy of theirs (for such the Grecian philosophy is), or rather not itself but only its mere name, and wearing the threadbare cloak, and letting their hair grow, impress many; how much more will he who is a true philosopher? If a false appearance, if a mere shadow of philosophy at first sight so catches us, what if we should love the true and pure philosophy? Will not all court it, and entrust both houses, and wives, and children, with full confidence to such men? But there is not, no, there is not such a philosopher existing now. And therefore, it is not possible to find an example of the sort.”<sup>45</sup>

45. John Chrysostom, “Homily XXI”, *The Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers: Series 1*, ed. Phillip Schaff, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, et. al. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 13:153-157.

Briefly, here is the synopsis of this great 5th century teacher's words on the matter of Christian education:

1. The goal of education is not to ensure one's child receives a good job and great monetary success later in life. This is the wrong motivation for parents and students alike.

2. The Word of God is the source of all true Wisdom. This is the true philosophy. In the minds of these Church Fathers, there is no Thomistic distinction between a philosophical knowledge based upon human wisdom and sacred knowledge based on Holy Scripture.

3. The focus in a Christian education is character and deeds (life-integrated action), not academics and words.<sup>46</sup>

4. The most devastating character flaw in a young student is academic pride. Modern empires in business, entertainment, politics, and education are built on human pride, as those who are "puffed up with the glory of this life." For Chrysostom and all Christians, the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge in education.

5. The writings and philosophies of the Greeks are largely worthless. Avoid the rhetoric of the Greeks as well.

46. For a modern defense of this theory of education, cf. Kevin Swanson, *Upgrade: 10 Secrets to the Best Education for Your Child*.

6. Parents are directly responsible for the form and quality of the education provided their children. They are responsible for the spiritual nurture of their children as well. Chrysostom's exhortations relating to children are exclusively directed to parents.

How many of these principles will be found on the brochures of those schools offering education to Christian families today? Will Christian classical schools glean from this wisdom? Certainly, these men have more wisdom for us than John Dewey, Horace Mann, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the other modern philosophers who developed the new forms of humanist education for the modern world.

#### BASIL (330-379 A.D.)

Often quoted as one of the only Church Fathers who recommends some familiarity with pagan literature, the Cappadocian father, Basil, qualifies his recommendations by carefully discerning between the good and the base.

“To begin with the poets, since their writings are of all degrees of excellence, you should not study all of their poems without omitting a single word. When they recount the words and deeds of good men, you should both love and imitate them, earnestly emulating such conduct. But when they portray base conduct, you must flee from them and stop up your ears, as Odysseus is said to have fled past the song of the sirens, for familiarity with evil

writings paves the way for evil deeds. Therefore the soul must be guarded with great care, lest through our love for letters it receive some contamination unawares, as men drink in poison with honey. We shall not praise the poets when they scoff and rail, when they represent fornicators and winebibbers, when they define blissfulness by groaning tables and wanton songs. Least of all shall we listen to them when they tell us of their gods, and especially when they represent them as being many, and not at one among themselves. For, among these gods, at one time brother is at variance with brother, or the father with his children; at another, the children engage in truceless war against their parents. The adulteries of the gods and their amours, and especially those of the one whom they call Zeus, chief of all and most high, things of which one cannot speak, even in connection with brutes, without blushing, we shall leave to the stage. I have the same words for the historians, and especially when they make up stories for the amusement of their hearers. And certainly we shall not follow the example of the rhetoricians in the art of lying. For neither in the courts of justice nor in other business affairs will falsehood be of any help to us Christians, who, having chosen the straight and true path of life, are forbidden by the gospel to go to law. But on the other hand we shall receive gladly those passages in which they praise virtue or condemn vice. . . .”<sup>47</sup>

47. Basil, “Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature,” [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/basil\\_litterature01.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/basil_litterature01.htm)

Thus, there are points at which the Christian student should flee from these pagan poets and stop up his ears so as not to fellowship with “the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:15). Basil is rightly concerned that “familiarity with evil writings will pave the way for evil deeds.” His endorsement of the pagans is well qualified and ought to be carefully noted.

According to Basil, the stories, the gymnastics, and the military practice were all preparatory and metaphorical for the real spiritual battle of life:

“Into the life eternal the Holy Scriptures lead us, which teach us through divine words. But so long as our immaturity forbids our understanding their deep thought, we exercise our spiritual perceptions upon profane writings, which are not altogether different, and in which we perceive the truth as it were in shadows and in mirrors. Thus we imitate those who perform the exercises of military practice, for they acquire skill in gymnastics and in dancing, and then in battle reap the reward of their training. We must needs believe that the greatest of all battles lies before us, in preparation for which we must do and suffer all things to gain power. Consequently we must be conversant with poets, with historians, with orators, indeed with all men who may further our soul’s salvation. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Thus, at least one Church Father did not altogether forbid the study of the pagan writers, as long as it was

48. Ibid.



found useful to guide Christians on their journey to heaven.

“Therefore the soul must be guarded with great care, lest through our love for letters it receive some contamination unawares, as men drink in poison with honey.”<sup>49</sup>

His concern is that the poison of the world is mixed in with the honey of truth. One must apply a thin-bladed scalpel with great care, otherwise the risk of contamination is great, according to this Church Father. “Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to God?” This seems to be the question on the minds of the majority of Church Fathers who took the time to write on education.

#### CASSIODORUS (485-585 A.D.)

Cassiodorus was an important figure in the monasteries (the Christian adult training centers) of the early Frontier Age. Serving first as a Roman Senator during the administration of the Ostrogoths, he later formed the Monastery at Vivarium. More importantly for the purposes of this research, Cassiodorus summed up his philosophy of education in his work, *Institutiones Divinarum et Saecularium Litterarum* (Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning).

In this magnum opus, Cassiodorus concluded, “Secular writings should not be rejected. It is right however, as

49. Ibid.

Divine Scripture says, to ‘meditate on the law day and night,’ because from time to time we gain from secular letters commendable knowledge of some matters, but from divine law we gain eternal life.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, he found secular writings helpful as long as the Christian mind was thoroughly absorbed in the Scriptures. He encouraged a quick “pass through” the secular letters,<sup>51</sup> acknowledging that the great philosophers were “unable to reach the source of wisdom and without the true light have been submerged in the blindness of ignorance.”<sup>52</sup> Cassiodorus said it is essential to “remain in the law of God” in order not to be blinded by the ignorance of the pagans.<sup>53</sup> He insisted on maintaining the strict priority of holding Scripture above all other studies, “referring everything to the glory of the Creator.”<sup>54</sup>

For those simple brothers who did not desire to pursue much of the secular studies, Cassiodorus exhorted that they study the Scriptures and the “holy Fathers” first.<sup>55</sup> The whole purpose of education is to understand divine law, “to reach in the companionship of the Lord, true faith and holy works in which our life is eternal.”<sup>56</sup>

50. Cassiodorus, *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul*, trans. James W. Halporn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 230.

51. *Ibid.* 160.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.* 230.

55. *Ibid.* 159.

56. *Ibid.*

Cassiodorus' entire first volume recommended specific curriculum for Christian institutions of higher education. This curriculum began with the Bible, and warned against changing the grammar of Scripture, in spite of the "rules of Latin idiom."<sup>57</sup> He also placed great emphasis on studying commentaries of each book of the Bible, adding to this a reading list of Jerome, Ambrose, Eusebius, Augustine, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and some others. He warned about the errors of Pelagius and the Donatists, and he advised careful study of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>58</sup>

Cassiodorus gladly admitted that the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ are incomprehensible to the human mind, yet are "delights to Christians," and are to be regarded with "much awe."<sup>59</sup> This is important to a Christian worldview. If the most basic constituent of a Christian education lies in epistemology, Cassiodorus' child-like faith in the incomprehensibilities of the one and the many (the doctrine of the Trinity) is encouraging. As for the study of history, he recommended Augustine's *City of God*, and the authors Eusebius, Josephus, Orosius, and Jerome. He made only one mention of the pagan historian Livy in order to point out that Christians must use great discretion when copying his "style." It is significant that Cassiodorus stayed away from historians who mainly chronicled the history of the city of man.

57. Ibid. 141.

58. Ibid. 147.

59. Ibid. 231.

Although in Book 2 of his *Institutions* Cassiodorus commended the “methodological” studies of Arithmetic, Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectic (logic), Mathematics, Music, Geometry, and Astronomy, he refused to endorse the study of the poets, the fables, and the historical writings of the pagans.

In his *Explanation of the Psalms*, Cassiodorus argued that many secular disciplines and methods found in education originated in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>60</sup> Thus, he found value in studying the Scriptures as the source of knowledge—both theological and methodological (also called “grammatical knowledge”). Secular handbooks become merely supplemental in the process. In his own words, “It is well-known that, at the beginning of spiritual wisdom, information on these subjects [arts and disciplines of the liberal studies], was sowed, as it were, that secular teachers afterwards wisely transferred to their own rules as I have perhaps shown at suitable places in my Psalms Commentary.”<sup>61</sup>

## EUROPEAN MISSIONARY AGE

During the European missionary age (475 A.D. - 1100 A.D.), as Christian discipleship spread across Europe, a truly Christian culture developed. Until the first university revived Greek thinking and learning in the latter half of the 11th century, Christians (whether Eastern, Western, or Culdean) focused their disciple-

60. Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, vol. 3., trans. P.G. Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1990)

61. Cassiodorus, *Institutions*, 108.

ship in monasteries. The role of the Culdeans in the evangelization of Europe must not be underestimated. Wylie writes concerning the monastery on Iona:

“It is certain that celibacy was not the rule either in Iona or in any of the later establishments which sprang from it. In the Culdee establishment of St. Andrews the father was succeeded in office by the son during thirteen generations. The author of the *History of the See of Dunkeld* tells us that ‘the Culdees had wives after the manner of the Eastern Church.’ In the houses which Columba founded in Ireland marriage was had in honour among the brotherhood by which they were served, and the right of hereditary succession was recognized. In the diocese of Armagh, son succeeded father during fifteen generations. Moreover, the office of abbot came to be hereditary, descending from father to son, a thing impossible if celibacy had been the law of the community.”<sup>62</sup>

The Iona monastic discipline required assemblies for Psalms and prayers six times a day. The men were mainly taken up with copying books of the Bible during their tenure there, the Psalms playing a prominent part of the Culdean liturgy.

“In other offices of the night from October to February, they were to sing thirty-six psalms and twelve anthems at three several times; through the rest of the year, twenty-one psalms and eight anthems; but on Saturday and Sabbath nights,

62. J.A. Wylie, *History of the Scottish Nation* (London: Hamilton, 1886), 287.

twenty-five psalms and as many anthems.”<sup>63</sup>

In the year 1150 A.D., a library of books from the Culdean learning center of Lochleven was discovered, and the list follows:

- Books of Ecclesiastical Order
- The Acts of the Apostles
- The Text of the Gospels
- The Three Books of Solomon
- Glossaries on the Song of Solomon
- Works of Origen, St. Bernard
- Exposition of Genesis
- A Dictionary <sup>64</sup>

Conspicuously missing in this list are secular books. Although there are fragments of evidence that the Irish had access to the pagan classics, the majority opinion held them in scorn. Aldhelm of Malmesbury (639-709 A.D.), himself trained in an Irish monastery wrote,

“What advantage does it bring to the sacrament of the orthodox faith to sweat over reading and studying the polluted lewdness of Proserpine, or

63. W. L. Alexander, *Iona: The Druids Isle* (Nashville: Redford, 1875), 91.

64. *Ibid.* 135-136.

Hermione, the wanton offspring of Menelaus and Helen, or the Lupercalia and the votaries of Priapus?"<sup>65</sup>

Of the most important missionary authors during this age, none was more essential than the Venerable Bede. George Brown's book, *A Companion to Bede*, describes something of the discipleship programs used during this period, the seventh and eighth centuries. Note that this education was not intended for children, but adult men.

Bede strongly discouraged the reading of pagan literature. In *De Arte Metrica* he mentions a volume by the poet Porphyry cited by Jerome that exemplifies various meters, but adds: "Because they were pagan, it was not permitted for us to touch them."<sup>66</sup>

"In the abbey school the two main disciplines were grammar and biblical exegesis, with some study of time reckoning and a bit of natural history and geography as a complement to the Bible."<sup>67</sup>

"There was no apparent reason why the monastic curriculum should provide anything more than the study of grammar (for the reading of the Bible and liturgy and composition of hagiography, history, and hymns, and for the correct writing of manuscripts), computus

65. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 158.

66. George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2009), 20.

67. *Ibid.* 21.

(for the reckoning of the church calendar and history), and the practical arts of music performance (for chanting the texts of Office and the Mass), as well as physical arts such as husbandry, agriculture, and domestic management.”<sup>68</sup>

Education in the monasteries mainly involved training in Scripture and training in a trade. These Christian “discipleship centers” were not trying to create mere academicians. For example, Article 48 in the Benedictine Rule (AD 529) stated, “Idleness is the great enemy of the soul, therefore the monks shall always be occupied, either in manual labor or in holy reading.”<sup>69</sup> Benedict required about nine hours of manual labor and two hours of reading from Scripture and other Christian literature on any given day.

This was the form of education that brought about a Christian civilization in the West over one thousand years. It was the secular universities of the 13th century that changed all of that.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian Church Fathers did not sharply distinguish between an academic education and a Christian discipleship. Generally, they frowned upon the use of classical, pagan literature as part of the paideia of a child. Many if not most of them would have repudi-

68. Ibid. 19.

69. “The Rule of St. Benedict,” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html#ch48>



ated its use for adults as well. They would have rejected outright the modern secular form of education that forbids even a tacit mention of the fear and worship of God in a classroom. According to the corpus of teaching from the first thousand years of Christ's church, this secular form would represent a different religion—a pagan faith. In summary, the basic tenets of a Christian education as defined by the wisdom of the most respected leaders of the Christian church in history are as follows:

1. The fear of God is absolutely fundamental to the Christian education.
2. Parents are primarily responsible for the education and Christian training of their young children.
3. Life integration is critical, and practical application of knowledge in some form of trade must be included in their training.
4. Faith and character is far more important than prideful knowledge and mere academic lessons. Teachers must be focused more on the matter of discipling the character of the student.
5. Secular literature and art is dangerous and must be approached with great caution, if at all.

Little or nothing is said of “Christian schools” for youngsters in any of the extant writings of the day. However, there are many exhortations directed towards

parents (especially among the early Church Fathers) to disciple their own children in the fear of God. Also conspicuously absent are references to Sunday Schools, day schools, or any kind of school whatsoever (with the exception of Origen and Clement's school in Alexandria for adults).

Nevertheless, a trained clergy was important for the early church through the Frontier Age, and John Calvin spoke of the training regimen in the *Institutes*:

“We have now reviewed the ministerial offices of the ancient Church. For others, of which ecclesiastical writers make mention, were rather exercises and preparations than distinct offices. These holy men, that they might leave a nursery of the Church behind them, received young men, who, with the consent and authority of their parents, devoted themselves to the spiritual warfare under their guardianship and training, and so formed them from their tender years, that they might not enter on the discharge of the office as ignorant novices. All who received this training were designated by the general name of Clerks. I could wish that some more appropriate name had been given them, for this appellation had its origin in error, or at least improper feeling, since the whole church is by Peter denominated κληρος (kleros), that is, the inheritance of the Lord (1 Pet. 5:3). It was in itself, however, a most sacred and salutary institution, that those who wished to devote themselves and their labor to the Church should be brought up under the charge of the bishop; so that no one

should minister in the Church unless he had been previously well trained, unless he had in early life imbibed sound doctrine, unless by stricter discipline he had formed habits of gravity and severer morals, been withdrawn from ordinary business, and accustomed to spiritual cares and studies. For as tyros in the military art are trained by mock fights for true and serious warfare, so there was a rudimental training by which they were exercised in clerical duty before they were actually appointed to office. First, then, they entrusted them with the opening and shutting of the church, and called them *Ostiaarii*. Next, they gave the name of *Acolytes* to those who assisted the bishop in domestic services, and constantly attended him, first, as a mark of respect; and, secondly, that no suspicion might arise. Moreover, that they might gradually become known to the people, and recommend themselves to them, and at the same time might learn to stand the gaze of all, and speak before all, that they might not, when appointed presbyters, be overcome with shame when they came forward to teach, the office of reading in the desk was given them. In this way they were gradually advanced, that they might prove their carefulness in separate exercises, until they were appointed subdeacons. All I mean by this is, that these were rather the rudimentary exercises of tyros than functions which were accounted among the true ministries of the Church.<sup>70</sup>

70. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 4.4.9.

This pastoral training involved a guardianship, training, or mentoring within the context of the local church. By this approach, the character of the young person was known by the bishop, and personal accountability and discipleship was the norm. Large secular universities and seminaries were not used by the early church for the training of ministers.

If the 21st-century church will ever reform in the West, there will no doubt be something of a return to a relational, local mentorship of young pastors, such as that which the early church practiced.

#### THE REFORMATION AND PURITAN AGE

After the humanist incursions of the Scholastics and others contributed to the rise of the humanist universities and the breakdown of the faith, the Reformation came. Although many of the Reformers were trained in universities that had conscientiously declared philosophical knowledge to be distinct and separate from sacred knowledge—many, if not all of them, came to regret this form of education.

Toward the end of his life, John Knox voiced concerns about the universities: “Above all, preserve the kirk from the bondage of the universities.”<sup>71</sup> To his credit, Martin Luther served as the prophet for Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and a thousand other secular colleges when he wrote:

“I am much afraid that the universities will prove

71. John Knox, *Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1895), 6:619.

to be the great gates of hell, unless they diligently labour in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.”<sup>72</sup>

Could he have imagined that Yale Sex Week would glorify incest and prostitution in 2013?<sup>73</sup>

Martin Luther is known for his dislike for Aristotle (and by implication, Thomas Aquinas’s endorsement of Aristotle’s “natural philosophy”). Luther wrote,

“My soul longs for nothing so ardently as to expose and publicly shame that Greek buffoon, who like a spectre has befooled the Church. If Aristotle had not lived in the flesh I should not hesitate to call him a devil.”<sup>74</sup>

Luther continued,

“The schoolmen had forced the contents of divine revelation into the thought forms of the Aristotelian philosophy. In course of time they had borrowed from him not only the dialectical forms, but also his definitions and principles. Aristotle had behaved himself as the proverbial camel. At first the schoolmen had allowed him to protrude

72. quoted in J. H. Merle D’Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1846), 190.

73. <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/yale-hosts-sex-week-explore-sexual-culture-including-incest-and-prostitution>

74. Martin Luther, “Letter to John Lang at Erfurt, February 8, 1517”, *Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 25.

his nose into the tent of Christian theology. He had ended by forcing his way in completely. Philosophy at first had acted as the handmaid of theology, but finally became its mistress. Hagar had usurped Sarah's place. The teaching of the Church had been corrupted by a rationalism, in which Aristotle had been permitted to sit in judgment on Christ and the Apostles... The greatest part of my cross is to be forced to see brothers with brilliant minds, born for useful studies, compelled to spend their lives and waste their labor in these follies."<sup>75</sup>

Luther's "Sermon on Keeping Children in School" provides a glimpse into his "theory of education:"

"They ought at least to read, write, and understand Latin, for we need not only highly learned doctors and masters of Holy Scripture but also ordinary pastors who will teach the gospel and the catechism to the young and ignorant, and baptize and administer the sacrament. That they may be incapable of doing battle with heretics is unimportant. For a good building we need not only hewn facings but also backing stone. In like manner we must also have sacristans and other persons who serve and help in relation to the office of preaching and the word of God."<sup>76</sup>

Here, Luther explained the purpose of education as preparing pastors and fathers who would better rule

75. Ibid.

76. Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School", <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/lutherantheology.lutherchildreninschool.html>

their homes and disciple their children in the Word of God. It seems that Luther considered schooling important for preparing a reserve of pastors to better serve the church of Christ. This was the essence of a “higher” education, in Luther’s view.

“Even though a boy who has studied Latin should afterward learn a trade and become a craftsman, he still stands as a ready reserve in case he should be needed as a pastor or in some other service of the word. Neither will such knowledge hurt his capacity to earn a living. On the contrary, he can rule his house all the better because of it, and besides, he is prepared for the office of preacher or pastor if he should be needed there. It is especially easy in our day to train persons for teaching the gospel and the catechism because not only Holy Scripture but also knowledge of all kinds is so abundant, what with so many books, so much reading, and, thank God, so much preaching that one can learn more now in three years than was formerly possible in twenty.”<sup>77</sup>

Although innocent in his intentions, it seems that Martin Luther was one of the first to open the door to state control and funding of education in the modern age (even before Jean-Jacques Rousseau). This is manifest in his letter to the mayors and aldermen of Germany:

“The right instruction of youth is a matter in which Christ and all the world are concerned. Thereby

77. Ibid.

are we all aided. And consider that great Christian zeal is needed to overcome the silent, secret and artful machinations of the devil. If we must annually expend large sums on muskets, roads, bridges, dams, and the like, in order that the city may have temporal peace and comfort, why should we not apply as much to our poor, neglected youth, in order that we may have a skillful schoolmaster or two?”<sup>78</sup>

Little could Luther imagine what secularists would do with the power of the state to gain almost total control over the minds of the populace in the 20th and 21st centuries! Well-intentioned though he may have been, the fierce persecution against homeschoolers in Germany to this day may have its roots in the seeds planted at the Reformation.

#### WILLIAM TYNDALE (1494-1536 A.D.)

The English Reformer William Tyndale placed the responsibility of child discipleship at the feet of parents:

“Fathers move not your children unto wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and information of the Lord. . . Teach them to know Christ and set God's ordinance before them saying: son or daughter, God hath created thee and made thee

78. Martin Luther, “Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany in behalf of Christian Schools,”  
[http://www.holybible.com/resources/living\\_learning/autumn\\_1997/letters\\_mayors.htm](http://www.holybible.com/resources/living_learning/autumn_1997/letters_mayors.htm)



through us thy father and mother, and at his commandment have we so long thus kindly brought thee up and kept thee from all perils: he hath commanded thee also to obey us saying: child obey thy father and thy mother. If thou meekly obey, so shall thou grow both in the favour of God and man and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If thou wilt not obey us at his commandment: then are we charged to correct thee, yea, and if thou repent not and amend thyself; God shall slay thee by his officers or punish thee everlastingly.”<sup>79</sup>

Tyndale was also insistent that parents be consulted concerning their children's marriages: “Let them teach their children to ask marriages of their fathers and mothers. . . .”<sup>80</sup>

The *1599 Geneva Bible* instructed fathers in the same manner, “Masters in their houses ought to be as preachers to their families, that from the highest to the lowest they may obey the will of God.”<sup>81</sup>

William Tyndale was particularly annoyed with the university training available to divinity students in the 16th century. Evidently, the rise of humanism was as much of a concern to these early reformers as was the perversion of the truths of Scripture. Tyndale wrote in his 1530 work “The Practice of Prelates,”

79. William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 59-60.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *1599 Geneva Bible*, Marginal Note on Genesis 17:23.

“And in the universities, they have ordained that no man shall look in the Scriptures until he be noselled [nursed] in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of Scripture.”<sup>82</sup>

What would Tyndale think of the K-12 schools, universities, and seminaries today?

### JOHN CALVIN’S ACADEMY

John Calvin did not issue a blanket recommendation to read the profane authors, but he did find it essential to recognize talent as a true gift from God.

“Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to Him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver. How, then, can we deny that truth must have beamed on those ancient lawgivers who arranged civil order and discipline with so much equity? Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skillful description of nature, were blind? Shall we deny the possession of

82. quoted in David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 37.

intellect to those who drew up rules for discourse, and taught us to speak in accordance with reason? Shall we say that those who, by the cultivation of the medical art, expended their industry in our behalf were only raving? What shall we say of the mathematical sciences? Shall we deem them to be the dreams of madmen? Nay, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration; an admiration which their excellence will not allow us to withhold. But shall we deem anything to be noble and praiseworthy, without tracing it to the hand of God? Far from us be such ingratitude; an ingratitude not chargeable even on heathen poets, who acknowledged that philosophy and laws, and all useful arts were the inventions of the gods. Therefore, since it is manifest that men whom the Scriptures term carnal, are so acute and clear-sighted in the investigation of inferior things, their example should teach us how many gifts the Lord has left in possession of human nature, notwithstanding of its having been despoiled of the true good.”<sup>83</sup>

While complementing the natural abilities of the great philosophers and writers, John Calvin admitted that the content of their writings had been “despoiled of the true good.” Therefore, he did not recommend that students read their works. However, he did commend pagans for their research into medical science and the development of the mathematical sciences. He also

83. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 2.2.15.

noted that unbelieving authors were quite adept at describing human nature.

Calvin's Academy in Geneva consisted of a "schola privata" as a prep school (for young boys), and "schola publica" as a seminary for the preparation of pastors. The assigned readings for the upper grades in the schola privata included Cicero, Virgil and Livy.<sup>84</sup> This should come as no surprise, since the humanist universities had revived pagan classical education in the 12th century, and the Reformers had subsequently failed to make a break from it. Every university, including the Geneva Academy, was quickly ruined by these pagan seeds. Our own Harvard and Yale Universities followed this pattern in the 17th and 18th centuries as well.

In 1618-1619 The Synod of Dordt produced a resolution in the 17th session concerning the Christian instruction of children:

"The office of parents is diligently to instruct their children and their whole household in the principles of the Christian religion, in a manner adapted to their respective capacities; earnestly and carefully to admonish them to the cultivation of true piety; to engage their punctual attendance on family worship, and take them with them to the hearing of the Word of God. They should require

84. Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim Life* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2009), 239.

Hugh Young Reyburn, *John Calvin: His Life, Letters, and Works* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 286-287.

their children to give an account of the sermons they hear, especially those on the Catechism; assign them some chapters of Scripture to read, and certain passages to commit to memory; and then impress and illustrate the truths contained in them in a familiar manner, adapted to the tenderness of youth. Thus they are to prepare them for being catechised in the schools, and by attendance on these to encourage them and promote their edification. Parents are to be exhorted to the faithful discharge of this duty, by the public preaching of the Word; but specially at the ordinary period of family visitation, previous to the administration of the Lord's Supper, and also at other times by the minister, elders, etc. Parents who profess religion, and are negligent in this work, shall be faithfully admonished by the ministers; and, if the case requires it, they shall be censured by the Consistory, that they may be brought to the discharge of their duty."<sup>85</sup>

The Synod required pastors to follow up with sermons appropriate to “the comprehension of children as well as adults, as well as with regular visitation to the homes offering “suitable questions and answers, adapted to the apprehension of each individual.” The home visits on the part of the shepherds appear to be family integrated and complementary to the family’s work.

Also the Synod recommended 2-day-a-week schools

85. *History of the School of the Collegiate Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York from 1633 to 1883* (New York: Aldine Press, 1883), 4-5.

in which the children would be taught the catechisms, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and so forth.

The Westminster Assembly produced a Directory for Family Worship for millions of Christian families that took part in the Protestant Reformation in England, Scotland, and America in the early 17th century. There is no mention of Sunday Schools, Youth Groups, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or day schools. Rather, the responsibility was placed upon parents to instruct their children daily in the Word. To assure that there would be follow-through with family discipleship, the Westminster Assembly required strict oversight for member families in the churches:

“And, to the end that these directions may not be rendered ineffectual and unprofitable among some, through the usual neglect of the very substance of the duty of Family-worship, the Assembly doth further require and appoint ministers and ruling elders to make diligent search and enquiry, in the congregations committed to their charge respectively, whether there be among them any family or families which use to neglect this necessary duty; and if any such family be found, the head of the family is to be first admonished privately to amend his fault; and, in case of his continuing therein, he is to be gravely and sadly reproofed by the session; after which reproof, if he be found still to neglect Family-worship, let him be, for his obstinacy in such an offence, suspended and debarred from the

Lord's supper, as being justly esteemed unworthy to communicate therein, till he amend."<sup>86</sup>

A century after Calvin, some of the Puritans came to see the synthesis of humanism in the Christian universities and seminaries of their day. But alas, it was too little, too late.

An early Puritan writer, William Gouge warned parents against sending their children off to a school for "temporal benefit," where they pick up the wrong religion. He interpreted this as trading the child's soul for a "good education."

"Most parents care only for the temporal and civil good of their children: so their children may be well fed and clothed, and brought up in some profitable calling, whereby they may well maintain themselves in this world, little thought is had, or care taken for their spiritual life in this world, or eternal life in the world to come. Wherein are these parents better than heathen? *Job* was otherwise minded: he was more careful for their souls than for their bodies. . . Many are so far from teaching piety, as they teach their children profaneness, pride, riot, lying, deceit, and such like principles of the devil. It had been better for such children to have lived among wild beasts, than under such parents. As the children hereby are thrust headlong to hell, so their blood shall be required of

86. "Directory for Family Worship," [http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf\\_standards/index.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_standards/index.html)

their parents. . .Others think it enough that their children be taught a religion, but what religion it skilleth not. Such are they as having rich kindred but popish, commend their children to the education of such kindred, in hope of some temporal benefit, that their children may reap from them. If they were as careless of their children's bodies, they would be accounted little better than murderers: and is not the soul more precious than the body?"<sup>87</sup>

Richard Baxter complained of "Christian academies," which we interpret to mean the universities of his day. He wrote:

"It is a grand error, and of dangerous consequence in Christian academies, (pardon the censure from one so unfit to pass it, seeing the necessity of the case commandeth it), that they study the creature before the Redeemer, and set themselves to physics, and metaphysics, and mathematics, before they set themselves to theology; whereas no man that hath not the vitals of theology, is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology must lay the foundation, and then lead the way in all our studies..."<sup>88</sup>

Thomas Aquinas would have shuddered to read such a bold statement! Baxter insisted on a full integration of sacred knowledge and education in the sciences. He continues:

87. William Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, Ed. Greg Fox (Lulu, 2006), 391-392.

88. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 58.



“If God must be searched after, in our search of the creature, (and we must affect no separated knowledge of them) then tutors must read God to their pupils in all; and divinity must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the life, the all, of their studies. Our physics and metaphysics must be reduced to theology; and nature must be read as one of God's books, which is purposely written for the revelation of himself.”<sup>89</sup>

In his brief instructions concerning covenant children in the church, he exhorted the pastors to promote “family religion.” Nothing is said about children's ministries provided by the church.

“The life of religion and the welfare and glory of both the Church and the State, depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we undo all. . . I beseech you, therefore, if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people, do all you can to promote family religion. . . you are not like to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation.”<sup>90</sup>

Baxter called for pastors to hold fathers (or the “masters”) accountable to prayer and reading of Scripture. Should the father neglect this, the pastor should labor to convince such “of their sin.”<sup>91</sup> After church services, “the master of every family [should] cause his children and servants to repeat the Catechism

89. *Ibid.* 58-59.

90. *Ibid.* 100.

91. *Ibid.*

to him. . . and to give him some account of what they have heard at church during the day.”<sup>92</sup>

In his *Practical Directory*, Baxter also identified one of the key dangers of public schooling: peer-contact, especially among younger children. “Keep your children as much as may be from ill company... It is one of the greatest dangers for the undoing of children in the world; especially when they are sent to common schools; for there is scarce any of those schools so good, but hath many rude and ungodly ill taught children in it.”<sup>93</sup>

Since then, many Christian families have found this to be a more pressing concern than ungodly instruction. Among the problems that plague Christian families in the present era, this may be the most endemic. While the wrong view of reality, ethics, and truth are conveyed regularly to children in the public schools, the vast majority of these students are hardly paying attention. It is the popular culture that is transferred to children through peer contact that is most harmful. Modern Christian parents would do well to heed Baxter’s warning.

## JOHN BUNYAN

The non-conformist pastor and writer, John Bunyan directs the Ephesians 6:4 mandate particularly to fathers in his book “Christian Behavior.”

92. Ibid. 101.

93. Richard Baxter, *Practical Works*, Chapter 10, Directive 15.

“As touching the spiritual state of his family, [the father] should be very diligent and circumspect, doing his utmost endeavor both to increase faith where it is begun, and to begin it where it is not. For this reason, he should diligently and frequently lay before his household such things of God out of His Word as are suitable for such a practice. . . Take heed that you do not neglect family duties among them yourself—as reading the Word and prayer. . . Do not allow any ungodly, profane, or heretical books or discourse in your house. ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’ (1 Cor. 15:33). I mean such profane or heretical books, etc., that either tend to provoke looseness of life or such as do oppose the fundamentals of the gospel.”<sup>94</sup>

When Increase Mather took the presidency of Harvard in the 1680s, he lamented that “many Preachers in these days have hardly any other Discourses in their Pulpits than what we may find in Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, or some Heathen Moralists. Christ, the Holy Spirit, and (in a word), the Gospel is not in their sermons.”<sup>95</sup> He attempted “to make scripture the sole guide in moral questions and ignore pagan ethical writing.”<sup>96</sup> Sadly, his efforts at reform were short lived, because Latitudinarians Leverett and Brattle gained

94. quoted in *A Theology of the Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, Ed. Jeff Pollard and Scott Brown (NCFIC: Wake Forest, 2014), 354, 356.

95. John Flavel, “England’s Duty,” *Increase Mather: A Bibliography of His Works*, ed. Thomas J. Holmes (Martino, 2003), 586-587.

96. Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 199.

control of Harvard by the turn of the 18th century. This became the story of almost every Christian university since the days of Thomas Aquinas.

### THE MODERN ERA

The modern church registered some opposition to the rising secular form of education following the Enlightenment in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This seems to have largely dissipated now. For the sake of history, however, it is wise to retain these well-placed quotes.

George Whitefield also registered strong concerns with the grammar schools used in England in his early years (which would have been the early part of the 18th century). It is doubtful that these schools were anywhere near as anti-Christian as modern schools produced by John Dewey and other secularists. Whitefield writes,

“When I was about twelve, I was placed at a school called St. Mary de Crypt, in Gloucester – the last grammar school I ever went to... And I cannot but here observe, with much concern of mind, how this way of training up youth has a natural tendency to debauch the mind, to raise ill passions and to stuff the memory with things as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as light to darkness, heaven to Hell. However, though the first thing I

had to repent of was my education in general..."<sup>97</sup>

The evangelical John Wesley issued strong warnings concerning sending Christian children to large public schools. These timely exhortations came as public schooling was turning towards secular humanism.

"Let it be remembered, that I do not speak to the wild, giddy, thoughtless world, but to those that fear God. I ask, then, for what end do you send your children to school? 'Why, that they may be fit to live in the world.' In which world do you mean,—this or the next? Perhaps you thought of this world only; and had forgot that there is a world to come; yea, and one that will last for ever! Pray take this into your account, and send them to such masters as will keep it always before their eyes. Otherwise, to send them to school (permit me to speak plainly) is little better than sending them to the devil. At all events, then, send your boys, if you have any concern for their souls, not to any of the large public schools, (for they are nurseries of all manner of wickedness), but private school, kept by some pious man, who endeavors to instruct a small number of children in religion and learning together."<sup>98</sup>

The famed Baptist pastor, Charles Spurgeon, as late as

97. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 1:48.

98. *The Sermons of John Wesley*, "On Family Religion," ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1872)

the 1890s saw the Sunday School movement as a stop-gap measure for negligent parents (and grandparents):

“Nowadays, the world has in it, alas, so few of Christian mothers and grandmothers, the church has thought it wise to supplement the instruction of home by teaching held under her fostering wing. Those children who have no such parents the church takes under her maternal care....They endeavor to perform the duties of fathers and mothers, for God's sake, to those children who are neglected by their own parents; and therein they do well. Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday-school is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for the Christian parents to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”<sup>99</sup>

The Princeton theologian Charles Hodge stands by the historical perspective on Christian education in this section from his commentary on Ephesians 6:4.

“This whole process of education is to be religious, and not only religious, but Christian. It is the nurture and admonition of the Lord which is the appointed and only effectual means of attaining the end of education. Where this means is neglected or any other substituted in its place, the result must be disastrous failure. The moral and religious element of our nature is just as essential and as universal as the intellectual. . .And as

99. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:15”

Christianity is the only true religion, and God in Christ the only true God, the only possible means of profitable education is the nurture and admonition of the Lord."<sup>100</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Charles Hodge's son, A.A. Hodge, issued a clarion call to Christians concerning the danger of a secular national education. Sadly, not many Christians heeded the warning.

"I am as sure as I am of Christ's reign that a comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separated from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove the most appalling enginery for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen."<sup>101</sup>

Another 20th century pastor and renowned Christian writer, Arthur W. Pink indicated some concern that Sabbath School teachers might displace parents in the Deuteronomy 6:6-7 mandate:

"[Fathers], it is your duty to instruct your children. 'And these words, which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and

100. Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1856), 360.

101. A.A. Hodge, "Lecture XII: The Kingly Office of Christ," *Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westcott and Thompson, 1887)

when thou risest up' (Deut. 6:6-7). This work is far too important to allocate to others: parents, and not Sabbath School teachers, are divinely required to educate their little ones. Nor is this to be an occasional or sporadic thing, but one that is to have constant attention."<sup>102</sup>

The well-esteemed Welsh clergyman of the 20th century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), used strong language to call modern parents back to their responsibilities:

"The bringing up of children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' is something that is to be done in the home and by the parents. This is the emphasis throughout the Bible. It is not something that is to be handed over to the school, however good the school may be. It is the duty of parents - their primary and most essential duty. I emphasize this because we are all well aware of what has been happening increasingly during this present century. More and more, parents have been transferring their responsibilities and their duties to the schools. . . The Bible's emphasis everywhere is that this is the primary duty and task of the parents. And it remains to this day."

Lloyd-Jones understood the unique challenges facing the modern Christian home (from secular media and aggressively anti-Christian education), and this

102. quoted in *A Theology of the Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life*, 346.



only further accentuates the crying need for parental discipleship:

“Children are being taught perverse things in the schools. They hear them on the wireless and see them on the television. The whole emphasis is anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-Christianity, anti-miraculous, and anti-supernatural. Who is going to counter these trends? That is precisely the business of parents - ‘Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.’ It demands great effort by the parents at the present time because the forces against us are so great. Christian parents today have this unusually difficult task of protecting their children against these powerful adverse forces that are trying to indoctrinate them.”<sup>103</sup>

While Western Christianity lost considerable ground to the humanist juggernaut in the 20th century, the Presbyterian J. Gresham Machen took the minority position, strongly protesting against a rising secular education system enforced by the state:

“Place the lives of children in their formative years, despite the convictions of their parents, under the intimate control of experts appointed by the state, force them then to attend schools where the higher aspirations of humanity are crushed out, and where the mind is filled with the materialism of the day, and it is difficult to see how even the remnants of liberty can subsist. Such a tyranny, supported as it is by a perverse technique used as

103. *Ibid.*, 282.

the instrument in destroying human souls, is certainly far more dangerous than the crude tyrannies of the past, which despite their weapons of fire and sword permitted thought at least to be free."<sup>104</sup>

Machen was well aware of the power of ideas presented in the wrong framework, in a false worldview, and the impact this would have on the Christian West.

"False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas. . . which prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."<sup>105</sup>

By the time he wrote his essays on education in the 1920s, Machen believed that modern public education in America had turned into something of a horrible monster: "By this purely secular, non-moral and non-religious training we produce not a real human being but a horrible Frankenstein, and we are beginning to shrink back from the product of our own hands."<sup>106</sup>

104. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 14.

105. J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review*, vol. 11 (1913), 7.

106. J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), 75.

## THE 21ST CENTURY BATTLE

The vision for a Christian education that was held by our church fathers was a far cry from the revolutionary, humanist form of education that defines 21st century education. By the 1960s, the U.S. Supreme Court decisions *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), and *Lee v. Weisman* (1992) officially classified expressions of the fear of God (or worship of God) in public school classrooms as illegal. Teachers explaining the marvelous character of the universe, the complexity of the human cell in the biology class, and the great wars and natural catastrophes in history, could render the sovereign God of the universe no credit for His works. They could not lift their hands in praise and prayer. They could no longer teach the fear of God as the beginning of knowledge in the Chemistry laboratory or during the field trip to the Planetarium. The students may have heard the heavens declare the glory of God. The rocks may have cried out. But the teachers were silent.

For John Dewey, the father of modern K-12 schools, education was the “fundamental method of social progress and reform... serving the cause of social unification.”<sup>107</sup> Another humanist who was influential in the development of modern education, H.H. Horne, called education “the process of evolution become conscious of itself.”<sup>108</sup> Harold Ordway Rugg wrote of a humanist school that was “truly society-centered

107. John Dewey, *Characters and Events*, 2:515.

108. H.H. Horne, *The Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 56.

as well as child-centered”<sup>109</sup> versus God-centered. Inevitably, these theories resulted in more anarchy, tyranny, and general social disintegration. The public school became the primary means of building the humanist state, an entity which proved itself to be counterproductive to the growth of the kingdom of God. Nothing in the wisdom of the Proverbs or the Church Fathers endorsed this manner of education.

Academic Thorstein Veblen repudiated practical learning and preparation for a calling, and another academic Robert Hutchins insisted on the “pursuit of truth for its own sake,” as set against “the preparation of men and women for their life work.”<sup>110</sup>

As stated on their website, the goal of the National Education Association is to develop the student’s “potential, independence, and character,” and to “succeed in an interdependent world.”<sup>111</sup> The U.S. Department of Education explains that the purpose of education is to see that “children are prepared for success in the 21st-century workforce.” John Chrysostom would have disagreed. There is nothing to be found on these websites about the fear of God as the beginning of knowledge. Instead, wealth, riches, and the maintenance of a socialist society are the goals of the humanist education model.

109. H.O. Rugg, *That Men May Understand* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1941), xi-xv.

110. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning In America* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957) and Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 33ff.

111. <http://www.nea.org/home/19583.htm>

The current Mission Statement on the Harvard University website quotes the 1650 charter with ample ellipses so as to avoid all references to the Scriptures, God, and Christ. Now Harvard's mission is "to create knowledge!" We read,

"Harvard seeks to identify and to remove restraints on students' full participation, so that individuals may explore their capabilities and interests and may develop their full intellectual and human potential. Education at Harvard should liberate students to explore, to create, to challenge, and to lead. The support the College provides to students is a foundation upon which self-reliance and habits of lifelong learning are built: Harvard expects that the scholarship and collegiality it fosters in its students will lead them in their later lives to advance knowledge, to promote understanding, and to serve society."<sup>112</sup>

This statement is thoroughly humanistic, with no similarities to the writings of the Church Fathers. The secular university system is apostate; it is radically opposed to the knowledge of Christ. One would have to search diligently to find any mention of Proverbs 1:7 on the website of any Christian school, much less any secular school. Secular and Christian schools alike plunge into pagan literature in the early grades, drawing very little distinction between Christian thought and pagan thought.

112. <http://www.harvard.edu/faqs/mission-statement>

## CONCLUSION

If parent-based instruction, the fear of God, practical training in a trade, education in the Holy Scriptures, and avoidance of secular literature are essential to a Christian view of education according to the most respected church fathers in history, what can we say about public education? What about Sunday Schools? What about Youth Groups? Do these things represent a move towards a Christian approach to child discipleship and education, or is it a move in the opposite direction? Is this what we find in classical schools? Is this what we find with children's programs in the average church today? What would Clement, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Ignatius, Barnabas, Eusebius, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, Bede, Martin Luther, Richard Baxter, George Whitefield, John Wesley, A.A. Hodge, and the rest say about the drift of the modern Christian church? Would they be satisfied with the practices of the modern Christian family? Would they be happy to see the television programs they watch, the schools they attend, the irregular pattern of Scripture study, etc.?

It would be refreshing to find the influence of Augustine, Jerome, Eusebius, Clement, and the *Didascalia* in the teaching of today's Christian churches. It would be a relief to find more churches, more Christian schools, and more Christian home schools speaking of the fear of God, the book of Proverbs, life-integrated learning, biblical character, parental involvement, the

dangers of the humanist goals of materialism and socialism, and the unhealthy influences of pagan literature. This would be refreshing because it would suggest the preservation of the faith for future generations. But is this to be found in the modern conception of Christian education with the typical church denomination?

Sunday Schools and Youth Groups came about as a result of the massive socio-economic shifts of the Modern Age (post 1800), and the decline of the faith in the West closely paralleled the growth of these programs. Now, thoughtful elders within the church are grappling with some serious questions. Have the socio-economic changes of the Modern Age detrimentally affected the family? Do Sunday Schools contribute to these detrimental effects? Have the traditions of men made the law of God of none effect? Many parents have noted the incipient weaknesses of peer-oriented, heavily age-segregated social settings, where the hearts of young people are formed more by their peer-groups than by mature teachers and parents. Many have discovered that pop-culture has borne great influence in these settings as well, and the result is immaturity that yields more immaturity, and foolishness that yields more foolishness.

By the latter part of the 19th century, the sage Presbyterian R.L. Dabney could see that the original intent of Sunday Schools had “invaded” and “superseded” the intent of God’s assigned means of grace for

the discipleship of children. Near the end of his life, he wrote,

“Your memorialists would represent to the General Assembly, that we have seen, with anxious concern, certain perversions and abuses which have silently crept into the Sabbath schools of our Church and country. The first of these perversions is an extensive wresting of these schools from their proper and legitimate scope as missionary measures for the children of neglectful and godless parents, into a substitute for the Christian family training of the children of parents professing godliness, by their own parents in their own homes. The good Robert Raikes, of Gloucester, England, is reputed to have invented such schools in the eighteenth century. His avowed purpose was to give Christian instruction, by this means, only to children of godless parents who received no Christian teaching in their homes. He sought his pupils in the streets, among such neglected children as were straying there on the Sabbath.

Had one proposed to him to do what is now so frequently done among us, viz.: to invade the homes of them professing godliness, and withdraw to his Sabbath school such children from the domestic tuition which their parents were giving them during the private hours of the holy day (which was then the universal custom of all Christian parents of decent repute), we presume that Raikes would have drawn back in astonishment and strong refusal. His missionary schools



were never designed to invade, supersede, this divinely appointed means of grace.”<sup>113</sup>

As late as 1854, a Presbyterian minister David Magie warned of day school or Sabbath school that might “supersede the necessity of kind and faithful home instruction.” These were only an “auxiliary to the efforts of the parlor and the fireside.”<sup>114</sup> The priority remains with the parents.

Many Christian parents and pastors alike are shamefully careless in their arrangement of the education of their children. They wrongfully separate the education of a child from the discipleship of a child. These parents neglect the responsibilities given to them in Deuteronomy 6:7, Ephesians 6:4, and Hebrews 3:13. Being that family worship and family discipleship are extremely rare practices in “Christian” households today, we must conclude there are few who love God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength (Deut. 6:4). Few take care to teach the children they love about the God they love, as they sit in the house, as they walk by the way, as they rise up, and as they lie down (Deut. 6:7).

Christians routinely displace the principle of God’s law with their own traditions, and practically every

113. R.L. Dabney, “A Memorial and Overture of the Synod of Texas to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, to meet in Macon, GA,” *Discussions*, (Sprinkle Publications, 1980), 5:336.

114. David Magie, “Children Blessed in their Parents,” *Home, the School and the Church* (Presbyterian Education Repository, 1854), 14.

successive generation has been worse than the previous. They ignore God's law because their hearts are far from God (Matt. 15:8). Their pastors find theological and pedagogical constructs to enable Christian parents' abdication.

This matter can be reduced to a call for discernment. Undiscerning pastors do not perceive there to be any problem with an education that refuses to acknowledge God as the source of reality, truth, and ethics—an education that disengages the fear of God from the study of history, science, and literature. Unwise pastors ignore the problem of 64% of children under six being “latchkey” kids.<sup>115</sup> Unconcerned pastors see nothing wrong with the social conditions of the dying family in America and the birth implosion of Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Undiscerning pastors ignore what the surveys tell us—that 95% of born-again parents have never even “tried” family worship. These pastors see no need to apply the passages of Hebrews 3:13, Deuteronomy 6:7, and Ephesians 6:4 to their congregations. They may be content with the present condition of the Christian faith in their churches.

Undiscerning pastors have always cried “Peace, Peace!” when there is no peace (Jer. 8:11). We have to wonder: if there were a “heart problem” in this country, would pastors detect it? If pastors were part of the problem themselves because they were failing to disciple their

115. cf. Mary Eberstadt, *Home-Along America: The Hidden Toll of Day Care, Behavioral Drugs, and Other Parent Substitutes* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

own children, would they acknowledge it? We may well wonder. There would be no need to look for a solution if there were no problem to begin with, and therefore there would be no need for repentance.

How would a pastor know if he had displaced the commandments of God with his own tradition (Matt. 15:6), especially if his heart was far from God (Matt. 15:8)? Perhaps this is the condition of many of the pastors in our “best” churches in the present day. Yet, we know that our Lord will sort it all out for us. If pastors have failed to discern, it is to their own Master that they rise or fall. If I, as a pastor and church shepherd, have discerned wrongly and reacted too abruptly, then my Master will correct me for this. In another forty years from now, we will see the results of the social, economic, cultural, and ecclesiastical breakdown of this country. The fire will burn, and the fire will tell. Some will have gold, silver, and precious stones, and some will see their wood, hay, and stubble burned to ashes (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

It is the pastor’s responsibility to call men and women to faith and repentance concerning the major sins of the day, whether they be sins of commission or omission. If parents offend the little ones that belong to Jesus, by subjecting them to unhealthy peer influence and ungodly teachers for long hours throughout the week, these parents may be subject to the “millstone treatment” (Matt. 18:6). These are deadly serious matters, not to be taken lightly by the leaders of the

church. Every church shepherd will be held accountable by the Chief Shepherd for how he cared for the lambs in his flock, and how he disciplined the families in his church.

I have been in ministry long enough to see failure and apostasy. There were moments I thought I was making progress, but then I began to wonder. What will we glean from all of the years of work—the discipleship centers in our homes, the family Bible studies, the weekly catechism classes, the hour-long sermons, the biblical counseling, the visitations, the hospitality, the Psalm singing, the eldership training, the family conferences and camps, and the men’s meetings? God gives the increase.

Meantime, as we stand in the midst of the corruption of this present world and the raging apostasies of the day, let us continue to cry out without ceasing for God’s mercy on our poor families and struggling churches. If God will save us from this present evil age, it will be by His pure mercy. There is no recipe that will work for all. Any one of us can fail to teach the fear of God in our home schools or our academically-intensive classical schools, just as much as the ungodly can fail in the average public school.

Here I encourage my pastor friends to preach for more love for God, more faith in God, more parental love for children, more fear of God and prostrate worship in the chemistry laboratories, more intensive disciple-

ship, more sincerity, and less hypocrisy. Give me more fear of God! Don't give me sixteen essays on why you don't need to bring the fear of God into your children's public school education. Tell me how you can disciple a young woman or young man into honoring his or her parents more. Tell me how you can encourage fathers and mothers to love God more (Deut. 6:4) and to obey the will of God for parents found in Exodus 12:26-27, Deuteronomy 4:10, 6:7, Ephesians 6:4, 1 Thessalonians 2:11, and Proverbs 1-31. How are our churches equipping parents to aggressively address their parental responsibilities while trusting in the sovereign, gracious God who is "the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him?" How are we encouraging fathers to love God passionately, such that they would disciple the children they love, to love the God they love, as they sit in their house, and as they walk by the way (Deut. 6:4-7)?

May God help fathers, mothers, pastors, and elders to lead a reformation in the field of education and thereby salvage the Christian faith for future generations.

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