

Faith *in* Education

Newsletter - Issue 1, November 1999

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Restoring our faith in education

Faith in Education is a new project from *The Christian Institute* which seeks to help parents and teachers engage in practical Christian thinking and action on education.

Schooling was pioneered by Christians who believed in the importance of education. Today Church schools are still extremely popular with parents and they achieve high academic results.

Education is not neutral. At its best education can help young people

develop a thirst for truth. Teaching can also subtly or directly undermine the Christian faith.

The Faith in Education project is about:

- unashamedly promoting Christian education;
- helping Christians challenge secular schooling;
- keeping Christians informed of strategic developments;
- providing details of helpful resources.

Still a Vision for Christian Education

"Say not the struggle naught availeth, the labour and the wounds are vain, the enemy faints not, nor faileth, and as things have been, they remain"

(Arthur Hugh Cough 1819-1861)

It is very tempting for biblical Christians to throw up their hands and give up on public education as a lost cause. As fewer and fewer look to the Bible as their ultimate frame of reference and infallible guide, so the assumptions underlying the discipline, organisation and curriculum of the school have become more humanistic and man-centred.

Many non-Christians believe that something is wrong with our schools. At its heart the real problem is a spiritual one. So much of what is done to rectify the situation is cosmetic and avoids a real look at the very foundations. Resources obviously are important but what matters even more is that the school system should be built upon those truths that God has chosen to reveal about Himself and about human beings.

We share the passion of the government for education and its quality. We want to affirm at the



John Burn

November 1999

"God made us as communicating beings and there is a need for children to develop the ability to communicate by speech and in writing with clarity and accuracy."

John Burn has been headmaster of two large urban comprehensive schools. He has served on three Government advisory bodies covering examinations, the curriculum and teacher training. He was also a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission which, in 1985, produced the report Faith in the City.

outset that children are a gift from God and are the prime responsibility of parents. They do not belong to the state. Teachers have a role in helping parents in the discharge of their God-given responsibilities. There is much that concerns us in schools today: a system of discipline far removed from biblical principles; an act of worship that is often syncretistic; a scheme of religious education which too often fails to present the unique truth claims of Christ; and a relativistic and subjective programme of personal and social education which often leaves no opportunity for young people to consider positively God's ideal of chastity outside of marriage and faithfulness within.

We share these concerns but seek to reverse the decline. We know that many Christian teachers labour faithfully in unpromising, difficult and sometimes hostile situations. We want to

stand by them and help to support them as they continue to act as salt arresting the decline and as light illuminating the darkness and the confusion.

The Director of *The Christian Institute*, with others, played a significant part more than ten years ago in strengthening the place of worship and religious education in schools and in providing for the priority of Christianity within religious education (RE). The nature of RE and the observance of the requirement for an act of worship each day, which is to be broadly and mainly Christian, is regularly monitored by OFSTED. Much still remains to be done here. We are opposed to the multiplicity of faiths taught in school especially in the earlier years and we shall continue to seek to remedy this situation. We will need your support in this. Nevertheless, in many respects we would argue that things are better in relation to religious education and worship than they were ten years ago.

For years we have been arguing strongly for the promotion of marriage within the school curriculum and we are pleased that teaching about marriage has been placed in the curriculum as a result of the recent government review. We believe that it should be presented to young people positively.

God made us as communicating beings and there is a need for children to develop the ability to communicate by speech and in writing with clarity and accuracy. The teaching of reading in schools and in teacher training institutions had been in serious decline. Elizabeth Gray, a member of *The Christian Institute* Advisory Group, along with myself, wrote a book, *Reading Matters*, several years ago. We argued that children should be taught to read in a systematic and structured way with an emphasis on phonics. The Government is to be congratulated on the importance they have attached to reading in primary schools and on their introduction of a structured programme of literacy and phonics. We believe this is already making a difference.

We note the growing success of church schools in public examinations and their popularity with parents. We believe that much of their success can be attributed to the fact that benefits flow when learning takes place within an ethos rooted in the unique claims of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

We appreciate that parental concerns are reflected in the growth of the Home School Movement and also in the growth nation-wide of the number of Christian schools open to Christian and non-Christian alike. We have contact with a number of these and encourage their development. We believe that there will be opportunities in the not too distant future for new schools, based on Christian principles, to be created and we wish to be involved in this also. Christians must be alert to the doors of opportunity open to us whilst recognising that there are many who oppose us.

We want to offer encouragement with practical advice to parents to be active in the crucial work of being a governor or manager of a school. This is a position of considerable influence in terms of the curriculum and staff appointments. Christians must be there.

We hope that you will find our regular publication helpful. We look forward to hearing from you as to how we can best serve you.



john.burn@christian.org.uk

- **Children in schools are to be taught about the importance of marriage in a new initiative announced by Education Secretary, David Blunkett.**
(Department for Education and Employment Press Release No. 402/99, 9 September 1999, (see page 4))
- **Fulwell Grange Christian School in Sunderland is to expand its numbers and move into new premises in the summer of 2000.**
- **Corporal punishment is now illegal in independent schools and the Liverpool Fellowship School in Liverpool is challenging the decision in the European Court of Human Rights.**
(*The Mail on Sunday* 31 January 1999)
- **Evolution is to be dropped from the science examination syllabus in state schools in Kansas, USA.**
(*Times Educational Supplement* 27 August 1999)
- **According to Home Office sponsored research, one in four 13 year olds in Northumbria and West Yorkshire are said to have tried drugs.**
(*Daily Telegraph* 4 September 1999)
- **Forcing primary schools to have a compulsory literacy hour with a large component of phonics has produced a huge increase in the proportion of 11 year olds reaching Level 4 in English - according to David Blunkett, Education Secretary.**
(*Daily Telegraph* 16 September 1999)
- **John Clare writing in the Daily Telegraph says that it is now impossible to deny that for the last 30 years the people who have trained, advised and inspected teachers have been hopelessly and catastrophically wrong.**
(*Daily Telegraph* 19 September 1999)
- **Schools in deciding which half GCSE courses to take have shown a great enthusiasm for GCSE Religious Education. This year 105,994 took the subject whilst numbers fell in technology and modern foreign languages.**
(*Times Educational Supplement* 27 August 1999)
- **At Emmanuel College, Gateshead, 90.4 percent of all 16 year olds, gained at least 5 higher GCSE grades this year. Emmanuel College is a Christian City Technology College and a fully comprehensive school serving an entirely urban area.**
- **70 per cent of British adults believe that teachers in schools have a lower status than when they were in school.**
(*Daily Telegraph* 18 August 1999)
- **Children in Saskatchewan, Canada are no longer to listen to the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of the school day on the grounds that it could cause them 'psychological harm'. This decision follows similar ones in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia.**
(*Times Educational Supplement* 13 August 1999)
- **In May 1999 a dozen private companies were given permission by the government to take over failing education authorities.**
(*The Times* 12 May 1999)
- **"We have resisted pressure to drop the requirement for school assemblies in schools" - The Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP, Schools Minister.**
(*Times Educational Supplement* 16 July 1999)
- **Dr Tony Travers of the London School of Economics believes that the handing over of King's Manor comprehensive school in Guildford, Surrey to a private company is a decision of epoch making significance.**
(*Times Educational Supplement* 26 May 1999)



Marriage and the school curriculum

Guy Hordern is a parent of four who lives in Birmingham. Since the death of his wife, Helen, in 1986 he has been a single parent. Over many years he has been heavily involved in education as a school governor and as an active member of the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Guy is a strong believer in the need for schools to promote marriage. The courageous stand he took on this subject was ultimately to impact all schools in England and Wales.

Front Page News

The issue made front page news in the national press. The Education Secretary at that time was Gillian Shephard MP. As a result of the campaign she called for references to family values in the framework to be strengthened although in press reports at the time the Government did not define 'family'.² A senior adviser at SCAA claimed that there was "insufficient support" for the report to say that "the family can only be a good grounding for life if it is based on lifelong marriage between two heterosexuals".³

The report was then revised as a result of further consultation with schools, religious and other groups but not to the satisfaction of Mr Hordern. The new framework read: "On the basis of these values, we as a society should support marriage as the traditional form of family whilst recognising that the love and commitment required for a secure and happy childhood can be found in families of other kinds."

Criticism

Guy said at the time: "I am pleased that the word marriage is now there, but regret that SCAA is proposing that marriage be supported only as the 'traditional' form of family, instead of the 'ideal' form of family in which to bring up children."⁴ "Using the word 'traditional' for marriage suggests it refers to what happened in the past." He criticised the proposed wording for drawing no distinction between marriage and cohabitation or even heterosexual and homosexual relationships.⁵

In 1996 the then Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) set up a national conference to discuss a framework of moral values to be taught in schools. The framework was to be used as the basis for citizenship lessons proposed by the Conservative Government. The conference was entitled 'The National Forum for Values in Education'. Guy Hordern served on the conference as a parent governor representative. During the conference proceedings, Guy was shocked that the supposed moral framework for schools completely omitted marriage. A group of those serving as representatives joined with Guy to dissent from what was proposed. They pressed SCAA to accept that:

"Children should be nurtured and developed within a stable, moral and loving home environment with preferably both mother and father present in a happy marriage."¹



No further changes were made to the framework and there the story appeared to have ended until a recent announcement by David Blunkett, the current Education Secretary. It is thought that Mr Blunkett personally decided that marriage should be formally included in the school curriculum - against the advice of his officials. As a result the National Curriculum, which will apply from September 2000, will include, as part of the non-statutory Personal Social Health Education curriculum, teaching on marriage. This will include its role and importance in family relationships and bringing up children. Despite claims that it would upset children from single parent families or those with divorced parents, the decision was welcomed by Mr Hordern: "Given the choice, most lone parents would prefer to be married... The key is to promote marriage as ideal."⁶

Section 28

However, the government now appears to be at cross-purposes in its education policy. Tony Blair's government wishes to remove Section 28, the law that bans local authorities from promoting homosexuality in schools. So while David Blunkett

wants to promote marriage, it seems other government ministers wish to allow homosexuality to be taught to our children.

Dr Jack Cunningham, speaking at a pro-gay dinner in May, outlined Labour's policy: "The New Labour Government is committed to repeal Section 28," he said. "I can say quite clearly that the government believes that Section 28 serves no useful purpose and we remain committed to the repeal as soon as parliamentary opportunity arises."⁷

Undermining Marriage

Taking away this ban could seriously undermine the teaching of marriage. The inclusion of marriage in the National Curriculum is *non-statutory*. This means that schools are not obliged to teach it. If Section 28 is repealed, Local Authorities could attempt to force teachers to promote homosexuality - and ignore marriage.

This would go against the wishes of the vast majority of parents. Surveys have found that well over 70 per cent of people strongly support promoting marriage in schools.⁸ More than two thirds of men believe that gay sex is wrong.⁹ It seems clear that the general public

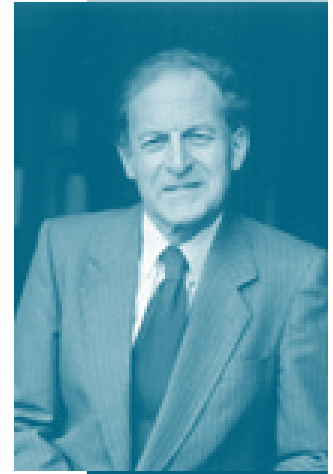
would not want homosexuality to be taught to their children.

Pro-gay Lessons

Although Section 28 has been effective in preventing local authorities from promoting homosexuality in schools, some things have still managed to creep into our classrooms. For example, children as young as 13 were encouraged to try out relationships with same sex partners by a teaching pack produced by Health Promotion Services, Avon.¹⁰

In just three weeks researchers at *The Christian Institute* found that £1million of public money had been given to promote homosexuality.¹¹ This is surely only the tip of an iceberg. If Section 28 were taken away, there would be little protection for our schoolchildren.

Christian parents should welcome the introduction of marriage into the National Curriculum. However, the efforts of Guy Hordern to get it there could be undermined if Section 28 is allowed to be repealed. ■



Guy Hordern fought to have marriage taught in schools



¹ *The Birmingham Post* Tuesday 29th October 1996

² *Daily Telegraph* Friday 20th December 1996

³ *Daily Telegraph* Wednesday 14th August 1996

⁴ *Daily Telegraph* Friday 20th December 1996

⁵ *The Times* December 1996

⁶ *The Birmingham Post* Monday 13th September 1999

⁷ Speech by the Rt. Hon Dr Jack Cunningham to Stonewall Equality Dinner, 20 May 1999. Available from Dr Cunningham's office.

⁸ A Gallop poll asked a cross section of 660 people "Should children be taught in schools that marriage is a good thing?", 75% said yes and 19% said no. See *Corporal Punishment Poll*, 12 November 1996, Gallup.

⁹ Wellings K et al, *Sexual Behaviour in Britain*, Penguin, 1994, page 271

¹⁰ Health Promotion Service Avon, *Beyond a Phase: A Practical Guide to Challenging Homophobia in Schools*, February 1999, see accompanying video

¹¹ Researchers looked at job recruitment adverts in back issues of *The Pink Paper* and at one grants scheme run by London Councils.



Find out the truth on how public money is being spent on promoting homosexuality in our report Bankrolling Gay Proselytism. Available from The Christian Institute office, priced £2.50 (inc. p&p.)

A Mandate for Christian Involvement

By Paul Yeulett

“Education is the chief defense of nations”, wrote Edmund Burke, the British political philosopher, who died in 1797. Opposed to outright democracy, he felt that a learned and responsible aristocracy would keep in check the unbridled movements of the masses, in the American colonies, and later in France. Education was, to Burke, the chief means available in order to ensure that strong government would maintain the *status quo* in opposition to demagogues who might lead the country into revolution. This sounds like a high and noble ideal – the desire to preserve intact the structure, even the soul of a nation, by passing on the lessons of the past from age to age. And there is undoubtedly much truth in it which should not be lost on our own generation.

But we have a higher and still more noble ideal, nothing short of a divine mandate, in support of education. It is in this belief that this Faith in Education Newsletter is being launched, and in this spirit that we hope to explore many diverse fields of education. For many of us, the existence of education is an ever-present fact of life, as much as work, health, relationships and recreation. Common sense alone would seem to dictate something of its aim and practice. But for all the heated discussions that have taken place in relation to education over the last thirty years, and for all the new initiatives and acts of Parliament, it is a striking fact that the dilemmas and debates of the 1960s are as intractable now as they were then. What Christians need to constantly affirm, in all areas of human activity as much as in education, is that the God of the Bible is the Sovereign Lord over all man’s affairs. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, ‘He is there and He is not silent’. Tragically, it is the silence of many *Christians* that has contributed, unsurprisingly, to the deterioration of the education system. The single greatest service that Christians can yield in the cause of good education is to work out the implications of Schaeffer’s words and seek to apply them wherever possible.

At this point, various objections are bound to arise. Where, after all, do we turn in the Scriptures to find detailed and systematic teaching on the subject of edu-

cation? There is no mention of organised schools, still less schools run by the Government or by local authorities! There is no concept of curricula, examinations or qualifications. It would appear that children spent most of their time in a state of enforced apprenticeship to their parents. Whatever teaching children received, it seems largely to have pertained to the great deeds which God had done for Israel - a great and mighty theme, to be sure – but that being the case, how are we to obtain Scriptural instructions relating to education, let alone speak of a ‘Biblical mandate’?

Beginnings in Genesis

The starting point of our reasoning must be the ‘cultural mandate’ of Genesis 1:28. “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” Adam’s descendants were to spread themselves over the whole earth, to exercise stewardship over it and over all other created beings. Man, as an intelligent creature made in God’s image, was alone capable of receiving the power and the ability to exercise dominion over the earth. The complex nature of the skills required to subdue the earth necessarily gave rise to the development of many fields of study, especially in science. Each succeeding generation, therefore, would be required to learn this knowledge from their parents. Lest it be thought that legitimate human activity was restricted to agriculture, it should be recognised that a wide variety of artistic abilities are mentioned towards the end of the fourth chapter of Genesis. Jabal was “the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock”; Jubal was “the father of all those who play the harp and flute”; Tubal Cain was “an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron”. Perhaps Tubal Cain is the earliest example of anyone who can explicitly be accorded the status of a ‘teacher’. But it is clear that these skills were transmitted from one generation to the next.

The main implication of the cultural mandate is derived from the positions that God and man occupy in the scheme of creation. Man, as a created being in

“But we have a higher and still more noble ideal, nothing short of a divine mandate”



Paul Yeulett is Assessment Co-ordinator and teacher of Mathematics at Emmanuel College, Gateshead

subservience to God, is required to undertake every activity with respect to his Creator. He is not an autonomous, self-appointed lord without any degree of accountability. It follows that in the field of education, man is bound to discharge his responsibilities in the light of God's truth. Education which distorts or denies *any* truth, whether self-evident or revealed in Scripture, is therefore opposed to the mind and will of God.

The pretence of neutrality

The objection is frequently made: "But this world is fallen and Bible-believing Christians are a tiny minority. How can you expect non-Christians to respect, let alone embrace, your position?" The blindness which sin causes is to deceive people into thinking that there is such a thing as a *neutral* position on this matter. Evolutionists claim to be neutral students of scientific discovery, but their fundamental position is one of faith, and a faith which is blind and vain by comparison with the faith of the Christian. The evolutionist has had to adapt and reconstruct his theories and speculations, whereas the Christian may rest secure in the knowledge of God's timeless and eternally true self-disclosure in the pages of Scripture. Christians should not consider it a waste of time, or an unspiritual exercise, to seek to persuade evolutionists of the superiority of the Christian position.

Fallen, as well as created

That, then, is our mandate for education, which is based upon God's creative acts. But we must be equally alert to the fact that man is a fallen being as well as a created one. A failure to do so lies at the root of the very worst educational practice. It should be an axiomatic principle of education that children inherit the original sin of Adam, and that it resides in them very manifestly. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (*Proverbs 22:15*). In her article entitled *The Crucial Early Years* (page 16), Elizabeth Gray makes reference to the American educational philosopher John Dewey, whose basic premise, to put it quite crudely, was that the child is never wrong. To speak of 'influencing' children today is considered quite immoral; it cuts across their individuality, their right to make moral decisions. And where morality is relativised, the need for correction and punishment becomes meaningless.

The responsibility of parents

There is no doubt that the chief weight of responsibility for education lies with the parents, who are under a solemn charge to train up their children in the way

they are to go (*Proverbs 22:6*). This is the overwhelming testimony of Scripture and is of course consistent with the central teaching in connection with the family, that it is the central unit of human society. How is this teaching to be applied in today's society, in which many mothers go out to work and even those who do not work do not consider themselves to have the time, or the necessary ability, to take on full responsibility for their children's education? Elsewhere in this bulletin is an interview with some parents who have taken the decision to oversee directly the learning of their children, in partnership with other families. Home education is becoming more common in this country, and is much more widespread in the United States.

The application of this principle in today's culture can be stated along these lines: it should be unthinkable for parents to abdicate all of their educational responsibilities to the school. To demonstrate a lack of interest or concern in the academic, social, moral and spiritual progress of one's child is to be guilty of gross irresponsibility. It is for this reason that many topics addressed in this bulletin, both now and in the future, will, we trust, be of as much concern to parents as they are to teachers.

Redemption

Finally, having considered the Creation and the Fall, it would be wrong not to mention the Redemption which comes through Christ. Henry Morris, the well-known American expert on creation and evolution, also writes penetratingly in

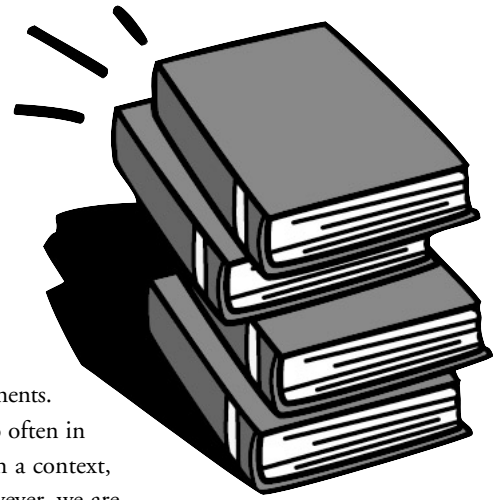
the area of Christian education. One of his books is entitled *Christian Education for the Real World*, and it makes the point that the 'real world' which we all need to know about is not the so-called 'big, bad world out there', but the world of eternity, of heaven and hell, of eternal life and eternal death. The greatest news that can be conveyed to anyone, young and old alike, is the truth of the Gospel. What kind of education is it that consistently by-passes a consideration of the claims of Christ?

It is very much our hope that those who read this newsletter will be encouraged to think positively about the opportunities that now present themselves in the field of education, and that perhaps they will be mobilised into prayerful action for the sake of our children – and the Gospel. ■

"The greatest news that can be conveyed to anyone ... is the truth of the Gospel"

What Should Our Children Read?

By Alison McClean



“With over 8,000 children’s titles published last year in Britain alone, there is no shortage of quality books to choose from. The tricky task is choosing the best books for your child.” So reads the *Dillons’ Guide to Children’s Books*.¹ If this is true for the nation at large, how much more for those who are spiritually concerned about what their children read! First-hand knowledge of each title is impossible. How can we find direction through such a labyrinth?

There can be little argument but that to cultivate the reading habit in our children is not only beneficial but vital to their mental and spiritual development. Reading informs the mind, stimulates the imagination, exercises the intellect, sharpens discernment and enhances language and therefore communication skills. Through reading we gain more idea of ourselves both as individuals and as social beings: words are of the essence in the expression of our personal ideas and emotions, and in our dealings with other people. In a society where a host of less than wholesome, often downright harmful influences vie for acceptance in young receptive minds, it is of the utmost importance that both the content and quality of children’s reading material are of a high standard. Too many factors in today’s society, both within and without the home, weigh against a child’s settling down to read a good book from beginning to end. These must be recognised and overcome. Instant and effortless entertainment is available on the touch of a button; the patience and

even the quietness required in an atmosphere conducive to serious reading are sadly lacking. Encouragement from parents by reading themselves and reading to and with their children is not all that it might be. A marked decline in reading standards turns the

exercise into an arid chore, a painful necessity rather than a pleasurable adventure. There is little doubt then that unless children enjoy what they read they are unlikely to persevere in the face of such adverse

elements.

Too often in such a context, however, we are inordinately delighted when they demonstrate interest in reading anything of any kind, focusing “only on the act of reading, not on the subject matter or the quality of the writing.”² Anne Barnes, general secretary of the National Association for the Teaching of English, told *The Independent* that “If teenagers read at all, that is a good starting point. It is inappropriate for adults to ... tell children what to read.”³ Barnes was commenting on a government survey carried out in December 1995, which found that children read few ‘classics’, and that their favourite literature consists mainly in romances and horror stories. Is this a phenomenon which we would wish to allow to pass unchecked? A more recent survey made the alarming deduction that “Young readers’ appetites for the grotesque having been whetted by Dahl creations like Aunts Spiker and Sponge, moved on with age to more serious horror.”⁴ It goes on to state that “R.L. Stine’s *Goosebumps*, a series of more than 40 thrillers with titles such as *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp* and *Attack of the Mutant ...* have sold at a rate of 250,000 a month in the UK.”⁵ One headteacher said “I believe that anything youngsters can be encouraged to read is to the good. Between the school and parents we can help to change tastes later on.”⁶ This is of course diametrically opposed to the inspired teaching of the book of Proverbs: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.”⁷ “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”⁸ If we abide by this in other areas of life, why not in the fundamental one of what enters children’s minds and is in itself a means for training them? “... for most people there is a direct carry-over from what they read to how they see and understand life. Literature has long been seen as a powerful moral educator.”⁹

Alison McClean teaches English at Emmanuel College, Gateshead.

“Too many factors in today’s society, both within and without the home, weigh against a child’s settling down to read a good book from beginning to end.”

Quality Matters

Perhaps if we were more instructive in the area of children’s reading, our teenagers’ choice of books

would be less a cause for concern. **Part of the problem is that there is a paucity of good classic literature written directly aimed at the 'teenager'.** That which appeals to them deals with the more controversial issues and good and evil are less distinguished from each other than in books written for younger children. Adolescents are less likely to be 'palmed off' with a traditional happy ending. At a time when young people are facing their own questions and dilemmas about life, books geared for their age-group do little to resolve these and perhaps even contribute to confusion. Teenagers have their own peculiar culture in fashion, music and leisure pursuits: in the serious matter of reading they are hardly likely to align themselves with those whom they see as either beneath them or out of touch with them. Stories for younger children have survived for generations, some for hundreds of years, and are continually being republished and re-edited. The classic English 'canon' works enjoyed by adults are sadly seen as too challenging for the youth of today's 'instant-everything' culture. Coinciding with a period in life when homework increases, examination pressure mounts and peer influence peaks, the early teenage years constitute a transition when adolescent pulp often in the form of escapism is turned to for relaxation. Even if the classroom were to promote only literature of excellence, that would probably not suffice. Another study in schools revealed that "only one out of every ten readers said that books 'done in class' were amongst the five favourite titles."¹⁰

It is vital then that the home environment provides encouragement from the earliest possible age to read and to read wisely, so that "A child does not get the idea that reading is a strange process that takes place somewhere else but that it is grounded in his daily life ... Children emulate their parents in many ways



and reading is no exception. If they perceive books to be the source of pleasure to the parents, they are more likely to look to books for their own pleasure".¹¹ Children who have been weaned on good literature, wholesome in content and well-written, may dabble with the occasional trashy novel, but are less likely to be satisfied with it and remain with its type than if they have known nothing else. Well-practised readers will be able to tackle more stretching books earlier than others of their age. Their critical faculties will have been developed, not least by the very reading heritage with which we have furnished them, to an extent where they can begin to make their own literary discrimination - "A child's spiritual foundation must be established before he delves into books that will blatantly challenge his faith".¹² The formative years are the time to inculcate children with a sense of things as they ought to be, leaving later years for them to cope necessarily with things as they are. A sense of the ideals of right and wrong will be retained as a framework to deal with the real world.

Stretch The Mind

We should not simply pander to the lowest common denominator. Age is important, of course, and level must be geared to ability, but "You will not improve as a reader if all you read are books that are well within your capacity. You must tackle books that are beyond you ... books that are over your head. Only books of that sort will make you stretch your mind. And unless you stretch, you will not learn."¹³ Perhaps

too often our fallen natures prefer milk to solid meat, taking the easier instead of the better. How much more do children need guidance! Enjoyment of literature is vital, but there is a vast range available to suit all tastes without allowing free, undisciplined rein. For a secular but apposite example take W.B. Yeats's poem 'To a Wealthy Man'. The wealthy man was Sir Hugh Lane who said he would build a centre for promotion of the arts in the city of Dublin "if it could be shown

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that the people wanted it". Yeats maintained that this was no basis for doing anything:

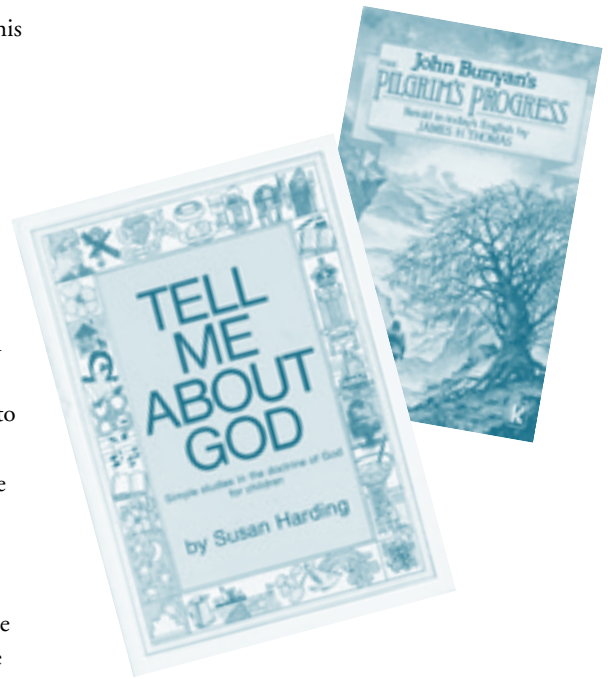
Look up in the sun's eye and give
 What the exultant heart calls good
 That some new day may breed the best
 Because you gave, not what they would,
 But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!¹⁴

What then are 'the right twigs' with which to build stores of knowledge for our children? Obviously specifically Christian literature can be a useful tool to promote Biblical values. We must be aware at the outset, however, that not all of that which might be broadly labelled 'Christian' is indeed strongly Biblical, evangelical or beneficial. In many cases quality of writing is lacking in the well-intentioned interests of a safe and necessarily contrived story-line and a pointed moral message often tacked on at the end. "The best books create an appearance of reality - in characterisation, in plot, in dialogue. Even though the situation may be fantastic, as in a fairy tale, the reader should feel that what the characters do and say is consistent with their nature, and that the situation could really take place within the boundaries of the world that has been created".¹⁵ Far better a believable, and in that sense, interesting, original, vocabulary-rich experience, with Biblical values inherent and intrinsic to the very fabric. Let us not fall into the dualist trap of cutting ourselves off from the vast artistic and cultural heritage that is ours, ultimately from the hand of our Creator. All art does not have to depict Biblical scenes or have a Scripture verse printed across it; all poetry does not have to be hymnal, all literature does not have to be sermonising in order to be God-glorifying. "The notion that [children] should derive some immediate and spiritual benefit from every word that leaps out at

them across the page ... can be a form of bad witness, a turn-off from Christianity, an unnecessary stumbling-block."¹⁶ God has made us in his image and so has given us creative ability and inclinations. It is our responsibility to reach the best of our potential in

these areas to reflect as far as possible his standards: of his own Creation "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good".¹⁷ The way in which we go about creative tasks will be with honour and

"There are books not explicitly Christian which do uphold a worldview we could endorse."

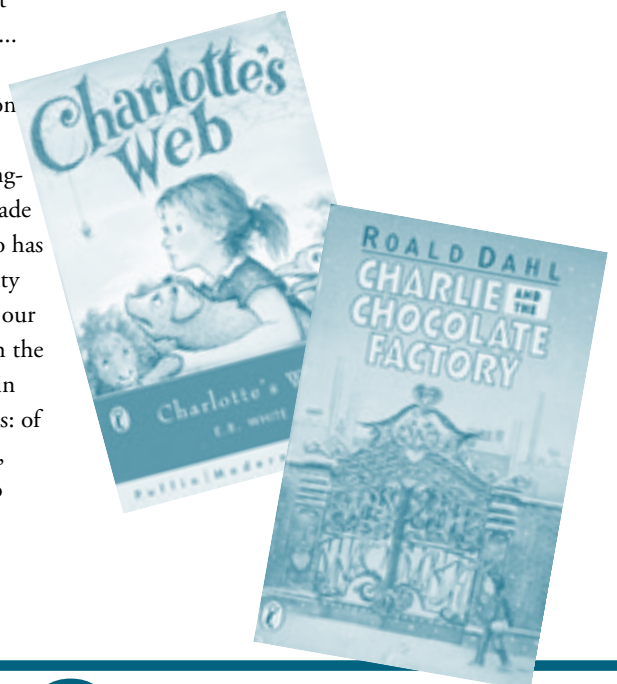


integrity, in order to witness to his perfection, but let us not stifle our talents or limit our enjoyment of the talents of others, remembering that "the cattle on a thousand hills" are his.¹⁸

Some Pointers

There are books not explicitly Christian but which do uphold a world-view we could endorse. Leland Ryken, Professor of English at Wheaton College, suggests the following guiding principles:

- What do the writer and/or characters in the work value most?
- According to the writer and/or characters, what really exists? The physical world? A supernatural world? If so, what is the nature of each? Do moral qualities such as goodness or love really exist?



- According to the writer and/or characters, how should life be lived? What constitutes the good life?
- According to the writer and/or characters, what brings human fulfilment and happiness? Virtue? Pleasure? Money? God?¹⁹

In 'A Call to Discernment' Jay Adams cites his experience of talking with a Christian mother who had bought what she thought were constructive Biblical books for her children. They were published and circulated by the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is vital that parents are themselves aware of dangers and issues, that they know and adhere to God's Word.²⁰ The type of book which perhaps requires most care in censoring is not that which is *obviously* of poor quality, or containing bad language, or written by an author with a dubious occult or sexual agenda, but by one whose mindset and general perspective on the world is not Christian. Values are always communicated in literature - it cannot be neutral. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks".²¹ Poor priorities and low standards are bound to have some bearing on the themes and outcomes of plot, the behaviour and speech of characters, and therefore the influence on the reader. Such literature fails to promote Christian values. We wish to see for example the family presented as a positive institution; friendship, honesty and loyalty upheld; recognition and admission of guilt, repentance and forgiveness whenever appropriate. Perhaps instead deceitful or underhand methods succeed; revenge is exacted and gloried in; lying, thieving, cheating, etc., go undetected and unpunished or are laughed off. Even in books for the youngest children this can be the case, and it constitutes a subtle undermining of Scriptural standards. In the Bible there are instances where the wicked prosper, where evil actions seem to gain their objectives, but we know that in the end of the great scheme of things God's judgment will prove right: like the psalmist we understand "their final destiny".²² The principles we uphold must, while recognising man's sin, not exalt or celebrate it, in a world which is marred and corrupted because of it.



Taking all of this into account we must of course respect personal taste as well as individual conscience and sensitivities. Opinions among parents will undoubtedly vary, and a **child will not necessarily see enjoyment in what we see as great literature.** We must handle this tension between what children ought to read and what they want to read. "Make a child a reader, and his education is assured. Strain or force his interest in books and you may turn him from books for the rest of his life."²³

In the light of these considerations, outlined on pages 12 and 13 is a very selective list of literature suitable for children and young people which either advocates or does not undermine the values which Christians would wish to support. There is a wealth of excellent and worthwhile literature not mentioned here. The majority of recommendations are given as series or by author to facilitate finding and to widen scope. The books are listed roughly in ascending order of age suitability, the more explicitly Christian are on page 13.

In conclusion, then, "let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess".²⁴ Let us not be afraid to put Christian censorship into practice. Let us take positive steps to encourage wide reading of edifying, high quality literature from as early an age as possible, and thereby equip our children to face both the obvious and the insidious challenges to Christian belief.

"We must handle this tension between what children ought to read and what they want to read."



For very young children, an excellent series has been written by Dick Bruna, and includes the 'Miffy' books. A personal favourite of my own, they also have to recommend them a strong sense of family and wholesome peer relationships; standards of hard work and constructive play. Concepts are clear and simple but good stretching vocabulary is integrated, and usefully presented in rhyme, which children enjoy and which has been shown to aid substantially with phonemic awareness and thus reading development.²⁵

Miffy at the Playground ISBN 0749829923

Miffy's Birthday ISBN 0416194141

Sadly many of the works of Richard Scarry are currently out of print, although a few are still available. These are usually published in large format, with a wealth of delightful pictures on each page, which in themselves provide scope for endless discussion, speculation and tangential stories! There is lucid distinction between right and wrong behaviour, promotion of healthy, traditional family activities and the work ethic.

The almost classic **Winnie the Pooh** series by A A Milne seems to be only increasing in popularity as his 70th birthday approaches. Friendship and kindness are the main themes; vocabulary is fresh and turns of phrase original and quotable.

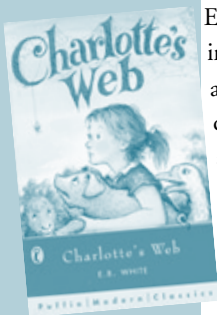
Winnie the Pooh ISBN 0416168604

The House at Pooh Corner ISBN 0416789005

E B White's **Charlotte's Web** is an interesting mixture of animal fable and human realism. Characters are detailed and well-rounded; there is a suspense element.

Charlotte's Web

ISBN 0140301852



Of course there are the children's all-time classics which are republished in attractive format. It is often confidence-building for a child to read a book which has been read and enjoyed by parents - role models! Such literature is tried and tested and gives a taste for what is good. **Little Women** and the others in the series by Louisa May Alcott, and L M Montgomery's **Anne** series remain favourites, along with J R R Tolkien's **The Hobbit**. Experienced readers should be able to move on to certain works of Charles Dickens: particularly **Oliver Twist** and **Great Expectations**.



The ever-popular **Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends** series, by Rev W Awdry presents clear examples of what it means to be fair, to be loyal, to be helpful, etc.

Thomas the Tank Engine

ISBN 0434966738

A notice over a rather obscure foreign fable in a bookshop I visited recently read: "Even if you don't appreciate the story, buy this book for its illustrations."

The shop owner is himself an artist, and while this article is primarily concerned with the content and literary merit of books, it is true that pictures can strongly influence appeal for better or worse. **The Trotter Street** and **Lucy and Tom** series by Shirley Hughes are worth recommending in themselves but are greatly enhanced by the beautiful illustrations.

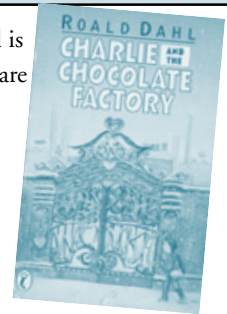
Lucy and Tom at the Seaside ISBN 0140544593

Lucy and Tom go to School ISBN 0140544151

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl is set firmly within the context of the family, with care of other family members and respect for elders. Disobedience is punished and good behaviour rewarded, and that money and success are not everything is shown.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

ISBN 0140371540



The Chronicles of Narnia by C S Lewis can be enjoyed on one level as tales of fantasy and imagination, comprising well-developed characters, vivid descriptive writing and all the excitement of children's adventures. The books have a strong moral flavour and are ultimately an allegory of the Christian gospel.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

ISBN 0006740588

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

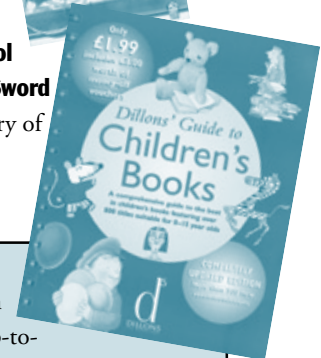
ISBN 0006739660



Perhaps a little old-fashioned but nevertheless worthwhile and still popular are the **Chalet School books** by Elinor M Brent-Dyer, and **The Silver Sword** by Ian Serrailler, based on a true story of war-time Poland.

Dillons' Guide to Children's

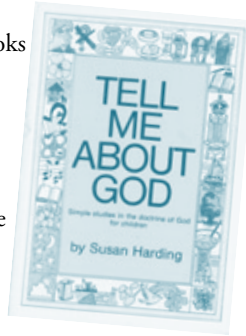
Books, referred to earlier, is an attractive, informative and up-to-the-minute publication with helpful pointers on educative and age-related aspects. Employed with caution it provides a useful overview of books currently available.



Books by Christian Authors

One of what must be the very few children's books specifically focussed on Biblical doctrines is also attractively produced and useful for readers of all ages. **Tell Me About God** by Susan Harding looks at a different attribute or characteristic of the person of God the Father under each letter of the alphabet.

Tell Me About God ISBN 0 85151 510X



The classic and true story of **Mary Jones and Her Bible** is still widely available and well worth reading, again for all ages, as is John Bunyan's **Pilgrim's Progress**. The latter can be obtained in many versions and abridgements, and despite its age (arguably because of it) continues to be extremely popular among children the world over. Its pictorial language makes it accessible, intriguing characters form gripping points of identification, and Bunyan's 'Bible blood' is evident throughout.



Much newer, lively and attractive books with broad appeal and sound Biblical content are published by Christian Focus Publications. To highlight a few favourites (ISBN prefix 1 85792/1 871676):

Novelty-shaped board books focusing on miracles from the Bible including **The Amazing Jar of Oil** and **The Big Picnic**.

Unusual colouring, puzzle and quiz books, e.g. **The Missing Coin**, **The Missing Sheep** and **The Missing Son** with hidden objects to be found on each page; **Jethro and Co.** about lesser known Bible characters; for older children **Puzzle Trails in China Town and Ancient Rome** which combines story, geography and puzzles.

Children of the Bible traces just that, looking at how God used them. This book is beautifully illustrated.

An original method of presenting Paul's often-neglected missionary journeys is used in **Postcards from Paul**, and a modern missionary's story is told in **A Friend for Life**, part of the Trailblazers biography series.

One of the best-loved Christian authors for children is Patricia St John. Her books span all ages, from **The Other Kitten** to **Until the Day Breaks**. Among the most popular are **The Tanglewoods' Secret** and **Treasures of the Snow**.



The Flamingo (age 9-13) and **Freestyle** (age 12 and upwards) series are fictional, and give Biblical and moral slants on issues including family difficulties, drugs, relationships - an ideal vehicle for transition from specifically children's to adult literature.

Further reading:

1. Barratt, Pooley and Ryken, eds. *The Discerning Reader - Christian Perspectives on Literature and Theory*, Apollos/ Baker Books 1995
2. *A Great Gulf Fixed? Christian and Humanist Values in Children's Books*, CARE for Education, 1990
3. Schaeffer, Francis A., *The God Who Is There*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968

References

¹ *Dillons' Guide to Children's Books*, Dillons' The Bookstore, 1998

² *Home Remedies - Reading lists and curriculum aids to promote your child's educational well-being*, Family Research Council, Washington D.C.

³ Barnes, A, General Secretary of the National Association for the Teaching of English. Quoted in *The Independent*, Saturday 16 December, 1995, in response to SCAA survey

⁴ *Telegraph Magazine*, 6 September 1997

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Fitzgeorge-Butler, E, head at Silverdale. Quoted in the *Telegraph Magazine*, 6 September 1997

⁷ Proverbs 22:15

⁸ Proverbs 22:6

⁹ Wynne-Jones, P - *Children Under Pressure*

¹⁰ From a study by student teachers at Exeter University, cited in *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 8, no. 3

¹¹ Gray, E and Burn, J - *Reading Matters* The Christian Institute, 1993

¹² *Home Remedies* Op cit.

¹³ Adler, M and Van Doren, C - *How to Read a Book*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972, quoted in *Home Remedies* Op cit.

¹⁴ Yeats, W B 'To A Wealthy Man'

¹⁵ *Home Remedies* Op cit.

¹⁶ Oliver, G 'What Should our Children Read' - CATS lecture, 14 May 1992

¹⁷ Genesis 1:31

¹⁸ Psalm 50:10

¹⁹ Ryken, L - *Triumphs of the Imagination: Literature in Christian Perspective*, Inter Varsity Press, 1979

²⁰ Adams, J E - *A Call to Discernment*

²¹ Matthew 12:34

²² Psalm 73:17

²³ Russell, R.L. - *The Child and His Pencil*, first published in 1935, reprinted 1992, Mid-Antrim Historical Group

²⁴ Hebrews 10:23

²⁵ Gray, E and Burn, J Op cit.

Home Education: Why do it?

Paul Yeulett talks to Jim and Janet McMaster

There has been a striking rise recently in the number of parents who have taken the bold decision to educate their children at home. The trend has been most noteworthy in the United States, where recent figures indicate that 750,000 children are now taught at home, but there has been a significant increase in Britain, where numbers have doubled in the last five years.

Jim and Janet McMaster took the decision to home-educate their son, David, three years ago, and were delighted to find a network of other parents in the north-east who did the same. In this article, Jim and Janet offer some advice and insight for those who are considering taking this step. They were glad to be granted an opportunity to speak about their own experiences and encouragements. I put a number of questions to them, the answers to which are summarised below.

Some people would say that your children cannot experience the 'real world' if they are educated at home. How do you respond to this challenge?

Jim: 'We see teaching them at home as the best way to prepare them for the "real world". If we wanted to plant some seeds we wouldn't put them straight into the garden. We would nurture them in the green house and only put them outside when they were strong enough to survive. I feel we put our children into the "real world" before they are prepared for it and so many of them become spiritual casualties. However, from a Christian point

"The school ... did not support the godly standards that we deemed vital for his education"

of view the "real world" is the place in which God is glorified and Jesus Christ is honoured. We see it as a vital part of education that David is established in the truth of God *before* being confronted with the theories of the world which contradict the teaching of the Bible.'

Did your child attend a state school before you began to consider home education?

'Yes, David was at a state school for two years. However, right from the beginning it was clear that our primary desire to bring our son up according to the teaching of the Bible would not be supported by the education system to which we had entrusted him. The school that our son attended was widely regarded as one of the better ones, but it did not support the godly standards that we deemed vital for his education, and at times it undermined them.

During our consideration of home schooling we met about 200 home-schoolers and the children's well-balanced attitudes and behaviour was a big factor in convincing us that we were making the correct decision. They were so well behaved, confident, respectful and happy.'

Which features of the state system discouraged you the most?

'As schools go David was in a good school. However we did find that the discipline taught at home was not reinforced at school. The most worrying aspect was that at five years old our son was being taught to question the truth of the Bible. We found that Biblical stories were presented in such a way that the children were left in doubt as to whether they were true. We were also very distressed at much of the reading scheme material, which we found to be contrary to orthodox Christian teaching. He was learn-



Janet McMaster and another parent 'at school' with Danny, David, Barbara, Jessica and Peter

ing to accept as normal standards and attitudes which were clearly contrary to the teaching of the Word of God.'

How did you construct your own curriculum?

'A great deal of prayer was required to ensure that the curriculum we were using fulfilled our desire for an all-round education based firmly in the authority of the Bible. Many months of research were required. We joined support groups for home-educators, asked as many questions as we could, and read a great deal on the subject. In general we are very happy with the curriculum that we have now established.'

How easy is it to combine the roles of parent and teacher?

'It is not really a problem. We are conscious that it is just one extra area where you have to be in control. We are convinced the key is discipline. All parents home-educate without realising it whenever they are with their children. Home Education is just a natural extension of that into more areas.'

How do you, as husband and wife, view your respective roles in education?

'It is clear that Home Education can only be undertaken if there is complete harmony and agreement between the parents. It is also clear that each must use the strengths that God has given and co-operation is the basis of success. In most instances it would be Mum who plays the major practical role in teaching. However Dad always has a very important role to play in discipline. In our house Dad teaches science which is his educational background although education continues as an integral part of everyday living when we are together as a family.'

What place does the Bible have in your child's all round education?

'It must be the foundation for *everything*. After all to bring children to a saving faith in Christ and to teach them how they can serve Him as He desires is the most important truth we can teach our children. One of the most rewarding aspects of Home Education is to see children grow in their love for the Lord and desire to please Him. Likewise we understand that the whole created universe was made by God and for the glory of Jesus Christ. The Bible is therefore the only real way that we can perceive the real purpose for everything.'

What advice would you give to parents who are considering venturing on this course?

'Most importantly ask God to guide you to His will in this most important matter. We had many doubts as we started Home



Home schooling in practice: Danny, Barbara and Jessica with one of the parents

Education. Yet as each year passes we become further convinced that it was the right decision. We do not believe David has suffered in any way but has benefited in so many. We have never committed ourselves as to how long we are going to do this. We take each year at a time. We are quite convinced that if we had even done just one year David would have benefited. When (if?) the time comes to put our son back into school we trust the Lord will show that plainly to us.'

Jim adds: 'Our fundamental desire for our son's education was not just an education by Christians but one that accepts the word of God as the full and final authority in all things and that honours the Lord Jesus. Our desire is to find a way of education which not only provides better academic results, but above all honours God and produces spiritual results in the children.' ■

For resources on home education see page 19.

Learning Japanese: Danny, Jessica and David with a visitor from Japan



The crucial early years

By Elizabeth Gray

“Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

(Proverbs 22:6)

These words speak clearly to parents and teachers alike and I want to address their importance to children up to the age of 11 although many of the comments would be applicable to children of all ages.

In themselves, children have never changed. They are still God’s individual, unique and special creation. As a result of the Fall they are sinful but they still bear the image of God. They have minds and consciences and an ability to create, to form relationships and to communicate.

Children have not changed but society has. We are witnessing more and more learning and behavioural problems even in very young children. The traits are the same, usually associated with self-will, but we see them manifested in an inability to listen, an inability to concentrate, in noise, in aggression, in disrespectfulness and in a total unawareness of authority.

I want to suggest several reasons for this and some possible ways of leading children into right behaviour.



One of the main reasons for the falling standards, I feel, is that too little value is placed on the importance of motherhood. Motherhood is a career in itself, and though not valued by society today, should be encouraged and supported by church leaders and those in positions of authority and decision-making. The best thing a mother can do for a child is to stay at home in their early years (and later if possible) to create a happy, secure home, in which children can grow up in stability. Unless there are over-riding circumstances, the early years of a child should not be sacrificed to meet the needs of economic or social pressure. Someone has said these words which I endorse wholeheartedly – “The

society that devalues motherhood is committing moral suicide and ours is downing the pills of careerism with mouthfuls of carelessness towards children and the whole responsibility of motherhood.”

The Bible is very clear too about the role of a father. He has a role of leadership and authority and, having sorted that

out, he too should endeavour to give his children time. Rob Parsons in his book, *The Sixty Minute Father*, says, “No-one has ever been heard to say on his death bed, ‘I wish I’d spent more time in the office.’ The incredible thing is that so many fathers who have never missed a window of opportunity in their jobs or careers, pass by the window of childhood as if it will never close. The problem for children is that they don’t have the power of bosses, customers and colleagues. A father can so easily put them off with the words, ‘We’ll do it tomorrow.’”

As we look back on our own childhood, we do not remember how rich our parents were or how big was the house in which we lived, but rather we remember the time our parents spent with us. It takes time to be an effective parent. Our children leave us so quickly and we are left with only vague memories of those years when they needed us.

For many years, great value has been placed upon self-expression. We have heard much about the child-centred approach advocated by Dewey. I would criticise the reasons behind his thinking and his conclusions,

“Motherhood is a career in itself, and ... should be encouraged.”

Elizabeth Gray,
Headmistress of Fulwell
Grange School in
Sunderland

one of them being, "Unless teaching proceeds from the needs of the child, it is idle". The question is – which needs? What Dewey defines from a humanistic perspective as 'needs' are in fact more like 'wants'. This leads to self-expression without control or boundaries – "If it feels right, do it". If there are no guidelines and no boundaries then there is no security for the child. Children need to know what is expected of them and the boundaries must be consistent.

As these boundaries are set and the children are taught absolutes of right and wrong behaviour, we must look at the area of discipline. Correct discipline takes time. It should not be authoritarian where the children are under total control, given no love, no eye contact, no physical expressions of love, no focused attention. Nor should it be permissive where they receive love, attention and support but are given no direction, no guidelines, no correction and the adults go along with the child's wishes. Rather, discipline should be authoritative, based upon unconditional love. Children should be given a lot of direction, definite guidelines and correction when needed. The Bible gives us absolute guidelines for behaviour and children should be given them too in an environment of unconditional love.

Another factor which has led to falling standards is the lack of effective role models for our children. They need to see proper behaviour lived out in front of them before they can understand and copy it. I have to say that in some of our parents today we are seeing the results of the 'do your own thing' approach of the 1960s. The things we do and say provide the examples on which our children will base their lives. Do we show responsible attitudes? Do we demonstrate respect for authority? If we do not, we are promoting an 'anti-authority' lifestyle to our children; we are showing them that we don't have to exercise responsibility for our actions.

Parents quite naturally wish to do all they can to encourage their children intellectually and there are many ways in which this can be achieved. Particularly in the early years, language development is essential to learning. Talking and reading are closely connected. The best way to encourage children's language development is to talk and read to them. If children see books as a source of pleasure to their parents, they are more likely to look to books for their own pleasure. Reading to a child in a close, relaxed atmosphere will

create an automatic association between reading and security. A child who has recognised the delight in reading has found the key to learning.

Every area of education and life requires that a person has the ability to read. In the past there may have been a kind of arrogance on the part of teachers which has led them to insist that parents leave the teaching of reading to them. Research has proved, however, that the right kind of help and encouragement from caring parents is enormously beneficial to children.

All homes and schools impart values – an understanding of what is of ultimate importance in life. The process of transmitting values leads to commitment and shapes attitudes, life choices and behaviour. It is the Christian parents' God-given responsibility to ensure that the influences brought to bear on their children are specifically and thoroughly Christian – "Whatever is

true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

In conclusion, as Christian parents and teachers, our desire should be to lead our children into a knowledge of God as their Creator. If they understand this, the knowledge leads to self-acceptance,

self-respect, self-discipline and self-fulfilment. Children are a gift from God entrusted to us, to be nurtured and cared for by us towards the unfolding of their character. This in turn affects their attitudes, their giftings and their behaviour.

Of course, the most fundamental way in which we can seek to become godly mothers, fathers and teachers is not by concentrating only on parenting or teaching skills but by growing, with God's help, more and more like Jesus. ■

"No-one has ever been heard to say on his death bed, 'I wish I'd spent more time in the office.'"

"That man will be a benefactor of his race who shall teach us how to manage rightly the first years of a child's education."

James A. Garfield.

All Must Have Prizes

By Melanie Phillips: Warner; ISBN: 0751522740; 1998; priced £6.99 (Paperback)

All Christians who have a concern for education and schools should read and learn from this important book.

Melanie Phillips, who formerly wrote for the *Observer* and who now has a regular column for the *Sunday Times* has some important things to say in this book about the current state of education in our country. Melanie is not a Christian but she has taken the same stance as *The Christian Institute* in our various campaigns on marriage and the family.

Many of those who have most influence on the theory behind the practice of schools have a sentimental, optimistic and decidedly unbiblical view of the child and human nature. They are inexplicably committed to the view of the child as essentially good. There is, of course, no place in their philosophy for sin. As Phillips explains even the word "education" is construed as meaning 'lead out' whereas its proper meaning is to 'put in'. The prevailing mind-set of the modern educator is thus one of cultural relativism and child-centred, "progressive" teaching methods.

If the foundation of schooling is built on shifting sand, then the result will ultimately be catastrophic. The fundamental issue in schools today is not lack of resources, although these do matter. The fundamental problem is not one of educational attainment, although in almost all schools standards are not high enough. Unless the system is based on truth, then it will ultimately collapse.

We need to ask ourselves about schooling as about everything else: "What is our ultimate frame of reference?" The only ultimate for the Christian is God's Word - His living Word, Jesus Christ, and His infallible Word in the scriptures which He has provided for us.

We desperately need to start again in our thinking about the school curriculum and the methodology and the discipline of the classroom. Melanie Phillips provides us with a critique of modernity as it affects schools. In endorsing her basic position I recommend it to you as a precursor to thinking about rebuilding the system. She provides a lucid exposé of modernity, post-modernism and relativism.

She describes how until the so-called Enlightenment, most Christian writers had seen education in terms of the transmission of truths necessary for salvation. Since the Enlightenment this approach has been progressively demolished and now the position of Christianity in schools is in exponential decline.

The book has important sections on the unravelling of what has been an essentially Christian culture and the destruction of morality and the teacher's duty to teach right from wrong. In her words from the book, "morality has now become a subject to be discussed only by consenting adults in private".

There is an important section on the flight from parenting and the deconstruction of the Judaeo-Christian concept of the family. As someone who played a small part on the National Curriculum Council and its successor The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, I can vouch for the fact that she accurately records the fight for the school curriculum.

The debate was at its most extreme in the area of English literature with one University Professor describing University departments of English literature as being "part of the ideological apparatus of the capitalist state".

Ultimately it was children in the schools who indirectly suffered at the hands of teachers subtly influenced by such superficial and nonsensical thinking by so-called academics.

Sadly many Christian continue to believe that schools are neutral and that the influence of the school on the child is minimal. Increasingly as the child develops often the influence of the home declines and the influence of the school and the media increases significantly.

This is a book which you really ought to read. I trust that I have whetted your appetite. It will confirm your worst fears and it will surprise. It is essentially a moral book and is a must for all of us who wish to arm for the inevitable conflicts as we fight the good fight in the education arena. ■



Melanie Phillips:
"Morality has now become a subject to be discussed only by consenting adults in private"



Next year *The Christian Institute* is beginning a series of lectures spanning three years on the biblical basis for education. It is also hoped to tape all lectures, to print booklets of each of them and also place them on the internet. The lectures will be held from 7.30pm at Emmanuel College, Gateshead, and are meant for teachers, parents, governors and all others who are interested in Christian education.

Next year's lectures are as follows:

Tuesday 13 April 2000

The Biblical principles underlying the organisation, management, discipline and curriculum of schools. Speaker: John Burn (former Principal at Longbenton Community College and Emmanuel College, Gateshead).

Tuesday 11 May 2000

The Teaching of Mathematics in Schools – a Biblical Perspective. Speaker: Paul Yeulett (Senior Assessment Co-ordinator and teacher of Mathematics at Emmanuel College, Gateshead).

Thursday 21 September 2000

The Teaching of Science in Schools – a Biblical Perspective. Speaker: Steven Layfield (Head of Physics at St Bedes R.C. Secondary School, Bradford)

Thursday 5 October 2000

The Teaching of English in Schools – a Biblical Perspective. Speaker: Nigel McQuoid (Principal of Emmanuel College and teacher of English).

Sources of Information on Home Education Useful Introductions

- *The Home Time Omnibus* - a compilation of articles from the first ten issues of a newsletter for home educating families in the UK.
- *Home Educating with Confidence* by Rick Boyer
- *Survivors Guide to Home Schooling* by Luanne Shackelford and Susan White
- *Encyclopaedia of Bible Truths for School Subjects* by Ruth Haycock (all available from Christian Educational Resources - address below)

Resources

- **Christian Education Europe** PO Box 770, Highworth, Swindon SN6 7TU (Tel/Fax: 01793 783775). Suppliers of Christian curriculum material and other resources. (web site: <http://www.christian-education.org>)
- **Christian Educational Resources** 'Hananeel', Otterhill Farm, Rowtown, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 1HD (Tel: 01932 855918 early evening only). Supplier of books on home education, text books and other materials, including a number of American titles not generally available in the UK. Please send 4 first-class stamps to receive a copy of the current catalogue. (web site: <http://www.thatthing.com/homepages/hananeel/>)
- **Family Resources Catalogue** 123 Claremont Road, Forest Gate, London E7 0PY (Tel: 0181-472 6356) Supplier of curriculum guidelines, books and tapes.

- **Grace Educational Materials Catalogue** 151 Halley Road, Forest Gate, London E7 8DX (Tel: 0181-470 7125) Supplier of project packs, science books, a phonics scheme and other educational resources.
- **London Outreach Centre Resource Library**, 32 Rotherhithe New Road, Rotherhithe, London SE16 2AD (Tel: 0171 394 8285). Makes available on loan a good range of textbooks, biographies and wholesome fiction for home educating families.
- **Northstar UK**, 37 Balmoral Crescent, Dronfield Woodhouse, Sheffield, Derbyshire S18 5ZY. A curriculum designed for students receiving a Christian education via the Internet, leading to GCSE. (web site: <http://www.northstar-academy.org/uk/>)

Home Education Support Groups

- **Home Education Advisory Service**, PO Box 98, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 6AN (Tel/Fax: 01707 371854). An organisation seeking to assist home educating families. (web site: <http://www.heas.org.uk>)
- **Home Service**, 48 Heaton Moor Road, Stockport SK4 4NX (Tel: 0161-432 3782). A Christian organisation which organises occasional conferences and has compiled a contact list designed to put homeschooling families in touch with others in their locality. They also offer testing of basic skills for 8-12 year-olds and have negotiated free entry to English Heritage sites and some museums etc for members who make an advance booking. The current annual membership fee is £10. (web site: <http://www.alphainfo.co.uk/homeservice/>)

Still a Vision for Christian Education

Christian teachers and parents should not give up the fight for a better education system, says John Burn. Although there is problem with a lack of resources in schools, the real issue is the absence of Biblical principles, values and truth.

This issue of *Faith in Education* offers help and encouragement to parents, teachers and anyone who has concern for the future of our children's education.

Marriage and the School Curriculum

Children will be taught the value of marriage as part of the new school curriculum beginning in September 2000. *Faith in Education* reports on Guy Hordern who campaigned for the change.

A Mandate for Christian Involvement

Christians have been too silent for too long, says Paul Yeulett. The best thing Christians can do in the cause of good education is to speak out. Paul Yeulett calls for parents to be mobilised into prayerful action for the sake of our children and the Gospel.

What Should Our Children Read?

Alison McClean shows how a child's spiritual development can be greatly helped by good reading habits. This does not mean children should read only Christian books. Secular titles can promote moral values that Christians could endorse.

Children must enjoy the books they are reading, but the books should also be of good quality that stretch the mind of the reader. *Faith in Education* reviews a number of children's titles for parents to consider.

Home Education: Why Do It?

Jim and Janet McMaster talked to *Faith in Education* about home-educating their son, David. Jim and Janet have devised a Biblically-based curriculum.

The advice from Jim and Janet to anyone thinking of home educating their children is to take the matter prayerfully before God and not to be discouraged in the early days.

The Crucial Early Years

Young children are experiencing greater learning and behavioural problems because little value is placed on motherhood, says Elizabeth Gray. Fathers must also give committed time to their children.

Parents will ultimately achieve more by setting a good example. The lack of an effective role model can be seriously damaging to a young child.

Book Review: All Must Have Prizes by Melanie Phillips

Journalist and author Melanie Phillips shows how traditional morality is being squeezed out of education in her book *All Must Have Prizes*. In the book, she presents a critique of modernity and how it affects schools today.

John Burn says the publication is a step in the right direction to rebuilding the education system. He said: "This is a book you really ought to read". Subjects discussed include postmodernism, relativism, the flight from parenting and the deconstruction of the traditional family.



CHALLENGING PUBLIC POLICY

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The Christian Institute is a policy research organisation which seeks to uphold historic, Biblical, Christian truth. Since being established as a charity in 1990 The Institute has specialised in marriage & the family, religious liberties, education, the case against drugs legalisation, and the constitution.

The Faith in Education project is about:

- unashamedly promoting Christian education;
- helping Christians challenge secular schooling;
- keeping Christians informed of strategic developments;

- providing details of helpful resources.

Faith in Education is a new project of *The Christian Institute* which seeks to promote Christian thinking in education, helping people of good faith to stand up for what is true. This new magazine will be published twice yearly. If you wish to receive this newsletter on a regular basis post back the response form in the freepost envelope (enclosed) or write to our office (address on the left). Alternatively you can e-mail to education.admin@christian.org.uk giving your name and address. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions you can either send them to the same address or e-mail them to education.comment@christian.org.uk