



Influencing the Mountain of Education

by Apostle Dion Boffo

Approaching the subject of education in the America is like approaching a very old reigning Queen. She has been on the throne for quite some time. She is revered by many for her accomplishments. At the same time, she is criticized by many for being out of touch and irrelevant. From a practical standpoint, she needs to be replaced but continues to live in a relative state of delusion; attempting cogent statements to encourage her supporters while trusting the magnitude of her accomplishments to drown out the criticism that will eventually slay her. A difficult place to be for sure.

The naked Queen is parading herself for all to see. Each year her accomplishments diminish. Each year it becomes more difficult for her to face the public. Each year her government make-up artists are busy making up the aging monarch to appear much different than she actually is. While the outward appearance changes, the cancer within continues to grow. Education in America is dying....

In order for us to breath new life into this situation, we must be clear as to our goal. Are there clear biblical imperatives with respect to education? If so, what are they and how are we to execute those imperatives?

As to our first question, the bible is very clear regarding the subject of education or "instruction". If we are to understand this subject of education, we must clearly understand the context.

For this we shall go back to the beginning. We first see instruction within the context of man's creation. That context was twofold. First to be made in "their image, according to our likeness". The second was to "have dominion over.... every creeping thing". The context is that the creation of man was to "re-present" a physical presence of the Godhead in the earth and exercise the purpose of dominion over every creeping thing.

Upon man's creation, the very first action God took was to bless them. This is extremely significant because in this act of blessing we see favor being imparted to man. Favor not for the sake of favor, but favor to be the re-presentation God created them to be.

The next action directed to His new creation was to give them instruction. He educated them. First he instructed them as to his purpose (instructs them to reproduce, subdue, and have dominion). Secondly he instructed them as to his provision (instructs them regarding food). Thirdly, he instructs Adam as to his protection (do not eat of this or you will surely die).

Herein we find the keys to understanding the root purpose of education. To

miss this is to miss the entire context of the word. The root purpose of education is threefold. Understand God's purpose for one's life. Understand what God has provided in order to sustain you in accomplishing that purpose. And finally understand that there are attractive dangers that have serious consequences and will keep you from His purposes. This is the essence of education. No matter what else we believe about education, if it does not go back to these roots, education becomes the weed that chokes out the true roots of purpose, provision and protection and replaces them with doubt, debt and defensiveness.... As indicated in the following statements:

Do I really have a purpose?

I need to do what makes me happy regardless of the cost.

I don't need God; I can take care of myself.

Let me ask you a question. In light of the above statements, which of the two roots do you believe is presently feeding and anchoring our education system? As we keep in mind the context and spiritual nature of our educational roots, what kind of education should spring forth from such roots? What are the biblical imperatives?

Probably the most important imperative is that of the educational responsibilities of the family. For example we read in Deut. 6:7... "You shall teach them (the words I command you today) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up". Clearly the burden of responsibility lies within the family to teach our children. But it does not stop there. We are to teach as we are going about our daily routine. In other words, these principles are practical. They are foundational. They are both applied and implied in our daily lives. This occurs by teaching biblical order within the family, biblical roles and relationships within the family, biblical purpose of the family and establishing a biblical worldview within the family. I believe strongly that the Education Mountain cannot be retaken without taking back the Family Mountain.

Putting the imperative of teaching within the family unit aside, I see distinct imperatives issued by God in the form of commands and laws. You shall do this... you shall not do that etc. Furthermore, it is evident from the verse above Deut. 6:7 and many others, that it is not enough to know and to do, but make sure that others are taught as well. Not simply speaking the laws by rote, but by living them in one's life. This idea has a parallel in the verse from Matt. 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples..." or more accurately, "Therefore, as you are going, make disciples....."

We see from the above examples, that the biblical imperatives regarding teaching are not simply for the purpose of listing rules and regulations to be learned or even practiced per se. They are foundational to every area of one's life that when both learned and practiced, they spill over and affect every area of one's life.

In light of the fact that our present educational culture is more of a Greek nature that prizes knowledge rather than a Hebrew nature that prizes lifestyle

application, I thought it appropriate to understand some of the history of Jewish education.

The first century Jewish historian Josephus writing in "Josephus Against Apion" Book 1 section 12 declares:

"Our principal care of all is this, to educate our children well; and we think it to be the most necessary business of our whole life to observe the laws that have been given us, and to keep those rules of piety that have been delivered down to us."

Again in "Josephus Against Apion" Book 2 section 17-18 he declares, "For there are two ways of coining at any sort of learning and a moral conduct of life; the one is by instruction in words, the other by practical exercises. Now other lawgivers have separated these two ways in their opinions, and choosing one of those ways of instruction, or that which best pleased every one of them, neglected the other. Thus did the Lacedemonians and the Cretians teach by practical exercises, but not by words; while the Athenians, and almost all the other Grecians, made laws about what was to be done, or left undone, but had no regard to the exercising them thereto in practice.18. But for our legislator, he very carefully joined these two methods of instruction together; for he neither left these practical exercises to go on without verbal instruction, nor did he permit the hearing of the law to proceed without the exercises for practice; but beginning immediately from the earliest infancy, and the appointment of every one's diet, he left nothing of the very smallest consequence to be done at the pleasure and disposal of the person himself."

We immediately see from these first century passages that there is in fact nothing new under the sun. Josephus is addressing the differences between the education of Jews and how those outside of Judaism teach. He immediately goes to the scriptures and specifically Moses, referred to as "our lawgiver". He anchors his position solidly in scripture. Note too his emphasis on the law and rules of piety being "delivered down to us". Did you pick up on the sense of being "privileged" to even have the law and the tremendous benefit it is? Josephus saw these laws as providing parameters regarding everything that touches ones life.

A further look into the Hebrew term for education during the time of Josephus reveals something interesting. It is the word Talmud Torab... or the study of Torah (the first five books of the bible). Clearly, the term education was more properly related to the study of Torah and had little to do with the prized pursuits of knowledge and culture promoted by our present educational system. Purpose, provision, and protection as presented in God's word were paramount.

Very much along these same lines, the Hebrew term for education that is used today is Hinuk. It has the meaning of "to train". Contextually we

know that those attending Hebrew School today are not training to train, but training for their Bar Mitzvah. That day when they will officially become a Bar “son” of the Mitzvah “commandment”. While this became an official ceremony sometime in the 15 century, I highlight this to show an educational continuity that remains even today... which is the foundational commitment to the following of biblical principles being essential for life.

As we continue to examine the subject of early Jewish education, it is clear that all secular study was related back to the scriptures. For example, Nathan Drazin writing back in 1940 on the subject of early Jewish education states:

“As the child grew older he began to study the manifold details of the various laws... from these details the adult mind would later evolve certain principles that would serve as a guide to new situations that might arise in life.

Secular knowledge was brought to the child not as separate bits of knowledge, but in relation to the Law. In studying, for example, the laws of permitted and forbidden foods, one learned directly and indirectly many facts of botany, zoology, physiology, anatomy, hygiene, and medicine as may be evidenced by the extant work, the Mishnah. To understand the Jewish calendar, the child had to be made familiar with certain elements of astronomy. So, too, in studying the laws pertaining to distances that one was permitted to walk on the Sabbath, the pupil learned certain facts of arithmetic and geometry. The narrative portions of the Bible supplied the child with certain facts of history and geography. Thus the study of Torah completely integrated life.”

Here in the last sentence, we have the essence of Jewish education. It was to be an education that would cause the Torah to be exemplified in every area of one’s life. It was not compartmentalized and relegated to the religious and secular. It was clearly discerned that one’s religious beliefs not only should, but would influence every other area of one’s life. With the advent of Christianity, the subject of education began to be addressed in the early church. Historically we find the Christians in Rome parting from the norm of sending their children to be educated under the Roman public school system and opting instead, according to ancient records, to form new Christian schools and take control of former Roman Public schools. There has been some evidence that the Christians who were in the catacombs established some form of Christian education.

The Catholic Church, during the Middle Ages, opened schools of its own to both train priests and also to focus on grammar and liberal arts. This was the beginning of Catholic education.

The advent of the Renaissance provided a renewed interest in learning. As learning became more accessible to more people, an unfortunate consequence occurred. Education became more and more secular.

This situation continued until the time leading up to the Reformation.

John Wycliffe, William Tyndale and many others risked their very lives to supply people with the Bible in their own language. This resulted in many Christian schools sprouting up all over to study and read the Scriptures.

In fact, during the time of the reformation, over 2,000 Evangelical Christian schools were formed and attended largely by French Huguenots.

The counter-reformation movement by the Catholic church, stayed the advance of the Evangelical Christian schools and eventually all but eradicated the Reform movement in France.

The newly forming education system in England also came largely under influence of the Catholic Church. However, struggles for power among reigning monarchs and the Anglican Church opened the way for those seeking religious freedom to realize that desire. They came to America.

As with early Jewish education, the early Christians here in America adopted much of the same the same mindset with respect to education.

We read that in 1647 the "Older Deluder Satan Act" was passed. It declared that students in Massachusetts be required to read, write and understand the scriptures. Public education was about teaching the scriptures.

Many schools were established at every level. Mennonites, Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists and Catholics eventually established schools that operated successfully until the late 1930's to early 1940's when influences such as modernism, individualism and intellectualism began to supplant the core religious content and rendered many totally secular.

Since then we have noticed an up-tic in Christian education where Christian Schools and Christian Home Schooling have begun to flourish.

In spite of the resurgence of Christian schools, the effect of Christian education remains suspect with many statistics virtually the same for both secular and Christian education. Sadly, statistics that should show a definite difference in the values, character and core beliefs of Christian students often show no appreciable difference at all.

As for our progress with secular education, the statistics are abysmal.

According to the National Institute for literacy, 50% of our nations unemployed youth are functionally illiterate. In California 33% of the

High School students will not graduate. (California Department of Education) According to the OECD, the US ranks 15th in literacy among the nations of the world. Time Magazine reported in 2008 that the 77% graduation rate from High School was below that of most developed countries. In short, the "Grand Dame" Education has been mortally wounded.

Given our present situation, how do we regain access to the educational heights?

As the church, we first must begin with repentance. Consider this. According to a recent survey in 2008 by George Barna, only 9% of ALL American adults possess a Christian worldview. Among born again Christians, this figure becomes 19% or only one Christian out of five. Is it any wonder that our children have no roots in biblical principles when 91% of the ADULTS do not hold to a Christian worldview and only one out of 5 Christian adults hold to a Christian worldview? As adults, we must set the standard and return to a biblical center. We must repent for coercing people into making a "commitment" to Christ and not encouraging them to become "converted" to Christ. We must repent for building "successful" churches at the expense of building biblical families. We must repent for our lack of reverence regarding the covenant of marriage that has allowed this sacred covenant to become denigrated and the family to suffer the devastating consequences of divorce. As adult believers, we must begin to both exemplify and promote a Christian worldview.

As the church, we must repent and eschew programs and policies that take children away from their parents and by default create a model that promotes an educational paradigm that is largely devoid of parental responsibility. The worship service should be revered as a place where families worship together and not a place where parents take a break from their children. Our children should learn to worship God because they see us worshipping God. Our children should learn to pray because they see us praying. They should see us crying out before the Lord. They should see us fasting and exercising our faith. Our children should see us coming before the alter for prayer and also for repentance. Our children should know about our faith because we openly practice our faith. This will be crucial if the heights of education are to be retaken.

Our next step should be to exercise our faith and believe that God is willing to reveal a plan to His people that will put us on our way to restoring a biblical center to our education system.

Next we must unite as believers and begin exploring educational strategies

and entering into dialogue that will compliment the foundational biblical values and core precepts entrusted to the family of God.

Some of those concepts should include:

- All subjects taught should have a practical and discernable root that goes back to the scriptures.
- All subjects taught should have a practical application in our society.
- Educators should recognize that those being educated are uniquely created by God. As such, a tremendous responsibility is implied to “train them up in the way that they should go” (or the ‘way they are bent’). Note the implication of the verse. God has created this individual in a very unique way. This child will process information in a unique way. This child will have a unique personality. This child will have a unique plan and a purpose spoken over him/her by the very voice of God. Given these three basic facts, it is crucial to be able to fit the education to the student rather than trying to fit the student to an educational system.

Given the above concepts, I would envision an educational system that is overseen and operated by groups of churches and parents with input from those who have influence on the other mountains. I firmly believe that the educational system needs both a strong representation from the ecclesial as well as the familial but not to the exclusion of the other important factors that influence our society. It is crucial that it all tie together.

The system would key in to the uniqueness of the child and be guided by the way the child processes information. I would envision classrooms that are organized according to how children process information rather than according to age or grade. The classrooms would be more generational in nature with the older students mentoring the younger in many respects. Common classes would be structured to bring the groups together for interaction geared to understanding their differences, team building and embracing those differences as necessities in their individual lives.

As children grow, their spiritual gifts would begin to be recognized. At this point, children would be encouraged in their unique abilities and taught to both share their gifting and also receive the gifting of others.

As the student grows, the student will begin to move in the direction of their gifting and calling. In some cases, they will be called to the ecclesial and in other cases they will be called to the secular. Realistically, it is clear that the majority of students will be called to serve in secular fields since the majority of influence occurs outside of the mountain of religion.

Therefore it is important that the church in particular recognize that secular training is spiritual training and that it is no longer acceptable to

abdicate that responsibility to the oversight of others. This shift alone will have a massive impact in every other realm of influence. This will also represent a major departure from the separation of the secular and the ecclesial and bring all influences back to their true biblical core.

From a practical standpoint, given the rate of knowledge growth and knowledge obsolescence, we must immediately modify our structures accordingly. Consider the fact that technical information is doubling every 2 years. This means that what students are paying dearly to learn in their freshman year will be outdated by their junior year and possibly obsolete by the time they graduate.

Having recognized that we are to be supplying a solid core education that will allow flexibility later on we should consider applying the concept of shorter terms of ongoing tertiary education over against the traditional four to six year plus models. We should be looking in the direction of multiple areas of certification over against the extended four year model which tends toward length and breadth rather than something more concise and specific.

The explosion of knowledge will necessitate the change to equip and train more people with specific information and skill on an ongoing basis rather than trying to equip people with more information in a fixed period of time that is quickly rendered obsolete.

As those skills become more interrelated and interdependent, the ability to effectively work together in teams will be absolutely necessary. People who have been exposed early on to the revised educational system I have suggested will be well prepared to understand the differences represented by the various skills and will have an appreciation for the necessity of the diversity of gifting and perspective in order for teams to achieve their maximum effectiveness.

I trust that this has been helpful in tracing the history of where we have been and provided a vision for where I believe we need to be headed. I believe deeply that God has given us an anointing to turn things around. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, look to Him, the Author and Finisher of our faith and He will lift us up to retake the mountain of Education.