



Written by [Israel Wayne](#) on February 7, 2019

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The Case for Christian Education

Scripture and church fathers clearly state that education should be God-centered, but God is banned from public schools.

In spite of the vast sums spent annually for public elementary and secondary schools by our federal, state, and local governments, academic standards in the United States have been plummeting scandalously for decades, as is detailed in other articles in this special report. But the academic decline is only one part of the story. The social, moral, and spiritual decline of the public schools is, arguably, far worse.



So, perhaps we should be asking: “Why are we spending all this money?” And that will lead us to the more profoundly important question: “What is the purpose of education?”

It only stands to reason that a religious people would avoid sending their children to a school that would undermine their religion. However, in our day and age, most people of faith — which is the vast majority of Americans — send their children to schools that are antithetical to their core values and convictions.

The Purpose of Education

The purpose of an education, from a Christian worldview, is ultimately to know our Creator and save our immortal souls. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says the chief end of man is “To glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”

Knowing God, and what He is like, in turn, teaches us how we ought to live. Harvard College’s original mission statement in 1636 defines the purpose of an education this way: “Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.” This once reflected the common understanding of education in America.

In our day and age, people pursue education largely for economic reasons. Doing well in school is a means to getting into a good college, which is a means to a college degree, which is a means to getting a well-paying job, which is a means to making a lot of money and attaining affluence and comfort. Of course, there is nothing wrong per se with attaining material success, and certainly breadwinners need to be able to earn enough money to support their families. But vocational training is not the *purpose* of education, and material successes are not the most important things in life.

Jesus Christ teaches us that life is more than the stuff we acquire: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). Also: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).



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Prominent Western thinkers whose ideas were foundational to Western civilization came to the same conclusion. “The end then of learning,” said John Milton (1608–1674), “is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him.”

Church History

The early church fathers were fairly unanimous in their support of parents taking responsibility for the education of their own children. Faith was not viewed as a separated and segmented particle of life, but a comprehensive worldview that encapsulated their entire existence. They embraced the truth of Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Of course, it is impossible today to teach “fear of the Lord” and “knowledge of the holy” in the government schools.

Clement I of Rome wrote in 96 A.D. to the church in Corinth: “Let us fear the Lord Jesus, whose blood was given for us. Let us reverence our rulers; let us honor our elders; let us instruct our young men in the lesson of the fear of God.... Let our children be partakers of the instruction which is in Christ: let them learn how lowliness of mind prevaleth with God, what power chaste love hath with God, how the fear of Him is good and great and saveth all them that walk therein in a pure mind with holiness.”

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107, A.D.) wrote to the early church in Philadelphia (modern-day Turkey): “Fathers, ‘bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;’ and teach them the holy Scriptures, and also trades, that they may not indulge in idleness. Now [the Scripture] says, ‘A righteous father educates [his children] well; his heart shall rejoice in a wise son.’”

Nearly all of the early church fathers stood strongly against the influence of the pagan arts, and denounced in strong terms the debauchery of the theater and the stadium. For them, wisdom was not merely academic knowledge, but it encapsulated the idea of virtue as well.

Faith, Virtue, and Knowledge

The Apostle Peter laid out a sequence of progression for the Christian life that applies to teaching and learning as well. “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge” (2 Peter 1:5).

Government schools purport to transmit knowledge comprised of supposedly neutral facts. Many “public school” advocates would claim they do not indoctrinate children, but instead, simply give them a values-free education, that allows children to determine for themselves what they believe (from many bits of amoral data). Political conservatives rightly cry “foul,” and point out that there is an awful lot of moralizing that happens on everything from sexual ethics, to environmentalism, socialism and much more.

So, once the student acknowledges God as the source of all creation, the attention then turns to the questions of ethics and right living. We find even in the pagan cultures of old that inculcating the young in virtue was a primary concern. For what does it profit the individual, the family, or society if a youth is filled with all worldly knowledge and practical skills but is an insufferable brat? Or even worse, uses his education to become a brilliant, vicious criminal or tyrant?

Socrates seemed to argue that it was impossible to teach moral virtues to children. However, virtually



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every human society has recognized the imparting of moral virtues as one of the most important duties of parents and teachers. So, what is virtue? It is a habit of the soul that disposes it toward right moral action. Confucianism, widely practiced throughout China for more than two thousand years, before the communist takeover, stressed five virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity. Plato and other ancient Greek philosophers identified four natural virtues called *cardinal* virtues on which all others hinge: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. To these four natural virtues, Christian theologians added the three supernatural or *theological* virtues of faith, hope, and charity (or love). These were taken from sacred scripture, most especially from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Thus, the seven Christian virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. The habitual practice of these virtues leads to the formation of the proper Christian character.

So if proper ethics and virtue are to be the grid through which students receive information, who should be the standard-bearers of these transcendent principles? If it does not frighten Christian and Jewish parents to have the government creating the standards of what is right and wrong for their children, it should! Parents, not big government, know best how to equip their children for life, and how to live according to the correct values.

So What Does the Bible Say About Education?

In one of the most revered passages of the Hebrew scriptures, parents are instructed, in Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

God gave parents the responsibility not only to teach their children, but also to guard them against evil influences from their peers and profane culture.

Psalms 1:1-2 teaches, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

In the New Testament, Paul warns (1 Corinthians 15:33), "Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals."

For centuries, both Catholic and Protestant churches have utilized a catechism for children (a series of questions to discover what students know about the doctrines of the church and the Christian faith in general). It has been deemed imperative to help students know what they believe, and why their beliefs are true. While never a majority within their ranks, there have been certain Catholic and Protestant leaders who have recognized the perils of placing children and youth under the tutelage of state schools that are indifferent to, or outright hostile toward, Christian faith and morals.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) proclaimed: "However, even if the high schools studied the Scriptures diligently we should not send every one to them, as we do now, when nothing is considered but numbers, and every man wishes to have a doctor's title; we should only send the aptest pupils, well prepared in the lower schools.... But where the Holy Scriptures are not the rule, I advise no one to send his child. Everything must perish where God's word is not studied unceasingly; and so we see what manner of men there are now in the high schools.... I greatly fear the high schools are nothing but great



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gates of hell, unless they diligently study the Holy Scriptures and teach them to the young people.”

Unfortunately, the Protestants have been slower in embracing the need to start their own schools than the Catholics. The Catholics were the first group to fight for exemption to compulsory attendance laws (see *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* in 1925). Most Protestant pastors didn’t even consider starting their own schools until the 1970s.

In “The Christian Education of Youth” (1929), Pope Pius XI stated: “Since every method of education aims for that formation of man which he ought to acquire in this mortal life, in order to attain the ultimate goal destined to him by the Creator, it is plainly evident that as no education can be truly so called which is not entirely ordered to that final end, in the present order of things established by the providence of God, namely after He revealed Himself in His Only-begotten, who alone is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6), no full and perfect education can exist except that which is called Christian.”

“Therefore,” he continued, “every form of teaching children, which, confined to the mere forces of nature, rejects or neglects those matters which contribute with God’s help to the right formation of Christian life, is false and full of error.... For the most part those systems of teaching which are openly proclaimed in our day tend to this goal.”

The government-directed, taxpayer-supported public schools of today definitely fit the description of “those systems of teaching” that Pope Pius XI condemned as “false and full of error.” But they didn’t arrive at their current dire state overnight. It has taken more than a century and a half for the government schools to degenerate into the militantly anti-Christian, nightmarish system that it is today. However, the socialist propagandists of the 1830s did indeed intend that their proposed system would take us to our present predicament. One of the architects of the public-school movement during that period was Orestes Brownson, the very influential New England writer-editor-philosopher, then a disciple of socialist Robert Owen. Brownson, who converted to Christianity, broke with his former comrades and exposed their plot. He wrote:

The great object was to get rid of Christianity, and to convert our churches into halls of science. The plan was not to make open attacks on religion although we might belabor the clergy and bring them into contempt where we could; but to establish a system of state, — we said national — schools, from which all religion was to be excluded, in which nothing was to be taught but such knowledge as is verifiable by the senses and to which all parents were to be compelled by law to send their children.

Dr. A.A. Hodge, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, warned the Presbyterian church in 1890: “I am as sure as I am of Christ’s reign that a comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separated from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove the most appalling enginery for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen.”

His words have proven to be prophetically accurate. It is my sincere hope that people of faith will increasingly remove their children from State-dominated schools, and choose an education that supports and encourages the faith and beliefs they want to impart to their children.



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