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Home Influence: Key to Education

by Ronald E. Hawkins

The sixties and seventies have been variously described by historians, but most of them agree that the period represented a watershed in America's history. The era witnessed the entrenchment of an a-biblical consensus in the institutions of America with an accompanying erosion of Judeo-Christian values. Nowhere was this entrenchment more visible than in academic institutions. Americans everywhere began to feel keen disappointment in the permissive, relativistic, anti-American dogma attached to the rhetoric and practice of American colleges and universities. The disillusionment soon extended to the public education system, being infiltrated by the products of the colleges and universities.

The Public School's Dilemma

The public school in America was once the backbone of her educational system. Since the late sixties until this hour, there has been a growing uneasiness about the decreasing quality of the final products emerging from these institutions. Many newspapers and magazines have chronicled the descent of academic credibility in the nation's high schools. Millions of high school graduates have been termed "functionally illiterate." In fact, this past spring Florida had to withhold diplomas from 1,300 of its 86,000 high school seniors because they failed the state's new functional literacy test.

Discipline in many public schools is woefully weak.

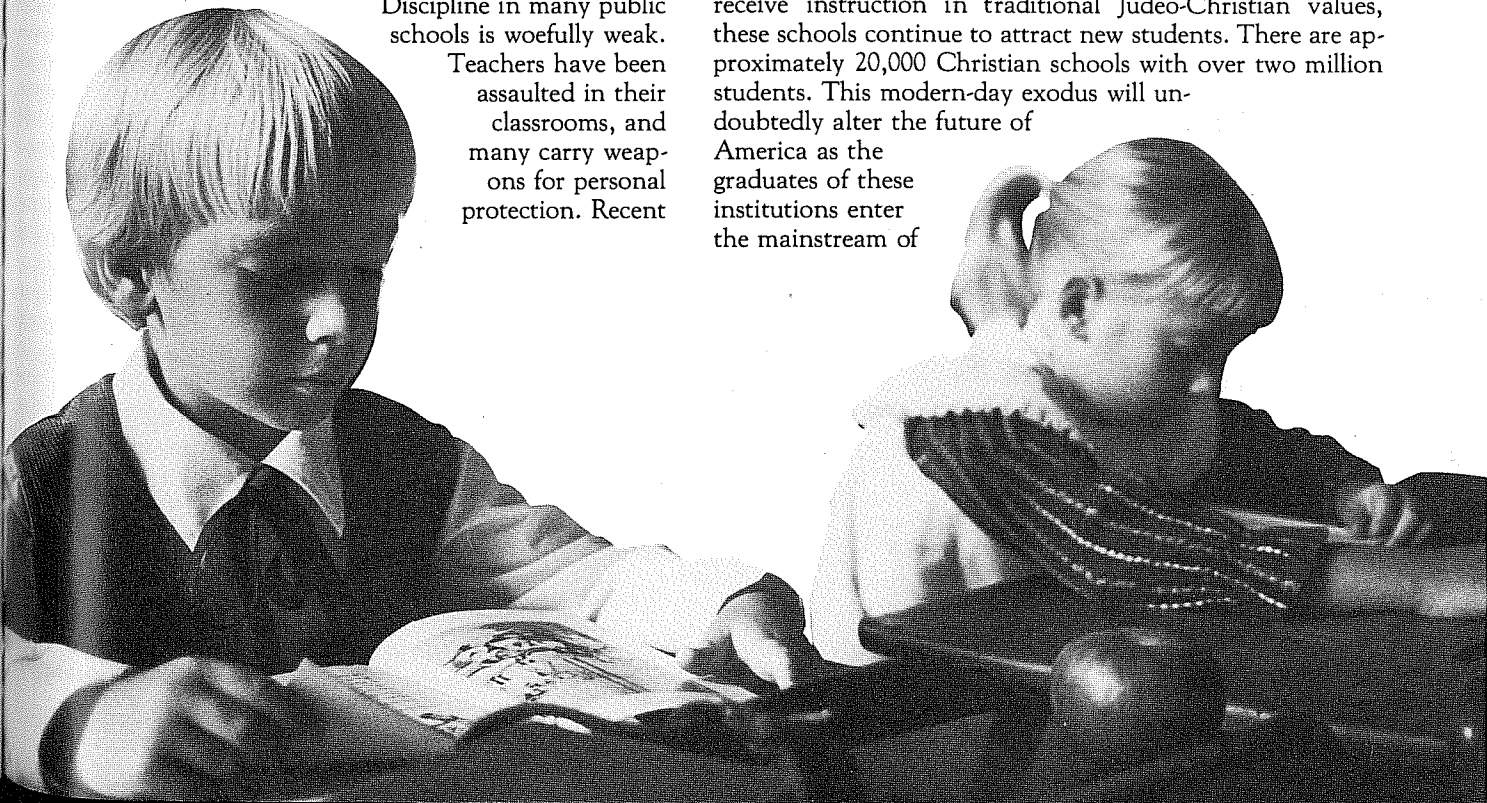
Teachers have been assaulted in their classrooms, and many carry weapons for personal protection. Recent

television documentaries have placed these extremities before the American public. The *American School Board Journal* reported that teaching school in some cities is already twice as dangerous as working in a steel mill. The excessive use of drugs and alcohol by public school students is a matter of national concern.

The commitment to Darwinism has become so strong in public education that creationism is viewed, almost without exception, as the highest form of naivete. The decision of the Supreme Court in 1962 and 1963 to ban prayer and Bible reading from public schools marked the enthronement of secular humanism as the religion of public education. Since that time, Christians in the public education system have literally been sojourning in an academic Egypt. C.C. Morrison, former editor of the liberal *Christian Century*, has said, "Public education without religion is creating a secular mentality faster than the church can Christianize it."

The Christian Alternative

Since the mid-1960s, Christians have vigorously pursued alternatives to the public school system. Without doubt the Christian day school has become the most dynamic of these alternatives. These schools began rather haltingly but at this juncture new schools are starting every day. Because of the deepening concern of America's parents for their children to receive instruction in traditional Judeo-Christian values, these schools continue to attract new students. There are approximately 20,000 Christian schools with over two million students. This modern-day exodus will undoubtedly alter the future of America as the graduates of these institutions enter the mainstream of



American industrial, professional, and political life. This influx of persons grounded in the values of Scripture may well help to change the amoral trend and create an atmosphere dedicated to the visions of our Founding Fathers.

The Christian day school can prove a valuable ally for Christian parents committed to raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Paul Kienel in *The Christian School* affirms this need when he states:

"Unless a child is inculcated with the Christian school educational philosophy (seeing all one encounters in life through the eyes of God as revealed in God's Word) during his early years, it is a difficult rethinking process later. As we have already seen, patterns of learning are established very early in life."

The Christian day school movement has provided the parents of America with invaluable assistance as they seek to implant the Judeo-Christian value system in the minds and hearts of their children. Like all movements, the Christian day schools are not without faults. Christian parents should consider several factors as they seek the right school for their children.

Parents ought to consider the staff and facilities of the school. Some schools are born in the heat of antiseccular fervor. Does the school have sufficient resources to do a good job academically and socially? Does it have personnel equally qualified as its secular counterparts? Are the facilities conducive to the instructional process?

Parents ought to be concerned about the atmosphere that will surround their children in the school. Is there a proper blend of love and rules? Is the staff sensitive to the struggles of adolescents who are moving toward adulthood? Occasionally students are expected to be more than young people. Every attempt at self-expression or any questioning of rules may be seen as rebellion against authority. Such an experience can prove extremely damaging to a young person. The blending of law and grace is one of the most difficult tasks that faces the Christian educator. How well does this school combine the two?

Parenting or Schooling

Perhaps the most serious issue to be faced by the parents who bring their child into the Christian school is their motive. Do they hope to see the school accomplish something in the life of the child that they have been unable to accomplish? Do

they believe that the school can somehow Christianize their children without the consistent support of the parents in both the home and the school? These are serious questions that parents ought to ask themselves.

The idea of the school functioning in place of the parents is not new in American education. Jennings Wagoner, in a paper to the South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society in October 1980, discusses the concept of *in loco parentis* (in place of the parents) as it relates to the establishment of the American college. He stated:

Parents still felt that the faculty was obligated to take every step necessary to stand in *loco parentis*.

Something akin to the *in loco parentis* concept seems mixed with the motives of many parents today as they enroll their children in Christian schools. Some parents with young children may feel that everything will be all right because "my child is going to a Christian school." Divorcing children from the secular world of the public school and committing them to the care of Christian teachers is often viewed as a fast, safe way to build character. Some parents, experiencing difficulty with their adolescents, bring them to the Christian school, thinking that such an environment will "straighten them out." Christian school administrators should be on the lookout for these attitudes and need to plan to educate parents with respect to the fallacy of this character-development-by-proxy approach.

Christian parents have often been devastated and embittered when they view the product of the Christian school. They blame the school for the poor character of their children. However, the blame cannot be placed on the school; it must be placed on the parents. The lesson the school should learn from this is that parents need help. There should be more parent-education programs sponsored by Christian schools. Parents should not be allowed to enroll their children without enrolling themselves in some type of parent-training program. Parental involvement in the school ought to be mandated rather than simply encouraged.

Whether in public schools or Christian schools, the ultimate responsibility for the children of America rests with the parents. The homes of America need to be led by parents who consistently teach and model biblical values. Developmentalists are all united in their emphasis on the importance of the home. Erik Erikson in *Identity Youth and Crisis* stresses the importance of the mother.

"Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by the kind of administration which in its quality combines a sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness."

Erikson's concern for



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"rhythmic" mothering is to be applauded. However, the Bible reaches beyond the role of the mother and strikes closer to the heart of the matter as it deals with the role of the father.

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More than Christian schools, America needs Christian fathers. The Old Testament closes with a clear emphasis on the family and the importance of the father. Malachi prophesies that when Jesus comes He will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers (Mal. 4:6). In this last verse of the Old Testament the emphasis is placed on the reality of God's curse upon that land where fathers do not have a heart for their children.

Fathers need to grasp biblical priorities if they hope to manifest a heart for their children. In Exodus 21:5, Moses speaks of the bondservant. Paul uses the term metaphorically in Romans 1:1 to describe himself. Every Christian father should desire to use the term for himself as well. Above all else, the bondservant is a man of priorities. He loves his master, his wife, and his children. Caught up in that love, he refuses to be enticed by the lure of personal freedom. God wants every Christian father and husband to commit to these priorities.

Paul speaks to fathers of the danger of provoking their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). Nothing will provoke children quicker than to defraud them of parental love which is their natural right. It is as though children have indelibly recorded on their minds the proposition, "My parents owe me love, time, and instruction!" No intervening agency can meet that need. No undertaking, whether self-serving or humane, should subvert that debt.

Paul speaks of the managerial responsibility of the man of God with reference to his home in 1 Timothy 3:4. The man whose priorities are right is concerned about the proper management of his house. As the manager of a "family team," the father knows the strengths and weaknesses of every player. He instructs and encourages each player with patience and persistence so the whole team may benefit.

Schoolteachers do not have the time nor, often, the inside knowledge required to make such an investment. Parents alone can consistently stand in the gap as instruments of nurture and instruction for their children. This commitment is in keeping with the model of

parenting set forth in Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Paul Kienel asserts the need for the early indoctrination of the child with the Christian school educational philosophy. Parents are misdirected, however, if they think the Christian school can function in their place. The philosophy of love and life embodied in the words *nurturance and instruction* must be the experience of the child before he ever enters the academic corridors. No sojourn in a Christian school can compensate for the lack of godly parental models.

In Either Case

America is a nation in turmoil. Much of her turmoil has nothing to do with politics or economics. America's youth have risen up in anger as a generation parented by proxy. Parents have often substituted toys for time, compensation for companionship, and uncertainty for instruction. The time has come to eliminate excuses for noninvolvement and replace them with genuine parental investment in the daily lives of children. □

