

Get the Kids Out!

By Cathy Duffy (*)

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Where can you have a discussion about education with devout Christians, Jews, and Muslims, as well as atheists and representatives of other belief systems, with most everyone agreeing on one central premise? The answer is the conference for the Alliance for the Separation of School and State (www.honestedu.org) that was held in Washington, D.C. in November of 2004.

The central premise upon which most attendees agreed was the conference theme: “Get the kids out of harmful schools and into honest education.” In the opinion of the Alliance and of most attendees, “harmful schools” are those funded and run by the government, whether they are traditional public schools or charter schools.

Honest Education

The last part of the conference theme -- “and into honest education” -- is defined in the Alliance’s brochure:

“In honest education, textbook and teacher openly discuss and reinforce parents’ beliefs about human origins, purpose, destiny, and standards of right and wrong. Consistency between school and family helps students grasp that reality is knowable. From this starting point, students can develop their reasoning powers and moral integrity.”

Perhaps it would be easier to understand what this means if we look at what “dishonest education” is. Government schools use a mistaken notion of “separation of church and state” to require schools to squelch any discussion of God, the basis of morality, the purpose of life, absolute truth, salvation, and especially any explanation of the origins of life that bring God into the picture.

Government schools must present secular, materialistic rationalizations for any theological questions, although some pagan theological explanations are allowed through the anti-God filter. Students are taught to be open to competing belief systems since all fall into the category of “mere opinion” rather than fact.

Meanwhile, the majority of parents claim to believe in God. Many of those parents believe in Scripture as the source of truth.

Clashing Belief Systems

What’s a child to do when she loves and respects her parents, loves and respects her first grade teacher, but is caught between competing “truths” presented by parents and teacher?

This creates a cognitive dissonance that most children deal with by compartmentalizing information and beliefs. A child believes what her parents say, attends church, memorizes Bible verses for Awana, and participates in the youth group, tucking all the pieces of this Christian worldview into isolated mental compartments.

She simultaneously believes her teacher, who has taught her evolution as fact, a multicultural tolerance for all religions as being equally true, and a nonjudgmental morality that each person determines for him or herself. All this gets stored in other isolated compartments.

When the compartments clash, as they inevitably will, especially in the teen years, most young people deal with it by becoming relativists. They choose to believe that it's wrong to swear, drink, do drugs, and have sex when they are around their church friends, but all that behavior can be tolerated or even embraced when in the company of schoolmates who consider it the norm.

This compartmentalization of beliefs about the important life questions results in what Marshall Fritz, president of the Alliance, labels "dishonest education." Children who must resort to relativism to make sense of the competing "truths" they feel obliged to accept never learn to use their minds well. They never receive an honest education that helps them fully grasp truth. They come to believe that it is impossible to even know truth.

Relativist Rationalizations

Consider a fifteen-year-old young man who arrives at his high school biology class with his Sunday School lessons on God and Creation as presented in the Book of Genesis nicely compartmentalized into his thinking. When the teacher covers the textbook chapter on evolution, he has to figure out how to synthesize the supposedly scientific, rational explanation for the existence of man with his Bible lessons. If he accepts evolution, then how does he make sense of the concept of original sin? And if original sin might be a myth, then why on earth would he need salvation?

For most teens, the tempting solution is to accept the outward appearances and attitudes of Christianity when they are convenient but the moral pragmatism compatible with evolution when they want to choose their own way rather than God's.

Was anyone terribly surprised when T.C. Pinckney, Second Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention, warned the Convention in 2001 that Christians are losing 70 percent of teens who are involved in church youth groups within two years of high school graduation? When teens leave their parents' authority and experience the numerous temptations of modern culture, their Bible-lesson morality usually lacks the consistent philosophical, theological, and biological underpinnings necessary to stand against the tide. It is no wonder our culture is degenerating.

Freedom to Think Logically

Attendees at the conference did not all share a common belief about God or the answers to all the important life questions. But they did agree that children need to learn to think coherently and that they can only do so when they are not forced to violate the law of non-contradiction by

accepting opposing “facts” as being true. They agreed that children should be educated at home or in schools that do not undermine parental beliefs. If both parents and schools present a logically consistent worldview, children can develop their minds to think logically and become truly educated human beings.

Conference attendees further agreed that this cannot happen in government schools. Government schools have always existed primarily to serve the greater needs and goals of the State rather than those of parents or individuals. Certainly, there is some individual benefit in most education, but the larger purpose driving the endeavor is not individual good but collective benefit to the State.

Therefore, government schools substitute goals of citizenship and preparation for the workforce for more individualistic goals such as developing the human capacity to express and appreciate goodness, truth, and beauty; or pursuing theological virtues of faith, hope, and love; or achieving economic independence through entrepreneurship.

Homeschoolers Lead the Way

Homeschoolers were well represented at the conference, with most participants pointing to homeschooling as the best example of actually separating school and state. Private schools, too, were represented, although many participants observed that sometimes private schools simply mimic government schools in providing dishonest education.

A number of conference attendees are already making major efforts to “get the kids out” by promoting homeschooling and private education. Michael Farris, founder of Home School Legal Defense Association and president of Patrick Henry College (www.phc.edu) was presented with the Alliance’s D’Toqueville award in honor of his groundbreaking work in advancing education freedom for homeschoolers. Samuel Blumenfeld received a giant pickaxe as the Digging Deeper award for all his research and documentation of the evils of government schooling in his books such as *Is Public Education Necessary?* (The Paradigm Company, 1985).

John Taylor Gatto, author of *The Underground History of American Education* (Oxford Village Press, 2002), previewed a clip from his explosive new documentary on education that is still in the development stage. This documentary has the potential to shift the topics raised at the conference to national prominence practically overnight.

E. Ray Moore, director of the Exodus Mandate Project (www.exodusmandate.org), works with pastors to encourage them to take leadership in their congregations, urging parents to remove their children from “Egypt’s schools.” David Noebel, president of Summit Ministries (www.summit.org) works to repair the damage of dishonest education by providing worldview

seminars and courses. Dr. Brian Ray helps buttress the cause of homeschooling with his National Home Education Research Institute (www.nheri.org) that provides the solid data and statistics to defend the movement. Joseph Farah -- founder, editor, and CEO of *WorldNetDaily.com* -- uses his world-renowned Internet news site to advance the cause of educational freedom.

Leaders of three new organizations participated for the first time. Gary and Denise Kanter have helped launch Considering Homeschooling (www.consideringhomeschooling.org), a new organization that targets parents of preschoolers to help them form support networks and participate in activities that build a culture that supports the choice to homeschool. Elizabeth Watkins is heading up SBCHEA, Southern Baptist Christian Home Educators Association (www.sbchea.org), to help support those within that denomination who choose to homeschool. Grady Arnold has recently formed Get the Kids Out, an organization that works with pastors and families to promote the exodus message.

I could recite at least another half-dozen examples of conference participants who are key leaders already working toward separation of school and state. But ultimately, separation happens one family and one child at a time. When parents choose to take responsibility for their own children's education, choosing either private or home schooling, they advance the cause. Some people say that one family and one child at a time is too little to make a difference. But it reminds me of an illustration used by our pastor.

He tells the story of a young boy walking along the beach where thousands of starfish have washed ashore. The boy tiptoes among the starfish, picking up one at a time and tossing it back into the ocean. A man come along and chides the boy, "There are thousands of starfish. It's impossible to save enough to make a difference." The boy picks up another starfish, heaves it into the waves, then turns to the man and says, "It made a difference for that one."

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