

God Must Be Crazy (about us) !

An article about the irreplaceable impact of home and church on education

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Every child needs someone who is crazy about him!

The above statement is a paraphrase of Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner's famous quote,

Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid, and vice versa! But what does "crazy" mean? It means that the adult in question regards this particular child as somehow special — even though objectively the adult may well know that this is not the case... For the child, the adult is also special — someone to whom the child turns most readily in trouble and in joy, and whose comings and goings are central to the child's experience and well-being. ¹

Bronfenbrenner, up until the time of his death in late 2005, taught Human Development and Family Studies at Cornell University. He was one of the world's most respected child development authorities and was instrumental in initiating our nation's *Head Start* program. He is remembered not just for this quote but also for his advocacy for nurturing and educating children within the "ecology of human development" (a title of one of his books). A recurring theme in his advocacy is a warning against increasing trends in our culture that undermine the security, intimacy, uniqueness and necessity of primary "nested environments" (Bronfenbrenner's term) of children. Engaged parents and committed teachers are irreplaceable in the successful development of children.

Christian homes, churches, and schools are the best, most effective, and first line of "nested environments" in which children can most fully "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." ²

Bronfenbrenner is not the only academic who raised the alarm regarding the dangerous trend of parental abdication of children's education to the secular state. Dr. Frank Gaebelien, Harvard Professor and a former editor of *The Christian Century* in the latter half of the 20th century, had earlier warned against this shift:

The fact is, as both home and church have lost grip on American youth, the people of this country have looked to [public] education to fill the gap. With a confidence that would be touching were it not based on evasion of responsibility, they have turned their youth -- body, mind, and soul -- over to the most extensive and highly organized system of education this world has ever known. ³

This transfer of educational responsibility from the family and the Church to the state was not initially the intentional act of a specific malicious group attempting a coup to rule over the hearts and minds of our children. Rather, it happened gradually, perhaps even innocently, but then, as momentum gathered, with increasing intensity and strategy bringing us to our present crisis.

Short Narrative of the Secularization of Education

When the pilgrims came to this country, in the early 1600s their physical diet was probably not very healthy; yet, they were concerned about what they ingested spiritually. In 1647 (less than 20 years after their arrival), they passed the "Old Deluder Satan Act." This act mandated towns to hire and pay teachers to teach Christian values. The act was named in reference to the devil -- the great deluder. This was the origin and beginning of public education in our nation.

The close link between Christianity and education continued beyond the colonial period in America. After the Revolutionary War, the first Congress of the new United States passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 which declared that Christianity, morality, and knowledge (in that order) were necessary for good government and the happiness of all people.

As our nation developed, so central to education were the Scriptures to both the desired outcomes of our nation's public education and the means by which our nation educated that a series of books (the McGuffey Readers), written by a Christian pastor, was used by 80% of American school children for the majority of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century. These McGuffey Readers did more than teach reading; they shaped values, revealed a worldview based on God's Word, and united a developing nation.

Challenges and threats to the uniqueness of our nation united around this common Christian worldview have always been present. In the mid 1800s, when the McGuffey Readers were fulfilling what seemed to be a divine purpose of educating a nation, Horace Mann came on the scene. Himself a product of the McGuffey Readers, Horace Mann, who later so championed public education that he to this day is known as the Father of Modern Public Education, pridefully separated Christianity from education. Intoxicated with false promises of what education could do, Horace Mann proclaimed, *Education will empty our jails.* ⁴ And, tragically, our nation began to get caught up in this delicious yet dangerous elixir which, as we have seen, does not deliver -- and yet the binge has not stopped. The operating assumption in our culture still assumes that human knowledge -- no matter how far separated from God's Truth -- will be our savior from all human difficulties, problems, illnesses, and injustices. This assumption, in itself, shows how far we have strayed from God's Word.

¹ Bronfenbrenner, Urie, 1994

² II Peter 3.18

³ Schulz, Glen. *Kingdom Education*, LifeWay Press, 1998, p. 97.

⁴ Schulz, Glen, *Kingdom Education*.

John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, a 17th century English author, was more insightful about the purpose of education when he wrote, *The end of learning 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.*⁵ As Christians, we know that no amount of human effort or progress can repair the ruins of sin that are at the heart of the human condition. God Himself knows, and Scripture testifies to this truth, that only Christ crucified can repair the ruins and redeem humanity and the world from its fallen state.

However, Horace Mann's secularizing influence continued to grow in our American school system. Fueled by blind optimism and the addictive success of a developing nation, curiously still developing on the strength of a shared Christian worldview that had been taught to 80% of the nation through the McGuffey Readers and the still predominant Christian worldview, the educational philosophy of our nation made a marked change of course in the mid-20th century. Commenting on this change of direction, Charles Clayton Morrison, then editor of *The Christian Century*, speaking to 10,000 public school teachers in 1940, said,

*The public school is confessedly and deliberately secular. I am bound therefore to lay on the doorstep of our educational system the primary responsibility for the decline of religion [Christianity] and the steady advance of secularism, another name for atheism, in American society.*⁶

Bronfenbrenner's observations regarding dangerous and continuing trends of education within our nation interestingly come from one of the most respected educators and child-development experts of our time. The government's programs to marginalize the primary nurturing "nested environment" of family and Church and in their place set up a secular educational system is doomed to failure for two reasons. One, an outer eco-influence cannot do for a developing child something that only the family and a "crazy-about-you organization" like the Church can do. Two, to attempt to educate independent of a philosophy or worldview is impossible. This attempt in itself is a worldview that will cause conflicted thoughts in the minds of many students. What is the result of conflicted thought-processes? Either rebellion or uncritical acquiescence – neither of which is a desired outcome of education.

It again needs to be stressed that behind much of secular education's efforts is a well-meaning and even noble motivation. Public education desires to teach and equip students academically and socially. However, a secondary or tertiary eco-influence cannot, no matter how it tries, do for a developing child what only a family and a "crazy-about-you organization" like the Church can accomplish. Furthermore, the secular public education's desire to be philosophically neutral compromises the very education it strives to instill. Education is the pursuit of and learning of Truth. As public education stops short of committing to an ultimate Truth, it, by definition, becomes a self-defeating organization.

Yet, public education is unwilling to admit this reality. Deluded and unwilling to consider otherwise because of the mass of momentum behind the delusion, public education refuses to yield to Truth or to admit the obvious. Like many before,

"He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"⁷

Hence, modern education can critically examine an idea's, a company's, a policy's, and an event's economic, environmental/ecological, and political impact, but it will not examine itself in light of its own impact on the development, education, and outcome of students or its even greater impact on the development and shape of the primary "nested environments" of family and Church that it seeks to replace.

One prominent politician brazenly promoted this attempt to usurp the familial roles of education, and to extract the child from the other primary "nested environment" of the Church, when, in the November 1973 issue of the "Harvard Educational Review," she advocated liberating our "child citizens" from the "empire of the father."

Indeed, there are problems in many primary relationships in the "nested environments" of family, school, and even of Church. However, the solution is not to extract all, or even the majority, of children from those environments and to place them in an environment that is qualitatively different and thereby unable to accomplish the needed result.

Where will it lead?

Nevertheless, until the primary "nested environments" of family and Church step up and assume their essential roles in the nurture, development, and education of children, the state – whether nobly, innocently, or maliciously – will fill the void. Tersely stated: "If you won't nurture, teach, and raise up your children, the world will."

What are some possible intended or unintended outcomes of public education's "stepping in" where parents and Church have perhaps not "stepped up" as they should? One extreme example is illustrated in Aldous Huxley's controversial book *Brave New World*. When first written in the early 20th century, this book was read in the same futuristic genre as H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* and George Orwell's *1984*. However, with the passage of time, development after development in our postmodern culture bears frightening similarity to scenes from Huxley's book.

Huxley's "Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Center" bears striking resemblance to today's fertility clinics where eggs, sperm, and embryos are bought, sold, and stored. A.F., referring to "After Ford," an acknowledgement to the paradigm shift that the assembly line brought to the world – and replacing the former Christian paradigm attested to in the A.D., no longer seems as far out as it once did now that secularism is promoting C.E. ("Common Era") in place of the Christ-referencing A.D. Huxley's hypnopædia ("pædia" is a Greek word referring to the whole spectrum of education –

⁵ Milton, John, *Of Education*

⁶ Schulz, Glen, "A Study of the Religious Beliefs and Practices of Christian School Graduates"

⁷ Isaiah 44:20

academic, social, emotional, physical, spiritual) is at work in our lives 24/7 through T.V., radio, billboards, and the press. In the *Brave New World*, sexuality lost its connection to both reproduction and marriage, becoming useful only for “amusements.” How frighteningly similar to current media’s promotion of it today. Huxley’s fictional and futuristic world faced and made a decision: “God isn’t compatible with ... scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. Our civilization has chosen science.” Have we also? In Huxley’s world, “Soma” is the addictive prescription for stress, depression, anger, and recreation. Are we today swallowing and prescribing the same pill under a variety of different labels? Finally, one poignant line from the book suggests an agenda that was critical for the daily worldview of inhabitants of Huxley’s *Brave New World*, “God in the safe; Ford on the shelves.” What human hubristic hope is public education putting “on the shelves” in today’s classrooms at the same time as the courts are more and more attempting to hide “God in the safe”? Is Huxley’s *Brave New World* surfacing among us in some brazen ways?

Another example of secularism’s encroachment into the irreplaceable “nested environments” of family and Church can be seen in movements such as California’s “Universal Preschool for All” Prop 82 (2006). Charitably interpreted, this Proposition had as its goal the expansion of a high quality preschool experience for all children in California, citing how preschool contributes positively to the overall development of the child and correlates heavily as a predictor of success (even economic) later in life. Betraying an agenda far different than this just stated noble pursuit, Prop 82 prohibited the teaching of Christian curriculum during the identified hours of Proposition-supported preschool. In other words, “God was in the safe” while secularism was put not just on the shelves, but also in the play bins and story time.

James Dobson and Gary Bauer are two respected contemporary proponents of child and family development. They poignantly paint a word picture regarding that is at stake in our current “war of two cultures”:

Nothing short of a Great Civil War...rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible world-views are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society... Instead of fighting for territory or military conquest, the struggle is now for the hearts and minds of the people... Children are the prize to the winners of the second Great Civil War. Those who control what young people are taught and what they experience -- what they see, hear, think, and believe - will determine the future course for the nation. ⁸

What does it mean to be “crazy about a child” – and what does this teach the child?

What is the solution to the above described culture-war which is fighting for nothing other than the hearts and minds of our children?

This article began by paraphrasing Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, “Every child needs someone who is crazy about him!” Moms and dads, brothers and sisters, grandparents and great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as the intimate and unconditional relationships uniquely found in Church and Christian schools are people who are crazy about their children. Why are they crazy... even, as Bronfenbrenner would say, “irrationally crazy”?

Christians respond, “We love because He [the Lord] first loved us.”⁹ How has the Lord loved us? The most beloved verse in the Bible tells us how crazy about us God is,

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”¹⁰

Christian parents, Christian churches, and Christian schools provide an irreplaceable “nested environment” that is essential for healthy learning and development. They are crazy about their children just as the Lord is crazy about them. What a secure and nurturing environment is provided by the experience and knowledge of being loved unconditionally, independent of how one achieves, regardless of test scores or athletic achievement or outer appearance. How conducive to healthy development is an environment that celebrates every little achievement, never keeps track of wrongs, seeks no return pay, expects no overtime, and simply loves a person for whom he or she is!

Why is this environment so healthy? Two reasons. One, Bronfenbrenner would probably maintain that such a secure “nested environment” filled with unconditional love is simply best the soil in which children can learn, develop, and thrive. Two, Christians would add that the child would experience in that environment the love of Christ, and, as a natural outcome of experiencing Christ’s love through significant others who are “crazy about him,” the child, consistent with God’s plan of passing on the faith, would come to transfer the identity of the source of the experienced love and grace to Jesus Christ. That is not only healthy and good for education; that is salvation.

Four Biblical guidelines for effective parenting

While the “crazy-about-you nested environment” of Christian family, Christian church, and Christian school is irreplaceable, this doesn’t mean that it is automatically and universally present for every child – even for every child in a Christian home. “Crazy-about-you nested environments” are only intentionally created.

Fortunately, God’s Word is a blueprint for such an environment. Though there are many passages that both prescribe and describe the roles and responsibilities of Christian parents and Christian churches and schools, here are four passages that lay a solid foundation upon which this nurturing Christ-centered environment can be built.

- **Do what God asks parents to do. Children are God’s homework assignment to parents.**

⁸ Dobson, James, and Gary Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of our Kids*

⁹ I John 4:19

¹⁰ John 3:16

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord")... When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-23, 39-40

Joseph and Mary were model parents. They "did everything required by the Law (God's Word)" for their child. What an example for us. A healthy "nested environment" is built through consistent obedience of bringing children to church and teaching, blessing, and nurturing children to become strong, to be filled with Godly wisdom, and to have the joy of God's protective grace.

- **Teach them and let them experience a Christian Worldview**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. II Tim 3:16

A Christian worldview is based on the paradigm of Truth revealed to us in God's Word, the Bible. The Bible is book of blessings and boundaries. In it, we hear and experience God's wonderful grace and love. We meet and receive Jesus Christ in the pages of Scripture as we read God's Word with an open and trusting heart. "All Scripture is God-breathed and useful." Period. Read God's Word. Trust it. Obey it. Rest in it. Teach it to your children. God's Word teaches us (what's right), it rebukes (what's wrong), it corrects (redeems us to get right after we've sinned), and it trains us (guides us to stay in right relationship to God through Christ once we've been saved).¹¹

- **Disciple and Discipline Your Children**

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11

Discipline means to disciple. Disciple means to teach. Some teaching lessons are verbal, others are written, others yet are actions. Discipline is also part of discipling and teaching. It too takes several forms. Sometimes it is verbal, at other times it is written, and at yet other times it may require action. To neglect discipline is to neglect discipling and teaching. Lessons about "blessings and boundaries" carry no Truth if trespasses beyond boundaries carry no consequences. The Bible is full of examples of parents who did not discipline children. Samuel the prophet failed to discipline his sons. Even King David neglected his fatherly duty to his son Adonijah, "King David had never interfered with Adonijah by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'"¹²

- **Celebrate and Rejoice over Your Children**

[The prodigal son] got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.' (Luke 15:20-23)

Parents not only can be, they should be, their children's greatest cheerleaders....no matter what! That is part of being crazy... irrationally crazy... about your children. Such unconditional love and constant celebration combine to create an environment that is healthy, forgiving, healing, and necessary for growth.

Reclaiming the responsibility

The goal of this article is to lift up the irreplaceable impact that parents and Church have on the nurture, growth, and outcomes of our children. In the absence of a primary "nested environment" of parental and Christian love and nurture, the world will encroach and even try, benevolently or malevolently, to replace or compensate for that which is lacking.

This article is a call to Christian parents and Christian churches and schools not be found lacking when it comes to the Biblical mandate to "bring up your children in the training and instruction of the Lord."¹³

- Immerse children in the "nested environment" of family and congregational love that conveys and convinces to our children that we are "crazy about them" – yes, even irrationally crazy.
- Engage your children in daily conversation, in activities, in the "nested environment" that they know is created just for them.
- Be aware of the threats and dangers your children face outside of the "crazy-for-you nested environment" you and your church and Christian school provide – and warn them of and protect them from those dangers whenever you can. Take a lesson from a mother bird protecting her little ones in her nest.
- Be an advocate for your children. Cheer them on! Open doors for them. Create opportunities for them. Build in protections for them. Reclaim your and the Church's role as creators and keepers of the "crazy-for-you nested environment" that no public school can replace.

Thank God, He is crazy about us and our children!

Dr. Wm. Bartlett, Executive Director

¹¹ Schultz, Glen, Kingdom Education.

¹² I Kings 1:6

¹³ Ephesians 6:4