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A Message from 31 years ago which is still relevant today: Christian Schools and the Future of Free Presbyterianism

A message preached by Rev Ivan Foster at the 2nd Seminar on Christian Education, held in Martyrs' Memorial Church, Belfast, as part of the annual Easter Convention, March 29th, 1986.

"If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore," Psalm 132:12.

In 1978 the Presbytery of Ulster of the Free Presbyterian Church heard a request from Rev. Ivan Foster to consider the need for Christian schools. Following a discussion a delegation of ministers and elders met of officials of the Department of Education.

The outcome of the meeting was a recommendation to Presbytery that permission be granted to any church that wished to start a school. The Presbytery agreed in principle and appointed a Presbytery Education Board, chaired by Rev. Foster, to supervise the new missionary enterprise.

In September of the next year, Kilskeery Church started the first Free Presbyterian school. Mrs. Ann Foster was its Principal and only teacher. It had 13 pupils. Today the Free Presbyterian Church has schools attached to its churches in Newtownabbey, Ballymoney and Bangor as well as Kilskeery with a total enrolment of 125 pupils. These schools are served by 8 full-time teachers and 6 part-time staff. In the case of Kilskeery School, it provides a full range of primary and secondary subjects. Last year a number of its pupils sat CSE and GCE "O" level examinations, obtaining marks above the national average. Two pupils sat and passed with very good marks, 11 "O" level subjects each. The other schools are also moving into secondary education with Newtownabbey and Bangor already providing first form and first, second and third form tuition respectively.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MOVEMENT OF THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IS WORTHY OF YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT

The need for Christian Education stems not from the failure of our Sunday Schools, Bible classes, Children's Meetings or indeed failure on the part of parents to instruct their children. If there are failures in these particular areas it is not the purpose of the Christian Educator to put them right. Christian Education is required in order to combat a much more serious threat facing our children. It is the threat of undisguised Anti-Christian teaching within the school system.

Discipline in State Schools

Firstly. The attitude toward discipline in the state school is Anti-Bible.

The complaints of teaching staff regarding rowdiness and lawlessness in schools have received wide publicity. In some cases it is so bad teachers have been forced out of the profession, the indiscipline has so affected their health. At present a working party has been set up to discuss discipline in schools in Northern Ireland. The chairman of the working party, Mr Bob Rogers is quoted in a Northern Ireland Office Information Service Bulletin as saying, "I think I should emphasise that the remit of the working party is to examine the question of discipline in schools with particular reference to possible restrictions on the availability of corporal punishment as a disciplinary sanction." As a result of a decision by the European Court of Human Rights in 1982 the law concerning corporal punishment in state schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has to be changed. In effect corporal punishment is virtually outlawed. Teachers who use it may find themselves in serious trouble. At present, any parent who objects to corporal punishment must have their wishes honoured and some other form of punishment that does not offend the parent must be used. The result is that teachers, quite naturally, safeguard themselves and let discipline go by the board with tragic consequences for classroom behaviour. The government is determined, however, to push ahead with



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the complete removal of corporal punishment in Northern Ireland schools. That is clear from Mr. Rogers words "...possible restrictions on the availability of corporal punishment..." Such an attitude shows the anti-Scripture bias that exists in the Education Department today since nothing could be clearer than the fact that THE BIBLE TEACHES CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.

Proverbs 13:24. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

Proverbs 19:18. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Proverbs 22:15. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14. "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."

Proverbs 29:15. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

Furthermore, it is to be emphasised that THE LORD USES CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.

This will come as a shock to the liberal namby-pambies who become very irate whenever their pet views on God are challenged. Nevertheless, the Lord does use corporal punishment.

Psalms 89:32. "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."

Psalms 94:12. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.

Psalms 118:18. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

Isaiah 10:5. O Assyrian, The rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.

Lamentations 3:1. I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his (the LORD's) wrath.

Hebrews 12:6-7. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

School Text Books Anti-Christian

Secondly. The contents of school text books are basically Anti-Christian.

The degree of Anti-Christian content varies from subject to subject but there is no subject in which that bias does not show itself. The theory of evolution is advanced as scientific fact and that falsehood can be traced in the text books dealing with Geography, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, History, Literature and of course Religious Instruction. No mention whatever is made of the view held by all orthodox Christians, of which there are still quite a few in Ulster, that Creation by the direct act of God, the fall of man, the world-wide flood of Noah's day and the supervising providence of God are the basis of an explanation for the existence of the world and of man with the complex moral, philosophical, ethical and spiritual difficulties that surround our existence. Christian parents have long been involved in a running battle with school teachers regarding the version of the Scriptures used and the unscriptural doctrines taught to their children. Recently, controversy surrounded the introduction of a publication issued jointly by the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. I need not emphasise that it is thoroughly ecumenical and therefore totally unscriptural. Suffice to say that nuns and priests had a hand in its compilation. The publication is called "Looking at Churches and Worship in Ireland" and was designed for use in the teaching of religious education. The presence in the classrooms of our state schools of such a document as this is evidence enough of the efforts being made to subvert Bible Christianity in a most Satanic fashion. Not for the first time has the ancient enemy of God's truth attacked the children of believers. "We are not ignorant of his



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devices" (2 Cor. 2:11)

The Prevailing Atmosphere in Schools

Thirdly. The general moral atmosphere of state schools is basically Anti-Christian.

Foul language, improper and illicit relationships and conduct between male and female pupils are unfortunately all too common in our Secondary schools. The example in the use of foul language is often given, sad to relate, by teachers. Recently, the Western Education and Library Board was asked to investigate drunkenness amongst pupils travelling on school buses. It is a fact that one school in the Southern Education Library Board area had to take steps to stop pupils obtaining alcoholic drink and returning drunk to school discos. Gone are the days that a parent's mind could be at ease when he knew his child was in school.

Some Schools Not as Bad as Others

What I have said about the State school system is not evident in all areas and in all schools to the same degree. In some schools such behaviour is not the order of the day due to the good influence of a principal or some members of the school staff or the presence in the school area of a minister of the Gospel who is not frightened to speak out against harmful trends. However, the decline and departure from standards acceptable to Christians is to be found everywhere and I challenge anyone to give me proof that there is a state school in Ulster that has not been affected by the introduction of unscriptural teaching through the curriculum text books and by the consequences that stem from such an introduction.

Let me come to the verse of Scripture that is my text. Please consider:

I. OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE IS DECIDED TODAY.

"If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore."

The future of Free Presbyterianism will be decided by how we raise our children today. If we raise children who do not hold to the doctrines that we believe but rather have been influenced by the teaching about God they have received in their schools, then doctrinally the Free Presbyterianism Church of the future will differ greatly from the church we know and love today. That is an incontrovertible fact.

In our text the future possession of the throne of Israel by the children of David depended on David's children remaining faithful to the teaching of God. If we are to see a continuance of the gospel witness of the Free Presbyterian Church and the enjoyment of the blessing of the Holy Spirit's unction upon our people so that they continue as "kings and priests unto God". (Revelation 1:6) then the up and coming generation must be taught to be faithful to God's Word. With all my heart I believe that we ask too much of our children when we demand faithfulness to God's Word and at the same time expose them to error and falsehood so devious that very few adults would catch it on let alone withstand it. A child who is taught the truths of Scripture in Sunday school, in the church service and in the home but then spends the major part of its time drinking in the poison of false doctrine and imbibing the atmosphere of rebellion against parental and school discipline cannot, with fairness, be expected to remain untainted. It is impossible for a child, no matter how well intentioned or how well warned, to come out of a daily battering of foul language and unclean conversation and the more insidious dosage of anti-Scriptural teaching contained in text books, unharmed and unmarked. At the very least, such treatment is bound to curtail spiritual growth or far more likely, nullify the efforts of parents, minister and Sunday school teacher. This cannot lead to optimism for the future of Free Presbyterianism. Already many parents are realising that the unwillingness of their son or daughter to attend church services and prayer meetings and their unhealthy interest in worldly events, their disturbing preference for pop music and television rather than the things of God, their preoccupation with the fashions and fancies of this world and their increasing use of makeup and jewellery, can be blamed upon the atmosphere of the modern classroom.



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The Answer is to Place our Children Under The Lord's Instruction.

The Lord's promise to David was "If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them..." David's children had to be taught of the LORD. It is the parent's duty to place the child in an environment suitable for the Lord to carry on His programme of instruction through His own appointed means. A child attending a state school for some 30 hours every week (and that is not counting the time many pupils are on buses, some having an additional 15 hours travelling time every week) spends far more time under the anti-Scriptural instructions I have already described than they do under instruction from parents and Sunday School teachers. No matter how diligent parents and Sunday School teachers may be in such circumstances, they are fighting a losing battle. It is impossible for them to fulfil the condition laid down by the LORD and consequently we must expect a forfeiting of the blessing promised, that blessing being the continuance of our children in the place of power and honour.

Action Needed—Now!

We must therefore take steps to remove the child from the destructive atmosphere that prevails in the state school system and place them in an atmosphere conducive to growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That requires the formation of Christian schools where each subject is taught in the light of God's Word and with the strict purpose of leading each child to understand the nature and character of the LORD through His Word and the testimony of His created works. The laws and principles governing every Science, far from demonstrating evolution, demonstrate the wisdom, power and providential care of God.

Psalm 19:1-3. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."

Psalm 97:6. "The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory."

Acts 14:17. "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Romans 1:20. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

The Promise of God, if the condition laid down is complied with, is to Preserve the Next Generation and the One that Follows. Ad Infinitum.

"Thy children,...their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore."

If we preserve the atmosphere of learning and faithfully provide proper teaching God will preserve our offspring. Failure to obey God in this matter will, I believe, cost us the future well being of our children. Just as Solomon's failure to obey God cost his offspring the throne, so our failure will cost our offspring the position of blessing and honour to which the LORD has brought this church. We enjoy much today, all of which can be traced to the merciful hand of God and His bountiful provision. Let us preserve that for our children by preserving them from the falsehoods and corruptions of the state school. Let us heed the warning contained in Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children".

Let each Christian parent, each committee member, each elder and each minister grasp the opportunity, given us of God and presented to us in the legislation of our country, and take whatever steps are necessary to provide Christian Education for our children. It is our duty. It is our privilege. To fail is to incur the curse of future generations of our own offspring on that day when the works of all men shall be judged.



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"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD... that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments." Ephesians 6:4; Psalm 78:7

A Challenge to Teachers who Love the Lord Jesus Christ and those Young Believers who have the Academic Ability and the Inclination to Teach

In 1978 when our Presbytery made a decision on the question of Christian schools, it decided that the matter would be viewed as a missionary venture. Truly, there is no field of the Lord's service today which provides greater opportunities to promote the knowledge of Christ among young people and to serve this generation in the Gospel. There is an increasing need for dedicated Christians ready to sacrifice the rewards that can be reaped in a teaching career in the State school for the more lasting and, therefore, more valuable rewards of serving our Master and Saviour. I challenge the young men and women of the Free Presbyterian Church to consider Christian Education as a sphere of service for the LORD. At present, there are eight full-time and four part-time teachers serving the LORD in our four Christian schools. By September there will be another full-time member of staff in Ballymoney. "Yet there is room". Newtownabbey requires more staff. We in Kilskeery need another teacher. It is expected that within the next two years another two, possibly three, Free Presbyterian schools will have started. The need for faithful, dedicated teachers, particularly Science teachers, is increasing.

"...Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest." Will you "Come over and help us"? (John 4:35; Acts 16:9)

The opportunity is yours to "begin at Jerusalem".