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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LAST 30 YEARS

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Mrs. Foster addressing those at the Education Board dinner.

(The substance of an address given at the 2010 Annual Education Board Dinner in Lisburn, Friday 28th May, in the presence of Education Board members, teaching staff of the Free Presbyterian Christian schools and their spouses)

It is good to learn lessons from the past. The Bible records the past for our learning, comfort and encouragement. The past thirty years have taught me much about the true nature of Christian Education.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Christian school must be firmly and **exclusively** founded on the Word of God. I emphasise the word exclusively for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11)". And isn't it Christ Who is the Word of God? We dare not build on man's philosophies or our own notions for such a foundation is flawed and will crumble and fail. We cannot incorporate our own logic and opinions and mix them with Biblical truths for to build on such a composite material will most certainly lead to disaster. A Christian school must be thoroughly Christian or it is unworthy of its name. It must be Christian in:

ITS CURRICULUM.

The topics chosen for study, the projects engaged in must all be in keeping with God's Word. Everything must be measured against that rule. "What saith the scripture?" Romans 4:3. That must ever be our guideline and sheet anchor.

ITS TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS

The leaven of evolution has so permeated textbooks and educational materials that we must be extremely vigilant. God's role in Creation and Providence must be stressed constantly. Evolution is the doctrine of devils and should be treated as such i.e. with total abhorrence. Textbooks should be carefully chosen and edited as necessary. Increasing immorality features in English and English Literature textbooks. There are sodomite overtones in half of the textbooks listed for study in GCSE English Literature. Given time, of course, these overtones will strengthen into overt relationships. Before I retired, I met with a representative of the Department of Education to inform him that we would no longer be able to offer GCSE English Literature unless we had at least one text which was not morally offensive. As the Department has a duty not to discriminate against anyone on the ground of religion, gender etc; we had a previous textbook restored to the list. I must say I was shocked to discover that one of the textbooks I objected to and which was described by the Department's representative as graphic was being studied in one of our schools. Such action of course, as well as being reprehensible, weakens our case for demanding suitable literature. Immorality is also promoted in the Biology curriculum. The teaching of human



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reproduction, birth control and alternative lifestyles in the state system has corrupted society and brought disease and misery in its wake. These topics also feature in parts of the AS Home Economics syllabus and Personal & Social Studies. Why should Christians follow the world, merely one step behind? The Christian school should and must withstand all pressure to conform and thus acquiesce in the corruption and brutalising of our children. These sections should not be taught in a Christian school. There is knowledge which only a parent should impart and at a time when the teenager is old enough to handle it properly and not broadcast it to younger children. Library books, even those designed for very young children, need to be carefully vetted. Many so-called Christian novels and romances are not suitable reading for anyone, never mind teenagers. Many, if not all of them, contain explicit passages. I think we also need to examine, in the light of Scripture, the common and relatively new practice of speaking of private family matters, our own and that of others, in public and before children. We should follow the example of Scripture and use discreet language at all times and forbear inquiring into and discussing the private affairs of others.

ITS RESISTANCE OF TRENDS IN EDUCATION

There are many fashionable topics in the educational world and Christian schools often receive project materials. Saving the world is one of the most recent. Of course, we should keep our environment tidy and avoid waste but God does not need any help, least of all ours, in saving the world. The world is reserved unto the judgment of the great day. Another fashionable topic is global warming and the horror stories associated with it. I think God had the last word on that, as just after the meeting of the international summit to discuss ways of halting global warming, the northern hemisphere had its coldest winter for 30 years! He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. Vegetarianism raises its head on occasion as girls especially begin to think that animals should not be killed for meat. God's Word soon puts paid to that false notion, as God Himself ordained the consumption of meat. Schools have, of late, been bombarded with health and safety issues. While we must take all reasonable care to ensure the safety and health of our pupils, we must exercise wise restraint. We cannot possibly protect children from every bump and graze. We trust to Providence to guard our children. Their angels do always behold the face of their Father in Heaven (Matt. 18:10). We cannot do God's work for Him or presume to do so. Risk assessments should not include ridiculous possibilities. By way of example, risk assessments by our school in Newtownabbey should not include the possibility of a lion escaping from Bellevue Zoo and pouncing on a pupil during a school outing!

ITS MAINTENANCE OF PRAYER

A Christian school can only function as prayer is maintained. Much prayer, much blessing, little prayer, little blessing, no prayer, no blessing. School boards must pray, churches must pray, teachers must pray, parents must pray. Every need and every aspect of the school must be brought before the Lord in prayer. No detail is too small or trivial for His attention. He is the God Who directs every raindrop. In Amos 4:7 we read how He caused it to rain on one city and caused it not to rain upon another city. We can certainly ask Him for dry weather when this is required! The monthly school prayer meeting has begun to falter at the present time. Parents and teachers must feel it their duty to be there and not only be there but participate in prayer. Teachers have a weekly prayer meeting and there



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should be a sharing of the burden of prayer by others at the monthly school prayer meeting. God answers prayer. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" is the promise of Psalm 81:10.

ITS UPHOLDING THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Christian school must be in subjection to the Word of God. The Word of God is inflexible. It cannot be bent to suit us. Neither is it elastic. It cannot be stretched to include activities which we feel to be right. We must bow to its authority in all things. Current errors must be refuted. Many young people today think that it does not matter how they behave as they claim it is the heart that counts. They fail to appreciate that it is the heart that dictates their behaviour. They assert that they are not under the law but under grace so they do not need to keep the commandments. They fail to see that if we are to be Christ-like we must keep the commandments as He did. If we love God we will keep His commandments. The Scriptures demand conformity to Christ in all things. The church and young people today are largely conformed to the world. Instead of taking on the likeness of Christ, they busy themselves in being like the world. We must teach the need for holiness of life, no matter how it is received or how unwelcome it is.

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

We have not only learned something of the nature of the truly Christian school. We have learned what constitutes truly Christian teachers i.e. teachers called of God and gifted by God to teach in a Christian school. They are not job seekers or those who think it would be nice to work with children.

The main characteristics of truly Christian teachers are as follows:

- 1. Self-denial.** Christian teachers have learned to die to self and sin. They know something of being crucified with Christ, of having crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. They have died to ambition and to the world. The Bible speaks of taking root downward and bearing fruit upwards. The teacher must be like the root, going down into the place of death, obscurity and humility in order to bear fruit.
- 2. Going the second mile.** If asked to go one mile, they go two. They see jobs to be done and look for more. They are like Christ Who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister" (Matt. 20:28). In Luke 22:27, He said, "I am among you as he that serveth". That is their disposition and attitude.
- 3. Being filled with the Spirit.** This is the duty of every Christian but is specially and earnestly sought by Christian teachers. They realise that they cannot do God's work in the energy of the flesh. God gives the Holy Ghost to them who ask. Luke 11:13 states: "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"
- 4. Being sold out to God.** God and His work come first and everything else takes second place. "Not I but Christ" is their motto. Some of our teachers are mothers with young children. God has enlarged their heart to care for the education not only of their own children but also the children of others. They remind me of the kine who carried the ark back from Philistia to the land of Israel. Their calves were shut up at home but against their natural instinct to be with their offspring, they went steadily on serving the cause of God.
- 5. Compassion.** They have sympathy for the children in their care. They wipe away the



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tears and comfort the distressed. They care for the progress and well-being of the children. Like Ezekiel who went out to the captives at the river of Chebar in Babylon and sat where they sat, Christian teachers are able to empathise with their pupils.

6. Prayerfulness. They are assiduous in attending staff prayer meetings, monthly school prayer meetings and days of prayer. They do not consider such prayer meetings as a burdensome duty but an opportunity and privilege. They are diligent in private prayer. They don't just say prayers. They have learned to intercede and plead the promises. They wrestle in prayer. Teachers who don't pray don't stay the course.

7. Diligence. They are diligent in preparation, punctual in reporting for work and playground duties, diligent in keeping records and diligent in their cleaning duties, in short, they are examples to the pupils.

8. Modesty. They adhere to what the Scriptures teach about modesty of dress and appearance. They seek the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. They seek spiritual beauty and long that the beauty of Christ may be seen in them. They are not the slaves of fashion or fashion houses.

9. Love for Christ. They love the Lord with all their heart, mind, strength and soul. Such a love excludes a love for the world. All, all that is in the world, is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1John 2: 16). There is nothing else in the world! There is nothing for the Christian to love in the world! These are the features of Christian teachers. Ah, they count not themselves to have apprehended: but this one thing they do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3: 13-14).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE FOR THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In conclusion, I have learned something of the consequences of not providing Christian Education. Our church experienced revival as a result of separation from apostasy. Christian schools were the next logical step in our separation unto God. Sadly, our church did not accept the challenge of Christian schools. The path has been downhill ever since. We have a church which is riddled with worldliness and materialism. Our young people have been swept away by worldly music and worldly social activities. Where is the holiness which God demands and without which no man will see the Lord?

In Numbers 14, we read of a people who also refused a challenge. They refused to go forward into Canaan, despite the good reports and reassurances of the faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua. Because of perceived difficulties, they refused to enter the land of promise. They were so hostile to Caleb and Joshua that they would have stoned them. As a result, they were turned back to wander in the wilderness for another 38 years. Does that scenario seem familiar? It does to me. The church was urged to consider the need for Christian education. Those who started Christian schools urged others to launch out, for God was able to overcome every difficulty. Many were not only indifferent but downright hostile to the whole idea. Because of perceived difficulties, blown up out of all proportion, many were not willing to set up schools. The church has become increasingly barren. May God be merciful and revive the church, for a revived church will demand Christian Education for its children.