

Learning for living or just for earning a living?

It was education that promised success in earning a living. Listen to the testimony of alumni from such a school— ‘we are men of reputation, rich, leaders, enjoying public praise and civic honours; moreover healthy, well nourished and fit; living luxuriously, strangers to low class jobs, living in the constant company of pleasure, and using all our capacity to bring delights to our senses, which gladly welcome them all.’ ‘The life [we live] is the witness’.¹ This was written around A.D. 40’s, indeed at the same time Paul was engaged in his missionary endeavours.

It was one of two outcomes of education philosophies in the Graeco-Roman world that were in competition and ideological conflict

earning a living and the benefits that accrued would guarantee 'the good life' for those trained in its schools.

Fathers would attend the equivalent of a parents' evening. Presentations were deliberately held in hired halls or the theatre of a city with their excellent acoustics, and impressive buildings designed for cultural events.

The opening segment of the evening saw the prospective teacher seated on a chair or

least three major gymnasia open to its inhabitants, pumping iron was major activity. Creating a body beautiful was essential. The ideal was a god-like image—the equivalent to the man in the ads for after-shave lotions in duty-free brochures on airlines.

Surviving statues of these teachers showed how presentable they were to be. You needed the body like that of a Greek athlete or a god. In Syrian Antioch there are two such statues, one seated for the preliminary stage of the evening, and the other standing, giving an

city that for good reasons was known as 'the second Athens'. The recent film 'Agora' gives some insights into Alexandria, as filmmakers sometimes do in historical reconstructions.³ As an Old Testament scholar, Philo used the story of Cain and Abel from the book of Genesis as an allegory for

office was guaranteed and therefore being highly articulate in the public domain was as essential for first-century citizens and politicians, as it is today. Taking part in debates in the classroom was one of the training methods used in this form of education. Doing so in a winsome and winning way was the aim. All this would establish a good reputation and secure a place in the public sphere. Also it would produce the satisfying life—one of personal happiness.

How did these proponents of the new system contrast it with the old school's arguments and their outcomes? Philo records their caricaturing of those in the old school and the inadequate outcomes of that form of education for their students. The new movement argued "The so-called lovers of virtue are almost without exception obscure people, looked down upon, of mean estate [low class], destitute of the necessities of life, not enjoying the privileges of subject peoples or even of slaves, filthy, sallow, reduced to skeletons, with a hungry look for want of food, the prey of disease, in training for dying".⁴

The old school's goal was education for life. The new school's was rather one that reflected the propaganda outcomes of the *pax romana*, Rome's "Messianic age" with its promise of the 'good life' i.e., 'your best life now'. It was into this age that Christianity grew.

The Greek classical virtues of 'prudence', 'self-control', 'courage' and 'righteousness' had been the expected outcomes for centuries—the fundamental aims of education. The antonym to each of these were 'folly', 'intemperance', 'cowardice' and 'injustice' and had to be avoided. The new education system still referred to the traditional classical Greek virtues but this was a matter of convention not conviction.

Just as in some of the UK's great public schools and chapels in all Cambridge University colleges, students, teachers and fellows doff their caps to classical Greek virtues and regular chapels that reflect culture Christianity, so too in this new system in

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<!Philo, 'The Worse overcomes the better' 34a.!

the ancient world there was a formal acknowledgement of such virtues. It has been described as ‘a kind of amoral “art of success”’ as J.C. Rose describes it.⁵ But the rising generation got the message that they were not essential to the good life. What was on offer for the elite, and the well-to-do and the socially mobile of the first century world of the Roman East was this attractive education alternative. Education for life had now become about learning to live sumptuously by earning a substantial living.

There were first Christians who had been programmed by the educational values of their society before they became disciples of Jesus, the Son of God. Paul does not say that there were ‘no any wise, powerful and well born’ but not ‘many’ (1 Corinthians 1:26).⁶ The metamorphosis from the programming of their educational system to that of the discipleship programme laid down by Jesus was not simply one of replacing one lot of ‘software’ with another at the moment of conversion. It could not caught but it had to be taught in detail, as it affected all the sphere of life.

It involved deprogramming in order to reprogram. Paul describes this as having

Paul also recognized that he was engaged with an intellectual warfare, hence his focus on the demolition of entrenched 'B.C.' programming among the Corinthian Christians. This included value systems

permitted for me' and battering down their stronghold with emphatic 'buts', and 6 other compelling reasons, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.⁹

Just as there was no such thing as one night flings, 'casual' sex, such 'fun activity' was psychologically harmful to the person. Paul concludes his demolition job with the command to glorify God in their bodies, 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Such educational programming and rationalization was not automatically abandoned by an older generation of Christians who also argued 'everything is permitted', *i.e.*, 'it is my right' and rights are inalienable and this determines and justifies conduct Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 10:23 and 8:9. In Greek the aphorism 'everything is permitted' has as a cognate the noun 'right', a term we hear so much about today.

What such glorification is about emerges only as one reads on in the letter, for there is further clarified in the discussion with older men who are determined to exercise their 'right'. In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul cites and re

Paul concludes one of his longest discussions in 1 Corinthians, i.e., 8:1-11:1 again with another and final call to be 'other people centred' as the top priority of every Christian.

discussed. Cretan Christians were not immune from learning for earning a living with all

‘When students leave school they

including others

The Australian Parents Council in 2007 produced a report in which the values parents wished to see inculcated in the school's agenda were 'respect for self and others', 'honesty, integrity, decency', 'compassion', 'love for one another', 'sense of justice, equality, 'acceptance of others, understanding', 'self-reliance', resilience, persistence', 'responsibility, independence', 'service to others, sense of duty'.

When values for education that the government endorsed were revealed to that Council, what stood out as missing was the last one that parents had endorsed, viz., 'service to others, sense of duty'. The Parents Council noted 'in today's Australia there is too much emphasis on rights and not enough on responsibilities'. Rights' was an outlook endemic in the first-century world and one Paul readily identified as a Trojan horse that had slipped through the church doors and was quite at home among Christians in Corinth (1 Corinthians 8:9 and 10: 23).

Christian publishers have no problem turning out books like 'Your Best Life Now' as a best seller for Christian consumption. Its author and leader of a

family that had teenage boys who only emerged from their rooms playing computer games all the time for meals that were laid out for them. There were used to having things laid on for them and they were largely socially inept. Ours is a take-out society in more ways than one, a society

sorted out. In fact the servant kept our house immaculately with meals on the table and everything in order.

We had our holidays coming up and had decided to return to Australia to visit our families. Just before we were about to leave I remember on one Sunday when the servant did not work, I went to our two children's rooms that were in a total mess.

‘Who will be picking up for you in Australia and tidying your rooms? I asked.

‘Grandmas’ was the spontaneous reply from both of them. An education process was inaugurated immediately informing them that their Grandmothers were not servants.

A friend gave us the use of an apartment in Australia. I remember the first morning at around 7am the door of our bedroom flung open and two children with bright

of the home and the church fail to do so? At the same time there will be the necessity to consciously pull down the citadel of 'learning just for earning a living' psyche. The latter is easiest when we provide opportunities to do the former in practical ways. 1 Corinthians 13 does have something to say about achieving important goals but doing so at the expense of relationships.

There are important paradigms to be deconstructed as well as those needing to be reconstructed in the thinking of the rising generation. Just as first

life, take care of the environment;

*** Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion** Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others