

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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INFORMAL THOUGHTS ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S READING HABITS

In our circles, a great deal of focus and thought is placed upon the material which our children watch on television or in the movies. This is not an unwarranted effort. For as we all know, the vast majority of today's so-called "entertainment" is jam-packed with foul language, perverse innuendoes, an adoration of violence, and sensuality. It is only the very worst of parents who would neglect to guide their children through such a gauntlet of vice by the exercise of parental authority and, frankly, loving censorship. Music, also, occupies our attention, as we endeavor to spare our children's ears and hearts from the perversion which is found in that media form as well.

But what about our children's reading? Is that an area of their development in the Lord with which we, as parents, ought to be concerned? I believe so. Frankly, I don't know of any area of our children's lives which is somehow immune from our endeavor to develop their knowledge and fear of Christ. Consider briefly Moses' words in Deuteronomy chapter six, which concerns itself with the upbringing of our children in the Law of the Lord: "And thou shalt teach them [the words of the Law] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut.6:7) These words, I'm certain, are familiar to you. They clearly communicate that the covenant upbringing of our children is an all-encompassing matter. We teach to them the Law when we sit, when we walk, when we lay

down, when we rise up. There is truly no area of their lives which stands outside the circle of our responsibility in pressing them toward the mark of Jesus Christ. The realm of literature and reading, then, ought to be included in our concern as parents.

WHAT TITLES ARE THEY READING?

After my parents' divorce and my father's remarriage, I grew up in a fairly conservative Presbyterian home. For the most part, Christ was honored in our house, and this worked itself out in many ways. Swearing was not permitted. Music was to be decent. Clothing was to be modest. In these and other issues the influence of the Spirit made itself felt. Yet, despite my family's attention to piety in so many other areas, from grace before meals to strict curfews, there was a terrible evil lurking in my house. I'm sorry to say that I was the source of that evil. Every night, after spending my day surrounded by my father's careful efforts to promote goodness in our home, I went into my room and immersed myself in darkness. This darkness came in the form of books. My taste leaned toward the realm of science fiction and fantasy. Thus, my nights were filled with tales of vampires, dragons, ghouls, necromancers, goblins, and the terrors of the dark. Hour upon hour of my teenage life was occupied with sinister wizards, arcane spells, legions of the undead, and black minions of the Abyss. In these works the line of demarcation between good and evil was blurred. Evil was made to be alluring, even impressive. So often, good was naive, ineffective, oppressive. My view of the self and the world did not go unaffected by what I read.

A dark and skeptical pessimism came to mark my personality for many years. And, I am ashamed to say, the light often seemed less bright and the shadow more appealing.

What if my father, rather than viewing what I read as "my private business," had decided to get more involved? What if he had set guidelines for what books I could buy? What authors I could read? What if he had come into my room one day while I was at school and filled up the garbage with all of the garbage I was reading? What if he had taken away Stephen King to replace him with John Bunyan? Would I be a better man? Would I be more enamored with the Light of Christ? Would I have come to serve Christ more fully in the following years...would I serve him better even today? I believe so.

My father is a good man, in the true sense of the word. He loves Christ, he loves his religion, and he loves the good. In so many areas of his fatherhood he excelled, and yet excels. But in this one area there was a blind-spot. A blind-spot which wielded the most terrible effects. There is so much danger in our failure to keep a watchful eye. To what degree is my father's failure our own?

FOR WHAT PURPOSE ARE THEY READING?

But aside from simple neglect, there may be another reason why we are more lax than we ought to be as to our children's reading. We desire our children to be educated people. We certainly don't want them to be backward or culturally inept. There is something appealing about the man who is able to all the world has to offer as to art, literature, and the sciences, while yet standing firm in his Christian commitments. But in our desire to beget a "Renaissance man" we may fall prey to what might be called "the lie of well-roundedness." The claim of this Lie is that our children, in order to be truly "educated," must be "exposed to" and must "experience" things which, in any other context, we would consider evil. Isn't it strange how in the name of

"education," or "knowledge," or "art" we will permit the creation and admiration of that which in all other contexts is considered wicked? Anything from profanity, to adultery, to taboo sex is set before our children in university classrooms as "art." When confronted with their poor choice of reading assignments, professors will argue: "Young people need to know what is out there in the world. Reading this material will help them to understand people and the world they live in." Such exposure, in the long run, makes them better Christians. This sounds like a convincing argument. But it doesn't stand up before Scripture, which says, "in evil be infants," (I Cor. 14:20) and again, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8)

Does that mean that it is inappropriate for our children to read books which include evil characters or speak of evil acts? Certainly not. The Bible itself includes both evil folk and evil deeds (even such foul behavior as that of Lot's daughters in Genesis 19:35ff). But there is a point to such narratives of evil...to express evil's ugly perversity, and at the same time, the purity and delight of righteousness. In the Bible there is no mixing or graying over of good and evil. Evil is never attractive. It is always hideous. Whenever evil is spoken of, it is to point out the very fact of its repulsiveness. A work which does not endeavor to do as the Bible does in this matter, is bound to give evil more glory and grandeur than it deserves. Evil characters become appealing, evil deeds become tolerable, even alluring. When we are drawn into such a view of things in the books we read, may we not more easily be drawn into this kind of thinking in our lives? The answer is, unquestionably, yes. On the other hand, when

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FAMILIES IN FOCUS

FAMILY WORSHIP - CONTINUED



It is natural that rational creatures need to be persuaded of the advantages of a thing before one would willingly engage in such an activity. So it is with the practice of family worship. The heads of families especially, though all the members of the family unit generally, need to be persuaded of the blessings of family worship before they would heartily practice it in their homes.

*There are numerous blessings and advantages to be gained through the exercise of family worship for its participants. Some are rather obvious, such as its influence on personal piety. Other blessings are less obvious, such as its positive influence on mans intellectual activity. For the purposes of the present article, we will limit ourselves to looking at just a few of the blessings of family worship. For a more thorough exposition of this theme, I would recommend the reading of J. W. Alexander's *Thoughts on Family Worship*, published by Soli Deo Gloria. I am indebted to this book for many of my thoughts. I am also thankful to my family for their patient and sometimes encouraging participation in our practice of family worship, which has then been a confirmation of this practice's benefits.*

The first blessing of practicing family worship ought also to be the most obvious. This is the blessing of the promotion of godliness on each individual of the family. This blessing by itself would be enough reason for a solid commitment to its practice.

The promotion of godliness comes by the blessing of God, yet He gives it ordinarily through the means of grace that He has instituted for us. He has given us His Word in the scriptures, the means of prayer, and singing of His praises with psalms, hymns and spiritual

songs. It is true that these means of grace are given to the public worship of God as well as to the individual's devotion to the serving of his God. God has nevertheless also given these to the heads of families for the promotion of family worship and godliness. "And these words which I command you today shall be in you heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Deuteronomy 6:6-7 What a privilege to be raised in a home where the head of the home is a recipient of God's grace, schooled and exercised in that grace longer and more deeply than his dependants. He has something to witness to and to share. The head of the home also has this advantage, that he above all others on earth loves his children most. It is inconceivable what would happen to our children if the care of them were to fall on the state or some other dimension of society not tied to our children with such close bonds of love. God's aim at a godly seed, that they would be holy and happy, useful and a manifestation of his glorious grace is advanced in the family (Malachi 2:16) and family worship is instrumental to this end. It is in family worship that the children are taught the scriptures and their application to their lives. These realities are being pressed on their minds and consciences daily. It is here in family worship that they see that the demands of this life are to be handled in connection to their higher aim at God's glory. It is in family worship that children learn the art of fervent prayer by example, teaching and participation. The singing of God's praises serves both to instruct their minds and to shape the expression of their feelings after God. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16

In Genesis 18:17-19 we read, “And the LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” See how God determined that He would grant His blessing through Abraham to the nations through the instrumentality of Abraham’s practice of family worship. Family worship is effective under God for passing on the faith to the succeeding generations.

Historically it has been observed that homes where family worship was habitually exercised, those families had a greater spiritual vitality. The concepts of the family altar and the family being a little church are concepts that are being lost in our day. It is not surprising that it coincides with the decline of true religion. How can true religion be passed on when its exercises of worship are neglected in the homes?

A second area where the practice of family worship brings a blessing is in the spread of the gospel. Being daily rooted in truths of scripture each member of the family is better prepared to promote the cause of Christ in all the other contacts of the day. Being armed daily with the preparation of the gospel of peace the family members are equipped to engage the world with the claims of Christ. But not only when the members of the family go out into the world through the day, but also when visitors are received into the home, is the family prepared to

witness to the gospel grace of Christ. Surely the context of family worship is a natural way to present the truths of Christ’s religion to the guests in the home. It is here that the life transforming power of the gospel is vindicated; people see that this is a family which lives consistently with its profession. Its power is seen to be real and desirable.

Another blessing that flows from family worship is the blessing that it brings upon the society. The best citizens of the country are those who have learned true religion from their youth. They have learned submission to and respect for authority. Family worship is a place where earnest prayer is daily offered up for the nation, its people and its leaders. I once heard at the funeral service of a godly man that the prime minister had lost a good friend. This

man had habitually prayed for his leaders. How wonderful it would be if there would be many more such individuals and families praying for their leaders. Scripture gives us a wonderful

encouragement to his end. “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” 1 Timothy 2:1-2

These and many more blessings are to be gained from the practice of family worship, looking to the Lord for His blessing. These reasons should be enough to commit oneself to it and to search out its further blessings. May God pour out the Spirit of grace and supplications upon His church that as families we might repent of our sin and look unto our crucified Savior. Zechariah 12:10-14

-Bill Kroesbergen

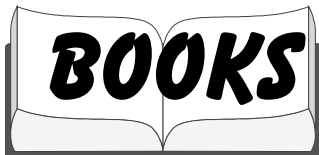
Family worship is effective under God for passing on the faith to the succeeding generations.

YOUTH'S CORNER **JONAH, THE RUNAWAY**

All of these words are found in the story of Johah, the man who tried to run away from God.

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D	E	E	P	H	L	A	P	N	U	L
R	H	A	S	L	R	P	P	I	T	Y
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|---------|-----------|
| ANGRY | JONAH |
| ASHES | JOPPA |
| ASLEEP | LORD |
| BELLY | LOST |
| BILLOWS | LOTS |
| BOOTHES | MARINERS |
| CALM | MERCIFUL |
| CITY | NINEVEH |
| CRY | PITY |
| DAYS | REPENT |
| DIE | SACKCLOTH |
| EAST | SHIP |
| EVIL | TARSHISH |
| FISH | TEMPEST |
| FLEE | THREE |
| FORTY | WIND |
| GOURD | WORM |



BOOKS IN REVIEW

Their Blood Cries Out
by Paul Marshall
Publisher - Word Publishing

This book details the history, causes and realities of Christian persecution throughout the world (written in 1997). Much of western society has been silent and indifferent to the beatings, looting, torture, jailings, enslavement, murder, rapes, and even crucifixions of many Christian communities. The ignorance and silence of even the western Christian communities is remarkable. This book is a call to them to action and prayer for their persecuted brothers and sisters in the Lord. Not only does this book open ones eyes to what is really going on around the world regarding the anti-Christian agenda, but it is also very convicting when one considers how virtually nonexistent our suffering is (although we often think the situation is very bad in the west) and that we don't even really know what it means to suffer for the sake of Christ. This may be due to the fact that Christians have been unwilling to deny themselves and stand up for their Lord Jesus Christ. Although the author views Christianity from a broad perspective, the message he presents comes across loud and clear. This book is a necessary read to awaken us from our sleep and begin earnest prayer for the persecuted church, as well as a call for us to redeem the time in our own day and situation.

-Cope Jonkman



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

HOW CAN WE PRESENT JESUS TO A NEW CULTURE WITHOUT BRINGING OUR OWN?

Editor's Note: Although this article by David Learner contains controversial ideas, it has been included in this newsletter to encourage us to 'think outside the box'. Pray that it may be used to spur us on to obedience in evangelism.

When I was a kindergarten-aged Sunday school student, I can remember my teacher handing me a piece of paper and asking me to draw a picture of Jesus. My church was not one to have images of Jesus hanging or standing around, though I am sure I must have seen some renditions of images of Jesus in books, Bibles or hanging on the walls around my community. When I finished my assignment to the best of my young and untrained abilities, my Jesus looked exactly like me in the ways that count. He had white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes. I loved Jesus, and was proud of how I had drawn him.

As a college student I was involved in the missions program of my student union. I was assigned to work among a group of African Americans in my community. It was my first cross-cultural experience. At one point in the ministry I had a group of young students. One day I exhausted all my materials before the time was up. I grabbed some paper, color pencils, and crayons and passed them out. I instructed the children to draw a picture of Jesus. I was surprised when the pictures depicted a Jesus with black skin and African features.

Since those early days in my ministry, I have been fascinated with how various cultures depict Jesus. I have worked with Hispanics, American Indians, East Asians, South Asians, Southeast Asians, and Africans. Children from each culture will render Jesus as looking like themselves unless taught to do differently. This is natural, and I think it is a part of God's plan for reaching the nations. Jesus is no longer flesh and blood, as we know it. He is different from us.

At this point in time we meet him as the Holy Spirit represents him to us. He has no color, no ethnic heritage, and no cultural distinctions except the holiness and righteousness of God.

One of the challenges of being a cross-cultural witness is presenting Jesus in the same way the Holy Spirit would. Jesus' cultural heritage is the family of God. As the Creator, He made all of us, regardless of our cultural identity, in His own image. As His adopted children, we should not introduce him as looking or being like ourselves. He is not. And to represent him as something He is not is a lie, first to ourselves, and then to those to whom we wish to introduce him.

For the past twenty years I have given my life to the ministry of cross-cultural witness on the behalf of Jesus. In the early days I was trained to contextualize my witness to my host culture. As I understood contextualization, this was basically to make Jesus acceptable to them by dressing him up to look like them. Add a little makeup, change the clothes, use a different language, and voila, a Jesus they certainly couldn't refuse. But with time, the makeup I applied began to run. The clothes wore out. And the language was always something short of perfect. Jesus, as I understood Him, would ultimately show up, confusing and sometimes offending my hosts.

Regardless of how hard I tried, I could never make Jesus look just right to another culture. Even though I had had some success in presenting my made-up Jesus to my hosts, it was extremely difficult and tiring to keep the make-up fresh, the clothes new, and the language just right. No matter how diligently I studied and researched culture, and built relationships, I could not know my host culture well enough to present Jesus in a perfectly contextualized manner.

I began to question contextualization. Perhaps I just wasn't cut out to be a cross-cultural witness for Jesus. I began to pray that God would show me how to represent Him to others. And slowly, God began to teach me through the experiences of others, my own experiences, and object lessons that will never be forgotten.

For the past 11 years, I have been working in World A. I have had to work in secret and keep my identity well hidden. Anything less could have resulted in the loss of access to the people to whom God has sent me, and/or the death of those who accepted Christ as a result of my witness. A dressed-up Jesus was not an option. I was non-residential much of the time, and didn't have the time, nor the inclination to keep the makeup straight, the clothes new, and the language perfect. I had to learn another way.

My first learning experience came when I had the unique opportunity to witness to a member of my host community. He was an old shop-keeper who was well liked and had no problems with me as a foreigner. We conversed almost daily. I liked him, and I think he liked me. I did not hide the fact that I was a Christian. Everyone assumed I was anyway, since I had white skin. He did not hide the fact that he was a Hindu. One day our conversation strayed to religion. As a trained witness I was thrilled with the opportunity. But, as it turned out, the opportunity was one for me to learn, not to lead another person into the Kingdom of God.

The old man told me that he just did not understand Christianity. There was no way he could give up his religion, which was so much a part of his daily life, to accept a new religion which from his perspective was so much NOT a part of the daily lives of the Christians he knew. He began every day with meditations, offerings and prayers to his god. As the day went on he would stop for more prayer and meditation. Each business transaction was blessed in prayer, and each dollar made thankfully offered to his god. Everyone knew his devotion, and

that devotion was as obvious at home and in private as it was in public. The questions he presented to me shoved me into some long and deep thought and prayer.

"Why would I want to give up the god I can see for one that I cannot see? Why would I want to worship only one day a week when now I worship several times every day? Why would I want to do business without the presence of my god to oversee it and bless it? Why would I want to try to convince others of my holiness with words, when they can see my devotion to my god? Why would I want to let only words teach my children, rather than my life?"

This old man had a limited and distorted view of a committed Christian's life, but the form of secret or private worship that was the norm for most Christians he knew or observed was certainly contributing to his misunderstanding. I realized this had to change. I asked God to give me a local cultural informant who could take Jesus as I know him and present the essence of who Jesus is in a meaningful way to his culture.

As I prayed for this person I realized that I had to find a way to minimize my cultural representation of Jesus. This is quite different from dressing Jesus up in a way that is acceptable to another culture. How can I ever know another culture well enough to dress Jesus up to meet their expectations or needs? I cannot. But I do know my own culture, and if I am honest with Scripture, and critical in my thinking and planning, I can present Jesus in a near a-cultural way that can be assimilated and transformed into a cultural model by one God has chosen and prepared to do so. I have learned that God has prepared individuals in every culture who can meet those who love Jesus from another culture, learn to love Jesus from them, strip away the cultural baggage attached (which we can minimize), and present Jesus to their own culture in a loving and caring way which results in lives changed and the Kingdom enlarged.

-to be continued

INFORMAL THOUGHTS ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S READING HABITS

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

we read works which unashamedly present evil as vile, and the good as lovely, we are, in fact, thinking upon that which is both "true" and "lovely" as our Apostle has commanded in our above quotation. When we take this approach to our children's reading, we are really and truly educating our young people. It is not exposure to evil which makes for good Christians, but exposure to good.

The principle which I would desire you to remember in this brief dialogue, and the principle which is set forth by the Apostle in the above quotation from Philippians, is that it is our duty to set before ourselves any and every thing which will serve to educate and encourage us in the Lord. We are to think upon that which reflects the truth, beauty, goodness, and justice of God. Such is to be our principle in our guidance of our children as well. It is our principle in choosing

what they watch, and it is likewise our principle in choosing what they read. The ugly and self-interested groanings of Emily Dickenson serve precious little toward enlightening our children as to the joyful brightness of Christ. Nor do the pessimistic and dark ramblings of Edgar Allen Poe. Such "works" do not reflect at all the truth and reality which God is building in His Kingdom, and of which we, as Christians, shall all partake in our happy future. The contemplations of C.S. Lewis, however, or the poetry of John Dunne, while confronting men with the reality of human pain and suffering, yet arrive at the truth and victory of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is such excellent and accurate portrayal of God's truth which makes for good literature... literature that our children (and we with them) ought to be reading.

-by Edward W. Ludt

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