

by *Martin Verueloet*

As a parent of nine children one might ask me, "Why do you home school?" It's a lot of work (especially for the mothers involved), and by no means easy. I must preface this article with the statement that I am not opposed to public or private schools, and believe each has its place. I recognize that there are many young people who would not be educated at all without a public school system in our society. Further, for those who have the resources but not the time, private school might be a way for them to instill some personal family convictions that a public school could not do. For myself and my wife, however, there has only been one alternative from the very beginning, when our eldest daughter (now nineteen), first became of school age, fourteen years ago.

At the time, I was a pastor of a little church in the country, ministering in the capacity of pastor, young pastor, children's ministry coordinator, etc. The church had young people in both the public and private system, but no homeschoolers. Being young and new to the game of schooling, I was content to sit back and observe the difference and soon came to the conclusion that if I wished the best my little girls, I would have to consider the private Christian school route. This changed when I came to know somewhat distant relatives on my wife's side who did the unthinkable: they home schooled. Again, I stood back as a keen observer to evaluate this new approach to schooling. Then, when my own in-laws decided to homeschool their youngest son, it came even closer to our doorstep. By the time our daughter reached school age, the decision was easy to make - and the past fourteen years have only impressed upon me that it was the right choice.

So what is it about homeschooling that makes it so much better in mind? Simply put, they are the children that God has given my wife and me, and no one on earth cares more about them than we do. Teachers can be great, or they can be bad, but they rarely have a child for more than one year. A bad teacher can undo in one year all the hard work done by a good one. My own public schooling is a testimony to this: An over-crowded classroom in grade one caused me to be moved from a class and a teacher that I adored, to one controlled by the dragon herself. I promptly learned to hate school, lost the incentive to learn, and became a poor student. I never learned to read effectively and my college

professor told me that I was functionally illiterate (he was being kind). I learned to read while at college, struggling along as best I could in those days. Today, I love to read! As parents, we never have to figure out where our students are at each year; we just carry on. Nor can we pass a mediocre student on to an unsuspecting teacher in the next grade, as so often I was.

So now, are my children going to be more intelligent than I was when I graduated? Surprisingly, the answer is, Maybe. In reality, they each seem to excel in different areas of study: Some are better at math, some do well in other subjects, and all of them read. There is, however, an area that goes beyond the average schooling that is well suited for the homeschooler. It is the importance stressed in II Peter 1.15: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge." The importance of this verse is the order in which it is presented. Faith comes first; this means salvation. Jesus was clear in Matthew 25 that goats that gather with sheep. In short, there will be pretenders to faith amongst those who are truly the church. That is, there will be those who take the name of Christ but who are in reality strangers to true salvation. Salvation is paramount; a private school may at times be able to implement some importance to this aspect of a child's life, but in my experience, too often this is not the case. It becomes the responsibility of the parents to see that their children are well-grounded in the faith and have a real and active relationship with Christ. No one knows the hearts of their children better than the parents. It is our responsibility to cultivate an environment that accurately expresses the care of our heavenly Father. We need to take it to heart, that "parenting is not for cowards."

The next thing on Peter's list is "virtue," that is, character. This reality was brought home to me while my mother-in-law was engaged in an elaborate project with her son. They undertook a massive collection of leaves, seeds, and bark from every tree that they could get a hold of, including many that were gathered while on extended road trips to homeschool conventions in the States. It was impressive, and today he is a journeyman carpenter and one wonders what the value of the information, which he gathered, is to him today? Information is transient; it may be helpful or it may

not be. Character is universal; it has value no matter what the future occupation of an individual is. The character quality of honesty will stand by a man or a woman in any trade, business, or vocation.

Finally, Peter comes to the point of knowledge; this is the hallmark of education. School teaches children stuff, be it any of the core and elective subjects found in any curriculum. The problem is, modern education teaches our children things but never teaches them to learn. They give information but often fail to educate. In reality, we live in an information age where the expansion of knowledge is proceeding at an unprecedented rate. Any education is limited to how much it can do because it cannot teach us everything. Any curriculum must pick and choose what it will teach, and of necessity, it must leave out something. All education teaches the basics of "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic," but beyond that, the scope is infinite. Ultimately, every student will have to specialize their schooling to the area that they are interested in. At home, this can be done earlier. My brother-in-law, for instance, had his carpentry ticket at the age of twenty, something that would have been almost impossible to accomplish within public or private schooling. His earlier project of collecting plant parts was not needed for his future occupation, but it did teach him how to learn through investigation and research. It taught him the character qualities of diligence and thoroughness, and these do help him in his present situation.

Unless a family is independently wealthy, homeschooling is a sacrifice. Of necessity, it means that a single income in a society structured towards a double income. Personally, I have never had a net-income over \$50,000. This past year, as I started my own business, finances were even worse. Homeschooling with a large family means that vacations are greatly curtailed and trips abroad are "off the chart." We have our own fun; many would think we are missing out, but it is the choice we have made and the sacrifice is well worth the effort.

So now for my children? What do I want for them? That they might know God and His Son, Jesus Christ. That they might stand for what is right, even if it costs them something in order to do so. That they might be men and women of integrity, in a world that is losing its grip on any sort of value. That they will be equipped to learn what they need to know when they need to know it. To me, that is what homeschooling is all about.

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