# *Educating for civic leadership*

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*It is the nature of man to rise to greatness if greatness is expected of him* - John Steinbeck (1902 - 1968)




The Prophet Daniel - 10TH Century window in Augsburg Cathedral

## Instilling civic leadership ambitions

Christian educators are well-placed to enthuse and equip young people who may provide great influence that enriches every state and nation in the world. This involves explaining the value of sharing wisdom at every level of social interaction, and instilling within young people a keen ambition to guide and shape the civic culture. The Book of Daniel provides us with a magnificent example of how the servant of God may rise to influence pagan nations:

After Daniel studied *the language and literature of the Babylonians* (1:4), he *trained for three years* prior to commencing in the public service (1:5). Avoiding the rich foods, Daniel opted for a wholesome diet, and urged his supervisor, *"test your servants"* (1:12) as to their subsequent suitability.

Additional to their studies, *God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning* to Daniel and his colleagues (1:17). Having *entered the king's service* (1:19) Daniel addressed a high-placed authority, to whom he spoke *with wisdom and tact* (2:14). Daniel went to the king, so *he might interpret the dream* which had troubled Nebuchadnezzar (2:16). Daniel explained that it is *"God in heaven who reveals mysteries"* (2:28). He subsequently became *ruler over the entire province of Babylon* (2:48), and he served four pagan kings: Nebuchadnezzar (1:1), Belshazzar (5:1), Darius (5:31) and Cyrus (6:28) according to God's ambition that his people *"seek the peace and prosperity of the city"* of Babylon (Jeremiah 29:7).

Christian teachers may prompt that ambition as they disciple and train their students, by asking and answering questions about civic ministry, and setting a pattern of virtuous citizenship that glorifies God, in service of humanity.

## Asking and answering questions about civics and citizenship

The best way to help young people obtain a well-rounded education which includes civics awareness, and the goal of shaping the nation, is in connection to questions that arise from hearts and minds which are eager to learn. This is in accordance with the way God has made the world, as Aristotle wrote in the 4TH Century BC: *All men by nature desire to know* (*Metaphysics* 1:1).

A similar educational observation was made when Albert Einstein referred to *the holy curiosity of enquiry*. The value of young people asking questions and listening to truthful replies may be seen especially in the example of Jesus at the age of twelve. He is described (in Luke 2:46-47) as attentively spending time *in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions*. Therefore, Christian educators do very well to raise questions, and encourage young people to answer and constantly to enquire.

But the promotion of citizenship and civics can only occur when educators themselves comprehend how and why the successful countries arrange their governance - and have a keen awareness of how Christian people may serve practically to lead, transform and bless the nations, by the grace of God.

## Educating to glorify Almighty God in service of the world

A Christian aim to enrich nations by education is well-known in the Ignatian ethos that (in the 16TH Century) formed the first international school network. It has trained many students who eventually became influential, guided by a statement based on a 1551 letter written by its founder **Ignatius of Loyola**:

*Our present students will in time assume various roles, some in the religious life, some in the government of the land and in the administration of justice, others in all sorts of responsible occupations. The children of today become the adults of tomorrow, so their good formation in life and learning will benefit many others, with the good results of that spreading more widely every day, to the greater glory and service of God our Lord.*



Abbreviating the Latin *Ad majorem Dei gloriam* (to the greater glory of God) students in the Ignatian tradition write AMDG on the top of each page of their workbooks. Every student is encouraged to thank God for his gifts, and excel in their use - serving others, with confidence, competence and compassion.

## Setting an example of dedicated citizenship

Teachers may exhibit respect for governments and the value of shaping the nations by setting a positive example of civic engagement. Since people are suspicious of principles or values which are not demonstrably held by those who promote them, educators must themselves show respect for authority and high esteem for God's gift of government. In fact the great virtue of setting an example applies to all believers. They should *excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness* ... (II Corinthians 8:7).

Teachers may excel *in faith* as they prompt *requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving* ... for *all those in authority* (I Timothy 2:1-2). They may excel *in speech* as they enunciate how each nation may obtain wisdom for its governance and progress, and as they teach students to speak with authority, volume, clarity, passion and persuasion. Educators may excel *in knowledge* by explaining how all of God's children may promote peace and prosperity.

With *complete earnestness*, each educator should excel in the responsibility to *submit himself to the governing authorities* (Romans 13:1), offering them *respect* and *honour* (13:7), *understanding the present time* (13:11). Hence whether or not students eventually lead or shape the culture, they will esteem and respect God's gift of government, and they will pray for the authorities.

Every teacher should *show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech* (Titus 2:7), exhibiting memorisation, recitation, neat handwriting, tidiness in all situations, the ability to address a group, disciplined note-taking, active listening, fitness, grooming, reliability, punctuality, good posture, wise eating, and life-long learning. As teachers provide a commentary on current events with heartfelt concern for the civic authority, they set an example by which it will be *enough for the student to be like his teacher* (Matthew 10:25).

Since all children learn by the pattern and training given by those they love, it is vital for teachers to win the hearts and minds of students. By that approach, *everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher* (Luke 6:40). As beliefs are more caught than taught, and as pupils aim to connect with the messenger and not just the message, it is crucially important for teachers to educate by relating warmly instead of patronising, criticising or simply lecturing. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ dearly loved children, and he cautioned his followers: *"do not look down on one of these little ones"* (Matthew 18:10).

## Indicating Jesus Christ as sovereign over the civic system

It is good when the teacher highlights the claim of Christ over earthly *thrones*, *powers*, *rulers* and *authorities*, recognising they are sustained by Christ and are made *by him and for him* (Colossians 1:16-18), *so that in everything he might have the supremacy*. Teachers may apply practical activities as they urge respect for civic leaders, along with the ambition to shape each nation:

- Helping children to run daily devotional times with prayer for authorities;
- Holding daily flag ceremonies at which the National Anthem is sung;
- Prompting children to individually recite the nation's citizenship pledge;
- Exhorting pupils to write letters that encourage Members of Parliament;
- Arranging visits to a court, so children can see the application of justice;
- Inviting a trusted local police officer to address a lesson or assembly;
- Perusing daily newspapers, and explaining relevant articles and reports;
- Obtaining overseas newspapers, to give pupils international perspectives.

Such actions may help students rise to the challenge of discipling the nations - *"teaching them to obey everything"* instructed by Christ (Matthew 28:20).

## Exalting our Lord as the one true Teacher

Recognising that those who teach *will be judged more strictly* (James 3:1), it is imperative for educators to be like Christ as they interact with children. Educators do well to minister in ways that help children to find fascination, hospitality, security, safety, affirmation and encouragement in their company - just as our Lord Jesus loved to spend time with children, and they with him.

But as all educators borrow their vocation from our *one Teacher, the Christ* (Matthew 23:10) on a temporary basis, the most important educational task is to encourage young people to become devoted disciples of him who said: *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them"* (19:14). In his service, may teachers educate wholeheartedly, with great expectations that students will wonderfully rise to help the world, as they follow and emulate Jesus - of whom it is written: *People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said* (Mark 7:37).

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