

FOR THE
Children's Sake



*Foundations of Education
for Home and School*

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

For the Children's Sake

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Published in association with the
Child-Light Foundation.

For more information concerning the
educational resources of Child-Light, see page 166,
or write to Child-Light at the address above.

The publisher wishes to thank the World-wide Education Service (WES) for giving permission to quote from Charlotte Mason's books. WES continues the work Charlotte Mason founded in 1887. In fact, PNEU (Parents' National Education Union) remains the official title of the organization as an educational charity and as a company limited by guarantee. It provides a range of services which are largely used by English-speaking expatriates living outside the United Kingdom. Its long established and widely respected Home School Service (endorsed by the Department of Education and Science, London) enables parents to educate their own children. WES also helps to set up and run British-style schools overseas, as well as providing related services. Its address is: World-wide Education Service, Waverley House, Penton, Carlisle, Cumbria, England, CA6 5QU.

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Cover design: Josh Dennis

Cover photo: Laughing Elephant

First printing, new cover 2009

Printed in the United States of America

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-0695-6

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 83-72043

VP 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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Introduction

I'd like to explain a couple of things to you before you start this book.

When I began writing it, I used the phrase "he or she" when talking about people in general. I did so because I wanted to make it clear that boys and girls and men and women are included when we talk about persons.

Unfortunately, it became very awkward when spelled out each time, and it might well have become a real hindrance to readers. So in later drafts I reluctantly went back to the old-fashioned "he," intending it to mean "he or she" just as "man" conventionally means "man and woman."

I do hope that this compromise doesn't give offense to any reader. It's a question of simplifying language, not of devaluing my own sex. I'm not giving male children a higher status than female, nor male adults a higher status than females. I believe that all are of equal value, and I believe that this is the Bible's teaching.

Another point I would like to make is that this book takes the accuracy of the Christian world view for granted, without first making out a case for it being true.

Now, my reason for believing that the Bible is true is *not* simply because I've been a Christian since childhood. Quite the contrary. It's very important to me that there are reasons why the Judeo-Christian faith can be seen to be

actually true. It's just that this is not the book in which to explain those reasons.

I'm starting from the time when, as ordinary parents, I and my husband Ranald tried to find a practical educational philosophy. For us, this had to relate to the truth of Christianity. However, you'll find lots of ideas that are often put into practice by many thoughtful non-Christians! Of course, if we stumble upon things that are really right, we'll not be the only ones who will have noticed them. Good and true ideas keep cropping up in different contexts. If you aren't a Christian, you'll still be fascinated by this human, balanced, practical view of what education and life is all about.

One last consideration. This book devotes quite a lot of space to the work of Charlotte Mason, an educationalist who lived some time ago. Many of the books and materials she worked with will seem very old-fashioned today. It may be that, either from the extracts quoted herein or from an examination of the materials themselves in your local library or bookshop, you will decide that your twentieth-century children will never want to read them. That may be true (and it may be equally true that once they have been encouraged to *really* read, they will find many new friends on Charlotte Mason's bookshelf). But please, don't throw out the ideas along with the materials. This book can be applied to people's lives anywhere, at any time. It is not a specific guide to one particular plan. There are many books in print today which Charlotte Mason would certainly have enjoyed using. Education is an adventure that has to do with central themes, not the particular packages a given generation puts them into. It's about people, children, life, reality!

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

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What Is Education?

Our first child was growing up in London, and as school age approached we began the search for education. As young parents we wanted the best for our curly-headed toddler. But what *was* the best?

We visited schools and imagined our daughter living out her child life in them. We reacted instinctively. It couldn't be the school where the desks were so crowded that an adult couldn't walk through the room. And would we be satisfied with the school where a teacher had told a friend that it was so noisy she didn't try to teach reading? We were further discouraged when this same lady later said, "I can't remember the children's names. Who is Ruth?"

Could we imagine our creative, singing Margaret sitting in a desk memorizing facts from morn to night? Or would we be satisfied with the opposite, the noisy chaos of endless free play?

This is a problem many parents face. What should we aim for when thinking about education? We want the best, but when we look around at what's available, we often have to settle for situations which we would not have chosen in the first place.

When we tried to figure out guidelines in education, we couldn't find a practical overview of the subject. We

invited experts to lecture to groups, but somehow it didn't help.

Well, Margaret had the best we could find, and all went well until we moved. The school near our new home turned out to be a blight on our youngster's life. Why? One reason was that the program of learning just didn't fit this particular child. Although we hadn't been able to organize an overall understanding of the subject, by now we were experienced enough parents to realize that something was badly wrong; drastic action had to be taken. We took Margaret out of school. Suddenly our child revived. She read books, played in the garden, worked alongside of us, enjoyed music. But an inspector didn't feel this education was satisfactory. Margaret should be in school. At that time, we didn't realize that he was wrong. The law in England allows for "education otherwise than at school." Eleven years later, Margaret's younger brother and sister were able to enjoy home-based education. But at that earlier time we sadly accepted that in the law's eyes "education" equals a school-room. In this case it meant two frustrating years, with forty children to one teacher. Was this what a child's life was meant to be? A drive to a closed-off cement area, a crowded room, a day so tiring that at the end Margaret and her younger sister came home taut with exhaustion?

We did the best we could in the hours spent away from school. But our prayers were becoming pretty desperate. And then, unexpectedly, the answer came.

The end of that story must wait to be told later in this book. Suffice it to say that the answers came when we found a little school run in a cottage. After our children went there, we realized that here was something really different. What was it? It seemed that the school still practiced the gentle art of an education based on a certain Charlotte Mason's ideas. We were, quite frankly, impressed. Could we find out more about these educational ideas? Was this what we were looking for?

We sent off for books (now out of print) by this lady

who lived nearly a hundred years ago. I can remember how we sat in bed reading, often stopping to share some newly discovered concept. Our enthusiasm grew. The ideas made such good sense! We found that they are relevant to today's child and today's society. They are of such universal nature that one can apply them equally well at home, in different kinds of schools, in an orphanage in Africa, in an Indian village, in an inner-city school or day-care center.

The ideas are so true that many of them are instinctively used by those with different educational or religious systems. They give us a satisfying view of education, or a child's life, from a Christian viewpoint. They provide a framework.

Before we continue with a consideration of these ideas I ought to introduce you to Charlotte Mason.

CHARLOTTE MASON

Charlotte Mason (1842-1923) was no armchair philosopher. Her views were shaped by her teaching experiences, not the other way around. She first decided that teaching was to be her life's work when she was still a child and saw a young teacher with a class of poor children. Neither did she ever consider that she had arrived at a final, authoritative "last word" in the field of education. There is a striking lack of pride in the title of her final book: *An Essay Towards a Philosophy of Education*.

A modest view of her own achievements, however, was not accompanied by any timidity when it came to putting her ideas into practice. Charlotte Mason believed passionately that children are *persons* who should be treated as individuals as they are introduced to the variety and richness of the world in which they live. She believed that biblical Christianity is truth. She had a pivot, a foundation.

Her determination was tested to the full at the age of sixteen by the sudden death of her parents. In the face of personal grief, she persisted in her ambition and was suc-

cessful in securing a place in the only teacher training college in England at that time. It was the beginning of an impressive, pioneering achievement which has a place in the history of women's contributions to society. But she was not able to remain a student for long. Probably because of the pressures of her financial situation, she obtained, after only a year at the college, a job as the teacher of a small school in Worthing. She managed to continue her studies in her spare time, as well as recording her experiences and thoughts. 1863 brought her the welcome award of a First Class certificate based on her work.

She really loved the children she taught. They were not just interesting specimens or an intriguing challenge. From the very start, they were valued friends, persons whom she respected. And this in a generation when children were normally meant to be "seen and not heard."

When the Bishop Otter College in Chichester appointed her as vice principal in 1874, Charlotte Mason had the chance to prepare lectures on the subject of education. Four years later ill health forced her to give up the post, and it seemed that her contribution to educational thought was destined to die an early death.

The enforced leisure was useful, however, as it gave time for further study and observation. Her thoughts crystallized into broad, helpful outlines. These she expressed in a series of lectures to parents. They found them so helpful that a National Society of Parents devoted to these ideas was started. Publications, journals, and finally specific curriculum guides gained wide and eager acceptance. Some parents were already teaching their children at home, but soon some families banded together to form schools. These were the famous Parents' National Education Union schools (after this referred to as PNEU schools). One thing led to another. Charlotte Mason opened a House of Education at Ambleside, in the English Lake District. This was a college for young women training to be teachers. Many found their first taste of true education for themselves as they prepared to teach others.

To begin with, the children whose parents followed Charlotte Mason's teaching were those of the educated classes themselves. But Charlotte Mason never forgot her first vision. She asked all parents who had been helped to organize meetings and so pass on the ideas to the mothers who would never be reached through her books. Perhaps her greatest joy was when numbers of underprivileged children had the richness of her school curriculum and practices applied in their overcrowded and underfunded schools. She delighted in the awakening of these previously dimmed minds. Children became fluent speakers and lovers of literature and art. Her vision was that these good wholesome aspects of life would bring joy, stability, and richness to every child.

By the time of her death in 1923, she had written several excellent books. She was the founder of an important educational movement and of a family of schools that touched countless young lives. She had started and led a "house of education" that had trained many students, not only for teaching, but also for living an abundant life. Through her work, families had been strengthened and guided in their life and purpose.

What happened? Why have so few heard of her today? Why do so few remember that she was one of the great educationalists, one who changed the whole idea of what education is and how we can go about it? I believe one reason is that the strong Christian base upon which she built became unpopular. The view of what life is all about, changed. In fact, our generation cannot grasp the key which explains exactly what human life is. Children have often been the chattels of the adults. Their worth is constantly expressed in terms of dollars and cents, their education in terms of their being a cog in a machine, to be made fit for the highest paid job possible.

What a tragedy.

Christians can't develop a Christian view of education by accepting the usual aims and views of our society and then adding a "Christian message" or interpretation.

No, we start from a different *basis*. We have another world view—another *people* view!

When a baby is picked up, spoken to, and loved, he is starting his education as God planned it. For all our lives we are human beings, in an active state of learning, responding, understanding. Education extends to all of life. In fact, an educational system that says, one bright summer's day in the dawn of my youth, "There. Now you are educated. This piece of paper says so," is doing me a gross disfavor. The truly educated person has only had many doors of interest opened. He knows that life will not be long enough to follow everything through fully.

This broad view of true education as the sum of all of life meant that Charlotte Mason first turned her attention to the parents. She believed that they had the most interesting and valuable vocation that exists amongst mankind. Into their love, care, and responsibility this person was placed. Charlotte Mason never spoke of education as merely taking place behind the walls of the schoolroom. She saw the home as the basic educational environment.

There will be different applications of these ideas for different families. Families have to consider the educational system they are actually up against. More than that, different children within one family may need different decisions as to what educational system is best for them. And it is important to apply Jesus' teaching that we must not judge other peoples' choices. Just because I decide to send my little Tom to the local public school or a private Christian school, or because I decide to give him a home education, does not mean that everyone else has to do the same. It is a complicated situation. Consider this: the average American child (and the British child doesn't lag too far behind) spends more time in front of the TV set than he ever spends at school. Many teenagers cull most cultural norms from their peers and all forms of media. I am not saying that school is not tremendously important. However, school is only *one* of the influences in children's lives. It can often be that a strong, rich home life with Christian teaching

and understanding more than offsets the “center of gravity” at a secular school.

Involvement by parents and teachers working in the secular institutions, private and public, is right. Voice and action are often the needed salt a situation requires to make it better rather than worse. Some schools are like cesspools spiritually, mentally, and/or physically. Jesus said we were not to place a stumbling-block in front of the child. Some schools are nothing but stumbling-blocks. The end-product is neither an educated person, nor one who has had a chance as a moral and free human being.

This is why many feel that something urgent has to be done. It may be simple: a family with their own children delighting in learning and living right at home without “going to school.” It may be a group of families who get together to share a very simple structure of community school living. It may be known as a Christian school. It may be someone who has a vocation to help the abandoned children of our urban ghettos, or those emotionally disturbed due to unsettled backgrounds. Surely caring for such children should be seen as a moral issue of the utmost urgency by the Christian citizens of our countries.

Any choice and/or arrangement should be done for the children’s sake. We are told in Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all people* [children are people], *especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*”

Also, consider the Gospel of Matthew, 7:7-11. First of all we must humbly ask for answers, we must seek, and then, “Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Surely this basic principle includes that broad lifelong seeking in all areas. Thank God that there is a definite answer! We are not only seekers, but finders.

The passage continues, “Which of you, if his son asks

for bread, will give him a stone? Of if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give *good gifts* to your children, how much more will your Father . . .”

Children ask for bread. Do we give them white gummy glue covered with saturated fat? Do we feed their bodies on any careless prepacked junk that comes into view? Or do we provide them with honest good food?

And what about their minds, their spirits? Do we make those bright eager eyes focus on any old, canned, mental junk food? Do we brush off the eager questions, and then expect the children to listen to some “spiritual lecture” another time?

Where to start? How? Parents need to evaluate their priorities. They need to consider *why* they respond, “We wouldn’t have time to read a book together every day. We don’t have time to hike/camp/paint/talk with our children.” What is really important? The sacred career? Educational institutions make poor substitute mothers, fathers, and homes. There has never been a generation when children have so desperately needed their parents’ time, thoughtful creativity, and friendship. The surrounding culture is deeply out of step with the Word of God. Other pressures threaten to take away sanity, stability, and simple humanity.

One of the greatest powers for good is a family whose members respect each other and who have learned to function, however poorly, with the rich concepts the Word of God gives us as human beings. It is almost incredible to think of the stabilizing effect ordinary families can have: not only for themselves, but as a light in a troubled generation.

Another application of Charlotte Mason’s ideas would be for the person who is working with children in any setup at all. Children can come to their public school teachers as to a stable adult friend in a personally insecure world. You need never speak a specific Christian word to

them (although this is a sad limitation), and yet can help them *as persons*. Even a glimmer of light can transform a dark world. The ideas will be applicable in a church or Christian community where the basic principles may play their part. How about a baby-sitter using them? I know of someone who did, with quite astonishing results. Then there is day-care and after-school care. Or how about being a friendly neighbor who gives the gift of helping that child who has nobody with time for *him*? How about your nieces, nephews, grandchildren?

I would appeal also to the single person. Please don't walk by on the other side. Christian single persons are in the position of having extra flexibility. Children in need are in every church, school, and community. They are often emotionally adrift, without that sweet and natural security of their parents' marriage to give a base to their family life. Parents become tense and stressed, trying to fit fast-moving careers into ordinary human life. Schools become mechanical, where the child all too often doesn't really count. TV becomes a sedative, stilling active play, reading, talking, sharing. Planned activities crowd out personal growth and creativity. And the god of money, status, and personal ease and pleasure seeps in everywhere, like a noxious gas.

If Christianity is indeed true, then every last little child matters. Bright to dull, privileged or from any variety of troubled background, each is valuable. *Persons matter.*

Let us really and truly be courageous. Much of what follows goes against the daily pattern of most lives. It's interesting to read about, but it will remain as so many words on a page if we cannot *do* what we know is right. One day we will stand before the Creator. Were we willing to give, serve, and sacrifice "*for the children's sake*"?¹

All of us, parents and teachers, want to give our children the best education possible. We hope the education we provide is a joyful adventure, a celebration of life, and preparation for living. Most education today, however, falls short of this goal.

For the Children's Sake explains what education can be, based on a Christian understanding of what it means to be human—to be a child, a parent, a teacher—and of the meaning of life. The central ideas have been proven over many years and in almost every kind of educational situation, including ideas that Susan and Ranald Macaulay have implemented in their own family and school experience.

Easy to read and filled with practical suggestions, this book will show parents and teachers in any educational setting—homeschooling, public school, or private school—how to extend learning to every aspect of life, instilling in children a new richness, stability, and joy for living.

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay grew up in Switzerland at L'Abri Fellowship, which was founded by her parents, Francis and Edith Schaeffer. She and her husband, Ranald Macaulay, established and led the L'Abri branch in England for several years. She also wrote *For the Family's Sake* and contributed to *Books Children Love* and *When Children Love to Learn*.

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