
Education for Children of the King

by Kevin W. Clark

We are living in a time of great cultural change that seems to have affected every institution—not least education. Like never before, parents have the sense that their children are academically unprepared and morally and spiritually unrooted. Christian parents know that they are called to raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), but until lately the educational implications of this call had not been clear. With this new sense of calling come important questions about why Christian education is essential, even what makes it Christian. A number of books and articles that address these important questions are available. The most compelling answers, however, are found in a children’s story—C.S. Lewis’ novel *Prince Caspian*. The narrative of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding Prince Caspian’s childhood and his remarkable education offers us a profound vision of Christian education as education for the kingdom of God.

Prince Caspian was raised in the house of his uncle Miraz, a usurper who had murdered Caspian’s father, the rightful king of Narnia. Unaware of this, Caspian thinks his uncle has done him a great kindness by adopting him. Miraz had no love for Caspian, however. He spared his life only because he was childless and needed an heir. Moreover, Miraz was cruel and unjust, oppressing rather than serving his subjects. Raised in his household, Prince Caspian would doubtless have followed his wicked uncle’s example. Thankfully, Aslan had other plans for Caspian and for Narnia.

As readers of the Chronicles of Narnia know, Aslan's plan for Narnia always included the rule of human kings. They were Aslan's stewards and servants, however, exercising their rule not for gain but for the good of all. To set things right, Miraz must be overthrown and Caspian restored as the rightful king. Yet he must also exercise his rule differently than the usurper Miraz. Caspian needs a kingly education of both heart and mind, and this is precisely what Aslan provides.

Caspian's education begins with his heart. As a child, he hears from his nurse wonderful stories of the old days of Narnia, feeding his imagination and kindling a longing in his heart to see those old days restored. Next, Caspian is put under the care of a tutor who does not tell tales so much as teach history. To Caspian's surprise and delight, however, the history lessons satisfy the hunger awakened by the nurse's stories. The tutor, in fact, provides Caspian with what we might call a thorough liberal arts education. Most importantly, he teaches Caspian to think for himself and provides him with a clear sense of his identity as a child of the king and his calling to restore Aslan's gracious rule to Narnia.

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Caspian's story, of course, is our children's story. Like Caspian, they are heirs of the true King but find themselves offered a corrupt vision of kingship at every turn. Left to themselves, they would live for themselves rather than serving others. Like Caspian, they must have their hearts turned toward the kingdom. Moreover, like Caspian, they need discernment—they need to learn the truth and how to recognize it when they find it. Like Caspian, they also need a sense of their dignity as children of the true King and a sense of urgency to fulfill their calling. Like Caspian, they need an education fit for children of the King.

As Christians, we are called to be a kingdom people whose lives together manifest and make known the character of the King we serve. By God's grace and the Holy Spirit, we are to bear witness to our King and extend the blessings of His gracious rule to all nations and all people. The great tradition of Christian education is a testament to the fact that earlier generations of Christian parents caught this vision. They understood that raising children of the King means spiritual as well as intellectual formation. Only this would fulfill Paul's words to the Ephesians quoted above. Interestingly, the Greek culture surrounding the New Testament church already had a term for this kind of full-orbed education of heart, mind, and spirit. The Greeks called it *paideia*, a word that

they also used for the Hellenistic culture they had spread throughout the world. This is, in fact, the very word that Paul uses when he writes, “Bring them up in the discipline [*paideia*] and instruction of the Lord.” It is as though the Apostle is telling the Ephesians to be as serious about educating their children for citizenship in the kingdom as the Greeks were about enculturating the world. Again, the great tradition of Christian education is evidence that Christian parents heeded Paul’s words. They adopted this educational ideal of *paideia*, transforming it by a Christian piety rooted in theology.

Recovering a vision of education for citizenship in the kingdom makes it clear that Christian education cannot be simply a value-added option for some families. All the children of the King need an education that prepares them for service in His kingdom. There is a great opportunity for Christian parents, who have newly awakened to a sense of their calling to raise their children in the Lord’s *paideia*, to provide their children with a Christian education. The church has an astounding opportunity as well, both to inspire parents with this educational vision and to create new structures and even schools where a kingdom education is accessible for every child of the King.