

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(37) The False and the True in Education (pages 439-450)

Summary:

The chapter contrasts two kinds of education; 1) a knowledge of earthly things that does not acknowledge God, and 2) a wisdom regarding heavenly things that puts God and eternity first in the life. The ideal is a wisdom that combines a knowledge of earthly things with a full commitment to God and eternity.

Thoughts:

Read in isolation this chapter can be somewhat disturbing, as it seems at times to disparage science and reason, or even higher education as a whole, things that are strongly encouraged in their right place elsewhere in Ellen White's writings (see, for example, her remarkable endorsement of seeking education at secular institutions in 5T 583-584). This chapter may reflect anti-intellectual trends that were common from time to time during her life. One possibility is that the original writing upon which this chapter is based occurred in the context of the Battle Creek debacle in the early to mid-1870s. At that time attempts were made to cut the spiritual and the work-study components completely out of the curriculum. She was not pleased!

Ellen White must always be understood in context. One way to provide that context is to read this chapter together with the next (38: The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge). The emphasis in this chapter is more on the false, the next chapter focuses on true education. Together, they provide a balance that might be missing with this chapter alone. Chapter 35 (A True Knowledge of God) also provides a positive balance to the more negative message of this chapter, as does the statement toward the end of this chapter: "It is right for the youth to feel that they must reach the highest development of their mental powers. We would not restrict the education to which God has set no limit. But our attainments avail nothing if not put to use for the honor of God and the good of humanity." (page 449)

There is a form of education that produces skeptics rather than believers. The natural inclination of human nature toward evil, makes the choice of education all the more critical. Skepticism is attractive to the human mind, particularly young minds. And as faith in God is weakened, so the ability to resist temptation is weakened. What is needed are schools where students are taught that true greatness is found in honoring God and revealing his character in daily life. (439-440)

Why are there so many true, helpful and powerful things in secular education? Ellen White's answer is that Satan himself was educated in the heavenly courts and knows good as well as evil. But the mingling of the two can be very deceptive. (440)

Among the lines of learning where there is a mingling of good and evil, Ellen White includes positive works by infidel authors, much historical and theological study (if its focus is on intellect rather than heart, pride of attainment rather than humility before God, speculation rather than biblical truth), the great classics of antiquity, current sensational fiction, myths and fairy tales. (440-448) While it is true that higher learning can produce pride, it can also produce humility, as a person discovers how vast their ignorance truly is.

True education focuses not so much on the learning of facts and concepts as on knowledge that can be utilized. Heart education is far more important than book learning. True

education builds humility rather than pride. It directs the attention to eternal things rather than the temporary. True education helps youth understand their weakness so they will turn to God for strength. (448-450)

It may be helpful to make a distinction or two here. Ellen White is not against good theories, she is against “mere” theorizing. In other words, theories are useful when integrated with practice. Theories that guide and motivate good practice are useful.

Quotable Quotes:

“The mastermind in the confederacy of evil is ever working to keep out of sight the words of God, and to bring into view the opinions of men. He means that we shall not hear the voice of God, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” Isaiah 30:21.” (439)

“Philosophical speculation and scientific research in which God is not acknowledged are making skeptics of thousands. In the schools of today the conclusions that learned men have reached as the result of their scientific investigations are carefully taught and fully explained; while the impression is distinctly given that if these learned men are correct, the Bible cannot be. Skepticism is attractive to the human mind. The youth see in it an independence that captivates the imagination, and they are deceived. Satan triumphs. He nourishes every seed of doubt that is sown in young hearts. He causes it to grow and bear fruit, and soon a plentiful harvest of infidelity is reaped.” (439)

“It is because the human heart is inclined to evil that it is so dangerous to sow the seeds of skepticism in young minds. Whatever weakens faith in God robs the soul of power to resist temptation. It removes the only real safeguard against sin. We are in need of schools where the youth shall be taught that greatness consists in honoring God by revealing His character in daily life. Through His word and His works we need to learn of God, that our lives may fulfill His purpose.” (440)

“(The study of sacred history) will give broad, comprehensive views of life. It will help us to understand something of its relations and dependencies, how wonderfully we are bound together in the great brotherhood of society and nations, and to how great an extent the oppression and degradation of one member means loss to all. But history, as commonly studied, is concerned with man's achievements, his victories in battle, his success in attaining power and greatness. God's agency in the affairs of men is lost sight of. Few study the working out of His purpose in the rise and fall of nations.” (442)

“Your intellectual pride will not aid you in communicating with souls that are perishing for want of the bread of life. In your study of these books you are allowing them to take the place of the practical lessons you should be learning from Christ. With the results of this study the people are not fed. Very little of the research which is so wearying to the mind furnishes that which will help one to be a successful laborer for souls.” (442-443)

“That which I have seen of eternal things, and that which I have seen of the weakness of humanity, has deeply impressed my mind and influenced my lifework. I see nothing wherein man should be praised or glorified. I see no reason why the opinions of worldly-wise men and so-called great men should be trusted in and exalted.” (449)

“It is right for the youth to feel that they must reach the highest development of their mental powers. We would not restrict the education to which God has set no limit. But our attainments avail nothing if not put to use for the honor of God and the good of humanity. It is not well to crowd the mind with studies that require intense application, but that are not brought

into use in practical life. Such education will be a loss to the student. For these studies lessen his desire and inclination for the studies that would fit him for usefulness and enable him to fulfill his responsibilities.” (449-450)

Tweets of Healing:

Satan is ever working to keep out of sight the words of God, and to bring into view the opinions of men. (439)

Philosophical speculation and scientific research in which God is not acknowledged are making skeptics of thousands. (439)

Whatever weakens faith in God robs the soul of power to resist temptation. (440)

We need schools where the youth are taught that greatness consists in honoring God by revealing His character in daily life. (440)

A practical training is worth more than any amount of mere theorizing. (450)

If the youth understood their own weakness, they would find in God their strength. (450)