

MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

Saints Seek Solutions to the Education Dilemma *Featuring Alison Holmes and Gary Arnell* *Introduction by Darla Isackson*

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I have been interested and even delighted with some of the creative solutions various parents are implementing for the education of their children. The responses I am sharing in this article are from parents in Washington State and California respectively who both homeschooled for several years, then both began part of establishing an LDS academy in their area. I keep hearing good things about LDS academies – and there are many of them. Some are very expensive, some are not.

The Kimber academies both of these parents were instrumental in starting are some of the most reasonably priced I've heard about and have much to recommend them. I have their information booklet, and the contrast between their approach and what is being taught in public schools is dramatic. Glenn and Julianne Kimber are the founders, and they have co-authored the textbooks for the core subjects that are taught well in just 12 hours a week. This makes it an excellent resource for homeschooling families, who can then choose to enroll their children in elective courses at the academy, supervise learning activities at home, or supplement the course with elective activities such as drama, sports, and music at the local schools.

I was amazed at the titles and stated purposes of their textbooks. For example, a math book is titled *Applying Mathematics; Learning How to Self-Govern Using Correct Principles*. Their physiology textbook is called *How and Why God Created My Body*, and surprisingly enough, the intrinsic value is stated as "Learning how to search the scriptures," because students are led to find their own "Why?" answers in the scriptures. The explanation of their history curriculum says, "History is more than facts. History can be defined as a study of God's dealings with mankind, and mankind's dealings with each other." The stated purpose is, "Learning how to ponder." I can't imagine what a difference this approach would make in establishing a firm foundation for children to build on. I received an update from Gary Arnell, whose essay appears below, and their experiment is working well and I may be able to present a more detailed report of it in a later article. But I want you to hear now what these parents are saying about their experiences and educational philosophy:

Gary Arnell, California

My wife and I started homeschooling in January 2002 and were introduced to the teachings of Dr. Oliver DeMille of George Wythe College in May of that year. The combination of these events has changed the course of our lives forever.

For the past two years we have been studying many topics, education and the founding fathers in particular, including many of the works you have cited in your articles. Late last year my wife and I began to feel that while we love homeschooling, we saw a need to raise up a peer group for our children – a peer group who had been raised with the same gospel/education focus that we were providing our children. A search ensued for some kind of program or curriculum that we could make available to our community. We have since been working with Glenn and Julianne Kimber to establish a Kimber Academy in our area. Kimber Academy emphasizes a gospel-centered, high standards environment. Coupled with the academic excellence and leadership emphasis of Dr. DeMille's teachings, we envision guiding these students on to getting a gospel-centered,

world-class education.

My wife and I also made the decision to leave my profession to promote and run and teach at the school full time. The impact on our family is significant, but the potential for our children and our community is thrilling. We've become acquainted with wonderful, like-minded Saints in our area, who have been searching for something similar and who have pitched in to help. We live about 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, in Camarillo, CA. Following is an essay I wrote to our local group a couple of weeks ago. I've been trying to articulate the need for a Godly education and am finding that your articles are dove-tailing wonderfully with the ideas I'm trying to get across.

[I appreciate] the Kimbers and their efforts in furthering the progress of gospel-centered education in our day. Like the painter keeping a watchful eye on her subject, I believe the Kimbers have closely studied the words of the prophets to create an educational program in keeping with their counsel; one that assists parents in our responsibility to prepare our children for church and civic service and future vocational training.

In his 1987 landmark work on the state of higher education, Allan Bloom lamented that "fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise as priests, prophets, or philosophers are wise. Specialized competence and success are all that they can imagine." (Allan Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, p. 58)

As Latter-day Saints, our goals go far beyond vocational success. Our aspirations are heavenly! Vocational success is desirable, to be sure, and requires hard work and discipline to achieve. To keep the proper perspective, however, we are continually admonished to seek *first* the kingdom of God and are promised that in so doing "all these things shall be added unto you" (3 Ne. 13:33). We are taught that "after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches [or learning], if ye seek them, and ye will seek them for the intent to do good: to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted" (Jacob 2:18-19, 2 Ne. 9:29). Throughout the scriptures personal virtue, character and obedience are given preeminence over academic knowledge and wealth. Once our hearts are in the right place, we are commanded to seek learning by study *and* by faith (D&C 109:7). Study and faith were not meant to be separated and are purposefully complementary. Kimber Academy supports parents by assisting in the academic progress of students while reinforcing the spiritual values forged in the home.

President David O. McKay further taught regarding the relationship between personal virtue and academic achievement: *"A man may possess a profound knowledge of history and mathematics; he may be an authority in psychology, biology, or astronomy; he may know all the discovered truths pertaining to geology and natural science; but if he has not with this knowledge that nobility of soul which prompts him to deal justly with his fellow men, to practice virtue and holiness in personal life, he is not a truly educated man. Character is the aim of true education; and science, history, and literature are but means used to accomplish the desired end. Character is not the result of chance work but of continuous right thinking and right acting.*

"True education seeks, then, to make men and women not only good mathematicians, proficient linguists, profound scientists, or brilliant literary lights, but also honest men, combined with virtue, temperance, and brotherly love – men and women who prize truth, justice, wisdom, benevolence, and self-control as the choicest acquisitions of a successful life." (David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* p. 440-441)

So is the solution simply public school curriculum, methods, accreditation, etc. *plus* prayer? That

would be an improvement, but I'm convinced we can do much, much more. Robert M. Hutchins, former President of the University of Chicago, made the following observation: *"I am afraid we shall have to admit that the educational process in America is either a rather pleasant way of passing the time until we are ready to go to work, or a way of getting ready for some occupation, or a combination of the two. What is missing is education to be human beings, education to make the most of our human powers, education for our responsibilities as members of a democratic society, education for freedom."* (*An Introduction to the Great Books and to a Liberal Education*)

In our modern society many voices loudly clamor for "specialized competence" at the expense of all else. As we stated before, we can stay the course by fixing ourselves steadfast to the foundational principles and priorities contained within the gospel. But I believe the Lord's *laws of learning* are superior to and *different from* those of man (Isaiah 55:8-9) and that we can find those laws in the scriptures, the teachings of the prophets, through the example of others who have proved themselves prepared to carry out God's work, and through personal inspiration given to parents prayerfully seeking to rear their children.

Having been raised up in the modern world, however, it can, even as saints, be difficult to *conceive* of an educational process different than the one we grew up with, as did our parents before us. It can be even more difficult to "buck the trend" and pursue such a process with our own children. After all, what will the neighbors (or grandparents) think?! I am grateful that the Lord does not expect us to raise our children alone and admonishes us rather to seek the Spirit's guidance in addressing our children's individual needs, educational and otherwise. We are not meant to *blindly* follow tradition or conventional wisdom or any path for that matter. We are admonished to act in faith, study things out and ask if they are right (D&C 9:8). Relying on the words of scripture and the promptings of the Spirit we can know the truth of all things (2 Ne. 32: 3-5) and we can join Alma in saying, "I know of myself" (Al. 5:46-47).

That said, we can turn our attention to the question of academics, of curriculum. While the scriptures and modern-day teachings are replete with instruction on this matter, allow me to make a few personal observations regarding what the Lord expects us to learn and in turn teach our/His children.

Somewhere around the age of 8:

In D&C 68:25-31, the Lord outlines specific things that are to be taught young children (by precept and example) before they reach the age of eight. These things are best taught in the home. Children are to learn good/bad, true/false, right/wrong, how to work and be industrious, and to repent, change, and recommit when they fall short of these principles in their daily life. (See also Mosiah 18 for additional responsibilities of those who take on themselves the baptismal covenant.)

Somewhere around the age of 12:

By the time children reach the age of 12, the Lord expects them to be sufficiently worthy, sober and teachable to enter into the Lord's House to perform sacred ordinances for our ancestors (Titus 2:2,4; Morm. 1:2, 15, D&C 43: 34, TG Sober, <http://scriptures.lds.org/tgs/sbrtysbr>) Furthermore, young men and women are, at this age, expected to be sufficiently mature and teachable to preside in priesthood and class presidencies. Young men, as young as 12, are expected to be ready to receive and magnify priesthood keys and responsibilities. Surely the Lord has great expectations of his youth. I cannot help but feel that generalizations regarding "teenagers" and typical "teenage" behavior so pervasive throughout our society *are not intended to be descriptive of these youth of the noble birthright.*

Somewhere around the age of 18:

The Lord's curriculum can be intimidating! In a few short verses (D&C 88:74-80) the Lord lays out a rigorous plan of study and preparation needful for laborers in the kingdom. Imagine the effectiveness of a missionary force that has been fully schooled in the Lord's way, in the order the Lord has established. At this age, young men are expected to be ready to receive and magnify the Melchizedek priesthood – the same power used to create worlds, heal the sick, and raise the dead. Young women, also, are expected to enter adulthood and serve their sisters, families, and communities. Both my wife and my mother were 19 years old when they married. Without a doubt, a great deal of learning occurs after marriage, but the Lord expects us at this young age to be sufficiently schooled and matured to enter into the new and everlasting covenant, to bring children into the world, and take our place in society.

The scriptures offer tremendous insights into education and life-preparation. I encourage you to read Mormon chapter 1 carefully. Here we find an awe-inspiring example of what the Lord can do with a willing heart and mind. By the time Mormon was in his 16th year he had the career and leadership training to serve as commander-in-chief of a professional army. He had the historical and scholarly training to assess and compile a thousand years of history into "the most correct of any book on earth." And he had the spiritual training of a prophet. Maybe it took him a few more years to fully accomplish all of these things. Surely the Spirit assisted him along the way. He was likely foreordained to carry out a great work. However, could the Lord be giving us a model to follow in the raising and educating of our children? (The insight regarding Mormon came from an article by Dr. Oliver DeMille entitled "Aristotle's Book of Mormon.") Along with Mormon 1, I encourage you to prayerfully study the upbringing of other Book of Mormon leaders (e.g. 1 Nephi 1, Enos 1, Mosiah 1).

In his paradigm-shifting masterpiece, "Invitation to the Pain of Learning," legendary educator Mortimer J. Adler removes any misconceptions in regard to the hard work, sweat, and tears that are part of any real education: *"Anyone who has done any thinking, even a little bit, knows that it is painful. It is hard work; in fact the very hardest that human beings are ever called upon to do. It is fatiguing, not refreshing. If allowed to follow the path of least resistance, no one would ever think. To make boys and girls, or men and women, think, and through thinking really undergo the transformation of learning, educational agencies of every sort must work against the grain, not with it. Far from trying to make the whole process painless from beginning to end, we must promise them the pleasure of achievement as a reward to be reached only through travail."*
<http://www.cambridgestudycenter.com/artilces/Adler1.htm>

If learning is necessarily difficult and yet the Lord commands us to seek wisdom, learning and understanding (Prov. 4:7), how should we go about educating our children? If so many young people in our society seem apathetic, or worse, hostile, towards learning and developing a godly character, what can we do differently?

The challenges we are to face and that our children are to face will be *at least* as great as those we face today. We must prepare a generation of leaders whose academics are second to none, whose moral compasses are sure, whose convictions are solidly founded, and whose adherence to true principles will be unwavering. We need strong leaders in business, politics, churches, education, and society, leaders in our homes. We need a generation of leaders who can recognize truth, combat falsehood, and not simply accept the decline of the society around them. We need a generation of youth who will discern where society is and where it needs to be, insert themselves in the middle and, like Martin Luther, proclaim, "Here I stand."

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Alison Holmes, Washington State

The education of our children is becoming more and more challenging for parents. I am convinced that public education is one of the “traditions of our fathers” that we, as a people, will and must increasingly abandon. We had a high councilman speak to our ward recently. He was commending the strength of the youth in our stake. In his comments, he asked if we had ever walked the halls in the local high schools. He said that the atmosphere, what our kids see and hear every day, was X-rated – not R-rated, but X-rated. He emphasized that and chills went up my spine, because it is so alarmingly true, not just here in Seattle, but all over.

We have other options!! We have four children (ages 5 to 13) and pulled them out of public school four years ago. We homeschooled for three years. Then, in the 2003-2004 school year, we were able to be a part of establishing the first Kimber Academy in our area (an LDS curriculum private school/ homeschool resource). A second Academy is being established in our area for the 2004-2005 year as well. It makes a huge difference being able to use the scriptures in our children’s studies. I can understand John Taylor’s and Wilford Woodruff’s concerns completely. Yes, it does cost some money, but it is a reasonable amount and well worth the sacrifice. Public school may be free, but in many instances the cost is way too high.

Of course, each family has to make this decision for themselves. Isn’t it worth fasting and praying over and listening to the guidance of the Holy Ghost? Sometimes we do things solely because that’s the way it’s always been done. A tradition. We have to open our eyes to what’s out there. Being involved in our children’s schools is great. Learning about other options is wonderful too. If you want to find out more about homeschooling or LDS based schools, [Kimber Academy](#), has homeschool-friendly curriculum and a growing list of their schools in the US. There are many other resources out there too. (The Kimber Academy booklet it says you can request a new school by contacting Marci Shupe at 801-771-7263 or 801-690-1618.)

Note: The next article planned for the education series is about “Mom Schools” – supplementing homeschool curriculum with cooperative effort.

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