

“Be Cool About School”

The Intellectual Warfare

This article
was written by
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Salama.



For many students, life at school is quite different from life at home or at church. Depending on the values observed in each household and the means for implementing these values, students often find a major gap between both lives. They find that the real world is, in many ways, much different than the way in which they were brought up, especially when it comes to competition, cheating, relationships and religious education. Teachers have been trained to make school a fun place to be in, while providing students with an opportunity to nourish their cognitive as well as their psycho-social development. In my opinion, most teachers deserve a lot more recognition and appreciation for dedicating their lives to such a worthy cause. Schools have been a place to challenge the intellect and to help students discover their passion about the future.

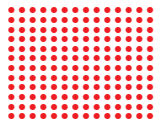
My biggest concern recently has been: Is school the best place to receive Religious Education? I have been involved in numerous discussions with children, youth and parents concerning the quality of Religious Education which students

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are exposed to in school and most of them agreed that the majority of their religious studies clearly contradict our Orthodox faith. Moreover, students are often discouraged from expressing their own opinions if they contradict those of their teachers'. Here are a few real life examples to show what our children and youth are facing in their schools. I visited a grade four class in a public school and I noticed that pictures of Harry Potter were hanging on the wall. When I asked the teacher about the reason that this particular character was idolized, knowing that the public school system does not exhibit any religious bias and Harry Potter represents an organized religion of witch craft and black magic, she responded by saying that last year a few parents objected but this year no one was concerned.

Moreover, she expressed that the story of Harry Potter is not different than any story in the library about science fiction. Also, a grade nine student in a catholic school learned that the stories of Adam, Noah, and Jonah are only symbolic and not real. When the student wrote in the exam that these stories were real, the teacher marked them wrong and she lost the marks. A third example is that of grade eleven students in a public school who were asked by their teacher in a world religions class if they believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was the only way to



Heaven to stand on one side of the class while others would stand on the other side. Only two Coptic students stood on the side which believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was the only way to the Father while everyone else opposed them. For the remainder of the period, the two students were attacked by the students as well as the teacher for insisting on their faith. Also numerous high school students who attended a Christian school have been put down for believing in the church sacraments, fasting, and other church traditions. Finally, a second year university student was asked to write an assignment worth forty percent of her final grade to defend homosexuality knowing that her teacher was a homosexual. When she did not support that view, she failed the assignment and barely passed the course. The stories go on and my anxiety increases daily due to the horror stories which our children and youth are continuously facing. I ask myself: Why are we accepting that our faith and beliefs would be violated in a society that preaches tolerance and respect to all religions?

Religious Education has always been entrusted to the parents and to the church. God said to Israel: **"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:6-9).** Orthodox education is acquired through discipleship to a spiritual father just as our Lord spent three years teaching the twelve and preparing them for the ministry. Also, St. Paul was taught at the feet of Gamaliel, who mentored him to observe the Law (Acts 22:3).

Even though martyrdom through the shedding of blood is not common now

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in North America, yet our children and youth are being martyred every single day through the ongoing intellectual warfare. The church encourages the advancement of science, technology, philosophy as well as the respect of all religions and cultures. In fact, H.H. Pope Shenouda III said: "correct science supports religion and correct religion supports science". In the mean time, we as Orthodox Christians expect to have our faith respected and not attacked in any educational institution. Parents must be vigilant concerning the religious education which their children are receiving in their perspective schools. Also, children must discuss with their parents or church servants the challenges which they face at school regarding their faith. Then we must peacefully, yet firmly, express our concerns to teachers, principals, or even to the Board of Education. The church must also be prepared to respond to any question brought about by a student in a manner which is scholarly, logical, and spiritual.

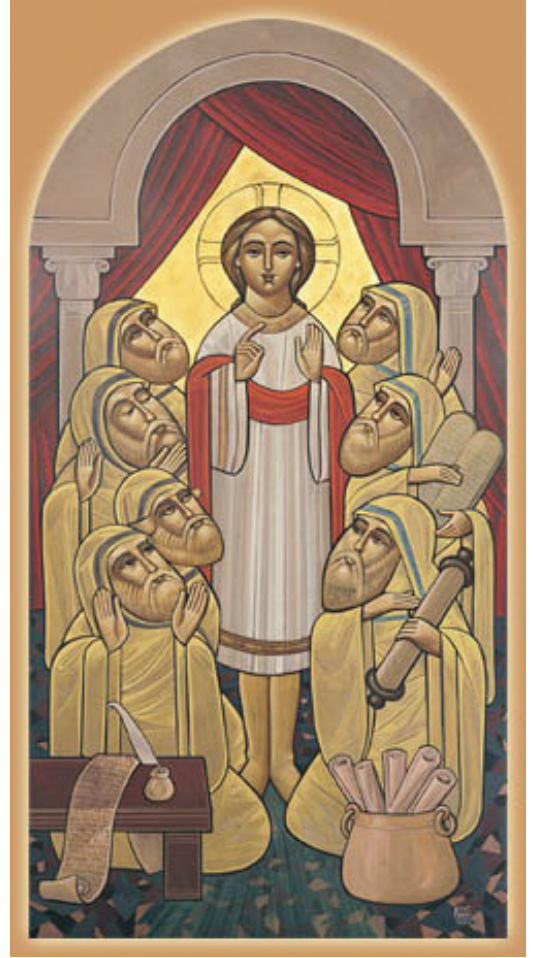
The parent of the above mentioned grade nine student asked me if he made a bad choice in placing his teenage daughter in her perspective high school due to the continuous attacks which has somewhat affected her faith. I responded by saying that he had researched and prayed before making that decision and proceeded after knowing that this school was the best one for his daughter at that time. Also, it was apparent that there were obvious challenges in any school system which must be addressed and reacted to. I encouraged him to speak with the teacher and the principal and see if this approach would bring a resolution to the problem of treating Bible stories as

symbols rather than truths. I was pleased to know that the student received the marks for the questions concerning the stories of Adam, Noah and Jonah.

It is true that life is a journey for learning and growing up but some things in life are non-negotiable, **“and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1Jn 5:4)**. We must realize that we, as Orthodox Christians, have the right to live our faith proudly in the midst of the society and be a light to the world and a salt to the earth. We must also look forward to passing on our apostolic faith from generation to generation so that our children and grandchildren would enjoy a faith which was defended by the shedding of blood as well as the sacrifice of many contemporary witnesses.

I pray for our church, the family unit, the youth and the children to remain strong in their faith; through the intercession of the Holy Theotokos St. Mary, St. Mark the apostle, and H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

Amen.



“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little

children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

