

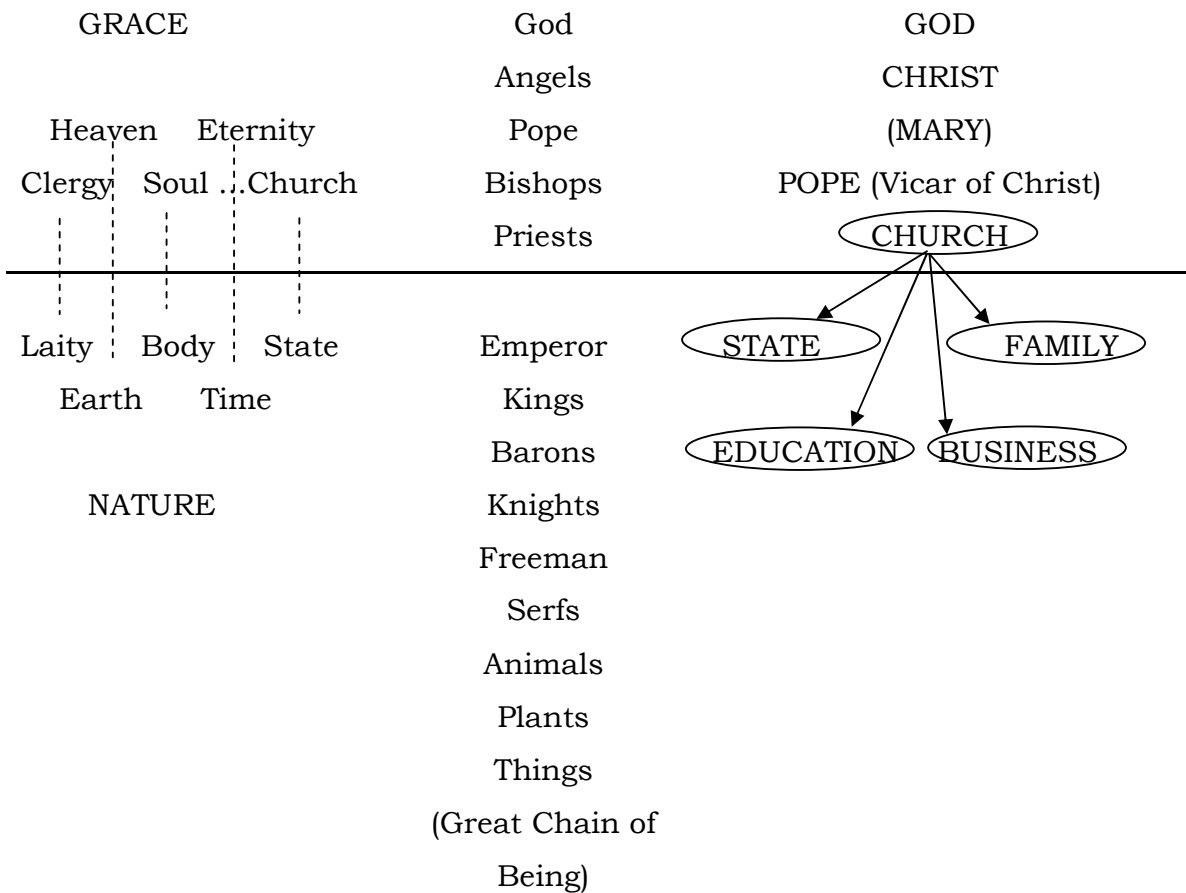
# The History of Educational Theory and Practice

## Turning Points Part 2

**Richard A. Russell**

### Medieval Education

Medieval Worldview (a synthesis of Christian and Graeco-Roman pagan worldviews > Dualism):



On this scheme all things are viewed hierarchically - the top is near God, the further down you go, the further away you are from God.

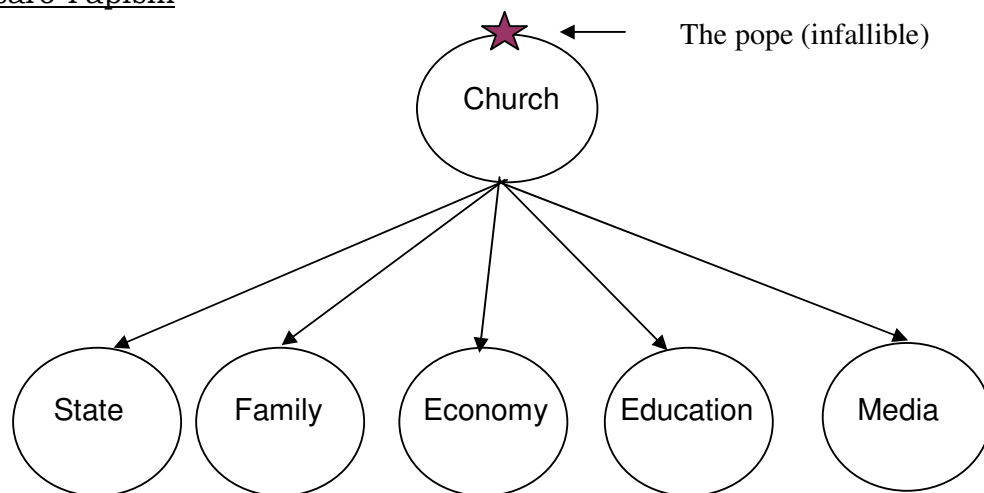
In the Middle Ages a synthesis of the Greek form/matter themes and the Biblical themes of Creation, Fall and Redemption (CFR) prevailed, with dominance given to CFR. The same tensions opened up in the Middle Ages

between form (soul) and matter (body), leading to a number of polarities. The world was split into two, one side was given to paganism, the other half to the Gospel - a great division between the whole of reality. Which is more important (the question comes with the split)? - of course the top (grace) realm. Of the other realm some said it was of the devil and just a distraction, others that it was there but of a lower order, and it was better to escape to the higher. The laity were in the lower, the clergy permanently in the higher. These two approaches are exemplified in:

(a) Augustine, who saw it as a question of either/or - are you with the world or with God ('world' meaning creation, flux, a source of terrible temptations and distractions, especially women - he left the woman he had children by to follow God); this view leads to monasticism; and

(b) Aquinas, who saw it as a matter of higher/lower - the world is not totally evil, but your priorities should lie with the higher. The lower is passing away and insignificant. This kind of thinking led to today's secular curriculum/R.E. split.

### Caesaro-Papism



Caesar was thought of as a divine being. The phrases "worthy art thou" and "my Lord and my God" were commonly used of Caesar, thus when Christians started using them of Jesus they were making a political declaration about

who rules: that even Caesar is ruled over by Jesus. (This is why the Christians were often called atheists).

**The State:** Medieval Christian Europe took on the same model as that of Plato's statism/totalitarianism, but replacing the emperor with the Pope, and the state with the church. In this model the state is subject to the church and is its instrument, with the Pope conferring authority on the emperor in the act of coronation (cf. now, the state appoints bishops in this country).

Napoleon, however, at his coronation, seized the crown and put it on his head himself, thus declaring his own authority, and his mere tolerance of the church. In England the Archbishop of Canterbury could excommunicate the king, as happened with John and many medieval monarchs, and at the threat of being excommunicated many kings got back in line, since to be excommunicated was to be cast outside the body of Christ into outer darkness, to virtually cease to exist. Excommunication of the king absolved all his subjects from their responsibilities, and from their oaths of allegiance to him, as he was a heretic. The threat of excommunication thus brought even the most stubborn English kings back into line, for if you were excommunicated, then when you died you went straight to hell.

Excommunicated heretics were likely to be bumped off at any time, and not by the church, but by the secular army.

**The Family:** The family was contained very much within the structures of the church, and the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, marriage and the last rights) covered the whole of life.

**The Economy:** The various areas of trade were controlled by the guilds, which were quasi-church institutions, very closely connected with the life of the church. There were also church rules against usury and interest which had a significant effect on economic life.

**The Media:** Preaching was the main public media, plus the copying of manuscripts which was again rigorously controlled by the church.

**Education:** There was very little education that was not church controlled. In the middle ages most education was what you might call vocational: boys and girls received education for their roles in life. The vast majority would be sent off at quite an early age to serve in other people's households, to be apprenticed to a master in some trade or profession. Only a very small percentage went to school and even fewer went on to university (for which knowledge of Latin was crucial) - those who did were trained as clergy, lawyers, administrators and schoolmasters. The grammar schools, cathedral schools and universities were all church-controlled institutions, and no others existed. If you were a nobleman who had a private tutor for his children, then he would most likely be a clergyman, or if not a layman who had been trained by clergymen, say at Oxford or Cambridge.

**To sum up:** there was a pervasive influence and dominance of the church in every area of life. Many of our contemporaries today secretly fear that fundamentalist Christians want to reintroduce some form of Caesaro-Papism, with a political version of Billy Graham or some American-style moral majority at the top instead of the Pope. We may seem meek and innocent now, but, they say, wait till we get some power" and we'll become ruthless and totalitarian. We need to be clear on the issue: are we in fact trying to introduce a new medievalism? We need a very clear analysis of what we think is right or wrong about that medieval order.

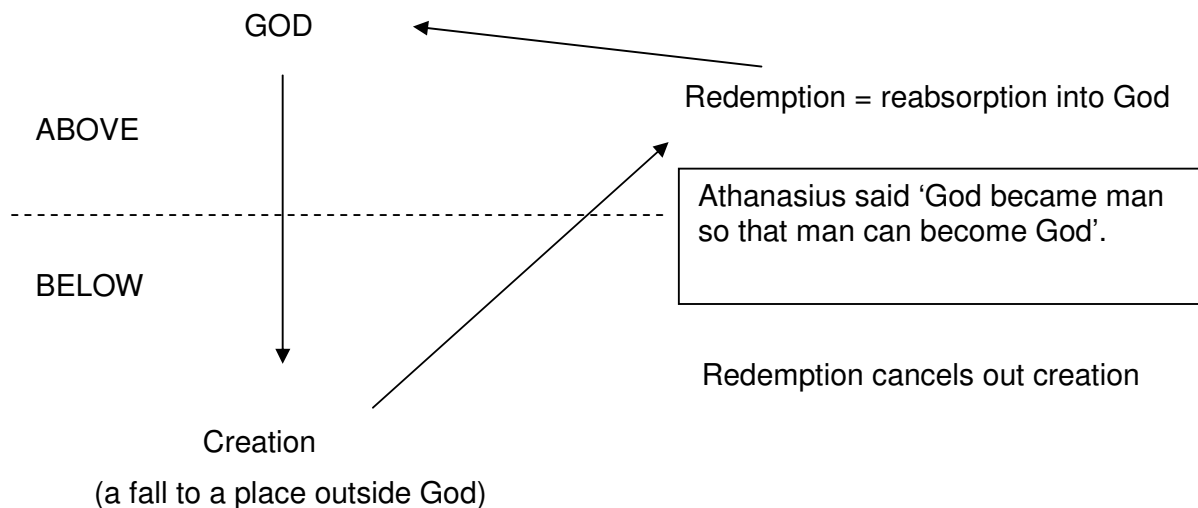
**University curriculum:** Basically the universities were agencies of the church for training the personnel which the church needed to do its work. The church, however, was a much larger institution than it is today, covering all there was of the welfare state - medicine and hospitals were a wing of the church - and being deeply involved in the administration of the state prominent churchmen became diplomatists and civil servants (e.g. Thomas a Beckett, Cardinal Wolsey etc.). Churchmen were used to wielding power, therefore they also made good politicians. Main areas of the university curriculum were: theology as the top faculty, plus the faculties of liberal arts,

medicine and law. If you were a 'man of gold', then your elementary education began with the creed, the paternoster and the Psalter in Latin - lots of heavy rote learning. Then when you went up to the university, which you often did at the age of fourteen, you were still doing a lot of fairly elementary education. In theory you got into grammar, rhetoric and logic (the trivium), then you moved on to arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy (the quadrivium). This curriculum had a great deal in common with Plato's educational programme; in fact the seven liberal arts was really the staple of Greek and Roman education. The trivium and quadrivium would be largely based on Aristotelian philosophy, which was seen as the prerequisite for rightly understanding the Scriptures and theology - indeed as the essential tool for rightly understanding anything. These were the secular subjects which would earn you your BA, but then the top few would go on to the faculty of theology to study for a Bachelor of Divinity or Doctor of Divinity - the sacred discipline. Those who studied theology, then, had already had their minds set to an enormous degree according to Aristotelian philosophy, so that when they came to Scripture they viewed it through pagan spectacles. Thomas Aquinas, the top RC theologian and philosopher, whose works were on the high altar of the Council of Trent at the time of the Reformation, and who defined orthodoxy in Rome right up to the present time, referred to Aristotle as "The Philosopher". A quote from one of Aristotle's works, *The Metaphysics*: "We assume the gods to be above other beings blessed and happy; but what sort of actions must we assign to them? Acts of justice? Will not the gods seem absurd if they make contracts and return deposits and so on? Acts of the brave man, then, confronting dangers and running risks because it is noble to do so? Or liberal acts? To whom will they give? It will be strange if they are really to have money or anything of the kind. And what would their temperate (tempered?) acts be? Is not such praise tasteless, since they have no bad appetites? If we were to run through all of them the circumstances of action would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, everyone supposes that they live, and therefore are active. We cannot suppose them to sleep like Endyroidion. Now if we take away from a living being action, and still more, production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of god,

which surpasses all other in blessedness, must be contemplative, and human activities, therefore, which are most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness."

What constituted true humanity, then, was rational contemplation - or for the Christian, prayer and meditation, which were the activities of the monks in the monasteries. Any other sort of life is seen as lower, inadequate, wrong. In this medieval view the final human destination, for which this life is a preparation, is the 'beatific vision' - staring at God in his glory for ever, just being there in a state of rational contemplation, without change or motion. Disincarnation was the theme of the day; the body, human life, culture, and everything around you is a distraction which you should rigorously set aside. According to Aquinas, who had an empiricist epistemology (basically: all knowledge comes through the senses) you can have no experience of God till you die, as God cannot be seen. There is a problem, though, in relating this to the Scriptures. What happens when you are resurrected? - You get your wretched body back again, even if it's an improved model! The Greek view of a human being as a rational mind on legs is very different from the Biblical view of being a whole person, embodied and culturally related.

Many of the medieval thinkers, including Aquinas, had this sort of scheme:



In the Biblical view there is a fundamental distinction between Creator and creation - "In the beginning God created (not emanated) the heavens and the earth". The creation is not some bit of God that he is later going to reabsorb. We have creation, a fallen creation, a redeemed creation and a restored creation: our future follows a linear course, not a leap 'upstairs'. The meek shall inherit the earth - it will still exist; the heavenly Jerusalem will come down to earth, and glory will come to creation.

The medieval view identifies the church with the kingdom of God: to be subject to the rule of God's kingdom means to be subject to the church. The reality, however, is that everything and everyone is answerable to Christ - this is not just how it ought to be, but how things are. And it is also what we ought to recognise: it's not true because we are convinced of it, but because it is there (in the same way that you can't make Jesus your Lord, you acknowledge that he is Lord).

The Christian worldview in government actually gives more freedom to other groups than any other system, as it has a higher regard for people and their convictions.