How did the influence the Church exerted on Education historically, worldwide and in the Cayman Islands Compare to the role it plays today, if any? What is the extent of its involvement today?

The Church’s involvement in education in the Cayman Islands today is still prominent as is noted by the number of private schools in Grand Cayman today which are affiliated and subsidized by churches.

Schools on Grand Cayman which are linked to churches include Truth-For-Youth School, First Baptist Christian School, Triple C. School, Cayman Academy, St. Ignatius Catholic School, Cayman Preparatory and Wesleyan Christian Academy.

I will first examine the role which the Church plays in education in the world at large, and then look closer to home to see what role the Church plays in education in the Cayman Islands today and the extent to which it is involved.

Let us begin our study by taking a look at the role of the church would have played in education historically, and the extent of that influence on the education of the world’s people.

As early as 1875 the President of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant stated that the church and state should forever be separated and advocated that religion should be kept out of public schools and that “the matter of religion” should be left to the family, the church and private schools.

Bringing our study home, until 1834 education had very little emphasis in the Cayman Islands, and the population was mostly illiterate. There was trade of slaves and real estate transactions had been recorded but the settlers, who had come from Jamaica, brought only an elementary education with them. Those settlers shared their limited education with those who wanted to learn.

Until 1887, every school in these islands was owned and operated by a church. Churches carried the burden of educating the people of these islands, conducting lessons often under large trees and in small, inadequate church buildings. Education was in the hands of the church clergy, with church pastors and their spouses also playing the role of school teachers. The first schools began receiving small grants from Government a few years prior to this when it became evident that schools could not survive solely by buildings, and as parents had found it difficult to pay the 3 pence or 6 pence per week, teachers had had to accept ground provisions and fish in exchange for educating a child. The grants proved insufficient as the Government regulated the grant based on attendance in excess of 60% and also that education should be provided to fatherless children free of charge. This meant that teachers would not be paid adequately and many left the profession for better-paid careers.

The Minutes of the Wesleyan Synod in Jamaica show that in the 1840’s there was a day school which was administered by Mr. T. B. Coe, as the Wesleyans had worked at missions in Grand Cayman from 1838 to 1845. The Presbyterians began their work in Grand Cayman in 1846. The first appointed teacher was Mr. Jarett Wood, who was a “Caymanian” teacher who had trained at Mico College in Jamaica. The school he was appointed to in George Town closed that same year due to a lack of financial support and Mr. Wood, returned to the island’s first Capital, Bodden Town to reopen a school which he had started there in 1844. That school was successful and five years later, 35 of his 95 students were able to read the scriptures. The Presbyterian Church contributed the most of all the denominations in the early days of education in the Cayman Islands. Messrs. Frederick S. McTaggart and A. C. Panton who were both Presbyterians from Jamaica contributed a great deal to education in the first years of the Presbyterians’ presence in our islands. These men had been trained in Jamaica and both arrived in 1860. McTaggart kept a school in the district George Town until his death in 1888. Panton had operated schools in Prospect and Bodden Town and then took over the school in George Town from 1888 until his death in 1897. There were a number of other Presbyterian educators namely Drummond, Grant and Hislop, who also operated schools from Presbyterian Church buildings and subsidized by the Presbyterian Church. There were also schools in West Bay, Bodden Town, and East End which were operated from the Presbyterian Chapels in those districts. The majority of schools were church-schools, but there were a few “private schools”. Today the private schools are the “church-schools” with the exception of a few.

We also see that through the involvement of the church in administering the Negro Education Grant in Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, which were a part of the Parish of Westmoreland in Jamaica at that time were able to indirectly receive some of the benefits of the Grant after the Abolition of Slavery in 1833.

While Government tried to provide for the children of slaves, the Presbyterian Church felt the responsibility of providing education, which was difficult to say the least. It is therefore understandable that the main textbook and in many cases, the only textbook was the Bible and children spent much of their time in Bible verse memorization.

The first Caymanian to be trained as a teacher, the late Flora Robinson, was sponsored by the Presbyterian Church and when Government took responsibility for the salaries of primary school teachers, Mrs. Robinson became the first Caymanian appointed as a Government school teacher. Even though Government had accepted responsibility for salaries, church buildings continued to be used for school in every district without rent for many years.

The first secondary school to be operated on a regular basis was established by the Chapel Church of God. This school opened as a elementary school in 1942 and then added the secondary branch in 1944. This school was known as the Triple C. School and still operates under that name today. Under apparent religious rivalry, shortly afterward, in 1949, the Presbyterian Church also established a secondary school, which was called the Cayman High School. Rev. John Gray was the first principal of that school. The Cayman Islands Government began to subsidize this school in 1955 to the order of GBP 700 per annum, and assumed full responsibility for the school in 1964, changing the name of the school to Government Secondary Grammar School.

Subsidized by our local Government, The Cayman Preparatory and High School was established by the United Presbyterian Church, which has been a strong –hold in educating our people since 1846, and is proud to have been a contributor to a high standard of morality and Godliness in these islands over the decades.

Taking a look across the Caribbean, Trinidad was the first country outside of Britain to introduce the University of Cambridge External Examinations to assess its students in Secondary Schools. Three of the first five Secondary Schools to be established in that country were private Roman Catholic schools and another was known as the Church of England Grammar School. Therefore four of the first five Secondary schools in Trinidad were denominational. Nothing is better known in the history of education in Trinidad than the fact that the Canadian Presbyterian Mission, founded by Rev. John Morton in 1868, dedicated itself to Christianizing and Educating the Indian population. Credit can be attributed today to the prominent place held by Indian females in the education system of Trinidad today, to the humble Canadian Presbyterian Mission Schools of the south. With the adaptation of the dual system of education in 1870, because the then Governor of Trinidad, Governor Gordon took the view that the English should not dominate the French creoles, nor their church, denominational schools as well as Government schools would both be aided and compete on given terms for Government grants. Nonetheless, the Christian Church paved the way for education to become a serious influence in social stratification, as churches were effective in establishing cheap elementary schools of which the main goal was to convert the black population to Christianity.

The Church has played a tremendous part in education both in Cayman and the world at large and change is evident. We will now take a look at the extent to which this change has impacted the church’s involvement in education.

When the Puritans arrived in the New England region of the United States, armed with a burning desire to pass down the heritage of Christ to their children, Harvard was the first college to be founded. This took place just six short years after their arrival and with every certainty, the purpose that Harvard was established was to hand down the Christian heritage that they had brought with them. They had set to work almost immediately building Christian schools. Eight colonial colleges were established along with hundreds of Christian elementary and secondary schools. An early “student handbook” from Harvard reads: “Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of sound knowledge and learning.” The College of William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth were founded by various denominations – Congregationalists, Anglicans, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, and so forth – to train ministers, Christian teachers, and missionaries. Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth – were founded directly as a result of the religious revival known as the Great Awakening. Spiritually, Christian education was instrumental in revivals, Christian growth, students’ repentance and salvation. Undoubtedly, education in early America was informed by biblical truths and morals, rather than by those of Secular Humanism.

In the United States today, and the world-over, there is an ongoing debate as to whether or not the church should influence education in public schools. Some suggest that there is now a state religion by taking prayer out of schools and that that religion is atheism, and that it is being forced on everyone regardless of what they believe. With so many different groups to please, lawmakers are pulled in many different directions. The First Amendment to the Constitution was held out in plain view, making its bold statement in that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

According to a excerpt by Warren A. Nord “Taking Religion Seriously”, Nord maintains that religious study is important because of its vast influence on world affairs, and that students learn too little about religion at home and church (synagogue or mosque). Television and newspapers only give some impression that religion has something to do with scandals, foreign wars and terrorism. The goal of public education if properly planned, is to provide students with an understanding of the varied religious as well as secular traditions, while not compelling them to conform to any particular view. Other educators have concluded that religion is irrelevant to education as America is largely a secular culture.

In the last few years however, a series of textbook studies, a few state boards of education and several national organizations- most notably the National Council on Religion and Public Education and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, have together brought the importance of religion in education to the forefront, and stressed that religion in education is not being taken seriously enough. It is therefore popular belief that religion cannot be avoided throughout our lives and that its study has to be taken more seriously. It is argued that since the very Constitution of the United States, though a secular document, has religious roots and that it is highly important for students to understand the relationship between moral law and civil law.

In Latin America, the work of the Catholic Church changed after the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, in Medellin, Colombia in 1968. Along with the Vatican II Proclamation, the conference formed the basis for a more political attitude toward social problems, and the church became split into two groups: those who strove for social justice and those who either actively supported the existing political order or those who refused to become openly involved in challenging it. Particularly in El Salvador, a number of priests began to work with peasant communities to create Christian base communities. These Christian base communities played a great role during the 1980s, helping to educate children and adults who had been denied the right to education. These individuals had a heightened desire to learn because of their level of political awareness, in that they had been denied the right to education, though they were still skeptical about their own abilities. This was during the civil wars, when people’s fears and suspicions of government-sponsored literacy initiatives caused those endeavors to fail. Still the war necessitated people who were literate. Those who were involved in the fighting needed to be able to read instructions on equipment and numbers on guns and shells, to read written commands or issue them. A great number of the priests who began these Christian base communities were notoriously murdered as they were labeled as communists or third-worldists.

The roles played by non-governmental organizations in education are diverse as they are immense. Their influence is greater than that of multilateral agencies. The influence of these non-governmental organizations in the development of education is not so much through the relatively small-scale funding they provide, as through their contribution to debates on education and development and the pioneering of innovative ideas and techniques. They focus on a particular group of people like refugees or children. A number of organizations in the United States stress individual child sponsorship, as does the Christian organization World Vision. World Vision has a presence in many third world countries today and brings Christian education to underprivileged families along with enabling communities to learn to sustain themselves. Through these types of organizations the church is still reaching those in need of education today.

According to a 2004 article from Education Journal in Scotland, schools which are church schools have a relevant curriculum. The Holy Trinity Episcopal Primary School was a denominational school by name and legality only and was deemed not to be a true faith school. The school, was closed because it did not follow the relevant Christian curriculum, but rather followed the same curriculum that was kept in non-denominational schools.

Historically, in Ireland, up until 1831, education was run by the Catholic Church. In that year The National System of Education was established in Ireland and happened to be the first state-supported system of elementary education to be established in Great Britain and Ireland. One premise of the National System was that it would be non-denominational. The break-down of this objective came when Catholic schools became affiliated with the National System and the system had to accommodate the demands of the “convent” schools and the schools tactfully reaped financial benefits from the system while maintaining their Catholic identity.

According to a March, 2006 article in the Daily Telegraph, church schools are criticized for seemingly picking the brightest and wealthiest students, and Archbishop Williams was expected to call for a standardized admissions procedure. A government adviser causally linked church schools with social selections, as their admissions criteria included points for parents’ church attendance. Church schools were expected to increase in number by 50 per cent, while General Synod debate on the Education bill was due to be released in July 2006.

A major challenge facing Christian higher education is how to interact with a pluralistic society. This challenge is encountered in many venues such as community involvement, accountability to churches at large, and the various activities within a particular school (college or university) itself as it conducts business, including teaching. A recent article notes that Christian higher education is becoming increasingly secularized.

The influence which the church has on education in the Cayman Islands remains prominent in comparison to the rest of the world where religion has been taken out of schools, secularists argue for a strict separation of church and state, and opposition groups demand public policies which directly reflect their views. As books by Christian writers have flooded the US market, opposing atheists have combated with written counterattacks which have become bestsellers. The greatest influence which the church has had in education in the United States is through grants and subsidies to affiliated schools.

The Presbyterian Church in America is committed to education at all levels, there are many members of the Presbyterian Church in America who are teachers and professors in many different facets, including a significant number of large universities and theological seminaries. Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri are the national educational institutions of the Presbyterian Church in America and these institutions are overseen by that church.

In the Cayman Islands many of the principles required in the Code of Ethics for teachers in the Cayman Islands are based on Christian principles. How strongly they are enforced is another question. Still the ways in which the church influences education in the Cayman Islands is outstanding, as eight of the eleven private schools on Grand Cayman today are denominational schools. Wesleyan Christian Academy which is run by the church board of directors has a curriculum which heavily envelops the scriptures, the church pastor is usually present at the school and there are regular morning prayers and devotion at the church. The school is located beside the church and church buildings are used to conduct classes. Fees are charged to parents of children who attend but the church subsidizes the school. The teachers all attend church at Wesleyan and the school band plays at Sunday morning worship services. It is a requirement for teachers to profess the Christian faith and be born-again believers prior to being hired.

The Cayman Preparatory and High School, as mentioned earlier is run by the Church Board of the United Church and that church subsidizes the school.

Grace Christian Academy, for example, which is not affiliated with any particular church in our islands holds fast to a high standard of Christian ethics and a deep Christian mission statement “The mission of Grace Christian Academy is to minister to students in a Christ-centered learning environment, which is committed to the pursuit and practice of excellence in academics, leadership, physical development and spiritual growth, in preparation to meet the challenges of the future.” At this school it is also a requirement for teachers to profess the Christian faith and be born-again believers prior to being hired.

At the St. Ignatius Catholic School, the school is also operated by the church and the church is heavily involved in the daily life of the school. Students go to mass, where they observe the rituals of that faith, and there is prayer and blessings in the classroom daily.

In Cayman Islands public schools is the required by law that there be religious instruction and this is interpreted in the primary schools in the form of traditional morning devotions and prayer, prayer before lunch is eaten, and prayer before leaving school in the evenings, in addition to religious studies that is required in the National Curriculum. In the Secondary Schools, there is a general departure from traditional morning devotions and some tutorials may include prayer and less often devotions. However, religious studies is still required by law in the high schools, in contrast to public schools in the United States for example.

In Trinidad as well, the Catholic Church is still involved in primary and secondary education to a considerable degree, and a substantial portion of primary schools, approximately 23 percent of primary schools are the responsibility of the Catholic Church. Any improvements the Catholic Church should make to primary education could have a significant impact even on government schools. The Presbyterian Church in Trinidad also has also made a great contribution to the development of education in that country and this contribution is recognized both by the state and the general public. There are 72 Presbyterian primary schools, five Presbyterian secondary schools and one theological college today. Other denominations also make their contributions but to a lesser degree.

In Britain, every publicly funded school is obliged by the law to provide religious education and daily collective worship, of a broadly Christian character, for all its pupils.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that the church still plays a vital role in education worldwide and particularly in the Cayman Islands, though to a lesser degree than it did historically. Nonetheless, its contribution should not be undermined as it still contributes greatly to the formation of our social fabric and instilling good morals and principles to the world’s population by way of missions and the establishment of Christian learning institutions.

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