

Christian Debt: What We Owe God

A Book Proposal

By

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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This book will be an expansion of an article that Samuel L. Blumenfeld wrote in November 2002 and was published on a Christian website.

It addresses the most important questions that confront Christian parents when raising their children and trying to instill a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives in a culture steeped in materialism, perversion, and nihilism.

The senseless tragedy of the Columbine school massacre is a crying indication that parents cannot leave such important matters pertaining to life's value and purpose to chance. They must be able to ask their children the right questions in order to know what's in their heads.

Nor can the children be left to our public education system which is totally devoid of God.

The author has been writing about the education of American children for the last forty years.

He shows how children—particularly Christian children—are at risk in the public schools: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically.

They are at risk academically because of teaching methods that produce reading failure, poor arithmetic skills, and dysfunctional handwriting. Faulty teaching methods can also produce Attention Deficit Disorder which will require the student to take powerful medications such as Ritalin and Adderall.

The children are at risk spiritually because of a curriculum that considers God to be of no importance in education and encourages belief in purposeless evolution.

They are at risk morally because of the teaching of explicit sex education, abortion as morally acceptable and necessary, the distribution of condoms, the teaching that perverse life-styles are perfectly "normal," drug programs that encourage experimentation, death education that may lead to suicide, values clarification based on moral relativism that creates conflict with the values of one's parents.

And they are at risk physically in the public schools where assaults, shootings, stabbings, and massacres have become a fact of life.

Attached is the article, Christian Debt, which forms an outline of what will be in the book. It will help parents instill in their children the sense that life has meaning and that they are here for a purpose. The author will work with the publisher on the length of the book and its final title.

How Shall We Teach Reading?

New Views and Discoveries in Reading Instruction

A Book Proposal

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Why This Book?

The recent report, *Reading at Risk*, issued by the National Endowment for the Arts on the declining literacy among young Americans indicates that there is something terribly wrong with the way we are teaching our children to read.

According to the Report:

The number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004. Almost half of Americans between ages 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure.

Endowment Chairman Dana Gioia has stated:

“This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading.”

The survey also tells us that only a third of high school seniors read at a proficient level. “And proficiency is not a high standard,” Gioia said. “We’re not asking them to be able to read Proust in the original. We’re talking about reading the daily newspaper.”

And things are not much better among college students. In 2005, almost 40 percent of college freshmen (and 35 percent of seniors) read nothing at all for pleasure, and 26 percent (28 percent of seniors) read less than one our per week. Even among college graduates, reading proficiency declined from 40 percent in 1992 to 31 percent in 2003.

That America has a reading problem has been known since 1955, when Rudolf Flesch wrote his famous book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, in which he said: "The teaching of reading—all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks—is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense." The tragedy is that not much has changed since then.

It is obvious that the continued decline of literacy skills among Americans is a problem that endangers our nation culturally as well as economically. How can we compete with nations who know how to teach their students to read English well? How can a person survive in our highly literate culture with poor reading skills?

The good news is that a small group of educators and researchers have found the means to solve our reading problem. But it means first acknowledging that the cause of the problem is the sight method of teaching reading in American primary schools. Today, that form of teaching is known as the Whole Language Approach. It teaches our phonetic reading system as if it were an ideographic system, like Chinese. Three Whole Language professors describe their teaching method in a book, *Whole Language, What's the Difference?*, published in 1991. They write:

From a whole language perspective, reading (and language use in general) is a process of generating hypotheses in a meaning-making transaction in a sociohistorical context. As a transactional process, reading is not a matter of "getting the meaning" from text, as if that meaning were *in* the text waiting to be decoded by the reader. Rather, reading is a matter of readers using the cues print provides and the knowledge they bring with them to construct a unique interpretation....This view of reading implies that there is no single "correct" meaning for a given text, only plausible meanings.

The only trouble with that high-sounding, complicated methodology is that it causes dyslexia. What is dyslexia? The dictionary defines it as an "impairment of the ability to read, often as the result of genetic defect or brain injury." Children born with serious retardation will exhibit the symptoms of dyslexia. But a normal child can become dyslexic when required by the teaching method to use the right brain to perform a left-brain function, and is therefore unable to see the phonetic structure of our printed words.

That is what the Whole Language method does. The left brain is the center of speech and language development. It's where vocabulary is expanded. The right brain deals with space, design, and sight. Our alphabetic reading and writing system is a phonetic one and is therefore a function of left-brain activity. Imposing a right-brain function over a left-brain activity can cause brain injury. And the injury it causes can actually be seen in brain scans.

Children who are taught to read by intensive, systematic phonics cannot become dyslexic because their left brains are correctly performing left-brain functions. Therefore, they can automatically see the phonetic structure of our alphabetic words and can easily sound them out.

What has confirmed all of this is a revolutionary reading test conceived by former school administrator Edward Miller. This simple but ingenious test proves beyond any doubt that whole-word teaching of reading can and often does cause dyslexia.

The test has two parts: The first part is composed of only sight words from Dr. Seuss's two most popular books, *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. The second part is composed of phonetically regular words taken from Dr. Rudolf Flesch's book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*. The student is asked to read the sight-word list first and then the phonetically regular words. The student is timed on reading both lists and the errors are noted. The dyslexic student will be able to read the sight words with few or almost no errors, but will slow down considerably and make many more errors reading the simple phonetically regular words.

This is the first time in educational history that such a test has been devised to provide that kind of startling information.

By now, hundreds of students have been given the Miller Test, and the results prove conclusively that the teaching method determines whether or not a student will become reading disabled and dyslexic or a good, accurate, phonetic reader.

This book will provide the details and results of the many tests given in the last five years. A copy of the test will be available in an Appendix, so that it can be used by any educator and tutor.

It should also be noted that the two methods of teaching reading—the whole word and the phonetic—produce two types of readers. Geraldine Rodgers, in her exhaustive history of reading instruction, has identified the two types of readers as “subjective and objective.”

The subjective reader, taught by a non-phonetic method, relies mainly on context clues, configuration clues, some phonetic clues, and simple guessing to make sense of text. That reader has acquired a whole-word or “holistic” reflex, automatically looking at all words as whole configurations. Thus they become inaccurate, subjective readers. They put in words that are not there, leave out words that are, truncate words, simply misread words, and guess. The objective reader, taught by intensive phonics, has acquired a “phonetic” reflex, and is thus an accurate, fluent reader, able to see the phonetic, syllabic structure of the words.

Of fascinating interest in all of this is the fact that Dr. Seuss used a sight vocabulary in writing *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. He revealed as much in an interview published in *Arizona Magazine*, June 1981:

They think I did it in twenty minutes. That damned *Cat in the Hat* took nine months until I was satisfied. I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list. That was due to the Dewey revolt in the Twenties, in which they threw out phonic reading and went to word recognition, as if you're reading a Chinese pictograph instead of blending sounds of different letters. I think killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country. Anyway, they had it all worked out that a healthy child at age four can learn so many words in a week and that's all. So

there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme that'll be the title of my book. (That's genius at work.) I found "cat" and "hat" and I said, "The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*."

Unfortunately, it is the reading of such books by millions of preschoolers and memorizing the words by sight alone that sets them on the road to dyslexia. But now that we understand how the whole-word teaching method can produce reading disability, it is imperative that parents and educators become aware of how to prevent reading failure.

In September 1993, a Boston Globe headline read: "90 million US adults called barely literate." It read further, "Nearly half of all adult Americans read and write so poorly that it is difficult for them to hold a decent job, according to the most comprehensive literacy study done by the US government." The study, mandated by Congress, cost \$14 million.

The concern expressed by the National Endowment for the Arts requires that we provide our educational leaders with an unequivocal understanding of why literacy continues to decline in America. For those of us who have labored in the vineyard of literacy, with virtually no recognition from our academic leaders, our only satisfaction is in having saved countless youngsters from lives of despair and frustration, who would have been unable to achieve their potential because of poor reading. But as Chairman Gioia has stated, "This is a massive social problem," and requires drastic reform of the way our children are being taught to read. That must be our mission in the years ahead.

The Making of the Black Underclass

And How to Stop the Process

A Book Proposal

By

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Why Is there a Black Underclass?

Why, after over 140 years of freedom from slavery and the benefits of compulsory, universal education, do we find in every large American city thousands of blacks who live in poverty, are functionally illiterate and engaged in drug trafficking, gang violence, and crime?

Why is there such a phenomenon as an “underclass” in today’s technologically advanced America with so many people living without hope in this land of opportunity?

Wasn’t universal education supposed to lift up the African-American to the same standard of economic prosperity as the white?

Theoretically, that is what should have happened. But it didn’t.

Why?

Census statistics on illiteracy provide some clues.

In 1890, illiteracy among African-Americans over the age of 10 was 57.1 percent. In 1900, it was 44.5 percent. In 1910 it was 30.4 percent. And by 1920 it was down to 22.9 percent.

Among white Americans only 2.0 percent were illiterate.

In other words, great strides in literacy were being made among African-Americans from 1890 to 1920.

According to the 1920 Census, the percentage of illiterates among African-Americans ranged from 38.5 percent in Louisiana to 2.9 percent in New York.

The Census of 1930 showed an even greater improvement in literacy among African-Americans.

In 1930, illiteracy among African-Americans in the urban population was 9.2 percent; in the rural population 23.2 percent; in the rural non-farm population, 20.5 percent.

That same 1930 Census revealed that 4,283,753 of a total population 122,774,046 Americans, or less than 4 percent, were considered illiterate.

But if we move fast-forward 63 years to 1993 we find a U.S. Government report revealing that 90 million American adults can barely read or write!

Indeed, it is estimated that 50 percent of African-Americans today are functionally illiterate.

What happened in the interim to produce this literacy catastrophe?

Two things:

- 1. The rise of the Eugenics Movement which declared African-Americans racially inferior and relegated them to a non-academic, manual education.**
- 2. The rise of the Progressive philosophy of education which denigrated high literacy in favor of socialization.**

The great tragedy is that African-Americans had made great educational advances in the first half of the 20th century. But from 1950 onward began the great slide into academic failure for many African-Americans.

The recent film, *The Great Debaters*, dramatically tells the story of black academic achievement in the racially segregated South of the 1930s. It reveals how education was stressed as the way out of poverty and ignorance. Indeed, the increase in African-American literacy during that period produced a vibrant culture of great writers and readers. But the film doesn't provide a clue as to why that process of educational advance was stopped and reversed.

Actually, it all started in 1898 when John Dewey, the leader of the Progressive Education movement, advocated moving education away from individualistic high literacy in favor of social collectivism. He was able to get his fellow educators to accept a completely new educational philosophy based on

collectivism and socialism. And it was understood among them that a decline in individualistic literacy was essential in carrying out their plan for a new collectivist society in America.

Indeed, it was Professor G. Stanley Hall, a leading progressive educator and mentor to John Dewey, who wrote in defense of illiteracy in 1911:

Very many men have lived and died and been great, even the leaders of their age, without any acquaintance with letters. The knowledge which illiterates acquire is probably on the whole more personal, direct, environmental and probably a much larger proportion of it practical. Moreover, they escape much eye-strain and mental excitement, and, other things being equal, are probably more active and less sedentary. . . . Perhaps we are prone to put too high a value both upon the ability required to attain this art and the discipline involved in doing so, as well as the culture value that comes to the citizen with his average of only six grades of schooling by the acquisition of this art.

And 70 years later, in 1981, we find Harvard Professor Anthony Oettinger telling an audience of communications executives:

The present “traditional” concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write. . . . Do we, for example, really want to teach people to do a lot of sums or write in “a fine round hand” when they have a five-dollar hand-held calculator or a word processor to work with?

Or, do we really have to have everybody literate—writing and reading in the traditional sense—when we have the means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication?

Ironically, young blacks have developed a new oral expression to compensate for their lack of literacy. It’s called Rap.

Of all Americans affected by this change in educational philosophy, African-Americans have suffered the most. They have had a much more difficult time adjusting to the new curriculum and teaching methods than any other group.

As a result, a great negative gap has grown between the academic achievements of African-Americans and their white compatriots.

Frustrated and discouraged by their inability to learn to read, many African-American high-schoolers drop out and wind up on the streets.

They form gangs and angrily take their revenge on society by anti-social, criminal behavior which lands them in jail.

The simple truth is that American public education deliberately prevents many black students from succeeding academically.

Can this be changed?

Can the process that produces the underclass be done away with?

Yes!

But only if an aroused and informed African-American community demands the kind of radical change that is necessary.

The purpose of this book is to indicate what must be done to end the continued creation of an underclass among African-Americans.

The solution is doable.

But is there the will to do it?

The author will contact Denzel Washington, Oprah Winfrey, Barack Obama, Thomas Sowell, and other concerned African-Americans who may be willing to take the lead in awakening the American people to the underclass problem and how it can be solved.

The Civil Rights movement brought African-Americans equality of treatment.

A new Academic Rights movement is needed to restore educational progress to African-American children.

About the Author

Samuel L. Blumenfeld, author of ten books on education, was born in New York City and educated in its public schools. It was while studying in Paris at the Sorbonne under the G.I. Bill that he first became acutely aware of the plight of African-Americans. There he met James Baldwin, the budding black novelist, and became a close friend. Baldwin found American racial discrimination insufferable and later became an active leader in the Civil Rights movement. Back in the U.S., when Blumenfeld became editor of Grosset & Dunlap's

Universal Library, he published the first paperback reprint of Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

But it took an interest in the literacy problem before Blumenfeld could understand why the Civil Rights movement had failed to raise the economic prospects of many blacks. That awareness was made in 1960 when he read Rudolf Flesch's book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, published in 1955. In that book Flesch wrote: "The teaching of reading—all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks—is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense."

Flesch described how the Progressives had changed the way reading is taught in American schools. They got rid of the alphabetic phonics method and imposed a new sight-word, or look-say, method that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic system. Flesch wrote that when you impose an ideographic teaching method on an alphabetic reading system you get reading disability.

In 1973, Blumenfeld wrote his own book on the reading problem, *The New Illiterates*. In researching that book he made the discovery that the sight method had been invented in the 1830s by the Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, the teacher of the deaf and dumb in Hartford, Connecticut. The method was tried with normal children in the primary schools of Boston and proved to be a disaster.

Blumenfeld then decided to provide parents with the means to teach their own children to read phonetically at home. He wrote *How to Tutor* and *Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers*. Both books have been used by thousands of parents to successfully teach their children to read at home.

Blumenfeld has lectured on the literacy problem in all 50 states as well as in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. He found that all the English-speaking countries have the same problem that we have in the United States. In fact, the latest book on the subject, *The Great Reading Disaster*, is about the UK!

In November 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts released its 99-page report on the plummeting levels of reading among young Americans. Endowment Chairman Dana Goia stated: "This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading."

And so, the literacy battle goes on!

Meanwhile, Blumenfeld's latest book, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection*, will be published in 2008.

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March 17, 2008

Diane Wachtell
Executor Director
The New Press
38 Greene Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10013

Dear Ms. Wachtell:

Niki Papadopoulos of Public Affairs suggested that I submit the enclosed book proposal, *The Making of the Black Underclass and How to Stop the Process*, to The New Press since he believes this to be an important project that should be published by an independent press.

A few weeks ago I saw Denzel Washington's stirring film, *The Great Debaters*, which led me to think about the present high rate of academic failure among black children, which inevitably leads to frustration, anger, anti-social behavior--and future membership in the black underclass. The impoverished black ghettos ought not to exist in America, and the enclosed proposal offers a realistic way to stop the process that creates them.

The Great Debaters was produced by Denzel Washington and Oprah Winfrey to show dramatically how African-Americans succeeded academically in the segregated South in the 1930s, despite enormous social obstacles. Today, those obstacles have been largely removed, but where is the academic achievement among African-American youngsters to show for this improved situation? In Detroit, Boston and Philadelphia the black ghettos are plagued with the highest black-on-black homicide rates in history!

I believe that a book on the black underclass published by a house committed to making a difference, could elicit the support of such important black leaders as Denzel Washington, Oprah Winfrey, Prof. Henry Louis Gates, and others and help get its message across America. For the last ten years I have worked with a private school in Boston's black community devoted to taking public-school illiterates and turning them into fluent readers. But we need to do more than merely save individual lives from ghetto despair.

Also, the recent ominous report from the National Endowment for the Arts on the deplorable decline in literary reading among young Americans of all ethnic backgrounds should spur us to tackle this problem head on.

Sincerely yours,

SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD

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August 5, 2008

Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA

Dear Dr. Gates:

I am writing to you as someone concerned about the plight of so many young African-Americans having a difficult time learning to read. I am the author of ten books on the subjects of education and literacy and have produced a reading program that could in a very short time create excellent readers of those headed for a bleak life in the underclass.

As one of James Baldwin's old friends from his early Paris days, I know how literate anyone can be regardless of color, provided they are taught correctly as Jimmy was in the public schools of New York City, the same schools that I attended.

I am enclosing a book proposal I have sent out to many publishers without success. Would you know of a publisher who would be willing to publish such a book? Your influence could make the difference.

Once a young person becomes a good, fluent reader, his brain begins to operate at a higher cognitive level thereby reducing the need to act out physically. As the saying goes, "a brain is a terrible thing to waste," but I am afraid that our schools are destroying young brains wholesale.

Many thanks, in advance, for your help.

Sincerely yours,