

Christian Education in the Bailey

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As a child, I used to love to read about medieval times. Lords and ladies, knights in shining armor, castles and kingdoms all held a sort of fascination for me.

The part of the stories that held my highest interest, as unusual as it sounds, was not so much the romance and intrigue, as it was the basic functioning of the castles and kingdoms themselves. I could never get enough details about how the day-to-day activities and tasks were accomplished!

The castle proper was not always that grand; basically, it was a large, cold, stone fortress, with a great room downstairs and sleeping chambers above.

But the castle yard, now that was where the excitement took place! The area between the exterior wall of the castle, and the large protective wall that surrounded the castle and all of its outbuildings, held a true microcosm of society. There was a castle garden, where all of the kitchen vegetables were grown. There was a dairy that housed cows for milk, butter and cheese. There was a kitchen and a bakery, where the meals for the castle's inhabitants were prepared. The finest horses were kept in the castle stables. A smithy shop would be located nearby, and usually an armory close to that. There was often a tanner's workplace, where leather goods would be created, and sometimes a seamstress workshop.

Raw wood would be crafted into furniture and tools in a woodcrafter's shop. Some kingdoms had a falconer, who kept and trained falcons for help in hunting. Most castles had a chapel on the grounds.

Of course, it took a lot of people to run the kingdom: gardeners, dairymaids, chefs and butchers, stable masters, grooms and trainers, blacksmiths, woodsmiths, armorers, tanners, seamstresses, hunters, watchmen and priests were some of the many laborers dedicated to their king and his kingdom.

The most fascinating place of all to me as a child was the bailey. The bailey is where the knights-in-training learned everything they needed to know in order to be the best knights possible for their king. Being an avid horse lover and rider, I could never get enough stories about how the knights trained so long and hard on their trusty steeds! The bailey provided space for young boys to learn everything in riding, from the very basic rudiments to the finesse of guiding a horse with only the rider's legs. This was very important for a knight, as his hands would be occupied in battle with a shield in one hand, and a mace, broadsword or ax in the other. Boys and young men worked long, hard hours, even in the heat of summer or the dead of winter, in order to become the very best horsemen they could be. When your life and the life of your king was at stake, you had

to be so much more than “proficient” at riding – you had to be “one with your horse,” so in tune to one another that all your actions became as natural as instincts.

Of course, it was not enough that these young knights become excellent horsemen. They also had to become experts at fencing, archery, and hand-to-hand combat. Additionally, they were well trained in battle tactics and strategies, including knowing who the enemy was, how he moved, how he fought, what his weaknesses were, etc. These young men put in hours and hours at their studies and training in the bailey each day, constantly striving to better themselves in order to better serve their king.

However, a well-trained knight was no good to a king unless he was, above all else, loyal to his king. What good was a warrior if he was fickle, ungrounded in his loyalties, easily swayed by others? Indeed, the most important part of the knighting ceremony was when the knight swore fealty to his lord.

Because a kingdom was only as strong as the knights who rode under the king’s banner, the training of the knights was of utmost importance to all who served the king in the castle yard – the stable master, the dairymaids, the chefs and the seamstresses. Everyone’s job ultimately was to see that nothing but loyal and fully trained knights rode out on the king’s missions.

The chapel was also a very important place in the castle yard. Some kings only had the benefit of a priest’s ministry once a month or so, as circuit priests used to ride from castle to castle, trying to serve as many as possible. Wealthier kings could often afford to have their own priest, and the people in the kingdom were blessed with being able to attend mass daily, and have a man of God always present for births, weddings, deaths, etc.

The chapel could also serve a very different, not as honorable, purpose. Miscreants of all sorts, as well as deserters from other kingdoms, could hide in a castle’s chapel and claim sanctuary. This would signify that the person was claiming protection from Rome herself, and absolutely no one could remove that person from the chapel for prosecution or anything else. For as long as the lawbreaker chose to hide out in the chapel, he was safe from the law and everyone, including the king himself.

In my job, I often hear people referring to Christian education as educating children “in a bubble.” From non-Christians, this is said derogatorily, implying that Christians overprotect their children and seek to bring them up Pollyanna-style, completely separated from and unaware of “the Real World.” We are told that our children are going to have to face “the Real World” sooner or later, and that we are doing them a disservice by trying to protect them from the truth. Sometimes they are offended, as if Christians are trying to keep their children “unsullied” by the association with non-Christian children.

Even worse, I often hear Christians happily referring to Christian education in the same way; only they are *deliberately* seeking to educate their children “in a bubble.” These well-meaning parents believe that they can indeed insulate their children from “the

Real World,” at least for a time, and that is their goal. They believe their children will be safer than in public school, whatever “safer” means nowadays.

I can’t help but compare both of these views to the poor culprit hiding out in the castle’s chapel, claiming sanctuary. It’s as if these people believe we in Christian education are nervously crowding our students into the chapel, hiding out while we teach, teaching under cover, paranoid about intruders, and claiming sanctuary from “the Real World.”

How I wish that these people knew what true Christian education really is.

- True Christian education does not take place in the chapel; it takes place in the bailey.
- True Christian education is not about hiding; it’s about equipping.
- True Christian education is not about evasion; it’s about commission.
- True Christian education does not whisper in the dark; it shouts in the daylight.
- True Christian education is not reactive; it is proactive.
- True Christian education is not ashamed; it glories in its King.

What does a school look like that is providing true Christian education? Day after day, you will see those young pages, squires, and knights-in-training working hard in the bailey, learning the rudiments, skills, strategies and tactics that they will need in order to one day serve the King in the big, bad Real World. You will see their riding masters, armorers, fencing instructors, and war instructors in their parents, teachers, pastors and coaches. You will see children, even very young children, being indoctrinated in the Truth, not so that they can hide the Truth with them in chapel, but so that they can one day defend the Truth and share it with the world. You will not see children hiding, you will see children training, working, sweating, and even occasionally being knocked off their horses as they strive to become equipped to be the very best-trained, loyal knights that they can possibly be.

And you will not see them leaving the castle until they have become so.

Covenant Day School – training children to think Christianly, equipping young men and women to *live* Christianly.