



## St James Preparatory School

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### EDUCATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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So long as the young generation is, and continues to be well brought up, our ship of state will have a fair voyage; otherwise the consequences are better left unspoken. Plato, *Laws*

Are we asking the right questions when we plan the education of South African boys and girls? Are the government clear what they are planning for and building schools for? Are the scientists and technologists sure what science and technology are for? Should we not inquire into the total moral impact of the cinema, press, radio, the computer, the internet, social media and T.V. on the modern child. The ancient Greeks would have asked all these questions. And governing all their inquiry would have been the final question – **in what way do these wonderful inventions help to make a man?** Socrates faced the same question in Athens:

Wherever the populace crowds together at any public gathering ... booing and clapping until the rocks ring and the whole place redoubles the noise of their applause and outcries – in such a scene what do you suppose would be a young man's state of mind? What sort of private instruction would give him the strength to hold out against such a torrent, or will save him from being swept away down the stream, until he accepts all their notions of right and wrong, does as they do, and comes to be just such a man as they are? *Republic*(trs F.M. Cornford), vi, 492.

**Is not this our own problem – young people caught up at six or seven years of age in the shoddy values and gadgets that absorb adult life?** If the formative power of environment, then, is to act beneficially we must learn to control that environment with our highest spiritual values. This may mean that we all, collectively, should take more note of the ease with which children feed on unhealthy pastures, and spend more money to ensure that the young 'live in a wholesome climate, and drink in the good from every quarter ?

Part of the burden lies with us as adults, who, from all accounts, finds difficulty in preventing children from hearing and seeing the bad. But is not this partly because we fail to discipline our own 'listening' and 'viewing' and because we allow ourselves the continuous clamour of provided amusement and entertainment? **Children's problems are adult problems too.**

Plato and Aristotle, would have answered the above, whether we like it or not, that parents and schools be more protective, more in control of youth's activities, less easy in their resistance to the penetration of amusements, propaganda and technology into the children's lives, more careful to surround them with good people and beautiful things, more selective in the subjects taught and more deliberately purposeful in the manner of teaching them, more forthright in declaring what is good and what is bad. **Plato places education so high in the priorities of national concern because he was not content that schools should merely reflect the current values in the general community, and because he believed that their function was to educate society and to change it.** But the overriding dilemma remains – how can we educate successfully when the community accepts lower standards than those

taught in school? As a previous headmaster at St. John's College once said, there are one set of values at school from eight until two in the afternoon and another set of values at home from two until eight.

If we can solve this problem we shall have done better than the Greek philosophers, for today the character-forming influence of the child's environment is greater than it has ever been in human history.

Mark Grace

Reference: Ancient Education and Today. E.B. Castle Penguin Books