The Failure of Secular Education

By James Riady

All over the world, people are talking about the economic crisis. Nobody, it seems, can escape from it. This crisis is said to be deepest and worst since World War II. And it seems that because of this crisis, people believe that some changes must be made — as if everything had been going on well, but we must now make changes because of the crisis.

We live in an era that always requires changes. My children, for instance, always wanted something new or different when they were young. Everything was always moving; if they did not see changes, they would get bored.

However, some things do not need to change. Absolute truth, for instance, has never changed and will never need to change. If we believe that God exists and that He is a God who reveals Himself, then what He says becomes the Word of God that remains consistent and will not change.

The duty of parents also remains unchanged. In every age, their role and basic responsibilities remain unchanged. Children’s basic needs remain unchanged.

But we live in an era that highly upholds the philosophy of change, and everybody seems to require changes, as if the solution to each crisis comes in the form of changes.

However, in reality, the nature of problems remains the same. If, say, children’s needs remain the same, and the duties and responsibilities of parents remain unchanged, then what is required also remains the same.

Yes, it is true that we need a progressive attitude, one that advocates change. That is good, as long as it is oriented toward the right direction.

But he said it was not a problem as long as they were not too active, because it would be dangerous if foolish people became too active. To me, that meant that if you are not going in the right direction, it is better to be inactive.

Even before the world was plunged into this global economic crisis, we had already been faced with a number of serious, unresolved problems. Modern, secular, contemporary education has actually failed.

On the surface, we can certainly see much progress. In the economic arena, the world seems to be getting more prosperous as the number of rich people continues to soar. In science and technology, so much progress has also been made.

The world is also preoccupied with democracy and human rights. The fields of health care and related technology have achieved a great deal of sophistication. In almost every aspect of global life, there seems to be much progress going on.

But if we look at the other side of the coin and deep into the core of our problems, we will see that the world has actually not made much progress. HIV/AIDS remains a threat to the world, as do bird flu, terrorism, hatred, etc.

The more they try to overcome terrorism, the more they arouse the spirit of fundamentalism in the hearts of every one of us. Hatred is billowing over the earth. Go to the Middle East and see for yourself how much people there hate Western countries; they hate the current systems being applied across the globe.

We also see up to 52 percent of marriages in the West break up within 10 years’ time. If you ask the wife, she will say her husband is like the devil. Ask the husband, and he will say his wife is too fussy to live with.

Moreover, natural disasters are taking
place all over the world and in higher frequency as well, and a great number of people have perished as a result. So how can people say that the world has made much progress?

Government leaders say they will introduce changes. But I don’t believe they can solve the problem of natural disasters, divorce, hatred, etc. They can give hope, but can they actually fulfill their promises?

The underlying problems that caused the current global crisis have actually been in existence for a long time, and they have only emerged now.

Regrettably, a great number of people are blind to this; even educators and government leaders are not aware of this. Before the crisis, they failed to see it, and even now with the crisis, they still cannot see the reality.

Many religious people, even Christians, don’t see this. They can’t comprehend what is going on, they can’t understand the true nature of the problems gripping the planet.

Many Christians have good intentions, aiming to change and improve the system, but they don’t realize that they cannot take apples from banana trees, no matter how hard they try. The problem is not the fruit but the tree or origin. The Word of God says a tree is recognized through its fruit.

Now, what have we seen to be the fruits of education so far? What kind of fruit has come out of the education system being implemented across the globe so far?

In the United States, there are more than three million cases of crime in junior and senior high schools every year. These cases affect children aged 12-18. Of these, 260,000 are extreme crimes including rape, sexual harassment, murder, robbery and kidnapping.

These cases pose a serious threat to everybody. We also know that between 120,000 and 150,000 teachers fall victim to these crimes, and around 80,000 teacher-related cases are considered very extreme. People are shocked, and they want to know whom to blame.

News reports show that people point to the availability of guns as the culprit. So,
following this argument, if there was good gun control, the problem would be settled. But that does not really solve the root of the problem.

So where are the roots? Who is responsible for the destruction of school discipline? Who is to be held responsible for the disappearance of self-control in school, at home and in society?

Never say that only in America are such things taking place! Look at Indonesia's divorce rates and the fact that many men have second wives and secret affairs on many occasions. This is a very serious problem.

In universities, senior students usually punish juniors to get them accustomed to the university environment. But they do it through top-down violence. This is a terrible tradition in which to instill discipline. Seniors should set good examples for juniors to follow, but the opposite is happening. Alas, even in the national context, such is the tradition.

The real problem lies in the philosophy of education itself. This philosophy assumes that parents are no longer responsible for their children's education, and parents now believe that it is the school that must be responsible for their children's lives.

Many parents, in fact, often come to school complaining about their children's behavior: they blame the school even though their children's behavior was shaped at home.

Children only spend four or five years at the university; a longer part of their lives is spent with their parents. Still, parents are upset with schools, as if their children were angels to begin with. The truth is, many parents fail to equip their children with the right values and emotional maturity.

Parents fail to equip children with values for emotional, social relational, and physical growth, for sexual maturity, self-control, etc. And above all, they fail to properly teach their children about the need to have good morals, ethics and faith.

But whenever something goes wrong with their children, they would blame the school. Such is the philosophy and system of education in our society today: parents are being exempted from their responsibilities, fathers are not playing the role they should be playing.

People have begun to think, "Well, school's there, let schools solve the problems." And then parents just wash their hands of their responsibilities.

Consequently, children begin to feel that they are no longer close to their parents. They become wild and undisciplined because they lack their parents' attention, love and affection.

But mind you: Other people can never discipline your children the way you do.

Today, parents are no longer disciplining their children. In fact many children are spoiled at home, leading to a low level of self-control. Everything is allowed. Smoking, consumption of prohibited drugs, lesbianism and homosexuality, and pornography are all tolerated. Some even believe that as long as you are in good terms with your spouse, pornography is okay.

I am telling you, our children cannot study psychology in secular schools, because there are fundamental differences between such schools and non-secular schools.

Secular schools don't have morality concepts. They don't have concepts of miracles, prayer and faith. They would tolerate secular practices, such as smoking, gambling, pornography, and use of abusive language as long as they are harmless to others or make you happy.

In secular schools, children are being taught that their ancestors came from apes. This means they don't have a purpose in life. Only when you know that you come from God will you have a purpose and accountability in life.

But if you believe that you come from monkeys, what values do you have? Nothing. You go nowhere because you don't know where you are from and who you really are.

Because you come from monkeys, your whole life is futile; monkeys don't go anywhere. They only live for today, and death is the end of their story. Thus, life to them is a matter only of today.

That is why the ultimate purpose of their lives is wealth and happiness. Then comes materialism and hedonism. This is what is being taught to our children today. The concept of morality being taught is no longer what God wants of man but what man wants to achieve; it's like Nike's ad — Just Do It. If you like it, just do it; if you don't like it, do something else.

I recently had a meeting with one of China's education leaders. In China, the Communist Party owns every child, but this man did not know how to answer when I asked him who actually owns children.

He said the child owns the child. What an answer! If a child owns himself, what kind of education does he receive from his parents? The reality of Eastern culture is that fathers still think they own their children, so they determine the nature and direction of their children's education.

Such is what's happening in society. Children raised in such a situation tend to lead a broken life. They don't have a yardstick for absolute truth. They lack self-control, morality, and the meaning of life. And they become confused individuals.

Not surprisingly, many of them develop animal characteristics. Some, for instance, take their guns to school and shoot at their teachers and schoolmates. Schools call them beasts or monsters.

These children should even be given some kind of appreciation or award; they know that such is the nature of their education, so
they put it into practice.

In 1988 when my wife, Aileen, and I returned to Indonesia, we learned that schools were like this. Even in international schools, teachers smoked, went to discotheques, found pornography acceptable, etc. So to what school should we send our children? This was part of the reason we established Sekolah Pelita Harapan (SPH).

Parents must uphold love, forgiveness and discipline at home. Like parents, children are made in the image of God. So as a father, I have to develop the image of God in my children’s personalities.

Every parent has this responsibility. But on the other hand, like their parents, children also have a sinful nature. So on one hand I have to help develop the image of God in my children’s personalities, and on the other I have to suppress their sinful natures.

This task can only be accomplished by making the presence of love real in the family. Love and forgiveness kill the sinful nature, but anger and hatred fertilize it.

Parents must be able to differentiate between children’s sinful and sinless mistakes. I, personally, would within less than 24 hours call anyone of my children known to have made sinful mistakes. I would be very strict about this and my wife would back me up until the erring child realizes his or her blunder.

But there are so many sinless mistakes children can make. For such mistakes we don’t call the children in every day. At school if you ask the students who they hate most, they would say it’s their parents — because parents always make them feel that everything they do is always wrong.

We prefer to address sinless blunders every two or three months. I would tell my children, “Over the past two months or so I noticed that there are a few points you need to straighten out.” Don’t criticize your children too often. Parents need to usher in love, forgiveness and discipline.

Without discipline, children don’t know their limits and what is right or wrong. But establish your family rules first before scolding your children. Don’t confuse them by punishing them when you have never told them what they should or should not do.

Today, we know that many parents have passed on their responsibilities to their children’s schools, but the latter cannot perform this duty well. Those who are supposed to be responsible are washing their hands of responsibility. Even national leaders are doing so.

In English, there is the word “ignorance.” It is not just about not knowing, but not knowing and not wanting to know.
In many cases we don't solve problems at their roots. We often waste energy searching for artificial solutions like gun control to prevent school shooting and violence. That's not a good solution.

I believe the solution will not come from gun control but from self-control. And self-control can only grow when you realize that God is there, watching you.

One of the most important decisions parents make is determining the direction of their children's education. Never choose a school without knowing its vision and direction. The most important question to ask is, does the school know who owns the children?

As a parent, my authority over my children is derived from God. It is derivative authority, so I must use it only according to the purpose of the Giver. And I will be held responsible for everything I do with this authority, so I execute this fearfully.

This has greater ballast than the philosophy that says parents own their child, because if parents own their child, they won't feel like they will be held responsible for their actions.

Now let's look at the problem of drugs. Singapore has a population of three million and yet there are almost 30,000 drug users or traffickers in its prisons.

In Indonesia, the situation may be worse. The surest gate to drug addiction is cigarette smoking. The government's warning label does not serve any purpose; people still want to smoke because they want it. Likewise, Playboy exists because there is a market waiting for it.

Another issue is literacy. Children today don't like reading; they like watching television, videos and playing games. Up to 60 percent of children aged 13 (and below) spend four hours a day in front of television, wasting precious time they should be using for doing homework and studying for exams.

Within that 60 percent category, 12 percent of them watch TV for six hours a day. They are so accustomed to rapidly changing digital frames.

They can't concentrate and lack the ability to analyze things deeply because their attention span is so short.

A lack of parental attention is to blame for this. Many parents don't care about their children's education, even when teachers call them in to discuss the children's problems. Such parents have little respect for education.

They would only pay attention when their children get good marks at school, not even realizing that they had little to do with their children's achievements.

This global crisis has shown that the education philosophy being applied everywhere has failed. For so long education has focused only on directing students to become rich and happy.

The Word of God says that everything we have achieved is because of the grace of God. Therefore, I believe that a successful education is also God's grace for us.

If not for His involvement, we would not have come this far. It is God who started human history, and it is He who will end it.

Every culture is an expression of its religion. Schools exist in and permeate the culture, and culture is the external form of religions. Therefore, you cannot say that schools have nothing to do with faith.

There are only two kinds of people on earth — those who believe in God and those who reject Him.

If you don't believe in God, who is your divine being? It can't be a dog or a cat. In the end you will say that you determine your life, so you become the god of yourself. This is humanism.

Humanism focuses on the human self. It leads to relativism; there is no absolute truth there. This is why Nike says Just Do It. If you like it do it. But all these ideas flow down from one central force: democracy. The word 'demos' means human and 'cra-tos' means reign. So it is about the supreme reign of humans or rule by the people — and not by God.

Somewhere down the road, we need to make a decision. Do we want to be ruled by man or by God? The spirit of democracy is the reign of man as the supreme being.

This is why people tend to ignore God. Democracy has taught the world that man must be in control of his destiny. So human beings are more powerful than God?

People think that democracy is higher than God's rules, higher than tradition and culture, higher than the advice of parents and teachers, even higher than religion and faith. Human ego is replacing God as the center of life.

The founder of this country did not believe in democracy, so he established a constitutional republic instead and stayed away from democracy for years.

The founder of America did not believe in democracy, so he established a republic and declared that in the green back this phrase must remain: “In God We Trust.”

Indonesia's founding fathers in effect established a theocracy, which is why they introduced the state ideology Pancasila that contains "Believe in One Supreme God" as the first principle.

Democracy is about the majority making decisions as if to represent the whole country. But it does not respect the value of man. Only theocracy does.

John Dewey, the father of modern education, is highly respected globally, and I was surprised to know that his theory on democracy and education is so engrained in global education and has tainted the minds of so many people.

Democracy is about the 51 percent majority determining what is best for everybody else, whether or not their decisions are really the best. For instance, we were all born with different talents and abilities.

But because of majority rule, the standard most people think to be the best is enforced on others.

This is why when someone excels in a Physics or Math Olympiad, ministers go to the airport to fetch him or her, but those excelling in music, arts, sports, culture and social services are ignored.

In every family, you need to make a choice — going for democracy or theocracy. You decide. But you take the consequences and will be held responsible before God for everything you do.

Theocracy in education does not mean turning every teacher in the classroom into teachers of religion. No. But it means making every teacher realize that whatever they teach should be integrated with their faith — a way of life in which knowledge, faith and character are integral parts of a life-long process of learning.

Theocracy in education means teachers know how to integrate faith, knowledge and character when teaching history, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and any other school lesson.