

Crimping Consciences: Texas City Railroads Pro-Gay Ordinance

Byron Barlowe blogs about the his city's Anti-Discrimination ordinance intended to give full recognition to the LGBT community at the expense of those who disagree.

New Anti-Discrimination Policy Approved

According to the [Dallas Morning News Plano Blog](#), "In a split vote Monday, the Plano City Council passed the controversial Equal Rights Policy [ERP] over the objections of many residents in the standing-room-only crowd.

The amendment to the city's 1989 anti-discrimination policy extends protections from housing, employment and public accommodation discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other categories" like veterans. While no one objected to the inclusion of veterans, an overwhelming number of surprised and very lately aware (as in, the day of) citizens voiced strong opposition. These objections, while noted, seemed to make little to no difference to the city council and certainly to Mayor Harry LaRosiliere, who was so eager to vote for the statute that he went out of order during proceedings.

As a Plano resident who publicly urged the council to vote "No" on the measure, I offer some reflections on the issue—both local and larger—from a biblically informed worldview.

Good Intentions: Trying to Legislate

Values *Directly*

Rather than seeking to legislate merely out of a set of values—an unavoidable reality—the Plano City Council clearly tried to impose a set of values directly onto the public by adopting this more expansive anti-discrimination ordinance. Such legislative overreach has become part and parcel of an increasingly politically correct polity known as the United States of America. Plano is now more PC. While this kind of ordinance is not only inadvisable because it cannot hope to work well, it also steps beyond the scope of a proper role of government.

IT CANNOT WORK BECAUSE . . .

We often hear the phrase “You can’t legislate morality.” Well, yes and no. While the very nature of human law at its root is a delineation of and codification of right vis a vis wrong—that is, strictures or incentives administered by the state as a morally informed code of conduct—it is also true that government cannot successfully impose morality, per se, onto the consciences of their citizens.

Yet, that is precisely what such ordinances as Plano’s ERP seeks to do. Plano’s “out” regarding the problem of conscientious objection? City Attorney Paige Mims assures us that if anyone outside of the many exempted statuses has a moral or religious objection, they can go through a waiver process. This is, on its face, an undue imposition on businesspeople who don’t fall under exempted categories like education, non-profit or religious. Recent legal precedent (see Hobby Lobby case) makes clear that religious businesses do not somehow lay down their rights of conscience when they go into business.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. . .

When government entities try to arbitrate motives, for example hate crimes laws that purport to regulate actions based on the attitudinal intent of the actor, it steps into a sphere where

it does not, indeed it cannot, belong. In other words, it takes on a godlike sovereignty to righteously discern between this and that intention. Can't be done. Not righteously. Not fairly.

People—including city legal departments and judges—are fallible humans who lack the innate ability to administer justice based primarily or solely on someone's internal motivation. "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (Proverbs 20:5). Drawing out the "purposes" of a man's or woman's heart is certainly not a governmental role. But this is what it takes to know motives, a role only God claims full access to, and a role traditionally reserved for clergy, other spiritual advisers and psychologists.

Here is a pithy bunch of [biblical worldview teaching on the role of government](#).

Biblically, the proper role of government is founded in limits primarily written in Romans 13. As I understand it, a biblical worldview on government's role is limited to: fighting wars, passing and enforcing laws concerning public human interactions and that's about it. Anything else falls under the jurisdiction of religious and social institutions. Government: stay out!

I'm not arguing for such a state of affairs as an absolute in the real world, but as a plumb line to measure when government has stepped over its proper boundaries. In the case of Plano's ERP government has overstepped.

Progressivism on Parade

The subtext of public deliberations on Plano's ERP was plainly a progressive agenda. Why else would a city seek to get "ahead of the curve" on a social issue such as gender bias or sexual identity discrimination or whatever the euphemism is today?

(Refer above to the value of limited role of government, which was expressed repeatedly to the council by citizens of Plano.) The council, challenged that there are no known cases of such discrimination, seemed to shrug dismissively and invoke the need to “get ahead of” the issue.

“The issue of equality is a basic human rights issue and the choice for some to focus on a person’s sexuality is conflating the issue,” said the Mayor. Conflating what with what? Either the mayor misunderstands the term “conflating” (making things the same) or he’s basically accusing objectors of the very thing that has been foisted upon them—namely, making one’s sexual choices (not their true sexuality) the determiner of human rights. This is like watching someone start a fight over a piece of land and then accusing the one attacked of starting that same fight over that very piece of land!

Questioning the need for the statute was otherwise met with a not-so-veiled sense of accusation, an implication of inherent bias on the part of the objectors, despite an overall congenial atmosphere. So, if I question the veracity of the claim to need such a policy or ask for reasonable cause, I am automatically anti-gay? That’s patently false and unfair. Yet that was the sense of things in a politically correct undercurrent that is the zeitgeist of our day.

Worldview War

This is the serious game begun back in the 1970s by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen who spelled out the propaganda project of the gay lobby in a book titled [*After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear & Hatred of Gays in the 90s*](#). Now that their jamming (name-calling, guilt by association and other tactics) have worked so well, only an implicit inference need be made at such meetings as Monday night’s. It has a chilling—no—a virtual shutdown effect.

Yet, many citizens displayed aplomb when speaking on the

Constitution and related matters. Businesspeople appealed to the unfairness of having to seek redress through a voucher system. One person well said in response: “The Constitution is my waiver.” First Amendment (or any other) rights do not require special permission. It’s government’s role merely to ensure them, which Plano may think it’s doing by elevating ever more special interests to protected status. That is an upside-down approach that’s illegitimate no matter how much case law exists or how many other cities and companies enact similar policies.

The “We’re Just Following” Fallacy

An admittedly very arguable point I’d like to add: Mayor LaRosiliere and City Attorney Mims claimed that other major cities in Texas have such statutes on the books. Hence we are not, as implicated, “out front” taking legal risks, but rather are following others’ lead. This seems disingenuous.

Are we “out in front” of the issue or are we, as strongly emphasized by the Mayor, simply one in a fairly long line of municipalities trying to codify fair treatment to people of all lifestyles and segments? One could make the case that Plano is in the vanguard overall but not first in implementation. However, that is unsatisfactory to many. You can’t ultimately have it both ways: either you’re progressive on social issues (which does not truly reflect Plano well) or you’re just falling in line with current legal trends.

The “Gay Gene” at the Bottom of the Debate

One thing is sure: *increased expansion of rights and privileges to previously unaddressed parties is the trend in our culture—and lots of it has to do with sexuality in a newly politicized way.* But we thought government was supposed to get out of our bedrooms?

Any claim to that distinction has been lost with the adoption of the near-universal belief in what amounts to a “[gay gene](#)”—that a person inherently possesses a sexual identity that may indeed be homosexual or of other varieties. This, over and against a mere proclivity or attraction to the same sex, which leaves room for choice, which is an ethical issue. Remove choice regarding homosexuality, you remove any basis of objection. Remove objection, you can run roughshod over any cultural restraints on the free and damaging expression of sexuality outside the bounds of its Inventor, God. Remove those restrictions, celebrate the lifestyle, then codify and impugn those who disagree, and the After the Ball agenda is a complete success.

Monday night’s meeting was an incremental victory toward this end, whether or not players on the city council or either side of the issue realized it. Regarding objectors’ motives, it’s one thing to care for individuals whose sexual identity is in question or those who act out a gay lifestyle and it’s another kind of thing entirely to exercise one’s rights to oppose codification of these choices and lifestyles. I and many of my friends there that night were doing one while we practice the other in private situations, too.

There is no cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy here—one can do both public square advocacy of conservative values and also outreach to individuals who struggle in a certain area of sin—namely other-than-heterosexual-wed sex. True Christlike love does not affirm that which the Bible condemns, but shows grace nonetheless.

There is a Precedent for Unintended Consequences and Abuse

Plano’s ERP sets up the same oppression of religious objectors that has been seen already across the U.S. with cake bakers, wedding venue owners and others who—for reasons of

conscience—refuse to do business with certain parties in select situations like gays getting married. Yes, exemptions were written into Plano’s ordinance, but does anyone seriously believe these will stand up under judicial scrutiny in this day and age? The erosion of rights continues—and saying so, again, is not to be confused with [intolerance](#).

This brand of identity politics is rooted in the cultural adoption of the doctrine of a gay gene (“God or nature made me this way!”), which is at a worldview level, where most objectors to the statute were coming from. We object to the underlying presupposition that homosexuality is not utterly tied up with choice, which is so fundamental to opposition to the gay rights issue. (I almost come off as a throwback rube for even bringing it up in today’s enlightened culture—which furthers my point!)

The Condescension that Falsely Pits Feelings vs. Facts

Monday night’s proceedings—at least from the point of view of the city council—were saturated with what has been called the Sacred / Secular Split. On this view, there are basically two levels of discourse: an area of public life informed largely by science but also by enlightened social values (invariably liberal / progressive / non-traditional ones) balanced unevenly by a lesser valued, private world of emotional / psychological / religious sentiments.

The former—where real knowledge resides—should supposedly be the domain of public policy. The latter—again, a private set of often closely held feelings and values that should have no sway in the public arena yet the existence of which are somewhat guarded by government and other institutions—are to be tolerated as inevitable but will hopefully catch up with social contracts like those being forged by the gay lobby and societal institutions across the waterfront. The notion is:

“You have a right to your private opinion. Just don’t bring it into the public square.”

This attitude, this taken-for-granted starting place was most evident in closing remarks made by several city council members—all of whom happened to vote for the policy. One council member waxed eloquent on his world travels, noting that the most advanced societies he’d run across made it a point never to discriminate. (I don’t know where he’s been, but perhaps his hotel’s staff might beg to differ—just guessing.)

More poignantly, he and another council member who said that her Christian faith informed her “yes” vote, was only one more who joined a chorus of comments like:

“There were lots of strong feelings on the topic of discussion tonight” and

“This is a very emotional issue for many. . . .”

The plain inference was that objections were raised out of the private, sacred area of life, laden with “emotion” and “feelings” while effective debate occurred on the level of law, fact and agreed-upon societal norms (at least the evolving kind that our “City of Excellence” wants to be known for).

Pronouncements by a clergy woman (Disciples of Christ) who serves as an officer of a Plano Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender association, the mayor and at least one more gay advocate that the passage of the ERP was just “the right thing to do” obviously paints the vast majority of citizens as those who want to do the wrong thing. According to Mayor LaRosiliere, “Providing equal rights to everyone is the right thing to do.” Rights to what? Rights in displacement of whose rights? The task in a pluralistic society is to find that fairest middle ground—and that failed Monday night.

Apparently bigotry, at least ignorance, was the only thing standing in the way of Plano's ERP. Thank you for the condescension. Which leads to my final point: the race card was deftly played by none other than Mayor LaRosiliere where it has no place. And the Mayor did precisely what he accused others of of doing, that is . . .

. . . **Conflating Race & Sexual Lifestyle**

Plano's Mayor ended deliberations (or nearly did) with [a speech](#) on the equivalency of historical human rights movements to the current push for special privileges for sexual identities and lifestyles. His well-written story arc was centered on the question, "Why are we doing this now?" In a series of juxtaposed historical references, he posed the question he deemed was being needlessly asked about Plano's Equal Rights Protection ordinance: **Why pass this now if there is no case on record of any discrimination?** In the case of the infamous Dredd-Scott Supreme Court decision that ruled blacks were 3/5 of a person one might ask, he said, "Why are we doing this now?"

"If we spoke in 1919," LaRosiliere continued, "to allow women to vote, the question would be, 'Why are you oppressing me and making me subject to this now.'" He went on to paint discrimination against the Irish in early 19th Century New York and segregation in the South in the 20th Century as morally equivalent instances comparable to the current situation—ostensibly oppression of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens.

Very cleverly devised rhetorical device, that. But it **presupposes a moral equivalency that a black man sitting beside me rejected outright.** This gentlemen from Nigeria was so confused by the proceedings and the Mayor's speech capping them off that he was convinced the entire issue at hand was racism! When I asked him this question, he unequivocally answered "No!": "Do you think that homosexual identity is the

same kind of thing as you being black or being from Nigeria?”

“No!”

And rightly, **my new African friend—who is a Christian—was bothered by the conflation of the two and the use of such rhetoric to elevate a class of people based on their sinful behavior and identity to it as the basis to extend so-called human rights. We all have the right to fair treatment as humans made in God’s image. We do not have a right to socially engineer law to force the compromise of conscience that is being carried out by Plano’s new ordinance.**

As I pleaded with the council not to allow, we will surely read about this case going to court, being found unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and costing this taxpayer and all others unnecessarily.

Ideas, worldviews, do indeed have consequences.

Gay Agenda in Schools – A Christian Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson summarizes the efforts currently underway to implement a gay agenda in our public schools, identifying some of the negative consequences. Looking at this initiative from a biblical worldview perspective, he suggests actions that Christians should take in response to these actions.

Advancing the Gay Agenda in Schools

Since the early 1990s gay activists and various homosexual

groups have been using strategies that provide them with greater access to public schools. Usually the focus is upon making the schools a safer place for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual students, thereby justifying the introduction of topics and speakers on the subject of homosexuality. And the establishment of homosexual clubs on campus provides an ongoing program to continue to introduce homosexuality to students on campus.

Two key organizations are the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Both have been helpful in establishing a foothold for homosexual speakers, programs, and curricula.



Perhaps the most effective wedge used by gay activists to open the door to the public schools has been concern over student safety. Kevin Jennings, Executive Director for GLSEN, explained in a speech how the “safety” issue was a most effective strategy:

In Massachusetts, the effective reframing of this issue was the key to the success of the Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. We immediately seized upon the opponent’s calling card—safety—and explained how homophobia represents a threat to students’ safety by creating a climate where violence, name-calling, health problems, and suicide are common. Titling our report “Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth,” we automatically threw our opponents onto the defensive and stole their best line of attack. This framing short-circuited their arguments and left them back-pedaling from day one. [\[1\]](#)

The strategy has obviously been successful because no one would want to be against making the schools a safer environment. It almost doesn’t matter whether the allegations are true. Once you raise the concern of safety, most

administrators, teachers, and parents quickly fall in line.

There is an irony in all of this. Many of the behaviors that are taught and affirmed in these school programs and clubs are unsafe in term of public health. For example, *Pediatrics* (Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics) reported on a Harvard study that found more than thirty risks positively associated with self-reported gay-lesbian-bisexual (GLB) orientation.^{2} So it is indeed ironic that the idea of “safety” is often used as means to introduce teaching and discussion of behaviors that have been proven to be quite “unsafe.”

The Goals of GLSEN

The mission statement of GLSEN is straightforward: “The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.”^{3} It is a growing, well-funded homosexual organization that promotes homosexual identity and behavior on campus. It has been very successful in gaining access on campus by working with such influential groups as the National Education Association.

Anyone who takes the time to read some of the materials recommended by GLSEN will quickly find that it condones sexual themes and information that would be disturbing to most parents. One researcher who has taken the time to review these materials and investigate various school programs came to the following seven conclusions:^{4}

1. GLSEN believes the early sexualization of children can be beneficial. This means that virtually any sexual activity as well as exposure to graphic sexual images and material, is not just permissible but good for children, as part of the process of discovering their sexuality.

2. “Coming out” (calling oneself or believing oneself to be homosexual) and even beginning homosexual sex practices at a young age, is a normal and positive experience for youth which should be encouraged by teachers and parents, according to GLSEN.

3. Bisexuality, “fluid” sexuality and sexual experimentation is encouraged by GLSEN as a right for all students.

4. Meeting other “gay” and “questioning” youth, sometimes without parental knowledge, is a frequent theme in GLSEN materials. At these meetings, minors will come into contact with college-age people and adults practicing homosexuality.

5. In GLSEN material, the “cool” adults—parents, teachers and counselors—are those who encourage students to embrace homosexuality and cross-dressing. They also allow adult-level freedoms and let children associate with questionable teens or adults.

6. GLSEN resources contain many hostile, one-sided anti-Christian vignettes and opinions, as well as false information about Christianity and the Bible’s position on homosexuality. This encourages antagonism against biblical morality and increases the risk that youth will experiment with high-risk behavior.

7. The spirituality presented positively in GLSEN resources is heavily laced with occult themes and nightmarish images.

Goals of PFLAG and Gay Clubs

PFLAG is a national organization of parents, families, and friends that “promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.”^{5} It has been an active organization at the local level to promote its views of human sexuality into schools, churches, and various youth organizations. Although there is a strong emphasis on rights

and tolerance, their message about sexuality would be disturbing to most parents.

One researcher who has taken the time to review their brochures and other materials came to the following five conclusions:[{6}](#)

1. PFLAG believes in total sexual license for people of all ages. For children, this means that virtually any sexual activity, as well as exposure to graphic sexual images and material, is not just permissible but good for children as part of the process of discovering their sexuality.

2. "Coming out" (calling oneself homosexual or cross-dressing) at a very young age, and even beginning early homosexual sex practices, is a desirable goal in the world according to PFLAG.

3. Bisexuality, fluid sexuality, and sexual experimentation is encouraged by PFLAG. The group believes it's important for all students to learn about these options.

4. Meeting with other "gay" and "questioning" youth, usually without parental knowledge, is a frequent theme in PFLAG materials. At these community meetings, thirteen-year-olds will come into contact with college-age youth and adults practicing homosexuality.

5. PFLAG spreads false information about the Bible, religious faith, and restoration of heterosexuality through faith. This misinformation closes the door of change for many young people, and stirs up anti-Christian and anti-Jewish bias and hostility.

Another way the gay agenda is promoted in the public schools is through Gay-Straight Alliance clubs. In the mid-1990s, there were a few dozen Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in U.S. high schools. Today there are 3,200 GSA clubs registered.[{7}](#)

These student-run clubs provides a meeting place for student talk about homosexuality and homosexual behaviors. It is also provides a platform for outside speakers to address various topics and for students to organize a "Pride Week" on campus. Once a year, many of the students in these clubs also participate in "The Day of Silence." This is a day when students will remain silent all day as a way of acknowledging the silence induced by those who oppose homosexuality.

Legal Liability

Is there any legal liability when schools permit and even promote the teaching of homosexual education the campus? One group (Citizens for Community Values) believes there is a potential liability. The group has published a manual documenting the potential liability that schools, administrators, and teachers might face. The following is a brief summary of much more information that can be found in the document "The Legal Liability Associated with Homosexual Education in Public Schools."[\[8\]](#)

Life expectancy—The *International Journal of Epidemiology* found that gay and bisexual men involved in homosexual behavior cut off years from their lives. One study showed that "life expectancy at age 20 years for gay and bisexual men is 8 to 20 years less than for all men." They therefore concluded that if "the same pattern of mortality were to continue, we estimate that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently aged 20 years will not reach their 65th birthday."[\[9\]](#)

Sexually transmitted diseases—The danger of various STDs, including HIV infection in homosexual relationships, has been well documented through many studies. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health says that "Homosexual men are at significantly increased risk of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, anal cancer, gonorrhea and gastrointestinal infections as a result of their sexual practices. Women who have sex with women are

at significantly increased risk of bacterial vaginosis, breast cancer and ovarian cancer than are heterosexual women.”[{10}](#)

Other health risk behaviors—A study by Harvard University of over four thousand ninth- to twelfth-grade students found that gay-lesbian-bisexual “youth report disproportionate risk for a variety of health risk and problem behaviors” and they found that they “engage in twice the mean number of risk behaviors as did the overall population.”[{11}](#)

Mental health—A study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* found those engaging in homosexual behavior have a much higher incidence of mental health problems. “The findings support the assumption that people with same-sex sexual behavior are at greater risk for psychiatric disorders.”[{12}](#)

Permitting and promoting homosexual activity through on-campus programs and clubs will certainly increase homosexual behavior among students. Administrators, teachers, and parents should reconsider the impact these programs, and the subsequent behavior, will have on the student body.

Biblical Response

When we talk about the issue of homosexuality, it is important to keep two biblical principles in tension. On the one hand we must stay true to our biblical convictions, and on the other hand we should reach out with biblical compassion. Essentially this is the balance between truth and love.

On the one hand, it is crucial for us to understand how the homosexual agenda threatens to normalize and even promote homosexuality within the schools. Moreover, gay activists are pushing an agenda in the courts, the legislature, the schools, and the court of public opinion that will ultimately threaten biblical authority and many of our personal and religious freedoms. Christians, therefore, must stand for truth.

I have provided a brief overview of the groups and programs that are promoting the gay agenda in the public schools. I encourage you to find out what is happening in your community. We have also documented the potential legal liability associated with many of the behaviors that are encouraged by these programs. Often administrators and teachers are unaware of the potential dangers associated with homosexual education in the schools. Take time to share this information with them.

On the other hand, it is also important for us to reach out to those caught in the midst of homosexuality and offer God's grace and redemption. We cannot let the hardened rhetoric of gay activists keep us from having Christ's heart toward homosexuals. As individuals and as the church, we should reach out to those caught in the sin of homosexuality and offer them hope and point them to Jesus Christ so that they will find freedom from the sexual sin that binds their lives.

It is important to remember that many in the homosexual lifestyle are there because of some emotional brokenness in their families. They may be trying to meet their emotional needs in ungodly ways. Youth in the public schools may be experimenting sexually and find themselves caught up in the homosexual lifestyle.

It is also important to remember that [change is possible](#). The testimony of hundreds of former homosexuals is proof that someone can change their sexual behavior. So are the various [studies](#) that document these same behavioral changes. And, most importantly, the Bible teaches that change is possible. Paul, writing to former homosexuals in the Corinthian church, noted that "such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

In addressing the issue of the gay agenda in public schools, it is crucial to stay true to our biblical convictions (and stand for truth) while we also reach out with biblical compassion.

Notes

1. "'Governor's Commission for Gay Youth' Retreats to 'Safety' and 'Suicide'," *The Massachusetts News*, December 2000.
2. Robert Garofalo, et. al., "The Association Between Health Risk Behaviors and Sexual Orientation Among a School-based Sample of Adolescents," *Pediatrics*, 101 (5), May 1998, 895-902.
3. GLSEN website, www.glsen.org.
4. Linda Harvey, "Children at Risk: GLSEN, Corruption and Crime," Mission America, 2003, <http://www.missionamerica.com/oldagenda26.php>.
5. PFLAG website, www.pflag.org.
6. Linda Harvey, "The World According to PFLAG," Mission America, 2003, <http://www.missionamerica.com/stoppflag2.php>.
7. Marilyn Elias, "Gay teens coming out earlier to peers and family," *USA Today*, 8 February 2007, 1A.
8. "The Legal Liability Associated with Homosexual Education in Public Schools," Citizens for Community Values, www.ccv.org/Legal_Liability_of_Homosexuality_Education.htm.
9. R. S. Hogg, et. al., "Modeling the impact of HIV disease on mortality in gay and bisexual men," *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 26 (1997), 657-661.
10. "Health Implications Associated with Homosexuality," Monograph published by *The Medical Institute for Sexual Health*, 1999.
11. Robert Garofalo, *Pediatrics*, 1998.
12. Theo G.M Sandfort, et. al., "Same-Sex Sexual Behavior and Psychiatric Disorders," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, Vol. 58 (1) January 2001, 85-91.

Capital Punishment: A Christian View and Biblical Perspective

Kerby Anderson provides a biblical worldview perspective on capital punishment. He explores the biblical teaching to help us understand how to consider this controversial topic apply Christian love and biblical principles.

Should Christians support the death penalty? The answer to that question is controversial. Many Christians feel that the Bible has spoken to the issue, but others believe that the New Testament ethic of love replaces the Old Testament law.

Old Testament Examples

Throughout the Old Testament we find many cases in which God commands the use of capital punishment. We see this first with the acts of God Himself. God was involved, either directly or indirectly, in the taking of life as a punishment for the nation of Israel or for those who threatened or harmed Israel.

One example is the flood of Noah in Genesis 6-8. God destroyed all human and animal life except that which was on the ark. Another example is Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19), where God destroyed the two cities because of the heinous sin of the inhabitants. In the time of Moses, God took the lives of the Egyptians' first-born sons (Exod. 11) and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exod. 14). There were also punishments such as the punishment at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13-14) or the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16) against the Jews wandering in the wilderness.

The Old Testament is replete with references and examples of God taking life. In a sense, God used capital punishment to deal with Israel's sins and the sins of the nations

surrounding Israel.

The Old Testament also teaches that God instituted capital punishment in the Jewish law code. In fact, the principle of capital punishment even precedes the Old Testament law code. According to Genesis 9:6, capital punishment is based upon a belief in the sanctity of life. It says, "Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man."

The Mosaic Law set forth numerous offenses that were punishable by death. The first was murder. In Exodus 21, God commanded capital punishment for murderers. Premeditated murder (or what the Old Testament described as "lying in wait") was punishable by death. A second offense punishable by death was involvement in the occult (Exod. 22; Lev. 20; Deut 18-19). This included sorcery, divination, acting as a medium, and sacrificing to false gods. Third, capital punishment was to be used against perpetrators of sexual sins such as rape, incest, or homosexual practice.

Within this Old Testament theocracy, capital punishment was extended beyond murder to cover various offenses. While the death penalty for these offenses was limited to this particular dispensation of revelation, notice that the principle in Genesis 9:6 is not tied to the theocracy. Instead, the principle of *Lex Talionis* (a life for a life) is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is warranted due to the sanctity of life. Even before we turn to the New Testament, we find this universally binding principle that precedes the Old Testament law code.

New Testament Principles

Some Christians believe that capital punishment does not apply to the New Testament and church age.

First we must acknowledge that God gave the principle of

capital punishment even before the institution of the Old Testament law code. In Genesis 9:6 we read that "Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man." Capital punishment was instituted by God because humans are created in the image of God. The principle is not rooted in the Old Testament theocracy, but rather in the creation order. It is a much broader biblical principle that carries into the New Testament.

Even so, some Christians argue that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus seems to be arguing against capital punishment. But is He?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not arguing against the principle of a life for a life. Rather He is speaking to the issue of our personal desire for vengeance. He is not denying the power and responsibility of the government. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking to individual Christians. He is telling Christians that they should not try to replace the power of the government. Jesus does not deny the power and authority of government, but rather He calls individual Christians to love their enemies and turn the other cheek.

Some have said that Jesus set aside capital punishment in John 8 when He did not call for the woman caught in adultery to be stoned. But remember the context. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus between the Roman law and the Mosaic law. If He said that they should stone her, He would break the Roman law. If He refused to allow them to stone her, He would break the Mosaic law (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus' answer avoided the conflict: He said that he who was without sin should cast the first stone. Since He did teach that a stone be thrown (John 8:7), this is not an abolition of the death penalty.

In other places in the New Testament we see the principle of capital punishment being reinforced. Romans 13:1-7, for example, teaches that human government is ordained by God and that the civil magistrate is a minister of God. We are to obey

government for we are taught that government does not bear the sword in vain. The fact that the Apostle Paul used the image of the sword further supports the idea that capital punishment was to be used by government in the New Testament age as well. Rather than abolish the idea of the death penalty, Paul uses the emblem of the Roman sword to reinforce the idea of capital punishment. The New Testament did not abolish the death penalty; it reinforced the principle of capital punishment.

Capital Punishment and Deterrence

Is capital punishment a deterrent to crime? At the outset, we should acknowledge that the answer to this question should not change our perspective on this issue. Although it is an important question, it should not be the basis for our belief. A Christian's belief in capital punishment should be based upon what the Bible teaches not on a pragmatic assessment of whether or not capital punishment deters crime.

That being said, however, we should try to assess the effectiveness of capital punishment. Opponents of capital punishment argue that it is not a deterrent, because in some states where capital punishment is allowed the crime rate goes up. Should we therefore conclude that capital punishment is not a deterrent?

First, we should recognize that crime rates have been increasing for some time. The United States is becoming a violent society as its social and moral fabric breaks down. So the increase in the crime rate is most likely due to many other factors and cannot be correlated with a death penalty that has been implemented sparingly and sporadically.

Second, there is some evidence that capital punishment is a deterrent. And even if we are not absolutely sure of its deterrent effect, the death penalty should be implemented. If it is a deterrent, then implementing capital punishment certainly will save lives. If it is not, then we still will

have followed biblical injunctions and put convicted murderers to death.

In a sense, opponents of capital punishment who argue that it is not a deterrent are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the criminal rather than to the victim. The poet Hyman Barshay put it this way:

The death penalty is a warning, just like a lighthouse throwing its beams out to sea. We hear about shipwrecks, but we do not hear about the ships the lighthouse guides safely on their way. We do not have proof of the number of ships it saves, but we do not tear the lighthouse down.”(1)

If capital punishment is even a potential deterrent, that is a significant enough social reason to implement it.

Statistical analysis by Dr. Isaac Ehrlich at the University of Chicago suggests that capital punishment is a deterrent.(2) Although his conclusions were vigorously challenged, further cross-sectional analysis has confirmed his conclusions.(3) His research has shown that if the death penalty is used in a consistent way, it may deter as many as eight murders for every execution carried out. If these numbers are indeed accurate, it demonstrates that capital punishment could be a significant deterrent to crime in our society.

Certainly capital punishment will not deter all crime. Psychotic and deranged killers, members of organized crime, and street gangs will no doubt kill whether capital punishment is implemented or not. A person who is irrational or wants to commit a murder will do so whether capital punishment exists or not. But social statistics as well as logic suggest that rational people will be deterred from murder because capital punishment is part of the criminal code.

Capital Punishment and Discrimination

Many people oppose capital punishment because they feel it is discriminatory. The charge is somewhat curious since most of the criminals that have been executed in the last decade are white rather than black. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of ethnic minorities (African-American, Hispanic-American) are on death row. So is this a significant argument against capital punishment?

First, we should note that much of the evidence for discrimination is circumstantial. Just because there is a higher percentage of a particular ethnic group does not, in and of itself, constitute discrimination. A high percentage of whites playing professional ice hockey or a high percentage of blacks playing professional basketball does not necessarily mean that discrimination has taken place. We need to look beneath the allegation and see if true discrimination is taking place.

Second, we can and should acknowledge that some discrimination does take place in the criminal justice system. Discrimination takes place not only on the basis of race, but on the basis of wealth. Wealthy defendants can hire a battery of legal experts to defend themselves, while poor defendants must rely on a court-appointed public attorney.

Even if we acknowledge that there is some evidence of discrimination in the criminal justice system, does it likewise hold that there is discrimination with regard to capital punishment? The U.S. Solicitor General, in his amicus brief for the case *Gregg vs. Georgia*, argued that sophisticated sociological studies demonstrated that capital punishment showed no evidence of racial discrimination.⁽⁴⁾ These studies compared the number of crimes committed with the number that went to trial and the number of guilty verdicts rendered and found that guilty verdicts were consistent across racial boundaries.

But even if we find evidence for discrimination in the criminal justice system, notice that this is not really an argument against capital punishment. It is a compelling argument for reform of the criminal justice system. It is an argument for implementing capital punishment carefully.

We may conclude that we will only use the death penalty in cases where certainty exists (e.g., eyewitness accounts, videotape evidence). But discrimination in the criminal justice system is not truly an argument against capital punishment. At its best, it is an argument for its careful implementation.

In fact, most of the social and philosophical arguments against capital punishment are really not arguments against it at all. These arguments are really arguments for improving the criminal justice system. If discrimination is taking place and guilty people are escaping penalty, then that is an argument for extending the penalty, not doing away with it. Furthermore, opponents of capital punishment candidly admit that they would oppose the death penalty even if it were an effective deterrent.⁽⁵⁾ So while these are important social and political issues to consider, they are not sufficient justification for the abolition of the death penalty.

Objections to Capital Punishment

One objection to capital punishment is that the government is itself committing murder. Put in theological terms, doesn't the death penalty violate the sixth commandment, which teaches "Thou shalt not kill?"

First, we must understand the context of this verse. The verb used in Exodus 20:13 is best translated "to murder." It is used 49 times in the Old Testament, and it is always used to describe premeditated murder. It is never used of animals, God, angels, or enemies in battle. So the commandment is not teaching that all killing is wrong; it is teaching that murder

is wrong.

Second, the penalty for breaking the commandment was death (Ex.21:12; Num. 35:16-21). We can conclude therefore that when the government took the life of a murderer, the government was not itself guilty of murder. Opponents of capital punishment who accuse the government of committing murder by implementing the death penalty fail to see the irony of using Exodus 20 to define murder but ignoring Exodus 21, which specifically teaches that government is to punish the murderer.

A second objection to capital punishment questions the validity of applying the Old Testament law code to today's society. After all, wasn't the Mosaic Law only for the Old Testament theocracy? There are a number of ways to answer this objection.

First, we must question the premise. There is and should be a relationship between Old Testament laws and modern laws. We may no longer be subject to Old Testament ceremonial law, but that does not invalidate God's moral principles set down in the Old Testament. Murder is still wrong. Thus, since murder is wrong, the penalty for murder must still be implemented.

Second, even if we accept the premise that the Old Testament law code was specifically and uniquely for the Old Testament theocracy, this still does not abolish the death penalty. Genesis 9:6 precedes the Old Testament theocracy, and its principle is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is to be implemented because of the sanctity of human life. We are created in God's image. When a murder occurs, the murderer must be put to death. This is a universally binding principle not confined merely to the Old Testament theocracy.

Third, it is not just the Old Testament that teaches capital punishment. Romans 13:1-7 specifically teaches that human government is ordained by God and that we are to obey government because government does not bear the sword in vain.

Human governments are given the responsibility to punish wrongdoers, and this includes murderers who are to be given the death penalty.

Finally, capital punishment is never specifically removed or replaced in the Bible. While some would argue that the New Testament ethic replaces the Old Testament ethic, there is no instance in which a replacement ethic is introduced. As we have already seen, Jesus and the disciples never disturb the Old Testament standard of capital punishment. The Apostle Paul teaches that we are to live by grace with one another, but also teaches that we are to obey human government that bears the sword. Capital punishment is taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Notes

1. Hyman Barshay, quoted in "On Deterrence and the Death Penalty" by Ernest van den Haag, *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* no. 2 (1969).

2. Isaac Ehrlich, "The Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment: A Question of Life and Death," *American Economic Review*, June 1975.

3. *Journal of Legal Studies*, January 1977; *Journal of Political Economy*, June 1977; *American Economic Review*, June 1977.

4. Frank Carrington, *Neither Cruel nor Unusual: The Case for Capital Punishment* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington, 1978), 118.

5. Further discussion of these points can be found in an essay by Ernest van den Haag, "The Collapse of the Case Against Capital Punishment," *National Review*, 31 March 1978, 395-407.

A more complete discussion of capital punishment can be found in chapter 10 of *Living Ethically in the 90s* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), available from Probe Ministries.

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Taking Religion Seriously

Religious Neutrality and Our Schools

The last century has seen a purging of both religious influence and information from our classrooms. For many, this seems only natural and proper. They would argue that the Supreme Court has determined that government schools must be neutral regarding religion. Since the landmark *Everson v. Board of Education* case in 1947, the law of the land has been that “Neither a state nor the Federal government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.”^{1} However, writing for the majority, Justice Hugo Black added that the state must be neutral in matters of religion in two specific ways. First, it must be neutral among the different religions, but it must also be neutral in how it treats religious belief and non-belief.^{2}

This question of neutrality is at the heart of my thoughts in this article. We are investigating whether or not our schools are taking religion seriously; at least seriously enough to be considered neutral in the sense of Supreme Court decisions. Excluding the topic of religion from our schools is not neutrality; it violates the second sense of neutrality given by Justice Black. And if our schools are not neutral regarding religion, they are privileging those who claim to have no religion. We will argue that this kind of education is actually a form of indoctrination into a secular perspective, or what is often called the [worldview of naturalism](#).

There is an additional reason to ask the question, are schools taking religion seriously enough? It can be argued that without sufficient information regarding religion a person cannot be said to be truly educated. Religious ideas and perspectives permeate art and literature. Without knowledge of

Christianity and the Bible, students will miss the meaning of key ideas embedded in both stories and pictures. They will only have a secular framework of interpretation for understanding literature and art.

Religion is also a crucial variable for understanding international affairs. Current relations between nations and between culture groups are often incomprehensible unless one understands the religious imperatives driving the people within them. To know little or nothing about the various religions of the world leaves one with a skewed view of why things happen and what might occur next.

Does religion still matter? To answer this question, we will look at the current state of teaching on religion in our schools and address possible changes that might need to be made. Finally, we will consider questions and concerns that arise if our proposed changes were implemented.

Religion Still Matters

Religion still matters in our society, at least enough to make it an important topic in our schools. Numerous surveys indicate that the vast majority of Americans still claim belief in God. Only about 5% of Americans label themselves atheist or agnostic. Another 10% to 15% either refuse to answer the question or are indifferent to the topic; this leaves between 85% and 90% who still claim belief in a God of some kind.[{3}](#) Belief is also high among our well educated; a 2006 Gallop poll found that 77% of those with a postgraduate degree have little doubt that God exists.[{4}](#)

A large majority of us claim that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (77%), that there is a heaven (63%), and that religion is very important in their lives (57%).[{5}](#) Close to 80% of Americans still identify with a specific religious tradition, and 40% claim to attend religious services weekly.

In 2005 they gave \$93.2 billion to religious organizations.

By any measure, America remains far more religious than its European neighbors. In his book *Does God Make a Difference?*, Warren Nord documents the considerable difference between our two cultures. According to a 2005 survey, only 52% of Europeans claim belief in God, although 27% believe in some sort of spirit or life force. Eighteen percent are atheist or agnostic. In a number of European countries fewer than 10% of the people attend church weekly.[{6}](#)

The rest of the world is closer to the U.S. than to Europe in its beliefs. About 85% identify with a religious tradition and there has been rapid recent growth in evangelical Protestantism in the Third World. Although it has been popular in recent years for academics to promote the thesis that the world is going through rapid secularization, it now appears that Europe is not necessarily the model for the future. That said, there does appear to be a trend in both the U.S. and Europe towards claiming to be spiritual “apart from churches, dogma and tradition.”[{7}](#)

So what does this mean? It tells us that a large majority of people in this country interpret reality through a religious lens. Whether it's economics, ethics, science or art, many Americans continue to make sense of their world and make important decisions based on their religious faith.

The twentieth century experienced a relentless assault on religion from governments (Russia and its satellites and China) and ideologies (Marxism, psychoanalytic theory, existentialism), but considering its continued influence in the U.S. and the rest of the world, it still seems prudent to teach our students about it.

Religion Removed

According to Warren Nord, students in American schools and universities learn very little about God and religion. His book reflects his study of national academic standards and high school textbooks in our public schools for history, economics, and science. Let's look at his results for history.

Information on religion makes up only about 10% of the *world* history standards and less than 5% of the *American* history standards.^{8} History textbooks tend to do somewhat better, but Dr. Nord's conclusion is that both fall dramatically short of what should be included. To begin with, not enough material is presented for students to actually make sense of any particular religion, and most of what is found predates the seventeenth century. The topic of religion simply disappears after that. Information about the twentieth century tends to show religion in an unfavorable manner, often connecting it to violence and warfare.

Another deficiency is the tendency to freeze theological thinking in the past by neglecting to show how religious traditions have responded to modernity. The rise of influential theologians, religious movements, or the science-faith dialogue of the last hundred years are missing. When religious topics are covered in the material they are viewed through a secular framework or lens. Thinking about history through a religious lens is never considered. For instance, most texts mention that our dating system is dependent on Jesus Christ's birth date, but they fail to say why. None of them include Christianity's claim that Jesus was God incarnate.

Finally, all students are to learn eleven long-term patterns in world history. Not surprisingly, none of the patterns are religious ones. Unfortunately, the other academic fields fare even worse. For instance, the National Science Education Standards contains no discussion of the relationship of

science and religion in its 262 pages.

How about religion in our universities? Nord estimates that “about 10 percent of undergraduates in public universities take a course in which religious ways of making sense of the world are taken seriously.”[{9}](#) He goes on to write that “for the great majority of American students in secondary schools and universities, less than 1 percent of the content of their education will deal with religion.”[{10}](#)

As a result he concludes that, “They will not be taught that God doesn’t exist, but they will inevitably learn to interpret whatever they study in secular categories.”[{11}](#) He adds that textbooks, the official curriculum, and the governing purposes of public education have become almost completely secular.

Real Education

Dr. Nord, who taught philosophy of religion and education at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, makes his case with a completely secular argument. Let’s start with his statement of the problem and then look at some of the specifics. Dr. Nord writes, “Public education leaves students religiously illiterate, it falls far short of religious neutrality, and it borders on secular indoctrination (if only unintended).” He adds that “schools and universities teach students to accept secular ways of making sense of the world as a matter of faith.”[{12}](#)

Nord comes to this conclusion as part of his discovery that we no longer provide students with what has traditionally been called a liberal education. The word “liberal” here is not used in a political sense but rather as a label for a set of generally agreed upon educational goals. He argues that an essential aspect of a liberal education “requires that students be initiated into an ongoing discussion about how to make sense of the world—one in which religious voices must be

included as live options.”

According to Dr. Nord there are four critical dimensions to a liberal education. First, education must be broad rather than narrow or highly specialized. Too narrow of a focus tends to end up more like indoctrination than like an education. Students need to consider alternate ways of interpreting the world if they are to be able to think critically about the problems that face us. Next, in order to understand different cultures and traditions students must have the opportunity to get inside them. In other words, they must hear arguments for a given position from people who actually believe them, not through a filter that merely reinforces our society’s current biases.

Another component of a liberal education is that it deals with things that really matter, issues that go to the core of one’s worldview. It should consider questions like, what is ultimate reality, what is our nature as human beings, and how does one know right from wrong?

Finally, all of this should be introduced to students in the form of a conversation about making sense of contending points of view. Our current form of instruction is mostly a series of narrowly focused monologues with little attempt to tie them together to other courses much less other cultures and traditions. It removes much of the conflict inherent in the discussion.

Nord argues that theology should be at the core of this conversation. The university should be a place where students are introduced to conflict, the most fundamental being moral and theological.

Concerns and Suggestions

Nord sums up his concern this way: “Education is now deeply biased against religion. Indeed, it is unconstitutional.”[\[13\]](#)

When it is suggested that we take steps to remediate this situation, a number of concerns come to mind. The poor preparation of most teachers to handle the subject is most apparent. Often teachers are unaware of both their freedoms to teach the subject as well as legal limitations regarding how that teaching is carried out. This can be overcome by proper training.

Some have argued that religion is not intellectually respectable enough to warrant a place in the curriculum. Psychologist Steven Pinker argued against adding a "Faith and Reason" component to Harvard's curriculum, writing that religion "is an American anachronism in an era in which the rest of the West is moving beyond it."[14](#) This kind of thinking reflects what is sometimes called the secularization thesis that has come under much criticism of late. In fact, a good argument can be made that religion is actually becoming more important in much of the world.

Pinker and others argue that the need to understand religion has been replaced by the overwhelming need to think scientifically. In their view, the Enlightenment and modern science have settled the case against considering a religious perspective of reality. However, this is not totally accurate. As Nord writes, "[U]niversities don't impose scientific standards of respectability on philosophy, ethics, politics, literature, or art." He adds, "What must be avoided is granting modern science the authority to define what is reasonable and respectable across the curriculum."[15](#)

So what can we do about the current bias against knowledge of religions in our schools? In his book *Does God Make a Difference?* Warren Nord argues that every high school student and undergraduate should be required to take a year-long course in religious studies. Preferably, this would consist of one semester on the Bible and another on world religions. He would also require that all classes dealing with topics impacted by religious thought such as ethics, politics,

philosophy, and art commit 5% of textbook space and class time to understanding the conflicts caused by different religious worldviews. Each perspective should be taught as a live option and represented by writings from people who actually believe in it.

The goal of these classes cannot be to indoctrinate or proselytize, but they could help to challenge the current monopoly that materialistic naturalism has on our curriculum.

Notes

1. Warren A. Nord, *Does God Make A Difference?* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 156.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 20.
4. Ibid., 22.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 21.
8. Ibid., 43.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 60.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 99.
13. Ibid., 188.
14. Ibid., 117.
15. Ibid., 118.

Romney vs. Obama and Beyond: The Church's Prophetic Role in Politics

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese answers a common question of a Christian view of politics and government: How would a biblical worldview inform us on being in the world of politics but not of it? "Dr. T" models a critical yet engaged distance in assessing the beliefs of Presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

Christian Government

During each new election season Christians ask, "What is a biblical view of government?" Does it teach Theocracy, Communism or maybe Democracy? The Old Testament does teach theocracy, which means the Priests ruled the people through the Mosaic Law. Later in its history Israel became a monarchy by its own decision under King Saul—a choice God was not very pleased with, but He accommodated Israel's demand (I Samuel 8).

The New Testament does not adopt theocracy because it applied only to the chosen nation of Israel; it gives no endorsement of any one form of government, but instead offers the Church a special role as a prophetic voice engaging any and all forms of government. There is no such thing as *Christian (civil) Government*, only *Christians in government*. Instead of creating a new system, the Church brings biblical principles to bear on all governments.^[1] This position allows the Church everywhere to be actively involved in its particular political situation through maintaining its witness to Christ.

Israel and the Church

The role of Israel and the Church are often conflated in Christian minds, especially during the political season. Many still believe that Christians should create laws or vote for candidates that will bring us closer to a "Christian America" ideal. This is a revised version of an old notion of Christendom that joins church and state going back to the Constantinian Church which espoused a Christian Roman Empire. Some of our Puritan forebears held that America was the New Jerusalem. America as a nation replaces Israel as the people of God and the Church becomes a political entity like Israel.

In approaching politics, it is essential that we keep in mind the differences between Israel and the Church. Israel was a national people with its own civil law and identity. It was closed to the rest of the world and had to live in strict separation from the Gentile nations. Their call was to isolation, to establish Theocracy and to drive the Gentiles out from Canaan, a goal they were never really successful at accomplishing (Judges 1: 19, 28, 32). Israel was one civil nation among many civil nations and it was usually at war with those neighbors.

Israel foreshadowed the Church. They prepared the world for the coming of the messiah and the Church. Their history and law serves as an example or model of instruction for the Church (Romans 15: 4 and I Corinthians 10: 6), but the Church is not obligated to adopt Israel's civil identity because this would violate her broader mission to reach all people (Acts 1: 8). The Church is called to political and cultural engagement with all systems and all people, not isolation. When the Church becomes a political or cultural system, it loses its message of grace through faith and reverts back to Law (Galatians 3). Faith cannot be legislated.

The Church could not be true to its universal calling if it was a political power like Israel because this turns its

mission into one of war and conquest, such as the Crusades in the middle ages, rather than conversion through faith (John 18: 36). Islam is a good example of a religion that does follow Israel's kind of political identity in the establishment of Sharia Law. The Church is not one nation, but one people among many nations, cultures and systems. It cannot afford to be a nation with its own civil law and government, which sets itself against other governments and other people. When the Church establishes itself as a political power it compromises its prophetic mission and loses its unique contribution to politics. Instead the Church has a more complex role in any system it finds itself in.

In The World but Not of It

Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Jesus prayed that his followers will not be taken out of the world, but that they be sent into the world and kept from its evil (John 17: 15). The Apostle Paul argued similarly that we must maintain our association with people in the world, even immoral people—and not to isolate ourselves (I Corinthians 5: 9, 10). He says, “the form of this world is passing away,” an awareness that creates in us an “undistracted devotion to the Lord” in every area of life. We are to participate in the world, but not get too attached to it. We “should be as those who buy, but do not possess...and those who make use of the world as though they did not make full use of it” (I Corinthians 7: 31-35). We bring awareness of the temporal nature of the world.

The Prophetic Role of the Church

The Apostle Peter states that the Church is a unique people of God, “a people for God's own possession” or a “peculiar people” as the King James Version says, called to proclaim the truth. He exhorts Christians to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness...” and to keep our “behavior

excellent" in the world. (I Peter 2: 9- 12).

The Church lives differently in society by setting an example. As God's special people, the Church is called to witness His truth to the world, including to the government structures. This means that the Church works within various systems, something Paul accomplished effectively in his use of Roman Citizenship and with his appeal to Caesar (Matthew 17: 24-27; I Peter 2: 13-20, Romans 13: 1-7, Acts 16: 35-39; 23: 11; 24 and 25).

In preaching the Word the Church acts as prophet to "the world," the societal structures arrayed against God (Romans 12: 2). This includes all political systems under satanic control (Luke 4: 5-8). A prophet brings a timely and meaningful message of relevance. He has insight to speak to a particular situation. For example when Nathan the prophet spoke the Word of the Lord to King David in confronting David's sin of murder he held him accountable for his behavior (2 Samuel 12: 1-15). The Bible teaches us through this example that the political powers are not absolute. *The king is not God*, a radical statement in ancient times.

Prophets call people back to obedience to God. They were the conscience of the nation. Likewise, the Church acts as prophet through active participation, but with an attitude of critical distance.

Critical Distance

Critical distance does not mean isolation or withdrawal where we go live in the woods and wait for the world to die. It means involvement in everything the world offers, especially politics, but with an approach from a *different perspective*, an eternal perspective. Criticism means Christians work from within society and offer a perpetual challenge to the status quo that reflects a Christian conscience; it never arrives at a final form of society in which it is completely comfortable.

This is an important, albeit an uncomfortable, role to play. It can never endorse any system uncritically because this acceptance negates the fact of the inherent evil of the world and announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church then is swallowed in the world's identity. This reflects what happened in the Christian Roman Empire and in the Christian America ideal, which is often the ideology behind so called "Christian Conservative" political activism. The United States is identified with Christendom as "a Christian country." Criticism in this sense does not simply entail a good word of advice, but active participation guided by an ethic of love (Matthew 5: 43-48; Romans 13: 8-10). This may manifest in working to repeal an unjust law or establishing a new law that meets certain needs in society, but especially the needs of the weakest members of society, who cannot speak for themselves and are powerless. This reflects a Christian conscience of concern for others, rather than just ourselves. Laws must protect those who need the most protection, rather than empower those who make it. Law is the enforcement of the personal morality of its makers (hence, when people say you "cannot legislate morality," that's an absurdity).

Perhaps the greatest example in recent times of the Church's prophetic voice in American politics was in bringing attention to the cause of the unborn in its efforts to stem the tide of abortion, both in its political activism and through nonpolitical work of advocating adoption as an alternative to abortion. Another good example was the American Civil Rights Movement when it spoke against racism and the unjust social structures in American society.

Just as the Old Testament prophets held the king accountable to the Law of God—*the king is not God*—so the Church reminds the world of its limitations, that its systems have flaws and must allow for improvement. *The world is not yet in the kingdom of God.* There is no perfect system any more than there

are perfect people. There is always room for growth and change. Only in the kingdom of God does change and growth cease because it is no longer necessary in the final state of perfection (Revelation 21).

Democracy offers a better system for Christians than Communism or Theocracy because it reflects an ideal of freedom, the basis of love and faith. But it has flaws, such as the tyranny of the majority (de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*). Nor is democracy “the end of history,” a popular idea after the Cold War, arguing that democracy has emerged from the ideological struggles of history to become the greatest and final system. Nothing will succeed it. The post-Cold War world has reached the end of history, or the end of struggle and the end of change. [\[2\]](#)

There is every reason to consider that democracy will perish from the earth if its people grow complacent and do not defend it or practice it and any idea to suggest that it cannot perish on the basis of a metaphysical law of history will only contribute to that complacency. There is never a final system of society in which the Church refuses to adjure and criticize toward change because that entity would then be equal to the kingdom of God.

Romney vs. Obama

We apply the same standard of *critical distance* in voting for our favorite candidate or party. Voting is often the choice of the lesser of two evils. This popular maxim expresses the same idea of critical distance as long as we understand that the choice of the lesser evil is still a far less than perfect choice. Critical distance includes self-criticism.

Most people choose a candidate who comes closest to their own position and then largely ignore their differences. Critical distance will not dismiss the differences because through it we hold ourselves accountable by seeing our blind spots and

recognizing potential problems. We show humility and responsibility through admitting the limits of our own position and choices.

Many contrasts exist between Governor Romney and President Obama, not least of which is personal religious belief. Ironically, Evangelical Christians largely ignore this issue, though each candidate's views represent a serious difference as compared to biblical Christianity. In the past, Evangelicals have stressed the importance of personal belief. After all, most people hold to a particular political and economic view because of their religious views, not despite them.

President Obama reflects Liberation Theology in his belief that government must act as champion of the people. This should be done, in his view, by elevating the condition of the disenfranchised into the middle class, mainly through economic redistribution, but also through religious pluralism, toleration of minorities, woman's rights and gay rights. Liberation Theology adapts Christianity to a socialist political agenda that uses government as a tool to free people from oppressive social structures such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy. There is a strong emphasis on social justice, radical equality and group sin, meaning the structure of a society is to blame for its problems rather than the individual, who is a victim.

Governor Romney styles himself as a stalwart defender of free enterprise informed by Mormon beliefs that reflect traditional American values of family, faith, and work ethic. Government must protect those values from its own encroachment in order to maintain the middle class. Although Mormonism is radically different from Evangelical Christianity in its doctrinal formulation, it accepts similar social values, which stress personal responsibility and initiative.

Although, no election can be reduced to one issue or to

personal beliefs, these considerations' potential impact cannot be disregarded. Behind Obama stands a Liberation Christianity that has and will continue to benefit from his re-election. A Romney victory will lift the cultural status of Mormons in America from outsiders to the mainstream. In the past, the election to the Presidency of a member from a group struggling for recognition in mainstream America received a stamp of approval at the highest level of political office that gave them increased cultural recognition and cache . The election of one of your own to the Presidency is a sign of arrival. President Kennedy's election to office brought American mainstream acceptance to Roman Catholics, just as President Carter brought it to Evangelicals and President Obama brought the full acceptance of African-Americans, so a "President Romney" will create a greater cultural awareness and acceptance of Mormons.

The contemporary political logic of the American system says put your criticism out there during the primaries, but put it away once a candidate for your party is chosen. You're supposed to fall in line behind him or her. Christians often follow the same logic and refuse to entertain criticism of our chosen candidate because it suggests a preference for the opposing side. The lack of criticism generally continues through our chosen candidate's administration. Problems and faults are usually blamed on the other side and Christians become as politically polarized as the parties. This surrenders any critical distance gained and the Church loses its unique contribution for political advantage. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25: 27-34). We can in good conscience choose a candidate that we do not completely agree with *if* we retain our criticism of him. We should participate, yet with reservations.

Critical distance can tolerate voting for someone of a different faith if he is a better choice than the alternative, but it cannot live with softening its differences in order to

win an election or modifying its convictions for political gain. Evangelicals are faced with a difficult choice, not between Liberation Theology or Mormonism, but whether or not they will retain their doctrinal critique and rejection of Mormonism, when those differences threaten its economic and political interests.

Recently, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association dropped Mormonism from its cult list. And the language of “values” between Christians and Mormons grows indistinguishable, so that now “Christian values” are somehow equated with “Mormon values” and a vote for a Mormon is a vote for “biblical values.” The greatest “value” for Christians is the deity of Jesus Christ, which most Mormons do not accept. Evangelicals and Mormons share a similar political agenda in preserving the free enterprise system and in protecting the traditional American family ideal, which they both consider preferable to the creeping socialism of the Obama administration. There is no need to drop the hard and fast differences between Christianity and Mormonism; Christians can work with anyone if we effectively practice *critical distance* at the same time.

So, it comes down to retaining our prophetic role as members of Christ’s Body—not as much who we vote for, but why and how.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, “A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action,” *Mind Games Survival Course Manual* (Plano, Texas: Probe Ministries, 1998), www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Politics/Gov1.htm

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). The idea of the end of history here is really a Hegelian version of Christian America, just as the idea of progress, the foundation of Fukuyama’s argument, reflects a secularization of the older notion of the idea of providence that founded “Christian America.” Both identify

either Christendom or the Western World with the kingdom of God, the final form of society. One is traditionally religious in its conception and the other secular.

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Responding To President Obama's Same-Sex Approval

President Obama recently gave public support to gay marriage. How do we respond from within a biblical worldview?

Some Christians have used this news event to highlight the way the church is blowing it on the opportunity to be “Jesus with skin on” to the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgender) community. This sentiment is especially prominent among people under forty who often have good friends who identify as gay.

There are two different issues that need to be kept separate: how the church treats gay-identifying *people*, and the church's position on the culture-affecting issue of gay identity and so-called gay marriage. The first provides an opportunity to display a welcoming attitude of grace, which says, “We're glad you're here like the rest of us messed-up sinners who desperately need Jesus. He loves you and accepts you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way. Come embrace holiness with us as we learn it together.” (And this message is just as true for drug and porn addicts, as well as Pharisaical holier-than-thou folks addicted to judgmental moralism.)

The other is about refusing to budge on what God has said about sexual sin, which does not change. Homosexuality is no

more right, holy or acceptable today than it ever was in Bible times. Neither is heterosexual fornication, adultery, or pornography-driven lust. It's not just that sex outside of God's plan for marriage (which is limited to one man and one woman, per the created intent in Genesis 1 and 2) breaks His law-His rules are given as a gift to keep us from breaking our hearts.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matt. 10:34), and this issue is one of the areas of conflict He was bound to cause because His standard of holiness, and His call to live in it, is at odds with the human desire to do what we want regardless of what God thinks. Is homosexuality a sin? This is a simple question, but it needs a complex answer. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is usually not a choice; it's something people discover, usually with pain and horror. (Females, naturally more relational, can cultivate it and be emotionally seduced toward lesbianism, though, even with no previous leanings that way.)

But does it "fall short of the glory of God," one way Scripture defines sin (Rom 3:23)?

Certainly.

Same-sex attractions are a corruption of God's intention for healthy personal and sexual development, the result of the Fall and of living in a fallen world. I get this. I have lived with polio ever since I was six months old. I didn't choose this disability, but is it a sin? It certainly falls short of the glory of God, and polio is part of living in a fallen world. It's one of the ways I experience the infection of sin. I did not choose the fallen-creation consequence of polio, yet I have to deal with it. My *responses* to it can be sinful, just as those who experience unwanted SSA have to deal with the fallen-creation consequence of homosexuality, but their responses to it can be sinful.

(By the way, there is no evidence of a genetic cause for

homosexuality. The “born that way” myth cannot be supported biologically. But there are good reasons that many people end up with same-sex feelings; for more information, please read my articles in the [homosexuality section](#) of the Probe website, as well as articles on the Living Hope Ministries website at www.livehope.org.)

When people give in to the temptations of SSA and engage sexually with other men or other women, God’s word has a very serious word for it: *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). But it’s important to understand that the abomination is the act, not the people.

President Obama referred to the golden rule (treat others as you want them to treat you) as his rationale for supporting gay marriage:

[Michelle and I] are both practicing Christians and obviously this position may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it’s also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated. And I think that’s what we try to impart to our kids and that’s what motivates me as president and I figure the most consistent I can be in being true to those precepts, the better I’ll be as a as a dad and a husband and, hopefully, the better I’ll be as president.[\[1\]](#)

In 2008, in defending his current position against same-sex marriage but for civil unions, he said concerning people who might find his position controversial, “I would just refer them to the Sermon on the Mount, which I think is, in my mind, for my faith, more central than an obscure passage in Romans.”[\[2\]](#)

Two things strike me about this. First, he’s not consistent about his application of the golden rule; he’s pro-abortion-

but of course he doesn't want to be hacked to pieces without anesthesia, which is precisely what certain abortion procedures entail.

Second, choosing the golden rule over "an obscure passage in Romans" shows he doesn't understand that "the entirety of [God's] word is truth" (Ps. 119:160). Both the Golden Rule and the Romans 1 passage are true; it's not a choice between the two. Since he used to give lectures on Constitutional law at the University of Chicago, I doubt that he would ever use the term "an obscure phrase in the Constitution," because obscurity is about one's perception of importance, not the actual importance of a matter. To a Constitutional lawyer who respects the document, every phrase of the document is important. To a serious [true] Christ-follower, every word of His scriptures is important.

The issue of same-sex marriage isn't about people's right to live in committed relationships, to do life together. It's about demanding society's approval for "[the façade of normalcy](#)." It's about demanding approval for what God has called an abomination (the sexual act, not the people engaged in it).

Ryan Anderson wrote in the *National Review Online*,

"What's at issue is whether the government will recognize such unions as marriages – and then force every citizen and business to do so as well. This isn't the legalization of something, this is the coercion and compulsion of others to recognize and affirm same-sex unions as marriages."[\[3\]](#)

American culture is definitely moving toward normalizing homosexuality, but from God's perspective it will never be normal or natural (Rom. 1:26-27). And it's God's perspective that matters.

Notes

1.

www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/

2. www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/

3. bit.ly/LGZ1z1

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Is Public School to Blame?

June 30, 2011

I was having a conversation recently about the reason so many students turn away from the church after high school, and it was suggested that it's because they don't get the proper biblical worldview/foundation in public school and only get an hour during the week at church.

It seems to me this is a big generalization since public school students can get a strong foundation in the home and Christian school and home school students don't necessarily get a good foundation (or it is a skewed perspective that actually turns them away from the church).

So I started thinking about the data that has been collected on this and wondered when the information is gathered and compiled if it takes into account what kind of schooling the student had – public, private Christian or homeschool. My guess is that the data wouldn't be significantly different if you did divide the three groups.

Also, does it make a difference if they go to a public college or a Christian college? I would hope that students who go to a Christian college are more likely to continue going to church and to have a more biblical worldview, but is that true?

Good question. Actually, studies show parents are the most influential in regard to the beliefs of young adults. So you're right, school really has little to do with it. As a kid who went to public school and loved it, I'm actually quite offended by this very unfair, very common stereotype about public school. Truth be told, public school forced me to know what I believed and why in a way a Christian environment couldn't have.

You're also right that going to a Christian college can be really helpful, but it depends on the college/university, and it depends on the person. I know going to a Christ-centered university where integration of faith (worldview) and learning was important was super-helpful for me. However, if I had gone to a public university, I know I would have been involved in a local church and a campus ministry; studies also show that such involvement significantly lowers the risk of faith abandonment during the college years. Community is key.

All that to say, public school, private school, home school... it doesn't really matter. When we grown-ups complain about the worldview issues of young adults, we really have no one but ourselves to blame because in both the home and the church, young people are watching how we walk the talk.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/06/30/is-public-school-to-blame/

Should Christians Respect

Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled "Should Christians Respect Obama?" was forwarded to me. Perhaps you've seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.

Dr. David Barton – on Obama

Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !

I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !

Why am I doing this ? It is because:

- I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;*
- I do not share his Abortion beliefs;*
- I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;*
- I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make \$150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);*
- I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;*
- I do not share his view that America is not a Christian Nation;*
- I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;*

- I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
- I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
- I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
- I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
- I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
- I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ; and
- I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson

GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !

(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)

Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"

"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan

I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK....

In GOD We Trust.....

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the man." It's like saying, "I respect my boss's position of authority over me, but I don't respect my boss." But in my experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to "do everything without complaining or arguing." That habit derives

only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I'm particularly unnerved by the way the term "embodiment of Evil" was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn't portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- *It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every sentence is exclaiming, that's a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)*
- *From Dad: "Dr. Barton's website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity." Thanks Dad!*
- *Thirdly, there are at least three of the President's views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian*

than bearing false witness.

- *Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.*

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/

Hail the Conquering Graduates!

June 10, 2009

I was asked to put together a few resources for the high school grads at church. I thought I'd share the wealth with the World Wide Web.

Below you'll find helpful and hopefully meaningful resources to guide you as you embark on adulthood. I especially recommend the two blogs. The most valuable resource of all, though, is people. Get involved in your own way on campus and in a local church. But don't just hang out with people your own age—that'll make you boring. Be sure to introduce yourself to your professors and tell them thank you (will likely turn that B+ into an A). I've been teaching and learning from college students for a really long time. So I know quite a bit about college stuff; and a decent amount about life stuff too—you can always ask me anything. The whole world is before you; but you never have to face it, with all its joys and hardships, alone.

Many congratulations and blessings.

Renea

Bookmark This

GoCollege.com

Here you'll find really good tips for getting the most out of the really (sometimes really, really) expensive education you're getting. Classroom lectures, writing assignments, and even exams can be a lot different in college than they were in high school. The tips on this website can help make the transition smoother.

Biblos.com

Biblos.com is this great website I've only recently discovered. It's a one-stop-shop for all your bible study tools including concordances, commentaries, maps, pictures, devotions, and of course the Bible itself in several different

translations and languages.

EveryStudent.com

I'm really pumped about this website. It's a place where no question about God or life is out of bounds. When your friends have questions about God and Christianity, or when you have questions yourself, this website can help. In college you'll do a lot of exploring, discovering, and learning about yourself: what you think about God, Christianity, the way the world is, the way it should be. This website is designed to guide you on that journey. Be sure to check out Life Issues, which touches on topics such as sex, beauty, racism, and shame.

Probe.org

Curious about Genesis and evolution? Need help answering the tough questions your friends have about Christianity? Whether you want to learn more about your friend's religion, are struggling with questions like – Why do bad things happen to good people? – or you need a credible source for the paper you're writing, Probe.org is an excellent resource that can help you think through some really tough topics.

Blogs

[Living Spirituality](http://LivingSpirituality.com)

Living Spirituality offers helpful, encouraging, and even sometimes convicting devotionals. It also provides a weekly discussion about real life stuff. These discussions are helpful as we try to live like Jesus in our everyday lives.

[Surviving College Life](http://SurvivingCollegeLife.com)

Surviving College Life is a really cool blog that's incredibly comprehensive. Not only will it be helpful as you prepare to arrive on campus. This will be something you'll find useful throughout your college years as you move from dorms to

apartments, friendships to romances, and from major to major. The above link is a list of all the posts divided by topic. So whether you're looking for time management tips, study aids, roommate advice, financial aid resources, or fitness facts, *Surviving College Life* can help give you a heads up and point you in a good direction.

Book Buzz

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2

This brief list of books includes stuff I read in college that was really important to my Christian walk, as well as a few books I wish I had read in college. They're books I hope you will find helpful as you journey with Jesus and strive to think christianly. (Don't worry; they're not just "smart people" books. Most of these are very easy to read.)

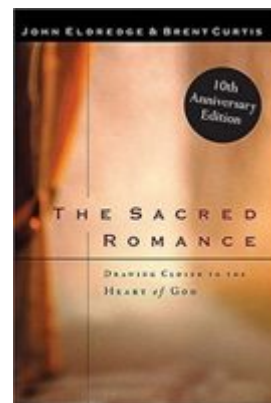


Don't Waste Your Life

–John Piper

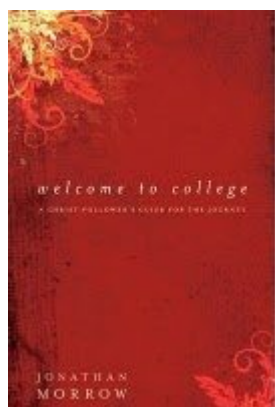
When Christ gave us real life, he gave our lives meaning and purpose. *Don't Waste Your Life* is about living on purpose a life passionate for God and people.

The Sacred Romance: Drawing Closer to the Heart of God



–Brent Curtis & John Eldredge

This is not a girly book; don't let the title fool you. The Sacred Romance was a really important book for me when I was in college. It helped me understand the big picture of the Bible: the story of God and the story of my own life. It helped me understand the difference between living by the rules and living spiritually.

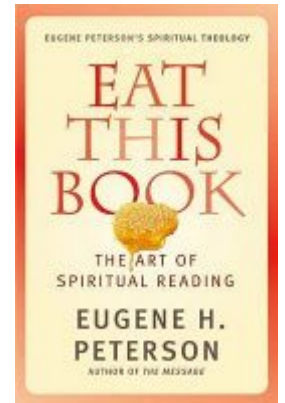


Welcome to College: A Christ-follower's Guide for the Journey

–Jonathan Morrow

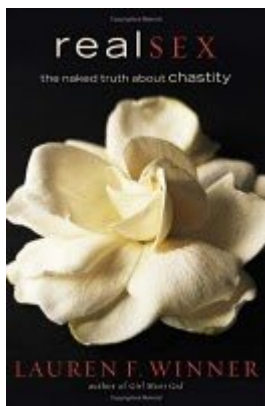
Welcome to College includes chapters on the problem of evil and suffering, Christology, ethics and much more. You will also find a broad collection of practical topics: health, sex and dating, finances, Internet use, alcohol. This book provides unique and much-needed help for navigating the head-spinning newness of college life.

Eat This Book: The Art of Spiritual Reading



–Eugene Peterson

This is a really helpful book about how to read and interpret and understand the Bible, how to let the Scriptures nourish and feed us, how to live the Scriptures as they are the Living Words of God.

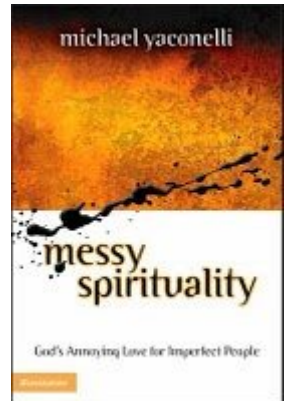


Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity

–Lauren F. Winner

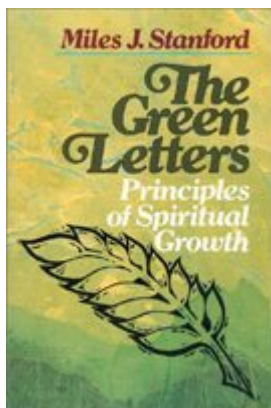
Winner talks about sex in a realistic way. She sorts through the confusing messages we hear about sex from both the world and the church, and helps us think about sex and romantic love within the big picture of God's story. Real Sex provides biblical and practical guidance for unmarried Christians who desire to honor God with their sexuality and dating relationships.

Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People



– Mike Yaconelli

This small book says big things about what being a Christian looks like. It reminds us that we're all human in need of God's grace; that there's no such thing as the ideal Christian—there's no one-size-fits-all pattern of spirituality.

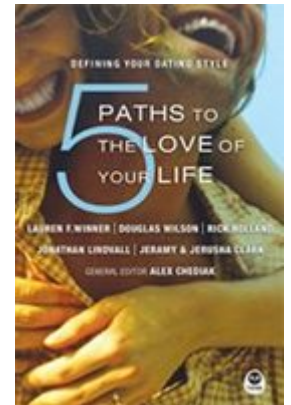


The Green Letters

–Miles J. Stanford

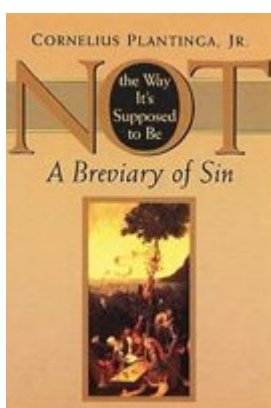
The Green Letters is about spiritual growth. It's one of those books you can pick and choose what you want to read by scanning over the Table of Contents; that is, the chapters don't necessarily have to be read in order. This book will challenge you to live less selfishly, or we could say, less as a self-follower and more as a Christ-follower.

5 Paths to the Love of Your Life: Defining Your Dating Style



–Alex Chediak

There are basically five different approaches to romantic love from the Christian perspective. This book gives you an overview of these five views, their advantages and disadvantages, and the logic and Scripture behind them. So you can decide for yourself which path you relate to most, which enables you to be intentional about biblical, christianly romance.



Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin

–Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

What is sin? What are the effects of sin? How do we think and talk about sin (if at all)? How do we deal with sin? These are some of the questions discussed in this small, but impactful

book on sin. You'd think a book all about sin would be depressing, but Plantinga understands that sin is only the distortion of something originally good; and that though things aren't the way they're supposed to be now, they will be one day soon when Christ returns.

This blog post originally appeared at reneamac.com/2009/06/10/hail-the-conquering-graduates/

American Education: The Hundred Years War

On its surface, the process of educating our children appears to be fairly straightforward. First, you must determine what kind of person you want to produce at the end of their formal schooling. In other words, decide what it means to be an educated person. Then, you establish what knowledge and attitudes will accomplish this goal. Next, hire an administrator who has the ability to pull together all the necessary components; someone who knows the best, scientifically verified, teaching techniques and the best optimum environment for implementation. Finally, give the principal or headmaster the authority to hire gifted teachers who can successfully do the job or to fire teachers who cannot. There's only one problem with this simple formula: educators disagree on how to complete every one of these steps. To make matters worse, education is one of the most expensive responsibilities that our government fulfills.

In the last forty years, spending in the U.S. on K-12 education has more than doubled. In 1970 it was \$221 billion; by 2008 it rose to \$556 billion in constant dollars.^{1} During that forty year period, enrollment has changed very little,

rising from about fifty-one million to fifty-three million students. So essentially, spending today is twice the amount we spent in 1970 on about the same number of students. Naturally, one would expect to see significant gains in learning for that money. However according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress Scores, not much has changed. For the last forty years scores have remained flat. Reading scores for seventeen-year-olds have remained at 285 out of 500, and mathematics scores went from 300 to 306, a minor improvement.[\[2\]](#)

Many argue that the reason we are not making progress in our schools is that we are using the wrong playbook. Because our educational leaders have bought into a philosophy of education based on a faulty view of human nature, they have endorsed techniques in the classroom that have marginal impact at best. This situation has not gone on without being contested. Historians of education point to a struggle going back to the beginning of the twentieth century between two factions that have very different ideas about what it means to be human and what the goal of education should be. Most Americans would be surprised to learn that there has been a century-long struggle between two distinct ways of thinking about how to educate our children.

In what follows we will look at the opposing worldviews of these two education camps and consider how their struggles have impacted our children. Join us as we look at the effect of what might be called the Hundred Years War in American education.

Progressive Orthodoxy

Education historian Diane Ravitch argues that at the end of the nineteenth century, America was facing two possible educational paths. One path led to an academic curriculum consisting of history, literature, science and mathematics,

language, and the arts for all high school students. The other path endorsed a vocational emphasis for most, and an academic training only for a few.

Criticism of the academic curriculum came from pragmatic business leaders and faculty members of our newly formed colleges of education that had recently sprung up across the nation. These so-called “progressive” educators felt that schools should be focused on the needs of society and students rather than centered on the traditional content of an academic curriculum. This emphasis on making school more practical and student-centered reflects the thoughts and writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau is considered by many to be one of the most influential thinkers on educational philosophy in Western culture. His book *Emile*, written in 1762, offered an extremely child-centered educational method in response to the traditional content-focused curriculum of the day.

Rousseau’s educational methods sprung from his faith in a particular worldview. One critical aspect of this worldview is that Rousseau believed that humans are “good” and that they naturally worship their Creator.^{3} He also argued that all we need to know about God can be learned from nature; any other source, including the Bible, would be seeking man’s opinion and authority which always turns out to be destructive. Rousseau thanked God for making him free, good, and happy like God himself.^{4} Regarding education, it’s not surprising that Rousseau valued freedom above all else. He wrote, “The truly free man wants only what he can do and does what he pleases. That is my fundamental maxim. It need only be applied to childhood for the rules of education to flow from it.”^{5}

The result of Rousseau’s worldview is predictable. The child, rather than his teacher, knows best how to learn and what to learn. This student-centered approach leads Rousseau to a strong opinion about books and reading. He brags that, “At twelve, Emile will hardly know what a book is.” He adds, “I hate books, they only teach one to talk about what one does

not know.”{6} His Emile will learn from life itself but only when the need for such learning comes from within.

For Rousseau, *natural man* is always superior to *civil man* and love of oneself is always good. This focus on freedom and student centered learning would influence educators for centuries and would find a warm reception in the minds of American educators in the progressive education movement.

Rousseau's Disciples

It's ironic that the most prestigious college of education in America, Teachers College at Columbia University, began as the Kitchen Garden Association in 1880 with the goal of training young girls to work as cooks and housemaids. Later, carpentry was added to attract boys and, as a result, the name was changed to the Industrial Education Association. In 1887 it was renamed the New York College for the Training of Teachers, and five years later just Teachers College. The opening of Teachers College marked the birth of the progressive education movement in America.

If Teachers College was the birthplace of progressive education, John Dewey was its father. Dewey was probably the most influential of all American philosophers and had an immense effect on how we think about education as a nation. He saw schools as a tool for social reform, and the goal of this reform was to replace Christianity with a new secular religion of democracy. To accomplish this goal, schools should turn from the traditional curriculum that encouraged abstract thinking and handing down the best ideas of Western Civilization, and instead base their activities on the needs and experiences of children in the home and community. Children should study problems and processes that mean something to them. Shop work, sewing, and cooking were a greater need than ancient languages, mathematics, history, or theology. As a result, books were downplayed and projects

centering on vocational training become the mainstay of many public schools.

While Dewey saw the value of maintaining some of the traditional academic content, some of his disciples worked to have it removed completely. William Heard Kilpatrick took the mantle of leadership for the progressive education movement from Dewey as an immensely popular professor at Teachers College. His 1925 book *Foundations of Method* described an educational philosophy that, to this day, still controls much of American education. It argued that we should simply teach children—to be child-centered, not subject-centered—because knowledge is changing so quickly and today's subjects will be of no use tomorrow. It celebrated whole-language over phonics and critical thinking over rote learning, tests, and even report cards. His first opportunity to design an experimental class resulted in no set curriculum, no assigned reading, math or spelling work, and no tests.

Augustine and the Academic Tradition

For the last hundred years, the progressive education movement has promoted a child-centered curriculum as a necessary remedy against a dying books-and-content-centered form of schooling. This old order was often referred to as a “liberal education” or possibly the “academic tradition.” Which worldview undergirds this academic tradition in schooling?

Progressives and traditionalists have very different views of human nature. Rousseau and the progressives argue that humans are created happy, free, and good while traditionalists see things more like the fourth century Christian Augustine of Hippo. Augustine believed that all humans are born with a sin nature and a tendency to do evil. There is a famous passage in his *Confessions* in which he describes an incident in his youth where he and his friends stole and destroyed fruit from a nearby orchard because, as he writes, “I became evil for no

reason. The only motive I had for this wickedness was the wickedness itself. It was disgusting, but I loved it.”{7}

Augustine believed that wisdom did not come from within our fallen natures, but came from God and knowledge of his word. He argued that “we should be led by the fear of God to seek the knowledge of His will . . . it is necessary to have our hearts subdued by piety, and not run in the face of Holy Scripture.”{8} While Augustine depended on God as a source for wisdom, he acknowledged that teachers need to use good methods if they are going to shape the minds and hearts of their students. He asked the rhetorical question, Should the wicked “tell their falsehoods briefly, clearly and plausibly, while the latter [believers] tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and . . . not easy to believe it?”{9}

Augustine and those who followed in his tradition down through the centuries believed that children must be trained in the beliefs and disciplines that made for a civilized society. Not just any information or content would do. A truly educated person would receive a foundation of theological training that would inform all the other disciplines. The first universities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries continued to see theology as the queen of the sciences. Although theology was still center stage through the Renaissance and the Reformation, it was removed from its throne during the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The progressive education movement’s efforts to reduce the influence of Christianity on schooling in America have been successful. During the 1960s and 70s the Supreme Court issued ruling after ruling that resulted in the secularization of our public schools. Parents would have to look elsewhere to have their children instructed in a Christian environment.

Why Does This Matter?

Even the progressive education leader John Dewey understood the need to transmit the best of one's culture to the next generation through the process of education. He wrote, "Unless pains are taken to see that genuine and thorough transmission takes place, the most civilized group will relapse into barbarism and then into savagery."[10](#) Dewey and his disciples planned to use this transmission process to change our culture dramatically.

Dewey's goal was to change the worldview upon which educational philosophy in America was grounded. He was convinced that the only intellectually responsible philosophy was a naturalistic one. This meant that education, ethics, politics, and life itself should be devoid of any hope in, or influence from, supernatural beliefs. As a result, he worked to replace America's faith in Christianity with faith in democracy, which he referred to as a religious belief. Revelation and religious authority would be replaced with the scientific method and this new faith in democracy.

Dewey was instrumental in breaking the connection to our past as a society. His followers took his lead, offering an even more radical break from the academic tradition. For instance William Heard Kilpatrick, a mathematician, argued that mathematics is "harmful" for ordinary living, and that dancing, dramatics, and doll playing offered more potential for educational growth.[11](#)

At the end of WWII, progressive ideology reigned supreme in American education. But even though the battle over educational philosophy had been won, its implementation would constantly be challenged. The Russian satellite Sputnik in the 1950s caused a temporary panic and a short lived re-emphasis on science and mathematics. But by then, the enrollment in science had already declined precipitously. For instance, fewer than five percent of high school students took physics

in 1955, down from nearly twenty percent in 1900.[\[12\]](#)

By the late sixties, only the lucky few who scored well on IQ tests received an academic high school curriculum, and our universities had begun to give in to student demands for relevancy by gutting the required curriculum and adding less challenging, highly politicized programs like women's studies, Black studies, and peace studies. To some, it appeared as if adult supervision had disappeared from our university campuses.

In recent decades, parents have resorted to homeschooling and private schools in search of rigorous academics for their children. Others have pushed for charter schools and voucher programs to re-inject greater rigor in the public schools. But it appears that the hundred years war over educational philosophy will continue well into the future.

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, www.bea.gov.
2. NAEP Data Explorer, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata.
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom (Basic Books, 1979), 278.
4. *Ibid.*, 281.
5. *Ibid.*, 84.
6. *Ibid.*, 116.
7. Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4.9.
8. D. Bruce Lockerbie, *A Passion For Learning* (Moody Press, 1994), 78.
9. *Ibid.*, 80.
10. E. D. Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, 120.
11. Diane Ravitch, *Left Back* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), 181.
12. *Ibid.*, 350.

