Weaponization of Institutions

Kerby Anderson examines claims that political activists and government agencies are reshaping American institutions, including immigration, policing, housing, education, and the administrative state, and presents a biblical perspective on faith, family, freedom, and civic life.

Society is defined by institutions, but unfortunately too many of those institutions have been captured by secular progressives. In this article I summarize material from Seth Barron, *Weaponized: The Left's Capture and Destruction of America's Sacred Institutions*{1} and from Christopher Rufo, *America's Cultural Revolution*.{2} In the discussion of the deep state, I will also refer to the material by Jason Chaffetz, *They're Coming for You*,{3} with some insights about the deep state from Ned Ryan's book, *American Leviathan*.{4}

Weaponization of Institutions

We heard lots of commentators talking about "weaponization" but often it is merely a means to focus on whatever someone finds annoying. The authors use this in a more specific way. Are there institutions and individuals who are using established institutions to advance their social agenda?

Leftist activists have been transforming respected institutions for their political and ideological ends. They could not achieve much success without leveraging the good reputation of those institutions. In his book, Seth Barron focuses on four institutions: citizenship, public safety, housing, and education.

Immigration is a process in America that is generally viewed in a favorable light. We are told that we are a nation of immigrants. Unfortunately, immigration has become a tool for the disruption of American political and cultural life. He

argues. “Citizenship has been devalued, weaponized, and turned against the citizens of the country.”

Policing is necessary in a civil society and has usually had a high reputation among the public. But activists have worked to tie policing to the legacy of slavery. The solution, therefore, is to defund the police and allocate tax dollars to “community-based radical social service nonprofit organizations” which often have the goal of destroying Western values and society.

Owning a home is central to the American identity. Living in a home of your own with enough space and a backyard has been part of the American dream. But the Left rejects these dreams and instead has been working to verticalize housing in the form of dense complexes that are close to mass transit. And they have been using state legislatures and zoning laws to achieve their goals.

Education has been the great cultural equalizer. Students in public schools traditionally learned about the history of this nation and the values that made it great. Unfortunately, public education has been “captured by teachers’ unions, ‘educrats,’ and leftist activists who have turned schools into indoctrination camps for progressive nostrums.”{5}

Leaders of the Cultural Revolution

While we are talking about the weaponization of institutions, it is worth mentioning some of the leaders of this cultural revolution. Christopher Rufo tells their story in his book, *America’s Cultural Revolution: How the Radical Left Conquered Everything*.

Within the last two decades, we have seen remarkable changes in institutions. Schools adopted critical race theory, which used to only be taught in graduate-level classes. Universities divided students into oppressors and victims and forced the

former to address their racial and sexual privilege. Corporations denounced the US as a “system of white supremacy” and adopted woke policies and used woke advertising to market their products.

How did this happen? To understand the changes, you need to understand the leaders of this cultural revolution. In his book, he provides the backgrounds of Herbert Marcuse, Angela Davis, Paulo Freire, and Derrick Bell. Many of those names are probably not familiar to you, but I can assure you that these names have surfaced in many of the radio interviews I have done.

Many of the ideas we will discuss this week have been in the culture for some time, but they exploded onto the scene with the death of George Floyd in the spring of 2020. Suddenly, the themes of the 1960s surfaced in our daily news feeds and became the official ideology of colleges and corporations. Phrases like “systemic racism” and “white privilege” and “diversity, equity, and inclusion” were being repeated in classrooms, newsrooms, and board rooms.

Much of this began in the 1960s during the student uprisings, urban riots, and revolutionary violence. Herbert Marcuse was the father of the revolution. Angela Davis was the leader of black liberation that later came to be known as Black Lives Matter. Paulo Freire promoted Marxist ideology in education. Derrick Bell promoted critical race theory and the development of DEI.

The rhetoric may not be as revolutionary-sounding as what was chanted in the streets decades ago, but the revolutionary goal is just the same. The radical left wants to replace individual rights with group-identity-based rights. They want to suppress speech and censor any ideas contrary to their ideology.

These new revolutionaries plan to do this with what have been called a “long march through the institutions.” No longer are

these revolutionaries on the outside trying to foment revolution. They are professors and administrators working to bring out a revolution from inside the institutions.

The Administrative State

Information is power. Data is power. When government has massive amounts of data, they also have incredible power. It is the power to control behavior. It is the power to shape the views of the electorate and the values of the next generation.

Consider that in the last few decades, government has passed the Patriot Act, established the FISA court (United States Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court), and expanded NSA (National Security Agency) warrantless surveillance programs. In every case, we were told it was being done to keep us safer.

Bureaucrats can use and abuse that power because our government has given them more power than the Constitution allows. And the problem has been made worse because new technology (such as artificial intelligence) has enabled what some have described as "weapons of mass detection." It can quickly find citizens who have not complied with the latest trends and woke ideas.

Our government is obsessed with collecting vast amounts of information. Countless Americans have been censored, debanked, and prosecuted by government officials who have collected information about them and their political perspectives.

In my booklet on *A Biblical View on the Deep State*, I explain that this term describes a parallel system of government that sometimes operates outside of official channels. This so-called "fourth branch of government" is referred to as a deep state or the administrative state. In his book, Ned Ryan refers to it as the *American Leviathan*.

Over the last few months, we have seen how this weaponization

of intelligence works. The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform issued a significant report documenting numerous ways the Biden administration weaponized several aspects of the federal government.{6}

The Justice Department documented the previous administration's weaponization of the FACE Act (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act) against pro-life individuals and organizations. They also discovered that "the Biden DOJ (Department of Justice) routinely colluded with pro-abortion groups like Planned Parenthood and the National Abortion Federation." {7}

There has also been testimony at the National Religious Liberty Commission hearings about the various ways in which government (federal, state, and local) shows significant hostility toward Christian Americans. The report not only documents these abuses but sets up a Task Force dedicated to eradicating Anti-Christian bias.{8}

When the government collects information, bureaucrats use it in a variety of ways. But there is another side to the data collection. The weaponization of intelligence makes government surveillance much easier. Many in the deep state collect and weaponize private information.

The Power of the Deep State

In his first term, President Trump discovered the power of the federal bureaucracy. Winning the 2016 election and winning the 2024 election may have been significant, but it didn't change the makeup of the federal bureaucracy.

The deep state can also depend on progressive non-profit organizations and social media platforms to collect even more data. Even though the government is technically limited in some of the data it can collect, that's not a problem. The federal government can merely collect it by purchasing data

from several of these private sector data brokers.

After Elon Musk purchased Twitter, he released the "Twitter Files." We learned of the insidious connection between social media and the federal government. And with the advance of artificial intelligence along with facial recognition, the government can learn virtually anything it wants to know about any citizen.

Many individuals have been debanked because their views or businesses contradicted the views and values of the administration. For example, Dr. Joseph Mercola lost his business and personal account because of his statements about the Covid vaccine. Marc Andreesen (founder of Netscape) told Joe Rogan in an interview that he knew of 30 tech company founders who had been debanked in the past four years.{9}

Of course, President Trump and his family have been debanked. Charles Gasparino documented the many successful attempts to debank Donald Trump after he left office. Pressure from regulators was all that was necessary to force the former president to find other banks for his business.{10}

There is also the power of the IRS. During the 2012 election, I covered numerous stories about conservative groups who waited months to receive their tax-exempt status or never received that status. The reason: they had "Tea Party" in their name. In many cases, the IRS demanded disclosure of their donors and other confidential information.

More recently, the IRS denied tax-exempt status to the group Christians Engaged. In particular, the IRS ruled against the Christian organization because it affirmed "the sanctity of life, the definition of marriage, and biblical justice."{11}

Fortunately, the ruling was reversed due to pressure from members of Congress and our (Point of View) radio broadcast. But consider that thousands of Christian churches also have those views. If those beliefs were supposedly enough to

disqualify a Christian organization, those same beliefs could be used to remove the tax-exempt status of those churches.

Biblical Perspective

The Bible teaches that God has ordained key institutions. Christians cannot allow these leftist activists to take over these divinely ordained institutions.

The first institution is the government, which is ordained by God (Romans 13:1–7) and is ultimately under God's control. We are commanded to obey governmental authorities (Romans 13:1–4, 1 Peter 2:13-14).

A second institution is the church (Hebrews 12:18–24; 1 Peter 2:9–10). Jesus taught that the government should work in harmony with the church and should recognize its sovereignty in spiritual matters (Matthew 22:21).

A third institution is the family (Ephesians 5:22–32, 1 Peter 3:1–7). The family is an institution under God and His authority (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:20–25). A related institution is education. Children are not the wards of the state, but belong to God (Psalm 127:3) and are given to parents as a gift from God. Parents are to teach their children (Deuteronomy 4:9) and may also entrust them to tutors (Galatians 4:2).

In my booklet on *A Biblical View of Borders and Deportation*, I talk about the importance of borders and boundaries. We cannot have open borders and cannot allow uncontrolled immigration to this country.

The Bible teaches that God established the boundaries for the nation of Israel: "I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates" (Exodus 23:31). The Bible also warns the Jewish leaders, "You shall not move your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set" (Deuteronomy 19:14). And again, "Do not move an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the

fatherless" (Proverbs 23:10-11).

In Acts 17:26, we read that God set boundaries for the lands of the nations: "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."

Education must also be done with the consent of parents. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Parents, do not exasperate your children: instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it." We should also be teaching wisdom to our children (Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10).

We have allowed these leftist activists to weaponize these institutions against biblical values of faith, family, and freedom. Christians are called to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). It is time for all of us to challenge the weaponization of our institutions.

Notes

1. Seth Barron, *Weaponized: The Left's Capture and Destruction of America's Sacred Institutions*, FL: Humanix Books, 2026.
2. Christopher Rufo, *America's Cultural Revolution: How the Radical Left Conquered Everything*, NY: HarperCollins, 2023
3. Jason Chaffetz, *They're Coming for You*, NY: Broadside Books, 2025.
4. Ned Ryan, *American Leviathan*, NY: Encounter Books, 2024.
5. Seth Barron, nypost.com/2026/05/02/opinion/the-left-weaponizes-everything-and-its-rotting-our-infrastructure/
6.House Oversight Committee, "Restoring America Through Oversight: A 2025 Year in Review," December 2025, oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Oversight-End-of-Year-2025.pdf.
7. US Department of Justice, "Justice Department Reveals the Biden Administration's Weaponization of Federal Law Against

Pro-Life Americans," April 14, 2026.
8. US Department of Justice, "Task Force Publishes Report on Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias and Restoring Religious Liberty," April 30, 2026.
9. Kerby Anderson, "Debanking," pointofview.net/viewpoints/debanking-3/.
10. Charles Gasparino, "Inside the Enormous Effort to Debank Trump," *New York Post*, August 9, 2025, nypost.com/2025/08/09/business/gasparino-inside-the-enormous-biden-effort-to-debank-trump-after-jan-6/.
11. Kerby Anderson, "IRS and Churches," pointofview.net/viewpoints/irs-and-churches/

©2026 Probe Ministries

Civility

We are living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness and desperately need civility. Kerby Anderson looks at the rise of incivility and documents its effects in society, education, and politics. He concludes by providing a biblical framework for civility.

The Rise of Incivility

We seem to be living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness. Articles in the newspaper document the number of incidents of road rage. And if you doubt that, just try to merge onto a busy freeway and see how many drivers honk their horn or try to cut you off.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. A 1997 American Automobile Association report documents a sharp rise in the use of cars as weapons (people trying to run over other people

on purpose). A Colorado funeral director complains about impatient drivers darting in and out of funeral processions. Instead of waiting for the procession to pass, they threaten life and limb while ignoring both law and tradition in their rush to get somewhere.

Rudeness seems to be at an all-time high in airports. There is the story of the man who was angry at missing a flight connection and threw his suitcase at an eight-month pregnant airline employee. Or there is the story of the woman who learned that there were no sandwiches on her flight and punched the flight attendant and pushed her to the floor. And there is the tragic story of the man who rushed the cockpit and had to be restrained. In the process of stopping him, the passengers apparently used too much force and killed him.

Cursing and vulgar language are on the increase. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are up. Meanwhile, charitable giving seems to be on the decline along with volunteerism.

No wonder so many are talking about the need for civility. George W. Bush's inaugural speech talked about "a new commitment to live out our nation's promise through civility, courage, compassion and character. America, at its best, matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility."

Commentators are wringing their hands over our social distress. Former education secretary and virtues guru William Bennett has addressed the issue of civility. Gertrude Himmelfarb has written about *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, has devoted a book to the problem, as has Yale Law professor Stephen Carter.

Newspapers are running stories asking, "Why are we so rude?" *U.S. News and World Report* talks about "The American Uncivil

Wars."{1} They conclude that "Crude, Rude and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners."

So in this article I will be addressing this very important concept of civility. In a sense, it is a second installment on a previous article I wrote on integrity. If integrity is the standard we use to judge our own moral development, then civility is the standard we use to judge our moral interaction with others.

As we will see, the rules of civility are ultimately the rules of morality, which are rooted in biblical morality.

The Moral Basis of Civility

The word *civilité* shares the same etymology with words like *civilized* and *civilization*. Quite simply, the root word means to be "a member of the household." Just as there are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household, so there are rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. We have certain moral responsibilities to one another.

While there have been many philosophical discussions on what civility is and how it should be practiced, I believe Jesus simply expressed the goal of civility when he taught that, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). If we truly love our neighbors, then we should be governed by moral standards that express concern for others and limit our own freedom.

Perhaps that is why civility is on the decline. More and more people live for themselves and do not feel they are morally accountable to anyone (even God) for their actions or behavior. We are told to "Look Out for #1," and not to let anyone limit our freedom to be ourselves.

Civility also acknowledges the value of another person. Politeness and manners are not merely to make social life

easier. Stephen Carter, in his book on *Civility,* says that our actions and sacrifice are a

> . . .[S]ignal of respect for our fellow citizens, marking them as full equals, both before the law and before God. Rules of civility are thus also rules of morality; it is morally proper to treat our fellow citizens with respect, and morally improper not to. Our crisis of civility is part of a larger crisis of morality.{2}

Again, this may help answer why civility is on the decline. An increasing majority in our society no longer believes in moral absolutes. These deny that absolutes of any kind exist, much less moral absolutes. So as our crisis of morality unfolds, so does barbarism and decadence. Civility is what is lost from society.

If this is so, then the rise of rudeness and incivility cannot be easily altered. Miss Manners and others have written books about how our nation can regain its civility. But if the crisis is greater than a lack of manners (and I believe that it is), its solution must be found in a greater social change than merely teaching manners or character. Ultimately, an increase in civility must flow out of a moral and religious change. Spiritual revival and reformation are the ultimate solutions to the current problem of incivility. And I believe Christians should lead the way by exemplary behavior. In essence, Christians must be the best citizens and the best examples of civility in society.

Civility in the Schools

We have documented the rising incivility in our society. What is so tragic is to find that our children are mimicking the incivility of the adult world. A poll conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that 89 percent of grade school teachers and principals reported that they “regularly” face abusive language from students.{3}

Contrast this situation with the nature of public education just a few decades ago. It is likely that when you grew up, you were instructed in manners and etiquette. The day began with the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and throughout the day you were instructed to show respect to your country and to your teachers.

Today when schools try to teach manners, parents and civil libertarians often thwart those plans. And when a school does succeed in teaching civility, the story becomes headline news; as it was when *U.S. News and World Report* opened its account on "The American Uncivil Wars" with a story of a school that was actually trying to teach manners.{4}

Consider what would have happened a few decades ago if you misbehaved at school. Your teacher or your principal would have disciplined you. And when you arrived home, your parents would have assumed you were disciplined for good reason. They probably would have punished you again. Now contrast that with today's parents who are quick to challenge the teacher or principal and are often quick to threaten with a lawsuit.

When I was growing up there seemed to be a conspiracy of the adults against the kids. Every parent and every teacher had the same set of moral values. So if I misbehaved at Johnny's house, I knew that Johnny's mother had the same set of rules as my mother. If I misbehaved at school, I knew my teachers had the same set of rules as my parents.

Today that moral consensus is gone. If anything, we have a conspiracy of the kids against the adults. Most kids spend lots of time telling their parents what *other* parents let their kids do. We have sunk to the least common denominator in our morality.

To rebuild civility in our society, we need to begin with the next generation. Sadly they are not learning to respect authority. They are learning to disrespect authority and to

play one set of parental values against another. And parents must begin to trust a teacher's authority. My parents trusted the teachers and the school to enforce the rules appropriately. Trust and respect are two essential ingredients in rebuilding a foundation of civility.

Civility in Politics

Often when we talk about the need for civility, we focus on the political arena. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are on the increase. Many commentators lament what they call the "politics of personal destruction." And savvy candidates have tried to tap into this growing concern by calling for greater civility in our public discourse.

At the outset, we should acknowledge that politics has always been a dirty business. More than two centuries ago, the founders of this country often had harsh and critical things to say about each other during political campaigns. Yet we also have some very positive examples of civil discussions of major social ills.

According to Stephen Carter in his book *Civility,* one shining example of this is the Civil Rights Movement. "The leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) knew that the protests would be met with violence, because they were challenging a violently oppressive system. But they also knew that success would be found not through incivility, but through the display of moral courage."

Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders trained their protestors to remain civil and even loving in the face of repression. He called this the "process of purification," and it "involved both prayer and repeated reminders that the Biblical injunction to love our neighbors is not a command to love only the nice ones." It's instructive to remember that the stated purpose of the Southern Christian Leadership

Conference was “to save the soul of the nation.”

Those of us involved in social action today should be mindful of this as we fight against social ills in our society. I firmly believe that Christians should be good citizens and models of civility. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be passionate about trying to rectify social problems. And we can disagree with those who do not hold to a biblical view of morality. But we should learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We should make our case with logic and compassion. And I believe we will be more successful if we do so.

Consider the abortion debate. A majority of citizens have a great deal of ambivalence about abortion. They do not feel good about abortion on demand, but they also fear what might happen if abortion was totally banned in this country. Will we attract these millions of people by being angry, vociferous Bible-thumpers? Or will we attract them by being thoughtful, compassionate Christians who demonstrate our love for both mother and child at crisis pregnancy centers? I think the answer should be obvious, and that is the power of civility in the public arena.

Civility: A Biblical Framework

At the heart of civility is the biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself. While it is relatively easy to love people who are your friends or people who are nice to you, the real test of Christian love comes when we are with strangers or with people who are not civil to you. When we find ourselves in the presence of strangers, we should treat them with dignity and respect even if they are not civil to us. Even if they are not gracious toward us, we should not repay them with incivility. Romans 12:21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Our duty to be civil to others should not depend on whether we

like them or agree with their moral or political perspectives. They may be disagreeable, and we are free to disagree with them, but we should do so by giving grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that, “A gentle answer turns away wrath.”

Civility also requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”

Civility also requires that we watch what we say. The Bible clearly warns us of the danger of the tongue (James 3:5-8). We should work to cleanse our language of harsh, critical, and condemning words. We should rid ourselves of nasty and vulgar language. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

If Christians want to reform society and return to civility, one excellent model is William Wilberforce (1759-1833). Most people know Wilberforce as the man who brought an end to the British slave trade. He served for half a century in the House of Commons. And led by his Christian faith, he tirelessly worked for the abolition of slavery. But that was only one of the “two great objects” of his life. The other, even more daunting was his attempt to transform the civil and moral climate of his times. Although he is known as an abolitionist, the other great accomplishment of his life was in the reformation of manners.

I believe he provides a positive example of how Christians should engage the world. We should do so with courage, compassion, character, and civility.

Notes

1. John Marks, “The American Uncivil Wars: How Crude, Ruse and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners and Why That Hurts Our Politics and Culture,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 April 1996, 66-72.

2. Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 11.

3. Antonia Barber, “Rough Language Plagues Schools, Educators Say,” *USA Today*, 11 March 1997, 6D.

4. Marks, “The American Uncivil Wars,” 66.

5. Carter, *Civility*, 28.

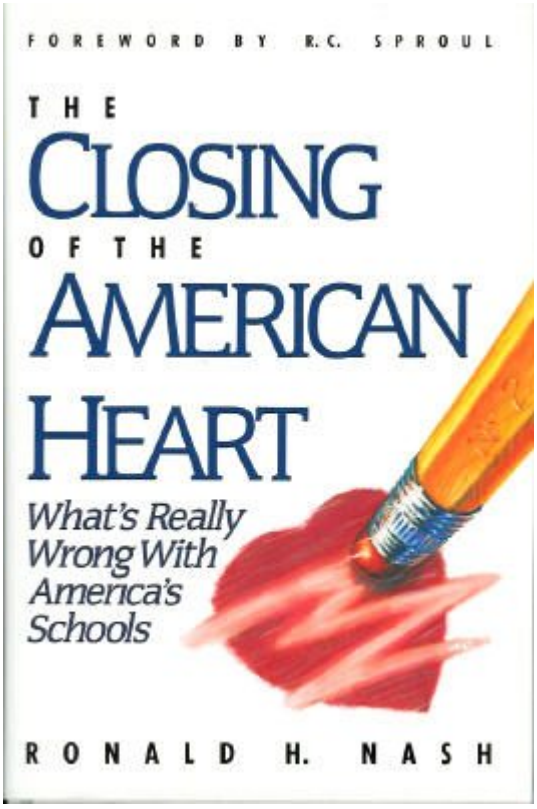
©2001 Probe Ministries

The Closing of the American Heart

Using Ronald Nash’s book as a starting point, Don Closson looks at the philosophical foundations of modern education in America and how they have contributed to low performance.

Every once in a while a book is written that shakes things up. *The Closing of the American Mind,* written by the now-deceased University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom in the late 1980s, was just such a book. You can tell that a book strikes a sensitive societal chord when numerous books follow with similar titles. Some experts hated it, others loved it. And it seemed that everyone was talking about it. What made this book so interesting was that it was written for a very small

audience of academicians, and yet it attracted the attention of millions and became a bestseller. Even more amazing, it's a book about education.



Dr. Bloom's book reignited a long and important discussion about the content and purpose of education. Here at Probe, we felt that both the book and the topic it discussed were so important that we needed to add to the conversation with a book of our own. The result was a book titled *The Closing of the American Heart*. We asked Dr. Ronald Nash, also now deceased, who taught philosophy at the University of Kentucky, to write it for us. I had the privilege of providing some of the research for the book.

Both books are an attempt to uncover the root causes of the many problems facing our public schools. In this article we will consider the critiques given by the two authors as well as their proposed solutions. One concept that runs throughout both books is that ideas have consequences. Allan Bloom writes that "a serious life means being fully aware of the alternatives,Using Ronald Nash's book as a starting point, Probe's Don Closson looks at the philosophical foundations of modern education in America and how they have contributed to low performance. thinking about them with all the intensity one brings to bear on life-and-death questions, in full recognition that every choice is a great risk with necessary consequences that are hard to bear."{1} This statement relates directly to the educational enterprise. Someone must decide what it means to be an educated person and consequently what students should know and believe when they are graduated from our schools.

Nash argues that this decision—about what it means to be educated—will be based on an educator's worldview. One's worldview is built on answers to life's big questions, answers that might be informed by traditional religious beliefs or by modern secularism. However, since everyone has a worldview, education can never be neutral regarding the "deep" things of life or life's ultimate concerns. Nash goes one step further by asserting that all public policy is shaped by the ultimate concerns of those holding power in our culture. In other words, worldviews shape institutions and policies, which directly affect how children are educated.

Bloom and Nash agree that one worldview dominates our nation's schools and universities. In what follows we will investigate the nature of that worldview and how these two men believed we should respond to it.

Education's Ills

Allen Bloom's highly influential book *The Closing of the American Mind* begins with the dramatic observation that "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."{2}

Relativism is the view that truth is unknowable and that universal moral virtues do not exist. Bloom's now famous (or infamous) description of American students rests on his observation that a single way of thinking has come to dominate our campuses. He adds that relativism has left us with only one acknowledged virtue, the virtue of tolerance or openness.

According to Bloom, this assurance that truth does not exist has gutted education and left our students with little desire to seek knowledge. The search for truth has been replaced by an "unsubstantial awareness that there are many cultures." Since cultures have different values, truth must not exist.

From this they derive the maxim that we should just get along with one another, and that no values are superior to others or worth defending. Students are left with a gentle egotism and the desire for comfort. The end result of all this is that books are no longer read as part of a hunger for truth; books have lost their significance.

Nash generally agrees with Bloom, but describes the situation a little differently. His book focuses on three areas of illiteracy among our students: functional illiteracy, cultural illiteracy, and moral illiteracy.

Functional illiteracy is the inability to understand the written word well enough to thrive within our modern culture. The National Assessment of Educational Progress test in 2007 found that thirty-three percent of fourth graders and more than a quarter of eight graders scored below basic levels in reading.{3} What makes this distressing is the fact that per pupil expenditures have more than doubled since 1970 while achievement has remained flat.

The problem isn't just in our primary and secondary schools. Poet and university professor Karl Shapiro writes that "What is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities."{4} It's also estimated that 30 million America adults can be considered to be functionally illiterate.{5}

Bloom and Nash argue that the prevailing functional illiteracy and the loss of interest in books is not a chance occurrence. Nash believes that it is the result of a change in the way the West thinks about truth and human nature, as well as the abandonment of a Christian worldview.

Education's Ills cont.

In addition to students who can't read, or functional illiteracy, there are those who can read but are unable to interpret the meaning of the material because they lack the necessary background information. E. D. Hirsch is the best known author on what has become known as *cultural illiteracy*.

In his book *The Schools We Need*, Hirsch argues that "just as it takes money to make money, it takes knowledge to make knowledge."{6} He contends that those children who begin school with an adequate level of intellectual capital have a framework upon which further learning may be built. But those who lack the necessary educational experiences and sufficient vocabulary tend to fall further and further behind. Not just any information serves as intellectual capital. According to Hirsch, the knowledge taught and learned must be of a type that "constitutes the shared intellectual currency of the society," or put another way, "intellectual capital has to be the widely useful and negotiable coin of the realm."{7}

Nash agrees with Hirsch and charges that modern educational theory deserves much of the blame for causing cultural illiteracy. Hirsch argues that educators often believe that "a child's intellectual and social skills will develop naturally without regard to the specific content of education."{8} Educators are more interested in *how* children learn rather than *what* they learn. Because of this, children fail to store away enough information to become culturally literate.

Some educators will grudgingly admit to the problems of functional and cultural illiteracy, and even assume some of the blame, but they are proud of the decline in what Nash calls *moral illiteracy.* Nash sees the problem of moral illiteracy as a conflict between those who are religious and support traditional values and those who are secular and advocate anti-traditional or modernist values. Those in the midst of the battle understand this conflict, while the

typical American often does not.

John Silber, past president of Boston University writes,

> *In generations past, parents were more diligent in passing on their principles and values to their children, and were assisted by churches and schools which emphasized religious and moral education. In recent years, in contrast, our society has become increasingly secular and the curriculum of the public schools has been denuded of almost all ethical content. As a result universities must confront a student body ignorant of the evidence and arguments that underlie and support many of our traditional moral principles and practices.{9}*

Three Philosophies

Nash describes three distinct philosophical ideas that have resulted in the decline in functional, cultural, and moral literacy in America.

The first of these ideas is *relativism,* which we mentioned earlier. It describes the conviction that there is no such thing as truth. This idea is almost universally accepted among both students and teachers on our campuses. It's often defended with the argument "that might be true for you, but it isn't for me." As Nash points out, this kind of thinking is the result of confusing the veracity of a proposition with one's personal judgment regarding that truth claim. Nash writes, "We may differ in our judgment about what is true, but that does not affect the truth of the matter itself."{10} Relativism itself is making a truth claim about knowledge which is self-defeating. Are we to accept the relativist's statement that there is no truth to be "really true?"

The second idea is *positivism,* an arrogant, quasi-religious devotion to the scientific method. A positivist argues that

any belief that cannot be tested by science is irrational. Positivism relegates all of theology and most of ethics to mere opinion or personal preference. However, as philosopher J. P. Moreland has argued, faith in science itself must be defended on a metaphysical basis and cannot be proven scientifically. “The aims, methodologies, and presuppositions of science cannot be validated by science. One cannot turn to science to justify science any more than one can pull oneself up by his own bootstraps.”{11}

Positivism often turns out to be based on hidden assumptions, assumptions that make up the third idea (or set of ideas) Nash blames the current state of American education on. This third movement has sometimes been labeled the *bootleg religion* of American education; a mixture of secularism, naturalism, and humanism. The assumptions of this faith include (1) the absence of a transcendent God, (2) the non-existence of anything outside of the physical universe, and (3) the acceptance of the self-actualization of each human being—complete autonomy—as the purpose of life. What makes this set of ideas especially dangerous is that they are presented as being neutral and not in violation of separation of church and state sensitivities.

As a result, some educators consider their students mal-adjusted or worse if they hold to a worldview that conflicts with these principles. On some campuses, especially at the university level, the monopoly that these ideas enjoy has resulted in Christian thought being systematically filtered out of the curriculum.

Two Solutions

Allen Bloom makes one major recommendation to combat the relativism that is destroying the desire for knowledge in our schools, he writes:

> *[T]he only serious solution is the one that is almost universally rejected: the good old Great Books approach, in which a liberal education means reading certain generally recognized classic texts, just reading them, letting them dictate what the questions are and the method of approaching them—not forcing them into categories we make up, not treating them as historical products, but trying to read them as their authors wished them to be read.{12}*

Bloom argues that even when these books are read today they are often viewed through the radical lenses of feminism or Marxism. Everything is deconstructed, every idea is neutralized.

Nash agrees that the Great Books are valuable and contribute to a complete education, but he argues that the array of ideas contained in them will baffle students unless they have an over-arching philosophy to guide them through the maze. Although Bloom acknowledges the necessity for individuals and schools to make the hard choices about the big questions in life, he himself fails to do this in regards to a curriculum. Should teachers treat all of the Great Books equally? Since the authors disagree intensely on basic issues regarding the nature of reality and humanity, are we not promoting a new relativism in place of the old? For instance, do we accept Augustine's *Confessions* and his views on the sinfulness of mankind, or Rousseau's *Confessions*, which assumes that humans are naturally good?

Nash contends that one condition of being an educated person is that he or she develops a single, consistent worldview, something not found in the Great Books. From a Christian perspective, only Christian theism can accomplish the task adequately.

Human beings are never neutral concerning the nature of God, and what people believe to be true about God will ultimately

affect their view of education. Although Bloom talks about how modern education has impoverished the souls of today's students, he leaves us without any indication of how those souls should be fed or what connection should be made between knowledge and virtue.

Nash believes that education would greatly benefit from true educational choice. This would empower parents to have their children educated under the worldview assumptions that correspond to their own. Putting more power into parents' hands, thereby increasing local control of education, is one step to re-opening the American heart.

Notes

1. Bloom, Allan, The Closing of the American Mind (Simon and Schuster, 1987), 227.

2. Ibid., 25.

3. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Reading Report Card, at nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2007/r0001.asp on 8/29/2009.

4. Nash, Ronald, *The Closing of the American Heart* (Probe Books, 1990), 46.

5. National Center for Education Statistics, "2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy," U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, at nces.ed.gov/naal/index.asp on 8/29/2009.

6. Hirsch, E.D., Jr. *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 20.

7. Ibid, 21.

8. Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart*, 50.

9. Ibid., 53.

10. Ibid., 63.

11. Ibid., 66.

12. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 344.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Educational Choice

Don Closson surveys the state of educational choice in America. Even though educational spending is the largest category in every state's budget, money is not our primary concern. It is the well being of our children.

What does the idea of educational choice have to do with a Christian worldview? Quite a lot, actually. As Christians we are called to be concerned about justice, about the poor, about the weakest individuals in our society. We also have an interest in having a population educated well enough to read and understand the Bible. It is about "loving our neighbors as ourselves" and "doing unto the least of these" in the society around us.



I must admit that during my twelve years of teaching and administrating in public schools educational choice wasn't a burning issue. I admit that personal interest convinced me to become a supporter. Vouchers made sense as I experienced the difficulty of paying taxes for local public schools even though my children were being home-schooled or were attending private schools. Back then, supporters of vouchers were either fans of free-market economist Milton Freeman or were

philosophically opposed to the “one-best-system” approach of government-provided schooling. They were a small but vocal minority.

Times have changed. Today, supporters of educational choice are often people who are shocked by the failure of our inner city schools to educate children in any meaningful sense of the word. A rising number of urban leaders have concluded that the current model of schooling just hasn’t worked for many of our children.

What is meant by the term “educational choice”? One definition says, “…it means letting every parent send their child to the school of their choice regardless of where they live or income. Parents choose schools based on their child’s needs, not their address.”{1} The desire for educational choice over the last couple of decades has found expression in the creation of voucher plans, charter schools, private scholarship programs, and personal tax credits or deductions. Since each state is responsible for establishing its own educational policies, there have been multiple variations on each of these categories along with endless court battles to affirm or deny the constitutionality of each plan.

Those who support educational choice begin with the assumption that increased competition is almost always a good thing. Its proponents argue that when schools must compete for students, they generally work harder at providing a better service. They believe in bottom-up reform, letting parents choose what educational methods and content is best for their children rather than a top-down approach that is guided by a centralized government or teachers’ union.

In this article we survey the state of educational choice in America. Even though educational spending is the largest category in every state’s budget, money is not our primary concern. It is the well being of our children.

Publicly Funded Vouchers

In 1955 economist Milton Friedman argued that America's public school system was not achieving the goals that it was created for. As a government operated monopoly it was failing in its mandate to educate all of our children equally regardless of race or class. In fact, it was a highly segregated system that was failing our most needy students in our inner city schools. His solution was to open up education to market forces by issuing vouchers to parents who could then choose where to spend their education dollars. He wrote, "In the end, the goal of education is to ensure learning and guarantee a free society and stable democracy. These goals are better met when all parents are free to choose the school that works best for their child."

For decades, Friedman was a lone voice, but in the early 1990's Milwaukee Wisconsin began a voucher program with 337 students who could use their publicly funded vouchers to attend religious or non-religious private schools in the city.

This program is now in its 17th year and is approaching its legislatively set cap of 15% of the districts students. In the 2007-08 school year over 18,000 students participated, attending 122 different private schools.{2} Voucher programs have been established in Cleveland Ohio, Colorado, Florida and Washington D.C., only to be met with an onslaught of legal challenges.

In 2002 the Supreme Court ruled that voucher programs are not a violation of the religious establishment clause of the First Amendment. Although that issue has been settled, state courts have whittled away or restricted these programs at every turn. Teachers' unions have also spent millions of dollars to fight voucher program legislation and to campaign against them in statewide referendums.

It appears that limited voucher programs aimed at poor inner-

city students who are trapped in dysfunctional schools now have the best chance of succeeding. While middle-class evangelicals seemed supportive of vouchers early on, they now perceive them to be a threat to the independence of the many private religious schools that have sprung up in the last 20 years. Most middle class suburbanites already have the power of school choice because of their financial ability to move into districts with better schools.

Tax supported vouchers are still popular among the many free market conservatives who argue that competition in the educational marketplace would be good for children and for the public schools. They have also garnered grass root support from the African-American and Hispanic communities in the last decade. There are other ways to inject choice into our educational system, but it is clear to many that choice is needed now, especially for our most needy students.

Why Educational Choice?

Giving inner city parents a choice in where they send their children to school is critical if we hope to solve the crises in our cities' schools. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings puts it this way:

> *"Despite our best efforts, there are still vast inequities within our education system. In too many of our cities, the reality faced by minority and low-income kids is shocking. As you've heard, 15% of our high schools produce more than half of our dropouts. Of these dropout factories a majority of the students trapped in them are minorities, and their high school experience looks vastly different from what most kids encounter. They go to schools where trash litters the floors, where graffiti decorates the walls. . . where most freshmen enter unable to read or do math at an eighth grade-level, and where graduation is a 50/50 shot, or worse."*[{3}]

Why do many reformers believe that educational choice has the greatest potential to solve our nation's education problems? Referring to legislation passed in 2004 that provided the first federally funded choice scholarships for low income students in Washington D.C., Secretary of Education Rod Paige explained that:

> *"Educational choice is important for two reasons. First, it extends civil rights and social justice. Second, it enhances school effectiveness. The introduction of opportunity scholarships in the District comes fifty years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision. It comes 40 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demanded a full measure of the American promise. Opportunity scholarships help remove the chains of bureaucracy. They free low-income students to obtain a better education in a school of their choosing."{4}*

Studies have shown how dramatic changes can occur in cities that allow its parents choice. Writing about the longest voucher program in the nation, the *Wall Street Journal* declares:

> *"There's no question the program has been a boon to the city's underprivileged. A 2004 study of high school graduation rates by Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute found that students using vouchers to attend Milwaukee's private schools had a graduation rate of 64%, versus 36% for their public school counterparts. Harvard's Caroline Hoxby has shown that Milwaukee public schools have raised their standards in the wake of voucher competition."{5}*

Educational choice works because it puts power into the hands of the people who care most about our nation's children, their parents. It works because it increases the autonomy of school administrators so that they can provide the kind of education that the public wants. It works because it encourages learning communities of like-minded adults to work together to provide

the best learning environment possible.

Private Vouchers and Tax Credits

Although the press has focused on the legal battles surrounding the use of tax-supported educational vouchers to pay tuition at private religious schools, there is another type of voucher program that is helping thousands of children and continues to grow without legal controversy. There are now more than two dozen *private* voucher programs in cities across the United States. Millions of dollars are being raised by private citizens in order to offer vouchers to less fortunate children so that they can attend better schools.

In that late 1990's, John Walton of Wal-Mart fame, and Theodore Forstmann of Forstmann Little & Company decided to offer 1,000 scholarships to low income students in Washington D.C. With very little publicity they received over 8,000 applications. Sensing a real need, in 1998 they together donated $100 million towards a national program that would fund 40,000 scholarships inaugurating the Children's Scholarship Fund.{6} That got people's attention. Former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, Martin Luther King III, General Colin Powell, and numerous C.E.O.'s from some of America's best known corporations have served on the organization's board.

By September of 1998 the fund grew to $170 million. Eventually, the Children's Scholarship Fund received applications from 1.25 million children from 22,000 cities and towns in all fifty states.

Mr. Forstmann concluded that:

> *The parents of 1.25 million children put an end to the debate over whether low-income families want choice in education: They passionately, desperately, unequivocally do. Now it is up to the defenders of the status quo to tell them, and the millions they represent, why they cannot have it.{7}*

In 2007, the Children's Scholarship Fund gave vouchers to 29,000 students. The families receiving these scholarships earned an average of around $27,000 a year, and supplemented the scholarship with an additional $2,000 per student. These low income families have a strong desire to remove their children from their current schools and are willing to make a significant sacrifice to acquire a good education for their children.

State-sponsored tax credits are another alternative to tax-funded vouchers. They are popular because of they are simple to administrate; they have a relatively long history and a settled legal status. They have limited scope because not all states have an income tax and often it is the families who need help the most who do not benefit from tax credits because of their low tax liability.

Advocates of educational choice agree that it will take many different tactics to provide the freedom parents need to get the best education possible for their children.

Educational Freedom

In 2001, the Manhattan Institute released an interesting study concerning the idea of educational freedom. The study suggested a strong relationship between the amount of freedom a state gives parents in directing their children to a school of their choice and the level of academic achievement accomplished by those children.

Since education is primarily governed at the state level, it makes sense to measure educational freedom by state. In the study, a state's ranking is determined by how much freedom parents are given by its laws regulating vouchers, charter schools, home-schooling, choice within existing public schools, and tax credits allowed for education expenses.

According to the study, the most educationally free state is

Arizona. It gets the top spot because of its wide selection of charter schools and its tax credits for private school expenses. The least educationally free state is Hawaii. Hawaii scores lowest on the index because it has one large school district for the entire state, no charter schools, and it highly regulates home-schoolers. Utah is second to last because gives no assistance to those sending their children to private schools, has few charter schools, and has large centralized school districts.

The study concludes that "For many years education reformers have advocated strengthening accountability systems and expanding educational freedom. Our statistical models suggest that such reforms, where implemented, have yielded the academic improvements that reformers predicted."{8} For instance, a one-point increase in a state's freedom index would predict a 4% increase in that state's math test results indicated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Educational freedom received another boost in a study released in October 2007 by the Milton & Rose Friedman Foundation. The research concludes that "A large body of top-quality studies consistently shows that school choice produces higher academic achievement for the students who have the opportunity to use it. On this issue, the evidence supporting school choice is as strong as the evidence on any social policy question whatsoever."{9}

Freedom makes a difference in education. Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute writes, "Simply providing families with additional options in the education of their children has a larger independent effect on student achievement than increasing education spending or reducing class size… the magnitude of the benefit of education freedom for student learning is comparable to the benefit of significantly increasing median household income."{10}

Christians are called upon to love their neighbors, and their

neighbors' children, as themselves. If we are serious about helping our underprivileged neighbors, especially in our inner-cities schools, educational freedom through greater choice is a policy we can and should endorse.

Notes

1. www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/schoolchoice/. Accessed on 12/13/2007.
2. www.schoolchoiceinfo.org/facts/index.cfm?fl_id=1. Accessed on 12/17/2007.
3. www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/05/05092007.html. Accessed on 12/14/2007.
4. www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2004/01/01282004.html. Accessed on 12/14/2007.
5. This editorial appeared in the January 23, 2006 *Wall Street Journal*.
6. www.scholarshipfund.org/index.asp. Accessed on 12/17/2007.
7. Theodore J. Forstmann, "A Competitive Vision for American Education" *Imprimis*, September 1999, Vol. 28, #9, p. 2.
8. www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_24.htm. Accessed on 12/20/2007.
9. www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/downloadFile.do?id=255. Accessed on 12/20/2007.
10. www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_14.htm. Accessed on 12/20/2007.

© 2008 Probe Ministries

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.

© 2012 Probe Ministries

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

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

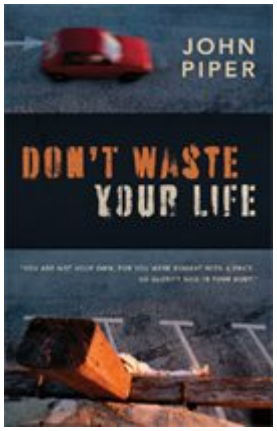
Surviving College Life is a really cool blog that's incredibly comprehensive. Not only will it be helpful as you prepare to arrive on campus. This will be something you'll find useful throughout your college years as you move from dorms to apartments, friendships to romances, and from major to major.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

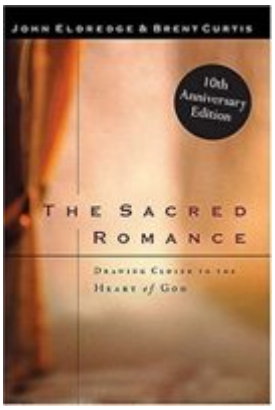


Don’t Waste Your Life

—John Piper

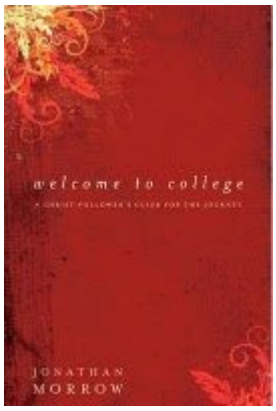
When Christ gave us real life, he gave our lives meaning and purpose. *Don’t Waste Your Life* is about living on purpose a life passionate for God and people.

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.

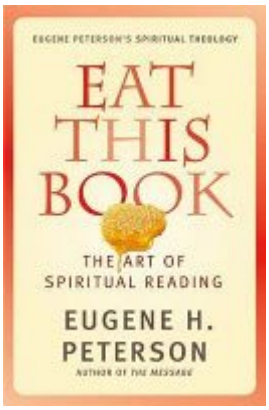


Welcome to College: A Christ-follower’s Guide for the Journey

—Jonathan Morrow

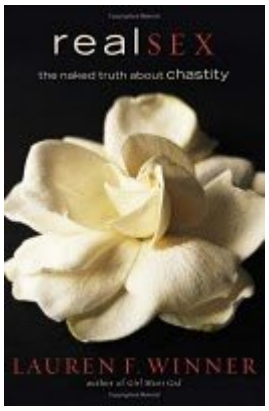
Welcome to College includes chapters on the problem of evil and suffering, Christology, ethics and much more. You will also find a broad collection of practical topics: health, sex and dating, finances, Internet use, alcohol. This book provides unique and much–needed help for navigating the head–spinning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

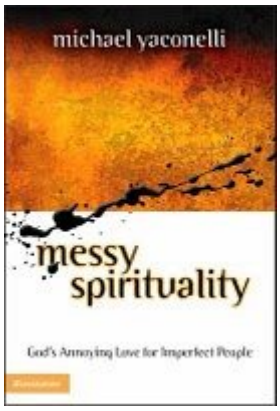


Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity

—Lauren F. Winner

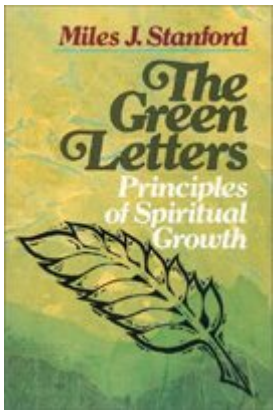
Winner talks about sex in a realistic way. She sorts through the confusing messages we hear about sex from both the world and the church, and helps us think about sex and romantic love within the big picture of God’s story. Real Sex provides biblical and practical guidance for unmarried Christians who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

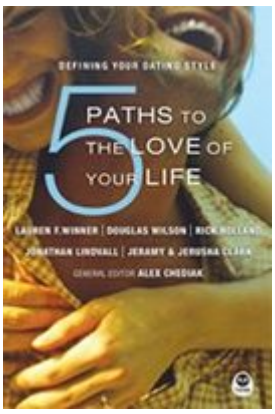


The Green Letters

–Miles J. Stanford

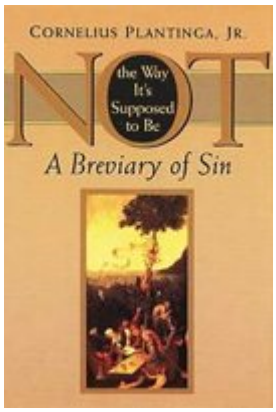
The Green Letters is about spiritual growth. It's one of those books you can pick and choose what you want to read by scanning over the Table of Contents; that is, the chapters don't necessarily have to be read in order. This book will challenge you to live less selfishly, or we could say, less as a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

© 2010 Probe Ministries

The Effect of Origins on Society

Why Is the Subject of Origins Important?

Every worldview addresses the question, "Where did we come from?" The Christian worldview says that we are a special part of creation made in the image of God. A materialistic worldview says that we are the product of natural selection and random mutations acting on organisms. The Christian view of origins is called Creation; the materialistic view of origins is called Darwinism. The Christian worldview is based on faith in the creative work of God of the Bible. The materialistic worldview is based on faith in the creative power of natural selection acting on mutations.

There are evidences for and against these worldviews from scientific research being conducted in the areas of intelligent design, evolutionary biology, genetics, mathematics, astronomy, and many other fields. However, people will often confuse the worldview with the scientific evidence. Worldviews are a way of explaining the evidence. For example, we see that during a drought birds with longer beaks are selected over birds with shorter beaks. This is an observation. Saying that this is evidence for natural selection's creative ability to make totally new types of creatures is an extrapolation based on a worldview. Just as there is a right and a wrong interpretation for observations, there are right and wrong worldviews. And one way to test for a worldview is whether or not it is livable.

So does your view of origins affect other areas of life than just science? Yes, these two views of origins have a profound effect on how we value people and how we view personhood and personal responsibility. Using John West's book *Darwin Day in America* as a resource, we will look at how the materialistic worldview has trickled down into areas of society that affect us every day.

West argues in his book that the logical end materialistic worldview leaves nothing for an ethical standard other than to survive. The materialistic worldview says that non-living chemicals came together to make genetic material which then made an organism and that organism evolved until we got human beings. This view claims that man is made from chemicals and is no more valuable than any other animal. The logical end to this perspective is that everything a man does is a result of his genes and his environment. He therefore has no choices or free will of his own. His actions are the result of natural selection acting on him. This has important consequences for how we deal with crime, personhood, the embryo, the infirmed, and education.

West says, "Darwin helped spark an intellectual revolution that sought to apply materialism to nearly every area of human endeavor. This new, thoroughly 'scientific' materialism affected the entire span of culture, from economics and politics to education and the arts".{1} Darwin published *Origin of Species* one hundred fifty years ago, but it is in the mid-twentieth century that we begin to see how his theory has trickled down into society.

Crime and Responsibility

How does a materialistic worldview affect society? For one thing, a Darwinian view of man has changed our criminal justice system.

How are the courts and science related? In our culture, the scientists are the holders of truth and the courts are the arbiters of law. And while the idea that law coincides with truth is good and even biblical, the idea that scientists, and only scientists, are the ones who dictate truth is a dangerous position. If the pervading worldview in science is materialism, then a materialistic view of man is reflected in the courts.

According to a materialistic worldview, man is the product of his genes and his environment with no real ability to act differently than what his genes and environment would have him do. If this is the case, then how can he be held responsible for his crimes? Why not just blame bad genes or a bad home life? Often this is what is argued in the courts.

West describes the crux of the problem. In order to provide protection and have an orderly society, the criminal justice system needs to punish wrong behavior. But from a materialistic worldview, there is no moral foundation for individual responsibility. A materialist perspective does not blame the individual but their genes or the way that they were raised (their environment). West outlines a history of criminals getting off in the name of very loose definitions of insanity, and other criminals undergoing treatment instead of punishment.{2} And the treatment, at times, amounts to something closer to coercion or torture.{3} Whether we are talking about being overly lenient by giving criminals excuses or coercing them to treatment, both diminish the value and dignity of the individual as a person.

The Christian view of man is that, although differences in our genetics or our environment may mean that we have different struggles or temptations than others, we are made in God's image. Therefore, just as God treats us with dignity by exacting punishment for our actions, so, too, do we treat people with inherent dignity by exacting punishment and allowing for atonement. The Darwinian view says that we are

not responsible because we are a product of our genes, but it also says that we are not redeemable because we will remain flawed.

Our entire criminal justice system is based on the idea that man can be held accountable for his crimes, that he has a choice in what he does. Furthermore, it is based on the inherent dignity that every individual has, so that a wrong done to one individual must result in the wrong-doer being punished. This maintains equal dignity and value in both individuals.{4} However, this system crumbles under a materialistic worldview.

So man is a product of his genes and his environment, a view which, taken to its logical end, has conflicting and dangerous results for exacting justice in society. Now we turn to how this view of man affects how we treat others that are different from us and how we define "normal."

Personhood

At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the rise of the scientific revolution, the idea of atonement for a guilty crime changed to an idea of fixing a broken machine. Criminals were treated as if they were machines with broken parts, instead of individuals with value and free will, because scientists had supposedly found a materialistic cause for crime. Something in their genetic code went wrong, so many were subjected to some kind of institutionalization or treatment. As John West points out in *Darwin Day in America,* the idea is if science can explain the problem, then science can fix it.{5} One way that scientists attempted to fix this problem was to try to breed out the bad traits. Scientists in the '30s, '40s and '50s reasoned that bad behavior, stupidity, and emotional instability were passed down from parent to child just like physical traits, and the only way to cleanse our society of these ailments was to sterilize those who carry

these traits.

It began with criminals being sterilized; then it turned to those who were mentally handicapped; then those who were deemed less intelligent, poor, or unproductive in society were sterilized. In hindsight it is easy to see how this slippery slope happened. One group changes the standards by which we value other groups. No longer is the foundation in the Judeo-Christian concept that all individuals have inherent value, but in the Darwinian concept that some are less valuable than others and deemed less worthy of life than the more "fit" in society. This was the breeding ground for what would become the eugenics movement. [Editor's note: Eugenics is the idea that the human race can be improved by careful selection of those who mate and produce offspring. The word comes from the Greek word *eugenes*, "well-born, of good stock," from *eu*– "good" + *genos* "birth."]

We saw the logical end of the eugenics movement in Nazi Germany. Darwinism was not necessarily the cause for Nazi Germany, but eugenics was justified with a Darwinian view of man. This is an important picture of how one can promote one's worldview (and one's prejudices) in the name of science. Darwinism allows for race discrimination and even genocide. As West points out, "Historically speaking, the eugenics movement is important because it was one of the first—and most powerful—efforts to use science to expand the power of the state over social matters. Eugenists claimed that their superior scientific knowledge trumped the beliefs of nonscientists, and so they should be allowed to design a truly scientific welfare policy."{6}

Today this attitude is still seen when doctors, lawyers, and family members evaluate individuals based on their physical abilities and their cost to society. Oftentimes individuals are assessed based on their perceived "quality of life." Unfortunately, this usually reflects what the doctor, lawyer, or family member would hate to have happen to themselves than

the actual desires of the individual in question. Judging others unworthy of life based on physical features or capabilities ignores the inherent value and dignity God has given man as being made in His image.

The Beginning and End of Life

We have looked at how a society that promotes a materialistic worldview results in a degraded view of personhood. This degraded view includes basing a person's value on how well they physically function and how much they cost society. However, from a Christian view, humans were created with a purpose and in the image of God. They have inherent value beyond their physical bodies.

How does a Darwinian view of man's origin affect the way we look at the most vulnerable in society—the embryo and the aged or infirmed?

West traces a historical record of the legalization of abortion and demonstrates why we have the debate about embryonic stem cell research today.{7} Darwinism is not the cause of the legalization of abortion and destruction of embryos, but it provided an ideology that allowed people to justify it. It began with a scientist named Haeckel who influenced Darwin. Haeckel discussed how all embryos go through stages of development and how the earliest stages look very similar to each other. In his famous drawings, he shows how a human embryo goes from a small fish-like creature that looks similar to other animal embryos, to a human-looking embryo. He said that the fetus goes through a mini version of evolutionary development.{8}

What conclusions were drawn from this? If the fetus is no more than a fish, then it is as ethical to discard it as it would be to discard a fish. The only problem with this idea is that it is now well-documented that Haeckel's drawings were faked,

and the similarities were more contrived than real. Despite this finding, people still latched on to the concept and refused to accept that the fetus does not go through evolutionary stages. It is from this concept that many justify early stage abortion and embryonic stem cell research; the clump of cells or the mass does not look human.{9} This is an example of basing a person's value on their physical appearance and function.

Today we not only see this idea played out in the unborn, but also in the elderly and the infirmed. Many family members and doctors elect to end someone's life because they have deemed them less valuable. Again, the basis of this is on how well they physically function. One group is putting value on another group.

Both of these examples demonstrate how our culture has bought into a materialistic worldview which devalues the person that does not have certain physical characteristics. As Christians we value human life and believe that the embryo, the aged, and the infirmed have inherent dignity despite how they might function or appear.

Education

We have been looking at how a Darwinian view of man led to a slow and steady dehumanization of man. Our view of origins affects other areas of life as well. In this section, we will address how a Darwinian view of man has influenced how we educate our children. A Darwinian view says that there is no absolute authority; there is merely survival of the fittest. In academics that means teaching based on what works, not on what is right.

One of the biggest influences on our educational system, both in public and private schools, has been John Dewey. As Nancy Pearcey points out in her book *Total Truth*, Dewey thought

education should be like biological evolution where students construct their own answers based on what works best. Pearcey calls this "a kind of mental adaptation to the environment."{10} It is easy to see how this leads to moral relativism. Students are not taught character or values. Instead, they learn that an idea or a concept is deemed valuable if it works, not if it is right. Teachers are taught in certification classes to guide students along and help them to come up with their own moral code. Teachers are not allowed to punish students for wrongdoing, because they have no moral basis to do so, but are still expected to have an orderly classroom. In some cases teachers are not permitted to give a failing grade to a student who is genuinely failing. Also they are not permitted to give A's to good students for fear that they may not continue putting forth effort. Students are stripped of the concept of an objective standard or absolute morals, and by the time they are high school seniors, they are more educated in how to play the system than in reading, writing, or arithmetic. This is the very fruit of Dewey's pragmatism, and it continues through the university level. When students are stripped of any set of beliefs and a moral foundation, they are left empty and ready to be filled with the pervading worldview of academia. What we end up with is a fully indoctrinated student with a materialistic worldview.{11}

Contemporary materialism's view of origins, known as Darwinism, has profound effects on our society. As Christians we need to be a light unto the world by showing that human beings are more than their genes and environment, that they have inherent value, and that there are moral foundations beyond survival of the fittest.

Notes

1. John West, *Darwin Day in America* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 41-42.
2. Ibid., 73.

3. Ibid., 79-101
4. For a good article on capital punishment and human dignity see Kerby Anderson, "Capital Punishment," Probe, 1992, www.probe.org/capital-punishment/.
5. West, *Darwin Day*, 80.
6. Ibid., 162.
7 . Ibid., 325-335.
8. See Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution* (Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 2000), chap. 5.
9. Ibid., 330.
10. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 239.
11. See Don Closson, "Humanist Psychology and Education" Probe, 1991, www.probe.org/humanistic-psychology-and-education/; Closson, "Grading America's Schools," Probe, 2002, www.probe.org/grading-americas-schools/; and Kerby Anderson, "Cultural Relativism," Probe, 2004, www.probe.org/cultural-relativism/.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Frasier Worldview Check

I got hoodwinked tonight.

I was watching re-runs of the old NBC television show Frasier—based on the minor character from *Cheers*, Frasier Crane—when I found myself agreeing with Frasier's words describing Judaism. It wasn't until later that night, as I passed those words through my worldview filter, that I came to realize something was wrong about Frasier's comments. Frasier (at least the writers) was not giving Judaism a fair shake.

In the episode, Frasier's son Freddy is celebrating his thirteenth birthday. Freddy's mother is Jewish, which makes Freddy Jewish as well. The thirteenth birthday is a special one for Jewish children; it is the point in their lives when they become adults. To commemorate their passage into adulthood, a celebration is in order: a *bar–mitzvah*.

Frasier's friend Roz knows that he is not Jewish, and asks him what that's like for him. His response is what hoodwinked me:

> *Roz: Is it weird to have a son brought up in a different religion from yours?*
>
> *Frasier: Not at all, Roz. It's a faith that espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. All values which I cherish.*

What tricked me was not what Frasier said but what he didn't say. Jewish culture definitely espouses love, compassion, duty, education, and art. I completely agree. Several friends who have helped me through dark times in my life have been Jewish. I feel a special affinity for the Jews as a Christian because I read the Hebrew Bible as a part of my own Christian Bible– essentially the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

But Frasier made no mention of the Hebrew God, who is the central figure of their faith. He is their Creator, Sustainer, Protector, and Savior. The Hebrew Bible is the story of this God and his special, chosen people. How then could Frasier have completely ignored Him?

To be fair, Frasier was merely speaking about the points of Judaism with which he agrees. We all understand that intuitively as soon as we read the dialogue. However, if these aspects of love, compassion, duty, education, and art are the only elements of Judaism that resonate with him, then I suspect he does not truly identify with the heart of the

Hebrew faith because he has not mentioned anything about their God.

Granted, this represents one comment in one episode. However, there may be something else going on beneath Frasier's words. When asked about the apparent conflict between Frasier's religious beliefs and his son's, in some sense he responds by saying that they are not so different. But he only says they are not so different in those five specific aspects: love, compassion, duty, education, and art. If he's saying that's all there is to Judaism, then I would have to disagree.

Philosophers have a fancy name for what Frasier did: *reductionism*. He has reduced Judaism down to smaller constituent parts which, when reassembled, do not recreate the whole. It seems unfair to equate Judaism solely with these five aspects because many other causes, beliefs, or even organizations can be characterized as espousing precisely the same principles, but not be Jewish in the least.

For example, Ancient Greece had a culture that espoused all such principles, yet it had no particular religious affiliation at all. Culturally we could also consider Italy during the Renaissance, or even the Chinese under the Tang dynasty.

Yet, cultures like these that valued love, compassion, duty, education, and art are in other ways very dissimilar to Judaism. Similarities do not equate to identity. That is, just because a religion or culture shares certain attributes does not mean that they are the same in essence. However, *reductionism* falsely makes them seem equivalent just because they share some traits.

So there must be more to Judaism than just these five aspects mentioned by Frasier.

Frasier's religious synopsis may not seem like a very big deal because it is, after all, only one statement. But this one

sentence is not what bothers me. I run across people making claims like these all the time in conversation, in magazines, news, practically everywhere. It's sloppy thinking, really. I just want to encourage us not to slip into *reductionism* ourselves—and further, to be even more careful about what we take in, keeping that worldview filter on at all times.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

A President's Educational Choice

An Important Choice

With each presidential election Americans are called to reflect upon public policy, ranging from military funding to education reform. Once the new president is chosen, everyone looks for evidence that he will move the federal bureaucracy in a direction favorable to their own agenda.

When it comes to education, President Obama has been difficult to figure out. In early speeches he seemed to favor dramatic reform. During the campaign he said:

> *We need a new vision for a 21st century education – one where we aren't just supporting existing schools, but spurring innovation; where we're not just investing more money, but demanding more reform; where parents take responsibility for their children's success; where our schools and government are accountable for results; where we're recruiting, retaining, and rewarding an army of new teachers, and students are excited to learn because they're attending*

> *schools of the future; and where we expect all our children not only to graduate high school, but to graduate college and get a good paying job.{1}*

Later, Obama appeared to move closer to those who already hold sway over how our schools operate, especially the teachers unions. An indication of this trend was the sound of relief voiced by Marty Hittelman, president of the California Federation of Teachers, who said, "It's such a clear change from what we've had. . . . Someone who's friendly to labor. . . . Someone who wants to work with teachers."{2} Obama has also signaled encouragement to the unions by appointing a teacher-friendly Stanford University professor to lead his education transition team.

But sometimes personal action speaks louder than political appointments. Our new president has decided to send his two children, Malia Anne and Natasha, to a well known private school in Washington, D.C. The Obama children will attend Sidwell Friends School, a private Quaker affiliated school that charges $29,000 a year per student. Some are criticizing the Obama family for not supporting the local public schools. As a supporter of educational freedom, and choice, I personally have no problem with the president choosing the best educational setting for his children. I would do the same.

What interests me is what this choice says about President Obama's thoughts regarding educational excellence. Sidwell Friends School violates key principles that the teachers unions and other public school supporters tell us are necessary elements for excellent schools, programs and policies that reformers insist taxpayers should be providing for every student in America.

Ensuring an adequate education for all of our children is a matter of justice that Christians should be concerned about.

In what follows I will look at these so-called educational necessities the teachers unions and other public school supporters demand.

What Sidwell Needs

President Obama's decision to place his daughters in Sidwell reveals something about what he thinks it takes to provide a superior education. Choosing this expensive private school raises interesting questions about President Obama's support of what might be called the "common wisdom" that public school leaders and teachers unions tell us is necessary for good schools.

Much of the following was brought to my attention by Mike Antonucci who writes a monthly newsletter for those who are concerned about education in America and particularly the role that the unions play in shaping it. Antonucci points out six areas in which the Sidwell School might be seen as deficient by our leading reformers and especially by the teachers unions.

According to the National Education Association, the largest teachers union in the country, the first deficiency at Sidwell is obvious. On its web site the NEA argues that "the attainment and exercise of collective bargaining rights are essential to the promotion of education employee and student needs in society."{3} In other words, the school simply must be unionized. How can Sidwell School hope to effectively educate students without a collective bargaining agreement? It boggles the mind to think that they can educate President Obama's children without such necessities as union agency fees, binding arbitration, grievance procedures, and most important, teachers strikes!

How can real education occur in the absence of an angry battle between a well financed teachers union and a harried

entrenched school administration? Can real learning happen in the absence of endless hours of negotiations over every aspect of the curriculum, the daily schedule, and teacher placement? Doesn't the president know that a hostile, confrontational working environment actually improves the educational process?

In addition to this remarkable neglect, the Sidwell School forces its teachers to pay between ten and forty percent of their health care insurance premiums, contribute towards their own retirement plan, and almost unbelievably receive only two personal days off per school year. Barbaric! Everyone knows that teachers are only concerned about compensation and benefits and if they do not receive an amount above the median level paid out by other schools of similar size, they simply can't function. These teachers are obviously being coerced to remain at this school. And to think that some have suggested that the opportunity to work with motivated students and supportive parents in building a strong learning community might be more important than financial rewards.

More Problems with Sidwell

A key ingredient missing from the Sidwell experience will be an appropriate level of diversity. To many, diversity has become the ultimate good in education. Millions upon millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent to create highly diverse student bodies across the nation. Without a high level of diversity, it's argued, students will not develop the necessary degree of tolerance, both for people and ideas, needed for our society to prosper or even exist into the future. A diversity deficit might result in the president's children coming to the frightening conclusion that truth itself isn't diverse and that perhaps we should not accept all ideas equally.

Although the Sidwell School has a significant level of diversity – thirty-nine percent of the students are part of an

ethnic or racial minority group – Washington D. C. public schools are ninety-five percent ethnic and racial minorities. How can the president send his children to a learning environment that is so far behind the level of essential diversity prominent in our capitol's public schools? If some diversity is good, isn't more diversity better?

However, this deficit of diversity pales in comparison to the next problem. The Sidwell School is a Quaker institution. It has mandatory weekly worship meetings for all its students, including the president's children. This practice goes far beyond the legitimate academic objective of learning the history of religious traditions; it requires students to participate in a religious activity.

The official National Education Association's Web site makes it clear that "encouraging or compelling students to participate in any religious activity, such as prayer, during any type of holiday festivity or classroom activity is forbidden."{4} Now, if such activity is harmful to our public school students, does it make sense to expose the president's children to them?

The NEA adds that while students may study various religious expressions and practices, they may do so "as long as schools make sure different faiths are represented in school-wide or classroom activities."{5} Does Sidwell promote Islamic or Wiccan worship? Is our president setting a good example by allowing his children to be taught in such an intolerant setting?

Sidwell's Curriculum

Here's another problem. It appears that Sidwell is kind of old fashioned when it comes to its curriculum. Its Web site says, "We believe that to be effective, education must be founded on secure mastery of basic skills . . . We place strong emphasis

on reading, personal expression of ideas through speaking and writing, and the mastery of computational and problem solving skills. We also encourage scientific exploration, artistic creativity, physical activity, second language acquisition."{6} Basic skills? Mastery learning? Isn't this a throwback to the education of the nineteenth century?

In the middle school, Sidwell's history curriculum says that "Each history course is designed to provide students with a sound foundation of knowledge in a given subject area and to develop research, writing and interpretive skills."{7} To many modern educators, this focus on acquiring information and developing mastery of essential skills is reminiscent of educational policies that have been out of vogue for decades.

Professional educators tend to endorse something called the Progressive Education Movement. This movement emphasized a "naturalistic," "project-oriented," "hands-on," "critical-thinking" curriculum and "democratic" education policies endorsed by the philosopher John Dewey.{8} Beginning early in the twentieth century, educators challenged the emphasis on subject matter and have attempted to replace it with what might be called the "tool" metaphor for learning.

The "tool" metaphor argues that students' minds shouldn't be filled with lots of facts, but instead should be taught how to learn. Although various arguments are used to promote this view, the one most often heard goes something like this: "Since knowledge is growing so quickly – in fact it's exploding – we need to teach kids how to learn, not a bunch of facts that will quickly become outdated." Education historian Lawrence Cremin writes that our elementary schools have been dominated by this metaphor since the 1960s, and that our secondary schools are not far behind.{9} The result of this monopoly has been a reduction of what might be called "intellectual capital," an agreed upon set of necessary facts that all well educated people should possess.

The Sidwell School seems to believe that this so called intellectual capital is important. By stressing the acquisition of key information in its curriculum it is revealing a more traditional rather than progressive education. Can this antiquated curriculum possibly prepare the Obama children for the rapid changes of the twenty-first century?

Educational Excellence

It seems, then, that the Sidwell Friends School chosen by the Obama family for their daughters violates many of what is considered to be the “best practices” in the public school sector.

On the other hand, it represents many of the factors that we know make for a superior learning environment. Almost twenty years ago the Brookings Institution published a book that made a powerful argument regarding what makes for an effective school and what doesn’t.{10} The author’s conclusions were really not that surprising. In a nutshell they found that bureaucracy kills, and if public schools are anything they are bureaucratic. In fact, the study argued that private schools are usually more effective simply because they have greater autonomy than public schools.

Exercising this autonomy begins with an educational leader. The role of a private school headmaster is often quite different from the public school equivalent, the principal. The headmaster has much more autonomy in fashioning the educational vision for his school as well as the authority for executing it. This includes shaping the curriculum and hiring and firing teachers based on their effectiveness and support for the school’s program. In the end, private school leaders have much greater power to fashion the kind of educational community they envision than do public school administrators.

Private school leaders also enjoy the freedom to create a disciplined environment necessary for learning to occur. Because parents have freely chosen a private school for their children to attend, they have already bought into the way the school chooses to structure its students' time and how it deals with distractions to learning. Parents of private school children tend to be much more supportive of the school's teachers and administrators as a result. This is not to say that private schools always get it right when establishing a disciplined learning environment, but parents always have the option of pulling out if they become disenchanted with the program. This educational choice both empowers private schools and encourages change as well. Parents vote for the programs that work and take their funds elsewhere when they feel the school is not a good fit for their children. Successful schools are rewarded; others are encouraged to change.

Private schools succeed when the headmaster, teachers, parents, and children have worked together to create a learning community. As simple as this sounds, it can be life changing for the students involved. Even students from our most challenging urban environments have benefitted from schools that have been freed from their bureaucratic straitjackets. If we hope to impact our most needy students in this country, we will do so by encouraging policies that increase the autonomy of school leaders and empower parents by giving them the kind of educational choice that President Obama enjoyed when deciding to send his children to the Sidwell Friends School.

Notes

1. Dan Lips and Jennifer A. Marshall, "Transforming and Improving American Education: A Memo to President-elect Obama," The Heritage Foundation online, December 9, 2008, www.heritage.org/Research/Education/sr32.cfm.
2. Nanette Asimov, "Stanford professor leads Obama education transition team," SFGate, online home of the San Francisco

Chronicle, November 22, 2008, www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/11/21/BANK140G28.DTL.
3. EIA Communiqué, November 24, 2008, www.eiaonline.com/archives/20081124.htm
4. Tim Walker, "Merry…? Happy…?" National Education Association online, www.nea.org/home/15287.htm.
5. Ibid.
6. Sidwell Friends School, Lower School Philosophy, www.sidwell.edu/lower_school/academics.asp.
7. Sidwell Friends School, Departments, www.sidwell.edu/upper_school/departments.asp.
8. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 7.
9 . Ibid., 49.
10. John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets & America's Schools* (The Brookings Institution, 1990)

© 2009 Probe Ministries