“Should Christians be Studying Literature and History from Secular Textbooks?”

After homeschooling my children for 5 years we were led to put them into our church’s Christian school. My question for you has to do with our school’s adoption of a few textbooks that are not from the Christian worldview and how we are supposed to train our children with these books.

My 5th grade daughter’s textbook is politically correct, multicultural and full of pictures, graphs and charts. The content that is there is slim and boring; in other words, “dumbed down.” The school adopted it for reasons that it is popular and they want the kids to do well on the SAT’s.

The 6th to 8th grade literature textbooks changed from Bob Jones (traditional Christian) to McDougal Littell (secular). The stories in the new textbooks are awful. Most of the authors I have never heard of and from their biographies in the textbook, they do not embrace a Christian worldview. Their stories are negative, immoral, and depressing. Again I believe that our school adopted these books because they are popular, may cause the kids to do better on the standardized tests and they offer a diverse view of the world.

On that last point is where I am having the most problem. The school says that they will combat the negative and immoral stories with Biblical principles to help the children defend their faith. There is no written teacher or student materials, however. Further, when I ask my daughter about the teacher’s rebuttal from a Christian worldview she could not explain to me what the teacher had said in class. I can’t say I blame her

in that she is only 11 years old.

One story in her 6th grade textbook is called "Scout's Honor" by Avi. This so-called comedy is about three arrogant Boy Scouts that earn a badge by lying, cheating and stealing. This story not only depicts the Boy Scouts in a bad light – have you heard about their pro-traditional family stand which they took recently – but it promotes the path of the ends justifying the means.

Should Christians be studying literature and history from secular textbooks? Are the school's arguments valid in that the immoral readings can be used as a apologetics-type course? What is the best way to train our children to respond to immoral behavior? Do we start apologetics in the 6th grade, 7th grade, or 8th grade in this manner? Is there another way? Are we sheltering the kids too much by not letting them read the works of the world and them tempering them in Biblical truth?

You have touched on one of the most important questions for Christian educators. Part of an answer to your question includes the importance of age appropriateness. I believe that the younger children are, the more vital it is that we give them an uncompromised Christian perspective. As they grow older and can understand more complex or abstract issues it becomes important to introduce them to other worldviews. This is dangerous for children who have yet to understand that there is a spiritual and intellectual battle going on in our society and in the world. However, if we never introduce them to other perspectives while still under Christian instruction they are open to discouragement and confusion when exposed to opposing ideas in college or later in life. The point is that when students are mature enough they should encounter difficult ideas under the direction of capable Christian instructors. This often acts as an inoculation against discouragement later.

The use of secular textbooks also depends on the subject matter at hand. A good math text from any source can be integrated into a Christian classroom by an alert instructor without much concern. History and literature texts provide a much more difficult challenge. I would want to know that considerable time had been spent on worldview instruction beforehand. Students must be able to comprehend the different faith presuppositions being made by the different worldviews in order to evaluate works of literature sufficiently. I am not against a multicultural component in history and literature as long as it is genuinely attempting to inform students about other cultures belief systems and traditions. Attempts to make all belief systems or worldviews morally equivalent has to be rejected and shown to be invalid to the students, as does religious pluralism. Offering a multicultural curriculum simply to comply with state or testing standards is not a sufficient cause. The material should be as inclusive as truth demands and must be interpreted through a Christian worldview.

I do not doubt that some middle school students are capable of understanding the worldview issues at hand and that they can benefit from reading and discussing works that challenge the Christian perspective. However, the instructor should be very careful to introduce this material only after properly preparing the students and to maintain a healthy balance between works that reinforce the students faith and those that present a challenge to it. Those schools who offer a classical approach (the trivium) to Christian schooling usually note that the middle school years are ideal for introducing the instruction of logic and debating skills (dialectic phase). Materials that help accomplish this instruction often must include opposing viewpoints.

Merely offering students a diverse view of the world does not appear to me to be a legitimate goal of Christian education. Introducing students to various perspectives in order to

evaluate them in light of revealed truth and to become a more effective ambassador for Gods Kingdom might be more appropriate.

Make sure that when you voice your concerns to your childs teacher that you are ready to listen carefully to his or her response. If you have to take up the matter with the schools administration, do so in a manner that will benefit the school in the long run.

I hope this is of some help.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

Educational Opportunity

What Produces Effective Education?

Parents want a good education for their children. Some may have greater resources or a more precise picture of how to accomplish their goal, but most parents in our society are aware that a good education is fundamental to financial, professional, and personal success. If we can assume that this is true, why is it that so many of our students are doing so poorly? Many feel that poverty, crime, and the breakdown of the family are an important part of the answer. In fact, research consistently reveals that parental income and educational success are the best indicators for predicting the educational achievement of a child. Unfortunately, this is not something that schools can impact easily.

Recent research has discovered that after the socio-economic well-being of the parents, the next most important variable predicting student success is the way in which a school is organized. Research has also discovered that effective schools have similar traits. Such schools have strong educational leaders who possess a clear vision of what it means to be an educated person and who have the authority to assemble a staff of like-minded teachers. These schools set high academic standards and encourage the belief that, with few exceptions, children are capable of achieving at high levels. They encourage collegial and professional staff relationships, and establish a disciplined, and drug-free, educational environment.

An example of an effective school, in one of the most difficult of circumstances, is the Westside Preparatory School in Chicago. Marva Collins has proven that when these criteria are met students from low income, single-parent families can achieve. In describing her inner city program she states that, “The expectations are as high here as in the most nurtured suburban area.”(1) Her motto for the children is that, “we are known by our deeds, not our needs.”

If we know what makes a school effective, how do we go about converting the vast number of ineffective schools, many of which are in our nations cities? The expensive reforms of the last few decades have yielded marginal results. Between 1960 and 1990 a great deal of money and effort went into school reforms. Total expenditures went from 63 billion to 207 billion in constant dollars.

During the period of steepest decline in student performance, the decade of the 70s, per-pupil expenditures increased by 44% in real terms. Much of the money went towards two areas often noted as fundamental to better schools: teachers salaries, which increased

faster than any other occupation in the last two decades, and towards reducing class size. Most indicators, including SAT scores,
reflect little increase in student achievement as a result of these types of reforms. These efforts failed to produce effective
schools.

In their recent book *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, John Chubb and Terry Moe argue that the greatest hindrance to having effective schools is bureaucracy. Conversely, the most important ingredient for creating effective schools is autonomy. Few public schools have autonomy, many private schools do. The key then to educational reform is to find a mechanism for creating school autonomy while maintaining some form of accountability.

The One Best System?

Since most Americans understand the need for a good education and more money than ever is being devoted to that end, why are we not more successful in educating our children, especially in urban areas?

Chubb and Moe argue further that government financed schools are by nature bureaucratic and ineffective. The current democratic system of governing our schools exposes them to special interest groups at the local, state, and federal levels. Everything from AIDS education to bi-lingual programs have their lobbyists advocating program expansion and higher spending. Local school boards, state legislators, and the federal government respond by enacting regulations that local schools are required to observe. Instead of being an educational leader, the local principal often becomes a middle manager, much more concerned about following regulations than enacting a personal vision of educational excellence.

One recommended reform aimed at increasing autonomy and

accountability in schools is a voucher plan. According to Chubb and Moe, a voucher plan promises much better results because it inverts the way schools are controlled. Decision-making authority would be decentralized, returning local principals to the role of educational leader. The influence of outside interest groups like unions and state legislatures would be diminished. Schools would be held accountable by the market system; if they fail to attract students they will go out of business.

The concept of a voucher plan is relatively simple. The government would determine how much money it is willing to spend per student in the state or district. Parents would then receive a voucher for that amount for each of their children. Once a school is selected by the parents the school redeems the voucher for state funds.

A key attribute of vouchers is that they give parents in our worst school districts a choice of where to send their children. If local public schools are dangerous and fail to educate, a choice or voucher plan gives parents the ability to go elsewhere. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is an example of an urban center which has adopted a choice mechanism for school reform. Thousands of economically disadvantaged students are receiving vouchers of up to $1000 per year of public money to attend private schools. Over 1000 students are on a waiting list for future spots, mainly because the program has exempted religious schools from participating, an issue that is now in court.

Although attempts to enact statewide voucher plans in Colorado and California have failed by more than a two to one margin, many are optimistic that some form of choice will be implemented by a state soon. The next attempt will probably be a more limited program aimed at disadvantaged students. The

goal of reformers is not to replace public schools, but to make them better. Competition will cause schools to become more responsive to the parents they are serving rather than to outside interest groups.

Myths About Choice

Schools become more effective when they are autonomous from bureaucratic regulations. Educational choice via vouchers has been suggested by reformers on both sides of the political fence as the best way to produce autonomous schools and thus more effective schools.

What then is blocking the school choice reform movement? The greatest opposition to vouchers has come from the teacher's unions: the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Keith Geiger, NEA president has said, "Free market economics works well for breakfast cereals, but not for schools in a democratic society. Market-driven school choice would create an inequitable, elitist educational system."(2) The NEA has worked hard and spent large sums of money to defeat choice legislation in Colorado and California. Let's consider some of the specific reasons given by those opposing vouchers.

One argument often heard is that vouchers will undermine the unity of America which was created and has been maintained by tax- supported common schools. The original ideal espoused by Horace Mann and others was that students of all socio-economic classes would be schooled together and that this would create mutual respect. Unfortunately, sociologist James Coleman and others have pointed out that this has not become a reality. Public schools are extremely segregated, by race and economics. The wealthy are able to purchase homes in elite suburban school districts, others are trapped in schools that are ineffective and often dangerous. Choice would actually help to re-create the common school notion. Parents could decide where to place their children in school regardless of

geography and, as a result, the schools would become more accountable to local control.

Another criticism against choice might be called the Incompetent Parent Argument. Critics feel that parents of minority or lower-income students will not know the difference between good schools and poor ones, thus they will get stuck in second-rate schools. They argue that the best students will be siphoned off and the difficult students will remain creating a two-tiered education system. Others are afraid that poor parents are not used to making important decisions or will make a schooling choice based on athletics rather than academics.

In response, it must be noted that today's public schools are about as unequal as they can get. Jonathan Kozal's book *Savage Inequalities* has documented this fact dramatically. Experience indicates that choice reduces this inequality. Magnet schools have been touted for their ability to attract diverse students bodies and have been achieving better results in over 100 cities nationwide. Choice carries this concept one step further.

Actually, political scientist Lawrence Mead has found that the poor respond well and choose wisely when given the power to make important decisions concerning their children's education. Those who don't participate will be assigned a school, as they are today.

More Myths About Choice

Senator Edward Kennedy has stated that educational choice will be "a death sentence for public schools struggling to serve disadvantaged students, draining all good students out of poor schools."(3) This Selectivity Argument is one of the most used criticisms against private schools and choice.

It is true that many private schools have high standards for admissions. But many also have been serving the disadvantaged for years. Catholic schools have been open to the needs of urban city children for decades, and recently, private schools have opened for students who have failed, or been failed by the public schools—in other words, the hard cases. The Varnett School in Houston is an example, as is the work of Marva Collins in Chicago. Sociologist James Coleman argues that Catholic schools have succeeded in raising the academic achievement of students that do poorly in public schools, including Blacks, Hispanics, and a variety of children from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

Another concern many have about vouchers might be called the Radical Schools Scare. Past California school superintendent Bill Honig writes that choice, "opens the door to cult schools."(4) He also argues that by placing the desires of parents over the needs of children we encourage societal tribalism and schools that will teach astrology or creationism instead of science.

Will there be a market for schools that are somehow bizarre or extremist? Private colleges in America are schools of choice, receive government funds, and are considered world class. Having to compete for existence quickly weeds out schools that fail to educate. Of course, any choice plan would allow the government to protect parents against educational fraud and against schools that fail to do what they advertise they will do. Although one wonders why this standard doesn't apply to many of our public schools today.

In many minds, the idea that tax money might end up in the hands of a Christian school is enough to cancel any choice plan. To them,

this represents a clear violation of church-state separation. In fact, the church-state argument is not a very strong one. According
to Michael McConnell, a law professor at the University of Chicago, the federal government does not maintain a very high wall of
separation when it comes to education. “The federal government already provides Pell grants to students at private, religious affiliated colleges” and “the GI Bill even covers tuition at seminaries.”(5) Lawrence Tribe, a liberal constitutional law professor at Harvard’s Law School, states that a “reasonably well-designed” choice plan would not necessarily violate the separation of church and state.

Many Christians feel that government intervention will follow public vouchers. But even if Christian schools refuse to participate, many other children will benefit from new, more effective schools, which will be competing for their tuition vouchers—schools that Christians may begin as a ministry to those suffering in our troubled cities.

Other Mechanisms For Creating Effective Schools

The threat of vouchers has resulted in the passing of charter school legislation in a number of states. In 1993, Colorado passed the Charter Schools Act which allows the creation of publicly funded schools operated by parents, teachers, and/or community members under a charter or contract with a local school district. A charter school is defined by the legislature as a “semi-autonomous public school of choice within a school district.” Legislators have recognized that for schools to be effective they must be autonomous. As a result, charter schools can request waivers from district and state regulations that interfere with their vision.

California and Minnesota have also passed charter legislation.

Minnesota's program is a good example of why charter laws are more a political response to the voucher threat than a real attempt to free schools from excessive bureaucracy. Their charter schools must
be started by licensed teachers who must comprise a majority of the board. They must also meet state education standards called
outcomes. Charter schools may establish their own budget and establish curricula, but the goals of individual schools will be
dictated by the state. The state-wide teacher union would be a powerful force within these teacher-controlled schools.

Another plan for creating more effective schools is centered around private vouchers. In 1991 J. Patrick Rooney, Chairman of the
Board of the Golden Rule Insurance Company convinced his organization to pledge $1.2 million for the next three years to fund half the private school tuition for approximately 500 Indianapolis students. To qualify, the students must be eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches according to federal guidelines. By 1993 the program had placed over 1000 students in eighty schools.

Inspired by Mr. Rooney's concept, Dr. James R. Leininger of San Antonio created the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation which has gathered $1.5 million in pledges from various Texas businesses. Off-shoot groups are starting in Austin, Albany, Denver, Phoenix, and Dallas. The Center for the study of Education Reform at the University of North Texas has conducted a analysis on the effects of these private voucher initiatives and found that parents are extremely satisfied with the program even though they only fund one half the cost of their children's private education.

Although charter schools and private choice programs both attempt to create more effective schools by encouraging autonomy, both ideas have limitations. Charter school's

survival depends on the very bureaucracy that creates ineffective schools, and private vouchers are limited to the good will of corporations willing to invest in them. This leaves publicly funded choice through vouchers as the best hope for real change in schooling for most children.

Our interest in this debate over educational reform should not be driven by our own family's educational needs alone. God told His
people, while captive in Babylon, to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (Jer. 29:7). Thus, the welfare of all children in our nation should be our concern.

Notes

1. Cohen, Deborah I. "Streets of Despair," *Education Week*, 1 December 1993, p. 28.
2. Jeanne Allen, *Nine Lies About School Choice: Answering the Critics*, The Center for Educational Reform, Washington, D.C.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

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Can Western-style Education Transform the Middle East?

Dear Probe reader,

A highlight of my recent tour of Jordan—a land teeming with biblical history—was visiting King's Academy. Jordan's new

prep school emphasizes critical thinking over rote learning, teaching students not *what* to think but *how* to think. Could it become a model to train a new generation of Middle Eastern leaders to shake hands with each other and the West?

As you analyze your world through biblical lenses, it's important to be aware of significant global developments. King's Academy has garnered considerable attention among US and international media:

> *"Rather revolutionary" (TIME)*
>
> *"What could be more important in the Middle East than educating open-minded future leaders?" (The Sunday Times [London] op-ed)*
>
> *"Bringing the best of western education to the Middle East." (NPR)*
>
> *"There is a crisis in Arab education. This school [is] about the future—trying to pull an education system into the 21st Century—to build bridges between clashing cultures." (CBS-TV News)*

Biblical worldview, of course, promotes careful, critical thinking. Many westerners are unaware of how lack of critical thinking permeates Middle Eastern education and, hence, influences international relations. This piece aims to expand readers' geopolitical understanding. And, alas, too many western readers lack critical thinking themselves, so this uses current news to help focus attention on that biblical value, a crucial one if we are to communicate cross culturally.

As are most of my shorter articles on the Probe Ministries website, this is an op-ed written for secular newspapers. I'm honored that you might read it and hope you find it useful.

Warm regards,

Rusty Wright

If you only learn to repeat what you've been taught—and not to think for yourself—you may be ill prepared to vote.

That's the lesson the Jerusalem-born librarian conveyed as we sat in her office in a brand new boarding school near Madaba, Jordan. When Afaf Kazimi moved to Jordan many years ago and could vote for the first time, she simply cast her ballot on another's recommendation without knowing much about the candidate. I voted for the wrong person, she concluded in hindsight.

Much of her early school education had involved rote memorization—learning facts for tests, as is common in the Middle East—and had lacked training in critical thinking, skills she developed later. Now she's excited to be part of a new experiment that blends Western analytical emphases with traditional Arab culture, helping students avoid the educational path she and others had to take.

Arab Preppies

Jordan's King's Academy opened in 2007 with goals of helping students from many nations and different religious backgrounds learn not *what* to think but *how* to think. Patterned after Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts, King Abdullah's alma mater, King's looks much like a New England prep school. Think *Dead Poets Society* or *The Emperors Club*, coed and transplanted to a desert oasis.

Students wear preppie blue blazers and ties, khaki trousers. Many live in dormitories, with faculty house parents. They have service responsibilities in the dining hall and community.

Sports aim to cultivate teamwork and discipline. An honor code is being developed. Course offerings involve the humanities, social sciences and hard sciences and include studies in Islam, Christianity, world religions, communication, rhetoric and ethics. Financial aid aims for socioeconomic diversity. Courses are taught in English and Arabic.

King Abdulla's Deerfield experience was formative in his young life. It developed lasting relationships. He's a friend of the West. Jordan has led efforts to renounce religious extremism and help religions coexist peacefully. King's Academy hopes its multinational faculty will train future leaders for the Middle East and beyond.

Critical Thinking

Since I attended Choate, Deerfield's peer (and, my classmates would want me to emphasize, chief rival), I'm especially interested in this Jordanian experiment. I'm grateful that I learned early to think critically and to ask lots of questions. King's appears eager to cultivate inquisitive minds.

A poster of William Shakespeare hung in the King's library along with promotion for J.R.R. Tolkien and the *International Herald Tribune*. Broad reading—especially of writers with whom you disagree—can facilitate learning and enhance communication. Intelligent people are always ready to learn, affirms an ancient proverb. Their ears are open for knowledge (Proverbs 18:15 NLT). How much better to get wisdom than gold, and good judgment than silver! claims another (Proverbs 16:16 NLT).

Logical, analytical thinking is, of course, crucial for healthy societies. Sloppy logic can be amusing or devastating: All fish swim. I swim. Therefore, I am a fish. Somewhat similar illogic appears in numerous aberrations: Muslim extremists threaten Western society. Omar is a Muslim. So Omar

is a threat to me. Or, American foreign policy undermines my country. You're an American. Thus, you're my enemy. Shallow thinkers can turn illogic into dogma and breed fanaticism.

Of course, no school will produce perfect students. George W. Bush's critics might sometimes wonder if his Andover education taught him to think clearly. And if Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had attended Andover, would he and Bush get along? Well, maybe. But please, dont expect miracles.

King Abdullah's promising educational venture deserves close scrutiny. Could it become a model to train a new generation of Middle Eastern leaders to shake hands with each other and the West?

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Education Myths

Don Closson offers 5 myths about education commonly held by the American public, from a Christian perspective. These myths include neutrality, more money is the solution, teachers are underpaid and school choice harms public education.

The Myth of Neutrality

Most of us assume that those involved with our public schools have at least one thing in common: the belief that the kids come first. This assumption allows us to believe that a kind of neutrality exists among the various participating parties. Since they all have the best interests of our children in mind, we can trust their motives and their actions. It also leads some to believe that there is no place for politics in schools; again, thanks to the myth of neutrality.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that no such neutrality exists. Our schools are highly political and are a battle ground for the various groups hoping to cash in on the huge amount of money Americans spend on public schools every year. Politics is all about deciding how our tax monies will be distributed, who gets what resources, when, and how. In the 2003-04 school year, America spent over $500 billion on public schools with about 60 percent of that amount going to actual classroom expenses. But even though we spend more on public education than any other industrialized nation, our schools continue to fail to adequately educate those who are most in need of a good education: our inner city students.

Despite being in an almost constant state of reform, the school districts in our largest cities perform poorly. In New York schools, only 18 percent of children receive a Regents Diploma after four years of high school. Those numbers fall to 10 percent for black and Hispanic students. Yet year after year, regardless of their performance teachers, principals, and central office staff cash their paychecks. Teachers unions, textbook publishers, and even colleges and universities that earn millions training and retraining teachers, thrive on their connection to the annual education budgets of our nation's cities. As New York Post columnist Bob McManus once put it: "This is the New York City public school system, after all, where power comes first and kids come last—but where money matters most of all."{1}

The entrenched bureaucracy that has grown up around the education industry knows how to protect itself and its link to the billions of dollars being spent. The lobbying efforts of teachers unions, national organizations representing school board members and superintendents, as well as the textbook companies all fight for influence in Washington and state capitols.

It must be said that there are many teachers, principals, school board members and countless others involved with our

schools who are diligently and conscientiously working to educate our nation's children. However, the way that our school systems are organized virtually guarantees that politics will reign supreme when important decisions are made on behalf of our most needy students.

In this article, we take a look at five myths about public education held by the American public.

The "If Only We Had More Money" Myth

Rarely do representatives of our nation's teachers unions, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers write about deficiencies in our public schools without blaming them on a lack of adequate funding. The "we need more money" mantra has been heard so often that it is ingrained in the minds of most Americans and goes unquestioned by most. But is this always the best explanation for the failure of our schools to educate well? In fact, inadequate funding is only one of many possible reasons for poor performance.

The U.S. has been increasing per pupil spending consistently for the last fifty years. From 1945 to 2001, inflation adjusted spending has grown from $1,214 per student to $8,745. Measuring increases in performance over that period is more difficult. We do have good data from the early 1970s when the National Assessment of Educational Progress began. Unfortunately, scores for twelfth grade students have remained essentially flat in reading, math, and science over that time period, and graduation rates have changed little. Many studies have concluded that although we have increased our educational spending significantly there has been little or no significant improvement in our schools.

Various explanations have been given for why more money hasn't resulted in improved student performance. One of the most

popular is that much of the increase in funding has gone to services for disabled students and special education programs. The special ed complaint is answered by the fact that we don't have a higher percentage of disabled students; rather, we are choosing to label students disabled who in the past would have been called slow or under-average learners. The percentage of students with severe disabilities has actually remained level between 1976 and 2001, and the number of students classified as mentally retarded has actually declined.{2} Regardless of what label we give these students, increased dollars spent should result in improved performance, but it hasn't.

Some argue that a smaller fraction of every budget dollar actually goes to classroom instruction, but whose fault is that? Others complain that students are harder to teach today due to the effects of poverty, greater healthcare needs, and the fact that they are more likely to speak a foreign language than in the past. However, childhood poverty rates have held fairly steady since the late 70s and has been declining since 1992.{3} One of the best indicators of health care for children, the child mortality rate, has improved 66 percent in the last thirty years, so it is hard to argue that today's children have poorer health care. The only argument that holds up is that more students have a native language other than English. But this factor alone does not explain why the huge increases in spending have not resulted in better performance.

Teachers Are Badly Underpaid

Another myth is that students perform poorly because teachers are severely underpaid.

Every few years we are warned about a looming shortage of teachers or that teachers cannot afford to live in the cities in which they teach, resulting in either inferior teachers or large classes. For instance, during the internet boom of the 90s, it was feared that teachers could not afford to live in

Silicon Valley due to the high cost of real estate. But a number of years later, the San Jose Mercury analyzed housing data from that period and discovered that there was no crisis. In fact, 95 percent of the teachers who taught there lived there, and about two thirds owned their own homes.{4} In fact, teachers fared better than software engineers, network administrators, and accountants when it came to home ownership.{5}

Others argue that the best and the brightest stay away from teaching because salary rates compare poorly to similar professions. But most researchers compare teachers' annual salary with the annual salary of other professions without taking into account the one hundred eighty day work year for the typical teacher. Adjusting the average teacher's annual salary of $44,600 to a full-time equivalent brings it to $65,440. This amount represents a respectable middle class salary by anyone's calculation.

Another way to look at the issue is on an hourly basis. In 2002, high school teachers made an average of $31.01 per hour. This compares to $30 per hour for chemists, $29.76 per hour for mechanical engineers, $28.07 per hour for biologists, and $24.57 per hour for nurses.{6} Doctors, lawyers, dentists, and others do make more per hour than teachers, but their education is far more rigorous, and they often require long internships or residency obligations.

Even when one compares benefits other than income teachers fare well. One researcher discovered that half of all teachers pay nothing for single-person health care coverage, while the same is true for less than one-quarter of private-sector professionals and technical employees.{7} Another type of employment benefit that teachers enjoy is job security. It becomes remarkably difficult to fire a teacher who has been employed by a school district for three or more years. Tenure protection for public school teachers give them almost unparalleled job security compared to professionals in the

private sector.

The reason that teaching does not attract the best and the brightest is more likely tied to the way that individual teachers salaries are determined than the average amount paid. A recent study found that the inability of teachers to make more money by performing better than their peers is the main cause for the declining academic abilities of those entering the field.{8} Talented people want to know that they can earn more if they work harder than others around them.

School Choice Harms Public Education

Another controversy that has generated myths of its own is the debate over educational choice or voucher programs. There are two popular misconceptions: first, that research has been inconclusive regarding the benefits of voucher programs, and second, that educational choice damages public education.

Whenever the topic of school vouchers comes up in major media outlets the consistent message is that research on their benefit to students is mixed at best. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine have all sounded the same warning. *Time* wrote, "Do vouchers help boost the test scores of children who use them? Researchers are trying to find out, but the evidence so far is inconclusive."{9} Why would publications and even researchers equivocate on the benefits of vouchers? There are a number of possible reasons. Ideology can play a role. If one has come out against vouchers it's difficult to affirm them regardless what the research says. Financial interests might also play a role if supporting vouchers might result in the loss of funding or readership.

The most accurate way to research the impact of voucher programs is to perform random-assignment studies.{10} There have been eight such studies, and all of them found a positive effect or advantage in academic progress for students who

received a voucher to attend a private school. Seven of the eight findings were statistically significant. The question left to researchers is to determine the magnitude and scope of the positive effect and to establish the conditions that result in the greatest amount of progress.

The second myth; that voucher programs damage nearby public schools, is also contrary to the evidence. Although not all voucher programs are large enough to impact the public schools nearby, those programs that have the potential to do so have been studied. The consistent finding is that the competition caused by vouchers always results in an increase in public school performance. For instance, as a result of Florida's A-Plus voucher program, "public schools whose students were offered vouchers produced significantly greater year-to-year test score gains than other Florida public schools."{11} Schools that faced competition experienced a 5.9 percentile point advantage on the Stanford-9 math test over schools not facing competition.{12} Other studies showed that even the threat of future competition produced public school improvement.

Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby studied the impact that the oldest voucher program in the country has had on student performance in Milwaukee's public schools. Again, she discovered that "schools exposed to greater voucher competition made significantly larger test score gains than schools less exposed to voucher competition."{13}

Studies in other states have supported the benefit of competition as well. Vouchers offered in Maine, Vermont's "tuitioning" programs, and charter schools in Arizona and Michigan have all prompted better performance in nearby public schools.

Public Education Doesn’t Matter

Our final American education myth is often held by conservative Christians. It is the belief that public education doesn’t matter. The argument goes something like this: the public educational establishment has adopted a completely naturalistic worldview. And. as a result, it is hostile towards anything Christian, rendering it morally bankrupt.

While it is true that our public education system is primarily built upon the assumptions of naturalism, and that it is often hostile to both individual Christians and Christian thought. It does not follow that Christians, even those who chose to home school or place their children in a private Christian school, should be indifferent to the fate of children in our public schools.

Perhaps we can compare our situation to that of the Israelites while in captivity in Babylon. Although the culture was alien and often hostile, as ours can be today, and it would have been tempting to undermine its institutions and seek its destruction, God communicated via the prophet Jeremiah that the Jews were to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”{14}

Out of love for our neighbors and their children, we should desire to see them receive the best education possible. One of the earliest justifications for public education was that children needed to become literate in order to understand the Bible and apply it to their lives. In 1647, Massachusetts passed the Old Deluder Act which argued that public education was necessary because Satan attempted to keep men in ignorance of the Scriptures by keeping them from the true sense and meaning of the text. If they could read it for themselves they would be less susceptible to deception. The same need is present today. A literate society is not necessarily more open

to the Bible and its message, but illiteracy places a large gulf between an interested individual and God's revelation.

Another reason to not lose interest in the funding and functioning of our public schools is because we continue to pay for them. If we are to be good stewards of the monies granted us by God, we cannot ignore perhaps the largest single government expense. The amount of money spent on public education in America is massive by any standard, and the potential for abuse and misuse is equally large.

Into the near future, most American children, Christian and otherwise, will be educated in our public schools. Misinformation or political spin should not be allowed to shape our opinions or our decisions about education in the voting booth. The parties involved are not neutral. Although many have the best interests of the children at heart, power and money also play a major role in educational policy making.

Notes

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4. Ibid., 72.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 79.
7. Ibid., 82.
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9. Ibid., 147.
10. See chapter 13 of *Education Myths* for an explanation.
11. *Education Myths*, 170.
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13. Ibid., 173.
14. Jeremiah 29:7

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Our Cheatin' Hearts (Radio Version)

From classroom to boardroom, from sports to shoplifting, people try to get something that's not rightfully theirs. What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution? Rusty Wright considers cheating.

This article is also available in Spanish.

Cheating Ways

Cheating is rampant these days. Just ask the nation's retailers, educators, and investors. From classroom to boardroom, from filling stations to airplanes, folks everywhere are trying to get something that's not rightfully theirs.

The *Wall Street Journal* has reported a rash of petty personal cheating ranging from zipping through turnpike tollbooths without paying to pocketing restaurant silverware.{1}

One Los Angeles network television employee described the rush he felt from sneaking into an airline First Class seat from his coach section. "It was exhilarating," he explained of his stealth upgrade. "I felt like I robbed a bank."

A Las Vegas restaurant lost $10,000 in pilfered ashtrays during its first two weeks of operation. A New Jersey engineer refuses to pay automated tolls on the Garden State Parkway

because he feels the toll plazas are poorly designed and irritating. The state established a bad system, he reasons, so "you have to abuse it." Convenience stores report massive losses from "pump-and-flee" customers who fill their gas tanks and take off without paying.

A Knoxville-based theater chain watches for discount cheaters who purchase pay-by-phone automated tickets at undeserved senior discounts and hope ticket takers won't notice. Shoppers buy party dresses and power tools, use them, and return them for refunds. A California bookseller laments the customers who try for full-price refunds on books they've purchased from discount outlets. "You want to send them to Miss Manners," she says.{2}

Prominent sports figures have been flagged for un-citizen-like conduct. George O'Leary lost the head football coaching job at Notre Dame within a week of his hiring for padding his résumé. U.S. Olympic Committee president Sandra Baldwin resigned after confessing lies about her academic background.{3}

Golfers not only adjust the lay of the ball. Some duck pricey greens fees by sneaking onto the course.

I know something about golf ethics. My childhood Miami home bordered a golf course. Occasionally, stray balls landed in our back yard. Neighborhood kids decided a ball was fair game only after the golfer had walked by without retrieving it. But it was entirely ethical, we determined, to cover the ball with a large almond leaf until the golfer passed.

What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution, and what is it? This article explores these themes.

Campus Cheating

What part does education play in cheating? Duke University president Nannerl Keohane says that 45 percent of Duke

students have cheated at least once during college. *US News and World Report* quoted one Duke student who plagiarized an assignment: “It’s not a big deal because it’s just a mindless assignment. It’s not a final or a midterm.”{4}

The Center for Academic Integrity reports that:{5}

- On most university campuses more than 75 percent of students admit to some cheating.
- About one-third of students in one nationwide survey admitted to “serious test cheating.”
- Half of the students in that survey admitted to “one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments.”

The Internet expands choices and convenience. Web access and a credit card can buy ready-made term papers or customized writing. Cybercheating can backfire though. Special computer searches sometimes allow suspicious professors to discover the original sources in only minutes.{6}

Cheating is bad enough when students do it to boost their academic standing. It’s a mess when teachers and administrators orchestrate it. So-called “high-stakes testing” has tempted some educators to cheat to retain their jobs, earn merit pay or even preserve their schools. Some states base financial allocations on school test scores. Administrators anxious over funding cuts prompt teachers to provide, shall we say, inappropriate assistance.

New York City teacher Stacey Moscowitz gave her students answers to tests, raising their scores and the school’s academic ranking. She says the school principal encouraged the practice. Later, Moscowitz felt she had betrayed her kids. Students needing remedial help did not qualify for it due to their artificially high test scores.

Moscowitz blew the whistle, prompting an investigation by Edward Stancik, the New York City School District independent

investigator. Stancik found fifty-two educators implicated in thirty-two schools. Among the methods he uncovered was the "scrap paper" method: Students took the exam on scrap paper, a teacher corrected the answers, then the answers went onto the standardized answer sheets, so as not to reflect erasures. In the "group testing" method, students called out the answers, the group agreed on the correct answer, and everyone filled it in.{7}

Cheating in school might seem fairly harmless to some. Lots of people do it. But what happens when corporate leaders cheat?

Corporate Cheaters

Corporate cheating has had devastating effects. U.S. corporate scandals have seen thousands of employees lose their jobs while stocks plummet and corporate executives are led off in handcuffs. Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Anderson, AOL Time Warner, Adelphia, Xerox . . . sometimes the patterns of financial scandals can be confusing.

Consider a simple illustration. Suppose you want your local bank to lend you money so you can purchase your dream house. The bank views you as a means for them to make money. They want to assess their risk of investing in you to be sure you can pay them back faithfully and with interest. So they check your credit, income, assets and liabilities, and get you to fill out lots of forms.

Suppose you deceive the bank into believing that your financial status is better than it really is. You lie about your income and indebtedness. They believe you and lend you the funds. You buy your castle, then can't make the payments. You default on the loan, declare bankruptcy, and the bank loses its money.

That's a snapshot of just one type of scandal plaguing corporate America. Corporations that cook the books look like

better investments than they really are. Investors buy their stock, driving the price up and enriching leaders who profit personally from stock gains. When irregularities are exposed, companies restate their actual earnings and indebtedness and lay off employees. Investors, realizing they've been hoodwinked, sell their stock. Stock prices plummet. Investors question the sincerity of other corporations and are reluctant to buy. The market system falters.

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan summarized for Congress corruption's impact on the nation: "Fraud is theft. . . . It is indistinguishable from going into a bank and stealing something. . . . Our free market capitalist system cannot function in an environment in which fraud and misrepresentation are critical elements, because trust is so essential to making that system work."{8}

Corrupt CEOs wielded power similar to economic "weapons of mass destruction," said University of Minnesota accounting professor Brian Shapiro.{9} Consumer advocate Ralph Nader called it "greed on steroids."{10}

Moses, the great liberator of ancient Israel, once received some counsel on leadership from his father-in-law, who advised him to pick able leaders who "fear God" and "hate dishonest gain."{11} Not bad advice. As national scandals have shown, to do otherwise can be disastrous.

Cheating's Costs

Epidemic cheating has serious costs. Whom can you trust?

TIME magazine compared what executives of seven troubled companies received (in stock sales and severance) with what their shareholders got.{12} Adelphia's John Rigas gained $4.2 million in severance. When Adelphia filed for bankruptcy, its stock was worth 14 cents, a decline of over 99 percent in about a year. Enron's Jeffrey Skilling made $78 million in

stock sales over a two-year period. Shareholders got a bankrupt company.

Have your medical insurance premiums been rising? Some of the increase may be offsetting corruption losses. Big names in healthcare like Columbia/HCA, National Health Laboratories, and GlaxoSmithKline have paid millions in fines to settle billing or fraud charges or investigations. While corporate accounting scandals may seem complex, much of the healthcare crisis involves outright theft such as overcharging for hospital care. This profitable game has even drawn drug criminals and the Russian mafia. Some have called the healthcare industry terminally ill.{13}

The African Union claims "corruption costs Africa almost $150 billion a year." That's about one quarter of the continent's gross domestic product.{14} One Nigerian doctor told me bribery had become so commonplace in his country that corporations were including bribery allowances in staff budgets. They called it "public relations." Problems arose when employees began pocketing the "public relations" money instead of using it for bribes.

Identity thieves use computers to snoop. The biggest identity theft in U.S. history garnered information on 30,000 people. Thieves used pilfered data to siphon bank accounts and tap credit card accounts. The prosecutor described the situation as "every American's worst financial nightmare multiplied tens of thousands of times."{15}

Cheating that may begin in school can have disastrous results in society. Duke's president Keohane aptly summarizes: " (A)n education that involves cheating instead of learning . . . is no education at all. . . . (I)n the real world, when you set out to build a bridge or craft a legal document or begin brain surgery, just knowing what the result is supposed to be is of mighty little use in making it happen; pity the poor patients and clients!"{16}

Why do people cheat, and what is the solution?

The Psychology of Cheating

Why do people cheat? Some seek the thrill of beating the system. Others want to make ends meet, protest high prices or achieve difficult—perhaps unattainable—standards.

Actress Winona Ryder's shoplifting conviction prompted questions about why a wealthy person would steal items they could easily afford. Often anxiety or depression accompanies kleptomania. The rush of theft may assuage deep emotional pain. Young shoplifters have stolen on dares from their peers.{17}

Desires for approval, advancement, avoiding embarrassment—all influence self-esteem. People sometimes take foolish risks to feel good about themselves.

Self-centeredness and lax standards seem obvious roots of dishonesty. The Securities and Exchange Commission began requiring CEO's of major companies to personally affirm "in writing, under oath and for publication " that their corporate reports are "complete and accurate."{18}

Restructuring business relationships to avoid conflicts of interest could reduce temptation. Stiff penalties—suspension, expulsion, prosecution—may help slow moral hemorrhaging. Strong role models, peer support, and ethical codes are significant.

Ultimately, honesty is an individual matter. Alan Greenspan told Congress of "an infectious greed" that influenced corporate scandals. "Greed is not an issue of business," he emphasized, "it's an issue of human beings."{19}

My sophomore year in college, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. "No one wants it," I

convinced myself. “It deserves to be taken.” I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I encountered a statement by an early follower of Jesus: “If we confess our sins to him, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”{20} I not only needed to admit my theft to God. I needed to make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

Solid spiritual commitment can help develop inner strength to resist temptation and act honorably. It can provide reasonable standards for civil society. And it can bring forgiveness and power to rebound from personal failure.

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, “Our Cheatin’ Hearts,” *The Plain Truth*, September/October 2003, pp. 6-10.

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Sheep Among Wolves

What's the Problem?

In Colossians 2:8, Paul states that a Christian should . . .

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Paul's words have particular application for the Christian student who is about to engage in the intellectual and social combat that can be found on many of our college campuses. Our higher educational institutions are often incubators for non-Christian thought and life. Christian students must be advised to be prepared. Too many of them are "taken captive." Consider these few examples:

> • A sociology professor asked her students, "How many of you believe abortion is wrong? Stand up." Five students stood. She told them to continue standing. She then asked, "Of you five, how many believe it is wrong to distribute condoms in middle schools?" One was left standing. The professor left this godly young lady standing in silence for a long time and then told her she wanted to talk with her after class. During that meeting the student was told if she persisted in such beliefs she would have a great deal of difficulty receiving her certification as a social worker.

• During the first meeting of an architecture class at a large state university the students were told to lie on the floor. The professor then turned off the lights and taught them to meditate. (Be assured they were not meditating on Scripture.)

• At a church-related university a professor stated, “Communism is definitely superior to any other political-economic system.”

• In an open declaration on the campus at Harvard, the university chaplain announced he is homosexual.

• When asked how he responds to students who confess strong Christian convictions, a professor stated, “If they don’t know what and why they believe, I will change them.”

• In a university dormitory crowded with over 100 students I declared that Jesus is the only way to God. Many of the students expressed their strong disagreement and anger. One student was indignant because he realized my statement concerning Christ logically meant that his belief in a Native American deity was wrong. Even some Christian students were uncomfortable. They had uneasiness about it because it seemed too intolerant.

These are but a few of many illustrations and statistics that could be cited as indication of contemporary college life. The ideas that are espoused on many of our campuses can understandably bewilder the Christian student. What can be done to help them in their preparation? In this article I will offer some suggestions that can serve to give them guidance.

Develop a Christian Worldview

A critical component in the arsenal of any Christian heading off to college is to develop a Christian worldview. Everyone has a world view whether they have thought about it or not. To understand how important a worldview is consider a jigsaw

puzzle with thousands of pieces. In order to put the puzzle together you need to see the picture on the box top. You need to know what the puzzle will look like when you finish it. If you only had the pieces and no box top, you would probably experience a great deal of frustration. You may not even want to begin the task, much less finish it. The box top gives you a guide and helps you put together the “pieces” of life.

The box top in a Christian worldview is provided by the revealed truth of the Bible. The Bible contains the correct picture to help us assemble the individual pieces we encounter in life. Other world views will always get some portion of the picture right, but a few important pieces will always seem out of place. It’s important for a young Christian college student to have some idea of which pieces are out of place in other worldviews as well as a foundational understanding of a Christian worldview.

Essentially a worldview is a set of assumptions or presuppositions we hold about the basic make-up of our universe that influences everything we do and say. For instance, within a Christian world view we wake up in the morning assuming that God exists and that He cares about what happens to you.

There are four essential truths that help us evaluate different worldviews.

The first truth is that *something exists*. This may seem obvious, but many people aren’t sure. Many forms of pantheism argue that the material world is just an illusion. The only reality is spiritual. If this were actually the case, then physical consequences wouldn’t matter. However, I have yet to find a pantheist who is willing to perform their meditation on a railroad track without knowing the train schedule.

The second truth is that *all people have absolutes*. There are always some things that people recognize as true, all the

time. For Christians, God is the ultimate reference point to determine truth. Even the statement, “There are no absolutes!” is to declare absolutely that there are no absolutes.

Third, *truth is something that can’t be both true and false at the same time*. This is critical in our current time. A contemporary idea is that all religions are the same. This sounds gracious, but it’s nonsense. While various religions can often have some elements in common, if they differ in the crucial areas of creation, sin, salvation, heaven, and hell, then the similarities are what is trivial, not the differences.

Last, we need to realize that *all people exercise faith*. What matters is the object of our faith. We all use faith to operate through the day. We exercise faith every time we take medication. We assume it will help us and not harm us. Carl Sagan’s famous statement that “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be” is a statement of naturalistic faith not scientific truth.

Take Ownership of Beliefs

Parents need to help their student headed off to college to take ownership of their faith. Too often Christian young people spend their pre-college years repeating phrases and doctrines without intellectual conviction. They need to go beyond clichés. A few of us at Probe have questioned Christian high school students about their faith by posing as an atheistic college professor. When pressed to explain why they believe as they do, the responses get rather embarrassing. They’ll say, “That’s what my parents taught me,” or “That’s what I’ve always heard,” or “I was raised that way,” or “That’s what my pastor said.”

If this is the best a student can do, they are simply grist for the mill. They are easily ground down to dust. Paul wrote to young Timothy saying, “Continue in the things you have

learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (2 Tim. 3:14). Timothy was taught by his mother, grandmother, and Paul. He not only learned about his faith from them, but he became convinced that it was true.

This means you are to know not just what you believe but also why. Ask yourself or your student why he or she is a Christian? If this question stumps you, you've got some thinking and exploring to do. The apostle Peter said to always be prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks for an account of the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15)

Peter wrote that we are always to be ready, and we are to respond to everyone who asks. These are all-encompassing words that indicate the importance of the task of apologetics. If the student is going to live and think as a Christian on campus he will be asked to defend his faith. Such an occasion will not be nearly as threatening if he or she has been allowed to ask their own questions and have received answers from their home or church.

For instance, how would you answer these questions if someone who really wants to know asked them of you? "Is there really a God?" "Why believe in miracles?" "How accurate is the Bible?" "Is Christ the only way to God?" "Is there any truth in other religions?"

Such questions are legitimate and skeptics deserve honest answers to their tough questions. How they receive the answer is between God and them. Our responsibility is to provide the answers as best as we can in a loving manner. To say, "I don't know, I just believe," will leave the impression that Christianity is just a crutch and therefore only for the weak and feeble-minded.

The Mind Is Important

A student needs to understand that the mind is important in a

Christian's life. In fact, a Christian is required to use his mind if he desires to know more of God and His works among us. The acts of reading and studying Scripture certainly require mental exercise. Even if a person can't read, he still has to use his mind to respond to what is taught from Scripture. For example, Jesus responded to a scribe by stating the most important commandment:

> Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:29-30)

The use of our mind refers not only to Scripture. We need to abolish the sacred/secular barrier many of us have erected. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to Him through God the Father." Paul pretty much covers it. It's hard to come up with anything additional after using the words "whatever" and "all." This includes our academic studies.

The first chapter of Daniel offers amazing insights into this issue. Daniel and his friends were taught everything that the "University of Babylon" could offer them; they graduated with highest honors and with their faith strengthened. God honored them in the task and even gave them the knowledge they needed to grapple with Babylonian ideas. (Daniel 1:17, 20)

If Daniel's situation is applied to a contemporary Christian student's life, there is an important lesson to be learned. That is, the young Jewish boys learned and understood what they were taught, but that does not mean they believed it. Many students have asked how to respond on papers and exams that include ideas they don't believe. As with Daniel and his peers, they should demonstrate their understanding to the best of their ability, but they cannot be forced to believe it. Understanding and believing are not necessarily the same thing. But a certain level of understanding is crucial in

knowing where these ideas fail to meet reality.

If Christian students have also been allowed to ask questions at home and at church, then they can apply the lessons learned by asking questions of those of differing faiths. This will allow them to expose the inconsistencies of these competing worldviews in a respectful manner.

Many Christian students enter an ungodly educational arena every year. They should be encouraged with the understanding that God's truth will prevail, as it did for Daniel and his friends. For all truth is God's truth.

How Do We Teach these Things?

Coming to the end of our discussion on preparing students to defend their faith in college, you may be asking, "How can I apply some of these suggestions in my life with students?" The following ideas are offered with the belief that you can use your imagination and arrive at even better ones.

First do role-plays with your students occasionally. This can be done either with an individual or a group.

For example, as alluded to previously, find someone from outside your church or school that the students don't know. This person should have a working knowledge of the ways non-Christians think. Introduce him to the group as a college professor researching the religious beliefs of high school students.

The "professor" should begin to ask them a series of blunt questions regarding their beliefs. The idea is to challenge every cliché the students may use in their responses. Nothing is to be accepted without definition or elaboration. After ten minutes or so, reveal who the professor really is and assure them he is a Christian. Then go over some of the answers and begin to reveal what they could have said.

This would also be good time to implement a second suggestion, and that is to teach a special course on apologetics for upper high school students. You've definitely got their attention now and they will be much more attentive.

Another idea is if you live near a college or university, ask to be put on their mailing list for upcoming lectures from visiting scholars. After attending one of these lectures, discuss it with your student. See if they can identify the speaker's worldview and where what they said conflicts with a Christian worldview. This would also be a good place to model asking good questions if a question and answer period is allowed.

When considering a college or university, the student should not only visit the campus to investigate campus life but also the intellectual atmosphere. Visit with representatives of a local college ministry or a Christian faculty member and inquire of their opinion of the likely intellectual challenges they can expect to find. This would also be a good opportunity to ask about resources available for Christian students who face challenges in the classroom.

Finally, consider sending your student to a Probe *Mind Games* Conference. A schedule of all our upcoming conferences is available on our website at www.probe.org. Just click on the *Mind Games* tile on the home page to open a menu of information on our conferences. Or better yet, organize one of these conferences in your own community. Probe travels around the country in order to help youth, college students, their parents, and the church at large prepare for contemporary life.

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Education: What Works

If anything is constant in public education, it is the endless cycle of reform and innovation that in turn generates endless theories and educational jargon. Heated conflicts exist over how to teach everything from reading to algebra. In the past, when our public schools were mostly local affairs, the debate was more localized. Today, state legislatures and even Congress take part in the battles, which can occasionally become the single most important issue in statewide elections.

Parents are usually not interested in the politics of education; they want to know what works! They realize that their children have one opportunity to become an educated person and those inappropriate educational ends or methods will permanently shape their children's lives. Here we will focus on answers to the question, "What works in education?" Some of the answers will come from a compilation of research done by the Department of Education under William Bennett in the 1980's.

Education should be about two tasks, building the intellect and instilling virtue. Regarding the intellect, the following words of Jacques Barzun serve us well:

> *[I]t is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotions—a shorthand (and a wireless) by which the mind can skip connectives, recognize ability, and communicate truth. Intellect is at once a body of common knowledge and the channels through which the right particle of it can be brought to bear quickly, without the effort of redemonstration, on the matter in hand.{1}*

Many have recognized the fact that parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. Christian parents should seek to begin their children's education as early as

possible. To that end, John Amos Comenius wrote in his work *The Great Didactic* that,

> *If we want to educate a person in virtue we must polish him at a tender age. And if someone is to advance toward wisdom he must be opened up for it in the first years of his life when his industriousness is still burning, his mind is malleable, and his memory still strong.{2}*

What can parents do? To begin with, the more book-friendly parents can make a home the better. Parents should read to their young children and let their children read to them. Asking in-depth questions about what is being read will boost comprehension skills, vocabulary, and general knowledge. Keep a consistent family routine for meals, bedtime and homework. Both parents should model the importance of a life of the mind. One of the best ways of doing this is to limit mindless entertainment like television. For, in order for our children to become mature handlers of the Word (2 Timothy 2:15), they must become competent readers.

Next we will look at the way parents and teachers can partner together to educate our children.

The Parent Teacher Partnership

It is extremely important that both teacher and parents convey high expectations to students regarding academic performance. Studies have shown that low expectations on the part of teachers can become self-fulfilling prophecies for their students. These students are often seated far from the teacher, receiving less direct instruction and attention. Parents need to work with teachers who have failed to expect good work from their children. This requires frequent communication with the teacher, as well as the student. If a parent perceives that a teacher may have “given up” on their child, a meeting with everyone involved, including a school

counselor, should be called immediately. If the situation is allowed to continue, your child may find himself hopelessly behind.

Sometimes parents demand too much of their children, resulting in anxiety and low self-confidence, but it is far more common for parents not to expect reasonably high standards for their children's academic work.

A corollary to setting high expectations for students is helping them to make a healthy connection between ability and effort. When students are young they equate effort with ability. In other words, if they work hard and do well, they assume that they have a high level of ability. Failure means that they did not try hard enough, something that they can personally overcome on the next assignment. Later, students learn that ability and effort are not the same. Some students need to work much harder at certain things in order to do as well as others. As a result, students might try to mask what they perceive to be low ability by turning in tests early even though they are hastily finished or by choosing not to participate in class discussions. High levels of effort come to represent low ability. As a result many students fail to work to their potential. Believing that they lack ability, they eventually lose hope for academic success.

Underachievement becomes a response to the possibility that they may be low ability students. Teachers and parents must intervene before these patterns become fixed. By setting high standards and insisting on consistent, diligent work, parents and teachers can work together to build confidence that can become the foundation for future effort. In some cases, parents may need to help their children crawl before they can walk. They may have to supervise homework efforts minute by minute until the student begins to see a connection between the work invested and its resulting success.

Some general rules for successful study include: convince your

child not to cram or try to accomplish large amounts of work in one sitting, help them to weigh the importance of an assignment by developing a system of schoolwork triage, and help your student to identify the standards necessary to succeed. Parents and students should work together to find a strategy that yields the best results.

Classroom Environment

The amount of class time spent on instruction has an obvious influence on student achievement. Unfortunately, studies show that in elementary classrooms actual "time on task," time focused on academic subjects, ranges from 50 percent to 90 percent of a given school day. This is so proportioned because of tasks imposed on the classroom teacher by those outside of the schools. But it can also be an indication of poor classroom management. What does a well-managed classroom look like?

First, class work is carefully planned, including content, presentation time, and instructional activities. Good teachers set and communicate clear expectations to the students so that they know what is required to succeed. They also make sure that content is sequenced so that it builds in a logical and consistent fashion and that students know where they are heading and how to get there.{3} A good teacher will also check students for comprehension often and give them multiple opportunities to practice what they have learned. This common sense approach to classroom management is called direct instruction, and research indicates that it has been found to help young and disadvantaged students learn basic skills and older, higher ability students to tackle more complex material.{4}

Since the more time that is focused on a topic naturally results in greater learning, the way that a teacher utilizes homework is also important. Research shows that although homework is beneficial for all students, it is even more

significant for those with low and medium abilities. In fact, average students who do three to five hours of homework a week, begin to receive grades equal to those of high-ability students who do no homework at all.{5} It has been found that Japanese students spend about twice as much time studying outside of school as American students.{6}

However, not every type of homework is helpful. All of us can remember doing homework that seemed like an afterthought. Homework needs to be well planned to be effective. It should relate directly to what is happening in the classroom and be treated as an integral part of instruction by the teacher. This means that teachers should take time to evaluate the assignments and count the grade. Assignments should be analytical rather than standard work sheets, and they should encourage students to think more deeply about the material. Homework encourages students to follow directions, to make comparisons, to raise questions, and to develop responsibility and self-discipline.{7}

Student assessment is another key factor to effective schooling. Teachers should evaluate students often in order to detect if the material is being covered too quickly or too slowly. Assessment should be done often and by various means. Teachers should use essays, tests, homework, quizzes (both verbal and written), as well as group projects to measure student progress. Students benefit from immediate feedback so that they can correct ineffective study habits or arrange for special tutoring

Teaching Methods

You wouldn’t think that how we teach children to read would be very controversial. It is! The ongoing battle between whole-language advocates and those who recommend systematic, structured phonics instruction is a heated and often strident one. The two methods stand on very different theoretical foundations and thus emphasize different activities for

children. Both use phonics and both advocate early, intensive reading by children. But whole-language promoters argue that learning to read and write are natural skills that can be acquired as easily as learning to talk. Just immerse children in words and good books, and they will eventually make sense of it all. Phonics advocates argue that reading is not a natural skill, and that children need intensive and comprehensive phonics training to succeed. They add that a high level of illiteracy, even in the U.S. where the written word is universally found, refutes the notion that language skill acquisition is automatic.

Jeanne Chall, long time professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education argued that research has established that reading is essentially a phonemic activity; children must know the relationship between sounds and letters. If children have not mastered this basic information, they cannot learn to read. Research has also demonstrated that teaching phonics benefits all children, particularly those who are at risk. Focusing on phonics does not deaden a child's desire to read, in fact, whole language is hurting children by not providing them with the tools necessary to read.{8} Athough whole language advocates argue that invented spelling, which calls upon students to apply phonics knowledge, actually forces students to think more deeply about phonics, others are not convinced of its effectiveness.

Our question is, "What really works?" Research by Steven A. Stahl and Patricia Miller concluded, "We have no evidence showing that whole language programs produce effects that are stronger than existing basal programs, and potentially may produce lower effects."{9} Even stalwarts of whole language are moving towards a more comprehensive phonics curriculum.

Similar arguments have arisen over the use of calculators in early math instruction. Although many math teachers advocate early classroom use, the public is not so sure. One survey found that 80 percent of math teachers are in favor of early

use, but only 10 percent of the public agrees. Although the final word on early calculator use is still out, research does support the use of manipulatives in teaching young children math. Using objects to represent mathematical values helps students to understand abstract ideas quicker.

Likewise, students learn science best when they are able to do experiments on personal predictions regarding natural phenomenon. Students often reject textbook and lecture material for what they consider to be common sense. Only when they are confronted with actual experimental data do they shed themselves of incorrect assumptions.

Finally let’s look at how overall school organization affects learning.

School Organization

Schools benefit greatly from having a strong educational leader, usually the principal, who focuses continually on improving the educational program of the school. This doesn’t seem too controversial. Unfortunately, many principals are either not equipped to perform this role or are not expected to. In order to be an educational leader, a principal must have thought carefully and deeply about what it means to be an educated person, and to have developed a clear vision for implementing his or her plan. Some principals haven’t had the academic experience to prepare them for this role. Too many have come from a physical education background and coaching duties, which may be a plus when it comes to discipline problems, but not very helpful in constructing an overall vision for academic excellence.

The educational leader should also enjoy a high degree of autonomy in building his or her program. This includes the hiring and firing of teachers and unrestricted communication with parents. Success is often determined by how well parents and teachers can be motivated towards the principal’s vision.

Unfortunately, this is much easier to do in private schools than in public ones.

A safe and orderly school environment is necessary for learning to occur. Nevertheless, many schools do not enjoy this basic requirement for success. This problem not only impacts inner city schools, which fight the multiple problems related to poverty and highly bureaucratic administrations. Rural schools can suffer from poor discipline and a lack of consistent policies as well. Realistically, even in generally good schools, a single teacher can diminish the educational experience of his or her class by refusing to, or not even desiring to, maintain order. This is where a strong principal can step in and make a difference.

A teaching staff is most effective when they share high morale, agree that students need grounding in the basics of each subject, and hold students to high standards. Teacher collegiality, the sharing of problems and solutions with one another in a professional atmosphere, is another indication of an effective teaching staff. Unfortunately, many teachers operate without the benefit of peer input. Collegiality seems to occur more often at the elementary school level than in our high schools.

Schools that test their students for the purpose of offering remedial help tend to be more effective, as are those that encourage their students to take more advanced academic courses.

Just knowing what an effective school looks like is only part of the battle for better schools. The challenge is to change poorly performing schools into effective ones. Research shows that effective schools tend to have a much higher degree of autonomy than ineffective ones; something found far more often in private schools than in public schools. Unfortunately, our public school bureaucracy doesn’t appear to be moving in the right direction.

Notes

1. Jacques Barzun, *The House of Intellect*, (Harper & Row: New York, 1959), 4.
2. *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning,* U.S. Department of Education, 1986, 6.
3. Ibid., 34.
4. Ibid., 35.
5. Ibid., 41.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 42.
8. "Whole Language in the 90's," *Update, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,* Vol 35 #9, 1993.
9. Arthur Ellis & Jeffrey Fouts, *Research on Educational Innovations,* Princeton, NJ: Eye On Education, 46.

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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.

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The Feminization of American Schools

There is growing recognition that American school-age boys are not doing well. In fact, many of our sons are experiencing significant problems both inside and outside of the classroom. This is ironic since educators have been concerned primarily about girls since a 1990 report released by the American Association of University Women claimed that girls are the ones being shortchanged in school.

However, recent statistics reveal that from the elementary years and beyond, girls get better grades than boys and generally fare better in school.{1} Although girls have all

but eliminated the much-discussed math and science gap with boys, boys' scores in reading and writing have been on the decline for years. At the end of eighth grade, boys are held back 50 percent more often, and girls are twice as likely to say that they want to pursue a professional career.{2} Boys are twice as likely to be labeled "learning disabled" and in some schools are ten times more likely to be diagnosed with learning disorders such as ADD. Boys now make up two thirds of our special education classes and account for 71 percent of all school suspensions.{3} There is also evidence that boys suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence as learners.{4}

As high school seniors, girls have higher educational goals than boys, are more likely to enroll in college, and once there, are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree in five years.{5} The majority of those receiving master's degrees are now women and the percentage of males seeking professional degrees is declining every year.{6} Boys are not faring much better outside the classroom either. Boys are three times more likely to be a victim of a violent crime and between four to six times more likely to commit suicide.{7}

While there is little controversy that a problem exists, widely divergent causes and solutions are being offered. Dr. William Pollack, who among other things is a faculty member of the Harvard Medical School and a founding member of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity of the American Psychological Association, has written a book titled *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*. He argues that a false masculinity is being forced on our boys, one that disconnects them from themselves. In a very general sense, our boys need to get back in touch with who they really are. Christina Hoff Sommers, a W. H. Brady Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, takes an opposing view. She believes that our boys suffer from a school environment that favors feminine traits and that attempts to squeeze boys

into an androgynous mold from which they naturally rebel.

Although both of these authors could be wrong, they most certainly cannot both be right. In this article we will consider the arguments and attempt to discover what needs to be done to help our boys.

Losing the Inner Boy

One popular viewpoint among feminists contends that boys are suffering from masculinity myths which, when enforced, work to squeeze them into a gender straightjacket. According to this theory, outmoded notions about masculinity cause parents to push boys away from their mothers too soon, resulting in a life long sense of anxiety and permanent damage to self-esteem. This is the viewpoint of Harvard professor William Pollack in his book *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*.

What are these masculine myths that Dr. Pollack feels are so dangerous? The first myth is that nature wins out over nurture, in other words, that boys will be boys. The assumption here is that testosterone is more powerful in shaping behavior than relationships and training are. The second myth is that boys *should* be boys. This dangerous myth supports the idea that boys should learn to be tough and never exhibit feminine traits. Myth number three is that boys are toxic. Where girls have a civilizing effect on the environment, boys are by nature dangerous and potentially damaging to those around them.

When these myths are used as a guide to raising boys, Dr. Pollack believes that we damage our children. In our desire to make boys into tough, competitive men, they lose touch with who they really are, their “inner boy,” and as a result they become angry, dysfunctional adult males likely to abuse their wives and neglect their children.

Much of what Dr. Pollack says about boys rings true. He wants us to raise boys who are able to be empathetic, compassionate, and to appreciate the full spectrum of human behavior. Unfortunately, he defines gender roles so broadly that he leaves us with few discernable boundaries. It appears that Dr. Pollack would agree with feminist Gloria Steinem who recently advocated that "we need to raise boys like we raise girls."{8}

According to Dr. Pollack homosexuality is no longer controversial. It is normal. And much of the damage done to young boys is the result of homophobia. Unfortunately, what he considers to be the strongest scientific evidence for the biological roots of homosexuality is a study done in the 1950's.{9} He ignores recent research that greatly reduces the strength of his argument.

The only guideline that seems to matter to professor Pollack is whether or not a specific behavior makes a boy happy. Happiness is all that counts, even if a boy feels that happiness lies in the homosexual lifestyle, or in a promiscuous heterosexual one. Humanistic psychology really doesn't have much else to go on. The biblical concept that a holy God might have created male and female with distinct roles in mind does not enter into the picture.

Therefore, let us consider a response to the popular ideas of Dr. Pollack.

The Androgynous Zone

The 1990's brought to bear a number of powerful ideas on the way schools look at and treat boys. Carol Gilligan, Harvard's first professor of gender studies, wrote a book in the early '80s that described how young girls lose their self-esteem when they reach adolescence. The American Association of University Women built on her work in the early 90s by releasing a survey that announced that girls were victims of a "male-voiced" culture and, as a result, lose self-esteem when

they reach the age of twelve or thirteen. Successful lobbying of Congress resulted in passage of the Gender Equity Act in 1994 that categorized girls as an under-served population, placing them on par with other oppressed minorities.

Since then teachers and administrators have been deluged with gender equity materials and conferences sponsored by the Department of Education. However, what really panicked school administrators was a 1999 Supreme Court decision that applied sexual harassment laws to school children. The decision resulted from a lawsuit by the family of a ten-year-old Monroe, Georgia, girl because of the school's failure to prevent her harassment by a ten-year-old boy. With the threat of expensive lawsuits over their heads, principals could not refuse to inject gender politics into their schools.

An example of the kind of information being disseminated can be gleaned from statements made by the director of the Women's Educational Equity Act Publishing Center, Katherine Hanson. Hanson has argued that four million women are beaten to death every year in America, that violence is the leading cause of death among women, and that the leading cause of injury among women is being beaten by a man at home.{10} These would be shocking statistics if they were true. Actually, one million women die in this country each year with the leading cause of death being heart disease, followed by cancer.{11} Homicide is far down the list, after suicide.{12}

Why do gender equity leaders feel the need to exaggerate the abuse of women in our society? It is because they want to establish a radical retraining of America's boys. Feminists like Dr. Nancy Marshall of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women believe that gender is a totally learned concept. She states that "when babies are born, they do not know about gender."{13} In other words, little boys have to learn what it means to be a boy. She believes that this happens between the ages of two to seven. In a slide show presented by Ms. Marshall, she explained that "a young mind is

like Jell-O: you learn to fill it up with all the good stuff before it sets."{14} The good stuff constitutes the feminization of boys. To make her point, she returned several times to the image of a pre-school boy dressed up in high heels and a dress.

Gender Politics in the Classroom

Gender crusaders believe that if they can influence little boys early enough, they can make them more like little girls. Feminist philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky writes that human beings are born bisexual and through conditioning are "transformed into male and female gender personalities."{15} William Pollack, a Harvard psychologist, argues that by doing away with traditional male stereotypes the next generation of boys "will be able to safely stay in the doll corner as long as they wish, without being taunted."{16} Age appropriate doll playing by boys is not a problem. Yet it becomes one when it is the center of an attempt to redefine what it means to be male.

The Department of Education supported the writing of a model curriculum for day care providers called *Creating Sex-Fair Family Day Care*.{17} It seems that the main goal of the curriculum is, again, to get boys to play with dolls. Of its ten photographs, two are of boys with dolls. Instructors are warned to "avoid highly feminine dolls such as Barbie or highly masculine dolls such as G.I. Joe."{18} They also urge instructors to monitor the children's fantasy play. If gender stereotypes are acted out, adults should be ready to intervene. According to the authors, without gender neutral child rearing, "we cannot fulfill our dreams of equality for all people."{19}

A teacher in San Francisco is going one step further. She has transformed her classroom into a woman-centered community of learners. All the images in the classroom are of women, and as one feminist noted "perhaps for the first time, boys are the

ones looking through the window."{20} While each student is required toperform a dramatic dialogue in the author's voice, the boys are forced to do works by women. One little boy attempts to lip-synch a song by blues singer Etta James, and when the other boys giggle they are chastised for their insensitivity.{21} During a history class the girls are encouraged to discuss how boys are sexual predators. The teacher is excited to see how angry the girls are getting. Although one boy tries to defend his gender, another admits to an interviewer, "I couldn't really defend myself, because it's true. Men are pigs, you know?"{22}

Schools are denying the very behavior that makes little boys boys. In Southern California, a mother was stunned to find out that her son was disciplined for running and jumping over a bench at recess.{23} Studies in England have shown that boys benefit from competition in school. However, in deference to the female tendency to learn more in cooperative groups, competition of all types is being purged from the schoolhouse. Sixty percent of American high schools no longer use class rankings or announce valedictorians.{24} Referring to the hostility towards honor rolls, one principal has stated, "It flies in the face of the philosophy of not making it so competitive for those little kids…We even frown on spelling bees."{25}

Biblical Masculinity

Feminists argue that we only have two models of masculinity to pick from. On the one hand, we have the self-centered, win-at-all-costs, barbaric, macho mentality portrayed by the stereotypical high school football coach. They contend that this model produces boys who beat, rape, and generally oppress women. It is also blamed for the bloodshed on high school campuses in Colorado, Arkansas, and elsewhere. The other model, the one offered by feminists, calls for a "profound revolution," one that will change the way society constructs

young males.{26} It hopes to eliminate stereotypical boyish behavior such as roughhousing and aggressive competition. In fact, they hope the future will look more like the Philadelphia school which has "replaced the traditional recess with 'socialized recesses,' in which children are assigned structured activities and carefully monitored" so that gender stereotypes are extinguished.{27}

I would like to endorse a third model of masculinity. This biblical model defines mature masculinity as "a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships" with the opposite sex.{28} This biblical model assumes a number of things to be true about gender. First of all, God created men and women to complement each other. Both are equally valuable to God and His kingdom, but each have different God-given roles. Second, it looks to the servant leadership model depicted by Christ's role as head of the church, for which He suffered and died.

Boys who embrace this ideal of mature masculinity would not stand by and allow women to be abused physically or sexually, as has recently occurred in a Central Park celebration. Nor would they personally take advantage of a woman without violating their own definition of what it means to be a man.

This picture of masculinity allows men to be nurturing and sensitive. It doesn't prohibit them from being chefs or nurses. It does define, in an ultimate sense, how a man is to perceive a woman. He is to treat all women, starting with his mother, as worthy of being honored and protected. When men's competitive, physically active natures are focused on this purpose, women will find our society a much safer place in which to dwell.

It will be an uphill battle to restore this kind of thinking in our schools, especially when the trend is going in the opposite direction. However, as parents we have considerable

influence on our boys and young men. A biblical ethic should be communicated clearly and often as our boys grow older, and specifically when they begin to have significant relationships with girls. To allow the feminist model to dominate will result in frustrated boys who are stymied in their God-given role to lead, provide for, and protect the women in their lives.

Re-engineering boys in the name of egalitarianism will not only fail, but do damage to countless normal children in our schools.

Notes

1. William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 15.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., xxiii
5. “Education Week” (Vol. XIX, #34, May 3, 2000), 1.
6. Pollack, 15.
7. Ibid.
8. Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 44.
9. Pollack, 214.
10. Ibid., 48.
11. Ibid., 49.
12. Ibid.
13. bid., 74.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 86.
16.Ibid.
17. Ibid., 76.
18. Ibid., 77.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 81.
21. Ibid., 82.

22. Ibid., 83.
23. Ibid., 94.
24. Ibid., 169.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 85.
27. Ibid., 95.
28.John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 36.

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The Muses

Picture yourself back at the university in a graduate comparative literature class.

Your humanities professor enters the room and announces, "You know, as we begin this course unit on 'ritual,' I believe we would do well to invoke the gods." He continues, "You may not be aware of this, but when we call upon the Muses, they really answer . . . *they come to us*."

"All of our human rituals can be traced back to our evolutionary heritage and the mating dances of birds and mammals. It is part of nature's survival machinery. For example, the male bird who best performed the mating dance was obviously more likely to attract a mate to assure its own survival and pass on its genes to its progeny."

The professor elaborates, "All of what we call our aesthetic and religious aspirations can actually be traced to, and are deeply imbedded in, these biological imperatives of our ancestors. Through evolution they are part of the deep lexicon which we inherited from our first parents."

“And so,” says the professor, “I would like first to invoke the goat-footed god named Pan, who assures us of fertility and thus, the perpetuation of our species, *homo—sapiens*.”

“Secondly, I would like to invoke the Islamic-Judaic-Christian God of Silence, who reminds us that He cannot be touched, but by invoking Him we confirm the reality of our own existence in the universe *as compared to His silence*” (italics mine).

“Let us read this poetry in a spirit of prayer,” says the prof. He then reads the invocations, and the majority of the students smile their approval, seeming to enjoy the exercise.

In a later session of the same class, one of the students chose as a project the reenactment of a pagan Greek sacrificial rite, with the class participating on a voluntary basis. With a processional, songs, imaginary bull and meal offerings, the student “priest” clothed in some strange garments was able to create an atmosphere in that class that literally sent chills up and down my back!

Yes, these things actually occurred in one of my own graduate classes at a university right here in Dallas some time ago!

We call this “Higher Education.”

These mystical, new age ideas that espouse the reality of some transcendent “something,” like “The Force” in Star Wars, are capturing the hearts and minds of our children and grandchildren as we speak.

University student minds are increasingly inclined to believe that “Something” does exist out there beyond their own physical existence; and they also in increasing numbers believe it is personally beneficial to *make contact* with that “Something”:

> *to give them strength;*
> *to show them right and wrong;*

to help them solve their problems and make decisions.

Those of us who are Christians know better. Some indefinable force is not what they need, but rather the Lord Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Truth and gave us His Word so that we might understand and live that truth. He is the only God who can help these young men and women choose the right path as they stand at the threshold of their adult lives.

That is why I have now given forty years of my life to find ways to impact university students, to give them biblical perspectives on life and to strengthen their discernment in evaluating ideas. The corridors of "higher learning" are filled with many gullible, media-brainwashed youngsters who stand for nothing and fall for anything that sounds good to them.

Frankly, there are easier places to minister. We often are met with hostility and contempt when we go to the campus to represent a reasoned, Christian point of view.

But we at Probe Ministries are compelled to persevere. And we continue to go there, because we know that the university world is as much a fountainhead for error as it is for truth. And it is definitely strategic as we look to the future. Abraham Lincoln perhaps captured this best when he said, "The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will become the philosophy of the government in the next."

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