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Christian Philosophy of Education

Children spend the majority of their time in school. It is therefore inevitable that school will help define how they will think, act, and believe for the rest of their lives. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” For a Christian teacher this carries an extraordinary responsibility. The purpose of education is to prepare students “to be mature adults who can live acceptably in their society and contribute to it” (Greene 252). A Christian teacher should recognize that in addition, “education is the process whereby we learn to act like God and to do His work” (Graham 52).

The first step in accomplishing this incredible goal of training young people to go into the world as followers of Christ is to recognize the barriers. One of these barriers is the relationship that Christians have with the world around them. There are two ways that this relationship tends to develop. The first is “that the American Christian church is deeply involved in society, creating a dangerous problem for that church” (Greene 27). Romans 12:2 says “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” God clearly says that we are not to be too involved in the culture around us, but many Christians are, especially our teenagers. This means that students

are constantly living in two cultures. Nancy Pearcey says that Christians are bilingual (67). It is almost as if Christians are immigrants in a new country; they come in speaking another “language.” This language is a system of ideas and beliefs, hopefully biblical, that they try to translate into the culture around them. Unfortunately, the culture’s new language starts to become the one used most often until the “immigrant” no longer has to translate because the new language is easy. Students are especially vulnerable to this. They want so badly to fit in that they can easily disappear into the culture of the world around them, even if that was not their intent.

The second way a Christian can relate to the world around them is to withdraw. Many Christian institutions work to create a safe “God” space where the outside influences of the culture around them cannot reach. The part of their life that involves faith is not connected to the part of their life where they live and work. They may not see how these two parts of their life can ever work together because they do not recognize the danger in becoming too involved in the world. Their lives become divided into a spiritual part and a secular part. When with Christians they act like Christians, but when with unbelievers they act more like the world. The problem with this approach is that it becomes too easy to lose your witness for Christ before the unbelieving world. God commanded us to share Him with others; if we withdraw from Him to live as others do, it is nearly impossible to follow this command.

Another troubling problem is the separation of the heart and the head. It seems as though “Christianity too often addresses the heart and not the head”

(Moreland 27). Somehow Christianity has become all about feelings while the job part of life is intellectual. This creates a problem because students never learn to think through why they believe what they believe; their faith is based on emotions, which are changeable. Many students, after they leave high school, will face college professors who inundate them with information that will seem to contradict their beliefs. If their religion is all heart, they will not be able to rationally defend their faith. Many young Christians walk away from their faith because they don't understand, intellectually, the basis of their beliefs.

So how can education combat these barriers? Education needs to provide a strong foundation for students. A strong biblical worldview should be that foundation (Greene 65). Students need to learn that everything they encounter is connected to God. "The school curriculum is composed entirely of the creation" (Greene 151). We study the earth and people, all of which were created by God. It stands to reason that education should include the One who created what is being studied.

Education is not wholly about learning facts; it is about relationships. In Luke 6:40, "Jesus said that a student, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Braley, Layman, and White 76). The relationship between the student and the teacher will shape the way that student learns. A teacher "should teach in ways that will give our students a continual longing to know more about this wonderful world God made for our home, and be able to do more in it" (Braley, Layman, and White 93). The overall goal is to create people who enjoy learning and want to continue for the rest of their lives.

To do this, teachers should remember that Jesus was himself a teacher. He is the example we should attempt to emulate. Jesus taught with parables; his lessons were relevant to the lives of his listeners. He used these stories to introduce ideas to his pupils so they could think through them on their own. He did not beat people over the head with a concept until they understood (Green 172). Instructors should find ways to integrate biblical truths into their curriculum, but it is important to find a balance. A teacher should remember that every student is different. They all learn in different ways and are at different places in their desire to know more about God. If educators constantly point out how their subjects reveal God the concept will lose its effectiveness (Greene 172). It is important to give students the freedom to explore on their own.

It is essential to understand that, “learning involves both head and heart. With the head, students can learn God’s Word as a revealed body of information. They can learn the wisdom and information gained by humankind through the centuries....With the heart, students can develop and maintain right relationships with God, others, and themselves” (Braley, Layman, and White 101). Life cannot be split into an emotional faith and an intellectual education. Educators must recognize this tendency and prevent it. Education is not all about the brain. “Learning is not simply remembering the things you are told” (Graham 187). True learning leads to a response or action, some kind of change; change must come from the heart. “The heart is the source of our behavior. In order to affect behavior, learning must touch the learners’ hearts. Learning is accepting something as the truth, making a heart-level commitment to it, and acting on it.

Learning must be more than simply intellectual storage or assent” (Graham 154). Teachers need to realize that “Neutral facts make no demand on the learner. One’s response is conditioned solely on one’s personal and selfish interest in the facts involved. The Christian teacher does not provide a new set of facts, but she does something special with them. She reinvests them with their God-intended meaning. In this light they now demand a response from the learner” (Green 168).

In the same vein, religion is not all about the heart. “Young believers ...need a ‘brain’ religion—training in worldview and apologetics—to equip them to analyze and critique the competing worldviews they will encounter when they leave home” (Pearcey 19). Students should be challenged to think through issues rather than spit back the “right” answer. After all, “students are made in the image of God...God is rational, creative, and personal” (Graham 18). Students must be able to think through and defend their beliefs. This can only happen if their faith comes from both their heart and their head.

Education can also help students find a right relationship with the world around them. There is a way to combat this problem of living in two worlds. Looking back at the example of immigrants, what if we trained our students to be more like missionaries (Pearcey 67)? The missionary lives in the new culture, but rather than attempt to blend in, he works to change the customs around him. In order for a student to do this, they must have a firm understanding of their own beliefs. This is where educators need to focus their effort.

In order to help students avoid withdrawing from the world educators need to prepare them to be a light in it. Christian schools so often become fortresses where students are protected from the bad influences of the world. If we want our students to be a light for Christ when they leave we should try a different strategy. Christian schools should be more like a garden than a greenhouse. We should be preparing and training students to grow and thrive within the harsh environment of the unbiblical world they live rather than the artificially sheltered environment of a Christian School. They should learn how to deal with all the difficulties that the world will throw at them rather than hide from them. We should teach them how to develop the skills they will need for their careers, but also how to do that job in a way that glorifies God (Moreland 181). We should teach them how their faith relates to every aspect of life. “For a Christian, there is no secular domain” (Braley, Layman, and White 60). All parts of our lives are relevant to our faith just as our faith is relevant to every part of our lives.

Education will be the foundation a young person will build the rest of his or her life on. Therefore, it is vital that this foundation include God. “If we want our students to live the gospel after they leave school, then we must help them experience it in school (Graham 39). We must teach them that the “Scriptures [are] interesting, contemporary, and vital;” the Bible is not just an old book (Braley, Layman, and White 328). Students must learn that their heart and head should work together in all areas of their lives. Educators need to prepare students to face all that the world will throw at them and still remain strong. It is a goal that will require much from teachers, but the rewards will be eternal.

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