11-30-2007

A Christian Philosophy of Education of a Public School Educator

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As a young man growing up in the fundamental evangelical circles in the United States where intellectualism was synonymous with spiritual liberalism, the author has entered the world of philosophy with a little trepidation and much excitement. In the book, *Total Truth,* Pearcey (2005) discusses the dichotomy that has developed within the American evangelic community and which envisions the world as a two-story structure— the upper story consisting of the realm of spirituality and the lower story consisting of the physical realities of the day. This dichotomy has led to Christians hiding the light of Christianity under the proverbial bushel of secularism, leading to the continued corruption and depravation of American Culture. Not only does restricting spirituality to the upper story limit Christians' effectiveness in the world at large, it creates a box that the world has used to push Christians back into, preventing the Christian's venture into the culture at large. It is against this that the following Christian philosophy of education for the public school educator was developed. It is intended not only to be relevant to the world of education, but also to permeate every other aspect of life.

For a Christian to develop a philosophy outside of Biblical authority is to develop the idea of light without the concept of the sun. The main questions that philosophers endeavor to answer are: "Why are we here?", "What is reality?", "What is truth?", and "In light of purpose, reality, and truth, how do we live?" King Solomon, in his treatise in Ecclesiastes, discusses the latter question in great detail. He discusses the actions of those living with a secular philosophy and continually finds them wanting. In this discourse, King Solomon analyzes those who live to work, who live to make money, who live to be successful, who live to party, and ultimately who live to serve themselves. In the conclusion of all these analyses, Solomon repeatedly equates such endeavors with "a

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chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:26, NIV). After debunking the various fruitless

reasons to live, Solomon seeks to answer the question, "What is the purpose in life?" He

leaves his readers with the ultimate answer in his closing dialogue,

> "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this are the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NIV).

Solomon seems to be saying that man cannot be fulfilled outside of a relationship with

God and cannot know how to live outside of His commandments.

Metaphysics/Epistemology

The question of truth has been debated throughout the ages. The idealist would

say that truth is what happens in the mind and emphasize what exists in the mind, not in

the natural world. By contrast, the realist would state that what happens in the natural

world is the only truth one can know. Pilot asks this question of Jesus Christ, whether in

jest or not, but does not stay for an answer, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). This question

was answered several times throughout the Gospel of John. The fact is that Jesus Christ

describes Himself as the total embodiment of truth: "I am the way, and the truth, and the

life. . ." (John 14:6, NIV). By virtue of this declaration, a Christian must conclude that

reality and truth only exist within the definitions of Divine revelation and the essence of

God's creation.

Divine revelation has taken on many forms throughout human history. Before the

birth of Christ, revelation was made manifest by the appearance of God to man; such was

the case when God appeared to Moses on numerous occasions. Another example is God

corresponding verbally to man, as when God audibly spoke to Samuel as a young boy in

the Tabernacle. At other times in Scripture, God revealed His will through angelic

messengers, as was the case on numerous occasions and included angelic messengers to Mary and Joseph with news of the impending birth of the Christ child. During the life of Christ, divine revelation took on the form of human flesh in the personhood of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John begins with the declaration that Jesus was the embodiment of divine revelation: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . .The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:1, 14a, NIV). After the ascension of Christ, divine revelation took on two forms. First, it took the form of the Holy Spirit: "But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.   He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears. . ." (John 16:13, NIV). Secondly, the scriptures are a form of post-ascension divine revelation; Paul makes this case in his second letter to Timothy: "All Scripture is God-breathed. . ." (2 Timothy 3:16a, NIV).

God's creation acts as another testimony to truth. Paul discusses this in Romans when he writes, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen. . ." (1:20, NIV). While it is true that scripture defines all truth, a Christian cannot ignore certain natural laws that have not been defined in the Scriptures. The law of gravity, while described in Scripture, is not defined within its parameters. This leaves a Christian to conclude that there are natural laws, and that while they are not defined in the Scripture, they are part of reality and truth. A Christian must be careful not to confuse theory and natural law. In other words, the Darwinist theory of survival of the fittest is accepted as a natural law by many scientists, while in actuality it is a theory founded on false premises of truth. Nature only acts as a purveyor of truth when it complements and corresponds to Divine revelation.

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Axiology

It becomes imperative for anyone calling himself a Christian or a follower of Christ to act with ethical behavior that will point others to a saving knowledge of Christ. St. Francis of Assisi implored his parishioners to "Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words" (Simple, 2005). Throughout his epistles, including nearly all of the text of I and II Corinthians, the Apostle Paul discusses how people should live ethically. Paul continues this theme throughout his epistles. For instance, his discourse on the 'Fruits of the Spirit' indicates that if a Christian acts in an ethical manner there will be tangible results of such behavior: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control" (Galatians 5:22, NIV). Paul writes this in comparison to the unethical behavior that results from the sinful nature of man: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. . ." (Galatians 5:19-21a, NIV).

In the Scriptural account of creation, God created man in His own image and called him good. He also created nature and the world and called them good. Obviously, God was talking about both functionality and beauty when He categorized them as good. Beauty can be defined as many things, but the first premise of nature and creation being beautiful gives one a starting point to discuss true beauty. The inverse of nature and true beauty, whatever sets out to destroy God's handiwork or God's redemptive plan, would thus be artistically unpleasing. While the Bible says little about beauty and art besides the obvious beauty of nature, God's divine revelation does state that everything that is

done must be done to glorify God in order to be considered good: "So whether you eat or

drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31, NIV).

Educational Philosophy

Pearcey (2005) states that all philosophies can be analyzed in light of three

important events and human reaction to those events:

>   CREATION: How was this aspect of the world
> originally created? What was its original nature and
> purpose?
>   FALL: How has it been twisted and distorted by
> the Fall? How has it been corrupted by sin and false
> worldview?. . .
>   . . . .REDEMPTION: How can we bring this aspect
> of the world under the Lordship of Christ, restoring it to its
> original, created purpose? (p. 128).

It is with these three events in mind that the author approaches the realm of

educational philosophy. Warren (2002) discusses man's purpose on earth in light

of Scripture in the best selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, theorizing that

each person was created with five purposes. Embedded within these purposes is

the idea that each person was created with a God-given yearning to establish a

relationship with his creator. Warren describes this in day one of the reading:

"You discover your identity and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ"

(p. 20). He goes on to describe the first purpose of education in a dialogued

question and answer session with God; the first of two questions of this dialogue

is "What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ" (p. 34). It becomes imperative to

ascribe the first and foremost purpose of education to equipping people so they

will be able to come to a cognizant, purposeful relationship with Almighty God.

This fulfills the first stage in Pearcey's three-stage test: that man was created as a

companion with God, made after God's image. Man was then dirtied and stained by sin, thus causing humankind to fall out of a right relationship with a Holy God apart from a proper atonement for sin. Redemption is only found in a relationship with Jesus Christ and His atoning act by virtue of His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

The second purpose of education can also be found articulated in the pages of day three of Warren's book, in which he discusses the idea that each person was placed on earth and equipped with specific skills and abilities to fulfill his God-given purpose. The second question in the dialogue with God in chapter three is God's question to man, "What did you do with what I gave you?" (2002, p. 34). In light of this question, it becomes obvious that the subsequent purpose of education is to prepare each individual student to fulfill his or her God given purpose. The implications of educating each student to fulfill his or her God-given purpose are more imperative and widespread than any government legislation. Every individual was created with a distinct set of gifts and abilities in order to achieve the acts he was uniquely designed to fulfill.

Student learning

Because of the individuality of each student, the student is the driving force behind education and the most important entity in the education continuum. Gardner has been in the forefront of discussions of student individuality with his theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner has proposed that intelligence is not just comprised of one's abilities to discern and process information in a traditional way, but rather defines intelligence in a less traditional way. Smith (2002) describes this as "the capacity to

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solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting." To date Gardner has conceptualized intelligence in eight different regions, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential (Smith, 2002). The implications of multiple intelligences are the realizations by educators that not all students process information in the same way and that every student must be valued for the intelligences he or she possesses.

Long before Gardner, the Apostle Paul discusses multiple intelligences in his discourse in I Corinthians 12, stating, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working. . . The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts. . . . Now the body is not made up of any part but of many. . . . As it is, there are many parts, but one body" (vs. 12-15, NIV). The implication is that everyone is different and has different abilities and gifts, but each person, because of his individuality, completes the whole of the body of Christ.

Teacher behaviors

The role of the teacher in this student-centered philosophy varies according to the situation. For teachers to place themselves and their knowledge of the curriculum above the needs of the student is detrimental, for it creates a culture that does not place the student first, therefore potentially limiting to the student's ability to interact with the curriculum. There is a time and place for the teacher to be the purveyor of knowledge and the student to be the receiver of the teacher's wisdom; however, a student-centered philosophy would dictate that this be used when appropriate to relay vast amounts of

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information in a short period of time. The teacher must know when this is appropriate and when it is not.

One of the most important lessons one first learns when dealing with youth is that relationships come first as students get older. However, when students need relationships, most American education systems pull the safety net out from under them. This is exemplified in the movement of students from a middle school environment where students are cared for in teams of teachers, to a high school environment where the typical student is without an adult advocate. When dealing with teachers, the author continually stresses the concept that "Kids do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." This idea that relationships must permeate every aspect of the school draws the author to the attractiveness of a progressive child-centered education concept. In many instances, the relationship between the teacher and student is more important than the ability of the student to process curricular information. Jesus Christ emphasizes this role as an accessible teacher that cares more about the child than the information in the Gospel of Mark: "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me…'" (Mark 10:13, 14a, NIV). The fact that Jesus took time on many occasions to build relationships with those following Him speaks of His value for relationships and of His belief that the people are more important than information. Knight (1998) emphasizes this in his book *Philosophy & Education*: "Healthy relationships, in fact, stand at the heart of both Christ's teaching ministry and Christian teaching methodology" (p. 236).

Curriculum Focus

The curricular focus of schools must be aligned with the two purposes of education: to equip people to establish a relationship with Jesus Christ and to equip people to fulfill their God-given individual purpose in life. By virtue of these purposes, the curricular focus should change as students grow in maturity, knowledge, and relationship with God.

The curricular focus of early education must be a focus on the basics. The ability of a student to read, write, and perform mathematical functions is the basis of a solid education. The ability of a student to read is imperative for a student to read the Scriptures and come to an understanding of God's purpose for them on a personal level. The focus on the basics is not the only thing that needs to be taught to each student, however. Other educational focuses must be both supplemental and complementary with the student's abilities to read, write, and perform mathematical operations. The increasingly shrinking size of the world due to technology makes it apparent that language acquisition may also become an essential of education. An increased understanding of language development makes it imperative also to teach foreign languages at an early age. Various studies show that early language acquisition is not only a luxury, but that students acquire language more easily at an earlier age (Bilingual, 2002). To complete the curriculum, a well-rounded early educational program is necessary, including physical education, a variety of the arts, science, and a basic understanding of social studies.

As the world changes with technology, the curricular focus tends to change and become more diverse. As students continue to grow in this ever-changing world, it mandates that students be more flexible in their thinking and processing skills. As the

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curricular focus expands, there is a need to ensure that the basics are reinforced and not neglected. The one constant in a changing world is the need for students to be able to read and write adequately. The simple fact that every person has a distinct and individual purpose in life that only he or she can fulfill requires that schools offer a diverse curriculum, offering courses designed to teach students certain vocational skills.

Educational Methodology

Based on the simple fact that every person is different and that each student has a unique set of intelligences, educational methodology must also be diverse. The diversity of the methodology must be determined by the diversity of the student make-up. With the advent of scientific, brain-based research on the process of student learning, the educational community can now discern what activities cause real, long-term learning to take place. Using this technology, research has been able to show several key generalizations: 1) Active students learn better than inactive students; 2) Learning linked to prior knowledge is more likely to become long-term learning instead of short-term knowledge; 3) Information that is assessed is more likely to be committed to long-term memory than information that is not assessed; and 4) Each student learns differently because every brain is unique (Chapongian, 2007).

<center>Conclusion</center>

Christian educators in the public school system find that it is often difficult to live out a Christian philosophy of education on a daily basis—difficult, but not impossible. The fact is, students are searching for something to believe in, and Christians have the answer. Quite often, Christians fail to take the first step in becoming an educator of influence by building relationships with their students. It becomes imperative that each

educator recognize the individuality of students and strive to prepare them for their God-given purpose in life.

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