

True Education

Why study? Is getting good marks the only goal? Does an education lead to the formation of character, the broadening of horizons, a love for a life-long exploration of knowledge?

I often ask students why they attend a university or college. Do they attend to get "marketable skills" without paying attention to the basic questions of life and the world? Does life have meaning? Who is God? Is truth knowable? What are the standards by which to judge right from wrong? Does the world make any sense? What is my place in it? And, how do Christian students "survive" in a secular postmodern environment? It seems that they are habitually marginalized.

At a university students are confronted with many choices. And what they choose will greatly determine their future role in society. Will they remember God on campus? Or will they postpone thinking about Him until they are old and senile?

University years are formative. Whether a student is in commerce, science or the humanities, choices are made about meaning, reality, God, human nature and history. At a secular university the dominance of non-Christian ideas can make it very difficult for Christian students. The influence of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and postmodernism is strongly felt between the academics and professors. For example, Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking, and others of the "scientific" community view Christian thinking as an outdated superstition that must be replaced by the certainty of science. Students are told that they must create their own truth and values. There are no absolutes. Modern universities have become multiversities. There is no functioning integrating central truth. Each subject taught stands by itself. Each professor protects his own turf. Every idea seems to be politically correct except classical Christian doctrine. This modern educational creed can be summed up with Steve Turner's poem Creed.

We believe in Afarxfreudanddarwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

The Christian faith is treated as just another private preference. Unfortunately many Christian students have adopted this view. They remind me of a medical doctor I read about. He believed in the Virgin birth of Jesus Christ but only on Sunday morning in church. But if students treat their faith as a privately held opinion they will never be able to connect it with their education. How can they connect to their subjects the belief that Jesus Christ is the Lord over every area of life while leaving Him outside of the lecture hall? The Christian faith is not simply a private belief but public truth for all people and for all times. When we recite the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...", we confess that the Creator knows all about His creation

so that all truth about everything is His. The world belongs to the Lord. All creation is included in God's plan of redemption (Rom. 8:18-25). In Christ all life finds coherence and unity (Col. 1:7).

How do we put together what we discover through our studies? Father Brown, the priest-detective in G.K. Chesterton's mysteries, often solved crimes in a way that baffled the experts. Sometimes, investigators would view the scene of a crime and make elaborate guesses. Father Brown would usually sigh, "There are many explanations that may fit the evidence. What we want to know is, which one is right? And this is exactly what happens when one investigates discoveries and theories. We must ask, "What is the right approach?" Students may say, "This is all theory. Why talk about right and wrong approaches to one's field of studies? Do perspectives really make a difference?" We cannot function with them. We all must interpret what we observe and try to make sense of what we see and hear. We all look at the world through tinted glasses. A person's worldview is his way of thinking about life and the world. Your perspective matters. As someone wrote, "Ideas have legs." There is a definite connection between a worldview and everyday life, between belief and practice. Different worldviews give different answers to different questions. For example, if one's worldview is shaped by naturalism than the cosmos is the beginning and the end of all things without any room for the Creator and creation. Hope in a life beyond death is then merely illusionary. If we believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, all other ways proclaimed by man are false.

If we believe in the possibility of miraculous healing, we will not be surprised when a so-called unexplained healing occurs, although we will continue to wonder why some are healed and others are not. When we view a person as a mere thing, nothing but a conglomeration of matter, euthanasia is an acceptable way of ending life. If we believe that God is the author of life and each human being His image bearer, euthanasia is then a horrible evil act. Abortion is then not a viable option but the taking of a life which belongs to God. If we believe that God instituted marriage already in the Garden of Eden, the union between a husband and wife, we will oppose same sex "marriages" as well as couples living together outside the marriage bond.

How do we connect our faith to our studies? Christians don't focus attention only on spiritual matters. Christianity is not just a rescue operation. It is more than a pathway to heaven. The Bible is a guide not just for our personal salvation but for our walk in the world. It provides a world-and-life-view, which should have a profound influence as "salt and light" throughout society. Its message is holistic. Because the Christian faith is a world-and-life view, it obviously has its own approach to education. The Christian scholar believes that the study of natural and human phenomena will disclose God's purposes. Christian education is more than getting marketing skills or learning ways to make more money. It focuses on the development of the Christian mind; it helps students to think about ultimate questions and important issues from a Scriptural perspective.

A Christian professor believes that he has a calling from God to nurture students in faith and knowledge. He is concerned not only with interpreting and communicating facts, but also with preparing students for Kingdom service. Harold J. Berman, professor emeritus at Harvard Law School, commented that a "Christian scholar strives to find God's purposes, God himself, in the subject of his scholarship. He or she must therefore be a prophet, and more than that, an apostle."

Why study? A university education should be a pursuit of knowledge which leads to the discovery of truth which discloses the glory of God in creation and history. True education is in service of God. How do we connect our studies to our faith? Should this question even be asked in our secular times? If we don't connect our faith to our studies we compartmentalize our faith.

Shortly after Harvard college was established, its founders confessed the dynamic relationship between the Christian faith and education. Harvard's College Law of 1642 sums up my argument for a Christian approach to education:

"Let every student. . . consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17:3, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. Seeking the Lord giveth wisdom, everyone shall seriously by prayer, in secret, seek wisdom of Him.

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