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## WHY DO CHRISTIAN STUDENTS SOMETIMES RESENT CHRISTIAN TEACHING?

**Christian education finds itself at a crucial and unsettling juncture. Although it has sought to lay a thoroughly biblical foundation and to impart truth at every hand, many students are cold, even resentful, to its teaching.**

In an age when young people define truth by their own subjective perceptions, perhaps we should ask ourselves some questions: Are we teaching them the whole truth? Could we, who cherish it, actually be dumbing down our presentation of the truth? Amid calls of “Don’t give them doctrine, make it practical!” and an obsession with “principles to live by,” have we lost sight of the basics and perhaps even obscured the person of the gospel, Jesus Christ?

When the way our students behave seems to indicate that they do not understand true Christianity, we often respond with more and more behavior-focused instruction. Instead of teaching what Christ has perfectly accomplished for us, do we overemphasize personal do’s and don’ts? Paul testifies his understanding of the command to present “Christ crucified” in I Corinthians 1:23. Perhaps one reason the gospel has lost its wonder and richness for young

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“Just because we have the same enemy does not mean we are on the same side,” says the character William Tyndale in the drama “To Serve a Higher King.” Biblical creationists may need to say the same thing to an eclectic group of scientists and philosophers who have, over the last two decades, found that natural laws and chance alone cannot explain everything in nature.

Biblical creationism has long been the target of attack by evolutionary scientists. But a new movement, called *intelligent design* (ID), has recently drawn fire for questioning the almost inviolable sanctity of Darwinism. It would seem then, at first glance, that biblical creationism has a new ally.

True, both creationists and ID followers agree that some biological processes are so functionally complex that astronomical odds would prevent their development. They also see the “irreducible complexity” of certain living systems; for example, structures

such as the human eye and the flagellum that propels some single-celled organisms have so many interdependent parts that they could not have developed in gradual steps by evolutionary processes.

And both creationists and ID proponents agree that nature abounds with evidence of design—and not the result of chance mutations as evolutionists maintain. Instead, it calls for some intelligent force or being with a plan. Unfortunately, the ID movement is so broad in its ranks that its supporters range from biblical creationists to agnostics. The designer could be the God of the Bible, or it could be Gaia, Mother Nature, or some unspecified life force.

The ID movement has certainly caught the attention of the science establishment and has drawn fire from many of the same scientists opposed to a literal interpretation of Genesis.

Simultaneously, it has fueled a more serious reappraisal of Darwinism among nonbelievers. The

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# A New Front in the War on Creationism

movement has caused many states to reevaluate their state science standards and has even influenced textbook adoption.

Because most ID adherents refuse to defend any sacred text or even to claim the identity of the designer, they have been granted more license than creationists have to question the status quo of modern science education. And their impact is significant. A recent issue of the National Science Teacher Association's periodical, *The Science Teacher* (November 2003), dealt almost entirely with helping teachers understand the nature of the intelligent design movement as well as scientific creationism and the "threats" they pose to "real" science.

The research and scholarship of the ID camp can certainly provide critical ammunition for our fight against the threats of evolution. A few of their writers are not only sympathetic with but also promote a literal interpretation of Genesis. However, many others share few of our convictions. While we benefit from many of their efforts and face some of the same foes, should we form alliances and fight from the same trenches? Some suggest that we should.

Just as the Apostle Paul used the words of Greek poets (Acts 17:28) to direct his hearers toward the true

Source of life, we have the opportunity to confront our culture, using the scholarship of some who might not be in total agreement with us. However, this must be done with caution. Romans 1:20 makes it clear that the "eternal power"

of the real Designer is clearly seen in His creation. We must be careful not to become "intelligent fools" by not clearly giving God the glory for His works (vv. 21-22). ■

*Romans 1:20 makes it clear that the "eternal power" of the real Designer is clearly seen in His creation.*

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# Defining Christian Education

Christians have been educating their children since the time of Christ and have been doing so in officially labeled “Christian schools” for decades, but there is still confusion as to just what Christian education is.

*Education* is the developing of character, knowledge, and skills for a desired purpose. Most educators would agree that education should prepare the student to function well throughout life. But secularists and Christians disagree on their definitions of the word *well*. What is the core of Christian education—that without which education is not Christian at all?

At the core of Christianity is Christ Himself—His person (who He is) and His work (what He does). Christian education begins by introducing the student to Christ—by bringing him to realize that there is a God (Gen. 1:1) to Whom he owes allegiance and obedience (Hos. 13:4) and that this God has revealed Himself perfectly in His Son (Heb. 1:1-3). It does this for two reasons: that he may know Him (Phil. 3:10; John 17:3) and that he may be like Him (I Cor. 11:1; II Cor. 3:18). Once

the student is regenerate, genuine Christian education can occur.

Just as Christ is the perfect revealing of God, so the Scripture is the perfect revealing of Christ (John 5:39). Christian education must recognize the Scripture as its primary written text. The student will learn theological doctrine from the Scripture, but Christian education depends on the Word for more than that. Since God is the Creator (John 1:3) and since He is truth (Ex. 34:6; John 14:6), then all that is true comes from Him, and all subjects must be taught from His perspective. The Bible was not intended to be a science textbook, and a chemistry course will include large amounts of material that is not in the Scripture. But the Bible is accurate whenever it speaks to any subject, and perhaps more importantly, it sets forth a worldview—creationist and providentialist—that must inform and direct the study of every subject.

Education includes development of character as well as transfer of information. The character goals of Christian education will be Christian in the narrowest sense:

they will imitate the character of Christ as revealed in the Scripture. Every part of the student’s school day will reflect the purposeful discipline that is necessary to the development of Christ-likeness. And since the goal is personal and all-encompassing, that discipline will extend beyond the campus to the student’s entire life. What the student does “on his own time” is of great interest to the Christian educator and falls under his oversight.

What, then, will the product of truly Christian education look like? He is a born-again Christian who is purposefully pursuing Christ-likeness in himself and others. Accomplishing of the will of God is his primary purpose for living. As his God-given talents and abilities allow, he is a critical thinker. He enjoys learning and is devoted to continuing his education throughout his life because it leads him to glorify God. And because he has the intellectual and character-based tools, he will be good at whatever God has called him to do. ■

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# Why Use Secular Textbooks?



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# Holding Our Ground: The Christian Response to Error

When countering error, conscientious advocates of biblical truth can all too easily arrive at extremes that caricature the positions they mean to defend. Rather than clarifying issues, such efforts leave God's people with a partial, misshapen account of the truth they sorely need—better off, no doubt, than they were without it but still poorly equipped and unsettled.

They can go wrong, first, by failure to recognize more than one side of a two-sided truth. The common term for a two-sided truth is paradox, ordinarily defined as “a seeming contradiction.” Some paradoxes express things not difficult to understand. When Jesus told His disciples that the wide gate opens toward destruction and the narrow gate toward life, the contradiction was simply between the factual truth and their ingrained way of thinking, between reality and appearance. To resolve the paradox required only relinquishing a misperception, replacing ignorance with knowledge. The paradox was simply an arresting packaging of a truth.

But when Jesus spoke of the need for a grain of wheat to fall into the ground and die in order to produce new life, the apparent contradiction was in the very nature of the truth itself—indeed in the actual structure

of the reality being represented. The idea that death must precede life is a startling truth, observable in nature but darkly mysterious as a universal principle—one that operates in both physical and spiritual domains. It requires special explanation in order to be understood.

Take, for example, the double sense of nature in Scripture. The biblical thinker has an ingrained suspicion of things natural, as indeed he should. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 1:14). The natural man in Scripture is spiritually blind and morally corrupt, caught up in his own purposes and importance. The opposite of the natural man is the spiritual, the perceptions and desires of regenerated man, whose entire being and course of life express the God-life within him.

On the other hand, we are given to understand also in Scripture that the natural is approved of God whereas the unnatural is disapproved. Paul speaks of reprobate

persons who lack natural affection (Romans 1:31; II Timothy 3:3), some of whom in their depravity even “did change the natural use into that which is against nature” (Romans 1:26). He reminds the Corinthians that nature teaches a man the shamefulness of his having long hair (I Corinthians 11:14). In these passages the opposite of the natural is not the spiritual but the perverse. Can it be that human nature is both bad and good? We are taught that the sin-flawed inherited nature—Satan's and our doing—is to be condemned and suppressed, whereas the created nature—God's doing—is to be affirmed and developed in His redemptive plan.

Paradoxes then can be merely verbal mechanisms, such as that of the two gates, or they can be of the actual substance of the idea, such as that of the grain of wheat. The latter kind are either easily resolvable, such as the double

meaning of nature, or ultimately unresolvable. The unresolvable includes some of the most important truths we have. The method of the paradox is to lead us, in the effort of resolving it, to a valuable insight, formulating a truth for us in a richly memorable way.

*To be in accord with divinely revealed truth, our positions must be formed naturally from Scripture, not counterrelationally to the error we mean to combat.*

Arguments in defense of truth go awry also because of a second tendency: forming a position diametrically opposite the erroneous one, forgetting that error is not always 180 degrees from the truth. Error may lie 90 degrees off the truth or even be sitting on truth's borders. If truth, let us say, is north by the compass, error is not always due south; it may be east or west, even northwest, and even in not-so-rare instances north-northwest.

To be in accord with divinely revealed truth, our positions must be formed naturally from Scripture, not counterrelationally to the error we mean to combat. The fact that a position was held by Freud does not mean it was in every respect wrong. Freud was not the first to propose that there are depths in the human mind. The

idea is prominent in Plato. It is everywhere in Scripture itself. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," searching all his innermost parts (Proverbs 20:27). God knows our thoughts and purposes "afar off"—before we ourselves are even aware of them (Ps. 139:2). The brain is a multitasking marvel, and beyond that is the mysterious interplay of its synapses and the soul.

In opposing Deweyism—self-directedness in progressive education—we need not reject every idea of John Dewey. Jesus used a variety of teaching methods with His disciples, including some associated with progressive education. He employed, for example, the method of learning-by-doing when He sent the twelve out to preach two by two. Their experience was conducted

under His oversight and structured toward a purpose. They reported to Him when they returned and received further instruction.

Reactional thinking is a special danger in deadly serious controversy. When reacting to a position that is mostly wrong but partially right, we may find ourselves proposing one that is mostly right but partially wrong, a mirror image in reverse of the one opposed and both inaccurate. How useless would be a weathervane whose base pivoted with it, turning in its entirety to confront the wind so that north showed always opposite to the way the wind was blowing. ■

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*Ron Horton of the Division of English faculty has published books and articles in Christian education as well as in his professional field of Renaissance literature.*

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people may be our presentation of the wonderful central figure His is sometimes overtly, sometimes subtly, superseded by lesser goals.

In I Corinthians 1:23 Paul also states that there were those who found his preaching of Christ patiently unacceptable. The impact of Paul's ministry on both his own generation and every generation since cannot be understated. It is astounding. But though Paul faithfully sought to preach Christ crucified, his message was not, and has not been, welcomed by every person who has ever heard it.

We all lament our own lack of power, our want of humble piety, and the great limitations of our flesh that make us inadequate to the task. We learn to put less and less confi-

dence in ourselves. But we are confident that God is never frustrated. His promise in Isaiah 55:11 is that His Word shall not return unto Him void but shall accomplish that which He pleases and prospers in the thing whereto He sends it.

As we seek to reach those who seem hardened to our message, we can remember our Lord's example of teaching on the road to Emmaus. In Luke 24:27 we read, "He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Though a stumbling block and a rock of offense, the teaching and preaching Christ crucified, we are assured, is our example for Christian education in every generation. ■

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*Brian Forrester is a writer for Teacher to Teacher.*