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Opportunities . . . in Christian Schools

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A list of some of the opportunities which a teacher has in a Christian school can serve two purposes. In the first place it may help young teachers or young schools to recognize their potentialities and to become more efficient more quickly. In the second place it may awaken Christian parents to the advantages of a Christian education and so stimulate them to establish new schools. I hope that both of these aims may at least to some extent be accomplished today. The particular items to be mentioned are found on all levels of instruction, yet is rather natural for me to think of the higher levels. The teachers of the lower grades will have to adapt these suggestions to fit their young pupils.

THE PLACE OF THE BIBLE

The first and most obvious opportunity that a Christian school furnishes is the opportunity to teach the Bible. In fact, Christian parents who hear of Christian schools for the first time often conceive the sole difference to be the inclusion of a few lessons in the Bible. While such uninformed parents are technically mistaken in this conception, they are nevertheless right in principle. The difference between secular and Christian education is indeed the inclusion of the Bible. What the parents at first fail to appreciate is the fact that the Bible affects all the courses of study and is not exhausted in a special course called Bible. However, we should never fail to insist on the special course called Bible. The Bible, whether or not it is a revelation from God, has been and still is the most influential book in our civilization. English and American history cannot be understood apart from the influence of the Bible. The Protestant Reformation, the desire for political liberty and freedom of religion, the growth and cultural formation of the United States, are all very largely products of the Bible. From a purely secular viewpoint therefore an educated person must know this most important factor in our civilization. And because the public schools do not teach the Bible, the graduates of public schools are not well educated. There is a gap in their training. They have been given information on mediocre and trivial matters, but they have been prohibited from learning the most important cultural force in the English speaking world.

In contrast a Christian school can teach the Bible. The pupils in Christian schools will learn its contents. Where the product of the public school knows of David only from the distorted story in the movies, the product of a Christian school will have accurate knowledge of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Elijah, Isaiah, and above all Jesus Christ.

The public schools give a defective education as judged even by secular standards. But I am not willing to judge education merely by secular standards. The Bible is not just one factor in western culture: it is a revelation from God of life and peace. And the Bible course in a Christian school is the place to teach God's plan of salvation. Adam, Abraham, and Isaiah all looked forward to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. To teach how salvation from sin was planned for, prepared for, and accomplished, is the paramount opportunity of the Bible course in a Christian school.

However, since parents think of the Bible course first of all, it seems that more emphasis is required on the opportunities a Christian school has in the other parts of its curriculum. I shall choose for discussion two subjects that occupy a prominent position in secular education: literature and history.

LITERATURE PROPERLY PRESENTED

In the teaching of literature the Christian school has opportunities not found in secular education and has obligations that secular education cannot fulfill. These opportunities and obligations relate to the use of Biblical material, Biblical ideas, Biblical principles, and Biblical philosophy in the teaching of linguistic and literary studies. In the lower grades where grammar is or should be taught, the Bible can be used for illustrative material. Figures of speech and the aesthetic embellishments of language can be studied in a Biblical setting. Parables and short stories as well as epic grandeur are likewise to be found there.

This is not to say that the pupils and students should be prevented from reading Homer's *Odyssey* or Aesop's *Fables*. The non-Christian literature should have its place. But I do wish to insist that Biblical literature also be given its place. There is no good reason why it should be ignored; and in a Christian school there is every reason why it should be exploited to the full. In this way Christianity and the Bible will be tied in with daily life. The Bible will not be a completely unknown book, nor even a book used a few minutes on Sunday but divorced from all the pressing phases of weekly living. Then too the use of the Bible in first or at least second grade reading, its use in grammar, language, or

English classes, and its use in literature courses will serve to impress the lessons of the Bible class and give the pupil a permanent grasp of the Bible's contents. It is to be regretted that students forget at least three-fourths of what they study. What person over forty years of age can remember much of his college course in sociology, astronomy, or German grammar? But in a Christian school with the Bible at the center of the curriculum and taught at every opportunity, the student will acquire a knowledge of the greatest book in the world, and will retain that knowledge throughout life, and indeed forever.

And yet the use of the Bible in literature is not confined to illustrating points of grammar or even to studying Ruth and Esther as model short stories: there is a further and much more important use of the Bible. This has to do with general literary criticism. The graduate of a Christian grade school, high school, or college must take his place in a society that prizes non-Christian literature. He will, or at least he may read the Saturday Review of Literature; he may find it necessary, pleasant or useful to read and discuss current productions. Whether it be for his own enjoyment and culture, or whether it be more pointedly for the propagation of Christian principles among his associates in the world, he should have been provided in the Christian school with principles of literary criticism. We are all at times likely to be taken in by plausible non-christian propaganda. There is much of it in literature. Goethe's Faust is one of the greatest poetic productions of all time and as such has powerfully recommended a pagan view of life. In this century Andre Gide has had a wide anti-christian influence, winning for himself a distinguished position on the Papal Index. To mention just one of his books, Philoctete succeeds in making Christians seem repulsive. Thomas Hardy too, at least in his earlier works, makes a plausible case against providence and in favor of blind chance. Samuel Butler gives a pleasant picture of (shall we call it) refined vice. And more recently there have appeared the novels that emphasize class conflict and advocate socialism or communism.

This is part of the literature that molds the modern mind. These are the books that college students and educated adults read. With this type of thought the Christian worker must contend. Therefore a Christian should know how to analyze these productions and show wherein their plausibility lies. What false assumptions are made, and how did the author surreptitiously insert them in the text without the reader's notice? Which seemingly clear sentences or paragraphs hide the central ambiguity between the author's alleged premises and obvious conclusion? In short, how can the educated Christian expose the antichristian author, explode his argument, and turn the whole matter in favor of Christian principles?

This is the opportunity and indeed the obligation of a Christian school.

HISTORY CORRECTLY TAUGHT

If this discussion of literature has been conducted too much on a college level and has therefore been of minor interest to teachers of lower grades, a rapid survey of the opportunities in history will disclose ample material for all levels of Christian instruction.

The history courses in secular institutions suffer from three defects: omissions, distortions, and false statements. These defects, instead of being haphazard and canceling each other out, are so chosen as to weaken the faith of Christian students, strengthen the opposition, and so produce a secular society.

That there are omissions cannot be doubted. Perhaps the most obvious of all omissions is the avoidance of explaining the role of Roman Catholicism in history. In the state of Indiana a board composed entirely of Roman Catholic priest passes on the text books used in the public schools. Small chance therefore that courses in American history will give the unfortunate experience of our diplomatic relations with the Vatican a century ago. That episode, having been expurgated from the text books, is now forgotten, and the Romanists are able to make another attempt at obtaining diplomatic recognition. In the field of adult education the Romanists have tried to exclude from the public libraries Paul Blanshard's book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*. Where this attempt failed, librarians report that somehow or other this book is soon lost.

Just as evil history of Romanism is omitted, so too silence is maintained as to Protestantism's beneficent role. For example, a seventh grade history of England is able to cover Cromwell and the Stuarts with hardly a hint that the basic problems were religious. And where religion has to be mentioned, as with the Reformation, the text books are generally deficient.

Let us examine this type of omission further. The schools will give the students an account of some of the greater political changes that have occurred. Kings and wars have been standard contents for history books. More recently the text books have included some of the social conditions of the common people. But where in any public school system can one find reliable church history?

The secular educators reply that courses in history cannot include everything. History is too

rich. Selection must be made.

In this the secular educators could not have spoken more truly. Selection must be made. The more important events shall be included and the less important must be omitted. But as Christians we ask, What is more important? Are kings and wars important and church history unimportant? People decide between important and unimportant history on the basis of their religious, moral, and philosophical predilections. Secular educators, because they are secular, naturally think that the Gospel and its course through history are unimportant. It is in this process of selection that the humanistic philosophy of Columbia University controls the thoughts of children in the public schools. Far be it from me to say that the Civil War is unimportant in American history; but I must insist that the growth of the denominations, the waves of evangelism, and the interest in foreign missions are no less important than the Civil War. In fact they are more important and should by no means be omitted from the curriculum.

Of course not all items of religious importance are omitted in secular education. But when omission is impossible, distortion is a ready refuge. It takes longer to expose distortions to list omissions, but perhaps there is time for two examples. Professor W. T. Jones in *A History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 307, col. 2, makes an attempt to explain the success of Christianity in the second and third centuries. Whether God had anything to do with it, he says, is an unimportant point. "The important point is to see that the beliefs offered by all these sects met a new need." By thus classifying Christianity with the various other new religions of that age, the author engages in distortion. To teach that all these religions actually met a need is likewise a distortion. And even the statement that Christianity met a new need is distortion. The need for salvation from the power and penalty of sin was not a new need. The mystery religions did not meet that need. Christianity did and still does. Professor Jones continues by saying that "the important point is . . . to see how a change in the western mind called forth these beliefs." This too is distortion, serious distortion; for it was no change in the western mind that called forth Christian beliefs, but on the contrary it was Christian beliefs and historic events like the resurrection of Christ that produced a change in the western mind. Small wonder therefore that the author's next several pages are a vicious attack on Christianity.

In disputed matters certain differences of interpretation are ordinarily regarded as legitimate; beyond this area is distortion. Still further beyond comes outright falsity. But it is difficult to fix the boundary line between distortion and falsity. A second example will cover both. Frederick Mayer of the

University of Redlands writes on the Protestant reformation. He describes Martin Luther as a superstitious, strong hater who disapproved for the Peasants Revolt in order to gain the support of the moneyed interests. Professor Mayer further says that Luther made narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness his ideal. Of John Calvin he says that, "He was responsible for the burning of Servetus, one of the most enlightened minds of his age." Now, perhaps it is within the limits of justifiable difference of interpretation to consider Servetus one of the most enlightened minds of his age. Such an encomium probably means merely that the author agrees with Servetus. But these historians who repeat the story that Calvin had Servetus burned to death nonchalantly ignore the evidence. The story that Calvin burned Servetus was circulated during Calvin's own life time; and with respect to it Calvin wrote the following in a Reply to the Slandorous Reports of a Certain Worthless Calumniator. Calvin says, "For what particular act of mine you accuse me of cruelty I am anxious to know. I myself know not that act, unless it be with reference to the death of your great master, Servetus. But that I myself earnestly entreated that he might not be put to death, his judges themselves are witnesses, in the number of whom at that time were his staunch favorers and defencers."

But secular historians will probably continue to ignore Calvin's statement till the end of time. And school children and college students will have their minds warped by the omissions, the distortions, and the falsehoods of secular education.

These defects of humanistic education show by way of contrast the opportunities of Christian schools. In such schools Roman Catholicism cannot silence Evangelical teaching, nor will secular propaganda go unchallenged. Instead of being stunted and deformed the pupils can be given the fullest and most important information. Instead of being deceived by the plausible fallacies of attractive atheistic literature, they can learn the basic principles of the Christian worldview. And so prepared they will be able, as they now are not, to meet modern unbelief in mortal conflict.