

Christian Philosophy of Education

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Core Beliefs

Tozer wrote that the human mind will never “comprehend” God, but it can spend eternity “apprehending” Him.¹ Rather than attempting to prove God’s existence, the Bible begins with an affirmation: “In the beginning, God...” The Apostle Paul states that God’s handiwork around us is sufficient evidence for his existence. He further claims that the universe tells something of the Creator’s nature....

For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

But God desired a closer relationship than mere acknowledgment. We know some of God’s other attributes only because He chose to *reveal* them to us through His Word. Through the Old and New Testaments, God progressively revealed more and more of His nature. He is holy, triune, personal, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, loving, and good.

For His own pleasure, God created all that is or ever will be. He created volitional beings with whom He could share experiences and love. With that freedom came the potential for *not* loving. Man (and some other beings) decided to live independently, rebelling against their Creator. As Man sinned, he and the entire cosmos came under the curse of sin and death. With great mercy, however, God immediately applies the remedy—a Redeemer is promised.

In what has been called the Grand Miracle, the second member of the Trinity became a human like us. The New Testament tells of Jesus, the Son of God—God in flesh—who dwelled with us, then died as a sacrifice for our sins. The sacrifice of Jesus paid the sin debt for all who believe. His death not only atoned for our sins but set in motion the redemption of the entire cosmos. As His children, we have the privilege of participating in this restoration through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Nature of the Learner

No effective educational endeavor can ignore or minimize the nature of the learner. Humans have a “split” constitution. On one hand, we exist as *image-bearers* of God, a role not given to any other created being. This truth alone places eternal value and dignity on each student in every class. Yet at the same time, all humans have inherited a fallen, sinful nature because of the original sin of Adam. The two sides of this paradox can be reconciled only through the redemption provided by Christ.

Graham sees six of God’s attributes that may be noted in learners—purposefulness, creativity, rationality, morality, freedom, faithfulness, and responsibility.² He also points to social aspects of being in His image. Learners can express love and mercy and are dependent on God and others.

¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1961).

² Donovan L. Graham, *Teaching Redemptively*, 2003.

The true nature of the learner must be considered in every aspect of the curriculum, or education becomes a vain pursuit, deriving its strategies from changing whims and opinions of those who interpret reality through relativity and contrived morality.

Nature and Role of the Teacher

Having served in many different classroom settings, it is evident that the term “teacher” is simply an umbrella for a diverse set of roles. Almost without exception, teachers are counselors, mentors, confidantes, encouragers, police, and too often “parents.”³ Some of these are even more pronounced in the Christian classroom, as the roles take on biblical mandates and ethics. This can be problematic at times since we are also just as *fallen* as our students.

The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. (Luke 6:40)

The Christian teacher must point learners beyond themselves to the nature of Christ. In general, my role as teacher must amalgamate these roles into a “classroom lifestyle” that leads students to become the mature image-bearers within God’s providence, and to participate in the sanctification He has planned. This is inclusive of subordinate objectives such as becoming good citizens, family members, church members, workers, and leaders. Also, within this scenario, I have the responsibility to model Christ in my actions in and out of the classroom. I must nourish my own growth with the spiritual disciplines that encourage my own sanctification.

Nature of the Learning Process

There is currently much disagreement over the “how” of learning. Most theories derive from the perceived nature of the learner as previously discussed. Graham asserts that students must learn “in conjunction with their nature.”⁴ He rightly asks why learners are so often viewed as passive *vessels to be filled* when their natures are so clearly active, creative images of their Creator. This perspective sets the heart as the “root of learning.”⁵

It is then crucial for students to not only see truth but believe it. In science especially, this becomes evident in differentiating between the *products* and *processes* of science.

A Christian’s View of Subject Matter and Curriculum

It should be obvious then, that the natures of the learner, teacher, and learning process necessarily inform the curriculum. According to MacCullough, there is a flawed tendency to think of the curriculum as a textbook and set of prescribed standards.⁶ Contemporary standards and practices attempt to address this concept, but usually achieve only superficial results. However, the Christian view of subject matter and curriculum provides the freedom to embrace all of these

³ Although not ideal, the traditional concept of *in loco parentis* is a reality That must be acknowledged to some extent in almost every classroom setting.

⁴ Donovan, 145.

⁵ Donovan, 147.

⁶ *By Design*, Martha E. MacCullough, 2013.

as a coherent “worldview.”⁷ My Christian view of the curriculum allows me to not simply to give lip service to ethnic, gender, and ability diversities, but to design curricula that consider the entirety of the truth in the context it is taught.

The Goal of Christian Education and Resulting Educational Practice

The catechism so aptly and simply defines the purpose of each human: “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” The entirety of Scripture gives instruction on specifically how this is played out in this physical world. My objective for every student within my influence must be centered on this goal. Note that this goal transcends the physical, transient realm. Other philosophies may emphasize truth, goodness, and beauty, but only the Christian worldview can bring about a curriculum that has as part of its goal the everlasting benefits to learners.

⁷ Actually, just a component and result of a solid biblical worldview.