

Textbooks: Messages Subtle and Not so Subtle

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Is it just me, or does it seem we may be partly to blame for the battle we are in for our students' minds? No, this is not an article about television. I'm referring to the textbooks used in most public—and many Christian—schools nationwide.

I recently surveyed secular textbooks and found the following topics discussed: the oppression and subjugation of women by the male “Establishment”; the glorification of pop culture icons including rock/rap/R&B stars, humanist authors, and fierce feminists; the acceptance of evolution as scientific fact; the affirmation of the primacy of environmentalism. And it's not just the secondary textbooks that worry me. Secular elementary books routinely encourage students to “be your own person” and “think of yourself first.”

So what to do? To redeem our students' minds for God's glory requires us to acknowledge that “in Him [in God] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) and that whatever is done must be done “heartily as to the Lord” (Colossians. 3:23). This acknowledgment makes significant the use of explicitly Christian textbooks—those texts that do more than merely purport a “moral emphasis” or tack a Bible verse onto the title page. A thoroughly Christian textbook helps a teacher to support the spiritual growth of Christian students and to equip that student for God's service.

Why are Christian texts so crucial? Foremost, Christian texts promote a biblical worldview. For example, when discussing the women's rights movement of the 70s, a Christian history text would not include a poem proclaiming disappointment as "a woman's lot" or praise a woman's "right to choose," as I saw recently in one secular text. Instead, a Christian textbook factually discusses the positive and negative outcomes of the movement, basing all such evaluation on Scripture. Christian textbooks do not, as do their secular counterparts, include statements that deny God as Creator ("millions of years ago," "before civilization got started,") or that worship the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:25, 28-32) by proclaiming humans the "greatest destroyers of all time" or apocalyptically stating that the earth is in the midst of a "garbage crisis." In short, using a Christian text, a teacher can spend time teaching rather than unteaching.

Sometimes more harm is done by what is left unsaid. A secular science textbook discusses babies and bees and rainbows but never mentions the God Who made them all (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3). It is this absence of even an acknowledgment of God that is perhaps most telling—and most damning—for the reader. For how can a student, daily bombarded with humanism, materialism, hedonism, socialism, and pragmatism, withstand the unstated premise that "God can't be too important since He isn't mentioned anywhere in this scholarly work"? Here Christian textbooks can effectively combat an anti-Christian worldview.

Christian textbooks emphasize the characteristics of God and principles of godly living. They recognize for each branch of study the traits of God that it manifests. A writing textbook reflects a God of creativity and beauty, a science book reflects a God of infinity and order, and a Christian history text presents world history not as a series of random acts but as events planned by an omniscient, omnipotent God. Students understand the conflict between

righteousness and unrighteousness, how it is played out, and how truth and righteousness ultimately triumph. They read real-life examples of the principles of sowing and reaping and of the providence of God. Their text illustrates that God knows and plans the beginning, middle, and end (Hebrews 4:12-14, Colossians 1: 16-18) and that His ways are perfect (Psalm 18:30).

Christian textbooks further support and equip Christian students by encouraging discernment. Far from being merely a “lock-step” series of exercises, Christian textbooks go beyond the presentation of facts to give students the tools necessary to detect the differences in the wisdom that is from above and that which is earthly (Proverbs 1:7). The books encourage analyzing content, using biblical principles rather than blindly accepting anything presented. For example, in a Christian literature text students are asked to compare and contrast Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* with various biblical accounts. The book also examines scriptural principles governing the consequences of Macbeth’s actions and evaluates the advice of Sir Francis Bacon’s essays in light of God’s Word. In effect, the text itself encourages students to discriminate between the good and the bad (or between the excellent and the merely good) and to choose the one over the other.

How can we best counter the philosophies that stunt students spiritually and prepare them for nothing nobler than an increase in this world’s wisdom? With God’s help, we can use Christian texts to give students access to a higher wisdom. But Christian textbooks, even excellent ones, are not the lone answer to our educational woes. For that, we must look to Christ alone: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all” (I Timothy 2:5-6). He is still the best answer—still our only Hope. Why use a textbook that undermines that Hope, subtly or not?

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