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Education and
the Real World

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EDUCATION AND THE REAL WORLD

In your light we see light Psalm 36:9

I am one of those fortunate people who has visited both Disney World and Disneyland. And I have enjoyed them both. The last time I was at Disneyland in Anaheim, California, was one of the place's busiest times of the year. It was wall to wall people, and, by the end of the day, battling the crowds became a little tiring. Other than that, though, I had an enjoyable time.

The first thing we visited that day was the Tiki hut. I had visited it for the first time about ten years earlier. It hadn't changed much—the same tropical birds, the same songs. But, as earlier, when I first entered the Tiki hut and the birds started singing, it seemed as though the birds were real. I had to look at them very closely before I understood that they were artificial. It was fun listening to them, and much of the fun came from realizing that, through some ingenious tricks, these imitation birds looked almost more real than real birds do.

So it was fun, visiting Disneyland, and one of these days I hope to visit Disney World in Orlando, Florida, again, because

I hear things have changed quite a bit since I was there last. The remarkable thing about both places is that they have been created by man to be nearly more real than the real world, but they are fantasy through and through. They're great fun for a day, but neither of them would be a good place for someone to spend his or her entire life. Of course not; both places are embodiments of the imagination, and the real world is more important.

One thing I would never do is send my child to school in Disneyland. Since we are talking about fantasy and the imagination, use yours for just a moment. Imagine that there was a school in Disneyland that confined its studies exclusively to Disneyland. When the students there studied the sea, they would study the submarine ride. When they studied about birds, they would go to the Tiki hut. When they studied literature, they would study Fantasy Land. When they studied about animals, they would study about Mickey Mouse. And when they studied history, they would study the talking statue of Abraham Lincoln.

Now, if one of the students raised his hand and asked, "Where did all this come from? Who made this wonderful place?" the teacher would say, "Walt Disney had

the idea at first, and he put an army of designers and engineers together, and they came up with the plans for all this. Then they hired contractors and built it all."

Now, can you imagine sending children to a school like that? Of course not. No one would do such a thing because it would be very obvious that though the students might have fine classrooms and excellent teachers-and perhaps even a great deal of homework-these students would be wasting their time, because they would not be studying about the real world.

Education and the real world-when it comes to education, we want to be sure that reality is being studied. Now, however, as you're looking forward to enrolling your child in a school in September, are you sure that your child will receive an education that is about the real world? "Why, sure I'm sure," you say. "I'm going to send my child to the school right around the corner; that's a splendid school."

"And what kind of school is that? ... "

That's a very important question. And I don't want to accuse any school of being like the imaginary school in Disneyland, but I must say that there are large and impressive schools these days that are not really educating children about the real

of world. It would be improper to say that they are educating in fantasy land, but some such schools come surprisingly close to promoting a fantasy education. If you are really interested in having your children educated about the real world, you should be interested in what I have to say about Christian education.

Possibly you are now very confused because you feel that, if any schools are educating in fantasy land, they are Christian schools.

"I often hear this charge made against Christian schools. And, surprisingly, I even hear it made by Christian people. They say something like this: "I am a born again believer, and I take my religion very seriously. I realize that there are things wrong with public schools, but I still send my children to regular public schools because I believe they have to be exposed to the real world. I just don't think Christian schools are very realistic. They shelter Christian kids, and they isolate them from what they have to know in today's world. No, I'm sorry; I'm a Christian, but no Christian school for my child, thank you. I want my children educated for the real world."

This is a very interesting reaction to Christian schools. And I can understand

it. Of course, we all want our children educated in the real world and for the real world. And it is true that, at first glance, Christian schools seem to be somewhat isolated from mainstream education. But in looking at the picture closely, we discover that Christian schools provide an education that is the most realistic there could ever be. In fact, if you want to talk about education for reality and about reality, send your child to a Christian school. Let me tell you why.

I should first define for you what I mean by a Christian school. A Christian school is one in which the administration and the faculty are all committed Christians who are skilled at expressing their Christian faith in connection with learning. They are people who say this to God: "With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Psalm 36:9). The way to know truth in this world is to see things in the light of God's Word. To be more specific, we must know the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him and study His Word carefully; then, as Jesus Himself put it, we shall know the truth, and the truth will make us free (John 8:32).

A Christian school, then, is made up of an administration and teachers who feel that the Christian faith is to be expressed

in all areas of education. Some people think that a Christian school is different from other schools only in that it has more discipline and has prayer and Bible reading at certain points throughout the day. But that's not really the way it is. A Christian school is a school in which every subject is taught in the light of God's Word.

A Christian school organization that I am personally familiar with is Christian Schools International, which serves thousands of students in the United States and Canada. I also know of many groups of parents who have banded together to form Christian school societies that presently operate Christian schools. And these are rigorous schools. Morale is high among the parents and administrators and teachers. They know what they are doing, and they are enthusiastic about what they are doing. But the most important thing about such schools is that they educate about reality.

Why do I believe this? Well, Christian education is education for the real world because it recognizes the existence of God and the fact that God has created every thing we study. Some people say that, when we engage in education, we should make no reference to God. In fact, they say, if we educate our children in terms of

God's existence, we are educating them in fantasy land because no one knows whether God even exists.

But, now, just a minute. Isn't it true that either God exists and He created the world or He doesn't exist and the world is independent (which means that matter is ultimate reality)? And isn't it rather obvious that education that believes in a Creator God will go one direction and education that believes matter is ultimate reality will go another? Of course. If you want to know which direction education will go in believing that matter is ultimate reality, just observe education in the Soviet Union or in mainland China.

The existence of our Creator God is a fundamental reality that affects education, whether we like it or not. And if we try to weasel from beneath this by saying that we feel we cannot judge whether a Creator God exists and that we wish consequently to be neutral on this question, we are in fact choosing practical atheism for the educational system.

Christian education recognizes the Creator God at every point, and it is education for the real world because it recognizes that the world belongs to God. Such education is an expression of praise and worship to God; in Christian schools, admin-

istrators, teachers and students realize that their very study is a worship of the glorious Creator. They acknowledge Him as they study about His world. This, you see, is different from what goes on in a school where all sorts of things are taught without ever giving God the credit for creating them. In a Christian school, education is a confession of faith; in a school that does not recognize the Creator God, education is a denial of faith. All education starts with a faith decision.

Christian education is also education for the real world because it has a useful authority controlling it. Now, this is a little more difficult to grasp than much of what we ordinarily talk about with regard to education. But think about this with me.

Education involves making choices. If we look at the school experience from kindergarten through grade twelve or thirteen, we see that we have to make choices about what we are going to teach our children. There is so much that we want to teach, and the quantity of knowledge grows every day. In addition, the government wants schools to teach the children some knowledge of government and love for country. And the business community wants students to be ready to go to work at useful occupations when they graduate.

So how are these choices going to be made? And what is the authority used in making them? The whim of the moment? What people happen to be excited about at present? What about values? Values enter into education, too. Schools nowadays deal with family matters. They even teach about sex. How are decisions made with regard to all this?

In a Christian school, the primary authority is the Bible. Some people throw up their hands in dismay when they hear this. They don't believe in the Bible as the Word of God. They don't even believe in God. But many of us believe that the Bible is the Word of God, so we have to make our decisions regarding the way we educate our children in the light of the Bible. As Psalm 36 says: "With you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light; the Bible is the light of God, surely we have to let its light shine in our schools. This enables us to make the educational choices we have to make. This provides us with the moral and ethical foundation that enables us to make the value judgments we have to make.

Now, if you object to using the Bible as the authority for education, what authority will you use? Will you use the authority of any group that can muster enough votes at a PTA meeting? Will you use Darwin and

Freud and Marx. If you say you would rather use Darwin and Freud and Marx, well, you are entitled to your opinion, but you must also realize that the ideas of these men, or of others like them, have become your Bible. You have put your faith in them, just as many of us have put our faith in the Bible. And if you accuse Christians of having made a religious choice in choosing the Bible for education, you have really made a religious choice yourself.

Finally (and there are many more matters that could be discussed in connection with education for reality), Christian education is education for the real world because it views children-students--properly! It is impossible to educate properly if you have an improper view of students. In Christian schools the children are viewed as image bearers of God who are responsible to live in obedience to God. They are viewed as citizens of their country and also as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, which spans all history and the entire world.

This view contrasts starkly with today's prevalent view regarding human beings in the naturalistic evolutionary view of origins that portrays human beings as nothing more than part of the animal kingdom. In this view, our self-consciousness and even our religion are explained solely in terms of

naturalistic evolutionary ideas. And human culture and each individual human life are purely accidental. Jacques Monod, in his book *Chance and Necessity*, indicates that we should not even think of evolution as a purposeful, straight-line process but as an arbitrary, capricious, meaningless conglomeration of events. And somewhere in all this we human beings have appeared, and love has appeared, and even worship has appeared. But in essence, nothing has any meaning or purpose. Such ideas dominate modern thinking, and such ideas dominate modern education when education is conducted without reference to the Bible.

In a Christian school, the student learns how to live as God's person. Each child is an awesome individual who has the potential, as C. S. Lewis has reminded us, of becoming either the most beautiful creature of the Lord or the most depraved creature of the underworld. When a teacher realizes that he or she is dealing with students of such potential, his or her teaching is profoundly affected.

Let's be honest when we talk about education, we talk about something that can be related either to reality or to fantasy. Many of us believe that any education that is based on a denial of the Creator

God, that proceeds purely under the direction of human authority, and that views humankind as nothing more than part of the animal kingdom is fundamentally flawed—it is education that is oriented to the imaginations of mankind—it is fantasy education. And the trouble with such education is that it does not provide the young citizens of our country with the equipment they need to live usefully, wholesomely, and joyfully.

On the other hand, education that begins with recognizing the Creator God, that is governed by the authority of the Bible, and that views students as image bearers of God is education in truth. It is reality education. It can provide students with equipment to live usefully, wholesomely, and joyfully. Parents who believe in Jesus Christ fully and who believe the Word of God will most certainly want their children enrolled in Christian schools.

Think about this as you prepare to send your child to school in a few weeks. Maybe you have never considered Christian schools before. Why not do so now? You know, we are living in an age in which we have become accustomed to fantasy, illusion, and trickery. We expect to be lied to. The media these days recreate truth and recast ideas so that it is becoming in-

creasingly difficult to determine what is truth and what isn't. And the school system itself can easily be infected with a lack of reality that will finally be detrimental to our nation's children.

Thank God there are Christian schools, in which the reality of the true God, the living Word, and the wonder of mankind shape everything. These schools begin by recognizing that the fountain of life is with God and that we see light in His light. They confess the kingship of Jesus Christ, in whom all wisdom and knowledge can be found.

I surely enjoyed visiting Disneyland, but I wouldn't want to go to school there. When it comes to education, the real world is far superior. And remember: education and reality come together in a Christian school.

PRAYER

Creator God, we confess that in you is the fountain of life and that in your light we see light. We also confess that once we step outside the circle of your light, there is only darkness. Wherever you are denied, there is only confusion, illusion, falsehood, and despair. We are grateful that there are schools in which

great work of creation is recognized and in which you are honored in every classroom every hour of every day.

As we anticipate sending our children back to school, help us to think seriously about our educational choices. When we remember that children are your image bearers and that they have glorious and eternal futures, we realize how important their years in school are.

Gracious God, surround us with the light of your truth, even as we trust in you and seek to do your will in education. In Christ, we Amen.

This message, prepared by Dr. Joel Nederhood, was heard over The Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in cooperation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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