



# Back to God Flour

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Memorial Library*

**Two Basic  
Textbooks**

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## TWO BASIC TEXTBOOKS

*The heavens declare the glory of God.  
...The law of the Lord is perfect, reviv-  
ing the soul.* Psalm 19:1,7

Since I am not a professional educator I don't know very much about designing a curriculum. A curriculum is a course of study-it's composed of the various subjects taught during a school day.

Teachers and other staff members work on their school's curriculum all the time. Most schools even assign a top-level administrator to work exclusively on curriculum development. Curricula change over the years; some courses are added and others are dropped, depending on changes of the times and on the needs of the community and perhaps even the nation. So schools are always working with their curricula.

Sometimes educators who work on curricula will consult with members of their communities-people like us-and ask us what we feel should be included in their school's course of study. They recognize that, even though we may not be educators, we have ideas about what's important in education.

And there are some things that all of us

would want to see in the curriculum of the schools our children attend. We'd want the courses to be useful-to prepare our children for real life. We'd also want the courses offered to form a unity-we'd want to see some "integrity" in the school curriculum. That is, we'd want our children to feel that what they had learned in school hung together, that it had coherence, that when they thought about all the courses they took, they'd feel that the courses altogether made sense.

We certainly would not want the courses in our children's schools to contradict each other. For example, we would not want our children to learn one thing in a class in biology and then be taught something totally contradictory in a history class. We wouldn't want courses on marriage and the family to contradict courses in sociology, and so on. If this happened, our children would be totally confused when they graduated, and they would be ill prepared to do something useful with their lives.

Now, one of the best ways to guarantee that a school provides a useful and unified educational experience is to have the school use the right textbooks. Textbooks are closely connected with the curriculum, and they determine to a large degree

whether the courses offered will be truly useful and unified in approach and goals. The textbooks used in a school should complement one another—they should all represent the same viewpoint. If our children had a school experience in which one textbook contradicted another, they would wonder what was actually true, and they might conclude that it is impossible to know the truth with certainty.

Because of the convictions we would have about having a unified and integrated curriculum in the schools our children attend, and because we all know that textbooks are important in education, many of us are deeply enthusiastic about Christian schools and Christian education. Many of the Christian schools I am most familiar with work all the time at making certain that their curricula reflect the teachings of two major textbooks. Of course, these schools have many courses, and many textbooks and other study helps are used in the courses. But what happens in the classrooms of these schools is determined by the contents of two major books that reveal God. One of these textbooks is the Bible—obviously that's a book, and we all recognize it as one. The other book is God's creation. We don't always think of God's creation as a

book, but through His creation God tells us many things that we need to know about Him. Christian schools are schools in which the curricula are designed in the light of both these prominent books. And schools that design their curricula this way provide extremely valuable education.

Now, when we call the Bible a textbook, we do not mean that it gives us information about a host of subjects in a very scientific manner. Obviously, the so-called scientific method, as we know it today, was not part of the thought patterns of those who wrote the Bible. They didn't think as we do now. Even so, there is much data in the Bible about the origin of the world and of man that is factual, and these facts must be taken with supreme seriousness, even when we do our scientific work. The Bible even tells us how we should look at the other book God has given, the book of His creation, the book of nature. It says: "The heavens declare the glory of God." If we didn't have the Bible to tell us this, we might make some very serious mistakes when thinking about nature.

The Bible's main purpose, however, is to provide us with the knowledge of God. It tells us about God's centuries-long work

of redemption. And when we read it, the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ emerge as central. The Bible tells us that nothing in the world has been made without Him (John 1:3). And it reminds us that, when we think about creation, we must always think about God and about Jesus, God's Son, who died to restore creation.

For Christians, the Bible is one of the most important elements for daily living. They study it all the time. Churches that are true to their calling preach from the Bible every Sunday and have special Sunday school programs designed to deepen both children's and adults' knowledge of the Bible.

When it comes to education, then, Christian parents and their children are continuously influenced by the Bible. Christian parents want the influence of this book in the schools their children attend. And Christian schools take the Bible very seriously. They have special courses that enable students to study the Bible with precision. But, more important, Christian schools keep the Bible in mind as the primary authority for education when they develop their curricula. They earnestly apply to all subjects what they know about reality from their study of the Bible. Christian schools know that the Bible is an

important revelation of God, but they also know that it is not the only revelation we have of God. God's creation is also a revelation of God. And it is this—the book of creation—that is the central focus of attention within a Christian school.

Thoughtful Christian people have always seen a close tie between the Bible and the world. They have felt instinctively (because of their faith) that the God who meets them in the Bible and the God who meets them in nature are one and the same. Back in the 16th century, a confession of faith emerged and expressed the view that God speaks to us through both nature and the Bible. This old confession says: "We know [God] by two means: First by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see *clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity*, apostle Paul says (Romans 1:20)." This confession (called the Belgic Confession) then goes on and describes the other book that God uses to reveal Himself to us: the Bible.

Now, let's read a bit more of Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth" (vv. 1-4). This is not merely a poetic description of the world as something that comes from God; it is a declaration that says that, when we look at the world, we are looking at God's handiwork, and when we learn about the world, we are therefore learning about God.

Examining Psalm 19 carefully, we see at once that the Bible considers it necessary to keep God's nature book, or His creation book, and His other book, the Bible, closely associated with each other. In fact, after telling us about God's revelation in nature, this psalm immediately goes on to tell of the importance of God's law, or the Bible. (What we now call the Bible was called the law when this psalm was written. The law was the revelation of God's being and of the way He wants His people to live.)

Notice how Psalm 19 continues after describing the glory of God's revelation in nature: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (vv. 7-11).

So God is revealed in the elegant text book of "the creation, preservation, and government of the universe" and He is revealed in the splendor of His Word, which reveals His will for our lives and shows us that as we live according to His will, our lives will be successful and filled with joy.

We need both of these books if we are going to understand God and possess the truth. And our children need an education that takes both books very seriously. We cannot use one to the exclusion of the other. If we use only the Bible and close our minds to God's creation, we will not learn many of the things that we would be able to learn about God. It's one thing to read in the psalms that God has made all the stars and set them in place, but it's another to explore the seemingly infinite heavens and to discover the wonder of

what placing the stars in the heavens really means. And as our knowledge of God's book of nature expands, we learn to appreciate things in the Bible that we never really appreciated before.

But the reverse of this is also true. When we study nature, it is very necessary that we study it in the light of the Bible. This is because nature, by itself, reveals God's power and His divinity but tells us nothing about His love and says nothing whatsoever about the meaning of nature or of human life, as the Bible does.

All this has implications for the way a curriculum is developed in a Christian school. A booklet called *The Beginning of Wisdom: The Nature and Task of Christian Education* has a section dealing with the curriculum of the Christian school: "The course of study ... in a Christian school provides the central avenue by which our children are led to biblical wisdom.

... First, the curriculum in a Christian school should reflect God's dynamic design for the universe. All subjects must be understood not simply as cultural products or human inventions but as determined by God's work of creation. For example, biology and astronomy could not be studied if the Lord had not created plants, animals, the sun, moon, and stars.

The arts could not be practiced if the Lord had not created us to be artists or people who appreciate art. And so the curriculum in a Christian school seeks to open eyes and minds and hearts not merely to an understanding of the world as described in textbooks, but also to the marvelous plan and design of God's creation. All subjects provide a glimpse into the workings and the will of the Creator."

The booklet also stresses that "a Christian curriculum differs from a non-Christian curriculum by emphasizing divinely ordained interrelatedness. The Lord did not create a chaotic, disjointed world .... Therefore, a Christian school ought not to over-specialize in one area to the neglect of others. Instead, it should help our children become sensitive to the wonderful unity and diversity in God's creation."

This booklet also talks about wisdom in connection with curriculum development: "A Christian school's curriculum should be designed to prepare for wisdom... Our children must understand the basic structure of our environment. They must sense God's order, design, and presence there. But they must also understand how sin has distorted it; they must understand the Lord's will for all of creation, and be able to act accordingly. They

must develop the beginning of wisdom, as they learn to address the issues of our time."

I think most of us are well aware that nowadays most education is not conducted in the light of the two major textbooks God has given us. Prayer and Bible reading have been excluded from many schools in many places. This is a very serious matter. But when we think of all that is involved in the development of a school curriculum, it should be clear that whether or not prayer and Bible reading are part of a school day is not the most important issue. The most important issue is whether or not the book of nature is studied in the light of the Bible. The light of the Bible must be allowed to illuminate everything that is studied within the school. Only when that happens is it possible to develop a curriculum that is truly useful and truly integrated.

Christian schools at their best do all they can to create an environment in which everyone knows that the truth about created reality cannot be understood unless created reality is approached in the fear of the Lord, in faith. Truly useful knowledge will result only when the world, history, and human experience are studied in terms of biblical revelation.

It could be said that the difference between Christian education and public education is that one takes both of God's books seriously and the other takes only one of these books seriously. And many of us cannot escape the conclusion that an education that stubbornly refuses to consider the Bible will ultimately be detrimental for us and for our children. On a very practical level, education that excludes the Bible from all subjects cannot properly equip young citizens of our country to make useful decisions on the personal level and on the public level. Over a period of time, we will discover that people educated in this fashion will not have the proper view of their responsibilities, of the sacredness of life, and of the destiny of the human race.

Those who are earnest believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will always be dissatisfied with such an education for their children. This is the reason they work with sacrifice and ingenuity and initiative to build and maintain for their children schools in which the curricula reflect both of God's good books: His Bible and the elegant book of nature, which we find everywhere. As these believers work at Christian education, they are delighted to observe that their children gradually grow

to see the connection between the Bible and creation. They feel, too, that they are providing their country with a most valuable resource.

Now, those who do not share such people's faith cannot be expected to become enthusiastic about schools that study the world in the light of the Bible. But those who have been captured by the grace of God and who have the Savior, who is also the King of creation, know that, in providing their children a Christian education, their children are richly blessed.

What kind of a curriculum do you find in the school that your children attend? Are you truly satisfied with it, or do you fear that your children are being taught in isolation from the Word of the living God? If they are receiving such an education, please consider that God might be calling you to become involved in the Christian school movement. Starting and running Christian schools takes a lot of hard work and sacrifice, but the satisfactions are enormous.

If you are a Christian and a parent, surely one of the main reasons you are in the world is to provide your children with a Christian education.

## PRAYER

*Almighty God, we thank you that many people have worked hard to develop curricula that teach that you have revealed yourself in the Bible and in the world around us. Thank you for not remaining hidden and for showing us much about yourself. How great you are!*

*Use what has been discussed here today to strengthen Christian parents' determination to provide their children with Christian education. Use it, too, to encourage Christian educators to pursue their calling by showing students what it means to see your revelation in ordinary studies.*

*Bless our nation, God, with millions of young people who have been exposed to an education that prepares for wisdom. So many difficult decisions face us. It is so easy to make mistakes. We need wise citizens. Our Christian schools to produce people like this for our country. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

This message, prepared by Dr. Joel Nederhood, was heard over The Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation 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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