

# THE BIBLICAL EDUCATOR

*"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" Proverbs 1:2*

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## THE CHRISTIAN THINKER AS TEACHER AN INTRODUCTION

### No. 3: Dimensions and Creativity, A Digression

*By David Robinson*

At some point or other in our lives, many of us have no doubt been amused by the anecdote of the city dweller who, being quite lost in the country, enlists the aid of a suitably laconic farmer in order to obtain directions. The farmer, unable to provide the information after several tries, finally looks up, shrugs, and announces, "Well, I guess you just can't get there from here." It is left to our imagination as to the final fate of our pilgrim: perhaps he achieves his objective, perhaps not. Personally, it would not surprise me if he came to some bad end, most likely indictment for the murder of one John Q. Farmer.

It a way, such a parable has something to say to Christian educators. Assuming that one is an energetic, thoughtful scholar and teacher, with some notions as to the basic shape of one's disciplinary foundations (and some ambitions to communicate this to one's students), you will no doubt become aware of some very malignant demons who will assail your sense of "lostness." "Look here, old man," they smile, "you're on a limited schedule and all that. If you start to deviate with all of these original ideas and exciting plans, you will certainly end up in the soup later on. Quite aside from the fact that you aren't quite up to this sort of thing, it will never fit. Just stick with the textbook outline, reviews and tests; that's the solution to the problem. If you do anything more, then you can't get there from here."

This is indeed a serious consideration to bear in mind as you reflect upon the nature of the content that you wish to pursue in your classes; the demons do here speak the truth, as if you desire to cultivate Christian reflection in the classroom in the most profound way, you are going to have to balance content with temporal limitations. This obviously means that you must have some understanding of what you are about and what you would like to do with your curriculum before you enter the editorial struggle. You certainly won't be able to attain that goal from the infernal realms, so you must leave the "educational" props, paraphernalia and lying wonders behind, and press on to a direct confrontation with that which you would do, and the time that you will have. And this, you see, brings us face to face with dimensions.

#### Content and Time

In order to illustrate the content challenge, let us again reflect upon some prospects that might come to mind as we prepare to teach a course in U.S. History. There are those who believe that nothing happened before 1620 or after 1945; some would emphatically disagree. There is a group who feels that political history is the backbone upon which rests the constellations; others, equally positive, structure in favor of social or economic factors. A strong emphasis on military affairs has its share of adherents, to find itself counter-pointed by the followers of theological/intellectual trends and developments.

Already our minds may whirl, but the possibilities are by no means exhausted. How does one "attack" the particular blend of history that one might eventually settle for? Does one proceed chronologically or thematically? Will the class rely on a heavy orientation towards lecture,

or will reading and discussion predominate? What of the role of research and writing, certainly no luxury to the historian? Do you plan to devote any special time to the perusal of the relationship between Christian thought and history, or will such be implicit in the content of the course? The Christian thinker will ponder these points, which are merely a possible starting point, and become excited at what could be. The temptation is to try to make it all "fit": if one is conscientious (ruthless?) in the pursuit of such an ideal, frustration is the usual result for the teacher. Either it just doesn't "fit," or "teacher burn-out" sets in, or the students are left in the dust back there, somewhere. The nine month span defeats our highest aspirations—we are still creatures of time and space. Despair sets in: "Perhaps the demons are right. Maybe I can't get there from here." How does one untie the Gordian knot? (Assuming that the teacher still desires to do so.)

#### Dimensions and Creativity

If you hearken back to Gordian knots you may remember that there is a brighter side to all of this; Gordian knots are vulnerable to blades and slicing. Rather than try to untangle the dilemma of making it all "fit" into our procrustean schedules of finding that ultimate "solution," I would like to propose an alternative. At the risk of sounding trite, I would suggest that the difficulty of dimensions lies not so much in the inherent "mass" of "inertia" of history and its instruction, but, as in so many things in the Christian life, in our attitude toward that challenge. One might look at the monstrous collection of questions that I proposed earlier and agree with the demons—"You can't get there from here." In this case you must resign yourself to teaching from the infernal regions. Miserable for you, the outer darkness for your students.

Or, you might become a determined "mechanic." "Here is a problem," you say. "Right. Now to find that solution." Perhaps you will search out your old notes, or dust off that teaching strategies book. Some will seek to inquire at the oracle of the textbook representative, while others might invoke their more experienced colleagues for advice. Alas, many of those colleagues are in league with the demons, or will argue with you about their pet "solution." "But," you respond, "isn't that what I want? You've pointed out a *problem* with this dimensions thing. Shouldn't I seek *solutions*?"

Herein lies the flaw in our attitude. In response to the all too real question of dimensions in the teaching of history, we have descended to the framework of "problem." You are not facing problems. Not even pedagogical ones. You are facing spiritual challenges. You are dealing with an artistic medium, requiring creative response to unimaginable possibilities. Consider the comments of Dorothy Sayers:

... the words *problem* and *solution*, as commonly used, belong to the analytical approach to phenomena and not to the creative. Though it has become a commonplace of platform rhetoric that we can "solve our problems" only by dealing with them "in a creative way," those phrases betray either that the speaker has repeated a popular cliché without bothering to think what it means, or that he is quite ignorant of the nature of creativeness.

From our brief study of the human maker's way of creation, it should be fairly clear that the creator does not set out from a set of data, and proceed, like a crossword solver or a student of elementary algebra, to deduce from them a result that shall be final, predictable, complete, and the only one possible. The concept of

problem and solution is as meaningless, applied to the act of creation, as it is when applied to the act of procreation. (Dorothy Sayers, *The Whimsical Christian*, pp. 126-127.)

Dimensions in education, indeed, all challenges in education, are not puzzles to be solved. The dimensional considerations of a history class, or a literature class, or a course in mathematics are formulations of the artistic possibilities that exist within the parameters of a particular discipline and a particular time-span. The creative Christian mind will respond to such limitations as the good artist always has—respecting and rejoicing in the bounds of his medium, yet always seeking to stretch those constraints as far as he can. The teacher should be an artist, not expecting resolution among equally possible and acceptable directions in class, but rather never-ending revelation of new horizons. The knot can be cut.

#### A Final Word

If you are experiencing despair at this point, there is some hope: at least you understand the nature of the beast more fully. And this appreciation of dimensionality and creativity is a first step on the road to thoughtful response, especially in something as demanding as education. This is to encourage you, but this comfort is the doorway to an unavoidable warning—the artistic struggle that you will enter into as a teacher never ends in this life. Ever. New growth will bring new vistas, new dimensions, and new humility. Did you expect that it would be any different? Would you have it any other way? If you ever find yourself reaching the point wherein your “canvass” has become fixed and certain, beware. Almost without doubt you have forgotten, or are ignoring the fact that what you are doing requires life-long attention and commitment. “Brothers, I do not count myself to have apprehended...”

This does not mean that change for its own sake is to be sought, or that any approach to the teaching of history is as significant as any other—don’t forget the role of discernment—but rather that the size of the creative, as well as its complex nature should be sufficient caution against the kind of overweening pride which claims conquest, or seeks resolution in “solution.” The claims of creativity cannot be ignored safely; neither can substitutes for creative struggle be “bought.” It is useless to attempt substituting some textbook company’s approach for your own efforts. The gifts of the Spirit are not purchased with a budget; the gall of bitterness awaits any who try.

“God made the world through imagination,” said Berdyaev. Understanding and teaching about the world will require the same.

### AN EDUCATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

By Rodney N. Kirby

#### #12 “Total Depravity”

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)

We have looked previously at one aspect of the Biblical teaching on “the nature of man”—the fact that man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). This month we look at another aspect of man’s nature—his sinfulness. When Adam sinned, his sin affected not only him, but the whole human race, of which he was the representative head. Every person born of Adam, then, inherits a sin nature—a natural bent and desire toward sin. This affects all of man’s capacities—his intellect (cf. II Cor. 10:5), his will, his desires, etc. Man, left to himself, naturally inclines toward evil and away from God and His Law-word.

#### Content

There is much emphasis placed in modern education on *creativity*. The teacher is to give the child information, materials, etc., so he can express his imagination freely. This is seen in the fine arts, and in “creative writing.” Now, there is a place in the Christian school for creativity. However, our text gives us a warning in this area. It says that “every *imagination*... was evil.” We must not stop with enabling the child to express himself freely; he may (and, at first, most likely *will*) express a *sinful* imagination. We must show him how his imagination is not in line with Scripture (say, a non-Christian thought being expressed through allegory), and how he can bring it in line with God’s revelation. One’s imagination is

not neutral, and we must not say, “Oh, but you will suppress the child’s creativity if you critique his work.” Paul tells us that we must bring *every* thought (including “creative” thoughts) into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5). Children must be taught how to express themselves creatively in submission to God’s Word.

In our economics and government classes, we must also remember the sinfulness of man. We cannot rely upon man to solve our economic or social problems; man is sinful, and will progressively move farther from God’s Law into apostasy. It is quite easy to point this out in liberalism—collective man (in the state or democracy) is looked to as the savior from all our socio-economic ills. With the liberals in control, there is more and more oppression—of the rich, of the poor, of Christians, etc. But conservatism (as it is generally preached) has the same flaw. As this is being written, the Republican National Convention has just been held. While we may agree with many of the positions taken, yet there is one basic flaw—it is all based, just as in liberalism, on man. To be sure, it is the individual man, rather than collective man. But Ronald Reagan’s words are still ringing: we can “make American great again; we can reestablish respect for America among the other nations of the world; we can bring our productivity back up; etc. Only *God* can “make America great,” and we must be careful to make that fact clear to our students. The blessings of Deut. 28 do not come from a free market economy *per se*, but from a God who blesses faithfulness to His Law-word.

#### Methods

Since the child is sinful, we cannot depend on him to decide what he should learn, and when and how he should learn it. He will not choose what he needs (as defined by God’s Word), but will choose those things which least enable him to obey God and exercise dominion. However, those who advocate open classrooms either do not see this, or they deny it. Open classrooms are those in which the children, individually, decide which of several subjects they will study, how long they will study it, and how they will learn it (educational games, worksheets, books, etc.). Maria Montessori was a prime advocate of this methodology. She believed in the natural goodness of the child; he would thus choose wisely what he needed and was ready for at the time. If he wanted to study math all day, he could—or art, or music, or for that matter, recess. The teacher was merely to provide him with the apparatus needed to do what he desired. However, if we, with Scripture, view the child as sinful, we cannot trust him to learn what he needs. The teacher (and administrator) must decide what the student will learn, and when.

There is a variation on the open classroom concept in vogue today in many Christian schools. This is the individualized course of study, best represented by Accelerated Christian Education (A.C.E.). While the student does not have complete freedom of choice as to subject matter, he does proceed through the booklet at his own pace. To be sure, the teacher does monitor his progress, and can detect any slothfulness. And, it is admitted, it is easy to understand the rationale for such a program as A.C.E.—a small school can offer all twelve grades, with only a few teachers. (The writer is using a similar curriculum in tutoring several Cambodian refugee children.) But it would seem that the A.C.E. and similar programs still have not considered sufficiently the sinful desire of the child not to work up to his capacity.

#### Discipline

It is popular to submit rules for classroom behavior to a vote—giving the children a chance to experience “participatory democracy.” Also, the children will more readily obey rules they themselves have drawn up, it is said. However, if the child has a sin nature, as Gen. 6:5 says, then he cannot be trusted to make his own laws. The child may make laws against every kind of wrong behavior *except* his own. Even Adam before the fall did not make his own laws; how much less would a fallen, depraved human being be capable of doing so! Such “democracy” is actually training in autonomy—when the child grows up, he will no more look to God’s Law than he does in school. He will be a thoroughly trained-autonomous humanist.

Since the child’s *heart* is sinful, Christian teachers cannot expect discipline (even Biblical discipline) *in itself* to have a lasting effect on the child. Only the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit can change the heart. We may, and must, make the child conform to Biblical Law; but we can-

not change his heart to make him *desire* to obey that Law. The sinner's problem is not just bad *behavior*—it is a bad *heart*, which produces bad behavior. Thus, Christian discipline is distinguished from behavior modification, which sees only the outward behavior, and uses external means to change that behavior. Gen. 6:5 tells us that the *heart* is wicked, and so it is the *heart* that must be changed. Christian teachers must pray for their students diligently, asking God to give the children a new heart, one on which His Law is written (Jer. 31:33). Only in this way will our discipline truly be effective.

## BOOK REVIEW

By David H. Chilton

*The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality* (paper, 134 pp., \$5.00) and *Notes and Recollections* (cloth, 181 pp., \$9.95), by Ludwig von Mises (Libertarian Press, Box 218, South Holland, IL 60473).

If you think *The Biblical Educator* is trying to push the writings of Ludwig von Mises, you're quite correct. Mises was the most important 20th-century expositor of the free market system, and his books are essential for a sound grasp of economics. *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality* is another of his more readable works, written in a popular style. It is not so much a discussion of economics as it is a fascinating analysis of the mentality behind opposition to private property. Mises did not usually dwell on this subject in his other books, for he felt that "an economist must deal with doctrines, not with men. He must criticize erroneous thought. It is not his function to reveal personal motives for protecting fallacies. An economist must face his opponents with the fictitious assumption that they are guided by objective considerations only" (*Notes and Recollections*, pp. 51f.). In *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, Mises departs enough from this policy to show that the dominating ethic of the socialist mentality is one of envy and resentment.

The socialist resents the fact that, according to the laws of the market, men prosper to the degree that they serve the wants of their fellow men. "The sway of the principle, to each according to his accomplishments, does not allow of any excuse for personal shortcomings. . . . If a man's station in life is conditioned by factors other than his inherent excellence, those who remain at the bottom of the ladder can acquiesce in the outcome and, knowing their own worth, still preserve their dignity and self-respect. But it is different if merit alone decides. Then the unsuccessful feel themselves insulted and humiliated. . . . In order to console himself and to restore his self-assertion, such a man is in search of a scapegoat" (pp. 12ff.). That scapegoat is found in the system of free enterprise, which, in the view of the socialist, rewards the wicked and penalizes the virtuous.

The pervasiveness of the socialist mentality is evident in what Clarence B. Carson has labelled "the transformation industry," the popular literature and entertainment of our day. One aspect of this is examined by Mises as he analyzes the plot of the typical detective story:

A man whom all people consider as respectable and incapable of any shabby action has committed an abominable crime. Nobody suspects him. But the smart sleuth cannot be fooled. He knows everything about such sanctimonious hypocrites. He assembles the evidence to convict the culprit. Thanks to him, the good cause finally triumphs.

. . . The detective's motive is a subconscious hatred of successful "bourgeois." His counterpart are the inspectors of the government's police force. They are too dull and too prepossessed to solve the riddle. It is sometimes even implied that they are unwittingly biased in favor of the culprit because his social position impresses them. The detective surmounts the obstacles which their sluggishness puts into his way. His triumph is a defeat of the authorities of the bourgeois state who have appointed such police officers.

This is why the detective story is so popular with people who suffer from frustrated ambition. . . . They dream day and night of how to wreak their vengeance upon successful competitors. They dream of the moment when their rival, "handcuffs around his wrist, is led

away by the police." This satisfaction is vicariously given to them by the climax of the story in which they identify themselves with the detective, and the trapped murderer with the rival who superseded them (pp. 54f.).

Parenthetically, Mises notes that "there are, of course, other readers of detective stories." That lets you and me off the hook, but basically Mises is correct—just add reckless driving, and his plot summary is the outline of virtually every episode of *The Rockford Files*. Throw in long legs and braless T-shirts and you've got *Charlie's Angels*. The Great American Novel can be written by anyone with a grade-school vocabulary and enough class-consciousness to qualify as an intellectual.

*The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality* is easy and worthwhile reading. The publisher has included additional features in the back, among which are a list of Mises' major writings (grouped according to their relative readability) and a brief outline of the various economic schools of thought. As is true of Mises' *Economic Policy* and *Planning for Freedom*, this book is ideal for high school students.

In 1940, when he was almost sixty, Mises arrived in the United States as a refugee from Europe. Almost immediately he wrote an autobiography—if you can call it that—which was not published until five years after his death in 1973. *Ludwig von Mises, Notes and Recollections* is "autobiographical," if that term means that a person has written about his own history. But Mises gives practically no "personal" information about himself: this is *intellectual history*, a literary form which has certain shortcomings, but which also enables the reader to grasp quickly the principal ideas in the author's thought. The book is also an illuminating account of the economic slide of Austria, from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War. Mises details the development of his thinking against the background of critical events in European history, as he moved from an early interventionist position to his embracing of neo-classical liberalism. ("Liberalism," by the way, means "free-market," both historically and in Mises' writings; its modern connotation—the exact opposite of its original meaning—refers to statist intervention. The reader of Mises' works will do well to keep the distinction in mind. When he used the word, he consistently did so in its older sense. It was only with great reluctance that he allowed his book, *Liberalism*, to be entitled *The Free and Prosperous Commonwealth* for the benefit of his American readers.)

In many ways, *Notes and Recollections* is a depressing book. While Mises and a few others desperately tried to convince the world of the reasonableness of the free market system, their contemporaries hurled themselves into the abyss of totalitarianism, multiplying fallacies and compounding cultural disintegration. When a people is enslaved to envy, when a nation sees expropriation as the means to prosperity, no amount of solid reasoning will prevent its demise. "Political decisions are not made by economists, but by public opinion" (p. 67). Slaves cannot be liberated by legislation (they can always make new laws), or by reason (since the problem is essentially spiritual); the liberation of the slave mentality can come only through the gospel, by the renewing and transforming of the mind. And though the system of free enterprise is founded on Christian principles, Ludwig von Mises was not a Christian. By God's grace, he understood and applied the truth to many economic issues—yet he was helpless to change the economic drift of his age. He wanted the social superstructure provided in biblical law; but, in common with the socialists, he rejected the indispensable foundation for a "free and prosperous commonwealth." Toward the end of this book, he penned what must be the most poignant statement in all economic literature:

I have come to realize that my theories explain the degeneration of a great civilization; they do not prevent it. I set out to be a reformer, but only became the historian of decline (p. 115).

That is exactly the point. The good work done by many free-market economists will never produce the culture they claim to be fighting for. They want the benefits of a society that is ruled, internally and externally, by God's law; what they *don't* want is God's law itself. More specifically, they don't wish to be ruled by Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that *Restoring the American Dream*, one of the most popular "libertarian" books in recent history, was written by Robert J. Ringer, the author of *Looking Out for #1* and *Winning Through Intimidation*. Ringer's American Dream, stripped of its origins as a secularized Puritan ethic, is little more than an

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