

“SINE DOCTRINA VITA EST QUASI MORTIS IMAGO”

VOLUME XXV NUMBER II

CLASSIS

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ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

JULY, 2018

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NATURAL SCIENCES

by Gordon Wilson, New Saint Andrews College

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CRITICAL ISSUES

Historians and scientists love to systematize what they study. Taxonomists derive satisfaction from categorizing animals and plants. Historians enjoy pigeonholing people into certain philosophical camps and worldviews. To a certain extent, I have done this in this essay, but keep in mind that many of these scientists defy tidy classification. They don't neatly fall into certain camps. To a greater or lesser extent, many had a mix of worldviews, and even if you could interview them, they would still be difficult to label. Nevertheless, whether a scientist had a blend of ideas or was clearly in one philosophical camp or another, it has always been true that every scientist has preconceived ideas (starting assumptions or presuppositions) that frame how they see the physical world and how they frame questions and testable hypotheses. There has never been an unbiased (lacking a worldview) scientist. Good scientists, however, don't ignore or deny data even if it seems

difficult to fit into their worldview. They may need to adjust, modify, or simply discard their worldview or see if the data is able to be interpreted in a different way, but they should never discard the data. If their worldview is objectively true and the data is true (i.e., it was accurately obtained—no fudging or hallucinating), then there will always be a way that the two will harmonize.

The first major problem that continues to face Christians today is the apparent conflict between “science” and “faith.” As we did a flyby survey of some scientists and their philosophies, I hope you saw a clear trend towards a naturalistic worldview.

Today mechanistic philosophy has been replaced by Naturalism, which leaves no room for divine intervention. It doesn't just maintain that the universe is like a complex mechanical watch, which demands a Divine watchmaker (mechanistic philosophy). Instead, God has been removed completely out of the equation in matters dealing with matter. This didn't happen overnight. Over the centuries, particularly during the

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Enlightenment, the prevailing philosophy of science progressively became more and more mechanistic and then naturalistic, though much of it was mixed with elements of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. Since Darwin, however, Materialism or Naturalism has prevailed and grown stronger and stronger, at least in the sciences. Inexorably, it gradually began to push out any philosophies that gave any credence to the supernatural.

This has resulted in the redefining of science such that only naturalistic explanations are considered for any phenomena, and it artificially rules out supernatural explanations for all phenomena, including phenomena that seem to require divine explanations or causation. So if one asks questions like, “What is the first cause of life, or the solar system, or the galaxies, or the universe?” scientists trapped by modern naturalistic prejudices can only consider naturalistic explanations. If there is any reference to any intelligent agent that is beyond the physical realm (i.e., God), it is ruled out with disdain and considered highly unscientific because it has religious implications. Naturalistic scientists think that religion must be quarantined in its own separate realm of values, ethics, and meaning. They may view religion as useful to maintain ethical standards for the “ignorant masses” but a contaminant to science. They see Christianity and other religions as science-stoppers that stifle scientific curiosity and rigor. Many even consider all religion as superstitious nonsense. The current rhetoric is that science cannot allow faith to influence its inquiry. This is laughable when recalling the great pioneers of science we discussed above. The current scientific community has successfully banned Christianity from speaking with authority about how the physical world came to be.

This is a huge problem facing the Christian scientist. Faith (at least the kind that is in conflict with current “science”) is a belief in a supernatural being (God) who is the ultimate cause of the universe and life. This definition clearly is at loggerheads with the current definition of science because you can’t believe in only

natural causes and also believe in supernatural ones for the same phenomena. One of them has got to be wrong, and therein lies the problem.

The second major conflict between faith and science facing Christians today is Uniformitarianism. Currently, it is strongly linked to Naturalism and deals with measurable processes. It clearly attempts to explain phenomena naturalistically, but it added certain conditions. As you recall, this philosophy was formulated by James Hutton and popularized by Charles Lyell. It was a clear departure from the Scriptures. If certain processes happen slowly today, then we must assume that they have always occurred at that same slow rate. This way of thinking forced one to conclude that huge geologic formations must have been slowly deposited and sculpted over eons of time rather than through processes that could have shaped the earth rapidly during the timeframe laid out in Scripture. Not only did Uniformitarianism open the door for Darwin’s theory of evolution, it established a non-biblical and generous timeframe to compose a completely naturalistic story of the earth and life.

During the Enlightenment, the Word of God was gradually marginalized regarding historical matters and was considered authoritative only when addressing spiritual and moral issues (this began to dwindle too). Human reason was increasingly exalted and was effectively cut loose from scriptural truth. This allowed men of science to consider alternatives to biblical earth and life history. These philosophies, Naturalism and Uniformitarianism, both of which are free from scriptural authority, began undermining and eroding the trust people had in the Bible’s authority. This erosion occurred at different rates in different countries, but midway through the twentieth century, the scientific and intellectual community worldwide embraced a non-biblical earth history. After that point it was very difficult to go against the prevailing scientific consensus without looking ignorant, backward, naïve, and anti-intellectual.

The third big problem that the Christian faith must sort out is the confusion between historical science and empirical science. Empirical science is dealing with the present. In empirical science, that which is being studied is observable, testable, and repeatable. Conclusions are not as greatly affected by preconceived assumptions. Two scientists with completely different philosophical or religious worldviews can and do often arrive at the same conclusions within empirical science. If both were measuring the acceleration of a ball dropping (and they are using the same instrumentation and system of measurement, say metric) they can arrive at the same answer: 9.8 meters per second per second. Or if they are molecular biologists studying gene regulation in bacteria, both could come to the same conclusion of what proteins are involved to turn its genes off and on.

Historical science, on the other hand, is enormously affected by starting assumptions or presuppositions that can not be proven or tested. They just have to be held axiomatically as a framework to interpret circumstantial evidence. Historical science is an attempt to reconstruct the past by analyzing data in the present. In order to draw the right conclusion about the past, you must have the correct presuppositions. However, if you have the wrong presuppositions, it doesn't matter how carefully and accurately you collect the data; you will draw the wrong conclusions. For instance, say you're a paleontologist who has dug up a small, bipedal dinosaur in a sandstone deposit. If your presuppositions are Uniformitarianism and Darwinism, then you will conclude that the sedimentary rocks on top of that skeleton are either a partial or a complete record of millions of years of sedimentation. A Darwinistic view may cause you to conclude that this form evolved from other creatures lower down in older rocks, and that some of its descendants may be alive today but are not small, bipedal dinosaurs anymore, but rather birds, due to hundreds of millions of years of evolution. If you presuppose the biblical account, that the earth is 6,000

years old, then it will greatly change how you interpret that fossil's place in earth history and your perspective on how much time is needed to produce large amounts of fossil-bearing sedimentary rocks.

Problem number four. There will always be scientific unbelievers who doubt the Word of God and construct their own (naturalistic) "scientific" story explaining the universe. Unfortunately this is much more common now. Nevertheless, the distressing thing is that Christians begin to believe the secular "scientific" story. Why? The short answer is that they are in awe of the great accomplishments of science. Even though science grew out of a Judeo-Christian worldview, its huge scientific successes resulted in a collective pride and trust in human reason divorced from the Word of God. "Science" began to get too big for its britches. Interpretations of the past (using unbiblical assumptions) led to conclusions that contradicted Scripture. Rather than question the validity of these unbiblical assumptions, the people began to mistrust the Scriptures. Christianity is truly the mother of science. Her child, "Science," grew up and became very successful. She also became proud and cast aside her mother as ignorant and superstitious.

Currently, scientific inquiry interprets data in the light of an entirely different paradigm; one based on Naturalism and Uniformitarianism, with human reason exalted over and severed from Scripture. Scientists no longer have to answer to the Scriptures or to the church. The liberal churches surrendered to secular science quite awhile ago, while the conservative church has lost most of her ethos with the intellectual community and with the public at large. The public has become very enamored with the power of empirical science, and rightly so. Unfortunately, the public often believes that scientific proclamations in the realm of historical science are just as authoritative as its conclusions in the realm empirical science. Secular science has truly won the high ground. It has become the guardian of knowledge, the high priesthood of truth about the natural world.

When one thoroughly embraces Naturalism, it results in the view that science is really the high priesthood of all reality. To win the high ground back, we must make the distinction between historical and empirical science and expose the erroneous philosophies they use when doing historical science.

As the author of Hebrews might put it, “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Francis Bacon, who developed the scientific method; of Antony van Leeuwenhoek, who unveiled a whole new world of microscopic animalcules with a simple microscope, making himself the father of microbiology; of Louis Pasteur, who finally put to rest the idea of spontaneous generation, and who, along with Robert Koch, developed the germ theory of disease; of Gregor Mendel, who discovered the principles of inheritance and became the father of modern genetics; and many, many others.” This was a hop, skip, and a jump through an enormous field of study—the history and philosophy of science. I have only scratched the surface of the discoveries and philosophies of a handful of scientists spanning many centuries, but I trust that this brief overview shows a few key pioneers of science and the importance their philosophies played in guiding their thinking and scientific work. Keep in mind, most of these scientists believed in a Supreme Being as the ultimate cause of the universe in all of its diversity and complexity.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

We’ve looked at some philosophy and history of science as well as some of the clear problems and tensions that have arisen between science and the

Christian faith. We have seen that people (as well as brilliant scientists) not only adopt philosophies through which they interpret data, they are also “herd” animals. Most of them find it very difficult to hold views contrary to the mainstream scientific community. But some brave scientists do break away from the mainstream and come up with a new way of looking at the world. Now is the time for Christians to cease their chameleon-like nature in matching our surroundings. The mainstream church since the nineteenth century has caved to the demands of secular science. Although a few brave Christians have taken a critical look at the hollow and deceptive philosophies that shape their scientific conclusions, most do not. Many clergy and theologians are cowed by the dictates of the historical sciences. They no longer strive to see what truths God was actually communicating to us in the Scriptures. Instead they first see what the prevailing views of historical science are and then fall all over themselves to find a hermeneutic that interprets the Bible so that it doesn’t disagree with this assumption-laden form of science. This is revoltingly obsequious, bending over backwards to avoid any perceived disagreement with historical science. What this kind of science claims as fact changes every few years and the Scriptures don’t. In whom do we trust, the word of man or the Word of God? Christian students need to reject two errors. The first is that of being too easily swayed by secular historical science by not understanding the highly speculative nature of it. The second error is that of becoming reactionary and throwing out the baby (empirical facts) along with the bathwater (certain secular theories) that these scientists produce. We must be circumspect—innocent as doves and wise as serpents.

Pulling down strongholds

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting

down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ . . .” (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

Naturalism is the first stronghold that needs pulling down. This philosophy, over the last couple hundred years, has become very strong indeed. Its practitioners (scientists) have exalted it against the knowledge of God in almost every facet of life. Darwinism (which is a naturalistic view of how life arose) is not just ruling the roost in biology—it has infiltrated every “ology” or science dealing with living creatures: psychology, anthropology, sociology, agricultural sciences, and medicine, just to name a few. The list goes on and on. Christians must cease being lapdogs for our materialistic masters.

Naturalism says that God is not necessary to explain the universe. Romans 1:20 says, “For since the creation of the world His *invisible attributes are clearly seen*, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse . . .” (emphasis mine). From this verse alone we know Naturalism is wrong. If the universe and life can be explained without God, then man has an excuse to reject God. To regain the high ground back, it is essential to not only proclaim the Word of God but also demonstrate through general revelation, that naturalistic processes are unable to explain the cosmos. Why? This verse also says, “His invisible *attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made . . .*”(emphasis mine). It doesn’t say “being understood from the clear reading of Scripture.” In other words we can draw the correct conclusion that God made the universe apart from Scripture by examining the things that are made.

Naturalism can’t explain first causes

The Law of Cause and Effect essentially maintains that for every effect there must be a sufficient cause.

When we examine the vast universe *we must* infer a Creator, because naturalistic causes are properties of the naturalistic universe. How can the universe be produced by natural causes that only can exist within a universe that does not exist yet? In other words, how can nature create itself? Something beyond nature must exist prior to nature. If the universe is an egg, naturalism says that the egg created itself from processes at work within the egg. Hold on a minute, it is not logical to form an egg from nothing but processes understood within an egg.

Also, the naturalistic formation of the universe cannot be explained in light of the First and Second Law of Thermodynamics. In a nutshell the first law states that matter cannot be created or destroyed. So from where did the point singularity that exploded in what is called the Big Bang, come from? Did it come from nothing? If so, that violates the first law which says that matter cannot be created (from nothing). If it was eternal, then you run into problems with the second law of thermodynamics. It maintains that in any ordered system, differences in the temperature, pressure, and chemical potential in matter or energy tend to even out (the measure of this evening-out or disordering is called *entropy*). If the matter in the universe was from eternity in the past, then the universe should have petered out and become completely disordered by now.

A simple cell is an oxymoron

Through the latter half of the twentieth century, our understanding of the inner workings of the cell has exploded. The basic unit of life can no longer be thought of as a simple blob of protoplasm. Even the simplest cell is far from simple. It is a marvel of complexity that astonishes our most brilliant mechanical and software engineers. The genetic information alone defies naturalistic explanations. Bill Gates, when referring to DNA, the cell’s information storage and retrieval system, says, “DNA is like a computer program but far,

far more advanced than any software we've ever created." Whenever anyone encounters any informational code, whether written language, spoken language, Morse code, binary code, etc., it is assumed that an intelligent agent created the information. All evidence points to the fact that every information-bearing system has been generated from intelligence. But due to the pervasive grip of Naturalism, our brightest biologists must insist that the DNA (or RNA), the code of life, arose naturalistically in or prior to the first cell and evolved into the assembly instructions for hundreds of thousands of different species alive today. Does the evidence point to a naturalistic explanation? Definitely not! However, scientists still must hold that position because the current philosophy demands it. Any professor that is outspoken about the inadequacy of naturalism in the life sciences is very lucky if he retains his employment.

Michael Behe, a biochemistry professor at Lehigh University, was one such dissenter. He wrote a book called *Darwin's Black Box*. The book is one sustained argument of why certain highly complex systems like flagella or blood clotting mechanisms in living cells could not form naturalistically through Darwinian processes. He coined a phrase called "irreducible complexity." In other words, they are complex, and they can not be reduced or subtracted from and still be operational. They are systems composed of multiple components where each part is required for its proper function. Remove one part (often out of dozens), and the system does not work. Biological cells are loaded with just such systems. Behe proposes in his book that these systems are too integrated and interdependent to have arisen through aimless Darwinian processes. In Darwinism each part is the result of a random mutation. If it is to be preserved by natural selection within an organism, it must grant some advantage to the owner of the mutation. The problem is that many of these irreducibly complex systems have dozens of

intermeshing, interdependent parts like a complex factory machine. Having the fully operational machine arise all at once is too miraculous for a naturalistic scientist to swallow. Each part presumably arose independently through random mutation and began to accumulate in the cell. They would then have to be retained in the cell for countless generations until the next part randomly evolved. Once all the parts had all accumulated, they assembled themselves into a complex cellular machine. The problem with this scenario is that each component would not be selected until the machine was fully operational. In real life, useless proteins are not kept around, because they disrupt other cellular processes and are wasteful to the cell's metabolic resources. In the struggle for life, those cells which are more efficient in using energy and raw materials out-compete cells making useless stuff. In the long run, cells making useless stuff (which may eventually become part of a wonderful innovation for the cell) are eliminated long before the wonderful innovation could ever arise. In addition, all these parts require genetic information, and again there is no naturalistic mechanism that generates totally new genetic information from scratch.

Michael Behe's thesis is very powerful because it rigorously shows why complex biological systems cannot arise through random processes. This is also why origin of life experiments are so depressing to the naturalist. The simplest cell is loaded with irreducible complexities, and early earth chemical soups experiments get nowhere close to a living cell. Although they have produced a number of biological building blocks, they never assemble into any biological molecules like DNA, protein, phospholipids, or carbohydrates.

This argument can be extended to include why more complex organisms cannot evolve from simpler organisms. When various creatures in an evolutionary tree are examined, the evolutionist points to all the similarities between the presumed ancestor and a more complex descendant. It could be similarities in anatomy

or physiology, or it could be similarities at the DNA or protein level. As interesting as these similarities are, they should pose no threat to a creationist who believes God created the various kinds. Similarity in anatomy, physiology, or gene sequences can easily be explained by common design rather than common ancestry. The devil's in the differences. The evolutionists can point to all the similarities between dinosaurs and birds to provide evidence for common ancestry. The creationist can acknowledge those same similarities and maintain that they were created according to a similar body plan. But what about the many differences? At some point something had to evolve feathers. An ancestor had to accumulate, through random mutations, the genetic material to code for a bird feather and a bird lung (and much more if it was able to fly). These are not trifling matters. Both the avian lung and feather are highly complex structures, whose development requires additional genetic information and new gene regulatory networks that orchestrate the development of such structures. When evolutionists draw the gradual changes in the overall shape of the body or skeleton of bird evolution, it can seem plausible to the uncritical mind.

However, when we consider all the additions of genetic information needed to account for all these anatomical and physiological changes, it is simply beyond the ability of random mutation. It's like thinking that randomly typing 1's and 0's on pre-Windows software could generate Windows software. It's not going to happen. Intelligent software engineers are required.

Scripture vs. Uniformitarianism

The vast majority of evangelical Christians have issues with naturalistic philosophy. At least they should if they believe in miracles. Most Christians (I hope) are firm in their belief that God created the universe from nothing, has intervened supernaturally many times

throughout the Bible, and has done so today in answer to prayer. Consequently, most Christians will at least take a stand for supernatural Intelligent Design and won't be too ashamed when strident atheists rally round and point the finger of scorn at believers in the supernatural. Unfortunately, many evangelical Christians are less likely to reject Uniformitarianism and publicly embrace young earth creation. Why? Old earth evolutionism and old earth creationism have one thing in common: the *old earth* part. Old earth (and universe) is so ingrained in our culture's psyche that to express views contrary to it is equivalent to being a self-proclaimed "flat earther." Many Christians don't have the guts to be labeled a Bible-thumping anti-intellectual so they just go with flow—whatever the scientific community says to believe, but then tack on God to the story. These beliefs are found on signs in national parks, plaques in museums, in the scripts of nature documentaries, and in secular textbooks. Many Christians don't have the time or energy to think through their claims critically and actually find out who is being anti-intellectual. Of course this is not true of all Christians who are not young-earthers, but it cannot be denied that this is what young-earth Christians are generally up against. And faithful Christians who want to maintain their old-earth convictions with integrity need to be doubly sure that they are seeking to ground their position on what the Bible plainly teaches and not be in any way beholden to the materialist assumptions that are pervasive in the world of science.

What does the Bible say?

So Christians must first adopt the worldview that interprets the claims of science through the lens of Scripture, not the other way around. We must first find out what the Bible actually teaches and then interpret the physical data within the boundaries of Scripture. Those Christians who say that the Old Testament

can accommodate deep time as a valid interpretation should, in my view, seriously reconsider. Rigorous textual analysis of Genesis 1–11 shows that the genre is unequivocally historical. It is not poetry (although it includes some poetry and song). Nor is it apocalyptic literature or a collection of parables. Forcing Genesis into some other genre to accommodate the demands of secular science doesn't do justice to the biblical scholarship.

What does yom mean?

Some say that the Hebrew word *yom* in the Creation week can mean more than a 24-hour period. Yes, it can, but the vast majority of its use throughout the Old Testament is a regular day or a short period of time (at most a generation or so). If the authors of Genesis wanted to convey huge spans of time then *yom* is not the Hebrew word to use. *Yom rab* (a long time) or *olam* (eternity) would be much more appropriate.

What do the genealogies tell us?

The genealogies given in Genesis 5 and 11 always include the age of each person when he begat so and so. These are the only two times in the Bible where ages are given. This allows us, through simple arithmetic, to add up the ages and calculate the amount of time between Adam and Abraham, which is about 2000 years. Through piecing together other established historical dates, it is possible to give Abraham a pretty firm date of 2,100 years B.C. This adds up to the Creation being a little more than 4,000 B.C. If we cringe with embarrassment at this date, it shows us how thoroughly we are in the grip of secular thinking. Again, the central issue is not the date itself—the central issue is taking God at His Word. If God clearly stated in his Word that the earth was billions of years old and secular science pronounced otherwise, would we be embarrassed affirming an old date?

Assumptions, assumptions

Many have uncritically believed all their dates of millions of years ago because many think these have been scientifically proven. The innumerable dates that they generate are produced using Uniformitarianism. Whether it be rates of radioactive decay, rates of sedimentation, rates of erosion, etc., they are assumed to have always occurred at the same rates as measured today. The stakes are high. If their assumptions are correct, then these deep time dates of millions or billions of years are reasonable. Here is just one example out of many. The problem is no one can prove the validity of assuming constant rates through all earth history. In fact, there have been excellent studies (the RATE project, ICR) showing good evidence that radioactive decay rates of uranium²³⁸ in certain rocks may have been exceedingly rapid in early earth history. This rapid decay would explain many of the ancient dates we calculate using Uniformitarian assumptions.

Uniformitarianism is a sword that cuts both ways

If we use Uniformitarianism consistently we would run into many incongruities with the accepted age of the earth. In several examples like continental erosion, ocean sedimentation, carbon-14 concentrations in certain rocks, atmospheric helium concentration, etc., uniformitarian rates would actually give dates incompatibly young when compared to the dates demanded by the geologic time scale and evolution.

This is just a brief summary of the problems that arise when blindly accepting the philosophies and assumptions that secular scientists use in trying to reconstruct the past. If Christians are to regain the high ground, we must not be duped by their pronouncements of “scientific fact” regarding the unobserved past (historical science). Rather, we must “pull down their

strongholds and cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”

PULLING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

What are these strongholds? Naturalism (including Uniformitarianism and Darwinism) is, in my view, the most formidable stronghold that Christians of all stripes (young and old-earth creationists) must tear down. Naturalism must be exposed for what it is, a philosophy, not the heart and soul of science. Naturalistic theories on the origin of life, namely the genesis of cells with all their information and complexity, are lacking one major thing: evidence. They are completely bereft of naturalistic mechanisms to produce genetic information without intelligent design. Macroevolution faces the same problem. What were the naturalistic mechanisms to produce creatures with novel features when their supposed ancestors neither had those features nor the genetic information to code for them? Is it mutation and natural selection? Show me the evidence. I have yet to see it.

In particular, Darwinism may seem like a formidable fortress but in actuality, it's a house of cards built upon the sand. One only need exercise some critical thinking, question its foundational philosophies (Naturalism and Uniformitarianism), look at the fossil record and the complexity and information content of living cells, and then look at what mutation and natural selection can actually do. Look past the glossy surface, and you will see that it's an impressive façade with nothing behind it. It's a really empty worldview being sold by persuasive, highly-paid salesmen.

One might think that in this war of scientific worldviews embracing young earth creation is too rigid, too narrow. Isn't it too hard a pill to swallow for believers who have a wobbly faith and for unbelievers steeped in Darwinism? Won't a staunch young-earth view weaken one's credibility and ethos before the secular

world? Couldn't one be more influential if one took a more moderate view? Shouldn't we put the best foot forward, so to speak, and argue from only an intelligent design perspective? If these are reasonable questions, why am I a convinced young-earth creationist? Before I answer that question, I would like to preface it with the importance of not being a shrill sectarian. We should never break fellowship with sincere believers who hold a different view in the young vs. old earth debate. I have dear Christian brothers who differ with me on this issue, and they will remain so. I also use and endorse materials and books by old-earth creationists who are intelligent design advocates. As I said before, it's good for the two camps to be allied for the purpose of destroying Naturalism. However, I strongly believe in young-earth creation primarily because the Scriptures unequivocally teach it. Secondly, I have found that if one is not intimidated by being in the minority and is determined to look at the evidence using different presuppositions, the astronomical, biological, geological, and paleontological evidence harmonizes nicely with a young-earth model. I have also found that it offers a more comprehensive worldview that answers so many more important theological and scientific questions which are much more satisfying to me than the old-earth view. I have heard the best of the old-earth perspective and in my view, it compromises Genesis 1–11 far too much and cannot explain the physical evidence as well. This doesn't mean that there aren't any perplexing, unanswered questions for young-earth creationists to wrestle with, but in my view, young-earth creation is superior both biblically and scientifically.

RECOVERING THE HIGH GROUND

Know and trust the Scriptures even if you think there is no current satisfactory creationist explanation.

Don't be ashamed or apologetic of the biblical

creation account. It's true history, so show some backbone.

Understand the limitations of science. Know the difference between empirical science and historical science. Remember that the former requires rigorous observation and repetitive experimentation. The latter interprets and explains physical phenomena in the light of a particular worldview.

Scripture tells us that someone who excels in his work will get noticed by those in authority (Prov. 22:29). Conservative Christian students who go into the sciences, and are being trained in the secular academy, should take care to be the best in the class, excelling in their work, establishing a reputation for superb skills—instead of establishing a reputation for mocking evolution or deep time geology while maintaining a C minus average. As Christians, we need backbone and true conviction, which are not the same as bigotry and ignorance.

Be leaven in the loaf (Matt. 13:33). If you have strong scientific inclinations, be excellent in your field of interest. Don't be an obnoxious, contrary pain-in-the-neck to your secular professors. Be reformational in the sciences, not revolutionary. We need to take over the scientific academy by facilitating a grass roots movement of young, biblically grounded scientists. Think towards taking dominion in the sciences. Imagine a scientific community that is completely under the Lordship of Christ and work toward that end. Secular, naturalistic scientists are jealously guarding the gates of the scientific academy and are vehement about excluding any reference to God or any metaphysical intelligence that was causal to the universe and life. We must not take this sitting down. God is to be glorified and praised for His mighty work of creation not just within our church walls. The secularists are fighting "tooth and nail" to keep the high ground because they know how important it is. Do we? Pray that God would soon fill the scientific community with outstanding, God-fearing scientists so

that His glory will someday be proclaimed throughout the earth . . . including the halls of science.

FOR FURTHER READING

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BRAND IS THE RHETORIC OF YOUR SCHOOL'S IDENTITY. WHEN IS IT TIME FOR A REFRESH?

by Dan Kennedy, Kumveka

“Rhetoric is the skill of persuading,” opened Andrew Smith, upper school humanities teacher at a recent parent event at Veritas School-Richmond. If this is true and your school seeks to persuade new families to enroll, donors to give, or recruits to join your team, you are practicing “institutional rhetoric.” Let us borrow the industry term for expressing the identity and message of an institution: brand. In this way, branding is the rhetoric of your school's identity.

HOW SHALL WE DEFINE BRAND?

As 10 marketing professionals tend to offer 11 definitions of brand, allow me this working definition: brand is a set of expectations. These expectations live in the mind of your audience and are influenced by your means of communications: websites, interactions with parents, social media, teacher newsletters, your facilities, yes—everything. When I say “Starbucks,” it brings to mind a set of expectations. Those expectations vary by person, from “A great spot to meet a friend” to “burnt and bitter” to “amazing venti caramel mochas!”—and everything in between. Starbucks literally spends

millions of dollars managing those expectations to achieve their goals.

Your school also has a brand. It exists whether you manage it, grow it, or ignore it.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT THIS?

Your school cannot be successful over the long-term without intentional development, execution, and ongoing investment in your brand. Sometimes this means just a refresh. Sometimes this requires a complete overhaul to work done long ago. This article provides a primer to the world of brand as you consider the opportunity to use this tool of persuasion to communicate what your school has to offer to your many audiences.

For classical, Christian schools, **we should first assume that persuasion is done in the context of virtue.** The opposite would be manipulation (again, credit Smith). As we know, any tool can be used for good or evil, whether that tool is best practiced in academia (i.e., signposting speeches) or in industry (i.e., developing an on-mission, audience-centric brand

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strategy). Within the context of virtue, a school should therefore seek to understand both the goals and mission of the institution and the needs of the intended audience. Successful persuasion that promotes an academic environment of “truth, beauty, and goodness” must mean a win for all parties.

Second, successful branding assumes your goals are clearly defined. This concerns both defining the outcomes of your mission and vision (a school’s “Portrait of the Graduate” is a great example) and your financial model (i.e., clear targets for the number of qualified applicants needed each academic year to hit enrollment goals, Annual Fund giving).

Third, successful branding assumes you understand the needs and perceptions of your target audiences. This understanding should be data based and shared by key decision-makers, including your administrative team and the board of directors. This would include understanding the motivations, real or perceived barriers, your market competitors, and how your audiences see and share your value equation. It means understanding your brand as it exists in the minds of your audiences—their expectations for your school.

Last, this assumes you have done the hard work of codifying your brand strategy and executing against it. While this begins with your Vision/Mission/Values Statement, your brand strategy should identify your key audiences, what you are promising these audiences, how you can prove these promises, and the personality of how you will communicate.

The brand strategy is then brought to life in the form of professional visual and messaging tools. This includes a pinwheel of expressions such as your logo, tagline, typography, color palette, photography style, and layout approach. This is carried out across every communication tool from websites to social media to banners to open house invites to donor case statements. At every touchpoint, audiences should experience your carefully considered and well-executed brand.

When is it time to examine this?

Given the assumptions above, you can ask yourself the following questions:

Is there alignment between your brand strategy and

1. . . . how your brand is EXPRESSED?
This can be uncovered through a communications audit. This process examines all materials that bear your identity—every web page, brochure, donor letter, social media post, etc. Misalignment is often characterized by an objective evaluation stating: “What you meant is not what you are saying.”
2. . . . how your brand is PERCEIVED?
This can be uncovered through audience research. It is said that, “It’s not what you say, it’s what they hear.” As such, this process—performed qualitatively and/or quantitatively—uncovers what is on the mind of the people you are trying to reach (and serve). Misalignment is often characterized by an objective evaluation stating: “What you meant is not what they heard or think.”
3. . . . how your brand is ACTED UPON?
This can be uncovered through establishing key metrics that define success. When I worked at Procter & Gamble—where billions are spent on advertising—the joke was: “We know half of ad dollars are wasted, we just don’t know which half.” Most schools don’t have that luxury. The discipline here is often characterized by routinely and intentionally examining existing metrics that are causal to delivering your financial model. These are best captured in a simple monthly report, often called a dashboard, used by leadership. Misalignment is often characterized by an objective evaluation stating: “What you meant is not happening.”

If the answer to any of these questions is “no” or “I don’t know,” take action.

WHAT’S NEXT?

If you are serious about addressing the distance between your current brand and your expected results, my recommendation is to seek outside counsel. Peer reviews can only take you so far. Find a qualified, compassionate truth-teller who will not grade your institution’s rhetoric on the proverbial curve.

How do you find this person or group? Start with your immediate network for recommendations, especially your board of directors. It is critical that the individual or group is not only trusted, but brings both best practices and a knowledge of the independent education space.

Additional articles on this topic can be found at

kumveka.org/blog including:

1. What questions should we ask our audience?
2. Why use an agency?
3. How do you choose an agency?
4. How do I navigate a big change?
5. How can brand architecture be a leadership tool?

Closing

Let’s return to Andrew Smith’s discussion on rhetoric. In a recent speech on the verbal arts, he argued for the logos, ethos, and pathos of effective, virtuous persuasion. As audiences interact with our school brands, we want to effectively communicate the truth, goodness, and beauty of our offerings. Good rhetoric—and good brands—“move the audience to action.” Thoughtful work on branding will do just that.


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HOW SATISFIED ARE PARENTS WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS?

by Albert Cheng, Harvard Kennedy School and Paul E. Peterson, Harvard University

All four sectors in K–12 education compete for the support of their customers—that is, the parents of their prospective students. Those parents have more choices today than in decades past: they may send their children to the public school automatically assigned to them by their school district, or opt for a private school, charter school, or district-run school of choice. These choices include a range of cost and convenience—and, not surprisingly, a range of customer satisfaction levels.

The assigned-school-district sector has a strong competitive advantage because assigned-district schools are free and universally available, and 76 percent of American students attend them, according to a 2012 survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education. The three choice sectors do not enjoy those advantages and enroll fewer

students: 10 percent of U.S. students attend private schools, 9 percent attend district schools of choice, and 6 percent attend charters, according to NCES. The private sector has a strong disadvantage because most families must pay tuition. The charter sector has the advantage of its programs being tuition-free but is limited to operating in specific places where charters have been approved by a state-determined authorizer. Similarly, district schools of choice also are tuition-free but cannot operate in competition with assigned-district schools unless school boards specifically allow them.

To maintain and enlarge their market share, all schools of choice must satisfy the families who make use of them, who specifically opt out of the free, more convenient assigned-district alternative. So how favorably do parents rate their children's programs? How do the choice sectors compare with

one another? With which aspects of schooling are choice parents most satisfied? Do these patterns vary across different segments of the population? We explore these questions by comparing parental satisfaction ratings for all four sectors: assigned-district schools, private schools, charter schools, and district schools of choice.

DATA AND METHODS

NCES has regularly gathered data on the educational activities of the U.S. population since 1991 through its National Household Education Surveys Program. In 2012, it administered the “Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey” to a nationally representative sample of households with children enrolled in K–12 schools. Families of school-age children were mailed a questionnaire asking about one of their children's schools, and the parent most

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familiar with that child's school was asked to respond. In the end, 17,166 families, representing a response rate of 58 percent, completed the survey. (An additional 397 families of home-schooled children, who are not included in survey results below, also took part.) This survey was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and findings were released in 2015 and updated in 2016. The data were weighted so that results would be representative of the school-age population as a whole.

Among other topics, parents were asked how satisfied they were with various aspects of the school their child attended, including the school overall, the teachers their child had that year, academic standards, order and discipline, and the way the school staff interacted with parents. Respondents were given the option of indicating whether they were very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied.

In their initial report, AIR and NCES researchers divided parents into four categories: parents with a child at an assigned district-operated school, and parents with a child at one of three types of chosen schools: either a public school that they chose (including district-operated schools and charter schools), a religiously affiliated private school, or a private school that did not have

a religious affiliation. Students were classified as attending a chosen school if the parent indicated that their child attended a private school or if the parent indicated that their child attended a public school but also responded "No" to the question: "Is [this public school] [your child's] regularly assigned school?" Some 76 percent attended an assigned public school, 14 percent attended a chosen public school (including charter schools), and 10 percent attended either a religiously affiliated or secular private school.

Charter-school parents are 39 percent of families using chosen public schools and 6 percent of all students in the sample. By separating out these students (most of whom were presumably attending 1 of the 5,274 charter schools operating across the U.S. in 2011), we are able to compare parent satisfaction of students at charter schools with students in private schools, assigned-district schools, and choice district schools.

Those choice district schools, which are attended by the 9 percent of students in chosen public schools who did not attend charters, cannot be further classified by type. We know only that the parent filling out the questionnaire said the school had not been assigned to their child by the district. These chosen district schools largely comprise the country's 2,722 "magnet" schools

(according to 2011 data), most of which offer themed programs and were originally designed to encourage desegregation by attracting a multi-racial clientele. In addition, they likely include some of the estimated 165 competitive "examination schools" like Stuyvesant High School in New York City, a district-run school that offers accelerated academic programs for students who meet rigorous entry standards. District schools also could be chosen when families participate in open enrollment or inter-district choice programs, which allow students in one school district to attend schools in another, often as part of a voluntary desegregation strategy. A few cities, such as Denver and Boston, have quasi-open enrollment plans that allow families to rank the preferred choices for their children's school rather than following automatic assignments. Whether magnet, exam, or open-enrollment schools, one may infer that many of these chosen schools were selected by parents for the superior educational opportunities they seemed to offer.

FINDINGS ON SCHOOL COMPOSITION

Family demographics vary among the four different school sectors, with larger shares of African American and Hispanic students at

tuition-free charters and district schools of choice than at private schools or assigned-district schools (Figure 1). Hispanics account for 27 percent of families at charters, 24 percent at district schools of choice, 20 percent at assigned-district schools, and 12 percent at private schools. African American students account for 23 percent of students at charters, 17 percent at district schools of choice, 14 percent at assigned-district schools, and 10 percent at private schools.

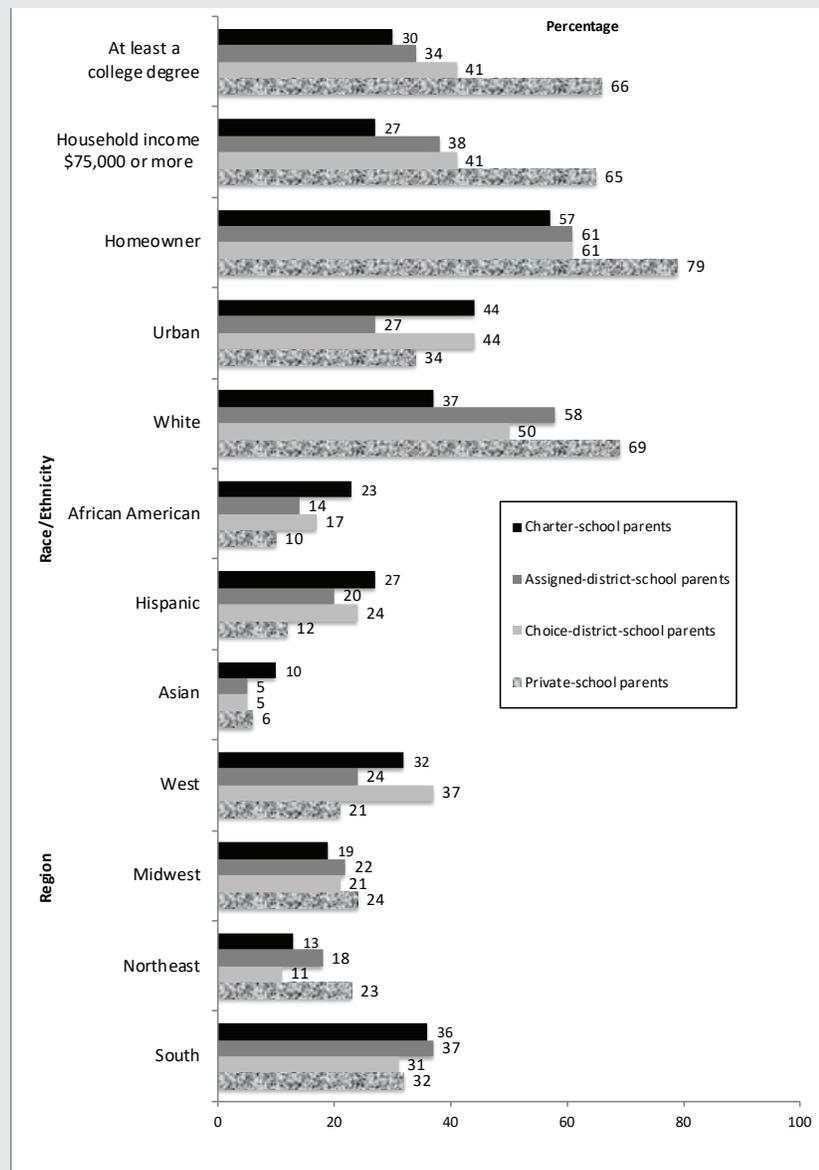
Compared to other sectors, charter-school parents report much lower family incomes and private-school parents report much higher incomes. Charter-school parents are also the least likely to have earned a college degree. Nearly half of charter-school and district-choice-school parents live in urban areas, compared to one-third of private-school parents and one-quarter of families whose children attend assigned-district schools. Parents at charters and district schools of choice are more likely to live in the West.

Adjustment for demographic differences

On the web site of the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance (<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/>), we present our unabridged analysis, including estimates of sector differences in satisfaction that adjust for the variation in the demographic background of parents across sectors. The statistical significance of

Composition of Parents Varies across School Sectors (Figure 1)

Private-school parents are much more likely to have a college degree and a household income of \$75,000 or more. Roughly one in four charter- and district-choice-school parents is Hispanic, a far greater share than in the assigned-district and private-school sectors.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 Household Education Survey

these adjusted differences as shown in Figures 2 and 3 are estimated by models that take into account the entire distribution of responses (e.g., very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied). However, for

our unabridged analysis, including estimates of sector differences in satisfaction that adjust for the variation in the demographic background of parents across sectors. The statistical significance of

ease of presentation in the text and figures that follow, we simply report the percentage of parents in each sector who say they are “very satisfied” with a particular aspect of their child’s school. An interactive graphic at educationnext.org provides additional information.

FINDINGS ON PARENTAL SATISFACTION

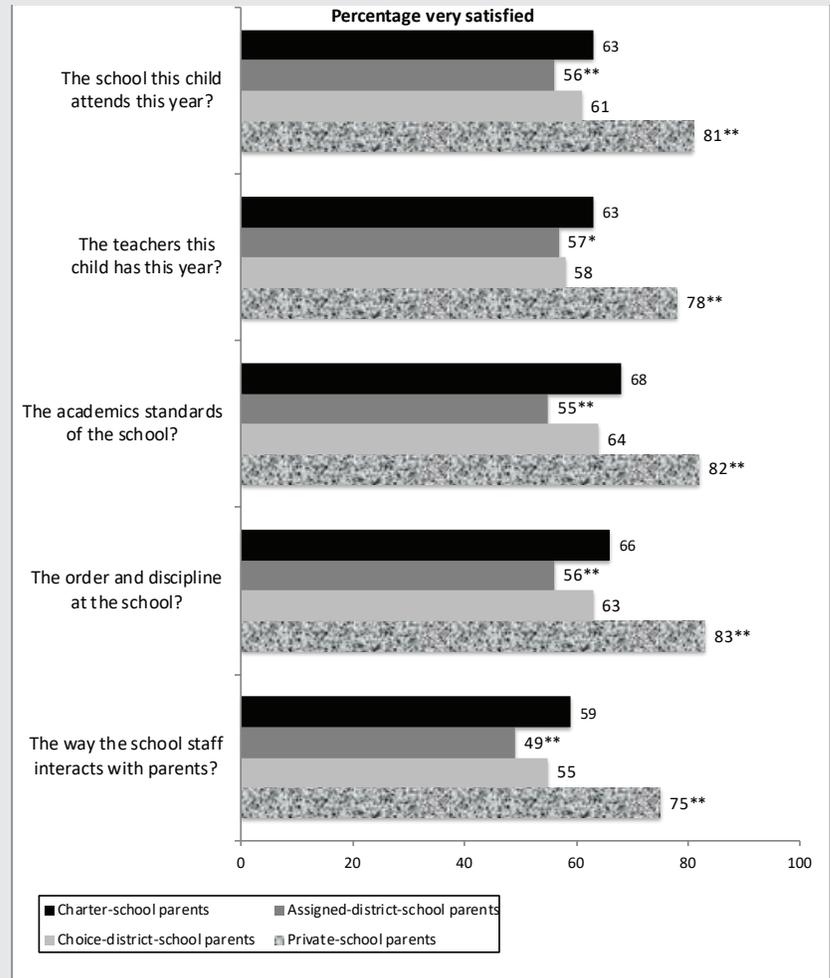
Although parents in all four sectors report high levels of satisfaction with their child’s school, the percentage saying they are “very satisfied” varies by school type. Satisfaction levels are the highest among private-school parents, with parents at charter schools and district schools of choice reporting lower, but similar, rates of satisfaction (Figure 2). Among the four sectors, parents of students attending assigned-district schools are the least likely to say they are “very satisfied” with their child’s school.

Charter schools vs. other sectors

Charter-school parents report higher satisfaction levels than parents with children in assigned-district schools. The size of that difference varies, however, depending on the specific aspect

School Satisfaction Highest in the Private Sector, Followed by the Charter Sector (Figure 2)

Charter parents are 7 percentage points more likely than parents with a child at an assigned-district school, but 18 percentage points less likely than private-school parents, to say they are very satisfied with their’s child’s school. Satisfaction among parents using district schools of choice is roughly comparable to that of charter parents.



Difference from charter-school parents statistically significant at the . . .
 * 95% confidence level
 ** 99% confidence level

Note: Respondents could choose one of four response categories: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied. The statistical significance of the findings is calculated by estimating sector differences across all four categories of responses after adjusting for differences in respondents’ background characteristics.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 Household Education Survey

of the school under consideration. Compared to parents at assigned-district schools, charter-school parents are 6 percentage points more likely to say they are “very

satisfied” with teachers at the school, 13 percentage points more likely to be “very satisfied” with academic standards, and 10 percentage points more likely to be “very satisfied”

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with both school discipline and communication with families.

Charter-school parents also report slightly higher levels of

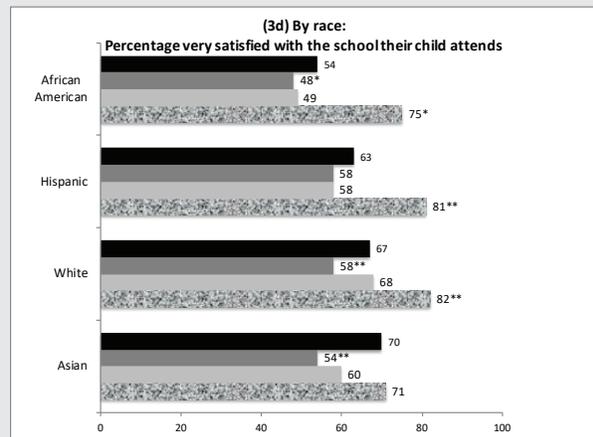
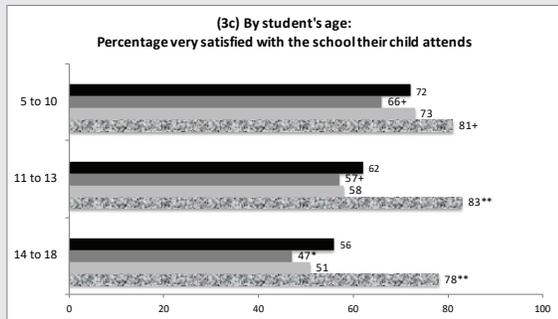
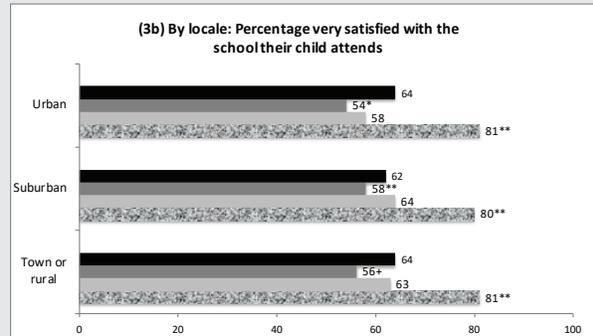
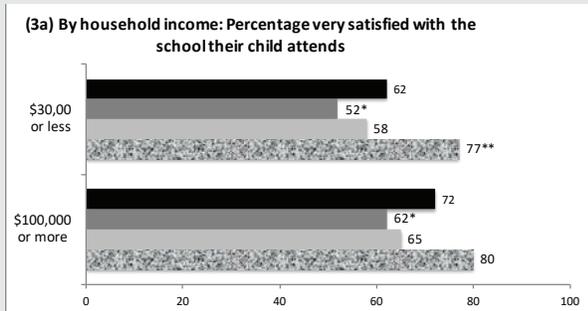
Charter-school parents report lower levels of satisfaction than parents of children at private schools. Differences in satisfaction

Lowest- vs. highest-income groups

Parent satisfaction levels vary

Sector Difference in Satisfaction Hold Up across Subgroups (Figure 3)

Charter parents are 10 percentage points more satisfied than parents using assigned-district school among families earning less than \$30,000 a year and among families earning more than \$100,000. Wealthier parents and parents of elementary-aged children are more satisfied with their schools across the board than low-income parents and parents of older children..



Legend: Charter-school parents (black), Assigned-district-school parents (dark grey), Choice-district-school parents (light grey), Private-school parents (white)

Difference from charter-school parents statistically significant at the . . .
 + 90% confidence level
 * 95% confidence level
 ** 99% confidence level

Note: Respondents could choose one of four response categories: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied. The statistical significance of the findings is calculated by estimating sector differences across all four categories of responses after adjusting for differences in respondents' background characteristics.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 Household Education Survey

satisfaction than parents whose children attend a district school of choice. However, the differences, which vary between 2 percentage points and 5 percentage points, are not statistically significant.

levels vary between 14 percentage points and 18 percentage points, depending on the aspect of the school.

by household income, with large differences observed for families with incomes of \$30,000 or less and those with incomes of \$100,000 or more (Figure 3). High-income parents are more likely than

low-income parents to express satisfaction with charter schools: 72 percent say they are “very satisfied” with their child’s school compared to 62 percent of low-income parents. We find a similar pattern for the other four aspects of the school—teacher quality, academic standards, discipline, and communication.

Despite these differences, both low- and high-income parents whose children attend charter schools are considerably more satisfied than comparable parents at assigned-district schools. When asked to assess the school itself, the share of low-income parents saying they are “very satisfied” is 10 percentage points higher at charters than at assigned-district schools. For high-income parents, this difference is also 10 percentage points. Averaging across all five assessment indicators, the percentage of low-income parents saying they are “very satisfied” is 9 percentage points higher at charters than at assigned-district schools. Among high-income parents, that difference is 14 percentage points.

Parental satisfaction with charter schools and district schools of choice is similar for both low- and high-income families. These differences are not statistically significant. Both high- and low-income families express higher levels of satisfaction with their school if it is in the private sector rather than the charter sector.

The difference in satisfaction levels between a charter school and a private school is 15 percentage points for low-income families and 8 percentage points for high-income families. The latter difference is not statistically significant. Averaging across all indicators, the difference in the share of low-income families who are “very satisfied” with aspects of their child’s private school is 25 percentage points, which is similar to the difference of 22 percentage points among high-income families. This suggests that school vouchers or other programmatic interventions that expand families’ access to private schools have a good chance of boosting levels of parental satisfaction.

Age of student

Because the data include information about students’ ages, we are able to compare degrees of satisfaction by grade span in each sector. Students age 10 and under are assumed to be attending elementary schools, those age 11 to 13 are assumed to be in middle school, and those who are 14 to 18 are assumed to be in high school. These estimates are not perfectly accurate, but even this rough classification system allows for estimates of the extent to which parental assessments vary by their child’s grade level.

We find that charter-school

parents of elementary-age children are more satisfied with their school than parents whose children are in middle or high school. Whereas 72 percent of those with an elementary-age child are “very satisfied,” only 62 percent of those with children in the middle-school years and just 56 percent of parents of students in high school are similarly satisfied. However, for all three age groups, charter-school parents are more satisfied than parents at assigned-district schools. By student age, charter-school parents are more likely to report they are “very satisfied” with their school by 6, 5, and 9 percentage points, respectively, compared to parents whose children attend an assigned-district school. Across all five satisfaction indicators, the differences are, on average, 8, 5, and 11 percentage points for parents of children at the three age levels, respectively. In other words, the charter advantage, from the perspective of parents, is at least as great at the high-school level as at the elementary level. If charters want to mobilize parental support, they might consider greater investments in the final years of schooling.

Urban, suburban, and rural regions

One finds little variation in the degree of satisfaction with charter schools by region: across

the country, more than 60 percent of parents in urban, suburban, and rural communities say they are very satisfied with the charter school that their child is attending. However, the charter-school advantage vis-à-vis assigned-district schools is somewhat greater in urban and rural settings than in suburban ones. In both urban and rural communities, 64 percent of parents say they are “very satisfied” with their child’s charter school, compared to 54 percent of urban parents and 56 percent of rural parents who say they are “very satisfied” with their child’s assigned-district school. By contrast, the difference in the percentage of charter-school and assigned-district-school parents who say they are very satisfied is only 4 percentage points in suburban areas. It is worth considering, however, that suburban parents may well have already exercised school choice as part of their house-hunting process, by choosing their neighborhood based in part on where their child or future children would be assigned to go to school. Private schools generate similarly higher levels of satisfaction than choice and district schools in all three types of communities, but significant differences between charters and chosen district schools are not observed in any of the three areas.

Racial and ethnic differences

White and Asian families are clearly more satisfied with their charter schools than African American families, and somewhat more satisfied than Hispanic families. Among charter-school parents, 70 percent of Asian parents and 67 percent of white parents say they are “very satisfied,” compared to 63 percent for Hispanic parents and 54 percent for African American parents. The differences in reported levels of satisfaction between charter and assigned-district schools are wider among Asian and white families, too: for assigned-district schools, the difference is 16 percentage points for Asian families and 9 for white families, compared to a statistically insignificant 6 percentage points and 5 percentage points for African American and Hispanic parents, respectively.

Comparing levels of satisfaction among charter-school parents to parents at district schools of choice, there are no significant differences by race or ethnicity. With the exception of Asian parents, parents of all ethnicities prefer private schools to charter schools by a double-digit margin.

INTERPRETATION

Our findings echo those reported by the 2016 Education Next survey, which examined the opinions of

parents whose children attend public, charter, and private schools (see “What Do Parents Think of Their Children’s Schools?” Spring 2017). That survey found that private-school parents are much happier with their children’s schools than parents at district schools. The study also found charter parents, though not as pleased as private-school parents, are more satisfied than district parents.

District schools of choice: the magnet school

When comparing satisfaction levels with charter schools to district schools of choice, it is helpful to keep in mind that magnet schools serve approximately two-thirds of the students in district schools of choice. This can be inferred from other surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, which have found that 2011–12 enrollments in magnet schools constitute 2.1 million students, slightly more than the 1.8 million students attending charter schools. If parents are accurately reporting the type of school their child is attending, roughly 6 percent of all students are going to magnet schools. That implies that two-thirds of the 9 percent of all students said by parents to be attending a chosen district school are attending magnet schools.

Unlike charter schools, which usually must admit students by lottery if they are over-subscribed, many magnet schools have admission standards. Others offer specialized curricular programs that are expected to promote racial integration by attracting students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds to seek admission. According to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) of 2011–12, a nationally representative survey of schools conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, 28 percent of magnet schools give admissions preferences to academically gifted students, three times the rate of charter schools. Likewise, nearly half of magnet schools (45 percent) are said to have special emphases in the performing arts, math and sciences, or foreign languages, while only 12 percent of charter schools are said to have a similar emphasis. Nearly a quarter of magnet schools report administering admissions tests as part of the application process. In contrast, only 8 percent of charter schools report doing so. Conversely, about 5 percent of charter schools are dedicated to serving students with special needs or at-risk students, whereas less than 1 percent of magnet schools do the same.

The SASS also suggests that magnet schools receive many more resources than charter schools,

on average. For example, teacher salaries, even after incorporating cost-of-living adjustments, are 5 percent to 12 percent higher at magnet schools than in charter schools, on average. And almost all magnet schools have a library media center, while only half of charters do.

Despite the greater exclusivity and resource advantages enjoyed by magnet schools, parental satisfaction with magnet schools and the other district schools of choice is no greater—and may be less—than the level of satisfaction of parents with a child at a charter school. This does not demonstrate that charter schools are superior to magnet schools, as we do not have any direct evidence about school quality independent of parental perceptions. But if parental satisfaction is a desirable, policy-relevant outcome in its own right, the data suggest that charters are a viable—and perhaps the preferred—option for those seeking to expand choice within the public sector.

Private schools

By a wide margin, parents with children in the private sector express much higher levels of satisfaction than parents in the assigned-district sector. That certainly helps to explain the viability of a sector that charges tuition when other sectors are offering seemingly comparable services without charge.

Private schools are also providing higher levels of satisfaction than either charter schools or district schools of choice. These choice-based schools pose a greater threat to the private sector because the differences in satisfaction level are, roughly speaking, only half as large as between private schools and the assigned-district sector. Yet the high level of satisfaction with private schools provides encouragement for those who support school voucher initiatives, which increase access to the private sector by paying some or all of students' tuition.

Assigned-district schools

The assigned-district school, which currently provides services to 76 percent of all students, may be an endangered species. Since all three choice sectors—private, charter, and district schools of choice—are offering parents educational options that are considerably more satisfying, one must expect the market demand for educational alternatives to increase. It will take a strong political defense of the district-operated school system, which assigns children to the specific place where they are to be educated, to thwart an underlying trend toward greater choice that has gathered support among the families that are most directly affected.

REIGNITING EXCELLENCE: WHY CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE

by Christy Anne Vaughan, EdD, Classical Christian Education International, Inc.

Recently, the Gospel Coalition (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-exponential-growth-of-classical-christian-education/>) published an article touting the amazing academic progress made in an inner-city school where most had not graduated high school and the ones who did read at an eighth-grade level. The instructional method utilized in this amazing, turnaround school? The classical Christian educational method.

If you are reading this article, you already have a vested interest in classical Christian education. Whether a parent, teacher, administrator or board member of a school practicing this instructional method, you have embarked on a journey to reignite excellence in education.

And well so. The classical Christian method encompasses the seven liberal arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music; liberal from the Latin *liber* meaning “free” meaning the virtuous, wise, and self-controlled man is free toward self-governance. As the Apostle Paul stated in Galatians 5:23, against such there is no law. Our founding Fathers understood this, as John Jay, First Supreme Court Justice, stated, our system of liberty and self-governance was designed for a Christian nation with elected Christian rulers. Or as John Adams, second president of the U.S. stated, our system of liberty and self-governance with

the Bible as its basis would be wholly unsuitable for any group other than a virtuous, Christian people.

And to that end, a couple of working definitions: The *Christian educator* believes we are called to teach Truth, Goodness (Godliness), and Beauty. Teaching is a calling to parents first and the church (Ephesians 6:4 and Deuteronomy 6:4–7). Teaching as a profession is a calling (Ephesians 4:11–16). There is Truth and God’s Word reveals it (John 17:17). Virtue is to be co-taught with knowledge (2 Peter 1:5–8). We are commanded to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

The *classical educator* teaches a man to fish by providing the tools of learning and inculcating the joy of learning.

The *classical Christian educator* accomplishes *both*—molding the heart toward God and inculcating discernment of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty through tried and true methods of teaching. Our Founding Fathers are a good example; so are 1800s reading lists from eighth-grade classrooms compared to modern lists (<https://thefederalistpapers.org/us/middle-school-reading-lists-100-years-ago-vs-today-show-how-far-american-educational-standards-have-declined>).

Again, the method of instruction we are discussing has been around for hundreds of years. In my doctoral

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dissertation, I trace it back to the Essentialists such as William Chandler Bagley in the 1920s. It was only after the Progressive movement took over teacher colleges and John Dewey's teachings became prevalent starting in the 1930s and 1940s that public education started shifting away from the idea that children need molding and disciplining, guiding into maturity. Instead, our culture fell for the child-centered, if-it-feels-good-do-it mentality that erupted in our society in the 1960s. Prayer and the Bible were banned from the public square and as a society we began to lose our moral compass.

If we are to recover that moral compass, we must reignite educational excellence through a rediscovery of the centrality of Truth. There is Truth and we know where to find it and we are called to teach it to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6).

How will we reignite Truth in education? It can be accomplished through that tried and true method of the Trivium, as explained by Dorothy Sayers in her famous essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," which expresses what child development researcher Jean Piaget and any parent can observe about how young children learn.

It is both a model and a method, teaching with the grain of the child's God-given makeup. Playing to our strengths, as it were. In a 2010 Liberty University dissertation (Leading Classical Christian Schools: Job Satisfaction, Job Efficacy, and Career Aspirations), E. J. Dietrich observed that classical Christian methodology "differs significantly from postmodern American education" in that "children are taught how to think and learn rather than viewed as great silos that need to be filled to capacity with information" (pp. 28–29).

And as I emphasize in my doctoral dissertation, you can find echoes of the Trivium model for instruction in the Bible:

The Trivium emphasizes mastery learning: from milk to meat—1 Corinthians 3:2, 1 Peter 2:2, and Hebrews 5:13; putting away childish things as a man—1 Corinthians 13:11, the Scriptures learned as a child helps

develops wisdom—2 Timothy 3:15. And why not? Our Maker designed our brains and our faculties and showed us how best to learn. He revealed it in His Word. As a culture, we are rediscovering and reigniting those God-given tools and insights.

My doctoral dissertation, soon available through Liberty University, was a quantitative, statistical analysis of averaged school scores on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test or PSAT. This carries more weight in academic circles than anecdotal, or self-reported statistics as found on the ACCS and other school websites. What I found in my statistical analysis was evidence for academic excellence in schools utilizing the classical Christian method of instruction. Specifically, in my study, taking a random sampling from schools responding to a headmaster survey providing year-by-year averaged school scores, I found that schools using the classical Christian method scored significantly higher on the PSAT than Christian schools not utilizing the classical Christian method. Through additional analysis, the predicted magnitude of the difference was high and the amount of the difference attributable to instructional method was compelling (more than 40 percent in reading, more than 30 percent in writing, and more than 20 percent in math).

This compares to the recently reported January 2018 *Education Week* K–12 national score card of "C" with scores mostly from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/17/nations-schools-stuck-in-average-range-on.html>).

The good news is that private schools, for the most part, are not accounted for in the NAEP.

But test scores are not all we are after as Christian parents and educators, correct? With more than 27 years of scholarly statistical analysis of Christian worldview retention among high school students, the Nehemiah Institute reports that children from Christian households only grow up retaining a Christian

worldview if they are taught from that perspective. Public school, where religious views are minimized, scores about 5% retention in 2015; mainstream Christian schools score only a little bit better at about 15%; homeschoolers are at about 50% retention, but the only two instructional methods that have 70% or better retention of Christian worldview—that is they think of everything from a Biblical perspective—are the classical Christian method and the Principle Approach. You can find much more material like this on their website <http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/> and access to statistical analysis.

The implications of my doctoral study reach far beyond current classroom instruction. In order to fulfill our calling to teach Truth, Goodness (Godliness), and Beauty along with the tools of learning and associated joys, we must improve teacher training. We must found more institutions training teachers in the classical Christian method and philosophy. We must inspire more Christian researchers to identify which variables may hold the most promise as correlated to standardized test performance and biblical worldview retention.

We must reignite the educational fire Plutarch praised while molding young hearts toward the Good and guiding them from times of milk to digesting meat. We must recognize we are held to a higher account (James 3:1). Let us remember the Apostle Paul's admonition to not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:9, NKJV).



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the good way is, and walk in it. – Jeremiah 6:16*



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THE BIBLE, NORTHPROP FRYE & CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

by Louis Markos, Houston Baptist University

Somewhere between the work of Joseph Campbell and Leland Ryken lies the literary criticism of Northrop Frye. Campbell, working in the tradition of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, laid side-by-side for his readers the various myths, legends, and sacred rituals of people groups across the globe, ultimately treating Christianity as one myth among many, albeit a more sophisticated one. Leland Ryken, to my mind the foremost evangelical scholar of the Bible as literature, shares Campbell's focus on mythic and literary structures, but treats the historical stories recorded in the Bible as reliable, if imaginatively presented history.

While remaining skeptical as to the literal, historical accuracy of the New, and especially the Old, Testament, Frye (1912–1991), a Canadian educator and literary theorist who was also an ordained minister, locates in the Bible transcendent, interlocking truths of permanent value. As an evangelical, I naturally gravitate toward Ryken; however, there is much that a creedal, Bible-believing Christian can learn from Frye. In *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (HBJ, 1982) and *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (HBJ, 1990), Frye offers readers willing to wrestle with his dense but accessible analysis stunning insights into the mythic architecture of the Bible. Although his insights will reward all careful students

of the Bible, they have special significance for classical Christian educators who seek to unite the best of our Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritages.

Frye achieved critical fame in 1947 with his path-breaking and code-breaking analysis of the arcane, esoteric, Bible-inspired prophetic poems of William Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*. A full decade later, he published *An Anatomy of Criticism*, the foundational text in the school of archetypal criticism. Archetypes are words or images or rituals that carry universal, cross-cultural significance. Nearly all civilizations, whatever their religion, recognize the archetypes of the sun or of water, of the quest or the cycle of the harvest, of the wise old man or the blue-blooded orphan. An archetypal critic identifies and analyzes such archetypes, not only in themselves, but as part of a complex series of symbols and allusions that link one poem to another and point back to a higher center of meaning.

Frye helped edge criticism, at least for a time, away from what he called centrifugal theories, ones that take us outside the literary work to the author's biography or the sociopolitical milieu in which he wrote or any of a number of race, sex, or gender-based ideologies. Instead, Frye advocated centripetal theories that take us into the work itself, treating it as both a self-contained literary artifact and an organic part of a greater system

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of aesthetic forces and patterns. With the boldness and apocalyptic energy of a biblical prophet, Frye the critic helped open the eyes of two generations of teachers and students to the deeper, eternal truths that lie hidden at the core of the Great Books of the Western Intellectual Tradition. And he did so in a way that championed the existence of a final center or nodal point from which all meaning radiates.

As Frye was arguably the last major systematic theorist to posit a transcendent meaning for poetry, it is vital that Christians of a literary bent who believe that absolute standards of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty exist should have some working knowledge of Frye's contribution to the study of literature in general and the Bible in particular. In the remainder of this essay, I will consider a helpful paradigm for understanding the unique language, mythic patterns, and metanarrative of the Bible that Frye develops in *The Great Code*. In a sequel essay, I will consider a second paradigm that Frye develops in his own sequel, *Words with Power*.

Frye is a master at laying out threefold or fourfold or sevenfold systems for organizing the interlocking archetypes that meet us again and again in literature. In *The Great Code*, he helpfully identifies and analyzes a seven-phase sequence of events that gives thematic structure and narrative direction to the diverse, sixty-six books that make up the Bible. He labels those phases creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse.

1) "Genesis," writes Frye, "presents the Creation as a sudden coming into being of a world through articulate speech . . . Something like this metaphor of awakening may be the real reason for the emphasis on 'days'" (108). Although evangelicals like myself will be far less prone to write off the creation week as merely metaphorical, Frye's point helps to clarify the centrality of waking to the overall story of the Bible. From God creating the world out of nothing, to Adam waking to find Eve, to Abraham being shocked awake by the angel who stops

him from sacrificing Isaac, to Jacob realizing that the man he has been wrestling with all night is God, to Moses awakening to his call to rescue his people, to the children of Israel waking over and over again to their stiff-necked rebelliousness, the Bible introduces us to a God who is ever shaking us out of our slumber.

Two things that God's role as Creator particularly shakes us out of is the twin temptation to either worship nature, as did the pagans, or to reject it, along with the Gnostics, as the bastard offspring of an evil demiurge. The first three chapters of Genesis help steer the reader away from both extremes by setting up what Frye calls a two-level view of nature, one that persists from Genesis to Revelation. "The upper level," Frye explains, "was the 'good' divine creation of Genesis; the lower level was the 'fallen' order that Adam entered after his sin. Man is born now on the lower level, and his essential duty in life is to try to raise himself to the higher one. Morality, law, virtue, the sacraments of the Church, all help to raise him, as does everything genuinely educational" (113).

We who live on the lower level must seek ever to repair the ruins of the fall, a project in which classical educators can play almost as important a role as the clergy. To teach children about Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, to attune their ears and eyes to hear the music of the spheres and to see the reflection in our world of the Form of the Good is to lead them along the path toward what Plato and the church fathers called the beatific vision. It is also to open up the Scriptures for them so that they can perceive the hand of the Creator who will one day bring both levels together in the New Jerusalem.

2) As we move from Genesis to Exodus, we encounter a revolutionary aspect of God. He may be the Creator of all the earth and of all the peoples on the earth, but he is also a God who works through particular events, who enters "history in a highly partisan role, taking sides with the oppressed Hebrews against the Egyptian establishment" (114). Whereas most modern critics of the Bible shy away from this aspect of the God of the

Bible, preferring to cling to an emasculated version of Jesus the meek and mild inclusivist, Frye stays true to this essential dimension of God's biblical self-revelation. Though he labels it the "least amiable characteristic" of the Israelites, Frye is honest enough to admit that it was not the Jewish "belief that their God was the true God but their belief that all other gods were false that proved decisive" (114).

The God who, in the Old Testament, takes sides with Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau, with Joshua at Jericho and Elijah on Mount Carmel, with Samson and David among the Philistines and Daniel and Esther among the Persians, is the same God who, in the New, thunders against the Pharisees and Sadducees, chases the money changers out of the Temple courts, strikes Herod Agrippa dead for refusing to give glory to God, and will one day defeat the godless nations who have oppressed his Bride. From Genesis to Revelation, the same God who creates nature involves himself in the kingdoms of men, now judging and now forgiving, now tearing down and now rebuilding.

It has been a good fifty years since the public school system abandoned history and replaced it with social studies. A renewed meditation on the Scriptures might help restore history to its proper place in the educational curriculum. Even though Frye often registers skepticism as to the historical accuracy of the biblical narrative, he does at least help us to see that the controlling mythic structure of the Bible is concerned with a providential history in which things do not happen randomly but in accordance with a greater plan.

3) God may be a revolutionary, but he is not an anarchist. No sooner does Israel secure her freedom from bondage than God binds her to the Mosaic Law. Drawing an incisive, historically relevant comparison between 1776 and the Sinai covenant, Frye helps us see the centrality of the biblical movement from revolution to law: "A country founded on a revolution acquires a deductive way of thinking which is often encoded in

constitutional law, and the American reverence for its Constitution, an inspired document to be amended and reinterpreted but never discarded, affords something of a parallel to the Old Testament sense of Israel as a people created by its law" (118).

Justice and purity are not peripheral concerns in the Bible, but touch on the very nature of God and his relationship to his chosen people. Frye highlights the stories of Achan in the Old Testament (Joshua 7) and Ananias and Sapphira in the New (Acts 5) as clear, if disturbing examples of God's absolute commitment to justice and purity. When the Bible used to stand at the center of American education, virtue was stressed as strongly as knowledge—not "values clarification," which encourages children to come up with their own morality, but true virtue that manifests itself in the inculcation of the specific and absolute virtues of courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice.

4) Phases four and five of Frye's sevenfold schema help remind readers of the Bible that history, though vital to the overall biblical narrative, does not exhaust the focus of God's revelation. A considerable portion of the Scriptures are devoted to wisdom literature and to the "thus saith the Lord" pronouncements of the prophets. In Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and many of the Psalms, the Law given to Moses takes on, as it were, flesh and blood. "Law is general," explains Frye, "wisdom begins in interpreting and commenting on law, and applying it to specific and variable situations" (121). The Bible, that is to say, not only provides a grand, sweeping narrative of God's work in human history, but meets each person where he is at. Its message is timeless, but its application is always *now*.

Never a book to mince words or to coddle dunces, the Bible unapologetically makes a division between the wise man and the fool: "the wise man is the one who follows in the accepted way, in what experience and tradition have shown to be the right way. The fool is the man with the new idea that always turns out to

be an old fallacy” (121). In our own day, “progressivist” thinkers both inside and outside the church never tire of recycling all the old heresies, from Arianism to Gnosticism, Marcionism to nominalism. It should come as no surprise that the Bible so often links wisdom—that is, discernment—to the old; the old are the ones who have learned through experience that there is nothing new under the sun.

Although Frye balks a bit at the pain that has been caused by the biblical warning that those who spare the rod will spoil the child, he admits that such verses are not motivated by cruelty or tyranny. “Education is the attaining of the right forms of behavior and the persistence in them; hence, like a horse, one has to be broken into them” (121). If we try to spare our student’s “feelings,” if we refuse to do anything that will hurt their self-esteem, then we will only succeed in producing eternal sophomores (a Greek word that means “wise fools”) who will continue the recycling of old fallacies with a passion born out of an unshakeable sense of entitled ignorance.

Those who pride themselves on coming up with ever-more “progressive” readings of the Scriptures have cut themselves off, not only from sound teaching and doctrine, but from the very biblical tradition of wisdom literature. Though evangelicals may be a bit too self-assured about the Bible being a self-interpreting book, the Bible, rightly understood, *does* equip and empower those who read it carefully and prayerfully to see through the mist and fog of worldly lust and pride, through what Solomon calls the vanity of vanities.

5) Biblical discernment grounds us in the wisdom of the past, but what of the future? Does the revolution end with the exodus and the giving of the law, or does it persist? For Frye, it persists via the fifth stage of the biblical journey: “prophecy is the individualizing of the revolutionary impulse, as wisdom is the individualizing of the law, and is geared to the future as wisdom is to the past” (125). Though the Bible refers to scores of

prophets who followed the status quo and told the king what he wanted to hear, the Old Testament champions those prophets who proclaimed the word of God in the face of corrupt leaders: Elijah, Enoch, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel, etc.

Furthermore, Frye rightly points out, those prophets of whom God approved rarely gave the sorts of messages that we expect: “The popular notion of a prophet is that of a man who can foretell the future, but the Biblical prophets as a rule take fairly short views, except when prophesying the future restoration of Israel” (127). Biblical prophecy has little to do with fortune telling and divination; in fact, the Old Testament forbids just such practices. When Isaiah, Jeremiah, and company are not looking ahead to the first or second coming of the Messiah, they generally speak words of judgment against an apostate Israel who has forgotten that God is the creator and provider of all things who rescued them from bondage in Israel and who expects them to follow the law and show forth godly discernment in their choices and actions.

Frye distinguishes thus between the voices of wisdom and of prophecy: “The wise man thinks of the human situation as a kind of horizontal line, formed by precedent and tradition and extended by prudence: the prophet sees man in a state of alienation caused by his own distractions” (128). We need to hear both voices if we are to understand the full revelation of the Bible and live the moral-ethical-spiritual lives to which it calls us. All is well, yet all is not well. The Kingdom of God is here, now, among us; but it is also still to come. An education that is truly classical and Christian will teach students the time-worn, biblical strategies for living a good and fruitful life, while clearly warning them against the estranged, fragmented nature of our fallen world and the deep depravity that lurks in each of our hearts.

6) As we move from the Old Testament to the New, prophecy gives way to gospel—and that gospel is heralded by the last and greatest of the Hebrew prophets:

John the Baptist. John calls on his followers to repent of their sins, but, Frye suggests, the sins John cries out against are not the kind that result “in criminal or antisocial acts.” Rather, they are the kind that “block the activity of God” (130). All of the prophecies of the Old Testament lead up to Christ, who preaches his good news in an eternal-infinite now that breaks down time and space. We can participate in that now or stand against it.

The gospel brings us face-to-face with God, not that we might be enlightened but that we might be transformed and united with him. In Christ’s atonement, “a channel of communication between the divine and the human is now open, and hence the whole metaphorical picture of the relation of man and God has to be reversed. Man does not stand in front of an invisible but objective power making conciliatory gestures of ritual and moral obligation to him: such gestures express nothing except his own hopelessness” (134). The gospel thus fulfills the Old Testament while simultaneously rendering obsolete and unnecessary its elaborate systems of sacrifice and ritual purification. Christ beckons us at every moment to ascend into the upper level, into the Kingdom that is both a restored Eden and a foreshadowing—or, better, in-breaking—of the coming New Jerusalem.

7) And that leads us to the climactic seventh phase, revelation, a Latin word that, like the Greek word it translates (apocalypse), means an “unveiling” or “uncovering.” Frye’s unique reading of this final stage in the biblical journey is searingly insightful, even if it relies a bit too much on Blake’s semi-Gnostic proclamation, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that “[i]f the doors of perception were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.”

According to Frye, Revelation does not so much foretell events to come as reveal to us “the inner form of everything that is happening now” (136). Why is this necessary? Because “[m]an creates what he calls history

as a screen to conceal the workings of the apocalypse from himself” (136). We need to have our man-made vision of history torn aside so that we can see what is really taking place all around us. What Revelation opens our eyes to is not “the destruction of the order of nature [but] the destruction of the way of seeing that order that keeps man confined to the world of time and history as we know them. This destruction is what the Scripture is intended to achieve” (136).

Frye uses the word Scripture rather than Revelation in the previous sentence because he interprets the final book of the Bible as offering the key to understanding the other sixty-five books. The journey from Genesis to Revelation is a historical journey, but it ever points beyond itself to an eternal, invisible God who dwells outside of time and space. That is why the Bible abounds with literary-poetic language. Apart from its metaphors and metonymies, its allegories and symbols, its parables and proverbs, it could not forge the kinds of connections between time and eternity, man and God, creature and creator, object and subject that it needs to make to fulfill its purpose of uncovering hidden truths.

A true classical Christian education is committed to far more than the impartation of knowledge. Things must not merely be memorized; they must be understood. Eyes and ears must not merely be pointed in the right direction; they must be opened and purified. Faith means much more than belief or even trust; it means achieving a radically new way of seeing God, ourselves, and creation.

We must do more than read the Bible in order to understand it; we must allow the Bible to teach us how to read and understand everything else.

IS THEISTIC EVOLUTION THE ONLY VIABLE ANSWER FOR THINKING CHRISTIANS?

by Steve Cable, Probe Ministries

Steve Cable examines Francis Collins's arguments for theistic evolution from his book *The Language of God* and finds them lacking.

FRANCIS COLLINS AND THEISTIC EVOLUTION

Dr. Francis Collins, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom for cataloging the complete human DNA sequence, put forth his views on science and Christianity in his 2006 book, *The Language of God*.¹ Could his theistic evolution view resolve the apparent conflict between modern science and the Bible? In this article, we will examine this belief and his arguments for it.

Collins grew up agnostic but became an atheist in his student years. At twenty six, he took on the task of proving Christianity false. Like many before him,² this hopeless task resulted in accepting Christianity as true: Jesus as God in the flesh bringing us eternal life. In his role as a medical researcher into the genetics of man, he found himself dealing in a world where many questioned the validity of Christian thought as anti-

science.

These conflicting forces led him to develop views reconciling the current positions of science and the truths of the Bible. As Collins states, "If the existence of God is true (not just tradition, but actually true), and if certain scientific conclusions about the natural world are also (objectively) true . . . , then they cannot contradict each other. A fully harmonious synthesis must be possible."³ Certainly, this statement is one we all should agree on if we can agree on which scientific conclusions are objectively true.

His resulting beliefs rest on the following premises:⁴

1. God formed the universe out of nothingness 14 billion years ago.
2. Its properties appear to have been precisely tuned for life.
3. The precise mechanism of the origin of life remains unknown.
4. Once evolution got under way, no special supernatural intervention was required.
5. Humans are part of this process, sharing a common ancestor with the great apes.

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6. But humans are unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation, pointing to our spiritual nature.

Rather than interceding as an active creative force, God built into the Big Bang the properties suitable for receiving the image of God at the appropriate time. Purely random mutations and natural selection brought about this desired result. Being outside of time, God would know that this uninvolved approach would result in beings suitable to receive the breath of God.

THE ARGUMENT FOR THEISTIC EVOLUTION

Is Francis Collins' theistic evolution the way to reconcile theology and science?

Collins argues the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of this universe are clearly the work of God. After that, no intelligent intervention occurred, even though

scientists have no idea how life began.⁵ At some point, God intervened—first, by giving humans moral and abstract thinking, and second, by sending Jesus Christ to perform miracles, be crucified and resurrected, and bring us eternal life.

In Collins' view, God is allowed to perform miracles to redeem mankind, but not in creating physical humans. The alternative theories make the scientific process messy and unpredictable. This position allows him to side with the naturalist scientists who hold sway today. However, it does not prevent naturalists from laughing at your silly faith.

He also appears to believe we are looking forward to new glorified bodies living in a new earth with Jesus. Apparently, at that time, God will disavow His penchant for not making changes in nature.

Collins wrote⁶ that our DNA leads him to believe in common ancestry with chimpanzees and ultimately with all life. His conclusion is partially based on the large

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amount of “junk DNA” similar across humans and other animals. If similar segments of DNA have no function, these must be elements indicating a common ancestry.

Subsequent research undermines this belief. “DNA previously dismissed as ‘junk’ are . . . crucial to the way our genome works For years . . . more than 98% of the genetic sequence . . . was written off as ‘junk’ DNA.”⁷ Based on current research,⁸ almost every nucleotide is associated with a function. Over 80% of the genome has been shown to have a biochemical function and “the rest . . . of the genome is likely to have a function as well.”⁹ Collins agrees that his earlier position was incorrect.¹⁰

In this case, the argument of reuse by an intelligent designer now makes more sense.

On theistic evolution, Collins could be right and it would not tarnish the absolute truth of the Bible. However, in all likelihood, Collins is wrong. From both Scripture and current observations, it appears much more likely God actively interceded in creation.

IRREDUCIBLE COMPLEXITY

One area of intelligent design¹⁰ that Francis Collins attacks is the concept of irreducible complexity.

ID researchers define it as: “[A] system of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of them causes the system to cease functioning. [It] cannot be produced directly by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor . . . that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional.”¹¹ A mindless evolutionary process cannot create a number of new, unique parts that must function together before creating any value.

However, Collins believes nothing is too hard for evolution given enough time. He states, “Examples . . . of irreducible complexity are clearly showing signs of how they could have been assembled by evolution in a gradual step-by-step process. . . Darwinism predicts that

plausible intermediate steps **must have existed**, . . . ID . . . sets forth a straw man scenario that no serious student of biology would accept.”¹²

One of Collins’s examples, the bacterial flagellum, is “a marvelous swimming device”¹³ which includes a propeller surface and a motor to rotate it. ID researchers identify it as an irreducibly complex. Collins suggests this conclusion has been “fundamentally undercut,” stating that one protein sequence used in the flagellum is also used in a different apparatus in other bacteria. “Granted, [it] is just one piece of the flagellum’s puzzle, and we are far from filling in the whole picture (if we ever can). But each such new puzzle piece provides a natural explanation for a step that ID had relegated to supernatural forces . . .”¹⁴

Today, seven years later, ID researchers are not backing off. A recent article concludes, “The claim . . . to have refuted . . . the bacterial flagellum is unfounded. Although there are sub-components . . . that are dispensable . . . there are numerous subsystems within the flagellum that require multiple coordinated mutations. [It] is not the kind of structure that one can . . . envision being produced in Darwinian step-wise fashion.”¹⁵

Evolutionists have been trying for over 15 years to attack irreducible complexity. Rather than discrediting the theory, their efforts have shown how difficult it is to do so. Collins’ claims put him in the company of those relying on the ignorance of their audience to cow them with logically flawed arguments.

GOD OF THE GAPS AND AD HOMINEM ATTACKS

Francis Collins states, “ID is a ‘God of the gaps’ theory, inserting . . . the need for supernatural intervention in places its proponents claim science cannot explain.”¹⁶

This statement mischaracterizes intelligent design. “ID is not based on an argument from ignorance.”¹⁷

It looks for conditions indicating intelligence was required to produce an observed result. The event must be exceedingly improbable due to random events and it must conform to a meaningful pattern. “Does a forensic scientist commit an ‘arson-of-the-gaps’ fallacy in inferring that a fire was started deliberately . . . ? To assume that every phenomenon that we cannot explain must have a materialistic explanation is to commit a converse ‘materialism-of-the-gaps’ fallacy.”¹⁸

ID researchers identify signs that are consistent with intelligent design and examine real world events for those same signs. In addition, a number of non-ID scientists having reached the conclusion that Darwinism is not sufficient, are looking at other mechanisms to explain certain features of life.

Another aspect of Collins’ defense of theistic evolution is using overstated and unsubstantiated attacks to discredit other views.

Of the young earth creationists, he states, “If these claims were actually true, it would lead to a complete and irreversible collapse of the sciences of physics, chemistry, cosmology, geology, and biology.”¹⁹ This is a gross overstatement. In truth, belief in a young earth creation does not prevent one from making predictions based on micro-evolutionary effects or investigating the physical laws of the universe from a microscopic to an intergalactic level.

Collins also states, “**No serious biologist** today doubts the theory of evolution.”²⁰ And, “ID’s central premise . . . sets forth a straw man scenario that no serious student of biology would accept.”²¹ So, those differing with Collins are **not even serious students** of biology. Collins ignores the over 800 Ph.D.s who signed a document questioning the ability of Darwinian theory to explain life.²²

In discrediting ID, he misrepresents the premise of this field, saying ID is designed to resist an atheistic worldview. As one researcher, William Dembski, explains, “Intelligent design attempts only to explain

the arrangement of materials within an already given world. Design theorists argue that certain arrangements of matter, especially in biological systems, clearly signal a designing influence.”²³

Collins would rather pursue an answer that was wrong and exclude the actions of an intelligent designer, than consider the possibility of intelligent design.

PERVERTING THE VIEWS OF C. S. LEWIS

Did C. S. Lewis support theistic evolution? Francis Collins quotes Lewis,²⁴ postulating God could have added His image to evolved creatures who then chose to fall into sin. Although consistent with theistic evolution, Lewis’ thoughts are more consistent with ID tenets.

Lewis begins, “For long centuries, **God perfected** the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the **image of Himself. He gave it** hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, . . .”²⁵ So, God was actively involved in bringing about the human form; God intervened to produce the desired outcome. This view contrasts with Collins’s view that God took whatever evolution produced and breathed into it His image.

BioLogos extends the thought, stating “(Lewis) is clearly a Christian Theistic Evolutionist, or an Evolutionary Christian Theist.”²⁶ They point out passages from Lewis showing the evolutionary theory of physical change was not contradictory to the gospel. They suggest Lewis would accept today’s theories as truth and reject ID.

John West’s research²⁷ finds Lewis was not saying evolutionary theory was definitely true, but rather that it did not refute Christian belief. Lewis wrote, “belief that Men in general have immortal & rational souls does not oblige or qualify me to hold a theory of their pre-human organic history—**if they have one.**”²⁸ In *Miracles* he wrote, “the preliminary processes within Nature which

led up to” the human mind “if there were any”—”were **designed** to do so.”²⁹ In both these quotes, Lewis caveats evolutionary theory by adding a big “if.”

Lewis did not embrace a simple-minded view of natural science as fundamentally more authoritative or less prone to error than other fields of human endeavor. Lewis argued that scientific theories are “supposals” and should not be confused with “facts.” . . . We must always recognize that such explanations can be wrong.³⁰

Clearly, Lewis did not feel that a young earth view a necessity. But, he was adamantly against the thought that science trumped theology. Although, one cannot know with certainty, it appears that Lewis would resonate with the methodology and claims of Intelligent Design theorists.

I appreciate Collins’ faith journey. However, I wish he would say “We really don’t know the details of man’s creation, but we know God was intimately involved.”

NOTES

1. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

2. See for example, Josh McDowell’s story in *Undaunted: One Man’s Real-Life Journey from Unspeakable Memories to Unbelievable Grace*, Lee Strobel’s story in *The Case for Faith*, and Viggo Olsen’s story in *Daktar, Diplomat in Bangladesh*.

3. Collins, p. 169.

4. Collins, p. 200.

5. Collins, p. 90.

6. Collins, p. 109–142.

7. *UK Guardian*, September 5, 2012.

8. ENCODE is an acronym for the Encyclopedia of DNA Elements project.

9. Casey Luskin, “Junk No More: ENCODE Project Nature Paper Finds ‘Biochemical Functions for 80% of the Genome,’” *Evolution News* (Sept. 2012), https://evolutionnews.org/2012/09/junk_no_more_en_1/

10. Jonathan McLatchie, “Has Francis Collins Changed

His Mind on ‘Junk DNA?’,” *Evolution News* (March 2011), https://evolutionnews.org/2011/03/has_francis_collins_changed_hi/

11. Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biological Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

12. Collins, p. 188–190.

13. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*.

14. Collins, p. 192.

15. Jonathan McLatchie, “Two of the World’s Leading Experts on Bacterial Flagellar Assembly Take on Michael Behe,” *Evolution News* (March 2013), https://evolutionnews.org/2013/03/Kelly_hughes_an/

17. Jonathan McLatchie, “Once Again, Why Intelligent Design is Not a “God-of-the-Gaps’ Argument,” https://evolutionnews.org/2013/01/why_intelligent/068151.html (Accessed Mar. 30, 2014).

18. Ibid.

19. Collins, p. 174.

20. Collins, p. 99.

21. Collins, p. 190.

22. www.dissentfromdarwin.org

23. William Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 248.

24. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 69.

25. Lewis, p. 68.

26. Michael L. Peterson, “C.S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design,” *BioLogos* (2011),

<https://biologos.org/blogs/archive/c-s-lewis-on-evolution-and-intelligent-design-part-1>

27. John G. West, *The Magicians Twin: C. S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2012).

28. West, p. 114.

29. West, p. 131 quoting from *Miracles* by C. S. Lewis, 1960.

30. West, p. 140–141.

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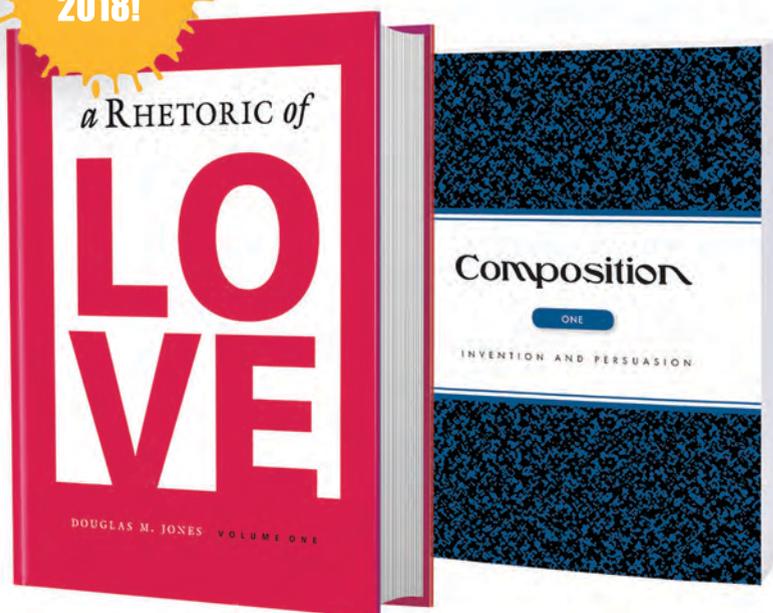
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