

EDUCATION: FOUR CORNERSTONES

Not only can we say that everyone's life must have a foundation, we may categorically state that everyone's life *has* a foundation good or bad. We find this in the Saviour's conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. We have two men whose lives have similarities and differences. The similarities are: both build, both experience a tempest, and both experience consequences. The differences are as follows. The wise man builds on a foundation of rock and his house stands fast in the tempest and he suffers no loss. The foolish man builds on a foundation of sand, his house falls down in the storm and he suffers total loss. Just as the foundation of a house is fundamental, so is the foundation of a person's life. The Saviour explains his point as follows, 'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock' (Matthew 7.24). It is evident from this that our 'philosophy of education' is fundamental for the safety of our children throughout their life in this world and for eternity. A foundation has four corners and it is evident that each one must be sound. We consider four cornerstones of sound education. We will call them the four 'C's.

I. Creation

The Bible begins with the doctrine of creation in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. It involves everything including mankind. Two key verses are Genesis 1.1, 'In the beginning God created *the heaven and the earth*' and Genesis 1.27, 'So God created *man in his own image*, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'.

A. Creation is the Christian explanation of origins

We read in Psalm 33 (verses 8-9), 'Let all the earth fear the Lord: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast'. *The Shorter Catechism* explains the work of creation as, 'God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good' (Question 9). It is easy for skeptics to dismiss divine

creation in a few words as an ancient myth but it is not so easy then to account for our existence, the meaning of life and our purpose in being here. This requires libraries of book without producing convincing explanations and we realize that the debate about origins is more than a creation verses evolution matter. It is decisive for the meaning of life and the direction of human society. Anyone who thinks knows that without the doctrine of creation life is an enigma.

B. Creation is the Christian explanation of ownership

When you make a model castle, you have a sense of satisfaction and ownership. You do not expect others to interfere with what you do with your workmanship. You might put it on display on the mantle-piece. You might use it in battles involving your toy soldiers. It is yours to do as you will. It is so with our sovereign creator. In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, God is depicted as a 'householder' who hires labourers at a rate of one Roman penny. At the end of the day those who had worked the full day grumbled that those who worked but one hour were paid the same. The householder replies to one of them, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?' (Matthew 20.13-15). Implicit in the doctrine of creation is God's sovereign ownership of all things and persons. It is an uncomfortable truth for sinners. It exposes selfishness, waywardness and rebellion! God's sovereign ownership is, however, a great comfort to believers. We find meaning in life through service to a loving, heavenly Father who originated our being and surroundings and has a purpose for us.

C. Creation is the Christian basis for science

Many fine Christians have been or are scientists. The evolutionary hypothesis, however, is a contradiction of science. The scientific method presupposes a *rational* explanation of the *physical* universe whereas evolution presupposes that all things physical and *spiritual* came into ordered existence from a vast explosion of something

that had an unexplained beginning. This hypothesis fails to explain the origin of the building blocks of matter yet affirms that it can explain the origin of man but can only do so by denying the existence of the soul, which cannot be accounted for by materialism. At least acceptance of creation allows an honest science to explain what can be explained without entering the lists with the Creator for doomed jousting. Hearken to the Almighty, 'To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth' (Isaiah 40.25-26). It is the doctrine of creation that gives meaning to mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and other scientific disciplines.

II. Conscience

The problems of secularists are no less in the matter of morality. Ethics ceases to be an exploration of the good life and becomes a philosophical search for a *foundation* for morality. If there is no divine law, by what law is life to be governed? Relativism makes all relative to time and place. It has no absolute standards. It affirms that what is right for one is not necessarily right for another. Consumerism enters our social morality. I am told that what's right for me is what I choose according to my tastes. Marriage is presented as a variegated product range. The life of the unborn child is accounted expendable if he or she will be an inconvenience. Those who have had enough of this life, head for the exit marked 'euthanasia' without serious thought about what lies beyond. Practical ethics becomes a jungle, if not an irrelevance and economic factors become the main determinants of behaviour. This is no basis for the instruction of the young but is there a basis?

A. Conscience is a moral compass

The compass is a long-standing device to keep ships, planes and travellers going in the right direction even when networks go down. A cloudy sky prevents navigation by sun or stars but the compass points us in the right direction. For the individual walker in the fog

the compass can be life saving. It is so in the fog of human theories of behaviour. Paul affirms that there is a moral compass. In Romans 2.14-15 he writes, 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another'. The Gentiles did not have the law of Moses to teach them their moral duty but this did not mean that they were ignorant of what it requires. Nature teaches the same things that are contained in God's law. Our consciences are an internal witness to our duty to God and our duty to our neighbour. We are aware that our consciences have an independence that we cannot control. Conscience is like a close friend who encourages us in good things and discourages us from evil things. We might make every effort to persuade our conscience to see things our way but like a good friend it sticks to its guns and, when intent on something different, we stop listening to our consciences. Indeed, determination in sin results in either silencing our consciences or darkening them. So the Gentiles, 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened' (Romans 1.21).

B. Servicing the compass

The ancients apparently understood the function of gears and modelled the heavens for purposes of navigation. Like ours today, the gears would need servicing. In the law of Moses, the Jews had a built-in servicing of their consciences. Paul explains, 'Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law' (Romans 2.17-20). Their sin was that of hypocrisy. Paul charges them that they taught one thing and did another. He writes, 'Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should

not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?' (Romans 2.21-23).

C. Christ's golden rule

Christ was emphatic that his followers must not set their compass by the Jewish traditions of the elders. They externalized and distorted the law of Moses. The Sermon on the Mount has a lengthy section expounding the law to show that the law reaches to thoughts and words as well as deeds. 'Thou shalt not kill' forbids unwarranted anger in the heart and unkind words on the lips. 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' applies to the eye as well as the act. The Saviour would allow no depletion of the Law's demands. As the standard of morality God's law applies in Christ's kingdom 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' This involves no legalism. We do not expect to be saved by law keeping. Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. Nor do we observe God's law in a servile way. The spiritual man delights in it (Romans 7.22). His heart's desire is to fulfil it more and more by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. We take seriously the Saviour's golden rule: 'The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mark 12.29-31). If we imitate Christ who loved his own unto death God's law as defined by the Ten Commandments will be fulfilled by us. Paul writes, 'Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans

13.8-10). This will work in family, church, local community, and nation.

III. Calling

Genesis 2.15 defines a relationship that affects the entire human race. Moses reports, 'And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it'.

A. The dignity of work

In the beginning work did not arise from necessity or selfishness but calling (or vocation). God gave to man his daily work as a privilege whereby he could pattern after his Maker in fruitful activity. This involved agriculture and botany (verse 15) and zoology (verse 19). We see from this calling that the spiritual man will recognize privilege, dignity, purpose and direction in his work as he does all things as unto the Lord.

B. The reality of man's stewardship

Adam was to find fulfilment as God's steward. He was in God's-garden (verse 8) not for selfish enjoyment by plundering it but for personal fulfilment by appropriate management of it to the glory of God. Stewardship appears repeatedly in the scriptures involving entrustedness, management, development and accountability. We may think of Adam, Joseph, the servants of the Parable of the Talents, Paul and *the* Servant of the Lord. Their charges were varied but each had their stewardship as we do. The stewardship of Christ enables us as faithful stewards of God.

C. The relevance to socio-economics

Sociology, politics and economics will always suffer from distortions when the ultimate stewardship is left out. There is magnificent vision in Psalm 67 (verses 5-7), 'Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him'.

IV. Christianity

One of the early pioneers of general education for children in our country was the SPCK (The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge). They had a Christian motivation and Christian content and the education had meaning beyond life skills and subject content. When Paul gave instructions concerning parental education of children, he wrote, 'And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition *of the Lord*.' (Ephesians 6.4b) Whether we deal with history, religion, or any other subject, as Professor John Murray noted, 'the claims of truth are paramount'. Without the Lordship of Christ we cannot make sense of life 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8.36).

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