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## Reading, Literature, and Concern for Values

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13. John 3:19; Romans 1:18-25.
14. Psalm 147:18; 148:8; Hebrews 1:3.
15. Jeremiah 31:35; 36; Matthew 5:45.
16. Genesis 2:7.
17. Genesis 1:26, 27.
18. Genesis 1:28; I Corinthians 10:31.
19. Genesis 1:1,2; Psalm 104:30; John 1:3.
20. Hebrews 1:2,3.
21. Ephesians 1:20-22; Matthew 28:18.
22. Colossians 1:16,17.
23. II Peter 3:7-13.
24. Proverbs 29:15. See also Proverbs 22:15; 23:13.
25. Ephesians 6:4.

26. Perhaps this point seems to deny the sufficiency of Scripture. But there is no intention of denying here that the Bible is the all-sufficient rule of faith and life. We need nothing other than the Bible to find salvation in Christ and to learn God's will for our life. But one should not attempt to apply the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture to scientific knowledge, for the Bible is decidedly not sufficient as a source of scientific data. If the Christian scientist is to develop a complete science he is required to incorporate into his Biblical perspective of life the kind of detailed information that can be obtained only through scientific research.

## READING, LITERATURE, AND CONCERN FOR VALUES

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### Introduction

The art of teaching today is complex. Therefore, certain psychological and pedagogical principles must be carefully considered. There is concern not only for communication and for the cognitive process, but also for emotional climate, for social climate, for play and games, for aesthetics, and for strategies. Teaching involves working with all aspects of the whole human being--for

example, the physical, the psychological, the ethical, and the spiritual dimensions. Involved in the art of teaching should be an awareness on the part of the teacher of his role in aiding the student on the road to Christian adulthood.

The thrust of this presentation is to bring to the attention of the reader the importance of the teaching of reading today, with special emphasis on how what is read relates to the development of values.

## Importance of Reading

It is generally conceded that much school time is devoted to reading, whether it involves readiness, beginning reading, reading skill, developmental reading, critical reading, reading for enjoyment and appreciation, reading in subject matter areas, or other reading activities. Quite recently the President of the United States re-emphasized the importance of teaching reading, or more specifically, "the right of every child to read. Implied in this should not be only teaching all children to learn to read, but also teaching them how to read meaningfully and with purpose, so that reading becomes a part of the student's way of life. And a way of life involves making choices, and making choices involves value judgments. And developing value judgments, for the Christian, necessitates a Biblical perspective.

## Definition of and Need for Values

In trying to define the word "value," it is difficult to express its meaning without associating the term with some kind of value. A general definition, however, might be as follows: The desirability or worth of a thing compared to something else, or that which is worthy of esteem for its own sake, that which has intrinsic value--or those things judged admirable, honorable, and approvable so that men desire to create and preserve them through coming generations. Beyond the horizontal or humanistic perspective, of course, values suggest Biblical choices and judgments which honor God as well as help our fellow men.

From research done in the area of values, it appears that one of the real concerns for the seventies is that of ethical judgments. This is true not only of Christian-oriented writers. All teachers today are being challenged to address themselves to the matter of values. James Reston of the New York Times writes, "There is something in the air of the modern world: a defiance of authority, a contagious irresponsibility, a kind of moral delinquency no longer restrained by religious or ethical faith."

Traditional values and institutions are

under severe strain. Youth are faced with conflicts in family life, religious institutions, and society in general. These conflicts and problems manifest themselves in school through various behavioral patterns. Some students are apathetic, some flighty, others uncertain. Many are drifters, inconsistent, or over-dis-senters. But the common malady of most contemporary students is confusion about values. The so-called "new freedom" also imposes upon the student added responsibilities for which he may not be physically, psychologically, emotionally, or spiritually prepared.

## The Reading Teacher's Role

As a result of the confusion about values found in society, many teachers and schools find it difficult to stand for any single set of values. And in many cases, to avoid controversy, teachers have resorted to the mere teaching of "facts" or concepts that were not meaningful for the child. In too many cases, ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual values are depreciated or ignored even though they are integral facets of learning which should be illuminated through good teaching.

It must be admitted that there are real problems related to value teaching. For example: Can values be taught? Whose values must be taught? Does evaluative education lead to indoctrination? However, if the teacher is to perform his God-given task adequately, one of his first concerns should be that of establishing an environment where the process of valuing can take place.

Leadership must be provided by the teacher in demonstrating his own commitments and beliefs. For example, a consistently Christian teacher has Scriptural convictions about who the student is, where he came from, why he is here, and where he is going. He is not concerned merely about things temporal, empirical, and utilitarian.

In a wholesome learning situation, the student and the teacher should become involved in a variety of experiences. And as the teacher helps the student, certain guidelines will be developed to give direction to the daily classroom activities. These guidelines will then be founded on the values af-

firmed and demonstrated by the instructor, as well as on the value judgments made by the teacher (as, with his students, he discerns the spirits in the literature that they study together).

### Reading, Literature, and Values

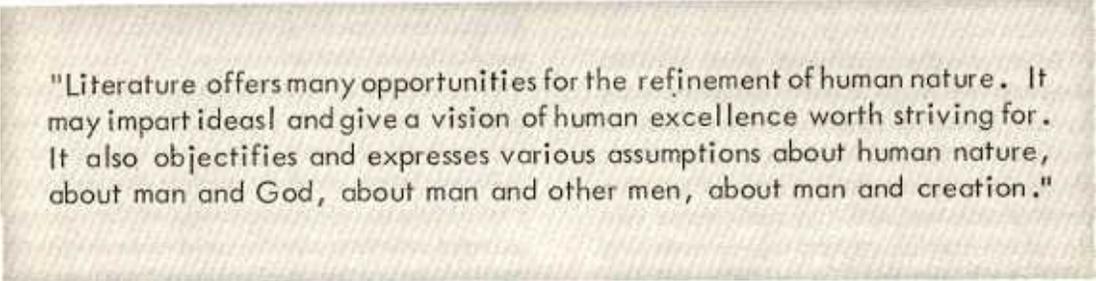
Values and value judgments can probably be dealt with most adequately through the reading and study of literature. Literature can be used as a vehicle to help the child see beyond his immediate environment and come to grips with the social and moral questions of his day. In his reading, the student often encounters vivid and immediate and lifelike experiences. He observes heroes and villains, men of strong character and weak, men of good character and men of evil, those who recognize God and those who do not, those who believe and obey Christ for their salvation and those who redeem themselves. The student of

### Christian perspective

#### Illustrative Literature

The poems of Christina Rossetti or Marianne Moore are of durable value because they are derived from both the writers' religious views and their artistic ability. The originality of their poetic styles, with involved titles, traditional and free-verse line forms, chiming or muted rhyme schemes, and varied stanzaic structure, not only adds to their intriguing subject matter, but also to an affirmation of significant insights. (Though Rossetti's Roman Catholic Christianity--in many of her sonnets--is notably more Biblical than Moore's "Christian" humanism, and the contrast can also prove instructive.)

Early in a student's school experience, flannel-board displays of pictures and poems, singing of songs to complement stories and poems can instill an appreciation for nature,



"Literature offers many opportunities for the refinement of human nature. It may impart ideals and give a vision of human excellence worth striving for. It also objectifies and expresses various assumptions about human nature, about man and God, about man and other men, about man and creation."

today requires some standard outside of himself to make his decisions. Literature offers many opportunities for the refinement of human nature. It may impart ideals and give a vision of human excellence worth striving for. It also objectifies and expresses various assumptions about human nature, about man and God, about man and other men, about man and the creation. Thus, the student's world can become less threatening and more meaningful. Literature can be a dynamic force in assisting the student to understand God's universe. A well-informed, committed Christian teacher can assist the student in bringing order, stability, and structure to his life style. It is impossible to measure the importance of good literature in the child's total life, but only as it is presented and evaluated in Biblical

a concern for animals, a love for other persons, and gratitude to God for blessings received. Proper courtesies can be taught and instilled by the use of simple stories and fables that lend themselves to memorable illustration.

At the fifth-grade level, the teacher can devise a plan to develop increased appreciation of our American heritage through the use of biography, fiction, and poetry. To help students explore ideas of friendship, ambition, and the deadly effects of violence and greed, Shakespeare's Macbeth can be used at the junior-high-school level. Of course, specifically Biblical values are more evident in such works as The Pilgrim's Progress and in contemporary Christian novels such as Peace Shall Destroy Many by Rudy Wiebe, Marching

Orders by Olov Hartman, and Whisper the Robin by Bernard Palmer.

And do not overlook the literature of the Bible. No other literature in all the world offers perfectly true and normative values, for the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness--for total human development in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. II Timothy 3:16). The Bible also contains lyric poetry, allegory, narrative, metaphor, drama. In fact, it is unsurpassed in its presentation of the drama of human life, for the life of every image-bearer of God is of great and eternal importance. Moreover, the Bible, although primarily the revelation of God's will and of the Redeemer Jesus Christ, is also peerless in the literature of history, biography, essay, and oratory; for its Author, through inspired holy men, is God Himself, and whatever He does, He does perfectly.

### Suggested Value Theory

In a recently published book entitled Values and Teaching, the authors Rathe, Harmin, and Simon<sup>1</sup> present a theory of values which may be helpful to classroom teachers. They place a great deal of emphasis on the process of valuing, and they posit seven criteria which may be appropriate in teaching reading and literature. The following requirements should apply in the process: (1) choosing freely, (2) choosing from alternatives, (3) choosing after thoughtful consideration of the consequences, (4) prizing and cherishing, (5) affirming, (6) acting upon choices, (7) repeating. But the authors also suggest that values grow out of purposes, aspirations, and beliefs which may suggest the presence of prior values. These expressions which approach values are called value indicators, and include (1) goals and purposes, (2) aspirations, (3) attitudes, (4) interests, (5) feelings, (6) beliefs and convictions, (7) activities, (8) worries, problems, and obstacles.

### Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to call

the attention of the reader to what is involved in the art of teaching, with special emphasis on the importance of values as they relate to the teaching of reading and literature. We observed that appropriate media, materials, and methods must be used, but that the most important ingredient in any teaching situation is the teacher. He must be knowledgeable and well read, but he must also be a model. It may be rather difficult to describe in detail what that model teacher of reading should be, but the life style, the feelings, the beliefs, the interests and activities of the teacher make a crucial difference in teaching values and valuing. The conscientious Christian teacher is prayerfully conscious of how he conducts himself and of whether his instruction shows the kind of Biblical perspective necessary to promote growth in valuing, which results in building values that are sensitive to human feelings, that contribute to appreciation of Godliness in the area of social activities, and that stress the importance of being actively engaged in Kingdom service for the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in Heaven.

Recently a Roman Catholic educator pleaded for a "return to a real concern for values in the schools today that combats any cultural force which brutalizes our children by building up in them an image of themselves as mere animals, divine neither in origin or destiny, bound by no morality not imposed by force, knowing no value, spiritual or otherwise, higher than the selfish and conspicuous consumption of leisure, material goods and sex." Reading and the study of literature for the development of God-ordained, Biblically enjoined values must have at least these humane goals. But children have even more distinctively Scriptural values to learn as disciples of the King and as His witnesses to an unbelieving and increasingly valueless world.

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1. Rathe, L. E., M. Harmin and S. B. Simon. Values and Teaching. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1966.