

"Where to Begin"

Genesis 1:1

February 27, 2003

South Idaho Lutheran Teachers' Conference - 1

Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Boise, Idaho

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The Word of the Lord, from Genesis 1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."
This is the Word of the Lord.

So you teach at a Lutheran school; and with a Lutheran school there are advantages and disadvantages. Here is one big advantage that you have, one beyond calculation: You acknowledge the existence of God. That's why we begin with Genesis 1:1, because it helps form the foundation of who we are: God exists, and we are His creation. So as this conference begins, I pose this question to you who acknowledge God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth: If you don't, can you really teach any subject correctly?

Consider this: God is the basis for truth. We know what is right and wrong because God tells us what is right and wrong. If you reject God, you reject His declaration of right and wrong. You reject His truth. That means it's up to people, sinful people, to decide what is true and false.

Now, this is obvious enough in some areas: For one, sex education is going to be much different if you believe God gave the 6th commandment than if you believe morality is the choice of the individual. In reality, though, this permeates all subject matter.

Take social studies, for instance. If God doesn't exist, then all these different societies and cultures are man's different attempts to civilize; and because there is no standard of right and wrong, every cultural practice is equally acceptable. (Can you really say that the human sacrifices by the Aztecs were wrong?) However, you acknowledge God's presence, so I suppose that we could say that social studies begins with Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel. That's where different cultures start to develop as God scatters man with different languages. Social studies isn't the study of random development, then; it's watching how different cultures struggle with right and wrong, and how each society is profoundly affected by its acceptance or rejection of the Word of God.

"Religious studies" gets lumped in here, too. If God doesn't exist, then religion is just how each society views a non-existent God. God is whoever, or whatever, people want Him to be. Therefore, every religion is equally good, and Christianity is just for people of Western European descent. You know better: There is one true God who has created and redeemed all. Christianity is not Western Europe's way of defining God; it's the Lord's salvation for all nations.

Science? If there is no God, then there is no Creator. Science is then about our taming of a random universe and is illogically used to prove God's non-existence. For you, science begins at Genesis 1:1- the natural world is created and ordered by God, and scientific studies lead to the wonder of His intricate creation.

History begins for you at Genesis 1:1, too: Because God exists, history has a beginning and an end.

We want to keep accurate accounts of history as a witness to man's achievements, failures, and God's intervention. But if God does not exist, there is no basis for truth or accuracy; therefore, it's acceptable to play with history so it fits your agenda, what you want it to say.

Mathematics? A friend of mine maintains that the foundation of math is Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Mathematics works because the one God defines quantities and establishes orderly, mathematical laws. If God doesn't exist, however, then math is man's attempt to make order out of chaos; and, I understand, some are proposing that-since math is man's invention-wrong answers aren't necessarily wrong after all. Hopefully, they won't be building bridges or skyscrapers anytime soon.

Do you see? The existence of God has a profound effect on any classroom subject. If God does not exist, there is no foundation. There is no absolute truth. There is no right or wrong.

But God does exist, and you have the marvelous freedom to proclaim His existence. And because God exists, you have a foundation. You have truth.

You have one more thing: Hope.

If God doesn't exist, there is no hope. This is all there is. In that case, feel free to change history, because history is going nowhere. The goal of science is immortality, because there's no other way to live forever. The goal of social studies is to make the best of now, because this is all there is. The goal of education is to make the best life for yourself, because this is the only life you'll ever have. In the short run, it sounds attractive. In the long run, it's pretty hopeless.

But you have hope. You have hope because God, who does exist, doesn't stop with an orderly creation. He goes on to declare His truth of redemption. He declares that, within history, His Son became flesh and died for your sins. He declares that, over and above all mathematics, His Son's death atones for the sins of the world. For the world-not just one culture or social group: Jesus sends His disciples to all nations. He who founds science declares that His gifts do not stop with the laws of chemistry and physics: Over and above the scientific laws that He sets in place, He raises you from the dead for eternal life.

This, too, is your privilege to share in your classrooms. History teaches that civilizations fall apart. Science teaches that people fall apart. The Gospel declares that Christ has died to raise you from the dead, for life eternal. This is just as sure and certain as the orders of creation and the laws of science, because the same God promises it is true.

Here at Good Shepherd, each school day includes the Apostle's Creed-either at Morning Prayer or chapel time. The repetition is for good reason: It declares the foundation of education: God the Father who created the heavens and earth, God the Son who has redeemed us, and God the Holy Ghost who continues to sanctify us. We conclude this devotion, and begin this conference, by speaking the Creed together.

Because there is God. There is truth. There is your hope-In the name of Jesus, Amen.