

BOOK REVIEW

Curriculum Unmasked: Towards a Christian understanding of education (Mark Roques, 1989)

At the recent International Transforming Education Conference in Darwin, I was inspired by the presentations of Mark Roques from England. It is not unusual for someone at a conference like this to speak about the importance of the worldview perspectives of students and how to reform or redeem them. However, I was inspired by Mark's argument for the power of stories in highlighting worldview and I was inspired to rethink the use of narrative in my pedagogy (and somewhat entertained by the intriguing stories and humorous telling in the examples he gave).

This got me wondering about what he might have written/published that I could read. So for \$1 and one week's wait, my yellowed copy of *Curriculum Unmasked* arrived from a second hand bookstore in London. And thence began my journey into a where-have-you-been experience with this great resource. This book is gold!

Curriculum Unmasked is written from personal observation as a 'supply teacher' working in a variety of schools in England. It begins by describing the widespread boredom and dissatisfaction Mark observed in his students. In exploring this, he provides an excellent, and humorous, unfolding of the biblical view of life and how this is contrasted with the life-and-world views of England's youth. Many Christian education books will provide an exploration of the biblical worldview and *Curriculum Unmasked* is an excellent companion to them with its emphasis on idolatry.

...the humanistic worldview of the Enlightenment was idolatrous in the sense that human beings focus on the created (worship of science, technology and economic growth) and so forget the Lord and his claims upon our lives. This idolatry refuses to develop culture and civilisation to the glory of God (cultural mandate) but instead encourages man to rule and master 'nature' to the glory of himself.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF EDUCATION

With Mark's authentic, humorous and positive writing style, he helpfully explores the biblical foundation for education. His context is not refined to Christian schools only, making this book equally helpful for Christians teaching in state schools. In his unfolding of education as wisdom he claims that the Lord Jesus is the source of all wisdom.

Christians need to recapture the radically biblical insight that all wisdom is hidden in Jesus Christ.

Mark's expression is particularly refreshing when unfolding for us a creation, distortion, redemption framework to describe the biblical worldview story. This is shown in the following quotes:

Children and young people need to see that this world we inhabit is the stunning playground of our father in heaven. We must not allow our children to lose this sense of mystery as they gaze at Ron the porcupine or Ralph the badger.

When we look at God's world we can see a beautiful cosmos; granted it is a universe polluted by sin and satanic activity, but a beautiful cosmos nonetheless. This cosmos is not meaningless. It is ordered and structured with wisdom and variety... Koala Bears [sic] were fashioned in a certain way by the Father for Jesus Christ. They are not elephants!

In all of life, whether farming, business, education, raising a family, scholarship, art, managing a football club, politics, technology or marriage, the Scriptures continually drive home the same point: you can either follow wisdom or folly. Life or death. Now, many Christians will grant the point that Christ's wisdom is essential for a healthy marriage or family — but farming? What does Christ have to do with that? But this objection fails to acknowledge that the entire cosmos belongs to Jesus Christ and all wisdom and knowledge is somehow rooted in him.

I could also speak about Mark's convincing call for an integrated understanding and teaching of God's world, but I will just offer Mark's words:

A Christian approach to knowledge and curriculum must take seriously the richness and coherence of God's world.

Our theories in maths, history, geography, physics, art, etc, must reflect insight into our Father's rainbow-rich, multi-faceted cosmos. Why? Simply because all these subjects deal with God's world.

PRACTICAL CRITIQUE OF TEXTBOOKS

The second of the three parts of *Curriculum Unmasked* explores the implicit (and sometimes explicit) worldview stories found in textbooks. Mark does this by taking excerpts from a science, English, mathematics, technology, geography, history, religious education and art textbook. Despite the texts being from the 1980s the presuppositions that Mark highlights will be just as evident in those being published currently for the Australian curriculum.

PERSONAL STORIES

Another great strength of this book is Part 3, containing personal stories from Christian teachers who are attempting to unfold a big picture of God's world and the centrality of Christ through their subject. These testimonies are short and inspiring even when you suspect they might not have grasped the length and breadth of a biblical worldview for their subject.

Despite being written two decades ago and out of a context seemingly removed from our own, this book may well sit on the 'top shelf' for those embracing Christian education (it is now on mine). I will finish by sharing that the National Institute for Christian Education has begun discussions with Mark with a view to publishing a second edition as an eBook with content from Australian subject teachers and with reference to the textbooks currently written for the Australian curriculum.

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This review along with a further collection of quotes from *Curriculum Unmasked* can be found on Chris' book blog. www.toffsbkblog.edublogs.org.

