

# Introduction to Christian Education

A set of three papers

Paper Three

## Life or Death? Christianity & Secularism in School



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### Summary

The threat of indoctrination in schools today is not from religion, but from Western secular materialism.

Our fundamental duty in education is to ensure that students can identify and evaluate the frameworks of meaning that shape and colour the education they receive.

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2. Indoctrination
3. Stories (Worldview Stories)
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## 1 – Introduction

Many Christians appear unaware of the extent to which materialistic assumptions now shape people and society.

Many atheists find it very difficult to accept – to believe – what it would *really* mean to be in a godless world.

## 2 – Indoctrination




It is commonly asserted that the only danger of indoctrination in schools is from religion.

Today there is almost no danger from religion in schools.

But indoctrination into secularism occurs on a massive scale in schools and demands urgent attention from religious believers and leaders.


## Mindsets of Christian RE Teachers

Professor Trevor Cooling




“In the case of those who identified themselves as Christians, a consensus emerged that they had to be careful not to let their own private beliefs influence the pupils; that was not considered objective. Essentially, they saw their beliefs as a problem to be managed. However in the case of those that were atheist or agnostic there was a

Professor Trevor Cooling



contrasting consensus; these students thought that their beliefs enhanced their professionalism. In other words their atheist beliefs contributed to their being objective RE teachers because they didn't have a *religious* belief. In their case they viewed their atheistic beliefs as an asset to be




Professor Trevor Cooling




tapped. This was only a small scale project and as such one cannot generalize from it. Further research is necessary. But it does indicate the existence of a mindset within contemporary education which is influencing students.”

(Cooling, 2011: 4)

In RE what are children learning about the meaning of Bible stories?

### Professor Terence Copley



Professor of Educational Studies (Religious Education), University of Oxford


(d. January 2011)

### Teaching the Bible Stories

Look at the following examples.

How were the Bible stories being taught?


Teaching the Bible Stories



#### David and Goliath

“No matter how small u are, belive in yourself.”  
(Yr 8 Pupil)

The Meaning of Bible Stories




**Birth of Christ**

“That the birth of a newborn baby is the best gift of all.”

(Yr 11 pupil)

The Meaning of Biblical Stories


**Betrayal of Christ**



“You can’t trust anyone these days”

(Yr 8 pupil)


The Meaning of Bible Stories



**Feeding of the 5000**

“Don’t take things for granted and share things”


(Yr 8 pupil)



**Teaching the Bible Stories**

Like any other story with a moral

Professor Terence Copley

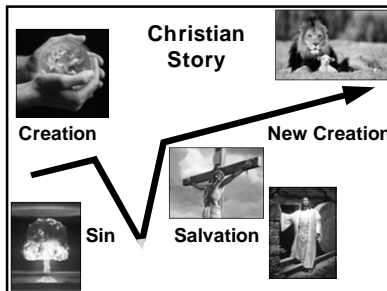


“Secularisation of biblical narratives, which excludes God as the ‘hero’, does *not* constitute a non-indoctrinatory approach to the Bible, but merely a new form of secular indoctrination.”


(Terence Copley *et al*, *Teaching Biblical Narrative*, 2005, page 19)

**Group Work 1**

How should a Christian teacher teach the Bible Stories?



Teaching the Bible Stories



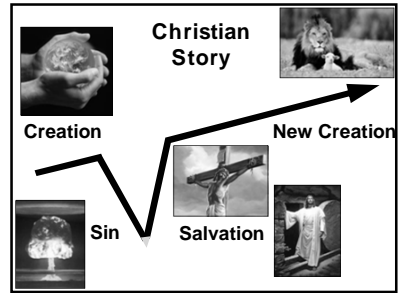
**David and Goliath**

# 3 – Stories (Worldview Stories)

**Worldviews ...**



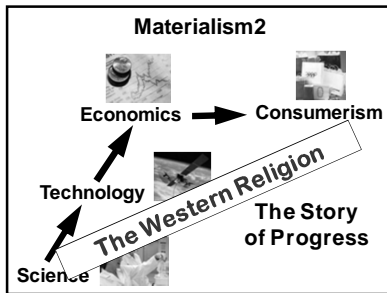
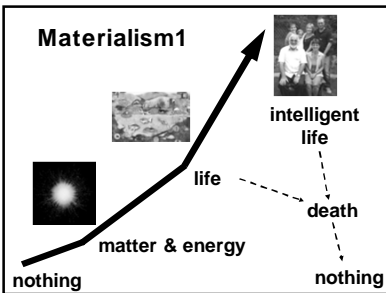
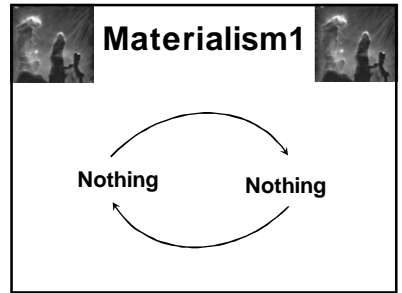
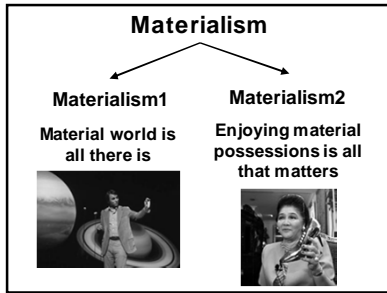
are 'spectacles behind the eyes' – we look *through* them not *at* them.



**Secular Worldview Story**



THANK YOU FOR NOT LITTERING YOUR MIND



“What is it about this thing (or this aspect of human life), that is relevant to (or can be exploited for) scientific and technological advance and/or economic gain?”

## 4 – Christian Perspectives on Education

1. Creation → Fall → Redemption → New Creation
2. Affirming the rich diversity of creation
3. Exploring our relationships

2. Affirming the rich diversity of creation. Resisting the temptation:

- To find a single cause or explanation.
- To locate the cause or explanation at the lowest possible level.
- To avoid personal responsibility.

3. Exploring our relationships

- to God;
- to ourselves;
- to other people;
- to animals;
- to plants;
- to the rest of creation.

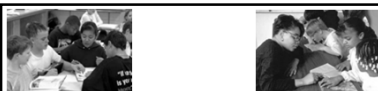
One of them, an expert in the Law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.

And a second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:35-40)

(cf. Mark 12:28-31 : "There is no commandment greater than these.")

A Quick Tour of the Curriculum



## 5 – Modern Foreign Languages

What do we want our students to be?

### Modern Foreign Languages

What do we want our students to be?

- Profiteers?
- Exploiters?
- Persuaders?
- Tourists?
- Connoisseurs?
- Escapologists?
- Revolutionaries?



David Smith

“Perhaps what we most commonly have at present are connoisseurs claiming to train profiteers and in fact producing tourists.”

*Language in God's World*,  
18, 1998, page 11

### Group Work 2

What would be a Christian goal for Language teachers?

### Remember:

Love the Lord your God ...  
Love your neighbour as yourself.

### A Christian Goal for Language Teachers?

Good Neighbours?



### The Gift of the Stranger



David Smith  
Barbara Carvill

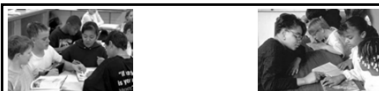


(Eerdmans, 2000)

### Modern Foreign Languages

All people are fundamentally religious – they live by faith in God or in some idol.

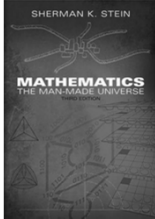

The only reference in many modern languages syllabi to anything religious is to horoscopes.



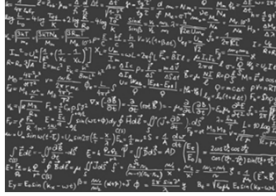
### 6 – Mathematics

Of course mathematics is completely worldview-neutral and value-free!

**Where does maths come from?**

(3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Dover, 2010)





**Will Mathematical Principles still hold tomorrow?**


**Who or what sets the questions in arithmetic?**



**Maths Textbooks in Afghanistan Communist Era**





“Their arithmetic problems deal with land distribution and egalitarian ideals. Red banners and happy collective farmers would guide children towards communism.”




(Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, 2002)

**Textbooks in Afghanistan Mujahedeen & Taliban Era**




“This is how first year schoolchildren learn the alphabet: ‘J is for Jihad, our aim in life, I is for Israel, our enemy, K is for Kalashnikov, we will overcome, M is for Mujahedeen, our heroes, T is for Taliban, ...’”



(*The Bookseller of Kabul*)

**Maths Textbooks in Afghanistan Mujahedeen & Taliban Era**



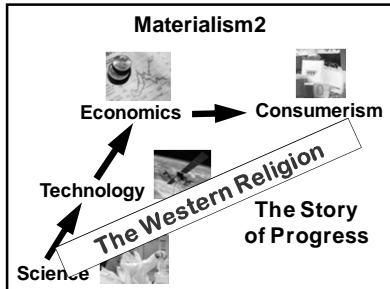
“War was the central theme in maths books too ... ‘Little Omar has a Kalashnikov with three magazines. There are twenty bullets in each magazine. He uses two thirds of the bullets and kills sixty infidels. How many infidels does he kill with each bullet?’”

(*Bookseller of Kabul*)

**Secular Maths Textbooks**

Of course *secular* maths books are worldview free. Or are they?

What are their arithmetic problems about?



**Secular Maths Textbooks**

The arithmetic problems are predominantly about buying and selling, profits made and interest earned.

They faithfully reflect the Western Religion.

### Group Work 3

How might our arithmetic problems reflect a Christian worldview?



## 7 – Science

### On the 5-16 Curriculum

“Despite an appearance of educationally impeccable aims and objectives, the *real* beliefs advocated ... may be expressed in quite different terms, harsh as it may seem:

#### On the 5-16 Curriculum

- that economics is the key to life;
- that technology can control the future;
- that people matter chiefly in so far as they work;
- that the arts, humanities and religion are to be seen largely as pleasant extras, to be accommodated if there is time;

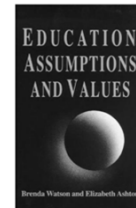
#### On the 5-16 Curriculum

- that there is either no spiritual side to life or if there is it is unimportant and secondary;
- that in the end there is only matter, money and the industrial machine.

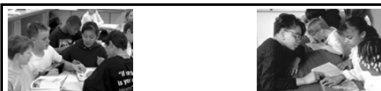
Such an approach is not education.”

Brenda Watson, *Education and Belief*, 1987, page 11

### Brenda Watson & Elizabeth Ashton



(London: David Fulton, 1995)

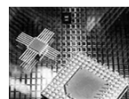
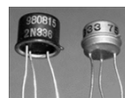


## Chemistry

### Chemistry

#### Silicon

transistors



computer chips

### Chemistry

#### Aluminium



aircraft bodies



wire & cables



kitchen utensils



**Chemistry** **Limestone**

glass cement

roads building stone

extraction of iron

chemical feedstock

**Industrial Value of Rock**

	Hard Limestone	Granite	Basalt	Gritstone
Cost of Extraction	low	high	high	v. high
Common aggregate	good	good	good	good
Base aggregate	v. good	good	v. good	good
Wearing course	poor	medium	good	v. good
Quarry wastage	low	medium	high	v. high
Building stone	yes	yes	rare	yes
Chemical feedstock	yes	no	no	no

**Chemistry** **Air**

source of raw materials for industry

oxygen gas nitrogen gas argon gas

**Chemistry** **Oceans**

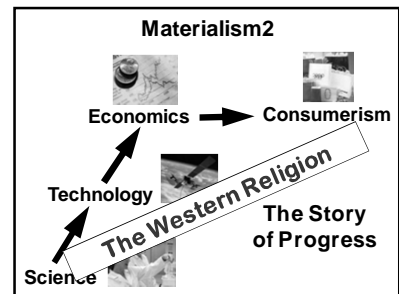
source of raw materials for industry

sea salts

**Group Work 4**

Which worldview shapes the curriculum?

Explain your answer



**Group Work 5**

How might a Christian teacher approach the teaching of chemistry?

Explain your answer

**Chemistry** **Silicon**

key element of rock

no silicon = no rocky planets = no life

**Chemistry** **Aluminium**

key element of soil

weathering plant nutrients

**Chemistry**

**Limestone – many creational roles**

**Air & ocean – many creational roles**

**Value of rock in creation**

	Hard Limestone	Granite	Basalt	Gritstone
Water resources	good	no	poor	occasional
Landscape	v. good	v. good	good	v. good
Caves & Archaeology	yes	no	no	no
Mines / minerals	many	many	few	few
Agricultural soil	good	poor	v. good	poor
Animals / plants	v. diverse	limited	diverse	limited

**Limestone *in situ***

water resources

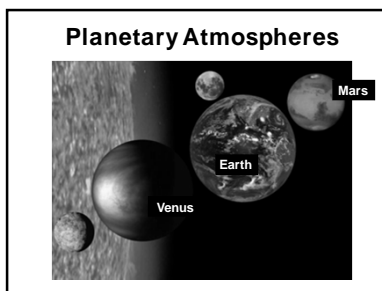
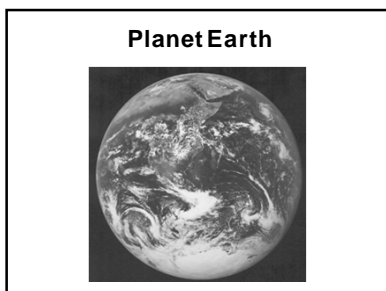
landscape

fossils

animals & plants

caves & archaeology

minerals



**Planetary Atmospheres**

Item	Venus	Mars	Earth (no life)	Earth (today)
<b>Gases (% volume)</b>				
carbon dioxide	96.5	95	98	0.03
nitrogen	3.5	2-3	1.9	78
oxygen	trace	0.1-0.4	0.0	21
Sea-level pressure (atm)	90	0.01	60	1.0
Surface temperature (°C)	480	-50 (± 70)	290 (± 50)	15 (-140 - +20)

**James Lovelock**

“imagine that some cosmic chef takes all the ingredients of the present earth as atoms, mixes them, and lets them stand. The probability that those atoms would combine into the molecules that make up our living Earth is zero. ...

**James Lovelock**

... The mixture would always react chemically to form a dead planet like Mars or Venus.”

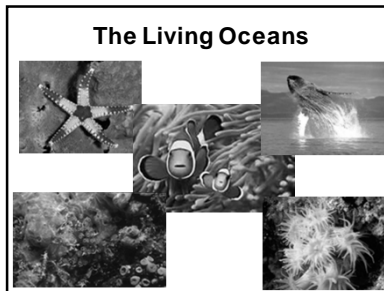
(*The Ages of Gaia*, OUP, 1995, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, page 24)

**Oceans with & without Life**

Item	Earth (no life)
<b>Chemicals (mass %)</b>	
Water	85
All salts	13
Sodium nitrate	1.7
Acidity	acid

**Oceans with & without Life**

Item	Earth (no life)	Earth (today)
Chemicals (mass %)		
Water	85	96.5
All salts	13	3.5
Sodium nitrate	1.7	trace
Acidity	acid	alkaline



**A vision of education...**

**... for life-enhancing Christian service**

**8 – Concluding Comments**

Sir Walter Moberly

**“Our predicament then is this. Most students go through our [schools and] universities [in the UK] without ever having been forced to exercise their minds on the issues that are really momentous. Under the guise of academic neutrality they are subtly conditioned to unthinking acquiescence in the social and ....**

Sir Walter Moberly

**... political *status quo* and in a secularism on which they have never seriously reflected ... Fundamentally they are uneducated.”**

*(The Crisis in the University, London, SCM, 1949, page 70.)*

**Prime Time**

Between the ages of 5 and 16 our children spend, on average:

- 15,000 hours in school
- 12,000 hours with the electronic media


**An environment for indoctrination that dictators past and present could never achieve.**

**Does it matter?**

✓ Unbelieving parents succeed in passing on their unbelief to almost 100% of their children


**Prof David Voas**  
Manchester University  
(ESRC 2005)

**Does it matter?**



David Voas

✗ Believing parents pass on their faith to barely 50% of their children



(One believing parent – 25%)

**Indoctrination**

**“...in order to be critical you must first be indoctrinated.”**

Robert Young, In R. Smith & P. Wexler (eds) *After Postmodernism*, 1995, page 13

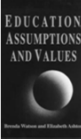
**Indoctrination**

**“... learners cannot understand reasons until they have already acquired a view ... criticism always presupposes a schema, background, worldview, *vorhabe*, or tradition. ... Put crudely, *in order to be critical you must first be indoctrinated.*”**

Robert Young, In R. Smith & P. Wexler (eds) *After Postmodernism*, 1995, page 13


**Educational Duty**

**“One of the most important duties of education is to seek to lay bare, clarify and evaluate precisely these numerous convictions which affect how we live, but which may be obscure to us unless critically examined.”**




Brenda Watson & Elizabeth Ashton, *Education, Assumptions and Values*, 1995, page 72

**Alasdair MacIntyre**



(b 1929)





(1981, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2007)

**Alasdair MacIntyre**

**“Teachers are the forlorn hope of the culture of Western modernity. ... the mission with which contemporary teachers are entrusted is both essential and impossible.”**

(1987: 16)



**Teaching Christianly**

**“Teaching Christianly may well be the hardest job in the universe.”**

John Van Dyk, *Letters to Lisa*, 1997, page 9

**Our fundamental duty in education is to ensure that students can identify and evaluate the frameworks of meaning that shape and colour the education they receive.**

**Life or Death?**  
Christianity & Secularism in School

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