

Delight-Based Learning
A response to David K. Naugle
By Thomas Whitehouse, Ph.D.

“Delight yourself also in the LORD and He shall give you the desires of your heart¹”
(Psalm 37:4)

It is a great privilege to be asked to respond to Dr. Naugle at this Pro-Ed conference. Regrettably, church duties prevented me from speaking in person but, even at a distance, it remains a joy and blessing.

In the absence of an advance copy of Dr. Naugle’s paper, I offer some reflection on the titles of his two excellent books.

The titles of those books illustrate two poles that must both stand tall in any philosophy of Christian education. In *Worldview: the History of a Concept* he traces the development of the understanding that human knowledge (and therefore learning) always takes place inside a worldview. That is, every person has a presuppositionally based grid that inevitably colors how and what he or she learns. This deals with the “how” and “what” people learn, the mental context in which education takes place.

His second book, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness* points us to the motivation, to the “why” people learn. They learn what they believe will bring happiness. In that book Dr. Naugle excellently applies what I would call, “delight-based teaching.”

Teaching and learning consist of much more than the impartation of information. They involve the creating of a desire for the reception and use of the information imparted. Without such a desire, the student or disciple quickly forgets what was learned.

¹ English Bible citations are from the *New King James Version*.

This forgetting is a matter of necessity. Every day a person's senses are bombarded by countless terabytes of data, and each byte calls for our attention. Humans at a very early age begin to learn to sort and filter this information, to pick and choose which pieces deserve to get stored in their gray matter and which ones are discarded. And the criterion usually used is "What interests me?" or "What pleases and delights me?" "What do I want?" Bruce Wilkinson's book *The Seven Laws of the Learner*² calls this "the Law of Need." We learn what we're convinced we'll need.

Our Lord has called believers to "make disciples of all nations, teaching" (Mt. 28:19). A teacher is, in Christ's words, one who has learned to "catch men." (Luke 5:10). Men (like fish) are caught by what stimulates their pleasure, gives them delight, or makes them happy. This is an innate, God-created direction in man. Blaise Pascal long ago noted:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever means they employ, they all tend to this end. . . . They will never take the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.³

Pascal's example shows that this delight-based learning can have disastrous consequences, depending on the lesson learned. The lesson that the man who hanged himself learned was "I will be happier dead than alive," and acted accordingly. But how did he come to that lesson?

In his epistle, James shows how Pascal's observation applies to temptations, such as (in this case), the desire to suicide. "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). "Δελεάζω" (entice) is, properly, "to catch by

² Bruce Wilkinson, *The Seven Laws of the Learner* (Sisters: Multnomah Press, 1992), Chapter 5.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensees*, trans. W. E. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113.

bait.” Thus also, Eve in the garden was “taught” by the Serpent that the forbidden fruit was “good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6).

Notice the Serpent’s teaching strategy:

- 1) He challenged Eve’s *worldview*, from “God gives us all we need” to “God withholds good things.”
- 2) He changed the *story* behind the worldview to one where God is worried enough about someone stepping on His turf, that He would lie about both positive and negative consequences of eating the fruit.
- 3) He motivated Eve to learn his lesson by appealing to her desire and *delight*.
- 4) The desire for delight was God-given. Eve had it before the Fall.

In the case of Pascal’s hanged man (as in the case of euthanasia teaching today) the issue is similarly one of happiness or delight giving the motivation, and worldview giving the context or direction. The man has two things in mind:

- 1) It is happier to be pain-free than to be in pain (delight)
- 2) There is no hell. My pain will cease at death (worldview)

In summary, Education without delight is ineffective, but delight in an idolatrous worldview is dangerous.

What, then, must the Christian educator keep in mind?

All knowledge takes place in a religious context. This point, argued convincingly in Roy Clouser's book, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*⁴, dispels the fantasy of a totally neutral "factual" education. All education takes place in the context of a worldview, and every worldview has, of necessity, a vision of what is the ultimate concern, or divine. The Christian educator must clarify, both in his or her own mind and in the mind of the student, the importance that both the teacher's and the student's worldviews have on the consequences of the lesson.

A Christian worldview provides a context for delight in every subject. From personal experience, this writer has always had a natural aptitude for math, but has never enjoyed it. Part of the fault lay with some High School teachers who tried to cram the head full of theorems and formulae with no regard for why I would need them. The only "need" I ever found in my life for any math beyond Algebra was the recent discovery that I had to help my own children with their math homework!

However, in preparation for a Philosophy of Science course I taught at Edinburg Theological Seminary, I read the sections on mathematics in Vern Poythress's book, *Redeeming Science*⁵. There Dr. Poythress presented mathematics in the beauty of a Christ-centered worldview. I acquired a new delight for the beauty of math that that I had not previously experienced. Even math, I found, openly declares the glory of God.

This anecdote contrasts with the sad experience of a great scientist who tried to find delight in science purely for its own sake. Eminent chemist Henry F. Schaefer III

⁴ Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: an Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Beliefs in Theories*, Revised Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway books, 2006), chapter 2, also nappendix 2.

recounts, from the biography of Nobel Prize winning astrophysicist Subrahmayan Chandrasekhar, where he states, of his pursuit of science: “I consider myself an atheist, but I have a feeling of disappointment because the hope for contentment and a peaceful outlook on life as the result of pursuing a goal has remained largely unfulfilled.”⁶

Every worldview is founded on, and develops, an underlying story. While the Bible *contains* and *informs* a worldview, it *is* a story. The worldview gives intellectual coherence, the story provides the worldview’s reason for being. One adopts a worldview because one is captured by, and believes, the underlying story.

Stories address the imagination and, through it, the faculty of delight. Good teachers through the centuries and (especially) Jesus in His use of parables, understood this. So do (on the other side) atheists such as Carl Sagan in his compelling T.V. series, *Cosmos*. While *Cosmos* taught many science facts, its draw was a compelling and even beautiful telling of the story of the “*Blind Universe that Could,*” how against all odds, natural law plus chance plus time produced all this grandeur. Christian educators must meet the challenge of this story, not only with facts, but with a better, more delightful story.

Christian educators must not only propound the Christian worldview. They must also re-capture the imagination with the Christian story. This is why, in the long run, C. S. Lewis’s *Narnia* books will probably be more effective than his excellent apologetic works. They present the Christian story comprehensively in a way that appeals to the learner’s delight.

⁶ Henry F. Schaefer III, *Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence?* (Athens: Apollos Trust, 2004), pp. 9-10.

It is in this light that I believe that Dr. Naugle's contribution is best appreciated. His earlier work did an excellent work in tracing the development of the concept of worldview. But he has gone beyond that now to the underlying story. In *Reordered Love*, *Reordered Lives*, he calls us to embrace the Gospel story, and allow it to reorder every facet of our lives. For in it is the delight in which (according to Psalm. 37:4), men and women will receive the desires of their hearts.