

## **Higher Education**

### **By David Feddes**

Higher education has been Richard Rorty's life. As a youth, Richard was brilliant. He enrolled in the elite University of Chicago when he was only fifteen years old. By the time others his age were graduating from high school, Richard already had his college degree. What a brain! Rorty went on to earn his doctorate from Yale University and has spent almost fifty years as a professor at highbrow universities such as Yale, Princeton, Virginia, and Stanford. His books have been translated into more than twenty languages, and he has been showered with many awards and honorary doctorates.

Wouldn't it be a privilege to study under someone so smart? Well, that depends on your goal. If you want an education that opposes faith in God and turn students against their parents' values, Richard Rorty is the ideal professor. Rorty calls himself a "militant secularist" and says, "Religion is something that the human species would be better if it could outgrow." He wants to substitute faith in human potential for faith in God.

Rorty thinks that college professors should "arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own." He says, "Students are lucky to find themselves under the benevolent [guidance] of people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents." Rorty warns parents, "We are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable." Faith in God and loyalty to family are to be ridiculed, not rationally discussed.

Rorty is not alone. His approach is popular among many educators. His hero, John Dewey, is the most influential figure in the history of American education. Dewey made his impact early in the 1900's, shaping the approach of the major teachers' colleges to public education. Dewey was the first president of the American Humanist Association. He wrote, "Faith in the prayer-hearing God is an unproved and outmoded faith. There is no God, and there is no soul... There is no room for fixed, natural law or moral absolutes." In Dewey's vision, schools and universities would replace churches and families in shaping future generations and transforming society.

Richard Rorty says that John Dewey is his favorite thinker because of his "thoroughgoing secularism... There's no God, no reality, no nothing that takes precedence over the consensus of a free people." Ironically, Rorty teaches in a country of free people where over 90 percent believe in God, but that's not the sort of consensus he approves. He wants to reshape future generations into a totally different consensus where God counts for nothing, where human potential counts for everything. This is what he calls spiritual growth. "Spiritual development," says Rorty, can mean "any attempt to transform oneself into a better sort of person by changing one's sense of what matters most." Rorty wants "a religion of literature, in which works of the secular imagination replace Scripture as the principal source of inspiration and hope for each new generation."

### **Religious and Political Bias**

Rorty rejects faith in God and embraces faith in left-wing political causes. He says, "The universities and colleges are bastions of the left in America, and the closest thing we have to the left is roughly the left wing of the Democratic Party, and if you look at the statistics on what kind of professor votes for what, the humanities and the social science professors always vote

overwhelmingly Democratic, and obviously the youth that is exposed to courses in social sciences and humanities is going to be gently nudged in a leftward direction.”

Rorty says that his left-most students are his favorites. He says, “They seem to me the most lively minds, the most curious, easiest to talk to, the people anxious to read the most books, stuff like that.” If a Christian professor favored Christian students, he would be accused of bias. But if a person makes a religion of left-wing ideals and favors leftist students, he sees that as a mark of the best minds and will give grades that reflect his bias.

Richard Rorty is right about at least one thing: the minds of higher education tend to favor left-wing political ideology. A researcher found that Stanford University had 22 Democrats and just two Republicans in its history department. Cornell University had 29 Democrats and no Republicans. At the University of Colorado in Boulder, of 190 professors in the social science and humanities departments, 184 were Democrats and only six were Republicans. A survey of 150 departments at 32 colleges, including the Ivy League, found that Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a 10-1 margin.

It would be best if faculties were more politically diverse, rather than being dominated by one ideology or party. Students don’t go to college for political brainwashing, and parents don’t pay tuition for the privilege of handing their offspring over to political partisans. But the political bias doesn’t concern me nearly as much as the religious bias. If professors push students toward a particular political party and ideology, that’s not their job, but it’s not the end of the world. But if they want their students to outgrow religion and forget God, that is far more serious. Higher education should not sink so low.

Richard Rorty represents a breed of educator who wants to liberate students from parents and God. Rorty’s grandfather was a famous preacher, Walter Rauschenbusch, who emphasized a socialist gospel more than biblical faith. Rorty went even further, completely rejecting belief in God. At various times in his life, he looked into Christianity but wouldn’t accept it. An interviewer once asked Rorty, “Why did you turn away from religion? Was it because of the emphasis on humility?”

“Yeah,” replied Rorty, “partially that and partly I just couldn’t believe that God had actually been incarnated in one person.” He couldn’t believe in Jesus as God incarnate, the one way to know God and be right with God. Rorty has battled depression at times. In his pursuit of truth, he has concluded that there is no such thing. It is sad when a person won’t believe in God and can’t find soul-satisfying truth, but it is sadder still when that person uses a position of influence to turn others against God and tells them to give up on truth.

A teacher who can’t find a basis for objective truth should get into a new line of work, rather than teaching others to deny all objective truth. A teacher who doesn’t know God should simply admit his ignorance, rather than trying to lead others. As Jesus said, “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?” (Luke 6:39) Higher education without God is not high at all; it brings you down into a pit.

### **Knowledge and Understanding**

J. Budziszewski (pronounced boo-jee-shef’-ski) is a Christian professor who teaches at the University of Texas. He knows how students raised in a Christian home can go to college and lose their belief in God and in biblical morality, because that’s what happened to him. He knows how professors can teach students a mindset of disbelief, because that’s what he did to his students for years before he repented and turned to Christ. J. Budziszewski has written an excellent book, *How to Stay Christian in College*, which I highly recommend.

Professor Budziszewski knows that university campuses can feel like a different world, a hostile world, to students who come from Christian homes. He says,

One day a student approached me after class. She seemed close to tears. “In lecture today, you mentioned that you’re a Christian,” she said. “I’ve never heard that from any other professor, and every day I spend at this university I feel my faith is under attack.

If you’re a student, you might feel like that girl. In the classroom, your professors teach ideas that contradict God’s truth. In the dorms, your fellow students have language and lifestyles that trash God’s will. You feel surrounded. You may be strongly tempted to reject the Lord. You may think that these professors and students must know something you don’t. These people are really smart, and they don’t believe the Bible or trust the Lord. You may get the impression that faith is only for those who can’t think and don’t know how to have fun.

Don’t be fooled. There is no knowledge without God. God created everything, so without God there would be nothing to know and nobody to know it. The Bible says of Christ, “All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17). Without Christ, we don’t know the meaning and purpose of things. Without Christ, there is no unifying center, just lots of fragments that we can’t fit together. Those who teach contrary to Christ are the blind leading the blind. They may have some specialized expertise in their field of study, but they don’t know how everything fits together. They can’t provide a solid foundation for your life. They are blind guides, and their anti-God path can only land you into a pit.

If you want truly higher education, you need wisdom from the highest source of all, the wisdom that comes from God. In Proverbs 2:1-10 the Bible says,

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding... Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

To gain soul-satisfying wisdom, you must want it, and you must look to the right source: the all-wise God. Jesus said, “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7:7).

### **Jay’s Journey**

Earlier I mentioned J. Budziszewski’s book *How to Stay Christian in College*. At the beginning of the book, Jay describes his own journey. As a young man, Jay had much in common with Richard Rorty, the prominent professor who says, “Religion is something that the human species would be better if it could outgrow.” Like Rorty, Jay attended the University of Chicago and earned his doctorate from Yale. Like Rorty, Jay rejected God, rejected the very notion of truth, rejected any objective standard of right and wrong. Like Rorty, Jay became a philosophy professor and taught students to reject God and to give up on any such thing as final truth. But unlike Rorty, J. Budziszewski eventually put his faith in Jesus Christ.

Jay describes his job interview years ago when he was trying to get hired as a professor at the University of Texas.

Fresh out of grad school, I wanted to teach about ethics and politics, so I was showing the faculty my stuff. What did I tell them? First, that we human beings just make

up the difference between good and evil; second, that we aren't responsible for what we do anyway.

Does that seem to you a good plan for getting a job teaching the young? Or does it seem a better plan for getting committed to the state mental hospital? Well, I wasn't committed to the state mental hospital, but I did get a job teaching the young.

Jay had been raised in a Christian family and had been enthusiastically religious as a teen. But soon after he entered college, he stopped believing in the Lord.

Why had I fallen away from the faith? For many reasons. One was that I had been caught up in the radical politics popular among students in the late sixties and early seventies. I had my own ideas about redeeming the world, and my politics became a kind of substitute religion. During my student years I had also committed certain sins that I didn't want to repent. Because the presence of God made me more and more uncomfortable, I began looking for reasons to believe that he didn't exist. Then again, once I lost hold of God, things started going wrong in my life, and disbelieving in Him seemed a good way to get back at Him. Now of course if God didn't exist, then I couldn't get back at Him, so this may seem a strange sort of disbelief. But most disbelief is like that.

Another reason I lost my faith was that I'd heard all through school that human beings had created God in their image, and that even the most basic ideas about good and evil are arbitrary. During graduate school I had fallen under the spell of the nineteenth-century German writer Friedrich Nietzsche [who taught] the meaninglessness of things...

All of this gives you a clue to the main reason I lost faith in God: sheer, mulish pride. I didn't want God to be God; I wanted J. Budziszewski to be God. I see that now. But I didn't see that then.

I now believe that without God, everything goes wrong. This is true even of the good things He's given us, such as our minds... A strong mind refusing the call to serve God has its own way of going wrong. When some people flee from God they might rob and kill. When others flee from God they may do a lot of drugs and have a lot of sex. When I fled from God I didn't do any of those things; my way of fleeing was to get stupid. Though it always comes as a surprise to intellectuals, there are some forms of stupidity that you must be highly intelligent and educated to commit.

J. Budziszewski wrote his doctoral dissertation to prove that humans merely invent the difference between right and wrong. He says with sadness, "I even taught these things to students; now *that's* sin."

How then did God bring me back? I came, over time, to feel a greater and greater horror about myself—an overpowering sense that my condition was terribly wrong. Finally it occurred to me to wonder why I should feel horror if the difference between the wonderful and the horrible was just something we humans make up. I had to admit there was a difference between the wonderful and the horrible after all. And that meant there had to exist a wonderful, of which the horrible was the absence. So my walls of self-deception collapsed all at once.

That was when I became aware again of the Savior I had deserted during college. Astonishingly, though I had abandoned Him, he had never abandoned me. I now believe He drew me back to Himself just in time...

Since the Lord changed him, Professor Budziszewski has helped many students come closer to Christ instead of pushing them away. He is a brilliant thinker and writer in the service of Christ. He says,

As I look back, I am in awe that God has permitted me to make any contribution to his kingdom at all. But He promises that if only the rebel turns to Jesus Christ in repentant faith, giving up claims of self-ownership and allowing this Jesus, this Christ, the run of the house, He will redeem everything there is in it. And He did.

### **College and Christianity**

College can be dangerous to your soul, but it can also be a great place to develop your mind and strengthen your spirit. For many young people, your best choice would be a Christian college, a place where the professors are Bible-believing followers of Jesus and are also excellent scholars and teachers in their fields of study. I know a lot of professors at Christian colleges and universities, and they are living proof that you don't have to shut off your brain to be a Christian. If you can attend a Christian institution of higher learning, you can benefit enormously.

By the way, did you know how much the educational system owes to Christianity? I'm not just talking about the fact that all minds are gifts from God and that everything being studied is created by God. Did you know that Christians began the movement toward education for all children, girls as well as boys, poor as well as rich? Did you know that Christians kept higher learning alive during dark times, saved many classic books from disappearing forever, and renewed learning and civilization? Did you know that Christians founded most of the world's great universities? Bologna, Oxford, Paris, Cambridge, Heidelberg, Basel, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and countless others were started by Christians and focused on Christian thought as their chief subjects. Many universities later betrayed their Christian foundations, but that doesn't change the fact that they owe their very existence to Christianity and that God is still the source of all reality and truth.

If you attend a Christian college or university which remains true to its mission, you will grow in your ability to love God with your mind and to understand his world. And even if you go to an institution that isn't Christian, you can still grow closer to Christ.

If you're not a Christian at all, your college years may be a time of searching not just for job skills but for the deepest truths about yourself and the world. God may lead you to a Christian student or professor who can help you find the answers you're looking for. Deep down, something inside you says that there's more to life than what unbelieving intellectuals are telling you. Your conscience tells you that there is such a thing as right and wrong, no matter who denies it. Your spirit hungers for the supernatural, no matter who says the natural world is all there is. God built these things into you, he gave the Bible to reveal what we couldn't find out on our own, and he gave Jesus to connect you with himself.

If you're already a Christian, your faith can survive and thrive even in a non-Christian institution. But don't try to do it alone. Depend on the Lord. Read the Bible and pray to him. Have conversations with him every day. Also, find students and professors who know the Lord. Encourage each other. Become part of a good church in the area where you can worship, hear biblical preaching, and take part in the Lord's Supper with God's people. A personal walk with God and fellowship with other Christians will help your faith grow stronger even in a hostile setting where many are tugging you the other way.

Don't be shocked when you encounter professors or fellow students who are hostile to biblical faith. Don't be shaken by them. Instead, treat it as an opportunity to help them see a better way. The Bible says, "You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But you must do this in a gentle and

respectful way” (1 Peter 3:15-16 NLT). J. Budziszewski’s book includes a section on “How to Hold Your Own Without Being a Jerk,” and many other helpful things.

Colleges and universities are often called “higher education,” but always remember that the highest education of all comes from the Most High God. “The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

#### Resources

Jason Boffetti, “How Richard Rorty Found Religion,” *First Things*, May 2004.

<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0405/articles/boffetti.html>

J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*

J. Budziszewski, “Escape from Nihilism” link to

<http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9801/budziszewski.html>

Helpful websites for college students:

[www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com)

[www.boundless.org](http://www.boundless.org)