

EDUCATING THE MATERIALIST?

Daniel P. Buxhoeveden
University of South Carolina
Director Religion and Science Initiative
Department of Anthropology

Abstract

Secular education is as much about the modern *Zeitgeist* as it is about information. It teaches us how to think like materialists and leaves us grossly ignorant of other options. It is not our position in the University to promote Orthodoxy but we can support the *spirit* that is required for an Orthodox approach to the world by utilizing the good wherever it is found and by cultivating other forms of knowing. We can call attention to the limitations of the dominant paradigm and when the opportunity arises, we should not be afraid of discussing mystery or the sacred. Students must be shown to face the implications of all worldviews, to recognize presuppositions, and consider whether amassing mounds of information about the world amounts to the same thing as understanding it. If there is any credence to the notion that the university is a place to openly critique and analyze ideas, then scientific materialism cannot be excluded from that criticism. We must try to initiate a paradigm shift among a generation of students that have been taught to think like scientific materialists since high school. They have to be shown that scientific knowledge and human reason, no matter how glorious, is in the end merely human. The challenge is to avoid indoctrinating students into the spirit of the age without encouraging superstition or fundamentalism.

Introduction:

The word materialism as used in this essay describes the belief that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality, that processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter, and additionally that our objectives as human animals lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress¹. More than that, it refers to a way of thinking, a zeitgeist, as much as to a concrete philosophy and it is this that I am focusing on the most. It is an atheism usually undergirded by a weak or strong scientism. Even if the definitions of the physical and the mechanistic ideas of nature are expanded so that we incorporate quantum physics and emergent properties, the cosmos nonetheless remains devoid of anything but impersonal matter. Thus it is not critical whether quantum physics is less mechanistic or that emergence adds a new level of complexity to material things, because when all is said and done, there are no angels, spirits, ghosts, or sacred places. Such things may be seen as a metaphor, myths (useful or otherwise), products of evolution, or even as ideals, but not as something that describes objective reality. The secular university is an environment where this is the shared and dominant philosophy and it is safe to suggest that the majority of faculty (which varies of course with the discipline) do not believe in the reality of the spiritual as something substantively real.

The phrase “educating the materialist” as used in this paper refers to a hypothesis, an observation, and a challenge. It is a hypothesis that suggests that we teach our students how to think like a materialist in all areas of life. In turn graduates of this system of thought go out into the world and re-enforce this worldview in all areas of our culture. This has been going on in the European mind for centuries and it has been exported with success around the globe². Second, it is personal observation that I have encountered in academia. Finally, it is a challenge: how do we teach students the best information in our fields without shaping their thinking so as to become de facto materialists? How do we aid them in intellectual pursuits without shutting off the sense and yearning for the spiritual? From the point of view of the student, does it and should it make any difference if they take a human evolution class from an atheist or from an Orthodox Christian professor? I am in a field that is as prone to being anti-metaphysical, anti-Christian (or any religion), and materialistic as any I can think of, and so it shapes my attitudes and I try to

¹ Adapted from the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

² The traditionalist school is especially critical of the rise and spread of modernity. “For the traditionalists modernism is nothing less than a spiritual disease which continues to spread like a plague across the globe, decimating traditional cultures wherever they are still to be found. Although its historical origins are European, modernism is now tied to no specific area or civilisation. Its symptoms can be detected in a wide assortment of interrelated "mind sets" and "-isms", sometimes involved in cooperative co-existence, sometimes engaged in apparent antagonisms but always united by the same underlying principles. Scientism, rationalism, relativism, materialism, positivism, empiricism, psychologism, individualism, humanism, existentialism: these are some of the prime follies of modernist thought. The pedigree of this family of ideas can be traced back through a series of intellectual and cultural upheavals in European history and to certain vulnerabilities in Christian civilisation which left it exposed to the subversions of a profane science. The Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment were all incubators of ideas and values which first ravaged Christendom and then spread throughout the world like so many bacilli. Behind the somewhat bizarre array of ideologies which have proliferated in the last few centuries the traditionalists discern a growing and persistent ignorance concerning ultimate realities and an indifference, if not always an overt hostility, to the eternal verities conveyed by tradition.-- . –The Critique of Modernism, *Religio Perennis*.

take this into account³. I think that there are minor but significant things we can do within the system itself.

1. Hypothesis. I suspect that western education has for a very long time molded humans into a mindset that is as imperialistic in its own domain as western colonialism was in the political sphere. It is a way of thinking that eviscerates the spiritual, and makes it seem something distant and unreal, primitive and ghostly. It is why I suggest that Orthodox spirituality is more easily comprehended by indigenous people like the Native Americans (note the Alaskan Orthodox model) than minds which inherited the renaissance, the enlightenment, and post-modernism. It is difficult within one owns culture to see oneself as we are and so looking outside is necessary, and this is why I use them as a mirror because as an anthropologist in the secular academy I cannot read from the Philokalia. Who but the European man, to copy a phrase by Justin Popovitch, could have created a Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Sagan, or Dawkins?

For whom is it more natural to see and lend respect to the sacred image found in a tree, an animal, or an icon? Who would have an intuitive grasp of fasting, humility, solitude, silence, and prayer? The European mind perceived that the way to truth required removing notions of sacredness and mystery rather than fostering them in a healthy environment. In quashing superstition it went too far and lost its soul and its ability to believe. Modern materialism is the extreme flip side of superstition.

The education we receive undermines the *sense* of the spiritual and of the sacred to the point that pushes the envelope of faith. There is no place for it in the realm of official knowledge and this has been compounded and justified by the rise of a multicultural society. The student who retains their belief within this setting does so in spite of and not because of their education. Philosopher William Barrett stated some years ago that scientific materialism is the de facto philosophy of our time. It is influential precisely because it sits quietly in the background, or it has until the flourishing of the new atheism (and the Soviet era)⁴. Still it tends to be foundational and therefore escapes serious criticism. Because science works well in so many domains it results in the illusion that it can be applied equally to *Everything*, and so it naturally follows that God becomes yet another hypothesis to be tested within the paradigm⁵. The science of matter always takes precedence over the science of the soul.

The myths embedded in the educational process escape criticism and become their own kind of fundamentalism. Without a balanced approach to knowledge, students acquire not just

³ Perhaps I am expressing the frustration nurtured over decades of relatively enforced silence. Had I known an environment that was different in tone than the one I experienced, I could have brought more enthusiasm to science. I know someone who has the knowledge and yet is independent enough and influential enough to call even high ranking scientists on their pretensions to knowledge and denial of religious-spiritual experience, something that most of us cannot do. This is a reality which needs to be addressed if the academy will ever be a place to engage holistically with the entire human condition rather than so often its most trivial aspects.

⁴ This may turn out to be useful as it brings the assumptions to the forefront and (hopefully) allows a response. By promoting scientism it should be only fair that the academy allow for an analysis of the arguments.

⁵ Orthodox would agree that in many instances, some 'gods' are human fabrications and lack feasible objective reality. The point here is that in the scientific mindset all ideas of God are human fabrications.

information, they acquire a mindset. Paradoxically, this can feed religious fundamentalism rather than alleviate it, and encourages suspicion of the educational process and rejection of otherwise valid scientific knowledge.

One can be many things in the academy, but a believer in non-materialism is not one of them. Even a Nobel Prize winning physicist dare not venture into evidence suggestive of ESP⁶. In a book about the scientific evidence for parapsychology, Chris Carter refers to the frantic fight against all forms of parapsychology as a holy war and the presumptions of modern science that preclude allowing for evidence of this kind. I would add that this includes the religious experience of our elders and saints. Do you think a materialist on a rampage against evidence for the so called paranormal is going to accept the incredible manifestations of clairvoyance witnessed in so many Orthodox elders and saints? If someone is taught to deny the possibility of something as relatively mundane as extra sensory perception, they will hardly accept the miracles of a saint. A culture like the Lakota can accept these, someone raised on Hume cannot. They have enclosed themselves into a mind box and thrown away the key.

This is a culture that does not know seem to know how to be scientific without also being materialistic. They apply to all the areas of life and this leads to what British Philosopher Mary Midgley refers to as the myth that science is “Omnicompetent in all areas”. It is misused but no matter how often this is said, we continue on the same path.

In this atmosphere, students with no foundational basis for the spiritual life are sorely tested. The upside is that students are required to scrutinize why they believe as they do. A testing of fundamentalism and erroneous thinking can do us good. Orthodoxy has no desire to promote fantasy. The notion of *prelest* and the teachings of many great elders, saints, and others in the Church, signify a sober approach to the spiritual that is to be (ideally) free from fantasy and speculation. There is nothing wrong with the university challenging us in our faith. One should expect this, even demand it. What kind of academy would it be that rubber stamped all our childish notions. The problem is that this takes place on one side of the aisle only while it omits serious criticism of materialism and scientism. The critique goes only in one direction and the atheist and materialist are rarely if ever challenged in their beliefs. When the materialistic-agnostic-atheist side is presented without serious objection and the spirituality becomes the doormat for platitudes and insults (read superstition, primitive, illusions, fantasy, myths, and so on) then critical thinking is replaced by indoctrination.

2. The Observation.

The argument I make in this essay is admittedly personal. It includes what I saw as a student, and what I encountered in the academy. I recognize that what I say cannot be applied in all cases for all institutions. I know of individuals who have passed through academia with no issues about their faith. Some of this may be due to a given major and to particulars such as a given professor and institution. Basic chemistry or physics are one thing but what about cognitive science, evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology and physical anthropology? These represent fields that I think are much more difficult and which tend to conflate science with philosophy. I think it is naïve to believe that our educational system has no affect on the student’s faith, or that it

⁶ Brian Josephson.

supports it. I would suggest that Richard Dawkins, even though considered extreme by some atheists and agnostics, is nonetheless more representative of the general mindset of which I am familiar, than someone like Alister McGrath. I wish it were not so but this is my observation and I may be wrong.

I came to the university with a deep sense of the wonder of the universe and some knowledge of what might be called spiritual reality and in contrast, the education I received eviscerated the universe of its life blood and made of it something not worth pursuing. If the cosmos was as the materialist defined it then why bother? Take me back to the South Pacific islands or hand me those golf clubs. The song by Peggy Lee; "Is That All There Is" with its representation of existentialism and nihilism are the most honest and valid responses to such an absurd universe, no matter how many billions and billions of dead stars there are (In reply to Carl Sagan). Never accept the argument that modern science does not take away mystery, or that the disclosures of data about the universe is somehow mystery to them. This is mystery defined as an unanswered question or the emotional reaction to something or some phenomena. This is a kind of mystery but true mystery for those who know it, is the encounter of the finite with the infinite. You cannot see through that kind of mystery.

When I was young, my step father, a graduate of the University of Bonn in the 1920's, would refer to universities as brain washing institutions and was highly critical of them and his own education. He was referring to the scientific materialistic thinking already in place. At the time I found this notion preposterous as my impression was that the Western University was the most open minded of all institutions, the place where one was really free to address any issue.

When I entered the university I was not a teenager but had already been to Korea and Vietnam, so I was not just out of high school. More pertinent to the issue, I had experienced things that are not acceptable to the dominant paradigm and I came from a family background of the same. I understood that there was more to the cosmos than what I was being told, not by philosophical argument and not by scientific experiment or theory, but by the power of first hand experiences as well as those from family members and others I knew very well. This demonstrated and supported the existence of a far broader reality that I was being taught in the academy or the official culture⁷. Nonetheless, and this is what is impressive to me, largely because of my education I finally 'broke down' and become agnostic even though I knew that the scientific model of reality as they presented it was incomplete and in that sense, false. It was a capitulation, an adaptation to the environment in which I found myself. This was not because I was able to disprove my past experiences. On the contrary nothing I learned over the years allowed me to deny them. I just put them aside as if they did not happen because there was no place for them. The smart thing was to repress them and say nothing and this speaks volumes about the dominance of materialism on campus and its intolerance for other forms of human experience.

⁷ The official culture refers to the most respected, prominent, and prestigious sources of information in our culture, as well as the seats of power. Examples include the university, journalism in general and especially prestigious ones like the New York Times, science journals such as Science and Nature, major television news stations, public radio and television, etc. The official culture is where a 'serious minded' person would go to find answers to questions pertaining to reality or a given topic including religion.

I was worn down by the sustained influence of treating all of life in the academy (whether sociology, cultural anthropology, evolution, etc.) with the same mindset and in the same atmosphere. In academia you cannot depend on the theological schools or religious departments either, for in some instances, they are even worse (when I was at State University at Stony Brook, Thomas Altizer was on faculty promoting the death of God for example). To the naïve student this can come as shock. With no serious alternative and no contextual placement or limits of human knowledge, how does one approach the idea of a spiritual world seriously? The Soviet empire was overtly persecuting the Church and all things spiritual, while in the West it was unofficial doctrine that such things are nonsensical and you keep your mouth shut. In this setting is it any wonder that the 1960's saw the rise of Eastern religions, cults, the Jesus movement, communes, flower children, Moonies, and those irritating Hare Krishna's at the airports? Anything that could give form and substance to the spiritual was attempted and is it any surprise that this fell to the way side as a sustained cultural movement?

The children of the Enlightenment lacked guidance in the realm of the spiritual. To some degree Western religion has become a reflection of Western non-religious thought. The actions of the sixties were experiments and represented an attempt to reach beyond the official culture. But there was no way to recognize substantive Christian spirituality in a culture that has repressed and excised it from their psyche. Someone who claims to have had a real religious experience or spiritual event, is more likely to be sent to a psychiatrist than to a priest or minister, and those who are sent to a priest will more likely find someone ill trained to deal with it and even unbelieving in such things themselves (what if your priest were John Crossan).

Given these things how do we expect a college student to comprehend Orthodox Christianity? How can they read about miracles after receiving an education that clearly dismisses this out of hand? Imagine having a discussion with the typical student majoring in cognitive science or evolutionary biology in regards to the phenomena associated with the life of Elders Porphyrios and Paisios, or St. Seraphim to name but a few? What would they have to say about the amazing experiences of Fr. Arseny in the Siberian death camps over two decades and the vision of the uncreated light granted to St. Silouan the Athonite and Elder Sophrony? Ask them if icons can really weep and if there is anything sacred about the cosmos? Personally, I would much rather dialogue with a Native American elder.

E.F. Schumacher's reflection of his education captures what I am trying to say as well as anything, and it is always heartening to find you are not alone in your thoughts.

"How is anyone to resist the pressure of such statements, made in the name of objective science, unless, like Maurice Nicoll, he suddenly receives "this inner revelation of knowing" that men who say such things, however learned they may be, know nothing about anything that really matters? People are asking for bread and they are being given stones. They beg for advice about what they should do "to be saved", and they are told that the idea of salvation has no intelligible content and is nothing but an infantile neurosis. They long for guidance about how to live as responsible human beings, and they are told that they are machines, like computers, without free will and therefore without responsibility. "

Among the films I show my students are a series of lectures by a renowned neuroscientist concerning the biological basis of human behavior. In the last lecture he seriously infers that belief and interest in religion is the result of a form of seizure disorder of the left temporal lobe;

that religion is another form of meta- magical thinking along a gradient that includes New Agers and science fiction addicts like star trekkies. As if to emphasize this he states with incredulity that “some people *really believe* that Jesus walked on water”. By the end of the series of lectures it is supposed to be clear to us that all this stems from the biology of the brain and a day will come when we know why some people are republicans and some democrats, why some are religious and others not, and so forth. Our mysteries will be revealed in the laboratory of the neuroscientist. He acknowledges that this threatens the notion of ourselves as something mysterious, special, and unique⁸, and to his credit he says in the first lecture that if you are not troubled by some of what you hear, then you’re not paying attention. I use these lectures because he is an excellent teacher on neuroscience and I want my students to think about the things he says. This invites discussion and I rather have someone who is honest and recognizes the implications of what he says, then someone who will skip over such topics without so much as a hiccup. There is less of a chance of being indoctrinated by this kind of approach which is honest and right to the point than by someone who would just let it sit without critique.

I have also shown a film about chimpanzee behavior where the narrator dramatically ends the film by giving us this really good news: we are not alone after all because there are chimpanzees to share this planet with us (I am not making this up). Of course the assumption of whether we were ever alone in this universe to begin with is not even raised. These are the topics in my field and to pretend that this is not confrontational or undermining to Orthodoxy I think is naïve. It is not that the facts have to be false, but in their presentation as complete knowledge they become lies.

Furthermore, I know I can show these lectures with impunity but I must look over my shoulder if I mention something substantively about religion or religious experience. Let me reiterate that I have no issue with materialistic arguments and philosophy made in the classroom or textbook. This is a multicultural world and Orthodoxy is not afraid to engage it as it has engaged the world for two thousand years. It is in fact a wonderful opportunity to get students thinking about the implications of what they are being taught and that is how I use it. My objection is that there are restricted and limited capabilities for us to respond and criticize the assumptions that uphold them. It is my experience that the climate of the academy is not conducive to serious criticism of science or secularism. The particulars in the field are critiqued but not the presuppositions about science and objective reality. We may exchange one method of Archeology for another, but all of them will be equally materialistic. We do it for biology and we do it for sociology and to the extent possible, we do for nursing, medicine, religious studies. There is no sense of limitation and there is no sense of context and that makes it indoctrination.

3. The Challenge.

⁸ As Orthodox Christians we can agree to a point that our animal bodies are not unique and this after all is what science studies. However, this can be taken too far and it is meant here to refer to the totality of our being. This is an animal without any kind of soul and no way to related to God (because of course there isn’t any).

Given the discussion so far, how do we educate the Orthodox student in this environment? How do we teach them true things about our fields like neuroscience, astronomy, geology, physiology and pathology, without teaching them to think like materialists in all areas of their life? How does one teach human evolution correctly using the best science, without leaving the student thinking that this *is* the human *and* nothing more? This is not just theoretical.

Classes on human evolution taught within anthropology tend to define the human in a larger framework predicated on a lack of substantive spirituality. The human is a biological organism, an animal with cultural and religious aspects emerging after suitable development of the brain⁹. The world of the spiritual is included because it is part of the human story, but not because it is true as such. There is little room for the spiritual that has not already been assumed under the presumptions of materialism and made known by the methodology of science. The classes in anatomy and physiology describe the animal body in regards to its mechanics and chemistry. The class on astronomy describes a universe of matter without intelligence. Classes in biochemistry and molecular biology tell us how life started without anything but matter and how to alter existing forms of it. Courses about society apply the same concepts of scientific method and lifeless objectivity to explain human interaction in groups. The class in psychology describes why we behave the way we do based on models that know nothing of the spiritual, the mystical, or the sacred as real things. Neuroscience completes the ultimate reduction by assimilating the entirety of the human mind, from belief in God and prayer, to the location of the self. From here there is nowhere else to go. Nowhere in all this is the student told that this is a perspective, that the information derived in science must conform to a man-made set of conditions and assumptions, or that science has been factually wrong before, and that its definitions of what constitutes materiality may be far too restrictive.¹⁰ How does an Orthodox student leave such an assemblage of classes and go to Church? What is an icon now to the student but a piece of wood and a symbol of nothing but the human imagination.

How do we criticize a behemoth that is supported by technological success and fuels economic systems, cures people, solves problems and provides military power to governments. How do we provide an education that could be seen as supportive of (or at least does not undermine) the foundational aspects of Orthodox Christianity?

As an anthropologist I incorporate indigenous peoples because I can legitimately use this in my classes and much of what they say corresponds closely with Orthodoxy. I do this to demonstrate that there are people with a substantive appreciation of the spiritual and they are not blown away by scientific materialism. In fact, were it not imposed on them, many would deny our technological and industrial lifestyle, or accept it selectively rather than wholesale .

In that vein I sometimes like to ask students a question. It is one that I will not answer but the purpose is to make them look underneath and behind our civilization and in this fashion everything becomes a topic to be examined critically. The question is this: why have we been doing all that we have in the name of our sciences, technology, and entire civilization? For what purpose and towards what end? I ask this in the context of the materialism and secular

⁹ Again, it is not that Orthodox would argue that we are not part of the created cosmos. We are dust of the earth. However, we do not end here whereas science does and it claims to stand in for religion when it comes to being the most comprehensive and accurate description of the human and our history.

¹⁰ Self-correcting can become a deceitful term in this instance when it is not presented honestly.

humanism as I presume this to be the dominant paradigm. I continue further that if the answer is to make human life better (and what else would it be in humanism?) then doesn't that require a happier existence? If at the end of the day this has not been attained, then what can we claim to have accomplished for all our efforts besides polluting the planet and over population? What is the purpose of the toys and the gadgets? We spend all that money on a Ferrari so it will make us happier and not for its own sake. Isn't that why we must have the telephone, cell phones, cameras, Ipods and Black Berrys, computers, medical sciences, cars and airplanes, washing machines, and who knows what is next out there just waiting to make us feel fulfilled, to make life easier and more comfortable. Isn't this why we must have knowledge and more knowledge, libraries and think tanks, space programs and research institutions? But what if these do not succeed in accomplishing our stated aim? Are we able to prove that the entire experiment of modern civilization has made life for the average person more joyous and peaceful than before? Could life be lived in any other way and what might that be?

The original Tahitians and the Lakota did not develop space shuttles, but neither did their children find life so appalling and complicated that they found it necessary to commit suicide at alarming rates. If all the amazing scientific, technological and medical breakthroughs, comforts and luxuries we have achieved, if they also result in greater and deadlier wars, significant increases in suicide rates, levels of poverty with no analogy in so called primitive societies; if they contribute to turning the basics of life like air and water into dangerous carcinogens, despoiled the earth and contributed to what I might call the uglification of the planet, and more so if it has resulted in a sense of emptiness and despair that seems unique to those of our kind, a life so complex and turned inside out that it requires Woody Allen to never wander too far from his psychiatrist, then is this a fools bargain? Did we squander our wealth on a Ferrari only to discover it breaks down all the time and we eventually get bored with it anyway? Does a head full of data about geology and cosmology make us better people? What are we progressing towards and who is taking us there? What is progress and how do we measure it? What category do you think progress is needed the most? In technology, science, society, individual love, kindness, economics?

The question requires that each student look behind the smoke and mirrors of modernity. I am asking them to look at the motivations, the engine that drives it, rather than the products it makes or examples of success that are taken in isolation of the whole of life. On the basis of particulars one can always point to successes but my question has to do with the overall result, the fruits that Christ refers to. And if there seems to be something wrong or missing, what might that be and where can we seek examples of better ways to do things? The secular university is known for encouraging students to question by which is usually meant religious faith. But why stop there? I encourage them to question the university itself, the sciences, the philosophers, modernity, technology, the economic system, all of it. This levels the playing field and loosens the grip that modernism has on the minds of young students. It is a way to open the door to a broader approach to life.

Given the nature of the world today religious neutrality is inevitable and understandable, but that is different from antagonism or the promotion of materialism. Those trained to think like materialists become desensitized to other forms of knowing. The vacuum created by a mind trained to approach life in only one way results in a naivety regarding the spiritual world. But on

the other hand, we don't want to promote biblical fundamentalism or crass superstition. So it is important that we critique some of the presumptions of the academy without trashing them entirely because at the end of the day there are worse things.

An Orthodox education, whatever else it is or does, and I am no expert on either, cannot accept the evisceration of the spiritual or the mystical. It is a balanced integration of the wholeness of life whereas materialistic education is a fragmentation of it, a reduction to the limitations of human thinking and human science. If the spiritual domain is not real, then Orthodox Christianity is very simply, a fraud. Orthodox Christianity must be experientially real and indoctrination into thinking like a materialist cuts right to this core issue. The recent history of much of Western theology is an example of this indoctrination and what follows is predictable because first and foremost, the academic and secularized theologian thinks like materialist. If this can happen in theology it will certainly occur in the academy at large.

How Not to Educate a Materialist in the Academy

The Orthodox Church has a stake in secular education but we do not want to open the door to unreasonable encroachments on the part of religion. One response is to establish more sectarian schools but is that what we really want? Should we have education for Native Americans, for Orthodox Christians, and for Protestants, Catholics, Atheists, and Muslims? This would tend towards a Balkanization of the culture creating more disunity and distance between each of our groups. I think there is a place for these schools but they cannot be the only answer. The focus of this talk is how to remain in the secular academy and be Orthodox and what influence should we exert? First, there are advantages at being in a secular institution. The students in my class normally do not expect to hear criticism of scientific materialism, nor a respectful reference to things spiritual (as opposed to the more typical condescending talk one often hears, i.e., 'we're not against religion for those who need it', or "you are free to believe anything you want but in this class we're concerned about facts" said with a wink, and so on). St. Paul Florensky was against the teaching of Sacred history in public schools even before the Russian revolution, because he was so concerned about compulsion in regards to finding Christ. Children he said, must be free to stumble and come to Christ under their own volition.

Our role as an Orthodox Christian at the college level in the secular academy is to keep the flame of Christ alive and we can do this in part by being certain there is a place in education for something more than the mundane and the profane. The curriculum must not become impervious to the idea of the sacred or the mystical. We must keep the door open to the existence of God and to do this it helps to have a universe where God really acts. We must encourage their interest in God and their concerns about materialism at every opportunity. We have to teach science without teaching scientific materialism. We have to respect the good and worthwhile in secular societies and its people. A negative tone that is always criticizing and demeaning will not work. We must emphasize the limitations of what we are teaching and make certain the student recognizes that a given field of knowledge is based on certain assumptions. The philosophy of science is very useful here as is the history of science. We can quote respected scientist and philosophers to show that we are not advocating anything wild or reactionary and there are many good examples. Famous scientists through time have made it clear that we are

not encompassing reality in its totality, nor that science should replace other ways of approaching the world. Let the students hear this.

We have to make it clear that the knowledge base we are using is subject to modification and even rejection in the future, that it is one way of learning about reality, albeit a very effective one but not without flaws and problem. We need to show that other domains of knowing are not necessarily secondary, that in fact, science can be the secondary way of understanding something depending on the context. True facts (not just in science but in politics and religion among others) can become distortions when they are not assimilated in context or without greater knowledge attained somewhere else. The student must learn to recognize that mounds of data and facts can mean very little and even become a lie.

At times I have had students come to my office and talk. These are typically very thoughtful people who having given up on Christianity or anything spiritual and have turned to find the answers in fields like neuroscience and evolution as a replacement. During the course of any discussion I share with them two essential points. The first concerns the limits of the topics we are studying and the inherent biases and assumptions that are embedded within. I stress the importance of examining presuppositions. I suggest that many of the academics who write about religion from the perspective of materialistic science (anthropologist, neuroscientists, sociologists) are not objective because their world view makes them bias against substantive religion from the start and secondly they employ the wrong tools. How can they claim objectivity when they control the rules of the game? If I make the presuppositions that Chess is the only valid game, then of course all talk about checkers is doomed, and as for soccer, well that does even have a board so what more need be said. They will find nothing more than they began with. If one asks a question within the confines of materialism, the answer will be derived from within materialism. There will always be a material explanation for actions occurring within matter.

The second point is that those who have not experienced religious or spiritual experiences (otherwise they would be thinking very differently) are ill qualified to denounce it. I urge them to consider (via various ways and writings) that spiritual realms are a reality, they are substantive and have been experienced by many more people than they may have suspected. Some students are confused because there are so many diverse religious explanations and use this to denounce all of religion. But that is a totally different question and to deal with that you have to get to first base and the official culture denies there even is even a ball park.

A summary of what can be done in teaching within the secular academy is as follows:

1. *Stick to the Science.* Hominid evolution, for example, can be taught as a science and not as a way of life. If this were done more often it would be less confrontational. If something claims to be a science, then let's keep it there. When it enters the realm of philosophy, and this is often necessary, then let those who do so make this clear. This is critical because our students by enlarge have been raised to value scientific information but not philosophical criticism.

2. *Recognize the limitations of human knowledge.* Modern education is always emphasizing our success and great achievements. This needs to be balanced with its opposite. Humans are

hardware and software limited, especially in regards to the big questions. As opposed to the breast beating of some current scientific figures, many of the greatest scientists displayed humility and recognition of the limits of our knowledge.

3. *Encourage students to consider other forms of knowing.* Don't be afraid to give examples and demonstrate how other cultures and people outside the scientific domain see the world. As an anthropologist I use the spiritual wisdom of Native Americans (and other indigenous people) to say Orthodox things without having to pick up the Philokalia (see appendix). Of course the ability to do this and the manner in which it is done varies according to the topic. Some afford better opportunities than others and judgment must be used. I may also say that in my tradition, so and so says the something very similar.

4. *Share concerns and work with other faith traditions that are in your school.* There are often many things within Orthodoxy that we can share with others. I did not become Orthodox to condemn others and I try to remind myself that the Gospel means good news. It is not a beating stick. If people of faith hold some common ground against the materialism of the university, we have a better chance of surviving. This is one of the strongest points for having a religion and science initiative on campus. It is a reason to talk about religion and to keep it alive. Since I am Orthodox, it is only understandable that I get to speak about Orthodox Christianity in the process.

When we have done these things, we can give them the best science we know and not have it overwhelm their sense of the realities behind ancient Orthodox Christianity. These are some points I have learned from my classes that work and I believe they are permissible and defensible within the context of a secular institution. They promote greater tolerance, not less, and yield a broader education not a narrower one. They encourage students to think critically and all this can be done without attacking the substance of the topic(s) themselves.

I want to end on a lighter note by suggesting something that will never come to pass but which I admit to secretly harboring a devious wish for. I have often thought that some classes should have a disclaimer associated with them. Imagine this on the course syllabus:

“The facts presented in this class may be true but that does not mean they speak to “Truth”. Finding bones in the ground does not automatically equate with the absence of the transcendent, and if the religious person has been wrong in the past, it does not mean that reality consists of the nose on ones face. The history of science is also littered with discarded models and theories and we do not know what the future will bring to those we currently accept. The information presented in this course will most likely undergo future modification and possible outright rejection. Science is ‘self-correcting’ which means that students in future centuries may be laughing at some of the things I am teaching you today. Self-correcting is also a euphemism for a mistake in science, that means that some things they taught you in the old textbook were wrong, that is why we

really hate old science textbooks. This kind of course is not permitted to other disciplines who must accept merely being wrong.

Another point to consider is that not everyone who lived before this age was necessarily as stupid as we like to make them out to be, and the lack of Ipods, MTV, the entertainment industry, fossil fuels, and space shuttles, does not reflect on the intelligence or wisdom of a given culture. Actually, it might but I will leave that for you to sort out. Finally, in the scheme of things, all this information may mean less and not more, than we assume it does.”

Now that would be a disclaimer.

References:

Barrett, W. The Death of the Soul. Anchor press, 1987

Midgley, M. The Myths We Live By.

E.F. Schumacher. A Guide for the Perplexed, Schumacher's last book. Harper & Row, 1977

Chris Carter. Parapsychology and the Skeptics: A Scientific Argument for the Existence of ESP.
Sterling House Books, 2007

Begley, Sharon. Our Brains Strive To See Only the Good, Leading Some to God. Science
Journal, Oct. 2005.