The CONFLICT B

Responding to so many immediate responsibilities that accompany meeting one's classes takes so much time and energy that it is easy to overlook circumstances that may be secretly disabling the effort to fulfill missions as one believes them to be. Two sets of such closely related circumstances are the published conflict between science and religion and the competition between using the methods of science versus other ways to deal with problems. Biology teachers cannot escape either the controversy or the competition. Making the most of what it means to be alive is what both science and religion are all about. And nurturing cordiality toward and the ability to utilize the methods of science are equally in their agenda. Positively put, biology teachers are in a wonderfully favored position to help young people explore and experience the best of what both science and religion have to offer. But they cannot do this if they are seen as being unbelievable.

luck, to rely on hunches, or heed self-appointed experts who claim to be in touch with powers that control chance and randomness. The second is more open to supporting efforts to help humanity deal with the here and hereafter. Until the true nature of the life entity and its origin is revealed to everyone's satisfaction, teachers can best protect their believability by reflecting respect for the spirit of science and the utility of its methods. After all, the real challenge is to have people grow up anxious to experience what both science and religion offer.

The conditions of today add new dimensions to this challenge. It is as though not only science and religion but all efforts to nurture humane values need increasing support. Citing Zbigniew Brzezinski, "between 167,000,000 and 175,000,000 lives were deliberately extinguished by political carnage during the twentieth century." (http://esers.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat8.htm). Such carnage reached the American homeland on September 11, 2001. The actual causative elements are yet to be fully revealed but there is evidence they may include misguided religious zeal.

A second circumstance points more directly to the degree to which the public is cordial toward science and tends to utilize its methods. Computers with life expectancy extending beyond the year 2000 were not designed to cope with dates beyond 1999. Dramatizing the proclaimed results frightened the public. There was a mad dash to avoid being victimized by the predicted complete breakdown of the nation's infrastructure. Acting as though they were anticipating the end of the world, people stockpiled groceries, withdrew their money from banks, invested in alternative ways to heat their homes, in fact, went to great effort and expense to head off the predicted catastrophic consequences. Actually, computer systems across the nation were repaired in time to adjust to the transition from 1999 to 2000 without causing noticeable disruption in the nation's affairs – but at enormous public and private expense. There was little evidence in the Y2K episode that logic and discipline of science were used to solve potential problems. On the contrary, amazingly effective persuasive strategies took advantage of the public who were willing to accept a predetermined solution.

Again, our 40,000 biology teachers are in a uniquely favored position. The traditional program of studies gives them contact with nearly all of America's citizens during one of their most formative years. Yes, it is a captive audience, but that only adds to the sense of being responsible for keeping the fruits of both science and religion available to everyone. And the responsibilities are tremendous. Add the efforts of presecondary school life science teachers and on the doorstep of these few men and women falls the opportunity to influence the beliefs and, hence, the values and behavior of their 288,000,000 fellow citizens. Fortunately, when they close those classroom doors they can step aside from controversy and fall back on the elements of our society that have played leading roles in humanity's journey from the cave to the ivory tower.

References

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