



History

History reveals God the sovereign planner of the nations.

God has good purposes and plans to fulfil for His world from the international to the personal level and He uses individuals to fulfil these purposes. The good and evil, wise and foolish actions of men all ultimately serve His purposes.

'All things work together for good to those called according to God's purpose.'

Romans 8:28

'But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart endure through all generations.' **Psalm 33:11**

All of history is moving towards the end of the ages when all things will be brought under Christ's rule.

'He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.' **Ephesians 1:9–11**

Aims

The basic faith commitment of every historian determines the way he looks at man's past. For the Christian the Bible provides a broad perspective on man's origin, nature, task and destiny. The central focus of that perspective is God's redemptive work through Christ, His covenantal relationship to His people through the ages. That story provides historical studies with certain basic premises.

(Louis J Voskuil. Quoted by Steensman and Van Brummelen. 1977)

Below is a suggested set of aims which will, hopefully, help Christian teachers of History deliver their subject in manner consistent with their faith.

Summary of Aims

1. To present History as a linear unfolding of God's purposes on earth.
2. To encourage children to look for signs of God's providence in History.
3. To help students make judgements on events and individuals on the basis of the truth of God's Word and on the consequences of men's actions.
4. To emphasise the importance of cause and effect in the study of History, and how men's decisions always affect others.
5. To study the actions of individuals (both Christian and non-Christian) against the background of their historical setting.

6. To inspire students to correctly respond to, and seek to change, their own culture for the Kingdom's sake.
7. To encourage the children to have a concern for the truth through the thorough investigation of primary and secondary source material.
8. To affirm that wise men and women learn from the past.
9. To stimulate interest in, and enthusiasm for, the study of the past, and to provide a sound basis for further study on the basis of personal interest.
10. To make the study of History a well-integrated part of an overall Christian education.
11. To promote the acquisition of knowledge and understanding concerning human activity in the past.

Commentary on suggested aims

1. a) A distinction needs to be made between the humanist linear view of History (that through man's efforts the world is becoming a progressively 'better' place – in materialistic and technological terms) and the Christian linear conviction that all History is ultimately subject to the sovereignty of God and is moving towards the climax of the ages when all things are brought under Christ's headship.
(Ephesians 1:3-12, especially 9-10)
- b) Teaching History in a broadly chronological framework is therefore very important. Taking periods of History out of order or dwelling too long on a particular period in order to 'get the feel of it' will obscure, in children's minds, the overall thread of History.
2. Whilst establishing cause and effect is a vital historical skill, we need to remind children that there is a divine perspective which must never be lost. After all, 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24) and 'the purposes of the Lord endure for ever' (**Psalm 33:11**). Picking up the clues of God's active involvement, while involving a degree of speculating, need not be shied away from, as children benefit from the sheer wonder of perceiving God's hand in the affairs of men.
3. This will involve affirming that men are ultimately judged on their response to God's unchanging nature and ordinances, and not on how they react to society's pressures. (For example, Saul was found wanting because he disobeyed God; he is not seen in the Bible as an unfortunate victim of insurmountable pressure.)
4. a) Of all the historical skills, the ability to discern the causes and consequences of actions is probably the most important, because all men are part of wider communities. Nothing we do fails to affect others.
- b) However, in analysing the choices men and women have made, and their consequences, students need to understand that God's heart is ultimately redemptive (**Romans 8:28**). God uses righteous and wise men and women to redeem the effects of the foolish decisions of others. (For example, Britain's acquisition of an Empire is hard to justify theologically but acquired, God used it for blessing some when righteous leaders were involved).
5. This involves giving students a full account of the main political, social, economic and cultural events of each period.

6. a) **Acts 17:26-27** clearly states that all men are placed in historical and geographical settings by God's ordinance to further the advance of His purposes. Students need to be constantly reminded that God has determined their historical settings as surely as He did that of the great Jewish and Christian leaders of the past.
- b) While an understanding of some world history is important, the bulk of British children's learning should be about the history of the British Isles, since this is their ordained geographical setting. However, to fully understand our history, frequent reference to other parts of the world will have to be made, e.g. The Norman Conquest, The Reformation, and studies of The British Empire.
7. a) Historians can only ever say what probably happened, but we need to teach children the value of assembling good evidence that enables a high degree of probability to be established.
- b) Having gathered evidence, to analyse and organize this information and present it in a form appropriate to the age and ability of the student. This will involve narratives and descriptions of varying length, and substantiated explanations of varying complexity.
- c) All historians come to their subject matter with some personal bias. A Christian approach to History will not be unbiased but, hopefully, it will be concerned with doing one's utmost to establish the truth.
8. Throughout the Old and New Testaments there are frequent references to Israel's history. The writers clearly expected their readers to learn from Israel's successes and failures (**Hebrews 11, Romans 15:4**). Past mistakes are there to be avoided, past heroic acts and achievements are there to be emulated.
9. Our methodology should be of such variety and interest that students enjoy studying History and want more History not less!
10. Links with other subjects need to be regularly pointed out to children, so they gradually come to see History as an integral part of their wider education. Therefore, liberal use of graphs and statistics (Maths) maps (Geography) references to literature (English) songs and music (Music) painting, architecture and sculpture of a particular period (Art) mention of famous scientists and inventions (Science) and some studies of documents in their original language (Languages) all help to establish links between History and other subjects in the curriculum. There may also be scope for providing integrated courses, or sections of courses, with some of the above subjects. Skills of analysis, comprehension, and clear presentation will also impinge on other subjects. Most important of all, the development of a specifically Christian approach to History teaching will conform to the overall aim of giving children a thoroughly God-centred education.
11. We obviously hope students will substantially increase their stock of knowledge of the past and grow through that in their understanding of how and why people act in the ways they do.

John Ellwood
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A Viewpoint of Teaching Key Stage 3 History

If History is teleological (unfolding towards purpose – especially **Ephesians 1:10**) and if geographical and historical settings are not accidental but ordained by God (**Acts 17:26-27**) then History needs to be taught in a broadly chronological framework and the life of past individual Christians and the Church needs to be taught with reference to their setting (political, economic, social and cultural). Although the National Curriculum would seem superficially to be a vehicle for both, there are a number of difficulties. These were identified as follows:

1. The value of chronology is impaired by:
 - a. the topic-based approach of the National Curriculum.
 - b. the emphasis on skills-related questions makes it difficult to tell the unfolding of history.
2. The problem of superficiality:
 - a. the prescribed content is very broad, (e.g. 1066-1500 in one 12-week term at 1-1.5 hours per week)
 - b. the emphasis on skills-related exercises results in less time available for an already broad syllabus.
3. Source-evaluation is given some prominence but how valid an exercise is it for 11 – 14-year olds, given the maturity of judgement required?

Resources

Refer to 'Towards a Christian Curriculum' by Barbara Lord