
God's Left-Handers

Most of us are fussy about some rather silly things. As a composition teacher, I like to receive all essays written only on the front side of the paper. This requirement has not always sat well with my students, as I vividly remember from one episode some 17 years ago, when I was teaching at St. Andrew's School in Delaware. One rather bright lad repeatedly turned in all of his work written only on the back side of the notebook paper. Whenever I stacked the papers from the entire class, this lad's paper would turn up backwards, at first appearing to have no identification. Daily I would write the same complaint, *Use front side only!* But he persisted.

Exasperated, I summoned the offender to my study. "Philip, why do you insist on writing on the back side of your papers when I have expressly asked you not to do so?" I asked.

"But sir," he said gravely, "I don't ever use the back side. I have wondered why you write notes about this to me."

"Philip," I interposed, "Don't be cheeky. Look, here is the paper you turned in this morning as you ripped it from your spiral notebook. The frayed edges are all on the right-hand side. The frayed edges on your classmates' sheets are on the left-hand side. They have written on the front; you have written on the back!"

"But *they* are all right-handed!" Philip exclaimed.

"What does *that* have to do with it?" I asked.

"God's Left-Handers," *Witness Magazine*
63:10 (1980)

"The location of the spiral determines which side is the front and which side is the back," Philip explained. "The side to the right of the spiral is the front side for right-handed people, so that they can avoid getting their hands caught in the spiral or the hooks of a loose-leaf notebook. The side to the left of the spiral or hooks is the front side for left-handed people for the same reason."

"Really," I muttered, wondering whether Philip had ever noticed that I am left-handed myself and had been catching my hand in spirals for years.

"Yes, sir. There are even some *left-handed* folks who don't know the front from the back, but of course, that is because we are usually taught by right-handed people. Why, some left-handed folks even have their lamps on the left side of their writing desks just as you do, sir, only because a grade-school health book said they should be there. Those books were written for right-handed people like you, to keep the shadow behind your hands; left-handed people need their lamps on the right for the same reason."

It was with no little embarrassment that I paused and quietly moved my floor lamp from the left to the right side of my desk. Philip looked on, much troubled.

"Thank you," I said.

"But I hadn't noticed, sir. I really hadn't!"

"Philip, I would be a real fool only if I didn't listen to your good sense. As you observed, we left-handed folks are usually taught all that we know about ourselves by right-handed people. I am very glad that you came along."