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A Road Less Traveled:
Christian Higher Education in a Postmodern World

Presentation 2:
“The Reviving of the Light:
The Educational Vitality of a Christian Worldview”

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Introduction

The world has lost its story. This is a definitive trait of our current cultural situation, according to theologian Robert W. Jenson.¹ Such macrocosmic denarrativization, however, is a relatively recent development. That we inhabit a narratable world, and that we ought to be able to make storied sense of our lives has been a tacit assumption that has dominated the West historically. Indeed, the primary business of the Church universal has been to proclaim the substance of the biblical narrative — liturgically, didactically, and evangelistically — as the purpose of her ministry. God the Trinity played the key role in this His-story as the creator of the cosmos, the judge of human sin, and the gracious redeemer of humanity and creation. This was *the* true account of the universe, granting the existence and veracity of the universal Storyteller, at least up to the modern period. Gradually, however, a new secular mythology glorifying natural science and the omniscience of human reason replaced the old ecclesiastical verities. The tradition of storytelling continued necessarily, but the source of the narration shifted dramatically *von oben* to *von unten*, that is, from above to from below. *Homo mensura* replaced *Deus mensura*. As time passed, however, the humanistic myth collapsed, and the modern project failed. Metaphysics, it was argued, were really politics. Metanarratives became incredulous. Without a transcendent author, there was no sustainable plot to the universe. Without God, the world lost its story.²

Why did this happen? How did the West end up dispensing with God and thereby losing its dramatic framework? In his book, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, James Turner documents how most scholars lay the blame for the demise of the divine by citing the typical causes:

¹ The ideas in this paragraph are inspired by Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things* (October 1993). Reprinted in *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader*, ed. and intro. Gregory Wolfe (New York: The Free Press, 1997), pp. 135-49.

² The loss of the cosmic narrative has profound personal implications as well. As Lesslie Newbigin asserts in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 91, "If there is no point in the story as a whole, there is no point in my own action. If the story is meaningless, any action of mine is meaningless."

“Renaissance and Enlightenment skepticism, the effects of Biblical criticism, the impact of Darwinism on theology, the rise of scientific naturalism, the implications of post-Cartesian philosophy and more.” The author also points out that other thinkers attribute God’s disappearance from Western consciousness as “the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and technological change, as well as the less easily defined social change labeled secularization.” Turner himself, however, argues that unbelief was not really something that happened *to* religion, but *in* it, and that the church’s accommodation to modernism — “a God sculpted more closely to the image of man” — is what caused contemporary incredulity,³

Whatever the precise reasons, no one has documented the dire consequences of the death of God and world’s loss of its classic story better than Friedrich Nietzsche. This one who philosophized with a hammer knew that the West had been drifting slowly toward the destruction of its narrative resources — a kind of “mythoclasm”⁴ — by its intoxication with scientific rationalism. Consequently, modern humanity, “untutored by myth,” is famished and in search for any narrative morsel on which to feed itself, as the frenzied activities and compulsions of contemporary life indicate. Nietzsche writes:

And now the mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among the remotest antiquities. The tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture, the assembling around one of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge — what does all this point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home, the mythical maternal womb?⁵

Nietzsche perceives that the “feverish and uncanny excitement” of modern culture — its incessant pace, its quest for exotic traditions, its passion for

³ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. xii, xiii, 113.

⁴ Jerome S. Bruner, “Myth and Identity,” in *Myth and Mythmaking*, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York: George Braziller, 1960), 285; quoted in Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, A Delta Book, 1991), p. 16.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. and commentary Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1967), p. 136.

knowledge — must be interpreted as nothing other than a hunger for myth, “the greedy seizing and snatching at food of a hungry man.”⁶ No matter how much it experiences sensually, or devours materialistically, or achieves egotistically, a storyless world and mythless culture cannot and will never be satiated. Nihilism reigns.

In this post-Christian, non-narrative age, no institution or person remains unaffected, including the academy and her charges. Though the Church gave birth to the modern university as a fostering mother for the schooling of the heart, Alma Mater has also lost her story and the capacity to tell it. The regnant story in the academy today is the story of no story, or the story of many stories, that is, the story of multiculturalism and diversity wherein no stories, despite their proliferation, are true.

The results for the academy have been disastrous. George Marsden indicates as much by asserting in the opening sentence of his volume on *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* that “Contemporary university culture is hollow at its core. Not only does it lack a spiritual center,” says Marsden, “but it is also without any real alternative.”⁷ Similarly, James Tunstead Burtchaell describes this situation in the title of his book as *The Dying of the Light*, an 868 page volume that meticulously documents the *Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* and their resultant secularization and loss of coherent vision.⁸

Both Marsden and Burtchaell have provided cogent analyses of contemporary academia that suggest that the time is right for a change. The anomalies afflicting the modernist educational paradigm have revealed its inadequacies. The university’s narrative resources are depleted, and it no longer

⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 136.

⁷ George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford, 1997), p. 3. Of course, Marsden has also chronicled the secular drift of America’s major research universities in his renown *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁸ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

enjoys any common wisdom, received tradition, or recognized set of first principles upon which to base its own enterprise. Its record of impoverishment is staggering among educators and the educated. The university is in a *cul de sac*, and must look elsewhere for an alternative. Hence, I propose at this kairos moment in educational history that the time is right for a reviving of the light, and so we must take a fresh look at the educational vitality of a classic Christian worldview.⁹ What this vigorous vision consists of and how it renews the educative mission are the primary concerns of this presentation.

The Current Crisis in Student *Paideia*

But before I trace the contours of this ancient and yet future option, an additional word or two about the current crisis in higher education is in order, especially in terms of the lives of students.¹⁰ In their book *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education*, William Willimon and Thomas Naylor document with painful clarity the faceless but deeply familiar nihilism that is rampant on most campuses today. Chalking up this condition at their own Duke University and other institutions to decaying social conditions and an impoverished educational vision, the authors identify an ironic mindset among collegians that connects disciplined study and aspirations for prestigious and successful careers with nights and weekends devoted to binge drinking and hooking up (that is, fornication). Business students, they report, had one mandate and one mandate only for their faculty: “Teach me how to be a moneymaking machine.” Another student confessed, “We’ve got no philosophy of what the hell it is we want by the time somebody graduates.” Even a university bureaucrat lamented, “Lacking a coherent vision of why we are here,

⁹ Another name for this is “Great Tradition Christianity,” the recovery of which is highlighted in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics & Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997). This way of articulating historic Christian faith is on par with C. S. Lewis’s concept of “mere” Christianity and G. K. Chesterton’s notion of “Orthodoxy.” Doctrinally, it centers on the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Christ and is articulated in the ancient and ecumenical creeds and their related teachings.

¹⁰ The three components of this section are derived from Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), *passim*.

administration becomes the mere lunging into one crisis after another without anyone stepping back and asking, 'Why are we here?'"¹¹ Overall, Willimon and Naylor unmask the moral impoverishment of the college experience, and unapologetically call for a serious reconsideration of the substance and goals of higher education.

The film *Reality Bites*, in which art imitates life, portrays rather poignantly the bewilderment and disorientation of contemporary collegians and their futile attempts to shape a meaningful life. Set in Houston, Texas, at Rice University, the movie opens with scenes from graduation day as Lelaina Pierce (Winona Ryder) is delivering the valedictory address. She attempts to say a word or two about the point of it all, something she has presumably reflected upon as an undergraduate. As she reaches the climax of her speech, however, she loses her place in her notes, and after fumbling several times, she can only conclude: "And the answer is...." "And the answer is...." "And the answer is, I don't know." Lelaina's uncertainty about the meaning of things is only intensified by her hapless, philosophically oriented boyfriend Troy (Ethan Hawke) whose own experience has amounted to a giant cosmic disappointment. "There's no point to any of this," he says in a revelatory moment. "It's all just a ... a random lottery of meaningless tragedy and a series of near escapes." In resigning himself to such despair, Troy conceives of life's greatest good in stark minimalist terms: "See Lainy," he says, "this is all we need. A couple of smokes, a cup of coffee, and a little bit of conversation. You and me and five bucks."¹² As a freshly minted college graduate from a premier institution, Lelaina learned quickly that reality bites, and bites hard. It seems that her university experience failed to provide her with an adequate moral vision to help her handle the vicissitudes of life without plummeting into despair. Though it is "just a movie," her agnosticism, along with Troy's cynicism and severely reduced version of the *summum bonum*, closely

¹¹ William Willimon and Thomas Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 38-39, 61.

¹² Quotes taken from "Jenny's UnOfficial *Reality Bites* Quote Page," available online at: <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/6327/reality.html>. Accessed 23 October 2003.

represent the actual perspectives and experiences of countless numbers of undergraduates today.

This condition really should not be that surprising, given the philosophy (or anti-philosophy) students are encountering in their courses and on campus. The fundamentally materialist ideas that govern the bulk of university life are in fact the kinds of ideas that ultimately undermine the goal of shaping any kind of substantive intellectual life or moral outlook. G. K. Chesterton, for example, notes in his book *Orthodoxy* that “the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle.”¹³ In this setting of cosmic disenchantment without transcendence, it is no wonder that education degenerates into a pragmatic, relativistic, self-serving enterprise. As the British poet Steve Turner explains in his popular poem “Creed,” today’s essential non-theistic beliefs generate an ethical *laissez-faire* that is sure to bear bitter fruit in real life. This poem runs in part as follows.

We believe in Marxfreudanddarwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

.....
We believe that man is essentially good.
It's only his behaviour that lets him down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of conditions.
Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth
that is right for him.
Reality will adapt accordingly.
The universe will readjust. History will alter.
We believe that there is no absolute truth
excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds¹⁴

¹³ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, ed., intro., notes David Dooley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 227.

Despite this overarching materialism and fashionable rejection of creeds that erodes the intellectual and moral foundations of higher education, our culture, given its needy state, still expects college graduates to be thoughtful men and women of character who will be good people, wise citizens, principled workers, and exemplary leaders who contribute significantly to the welfare of the world. There is, however, more than a touch of irony here. For the honorable product society needs and expects the university to produce is undermined by its own creed of creedlessness. The university's historic educative and moral purpose is thwarted by its own essential principles. As C. S. Lewis explains in these pointed words from *The Abolition of Man*, modern education is caught in the quagmire of a deep contradiction. "In a sort of ghastly simplicity," Lewis writes, "we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."¹⁵ How tragically humorous! How humorously tragic! This kind of self-stultification has brought the university to an undeniable impasse. Surely there is a better way.

A New/Old Educational Proposal

¹⁴ Steve Turner, "Creed." Available online at: <http://members.aol.com/OrthoVox/creed.html>. Accessed 23 October 2003. Turner has also written a postscript to "Creed" titled "Chance."

"Chance" a post-script.

If chance be the Father of all flesh,
disaster is his rainbow in the sky,
and when you hear
State of Emergency!
Sniper Kills Ten!
Troops on Rampage!
Whites go Looting!
Bomb Blasts School!
It is but the sound of man worshipping his maker.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1944, 1996), p. 37.

The proposal I envision as a better way to do academics and foster the intellectual and moral development of university students is based on an ecumenical version of the faith shared by Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants alike. It is derived from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and is centered on the infinite, personal Trinitarian God who is the Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of the world. As the conceptual framework for university life, it has had a venerable history extending roughly over two millennia, and though ancient is ever new. Though it has been educationally eclipsed for some time now by a prevailing metaphysical and/or methodological naturalism, it possesses remarkably fresh and full-bodied resources for educators and students. It consists of the following elements.

The Trinity. God the Trinity consisting of one divine substance and three co-equal and co-eternal persons — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — is the ontological foundation of this Christian educational vision. Immanently, God is love which determines the preeminently personal character of the eternal relationships shared by the members of the Trinity. Economically, God relates to the world as its creator, judge, and redeemer, and as such is the final explanatory principle of the universe. Faith, hope, and love, truth, goodness and beauty, therefore, find their ultimate reference point in Him. As St. Paul asserts in Colossians 2: 3, “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This affirmation, then, of God’s existence, internal character, and external operations is of superlative significance for the academy and its intellectual and moral enterprises. No academic discipline is truly comprehensible without Him. “Admit a God,” said Cardinal Newman in *The Idea of a University*, “and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable.”¹⁶ No program of moral formation is fully complete without acknowledging the ultimate source of love and its companion virtues and the role they play in shaping human character and relationships. To know the world aright and live in it wisely requires personal

contact with its Maker and Redeemer through faith since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Job 28: 12-28; Psalm 111: 10; Prov. 1: 7; 9: 10). Such foundational faith in God seeks understanding about the faith itself, which is theology, and it seeks understanding about everything else, which is the whole curriculum of university education. Faith in God is the key that unlocks the secrets of the universe and provides answers to the riddles of life. It is the central motivating vision and power for intellectual pursuits and moral formation. Therefore, to exclude this Trinitarian God from educational consciousness and practice is the greatest possible reductionism and the most egregious hermeneutic error. Denying the God who is there eliminates the single most significant component of reality and guarantees that nothing will be understood correctly or completely without Him. On the other hand, acknowledging Him is utterly consequential for the academy and its classic intellectual and moral purposes. His existence and character changes everything metaphysically, epistemically, ethically and aesthetically. The God-question is absolutely fundamental to the university.

Creation. In His self-revelation in Scripture, the first fact God discloses about Himself is that He is the *ex nihilo* Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1: 1). This truth has also been enshrined as the venerable starting point of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 indicate clearly that out of formless and empty chaos (Gen. 1: 2), God ordered and filled the world, and declared it in all its unspoiled glory to be very good (Gen. 1: 31). The first and last facts, then, about the universe, though largely forgotten today, are that it is *created* and that it is extraordinarily *good*. That an omnipotent Creator stands behind the cosmos, owns it, explains it, maintains it, and holds the human race accountable for its actions within it is the most important truth about it. As St. Paul states in Colossians 1: 16-17, 20,

For in Him [Christ] all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or

¹⁶ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Rethinking the Western Tradition, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 29

authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. And he is before all things, and in Him all things hold together ... For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Insofar as the Lord Christ is the creator, sustainer, goal, redeemer and judge of all things as this passage teaches, reality as a whole, therefore, is theistically structured and defined. Despite heroic efforts to do so, it cannot successfully be remade or reconceived by rebellious humanity. This point of view, in other words, uproots all forms of relativism. In relation to metaphysical, intellectual, and moral matters, there is therefore an authoritative, pre-given, created reality which requires acknowledgement and response.

The resulting shalomic cosmos which God made omnipotently and sustains providentially is also characterized by a uniformity of cause and effect in an *open* system. That is, it operates consistently in all aspects by divinely ordained natural laws and norms that govern the physical and moral worlds. As such, the universe is consistent in its functions and is knowable. Yet it is also a structure that is receptive to divine action at any place and time. Given the world's divine authorship, it is revelatory of God and sacramental in character. Isaiah 6: 3 states, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, the fullness of the whole earth is His glory" (NASB marg.). As such, it has been aptly described by John Calvin as the "theatre of the divine glory" (*theatrum Dei*), and by the Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann as "shot through with the presence of God."¹⁷ Educationally speaking, this view of creation means that whatever the discipline — from the humanities to the social and natural sciences to the fine and liberal arts to professional studies — professors and students alike are standing on holy ground. Thus education itself takes on added depth,

¹⁷ Calvin refers rather often to the heavens and earth as a theater (*theatrum*) in which people may see the Creator's glory (*Institutes* 1.6.2; 1.14.20; 2.6.1; 3.9.2; Commentaries Gen. 1: 6; Psalm 138: 1). Alexander Schmemmann's reference is found in *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), p. 16.

and becomes an exercise in discipleship and sanctification. As Simone Weil has said, “Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament.”¹⁸

This is possible because human beings as *imago Dei* are endowed with a variety of effective cognitive abilities to know the world God made, especially with the assistance of general and special revelation. He gave us reason and the senses to know rational and empirical objects, and He also endowed us with faith, imagination, intuition, empathy, and emotion as trustworthy cognitive powers to know the full scope of created reality, both physical and spiritual. Humanity has also received an original commission to have dominion over the earth, to exercise a responsible stewardship over creation, to pursue civilizing tasks in dramatic ways that signal the divine intent of cultural development and historical progress. As one theologian explains, this cultural commission has particular relevance for education:

Down to the present day, all the instructing of children, every kind of school, every script, every book, all our technology, research, science and teaching, with their methods and instruments and institutions, are nothing other than the fulfillment of this command [to have dominion over the earth]. The whole of history, all human endeavor, comes under this sign, this biblical phrase.¹⁹

Or as Shakespeare puts it more poetically, we are to “take upon ’s the mystery of things, as if we were God’s spies” (*King Lear* V, 3). The overall goal of this momentous cultural purpose in discovering and developing creation is to bring honor to God and blessing to people through the work of our callings as the divine-human drama on earth unfolds.

This theologically rich vision of the world as God’s cosmonomic (law-governed) and doxological (glory-reflecting) workmanship that an enterprising and religiously motivated humanity can know and develop has fueled the Church’s educational aspirations historically, and should continue to do so

¹⁸ Simone Weil, “Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,” in *Waiting for God*, intro. Leslie Fielder (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 112.

¹⁹ Ludwig Kohler, *Der Hebraische Mensch*, p. 112, quoted in H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 164.

presently. The capacity to know the world, to know God through the world, to make something of the world, and to benefit self and others through such knowing and making is a foundation stone of Christian education. This is the intellectual capital that has caused the Church historically to invest so heavily in education over the centuries. An acknowledgement of this, and a recognition of the authoritative platform that a biblical worldview continues to provide for educational endeavors in light of its teachings on creation is in order.

The fallen human condition. God created human beings upright, states Ecclesiastes 7: 29, “but they have sought out many devices.” This passage, like the *locus classicus* of Genesis 3, highlights humankind’s original innocence and subsequent fall into sin, along with its dreadful consequences. The reasons for humanity’s plight proffered at large and in the university typically lay blame on such things as sexism, racism, classicism, the body, temporality, finitude, emotionality, authoritarianism, rationalism, individualism, scientism, technologism, economism, religion, society, evolution, and so on. On the other hand, a classic biblical worldview, without minimizing the magnitude of these problematic issues, asserts unequivocally that humanity’s original sin, its sinful condition, and its active sins are ultimately to blame for our horrific problems past and present.²⁰ The brokenness of the world is traceable directly to human rebellion against God.

Now for any enterprise to be successful, it must understand what opposes it. Analogously, if higher education is to flourish in its intellectual and moral objectives, it too must understand its chief antagonist, not only symptomatically, but also in its root cause. That root cause, Scripture asserts, lies in the defection of the human race from God. Though heteronomous by divine design, humanity rejected God’s authority in its prideful aspiration to autonomy. In aspiring to the knowledge of good and evil, humankind did not simply wish *to know about* good and evil, or *to experience* good and evil, but rather *to determine* good and evil,

²⁰ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 301.

that is, to establish the basic rules of life and ultimately to be god.²¹ Its successful quest to divinization and self-legislation, however, proved to be lethal. Cut off from the true God, the human heart in its inescapable religiosity shifted its deepest loyalty and love to false, implacable gods that failed existentially as objects of worship. Idolaters has become powerless like the idols they worship (Psalm 115: 4-8). Cut off from the true light, the human mind in its natural desire to know became ignorant, futile, darkened and deceived in its many speculations. It professes to be wise, but is in fact foolish (Rom. 1: 21-23), and now succumbs to the idols of the tribe, the cave, the market place, and the theatre (that is to socially, individually, linguistically, and philosophically induced falsehood; Francis Bacon). Cut off from true righteousness, the human will in its necessity to act has surrendered to immorality and disobedience, and has been given over to judgment. It is now in bondage to disordered love and to sin (Rom. 1: 24-32; 6: 1-23). Cut off from true life, the human body in its physical and mortal state ages, sickens, and dies. Sin's wage is death and the body will return to the dust of the ground (Gen. 3: 19; Rom. 6: 23). To top this off, a classic Christian worldview also asserts, the demythologists notwithstanding, that the world and the human race are caught up in a vicious spiritual warfare in which the contending kingdoms — God's and Satan's — are fighting it out spiritually for the allegiance and future of human lives, social institutions, cultural pursuits, and the destiny of the planet. As Paul states in Ephesians 6: 12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Altogether, this is not a pretty picture of the human condition in its pride, autonomy, idolatry, ignorance, vice, mortality, and conflict. Certainly the world of scholarship, teaching and learning has not escaped sin's corrosive effects and the mind's ability to know God, the self and the world aright. The noetic or mental effects of sin corrupt our understanding of the *subjects of knowledge* depending

upon a discipline's ontological status and whether or not it is a part of the personal or impersonal aspects of creation. For example, sin has disrupted human thinking in the humanities disciplines more so than in the formal and symbolic sciences. The noetic effects of sin also impact professors as *knowing subjects* through the quality or destitution of their moral and spiritual lives, through the vices or virtues of the communities to which they belong, and through their own idiosyncrasies and personal characteristics, all of which affect patterns of thinking.²² Arthur Holmes points out how the noetic effects of sin manifest themselves in unintentional but real academic mistakes, in personal and institutional self-deception, in the faulty exercise of conscience and imagination, in misleading language habits, and in disrupted relationships with colleagues.²³

Though hard to admit, this description seems true to academic life. If it is an adequate assessment of the fallen human condition, including the world of education, how difficult it is to discover, foster, and sustain the truth, wisdom, and virtues that make for a genuinely human life. How hard it is extirpate professors and students from their lifestyles of ignorance and wrong desire. This is the unvarnished, raw material with which higher education must work in seeking to shape its own personnel and the generations. When it comes, then, to this critical matter of the intellectual and moral formation at the university, it has to be a work of grace.

Incarnation. This grace is manifested in the divinely wrought history of redemption in which God promises the coming of a worldwide Redeemer through the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and fulfills that promise in the New Testament in the incarnation of Jesus Christ — the second person of the Trinity and Son of God. The reason why “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1: 14) was “for us and for our salvation” as the Nicene Creed (A. D., 381)

²¹ Tim Chester, *From Creation to New Creation: Understanding the Bible Story* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK, and Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 17.

²² Stephen K. Moroney, “How Sin Affects Scholarship,” *Christian Scholars Review* 28 (Spring 1999), pp. 432ff.

²³ Arthur F. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

declares boldly.²⁴ This grand mystery of the hypostatic union, in which God the Son assumes a complete humanity and lives a truly human life yet without sin, demonstrates that while the cosmos typically operates in predictable ways, it is open to divine intervention, and brings the spiritual and natural worlds into the closest possible proximity. The doctrine of Immanuel — “God with us” — shows that the transcendent and the extraordinary can be revealed and known through the immanent and the ordinary, whose inherent but forgotten value is simultaneously affirmed. The incarnation of the Son of God dignifies the human person, honors the body, and values the physical creation, preventing their exploitation or deification, and engendering respect and careful consideration. To embrace the embodied state joyfully and to be immersed in the things of the creation wholeheartedly are the incarnation’s implications. So are a rejection of selfishness and pride, and the appropriation of a humility that generates love, service, and sacrifice on behalf of others, for this was the very mind of Christ Jesus in His kenosis, suffering, and death (Phil. 2: 3-11). As explained in Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. ... Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. ... For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, [He] acted by human choice, and [He] loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.”²⁵

A philosophy of education in search of a foundation for the intellectual and moral renewal of human persons can do no better than the incarnation of Jesus

²⁴ *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd ed., John H. Leith, ed (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 33.

²⁵ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*. Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965 (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1965, 1994), pp. 21, 22.

Christ who is the Savior of humanity and the earth, the light of the world and the bread of life (John 8: 12; 6: 35). As J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard affirm in their book, *Christianity: The True Humanism*, “Morally and spiritually, intellectually and experientially, motivationally and relationally, the incarnate Son of God stands before us as perfect man, the one totally human being that history knows.”²⁶ Since the gospel life requires the imitation of Jesus in every respect and aspect of life, this teaching provides the basis for becoming fully and truly human under God. Thomas Merton affirms, “True Christian humanism is the full flowering of the theology of the Incarnation.”²⁷ This biblically based humanistic vision, I submit, is the ultimate educational goal of a classic Christian worldview, a vision that brings greater glory to God the greater our humanity is renewed and flourishes. As St. Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a person fully alive.”

Redemption. Jesus Christ became man for a specific purpose as we have seen, namely to accomplish redemption which was the work of restoring (*opus restaurationis*) the work of creation (*opus creationis*). “It is the creator who redeems and in redeeming creates again.”²⁸ It was achieved by the in-breaking of the redeeming kingship of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ, especially through His death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. Having achieved an atonement for sin, the defeat of the powers, and the conquest of death, the ascended Christ has poured out His Spirit on the Church and into the world. He now rules with final authority over the whole cosmos. And when Christ returns, He will make all things new. The goal toward which the church and the whole creation move is that of a new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21-22). This is the New Testament gospel in a nutshell (*in nuce*). Though

²⁶ J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard, *Christianity: The True Humanism* (Waco, Word, 1985), p. 53

²⁷ Thomas Merton, “Virginity and Humanism in the Western Fathers,” in *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), p. 114; quoted in R. William Franklin and Joseph M. Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 4.

deemed foolishness and a stumbling block by some, a classic Christian worldview regards this good news as the basis for the renewal of human life and the transformation of culture. It is thus the hope of the world, both already and not yet, and should make us all leap, dance and sing for joy!

At a personal level, the gospel of grace undermines damning pride and autonomy, restores the heart to fellowship with God, renews the mind in truth, frees the will for virtue, and delivers the body from ultimate death through a future bodily resurrection. Believers in their spiritual, intellectual, moral and physical renewal are already new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5: 17), serving collectively in the church as an adumbration of the world to come. The whole person is redeemed — body and soul and spirit. In terms of culture, this vigorous and comprehensive renewal of Christian believers has implications across the whole spectrum of life. In contrast to a compartmentalized faith that is privately engaging but publicly irrelevant, a classic Christian worldview promotes an in-depth transformation of social institutions and cultural life through the agency of wholly converted believers. As H. Richard Niebuhr explains this vision with an Augustinian nuance, “Christ is the transformer of culture ... in the sense that he redirects, reinvigorates, and regenerates that life of man, expressed in all human works, which in present actuality is the perverted and corrupted exercise of a fundamentally good nature....”²⁹ Or in the more practical language of N. T. Wright in one of his popular volumes,

We need Christian people to work as healers: as healing judges and prison staff, as healing teachers and administrators, as healing shopkeepers and bankers, as healing musicians and artists, as healing writers and scientists, as healing diplomats and politicians. We need people who will hold on to Christ firmly with one hand and reach out with the other, with wit and skill and cheerfulness, with compassion and sorrow and tenderness, to the places where our world is in pain.³⁰

²⁸ Philip Greenslade, *A Passion for God's Story: Discovering Your Place in God's Strategic Plan* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK, and Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 192.

²⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), p. 209.

³⁰ N. T. Wright, *For all God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 101.

In this historic perspective, the impact of the Christian gospel is not limited simply to personal piety (which, by the way, was one of the main causes for the dying of the light in Christian colleges and universities, according to James T. Burtchaell). Rather it extends, like the scope of creation and the impact of sin itself, to the totality of life and culture and all its institutions. As Francis Schaeffer was fond of repeating regularly, “The Lordship of Christ applies to all of life and to all of life equally.”

The educational ramifications of Christian redemption, then, are profound. Since human and cultural revitalization are *sine qua non* spiritual issues, the Church works through her academic agencies to bring the full resources of the Kingdom gospel to bear on the fallen human condition. The overall goal is the transformation of students at the root of their being and in the fruit of their lives. The church and university work in tandem to achieve a crucial objective, for as Sharon Parks states, the educational task of shaping young adult faith “is a vital opportunity given to every generation for the renewal of human life.”³¹

Consummation and the telos of love. The gospel, of course, is not only a present reality, but also a future hope. Indeed, God’s kingdom has already come, but it is also coming. A New Testament philosophy of history focuses on the past, but also anticipates the future, as it lives presently “in between the times.” Thus, the maranatha Church looks toward the *eschaton* when God will consummate His redemptive work in history and usher in the new heavens and new earth. At that time, Christ will return, the wicked will be judged, the righteous will be resurrected, death will be defeated, and the devil and his minions will be destroyed. God’s original creation purpose to be with His people will at last be fulfilled in new creation, and He will be all in all. This is our known future, for God has already disclosed to us in Christ. As Paul writes in Ephesians 1: 8-10, “In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him, with a view to an administration

³¹ Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp. 96-97.

suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.”

At the heart of God’s work in history — past, present, and future — is love. This is unsurprising, since love is what God the Trinity is, both immanently and economically. Thus one of the most, if not *the* most important dominical sayings in the synoptic tradition contains the greatest commandment to love God supremely, and its corollary to love others as oneself (Matt. 22: 37-39; Mark 12: 30-31; Luke 10: 27-28). Obedience to these two grand imperatives, Jesus said, fulfills the Law and the Prophets. The whole of Biblical religion finds its summit in the love of God and neighbor. All human activity is to be aimed at the fulfillment of these greatest commandments. This means, as unusual as it sounds, that university education as a human activity must also have the cultivation of this divine and human love as its chief end (*telos*).

There are many motives for participating in the life of the university today. Most of them have personal aggrandizement as their goal. While looking out for self is not wrong, there is still a more excellent way. A robust proposal for higher education within a Christian framework seeks to draw students closer to the love of God through their studies. After all, the subject matter of any discipline is ultimately His creation that makes God and His glory known. Loving God, then, is the highest goal of education. As St. Augustine’s young, precocious son Adeodatus once said, “With His help, I shall love Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning.”³²

A greater love for God segues naturally into a greater love and service for others, and this is the penultimate priority of a university proposal based on historic Christianity. How can the knowledge, virtues, and skills students obtain — indeed, how can students as maturing human beings — meet the needs and be of service to those around them? Helping students learn how to love others even as they love themselves is the second highest goal of a Christian university.

³² Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans., intro., notes Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 146 (§13. 46).

This kind of second greatest commandment education has been summarized nicely in these famous words from Bernard of Clairvaux. “There are many,” he writes, “who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who desire to know in order that they may themselves be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonorable. But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love.”³³

If love, then, becomes the *telos* of university education and to a greater or lesser extent is actualized in real life, then the chief end of students as lovers of God and neighbor will be realized, and incrementally the world will become a better place. In short, the goal of Christian education is unadulterated Christian charity, and it exists not to produce mere graduates, but to produce saints.

Student Testimonies

Over the years, I have had the privilege of knowing some student-saints in the making who have been exposed to the transformative power of a Christian worldview through their educational experiences. Several Dallas Baptist University students have written notes to me indicating that as a result of this exposure, they were undergoing a significant shift in their way of thinking, seeing, learning, and living in the world.³⁴ For example, Josh states, “This topic has opened my eyes to a New World. It has enabled me to define what Christianity really is and to solidify what I believe.” Jessie admits, “I have been deeply affected by the principles of a Christian worldview. I have recognized a formerly unnoticed tendency on my part to consider some areas of my life trivial when compared to more ‘spiritual’ areas. If God is the author of academics, however, then I have just as much of a mandate to put my best effort into my classes as into my ministry.” Ashley reveals, “This study has greatly expanded my narrow

³³ Quoted in Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 60.

³⁴ Slightly edited, but not for content.

view of the Christian faith. It has reshaped my perspectives on the biblical categories of creation, fall, and redemption. Before, I was a dualist, but now it is challenging to live out my faith, not only in the spiritual areas, but in every area of my life. Christianity is not a realm of life, but a way of life for every realm.” Tommy reports, “My understanding of Christianity has changed in a huge way. I never understood the connection between creation, fall, and redemption. I thought very small about my faith. Now I see things on a larger scale. I never even thought about my worldview, but now I have a clearer understanding.” Katie proclaims, “This is transforming my Christian life. Everything I see is greener, more heavenly, more holy. The world has been renewed. I want to eat, drink and sleep to the glory of God. I am redefined.” Jennifer asserts, “These ideas have challenged me tremendously and have revolutionized my views on so many things. They have caused me to think and stretched me like nothing else ever has. To understand on a deeper level the totality of God’s creation and His desire to restore it is absolutely breath-taking!”

Conclusion

These student testimonies indicate what a reviving of the light can do! Their words demonstrate the educational vitality of a Christian worldview! For at its heart are the themes of the Trinity, creation, the fallen human condition, the incarnation, redemption, consummation, and the *telos* of love. This vision has the added, no-small, benefit that it is true. As a result, it generates a surprising paradox, for it moves secular educational enterprises from the center of things to the periphery, and pulls Christian higher education from the outer, disregarded edges to the very middle. If Christianity provides a genuinely *true account of reality*, then this means that educational undertakings based upon it lie closer to the center and offer a better explanation of human existence than those that ignore it. Despite their acclaim, secular institutions that disregard Trinitarian Christianity diminish truth and impoverish educational experience. Higher education that is Christian, on the other hand, despite its lack of acclaim and frequent weaknesses, stands at the very heart of reality. To be sure, education that is Christian is a road less traveled in the postmodern world. But it is a road

that should be traveled nonetheless. It is a road of light and vitality that can make all the difference:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Thank you very much.

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