

“Life, Learning, and the Christian Mind”

The poet and writer T. S. Eliot once asserted that “we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life.” If this is true, how important is it for Christians to found their views of education on a biblically-based conception of life? In this lecture, Professor David Naugle will discuss the relevance of a Christian outlook for education. Professor Naugle will consider education in the light of the Christian concepts of creation, fall, and redemption. He will also highlight the significant contribution of Christians to the West’s intellectual tradition.

“Matters of Consequence”

A little less than a year ago, a series of curious circumstances led me to read Antoine De Saint-Exupéry’s fairy tale titled *The Little Prince*. The book almost seemed to force itself upon me, and for reasons unknown at the time, I felt that I had better go take a look. For in less than a week’s time, at least three students of mine spoke of their admiration for the work, and recommended that I read it. And to top things off, about a week later, one of my students who hails from South Africa asked if his father who was visiting the States could sit in on our philosophy of religion class. Of course I agreed, and when he arrived for his class visit, we had a brief conversation beforehand during which he spontaneously quoted a famous line from, yep again, *The Little Prince*.

Well, I took the hint and I wasted no more time before I sat down to read this apparently famous fantasy story and also a short book of criticism on the text. As the plot unfolds, we discover that the Little Prince lived on asteroid B-612 where he cleaned three volcanoes and took care of a single rose. But he left his lonely celestial habitation in search of friendship and for the sake of an education. During the course of his travels, he visits six planets where he learns what most grown up people residing there think are *matters of consequence*, though they are sadly mistaken about what they take to be ultimately significant.

Finally, the Little Prince visits planet earth where he not only has experiences with a downed airplane pilot, a snake, a flower, and a garden, but where he also

meets a fox who shares with him a simple secret of what is truly a matter of consequence. Here is how the exchange between the fox and the Little Prince goes.

And the Little Prince went back to meet the fox. Good bye said the Little Prince. Good bye said the fox. And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible with the eye."¹

The Little Prince learned that what most grown ups think are matters of consequence—things such as one's authority, or pre-eminence, or financial investments—are really not matters of consequence all. Instead they only reveal the foibles, superficialities, and wrong-headedness of adulthood. Rather, from the fox he learns that what really counts in life, that what is of great and genuine consequence is the importance and condition of the heart, and its ability to see the world aright. So with this and other lessons firmly grasped, the Little Prince returns home to Asteroid B-612, and the narrator concludes "there is sweetness and laughter in the stars."

Matters of consequence. That phrase really stuck with me, and that is why I think I was led, perhaps providentially, to read Saint-Exupéry's profound little book.

What do people today in our modern or postmodern world think are matters of consequence? Fashion trends? Weather patterns? Upward mobility? The super bowl? The economy? The internet? The war on terrorism? The Academy Awards? Or what? What are matters of consequence in our lives as Christian believers? And specifically for our purposes tonight, what are matters of consequence in Christian education, particularly in the mission, vision, and culture of Cambridge Preparatory Academy, and in its work of teaching and learning.

Now what I would like to propose for our consideration this evening is that this issue of relating a Christian mind to life and learning, connecting a biblical worldview to Christian education, is a matter of consequence, that it is, indeed, a matter of great and genuine consequence.

Two prominent thinkers in the Catholic Christian tradition certainly think that this is the case. For instance, no less a figure than Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *On Catholic Universities: Ex Corde Ecclesia*, asserts that Catholic

¹ Antoine De Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*.

Christian professors and teachers must “set the content, objectives, methods and results of their [teaching and] research within the framework of a coherent [Christian] world vision.”² And Lutheran minister turn Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus in a relatively recent article in *First Things* states that “A Christian university will settle for nothing less than a comprehensive account of reality. Not content with the *what* of things, it wrestles with the *why* of things; not content with knowing *how*, it asks *what for*. Unlike other kinds of universities, the Christian university cannot evade the hard questions about what it all means. Therefore theology and philosophy are at the heart of the Christian university.”³

And surely what the Pope and Neuhaus affirm of a Christian university also applies to Christian schools as well, including the Cambridge Preparatory Academy.

But *why* is connecting a Christian mind to learning such a matter of consequence? What makes this issue of doing the Church’s educational work from the vantage point of a coherent Christian vision of the world and from the perspective of a comprehensive biblical account of reality so important? I can think of at least three reasons.

First of all, it is a matter of consequence because the integrity of Church and the Christian character of the school depends upon it. If it is, indeed, true, as T. S. Eliot once asserted that “we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life,”⁴ how important it is, then, for Christian people to establish programs of education that are consistent with their most fundamental beliefs and confession of faith. For integrity’s sake, Christian schools worthy of the name must be rooted and grounded in a radically comprehensive biblical picture of the world that supplies the first principles and constructs the frameworks by which they operate.

² *On Catholic Universities: Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (U. S. Catholic Conference, 1990), 19.

³ Richard Neuhaus, “The Christian University: Eleven Theses,” *First Things*, January 1996, pp. 20-22.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, “Modern Education and the Classics,” in *Essays Ancient and Modern* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932, 1936), 169.

Second, it is a matter of consequence because a genuine Christian perspective of the academic enterprise supplies a cogent philosophical alternative in contrast to the fragmentation and incoherence of the educational systems in our secular culture. “Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone” bemoaned the English poet/preacher John Donne (1572-1631) in a poem describing the modern period when a new secular science and philosophy had called all the old verities into doubt. This dissolution of the spiritual and intellectual unity of the West no doubt lies behind George Marsden’s recent claim that “Contemporary university culture is hallow at its core.” In his opinion, not only does it lack a spiritual center, but that it is without any real philosophical alternative of its own.⁵ And certainly what is true for many colleges and universities is true for many primary and secondary schools as well.

But this is exactly where a biblical worldview comes to education’s rescue. It offers a fresh set of neglected theological assumptions based on the infinite/personal, creator/redeemer God that provide an epicenter to the educational enterprise, tie intellectual things back together again, and infuse the academic venture with renewed vigor, meaning, and purpose. Christian educators, instead of feeling like they must emulate secular models, must capitalize courageously and wholeheartedly on their theological heritage, and by these resources create schools of such quality and distinction that their non-Christian counterparts must play catch-up.⁶ This kind of Christian vision supplies a sound, visionary alternative for the educational task in our disintegrating cultural context.

Third and finally, it is a matter of consequence because of the enormous potential influence of a Christian school in today’s needy world. Just think about the impact that a qualitative, distinctively Christian school can have on students, their families, the church, and our culture. In short, the overall well being of a plethora of institutions in our world depends largely on an oversupply of wise men and women

⁵ George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

⁶ George Marsden, “The Opportunity and the Need for Academic Leadership,” *The Southern Baptist Educator* 66 (Fourth Quarter-2001), 4-5.

educated with the mind of Christ. As the book of Wisdom 6: 24 says, “In the multitude of the wise is the welfare of the world.” Perhaps Dr. William J. Abraham, an evangelical theologian and philosopher who teaches at Perkins School of Theology at SMU was correct when he said that the last, best hope of Church and the American Republic depends largely on the role played by Christian education. And a Christian school will play this kind of influential role in our world only to the extent that is rooted and grounded in a sturdy biblical perspective of life.

Therefore, relating a biblical outlook to Christian education is of remarkable importance for three reasons: (1) because the Church’s integrity and a school’s Christian character depends upon it; (2) because it provides a solid educational alternative over against the incoherent character of secular academic systems, and (3) because of the enormous impact a school founded in Christian truth can have.

Since this is the case, our task this evening is to look more deeply at the essentials of a Christian mind and its implications on learning. Now it seems to me that if a school intends to think Christianly about life and the world, and to be a biblically based institution, it must be based up and shaped by the overall narrative content of the Scriptures, especially its big picture themes of creation, fall, and redemption with all of their attendant implications and applications for the educational enterprise. If a school rests upon this foundation, then the fear of the Lord becomes the beginning of wisdom and knowledge, faith empowers and governs reason in all of its academic pursuits, and education itself as a rigorous enterprise has the potential of fostering obedience to the greatest commandments and of bringing honor and glory to our Trinitarian God. So let’s turn our attention to these three pillar points of creation, fall, and redemption, as I like to call them, and attempt to tease out their educational meaning and significance.

A Biblical Worldview and Christian Education

Creation (Genesis 1-2)

Of course, a Christian mind or worldview must begin where the Bible itself begins, namely in the beginning with the grand narratives of creation in Genesis 1-2. On the basis of this text, we aim at one primary goal of tremendous educational import: to make the wonderful rediscovery of the world as God's very good creation!

However, because of the pervasiveness of evil, some people might tend to adopt a Manichean mindset and associate the material world with Satan, or embrace a Gnostic perspective that looks upon physical things askance. But the Scriptures will have none of this. Indeed, the clear teaching of the Bible is that, to borrow the first words of the Apostles' Creed, God the Father Almighty is the Maker of heaven and earth. "This is my Father's world," as the hymn writer puts it.

Indeed it is, for in Genesis 1, we have a *chronological account* of creation in which God forms a formless earth on the first three days of creation, creating light, the sea, the sky, dry land, and vegetation. And then He fills an empty earth on the second three days of creation with the sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, animals, and finally humankind. In Genesis 2, we have an *anthropological account* of creation that focuses upon God's creation of the man, woman, and marriage, and assigning them a shared stewardship—an *oikonomia*—of cultivating and keeping the creation garden.

Now the high point in my mind of these two complementary creation narratives is found in Genesis 1: 26-28, a text appropriately designated by theologians as the creation decree and cultural mandate. For, indeed, it contains God's overall decree for His creation, including the mandate for humanity to establish culture and civilization. These three verses contain God's original commission and set forth, in nuce, the entire human project. It contains answers to basic questions about human identity as *the imago Dei* (the image of God), and about human purpose, namely to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. It reads as follows:

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Gen. 1:27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Gen. 1:28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply,

and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

And, then, three verses later in Genesis 1: 31, we have another exceedingly important passage that conveys the true essence of God's creative handiwork both in its ontological purity and in its existential value for human beings. Thereby it repudiates the aforementioned Manichean or Gnostic outlooks on creation as somehow evil or inferior. And so it reads: "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." The Apostle Paul reiterates this same point in 1 Timothy 4: 4-5 when he states that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer."

Given these amazing realities, it is no wonder that John Calvin could refer to the wonders and beauty of creation as the *theatrum Dei*, for "The whole world," in the great reformer's estimation, "is a theatre for the display of the Divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power."⁷ Such was God's gracious gift of a very good world. He made as His image and likeness to delight in it and to care for it. He created us for shalom in this our earthly home.

But what meaning does the doctrine of creation have for Christian education, especially in an institution like Cambridge Prep? I can think of several implications that I would like to comment on briefly.

First is the implication of *objectivity*. The external world designed and created by God contains an inherent, objective, knowable law-like order that is the basis and object of all scientific pursuit and academic study. In other words, on the footing of creation, Christian education, teaching, and learning consists of a search for the truth that is there to be discovered, not made. We do not construct reality socially, culturally, linguistically, or in any other way as postmodernists propose. Rather,

⁷ John Calvin, *Comm. on the Psalms*, 135: 13. Quoted in Belden C. Lane, "The World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* (November 2001): 8. See also Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* for additional uses of the *theatrum Dei* image. I.VI.8; I.VI.2; I.XIV.20; II.V.1; III.IX.2; Comm. Gen. 1: 6; Comm. Psalms. 138: 1, plus other scattered references in Calvin's writings.

reality has been constructed by God and we submit to it, receive it, seek to know it in all of its diversity and mystery. Hence it is our wisdom to discover the way God has made the universe and human life within it, and to order our lives accordingly. It would be our foolishness to be ignorant of or rebel against the divine order of things, for those who live against the grain of creation will eventually get a splinter (to put it mildly). The objective character of creation, therefore, not only makes science and scholarship possible, but it also makes education exciting, for it provides teachers and students alike with the goal of discovering God's truth about the universe, as well as the possibility of attaining to wisdom.

Second is the implication of *subjectivity*. God not only made an objective world to be known, but He also made human subjects to know the world. In psalm-like terms, we might say that metaphysics and epistemology have met together, reality and knowledge have kissed each other. For by divine design, God made people as His image and likeness with a multifaceted cognitive apparatus capable of investigating and knowing the cosmos. In this regard, I am reminded of that lovely line from *King Lear* (V. 3) that says we are to "Take upon us the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies!" So, for this purpose, there is a compatibility between human knowers and the things to be known. And not only are human reason and the five senses adequate for logical analysis and empirical knowledge, but God has also blessed us with creativity, imagination, intuition, empathy, and emotion as cognitive powers in order to know the full range of the created order, including the divine. Hence, another outcome of the doctrine of creation is confidence not only that there is a God and a world to be known, but Christian epistemological confidence in our God-given abilities to know Him and His world.

Third is the implication of *wholeness*. Perhaps one of the most, if not the most *pernicious* problem afflicting the Christian church throughout her history, and the most *malicious* problem thwarting the enterprise of Christian education has been the perennial human effort to divide into parts what God Himself has made whole. This penchant, known as dualism, has led us to classify reality as sacred or secular, activities as temporal or eternal, persons as body or soul, knowledge as faith or

reason, and so on. However, it is only human sin and ignorance that has fostered this slicing, dicing, and dichotomizing of God's very good world into unrelated and often competing parts. Contrariwise, God made His creation to be embraced as an integral whole. Hence, the Christian teacher and student must say NO! to dualism, and YES! to a biblically-based, God-honoring, life-affirming, intellectually liberating wholism! This comprehensive perspective on reality has all kinds of ramifications for Christian education:

- It frees Christian teachers and students to pursue their academic interests fully and freely in the various things God and human beings have made without guilt or a sense that what they are doing is somehow unspiritual or contrary to God's will.
- It enables people to see and recognize God in all things, knowing Him through the study of the universe, and developing what we might call a sacramental perspective on reality.

"The fullness of the whole earth is God's glory," according to a literal rendering of Isaiah 6: 3. All creation and aspects of life are *iconic* in that they reveal and manifest God. Therefore I ask: what better place is there to make this grand theological discovery than a rock-solid Christian school with an extensive curriculum that forces teacher and student alike to explore the nooks and crannies as well as the vast stretches of the universe, and to see God in it all. This sacramental vision underscores the sense of the holy in all things, and imparts a kind of sanctity to the study of all disciplines, seeing in each of them an avenue to God. In this sense, education becomes a part of discipleship and is an intrinsic component to growth in Christ. Therefore, this recovery of the Christian vision of wholeness, grounded in the doctrine of creation, is indispensable to the work of any Christian school that is biblically sound.

Fourth and finally, there is the implication of the responsible fulfillment of the cultural mandate set forth in the original commission of Genesis 1: 26-28. God has a specific task in mind for human beings to fulfill perpetually, one that gives expression to their divinely-wrought identity as His image and likeness: to have dominion over world. This is a call to nothing less than the formation and development of human

culture and civilization. This is a call to the generational unfolding and historical opening up of the cultural possibilities hidden in the womb of creation. And it is to be done for God's glory and human benefit and well-being

Now I ask: besides the home, what institution other than a Christian school is better suited to assist in the fulfillment of this deeply human task? With a consciousness of this divinely ordained cultural purpose, a Christian school has the privilege and responsibility to foster in students a love and appreciation for the human cultural task and its achievements, to encourage its careful study, to be its astute and constructive critic, to play a part in its preservation, to promote its transmission, and perhaps most importantly, to contribute to its further development on the basis of one's interests, gifts, and callings. All of this can and should happen in and through a seriously Christian school! For indeed, the cultural mandate implies an educational mandate, and an educational mandate implies a teaching mandate, and a teaching mandate implies a student mandate, and so it is that students through their teachers in the context of their education are taught how to fulfill this primary divinely-given cultural purpose for humanity and the earth! Anchoring the Christian school in this decree sanctions its work and mission, and imparts to all of its activities a dynamism and rich purpose that must permeate its spirit and culture.

So I have identified four ways in which the doctrine of creation as the foundational element of a Christian mind assists in establishing the enterprise of Christian education. It affirms the following things:

1. Objectivity: there is truth to be known.
2. Subjectivity: there are human capacities to know the truth.
3. Wholeness: a recognition of the integrity of the total creation and saying NO! to the menace of dualism.
4. Cultural mandate: learning about and participating in the divinely ordained original commission to have dominion over the earth and to establish human culture and civilization.

But things are no longer the way they are supposed to be. All is not as God intended. Sin happened, the peace was disturbed, and death began to reign. What is true of Humpty Dumpty is true of man as well: we have had a great fall! And the

consequences of sin upon the human condition, and on the educational task, have been horrific. So we must review the story of the fall as the next vital component of a Scriptural vision of life, and then comment on its implications on Christian education.

Fall (Genesis 3)

In the story of the fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3, what I like to call the “uncreation,” the Word of God is first questioned and then denied by the Serpent/Satan, and finally it is flagrantly disobeyed by the primeval couple, Adam and Eve. The rest of the chapter details the consequences of this fatal act, entailing four separations, and three judgments.

The separations include, (1) the theological separation of humanity from God; (2) psychological separation of man from himself; (3) the sociological separation of man and woman; (4) the geographical separation of the human race from the Garden of Eden.

And these separations are followed by three judgments, three curses, if you will. against the serpent and Satan as the agents of evil in the world, against the woman as mother and wife, and against the man as dominion-haver and provider.

No doubt John Milton’s opening words in *Paradise Lost* capture well the gist of this space-time fall and its results:

Of man’s disobedience and the fruit
of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
brought death into the world, and all our woe.⁸

And certainly part of that woe due to sin has been manifested in the area of education in especially two noteworthy ways.

First is the spiritual effect of sin: *idolatry*. As a result, the religious options for all people at the end of the day are really only twofold: either the human heart will worship God or an idol, and it will cultivate a perspective on life that flows out of the power and direction of either commitment. This antithesis means that all educators and students, as well as every academic institution will be enlisted either in service

⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, illustrations Gustave Doré, The Franklin Library (Franklin Center, Pennsylvania, 1979), 7 (Book 1).

to the true or to a false god. They are either for or against, subject to or rebellious toward the Kingdom-rule of God! Consequently, there is no such thing as a religiously or spiritually neutral school, or teacher, or student. Some kind of belief system, Christian or otherwise, is an academic non-negotiable. Some kind of faith, in Christ or an idol, will always be integrated with learning. Educational objectivity or neutrality, therefore, is a farce. The intellect is always exercised within the boundaries of some kind of religion, whether it be biblical or not. Consciously or not, schools today make a decision similar to the one set before Israel at her covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem in Joshua 24: choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, either pagan deities or the Lord. “For it is indeed true, as Paul Marshall has pointed out, that “We always serve what we worship and worship what we truly serve.”⁹ Given the cultural milieu we operate in today, the chances are high that many schools are given over in service to contemporary idols and the gods of our age. How rare and how challenging it is, therefore, for a school to be deeply devoted to Christ and to seek to order its affairs by the principles of His authority and kingdom. For in a fallen world, the course and destiny of an institution, just like that of an individual, is determined by a particular mindset, an array of specific principles, and a spiritual orientation grounded in one of two opposing kingdoms, and that makes all the difference.

Second is the noetic or mental effects of sin: *ignorance*. Romans 1: 18-32, the key text on this topic, is Paul’s commentary on the fall of humanity into sin. In it, he offers a fourfold description of what happens when people swap the biblical God and His truth for a false god and a lie. In short, he says that they have embraced futile speculations, are darkened in the foolish hearts, have been deceived by false wisdom, and are given over by God in judgment to moral reprobation. Paul’s forthright language indicates that fallen humanity is characterized by a deep depravity that has had a devastating impact on our thinking. How hard it is, therefore, for the human mind to know God, the self, or the world aright!

⁹ Paul Marshall, with Lela Gilbert, *Heaven Is Not My Home: Living in the Now of God’s Creation* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 191.

How does this condition affect our educational efforts, even those by Christians? How has sin affected learning and scholarship? With some help from a recent article on this topic by Stephen K. Moroney in a Spring 1999 article in *Christian Scholars Review*, we can make the following points.¹⁰

First of all, it seems that sin's impact is proportional to objects of knowledge themselves. This is what Emil Brunner called the "law of the closeness of relation." He argued that "The nearer anything lies to that center of existence where we are concerned with the whole, ... the greater is the disturbance of rational knowledge by sin; the farther away anything lies from this center, the less is the disturbance felt, and the less difference there is between knowing as a believer or as an unbeliever."¹¹ According to this formulation, the impact of sin would be least upon the impersonal creation, in areas such as the formal and symbolic sciences, grammar, logic, and mathematics for example. The impact of sin would be greater, however, on the personal creation, on human beings in particular, and the subjects associated with them such as the humanities, the social sciences, and the fine arts. And then finally, the greatest disturbance of sin would be on our understanding of God and the overall meaning of cosmos itself, especially evident in the disciplines of theology and philosophy. The first point to be made, then, is that sin tends to disturb human thinking about some areas more than others, depending upon where the subject matter may fall in a kind of hierarchy of being.

Second, sin not only affects known objects but also knowing subjects, not only on things to be known, but on the one who is doing the knowing. This can be detected in three ways. First, since our moral and spiritual state affects what we think and how we know, then any person's academic work is sure to be influenced by his or her relationship with God, specifically whether or not that person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and to what degree that person has been sanctified.

¹⁰ Stephen K. Moroney, "How Sin Affects Scholarship: A New Model," *Christian Scholars Review* 28(Spring 1999): 432-451.

¹¹ Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939), 383; Quoted in Moroney, "How Sin Affects Scholarship," 440.

Second, how and what people think is also deeply affected by their corporate and communal affiliations. Sin not only affects individuals but also groups, and thus the virtues or vices of one's community will also be an important factor in determining intellectual processes. For example, a member of healthy family, a holy order, or a flourishing church will have a considerably different cognitive experience than a member of dysfunctional family, the KKK, or Hell's Angels. In other words, bad company corrupts good thinking, just as good company will foster it. Third and finally, individual idiosyncrasies also affect the knowing process. Basic personality types, unique habits, political and economic practices, lifestyle choices, and so on contribute powerfully to one's pattern of thinking. All of these factors, then,—our spiritual and moral state, our communities, and our habits—ought to be considered when contemplating the deep impact of sin on human thinking, especially in an educational context.

In practical terms, Abraham Kuyper has pointed out that the noetic affects of sin manifest themselves in several ways: (1) in unintentional, but real academic mistakes; (2) in personal self-deception (Jer. 17: 9 comes to mind here); (3) in the faulty exercise of imagination; (4) in misleading language habits, and finally (5) in disrupted relationships with colleagues.¹²

Other nasty results of sin that have educational significance include the impact of disordered loves and desires on the life of the mind, the tendency to transmute a legitimate objectivity into a kind of autonomous modernist objectivism, or its reverse, to pervert a legitimate human subjectivity into a kind of world-creating postmodern subjectivism and relativism. Furthermore, we splinter things meant to be whole, we destroy the unity of truth, and we exercise our cultural responsibilities in idolatrous and immoral ways.

Given, then, these effects of sin on all things human, including education, the whole creation cries out for redemption and the coming of the Kingdom of God!

Redemption (Genesis 3: 15-Revelation 22: 21)

Because God's covenant love knows no boundaries, even in the Garden of Eden, He set forth the first glimmer of the gospel in Genesis 3: 15, a text known as the protevangelium in which we find God's promise that the offspring of the woman will one day defeat the serpent/Satan and all evil. With this assurance, salvation or redemptive history begins, and through a series of covenants and promises functioning as the backbone of the Old Testament, the lineage of the offspring of the woman as the hope of the world unfolds. We discover throughout the long journey of Old Testament history that the Redeemer will be of the race of Shem, the line of Abraham, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the family of David, and ultimately the person of Jesus Christ who in the fullness of time was born of woman, born under the Law. For, indeed, He came, not to destroy the Law and Prophets, but to fulfill them.

The good news of the New Testament is that God broke into space, time, and history through the incarnation of His eternal Son and Word, Jesus Christ who became flesh and dwelt among us. In and through Him, the mysterious kingdom rule of God invaded this cosmos in an unexpected humble manner, defeating the enemies of sin, death, and Satan instead of Rome, and achieving a great spiritual exodus rather than a political one. In Jesus Christ, the sovereign power and authority of God was exerted victoriously against all the forms of evil in the world. But His redemptive work is not yet complete. When He returns, He will finish His campaign against evil that He began at His first coming, execute a general resurrection and a general judgment, and usher in the glorious new heavens and the new earth. Therefore, this cosmic, comprehensive kingdom redemption in Christ comes in two stages, the "already" of His first coming, and the "not yet" of His return at the *parousia* as George E. Ladd explains in these helpful words from his book *A Theology of the New Testament*.

Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age [the not yet], has already come into human history in the person and mission of

¹² Cited in Arthur Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 105.

Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history [already], and consummation at the end of history [not yet].¹³

Well, it's hard not to sound hysterical when considering the amazing grace of Christian redemption. New creation in its incipient form has already arrived, for if anyone is in Christ, "he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." And just like the doctrines of creation and the fall, this element of a Christian mind or worldview is very relevant educationally.

First, it reverses the spiritual affects of the fall from idolatry to the worship and service of the true God. It is now therefore possible to know, love, and serve God wholeheartedly in all of our dominion-having, culture-forming activities, including the context of Christian education. School is the setting where God can indeed be loved, served, and glorified by the service of teachers and the work of students alike.

Second, it reverses the noetic affects of sin from ignorance to truth. Faith renews and frees reason, delivers it from error, and infuses it with new knowledge and new wisdom based on God's self-revelation. The Christian mind is opened to embrace the truth of God about himself and all his works, set free to shape an interpretation of life and reality based in Scripture and rooted and grounded in the heart!

Now at this point in salvation history we must remember that our knowledge is not perfect; far from it, for we still see in a glass darkly. But we have been renewed in the spirit of our minds, and are capable of receiving the multifaceted rays of God's revelation and of transmitting that brightness, however imperfectly, to others. As J. R. R. Token has pointed out, our original vocation, though damaged by sin, was to refract the divine light in our lordship over the earth. We rejoice that our role as conduits of splintered light has been restored in Christ.

Although now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.

¹³ George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 89-90.

Disgraced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
And keeps the rags of lordship once he owned;
Man, subcreator, the refracted Light
Through whom is splintered from a single White
To many hues and endlessly combined
In living shapes that move from mind to mind....

Therefore, I submit to you that the Christian school can and ought to be a thriving community of teachers and learners with renewed minds where the divine light and truth about reality flourishes and is refracted to others!

Now certainly other positive consequences with educational significance accrue from our redemption in Christ. Our disordered loves are reordered in Christ through the work of the Spirit, and these rightly ordered loves reshape intellectual life by imparting to it new interests, proper motivations, and penetrating insights into the nature of things. Also, there is a new way of knowing that integrates and balances its objective external and subjective internal components. There is a new found recognition of the glorious wholeness and goodness of all things—a sacramental perspective on reality—as well as a fresh discovery of a divinely wrought unity to life and truth. And redemption in Christ also imparts an exciting understanding of the cultural roles and responsibilities of believers to be carried out through the faithful exercise of their various personal and vocational callings in fulfillment of the original commission now restored in Christ. When cultural life is undertaken for God’s glory in love and service to our neighbors, not only is this an expression our genuine humanity in Christ, but it is also the means by which the Church transforms the structures of our world, wafting the fragrance of Christ in every place. For as the prophet Jeremiah exhorted the people of God, “seek the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29: 7), and as contemporary poet Richard Wilbur has reminded us, “Love calls us to the things of this world!”¹⁴

Taking Stock

¹⁴ Richard Wilbur, *New and Collected Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, A Harvest Book, 1988), 233.

All right perhaps it is now time to take stock. So far we have said that this matter of connecting a biblically-based worldview to learning is a matter of consequence since the Christian integrity and character of our schools depends upon it; since it provides a credible philosophical alternative to the chaos of secular education, and because the potential influence of our schools on students, families, the church and our world rests upon it. So we turned our attention to the three overall biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption, and have attempted to tease out some of their educational meanings.

Recovering the Classical, Christian Intellectual Tradition

Now before we conclude, I would like to emphasize a point that I think can make a tremendous difference in the life and work of any Christian school, and that can support this vision we are talking about here this evening. I think that it is high time that evangelical educators seek to recognize the enormous contribution that the Church has made to Western education, and how important it is for believers to recover these incredible resources available in the historic Christian intellectual tradition in all three main branches of Christendom: Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and of course, Protestantism.

Through the passage of time, we contemporary evangelical—"free church"—believers have lost touch with the overall classical Christian tradition to our great detriment in the Church. And along with it, we have also lost touch with the rich, dynamic classical Christian tradition *in education* to the great detriment of our schools, colleges, and universities. For centuries, the Church was at the heart of the educational enterprise in the West. Her leading theologians and philosophers reflected profoundly on the foundations and meaning of the educational enterprise in the light of the faith. They committed the best of their reflections to writing, forming an unofficial canon of texts that has served as an amazingly rich literary resource for subsequent generations. Additionally, they were active in putting their theoretical considerations into practice, establishing various kinds of schools and creating a pattern of education and scholarship worthy of emulation. Over time, the Church developed a distinctive Christian intellectual tradition of remarkable breadth, depth,

and influence. For centuries, it constituted the heart and soul of Western intellectual life.

Unfortunately, however, the elements of this grand Christian intellectual tradition have been imprudently forgotten for a variety of reasons we cannot go into now. But without at least a working knowledge of the Church's wise and thoughtful intellectual heritage, contemporary Christian educational endeavors suffer a great, if unrecognized, loss. And, as a result, we may be using methods and pursuing goals that are more in keeping with the current *Zeitgeist* or spirit of the times than with historic, biblical faith.

To think that the Church's academic task today can be undertaken successfully apart from the accumulated wisdom of her past is not only foolish, but perhaps a little arrogant as well. For it is only as we stand upon the shoulders of giants that we see. As Robert Wilkins has said in his book *Remembering the Christian Past*, “. . . there can be no genuine Christian intellectual life that is not rooted in history. . . . The Christian intellectual is inescapably bound to those persons and ideas and events that have created the Christian memory. . . .”¹⁵ Or as the Jesuit author John Navone has asserted, “a tradition is an orientation for a particular future.”¹⁶ There is, therefore, a need to *rediscover* what the elements of this Christian intellectual tradition are, and to attempt to *recover* them as critical components in building Christian intellectual life today. There is great value in doing so, for our traditions enable us to know what we are to do. As Tevye says in the opening scene of *Fiddler on the Roof*,

Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything—how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may

¹⁵ Robert L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 173, 180.

¹⁶ John Navone, S. J., *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 71, n. 15.

ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you—I don't know! But it's a tradition. *Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.*¹⁷

Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do. This could and should be said by Christian educators today. To this end, may I suggest one easily accessible book that points the way to the recovery of our tradition, and will provide a good list of works to read to get anyone started. This book is Arthur Holmes' *Building the Christian Academy* published just last year by Eerdmans. In this work, the author (no pun intended!) examines what has constituted the soul of the Christian intellectual and educational tradition, a tradition that he also believes has been lost to our great detriment. So he asks what we need to know about that tradition as a condition of practical wisdom for our own educational ventures today. He examines seven formative episodes in history that pertain to building and maintaining a strong system of Christian education. His treatment is set within the history of ideas and he includes in his investigation the educational thought of Plato, Isocrates, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Erasmus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Milton, and finally John Henry Newman. However, as Holmes himself readily admits, this list just scratches the surface. But it provides a good scratch nonetheless. In reading the works of these and other classic Christian authors with my own students, we have found in them a treasure trove of rich, edifying, and motivating insights. And though we may not agree with everything they have to say, still there is much to be profited from the intellectual and spiritual communion with these saints through their writings that are God's good gifts to us. I commend them to you for your careful consideration. They will do you good.

Applications and Conclusion

¹⁷ *Fiddler on the Roof*, book Joseph Stein, music Jerry Bock, Lyrics Sheldon Harnic. Based on Sholom Alechem's stories (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1964), 1 (emphasis added).

So where do we go from here, what to do now? Perhaps a little encouragement from the *Lord of the Rings* will be a good way to round things out. At a moment of uncertainty about his calling and his desire to fulfill it, Frodo confessed his frustrations to Gandalf in this way. “I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.” But Gandalf rose to the occasion and responded with these words of wisdom.

So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. *All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.* There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the ring in which case you also were meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.

Like Frodo, all of us have various gifts and callings from God, various “rings” to bear if you will, some in this manner, some in that. But your presence here this evening would indicate that each of you has some special interest or calling in the sphere of Christian education, whether as a teacher, administrator, student, parent, or supporter of this noble cause. Whatever the specific status of your responsibility in this regard, we all have been handed a set of circumstances in our schools, the world, and church in which we have been called to serve. What these circumstances are, and whether we like them or not is not for us to decide. *All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.* So, recognizing gratefully that there are other forces at work in this world besides the will of evil, indeed, it is the kingdom of God, in light of our topic this evening—“Life, Learning, and the Christian Mind”—let us resolve to make the most of this our moment in history to develop a Christian mind in which God’s Word burns like a fire in our bones, to apply it in every aspect of our lives as believers, and to incorporate it enthusiastically in the mission, vision, philosophy, and activities of our Christian schools, colleges, and universities. May all this be done doxologically and in obedience to the two greatest commandments. For if God’s glory, and our love for Him and others is the end of all our efforts, then we must affirm that at the end of the day, Christian education as an *opus Dei* exists not so much to make one a scholar, but to make one a saint. And that, indeed, is a matter of consequence.

AMEN, GOD BLESS YOU, AND THANK YOU.