

Baylor University
"The Schooled Heart:
Moral Formation in American Higher Education"

"*A Paideia* Proposal:
The Educational Power of Great Tradition Christianity"
(Unabridged Version)

David Naugle, Th.D., Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
Dallas Baptist University

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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 both liturgically and evangelistically. 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: “Renaissance and Enlightenment skepticism, the effects of Biblical criticism, the

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.”

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 knowledge — must be interpreted as nothing other than a hunger for myth, “the

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.

greedy seizing and snatching at food of a hungry man.”⁶ No matter how much it devours materialistically or otherwise, a storyless world and mythless culture cannot and will never be satiated.

In this post-Christian 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 too many stories). The results, however, have been disastrous. George Marsden indicates as much by asserting in the opening line 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 I am afraid he is right. Within itself, the university’s narrative resources are depleted. The academy no longer shares any common wisdom or recognized set of first principles upon which to base its own enterprise. When it comes, then, to this crucial issue of moral formation in American higher education, the university is in a *cul de sac*, and must look elsewhere for an alternative. The anomalies afflicting the current paradigm have revealed its inadequacies. A revolution is in order. I would like to offer an old/new *paideia* proposal rooted in the recovery of a worldview based upon Great Tradition Christianity.⁸ What this vigorous tradition consists of and how it renews the educative process is the primary concern of this paper.

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

⁷ George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford, 1997), p. 3

⁸ 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), 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

The Current Crisis in Student *Paideia*

But before I trace the contours of this ancient and future option, an additional word or two about the current crisis in student *paideia* is in order.⁹ 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. 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, administration becomes the mere lunging into one crisis after another without anyone stepping back and asking, ‘Why are we here?’”¹⁰ 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

humanity of Christ as articulated in the ancient and ecumenical creeds and their related teachings.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ William Willimon and Thomas Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 38-39, 61.

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.”¹¹ As freshly minted college graduates from a premier institution, Lelaina and Troy learned quickly that reality bites, and sometimes it bites hard. It seems that their university failed to provide them with an adequate moral vision to help them handle the vicissitudes of life without plummeting into despair. Though it is “just a movie,” her agnosticism and his cynicism and severely reduced version of the *summum bonum* closely represent the actual perspectives and experiences of countless numbers of undergraduates.

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 university life are in fact the kinds of ideas that ultimately undermine the goal of shaping any kind of substantive 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.”¹² In this setting of cosmic disenchantment without transcendence, associating moral formation and higher education is oxymoronic. As the British poet Steve Turner explains in his popular poem “Creed,” today’s

¹¹ 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.

¹² G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, ed., intro., notes David Dooley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 227.

essential non-theistic beliefs generate an ethical laissez-faire that is sure to bear bitter fruit. It 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 creeds¹³

Despite this overarching materialism and fashionable rejection of creeds that erodes the moral foundations of higher education, our culture, given its needy state, still expects college graduates to be 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

¹³ 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.

needs and expects the university to produce is undermined by its own creed of creedlessness. The university's historic moral purpose is thwarted by its own essential principles. How tragically humorous! How humorously tragic, as C. S. Lewis explains in these pointed words from *The Abolition of Man*. "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."¹⁴ This kind of self-stultification has brought the university to an undeniable moral impasse. Surely there is a better way.

An Old/New *Paideia* Proposal

The *paideia* proposal I envision as a better way to foster the intellectual and moral development of university students consists of a worldview of Great Tradition Christianity that is rooted in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and is centered on the infinite, personal Trinitarian God as the Creator, Judge, and Redeemer of the world.¹⁵ This classic *Weltanschauung* of historic Christian faith as the conceptual framework for university life has had a venerable history extending roughly over two millennia. 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 thoughtful students who are "searching for a worthy faith"¹⁶ during

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1944, 1996), p. 37.

¹⁵ 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), 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 as articulated in the ancient and ecumenical creeds and their related teachings.

¹⁶ Sharon Daloz Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 133. In her follow up volume, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p. 10, Parks adds these comments about the role of higher education in the moral formation of collegians. She writes: "But higher and professional education is distinctively vested with the responsibility of teaching critical and systemic thought and initiating young lives into a responsible apprehension first of the realities and questions of a vast mysterious universe and second of our participation within it. Higher education is intended to

the critically formative college years. It ought to be given the opportunity for a new hearing. Hence, I would like to reflect on the essential themes of this vision that is ever ancient and ever new — the Trinity, creation, the fallen human condition, incarnation, redemption, and consummation — and state why it is a *paideia* proposal worthy of consideration.

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 *paideia* proposal. 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. 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.”¹⁷ 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 through faith since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Job 28: 12-28; Psalm 111: 10; Prov. 1: 7; 9: 10). Such foundational faith in God seeks

serve as a primary site of inquiry, reflection, and cultivation of knowledge and understanding on behalf of the wider culture. As such, institutions of higher education hold a special place in the story of human development, particularly in the process of becoming a young adult in faith.”

¹⁷ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Rethinking the Western Tradition, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 29

understanding about itself and all things. It is the key that unlocks the secrets of the universe. Therefore, to exclude this Trinitarian God from educational consciousness and practice is the greatest possible reductionism. On the other hand, His inclusion is utterly consequential for the academy and its classic purposes.

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), a truth that has also been enshrined as the venerable starting point of the Apostles' Creed. 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 fact, then, about the universe, though largely forgotten today, is that it is created. That an omnipotent Creator stands behind the cosmos, explains it, owns 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, "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 authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. And he is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Reality as a whole, therefore, is theistically structured and defined, and despite heroic efforts to do so, it cannot successfully be remade or reconceived by rebellious humanity. This point of view, in other words, uproots relativism. In relation to intellectual and moral matters, there is an authoritative pregiveness to things which requires acknowledgement and response.

The resulting shalomic cosmos which God made 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. 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. As such, it has been aptly described by John Calvin as the "theatre of the divine glory" (*theatrum Dei*), and by Alexander Schmemmann as "shot through with the

presence of God.”¹⁸ Human beings as *imago Dei* are endowed with reason and other cognitive abilities to know the world God made, especially with the assistance of general and special revelation. Humanity has also received an original commission to have stewardship over creation, to pursue civilizing tasks in dramatic ways that signal the divine intent of cultural and historical progress. As Shakespeare writes, shifting to the first person, 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 mandate in discovering and developing creation is to bring honor to God and blessing to humanity as time unfolds.

This theologically rich vision of the world as God’s cosmomic and doxological workmanship that an enterprising and religiously motivated humanity can know and develop has fueled the Church’s educational aspirations historically, and continues to do so 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 the foundation stone of Christian education. This was the intellectual capital that caused the Church to invest heavily in education futures, resources from which many universities have borrowed tacitly to fund their own operations. An acknowledgement of this, and recognition of the authoritative platform that Great Tradition Christianity provides for educational endeavors metaphysically and epistemically 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 highlights humanity’s original innocence and subsequent fall into sin, along with its deleterious consequences. Accounts of the brokenness of the human condition proffered at large and in the university typically lay blame on such things as sexism, racism, classicism, the body, temporality, finitude, emotionality, authority, rationality, individuality, scientism, technologism, economism, religion,

¹⁸ 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:

society, evolution, and so on. On the other hand, Great Tradition Christianity, without minimizing the magnitude of these issues, asserts unequivocally that humanity's original sin, its sinful condition, and its active sins are ultimately to blame for humanity's horrific problems past and present.¹⁹

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, the Tradition 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. Its successful quest to be independent and self-legislating, however, proved to be lethal. Being cut off from the true God, the human heart in its inescapable religiosity shifted its deepest loyalty and love to false, impotent gods that failed existentially as objects of worship. It has become like the idols it worships (Psalm 115: 4-8). Being cut off from the true source of light, the human mind in its natural desire to know became futile, darkened and deceived in its many speculations. It professes to be wise, but is in fact foolish (Rom. 1: 21-23). Being cut off from the true source of righteousness, the human will in its necessity to act has been given over to judgment and succumbed to disobedience. It is now in bondage to sin (Rom. 1: 24-32; 6: 1-23). Being cut off from the true source of its life, the human body in its physical and mortal state ages, sickens, and dies. It will return to the dust of the ground (Gen. 3: 19; Rom. 6: 23). To top this off, Great Tradition Christianity also asserts, 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.

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.

¹⁹ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 301.

Altogether, this is not a pretty picture of the human condition in its pride, autonomy, idolatry, ignorance, vice, mortality, and conflict. Though hard to admit, it is nevertheless a description that seems true to life with its bloody clashes of civilizations, culture wars, ideational conflicts, and the general nastiness of human existence. If this, then, is an adequate assessment of the human condition, 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 get people out of their caves of deception and detriment (ourselves included). When it comes, then, to this matter of intellectual and moral formation, it has to be a work of grace.

Incarnation. This grace is manifested in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. John 1: 14 states, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” As the Nicene Creed (A. D., 381) declares of Christ, “Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human.”²⁰ This grand mystery of the hypostatic union of the God-Man 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).

²⁰ *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.

A philosophy of education in search of a foundation can do no better than the incarnation of Christ which transvaluates the value of the person, the body, and the world. It alters the perceptions and practices of students, and those who lead them, in relation to all things. The God/Man is indeed the light of the world (John 8: 12). 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."²¹ In light of this thinking, Thomas Merton affirmed that, "True Christian humanism is the full flowering of the theology of the Incarnation."²² This biblically based humanistic vision, I submit, is the ultimate educational goal of Great Tradition Christianity.

Redemption. As the Nicene Creed states, and as Anselm confirms in *Cur Deus Homo*, the purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God/Son of Man was for us and for our salvation. Specifically, this salvation was a work of restoration (*opus restaurationis*) of the work of creation (*opus creationis*). 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. This is the New Testament gospel in a nutshell (*in nuce*). Though

²¹ *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.

²² 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, Great Tradition Christianity regards its gospel as the basis for the renewal of human life and culture and thus is the hope of the world.

At a personal level, the gospel of grace undermines damaging 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. Believers in their spiritual, intellectual, moral and physical renewal are new creations in Christ. The whole person is redeemed. 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, Great Tradition Christianity promotes an in-depth transformation of social institutions and cultural life by Christ through the agency of converted Christians. 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....”²³ 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.”²⁴ In this historic perspective, the Christian gospel is not limited simply to personal piety, but extends like the scope of creation and the impact of sin to the totality of life.

The educational ramifications of Christian redemption, then, are profound. Since human and cultural revitalization are *sine qua non* spiritual issues, the

²³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), p. 209.

Church works through her academic agencies to bring the full resources of the Kingdom gospel and Great Tradition Christianity 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.”²⁵

Consummation. The gospel of Great Tradition Christianity is not only a present reality, but also a future hope. Indeed, God’s kingdom has already come, but it is also coming. Thus, the maranatha Church, while it enjoys the presence of the kingdom now, still looks with anticipation toward the *eschaton* when God will consummate His redemptive work in history. 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 gospels 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, the totality of Great Tradition Christianity finds its summit in the love of God and neighbor. All human activity must 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.

There are many motives for participating in the life of the university at any level. Most of them these days have personal aggrandizement as their goal. While looking out for oneself is not necessarily bad, there is still a more excellent way. A *paideia* proposal for higher education within the framework of Great Tradition Christianity seeks to draw students closer to God in love through their

²⁴ N. T. Wright, *For all God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 101.

²⁵ Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years*, pp. 96-97.

studies. After all, the subject matter of any curriculum is His creation by which students may come to know Him better. As Augustine's young, precocious son Adeodatus once said, "With His help, I shall love Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning."²⁶ A greater love for God segues naturally into a greater love and service for others, and this is the penultimate priority of a university *paideia* proposal based on a Great Tradition worldview. 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? 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."²⁷ 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 will be realized, and the world will become a better place.

Summary and additional thoughts. This, then, is the kernel of a university *paideia* proposal based on the worldview of Great Tradition Christianity. At its heart are the themes of the Trinity, creation, the fallen human condition, the incarnation, redemption, and the consummation. In addition to what I have already specified, other educative benefits of this vision are rather significant. First, this kind of Christian vision sacralizes and ennobles intellectual life, investing it with a gravity and significance that is often lost today. It is also inherently holistic, since truth itself, rooted in God, is one. Its intrinsic unity critiques contemporary proclivities toward fragmentation and reductionism, and

²⁶ Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans., intro., notes Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 146 (§13. 46).

²⁷ Quoted in Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 60.

offers a fresh perspective on the coherence of life. Furthermore, its embrace of the divine realm and a spiritual order of existence, along with a doctrine of sin, prevent the human race from unduly exalting itself, and places needed restraints on human scientific, technological, and economic empires.²⁸ Finally, adopting this proposal would certainly enable institutions to move beyond the prevailing utilitarian, information-driven, and career-oriented vision of higher education in favor of a perspective that takes seriously the challenge of nurturing an appetite for wisdom and the search for principles relevant to a truly human life. While acceptance of this proposal is likely only in Christian universities and/or at church-related institutions, its reception elsewhere would certainly demonstrate a more authentic commitment to academic freedom, and give muscle to the university's claim to being authentically pluralistic as well as a genuine marketplace of ideas.²⁹ As such, it could function as a template for the rest of society as neither a naked or sacred, but as a genuinely civic public square.

Student Testimonies and Conclusion

Whether it is deployed outside the Christian community or not, a classic Christian worldview has certainly made a great difference in students I have known over the years. Within the past month after an intense seven week exposure to a Great Tradition worldview, I received the following statements from several Dallas Baptist University students that suggest that they are beginning to undergo a significant shift in their way of thinking, seeing, learning, and living in the world.³⁰ For example, Josh states, "This topic has opened my eyes to a New World. It has enabled me to define what a Christian worldview is and to solidify what I believe." Jessie admits, "I have been deeply affected by the principles of a

²⁸ Wilfred M. McClay, "Filling the Hollow Core: Religious Faith and the Postmodern University," in *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader*, ed. and intro. Gregory Wolfe (New York: The Free Press, 1997), p. 235.

²⁹ These last two points are taken from the vision statement of the Faculty Ministry of the C. S. Lewis Foundation. Available online at: <http://www.cslewis.org/programs/facultyforum/index.html> (Accessed 27 September 2003).

³⁰ Slightly edited, but not for content.

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. God is also concerned about my physical shape and my financial situation." Ashley reveals, "This study has greatly expanded my narrow 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 and worldview. 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!"

I could go on, but these are enough to give you a sample of a few students who are being exposed to a *paideia* proposal based on the transformative power of the worldview of Great Tradition Christianity. These students are in the process of recovering the story, and when they graduate and take up their posts in the larger stream of life, I think they just might be the ones who will help the world recover its story also.

David Naugle, Th.D., Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
Dallas Baptist University

(W) 214-333-5248
dnaugle@dbu.edu
Website: www.dbu.edu/naugle
(H)972-780-0626
d1naugle@aol.com