



FACULTY RETREAT

“No Adult Left Behind: The Christian College and Adult Education”

~ David Naugle, professor of philosophy, Dallas Baptist University

INTRODUCTION

Do Christian colleges and universities recognize the significant role that adult education is now playing in higher education nationally and globally? Does the Christian academic community also recognize the immense opportunity for influence in the lives of adult students personally and through them to the wider culture of which they are apart? Have Christian educators, who are primarily concerned with the mission to educate and prepare a new generation of traditionally-aged Christian college students (ages 18-24), accidentally or perhaps purposely negated or forgotten a burgeoning portion of today's total college population? Do Christian academicians and administrators have a conscious or unconscious prejudice against older students which they might somehow regard with suspicion, as second class or inferior pupils, as educational delinquents who are only deserving of remedial treatment? Are non-traditional adult degree programs viewed as a drag on an already sagging academic self-image, an impediment to scholarly quality, and a detriment to the institution's local, national or international reputation?

An honest answer to these honest questions may indicate that many Christian institutions of higher learning are forfeiting an unprecedented opportunity and neglecting a serious responsibility when it comes to the burgeoning adult education movement as a whole.

When I began my work at Dallas Baptist University in an adult education program, I had no understanding of the increasingly pre-eminent role that adults were playing on the educational scene, though I had been teaching on a state university

campus up until that time for some seven years. As an academic traditionalist and purist (and perhaps elitist), I harbored secret thoughts about the academic credibility of the adult program, and the "also ran" status of dilatory adult students.

But during almost four years of working in the field of adult education, my mindset changed ... radically! At long last I came to recognize the intrinsic and instrumental value of our institution's adult education program. Eventually I saw the strategic importance of adult students as key players in today's world in and through whom Christian educators might have amazing influence in the broader culture.

The purpose of this address is to share the results of my transformed perspective in order to challenge and perhaps change our thinking about adult higher education in a Christian context and to ask the consequent critical question: what is to be done?

THE ADULT STUDENT REVOLUTION

In his landmark book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn argued that revolutions in scientific conceptions and procedures occur when newly emerging findings anomalous to and inexplicable by the reigning scientific model are discovered. Thus there begins, according to Kuhn, "the extraordinary investigations that lead the [scientific] profession at last to a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science."¹ This turnabout in the scientific enterprise has been designated by the celebrated expression "paradigm shift" with which the names of Copernicus, Newton, Lavoisier, and Einstein have been rightly associated.

In analogous fashion, a revolution of another kind has been slowly unfolding during the past several decades transforming the landscape of higher education, not only here in the United States but also throughout the world.

¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second edition, enlarged. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 6.

This transformation in education is often referred to as the "Adult Student Revolution." Sparked by social, cultural, economic and technological factors, this sea-change is rightly called a "revolution" since it is causing astute educators, like scientists undergoing a paradigm shift, to assume pioneering attitudes and adopt unprecedented methods which the influx of adult students onto college campuses demands. Aware of the implications of this development within higher education, Jerold Apps graphically compares and contrasts it with the student revolts of the turbulent 1960s.

A quiet revolution is taking place on college and university campuses across this country. It is a revolution that began several years ago, in the sixties and seventies, and has been building in intensity ever since. It is not a violent revolution. There is no stench of tear gas in the air, no trashed buildings, no jailed demonstrators, no television cameras recording each activity as it unfolds. Yet this quiet revolution could have an even more profound impact on higher education and on society than did the violent demonstrations of the sixties. What I'm referring to is the return of thousands of adults to college campuses, adults who may have attended college for one or more years and then dropped out, adults who may have received a baccalaureate degree but find need for additional education, and adults who may never have attended college. [Consequently], colleges and universities cannot continue with business-as-usual, given the increasing numbers of these older students returning to work on undergraduate and graduate degrees.²

That was written in the early 1980s. In a 2008 report that examined adult learning in America at the national and state levels, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) confirms that an adult student revolution is still taking place in the American academy today. After citing some rather bad news regarding adult learning in the U.S., the CAEL report states that "The good news is that adults are making up an ever larger share of the total enrollment in postsecondary institutions. By 2004, adults made up approximately 43 percent of total enrollment at community colleges (includes full and part time). Increases over time are most dramatic for part-time adult enrollment.

² Jerold W. Apps, *The Adult Learner on Campus: A Guide for Instructors and Administrators*. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1981, p. 11.

From 1970-2002, adult part-time enrollment at all institutions increased from 7 percent to 12 percent, and adult part-time enrollment at community colleges increased from 17 percent to 26 percent of all students.”³

At Dallas Baptist University, adult learners have increased noticeably over the years. Since the inauguration of our adult education program in 1974, DBU has enrolled approximately 15,000 adult students of which almost one-third have completed their undergraduate degrees.⁴ Peaking at about 1,950 students in the fall of 2001 (after 9/11), the adult student population at DBU has consistently comprised approximately one-third of the entire student body (including both undergraduate and graduate students). Most recently, 1,632 adult students were enrolled in fall 2007 semester, and 1616 students were studying at DBU this past spring 2008.

It appears that the adult student revolution has firmly planted its flag in the soil of higher education. Astute educators in progressive educational quarters are aware of this trend, and understand that, "adult learners are at the center of today's most interesting innovations in higher education."⁵ But this is not always the case.

The phrase "paradigm paralysis" has been used in the business world by Joel A. Barker in his book *Discovering the Future: The Business of Paradigms*⁶ to convey the

³ See the executive summary of CAEL's student Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data. Available at http://www.cael.org/pdf/StateIndicators_Executive_Summary.pdf. Accessed August 7, 2008. According to the College Entrance Examination Board in 1991, nearly 50% of all college students are already 25 years old or older; business and industry were spending between \$30 and \$40 billion annually on education and training of adults, generating an equivalent of 2.55 million FTE's (Full Time Equivalents), the size of 65 Universities of Michigan; and that adult learning is the largest and most rapidly growing education sector in the nation, according to Nell Eurich in *The Learning Industry*.

⁴ This is a rough estimate.

⁵ Fred Harvey Harrington, *The Future of Adult Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1979, p. 2. According to this author, these innovations include such programs as college credit for learning obtained through life and work experience, credit by examination, drop-out and drop-in arrangements, special degrees for adults, weekend classes, and many other types of non-traditional experiments.

⁶ Joel A. Barker, *Discovering the Future: The Business of Paradigms*. St. Paul: ILI Press, 1985, 1988, 1989, p. 72. The College Entrance Examination Board, referred to above, also bemoans the

frozen state of a company or corporation that refuses to look beyond the way things have always been done despite rapid changes in the business environment. He asserts that a "hardening of the categories" can be fatal to market success.

The same thing can also happen in academe, and in some less pliant educational sectors, adult education is suffering from a "paradigm paralysis" or "hardening of the categories" as its second-class citizenship status would indicate. As Robert W. Tucker writes:

One look across the landscape of higher education reveals a blighted dust bowl called adult education — an amorphous notion lacking coherence, direction, and prestige; under funded, understaffed, profitable (but treated as a cash cow to pay for unprofitable programs), relegated to temporary buildings or basements, and circumspectly ignored in polite conversation among education cognoscenti.⁷

One way to set this captive free and to change attitudes and actions toward adult education is to highlight its importance historically, pedagogically (or andragogically), socio-economically, philosophically, and biblically/theologically. Hopefully, on the basis of the sociological fact of the adult student revolution and in light of these five considerations, Christian colleges and universities will catch the vision of what can and should be done in this vital area of academic opportunity and responsibility.

second class status of adult education and the inadequate attention given to programs for adults and their need for lifelong learning. They write: "We still think of education as something that is pursued by the young and completed upon entering adulthood. Our colleges and universities are primarily organized for 18 to 22 year old students attending full time and in residence, despite the fact that they represent only 20% of the total college population."

⁷ Robert W. Tucker, "A New Agenda for a New American Student," *Adult Assessment Forum* (Summer 1992): 3. This periodical is published by the University of Phoenix.

FACTORS HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF ADULT EDUCATION

The Historical Factor

Even though the systematic education of adults is a relatively recent educational phenomenon in the United States,⁸ its history and pedigree are impressive. One set of observers has noted the historic centrality of adult education the roots of which extend deep into the soil of Western civilization.

Recognition of the essentiality for educating adults to insure the security, productivity, and adaptability of a society facing changing conditions is as old as recorded history. In ancient times organized education was for adults, not youth. Most of the great teachers in history such as Confucius, the Hebrew prophets, Aristotle, Plato, and Jesus devoted their energies not to the development of the immature, but rather to the mature mind. The great social movements that produced Western Civilization, the Judeo-Christian religions, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the democratic revolutions, the Industrial revolution; all were founded on the ability of the adult mind to learn and change.⁹

Two examples might serve to demonstrate the connection between the Western intellectual tradition and the education of adults. The first comes from Plato whose well-known "cave analogy" contained in Book Seven of his *Republic* has been designated by some to be an exemplar of adult education. In this text, Plato's desire was "to show in a parable what education means in human life."

Since those entrapped in the cave had, in Plato's rendering of the story, been there "from their childhood," the implication is that the ordeal of breaking free from the bondage of false appearances and emerging into the light of truth is an experience that can successfully be achieved only by the older, more experienced person. Indeed, in

⁸ As Hal Beder notes, "Adult education was first recognized as a vital component of our [USA] educational system during the 1920s. During this decade, the term *adult education* first came into general usage . . . , and the adult education movement was launched." See his "Purposes and Philosophies of Adult Education," in the *Handbook of Adult Education*, edited by Sharan B. Merriam and Phyllis M. Cunningham. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989, p 38.

⁹ Gale Jensen, A. A. Liveright, Wilbur Hallenbeck, eds. *Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of University Study* (Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1964).

Plato's own reckoning, the philosopher/king, who had presumably passed through this experience, was not qualified to rule in the Republic until he was *fifty* years of age.

This platonic model of education, which implicitly underscores the connection between true knowledge and maturity, has been highly influential in the West, and may be taken as a testimony to the importance of life-long learning, and of the role of adult education in general.

In a more recent context (that is, only 200 years or so ago), adult educators have dubbed founding father Benjamin Franklin as the patriarch of adult education here in the United States. As Hartley Grattan writes, "If adult educators want to select a hero among the fathers of the nation, their choice must inevitably fall upon Franklin."¹⁰

Leafing through the pages of his *Autobiography* demonstrates the importance the venerable printer from Philadelphia placed on continued self-education through personal reading and inquiry. His development of group ventures to facilitate this process, namely the founding of public libraries, and the formation of his "mutual improvement society" called the JUNTO, testify to his recognition of the importance of an early form of adult education. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin describes the purpose of this early salon as follows:

I had form'd most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club of mutual improvement, which we called the JUNTO; we met on Friday evenings. The rules that I drew up required that every member, in turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss'd by the company; and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased. Our debates were to be under the direction of a president, and to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory.¹¹

¹⁰ Quoted by Ronald Gross, *Invitation to Lifelong Learning*. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 42. The quotation comes from "A Founding Father as Adult Educator," in *American Ideas About Adult Education, 1710-1951*, edited by C. Hartley Grattan and published by Teachers College Press, 1959.

¹¹ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Penguin, 1987, p. 65.

What Franklin has done for us is simply to set an example about education in general, and adult education in particular, even if it was done informally. Education and adults go together in a process that should never cease.

In corroboration with this is Mortimer J. Adler's observation that the authors the "Great Books of the Western World," which embody a significant portion of the Western intellectual tradition, were originally written for the adult mind. As Alder puts it, "They were not written as textbooks for children. The great books are for adults in the sense that theirs is the level at which adults operate and think."¹² Indeed, the contemporary Great Books Program was designed at the mid-point of the twentieth century specifically to fill the gap in the basic knowledge that was so woefully lacking in the minds of modern adults and to stimulate their intellectual and personal growth.

Since adult education has such deep roots in the intellectual tradition of the West, the present day "adult student revolution" provides Christian institutions with the exciting opportunity to preserve, cultivate, and extend this weighty heritage, and to do so from a deeply Christian perspective. It has been well said that "those having torches must pass them on to others," and this torch of the central role of adults in the educational enterprise of Western culture is one that Christian educators must gladly perpetuate.

¹² Mortimer J. Adler, "Why Only Adults Can Be Educated," in *Invitation to Lifelong Learning*, edited by Ronald Gross. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 101.

The Pedagogical/Andragogical Factor¹³

Perhaps the most important reason why adults have been at the center of many educational ventures in the past is that they possess by virtue of their age, experience, and wisdom, a unique capacity for learning, and an especially profound appreciation for the entire educational process. In a popularly written article entitled "Non-traditional Students: Why Do I Love Thee, Let Me Count The Reasons," William Deeds says that he especially enjoys adult learners not only because he has more in common with them (e.g., sharing the same generational events, economic and domestic responsibilities, etc.), but simply because they are good students.

He notes several of their positive pedagogical or andragogical qualities including (1) their motivation and determination to get an education; (2) their dedication and faithfulness to their studies; (3) their rich contributions to class discussion and their challenging questions; (4) the positive role-model they provide for the traditional student; and (5) their overall appreciation for the learning process and its importance. He concludes his plaudit with these words.

They are exciting students to have in the classroom although they make me work harder. They add a dimension to my courses which enriches the courses for me and for the traditional students as well. Although as I gain seniority as a college professor, and would not have to teach courses in the evening, I plan to continue to do so. The benefits which exposure to non-traditional students bring to me as an instructor far outweigh the inconveniences of the lateness of the hour.¹⁴

¹³ Pedagogy is a term derived from the Greek words *pais* (meaning 'child') and *agogus* (meaning 'leading'). 'Pedagogy' therefore refers to the art and science of leading and teaching children. "Andragogy" (from the Greek stem '*aner/andr'* meaning man or adult in contrast to a boy or child) is a term recently coined by adult educators to describe the art and science of teaching adults.

¹⁴ William Deeds, "Non-Traditional Students: Why Do I Love Thee, Let Me Count The Reasons." *Midnight Oil*. Alpha Sigma Lambda National Newsletter, 1989-90. Now lest we be in danger here of overromanticizing the positive attributes of the adult student, we must realistically reference their liabilities as well. Recognizing the wealth of experience that adults bring to the classroom and their motivation for study, Jerold Apps nevertheless, points out that adult students often have problems adjusting to university life, struggle to learn academic procedures, possess rusty study skills, and sometimes have difficulty concentrating. Other problems, he says, include unrealistic goals, poor self-esteem (i.e., lacking in

In this same vein, Mortimer Adler in the essay mentioned just a moment ago goes beyond a mere appreciation for the adult student to argue the provocative thesis that only adults can be truly "educated." His thesis is intensified if we consider that in terms of student preparation and maturity level, college, these days, is really the new high school. In any case, Adler asks us to consider the following scenario.

Consider the brightest boy or girl at the best imaginable college—much better than any which now exists—with the most competent faculty and with a perfect course of study. Imagine this brightest student in the best of all possible colleges, spending four years industriously, faithfully, and efficiently applying his or her mind to study. I say to you that, at the end of four years, this student, awarded a degree with the highest honors, is not an educated man or woman. And cannot be, for the simple reason that the obstacle to becoming educated in school is an inherent and insurmountable one, namely youth.¹⁵

Adler elaborates on his thesis by saying that "precisely because they [youth] are immature, properly irresponsible, not serious, and lack a great deal of experience, children in school are not educable."¹⁶ Youth, he avers, are much more *trainable* than adults especially in matters of simple habit formation. But the adult is much more *educable* because education is the cultivation of the mind. Education, he says,

consists in the growth of understanding, insight, and ultimately some wisdom. These growths require mature soil. Only in mature soil, soil rich with experience—the soul in the mature person—can ideas really take root. . . . When I say adults are more educable than children, I am really saying that adults can think better than children. . . . Basic learning—the acquisition of ideas, insight, and understanding—depends on being able to think. If adults can think better than children, they can also learn better—learn better in the sense of cultivating their minds.¹⁷

academic confidence), social-familial problems, and an excessive practical orientation. See his *The Adult Learner on Campus: A Guide for Instructors and Administrators*. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1981, p. 51.

¹⁵ Mortimer J. Adler, "Why Only Adults Can Be Educated," in *Invitation to Lifelong Learning*, edited by Ronald Gross. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Aristotle would agree for he believed that subjects that require experience (which ones do not?) would not disclose their true riches to the inexperienced. My own personal experience as an adult and also as a teacher of adults confirms these notions.

The older and more experienced I become, the more I myself as a continuing adult learner appreciate the gift of knowledge and education. Education only gets better with age. I am sure that college faculty members and administrators who as a lifelong learners continue to sharpen their skills and increase their knowledge will resonate with these personal remarks. As a teacher, I have also discovered that while traditional students bring with them a certain kind of excitement and charisma (as well as immaturity) to the class room, I have also found that the adult students with their serious spirit toward education make for an exceptionally challenging and productive classroom experience. Teaching adults is refreshing, plus it provides instructors with the sense that they are making a direct difference in the lives of those who hold the fortunes of world in their hands.

The Socio-Cultural and Economic Factor

An educational investment in adolescents (twelve to seventeen years of age) reaps dividends in the distant future (in ten or fifteen years). An educational investment in traditionally-aged college students (eighteen to twenty-four) reaps dividends in the near future (in five or ten years). An educational investment in adults (twenty-five plus) reaps dividends immediately! What an adult student learns in the classroom on Monday night can be applied at the office, in the board room, on the beat, in the home or at the civic group on Tuesday morning. There is hardly any lag time between effective

¹⁷ Ibid.

teaching and the application of what is taught in the lives and experience of adult students.

This observation, perhaps more than anything else, led me to appreciate the strategic importance of our adult students in the classroom at Dallas Baptist University. As an educator, I want to make a difference, Lord willing, and I want to make a difference not only in the *future*, but also *now*, especially in light of our culture's plight if not down right demise. Time is short and the days are evil.

The best way (and the fastest) to make an immediate and significant contribution to the world around me is by making a lasting impact on the minds and lives of adult students who are open to learning and eager to change. This simple notion transformed my mindset about adult education. What a resource, what an opportunity, what a way to fulfill the very reason why I chose a vocation in Christian higher education in the first place.

For example, an advertisement for DBU appearing in the August 6, 2008, business section of *The Dallas Morning News* showcases the fire chiefs in both Dallas and Fort Worth who both were students in and graduates of DBU's adult program. They credit their vocational success to their education on our campus. Chief Eddie Burns of Dallas Fire and Rescue asserts that "DBU taught me to be a servant leader. I credit my success to DBU." Chief Rudy Jackson of the Fort Worth Fire Department states that "I went there [to DBU] not only because they helped me build a schedule that worked for me, but because of their Christ-centered values. And the education is first-class."

Adult education is, indeed, a vital factor in improving our own nation's social, economic and cultural health. This has been noted by a variety of observers. For example, Henry Spille and David Stewart wrote an open letter in 1993 to Bill Clinton when he was President in praise of the value of adult learning to American well-being: "Satisfying the educational needs of adults is as important to the good health of America as satisfying the educational needs of children and young people. As you have already

pointed out, Mr. President, national efforts toward economic and social recovery must be infused throughout with a sound adult learning component."¹⁸

Similarly, Robert W. Tucker, noting that adult students "represent the 28 million managers and leaders in today's society . . . who function as agents of change in the workplace," asks these penetrating questions in his call for a "new agenda for a new American [adult] student":

Does any other group of college students stand to effect an immediate reversal in the decline of U.S. global competitiveness through the application of their newly learned skills to the labor force? Is there another sector of college students whose future is more intimately and reciprocally tied to the workplace, families, and communities served by higher education? Is there a class of younger students more certain of their reasons for attending college, more dedicated to succeeding or more eager to apply what they have learned to their work environment? As taxpaying, working adult citizens, comprising nearly half of the nation's student body, are these not the students most deserving of priority on the national educational agenda?¹⁹

The indispensability of adult education to social, cultural and economic betterment at the national and international levels has not escaped the awareness of the United Nations. As long ago as November 1976, The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization published a document entitled the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*. In commenting on this manifesto, Frank Spikes has forcefully expressed the profound relationship of adult education to national and international socio-economic and cultural well-being.

¹⁸ Henry A. Spille and David W. Stewart, "An Open Letter to President Bill Clinton," in *The Center Update: The Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials*, Spring 1993, p. 1. This newsletter is published by the American Council on Education.

¹⁹ Tucker, "A New Agenda," p. 3. In a similar vein and as far back as 1960, Wilbur C. Hallenbeck, noting trends such as the rapidity of change, the dominance of technology, the intensity of specialization, the complexity of human relationships, and the vastness of opportunity, argues that the "changing world has brought American culture to that state where it depends upon adult education to make its civilization operate successfully." See his article entitled, "The Function and Place of Adult Education in American Society," in the *Handbook of Adult Education in the United States*. Edited by Malcolm Knowles. Chicago: Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., 1960, p. 38.

The practice of adult education is clearly integrated into the context of lifelong learning; emphasis is placed upon viewing the adult as being a part of a larger cultural, societal, and economic matrix. Hence, [the] wholism of the lifelong education process relative to other aspects of society is the key to the thrust of the philosophical foundation of this [UNESCO] resolution. The content, process, objectives, strategies, and relationships of the practice of adult education are viewed as being integral aspects of a total eco-system in which each element is codependent upon other elements of the system and thus are designed to mutually benefit each other during the process of growth and development of the individual and the society. *Adult education is thereby seen as being a key structural component of society through which social, cultural, and economic development in the largest sense will be enhanced and facilitated. No longer does the educating of adults assume a peripheral position of adjunct importance. Rather it becomes the central force through which progress of the individual man and woman, and the collective cultures and societies of the world can be advanced* (emphasis added).²⁰

More recently, UNESCO sponsored a fifth international conference on adult education in Hamburg Germany on July 14-18, 1997. The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning that resulted from this gathering at the close of the millennium claimed that “Adult education thus becomes more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice. Adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life.”²¹

Indeed, a sixth UNESCO global adult education conference is scheduled for May 19-22, 2009 in Belém, Brazil under the theme of “Living and Learning for a Viable Future — The Power of Adult Learning.” This intergovernmental conference will be “a platform for policy dialogue and advocacy on adult learning and education” and will work “...[t]o create commitment and action on adult learning and education.” It will seek “to

²⁰ Frank Spikes, "The Worldwide Struggle for Adult Education," in *Invitation to Lifelong Learning*. Edited by Ronald Gross. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 267.

²¹ The Hamburg Declaration is available at: <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/con5eng.pdf>. Accessed August 9, 2008.

draw attention to the relation and contribution of adult learning and education to sustainable development, conceived comprehensively as comprising ... social, economic, ecological and cultural dimension[s]" with three major objectives in mind:

To push forward the recognition of adult learning and education as an important element of and factor conducive to lifelong learning, of which literacy is the foundation;

To highlight the crucial role of adult learning and education for the realization of current international education and development agendas;

To renew political momentum and commitment and to develop the tools for implementation in order to move from rhetoric to action.²²

If it is true that adult education is crucial to the national economic and social recovery of the United States, and if it plays such an important role in the global socio-cultural and economic system, then Christian institutions which embrace the challenge and task of adult education are poised to influence not only individuals and their local communities, but also the nation and even the world through its graduates who have been exposed to and influenced by an educational philosophy and curriculum rooted in the Christian world view.

The Philosophical Factor

Given the role that adult education now plays in contemporary culture, it is no shock to learn that many thinkers have carefully formulated philosophies of this enterprise that establish its nature and purposes. Philosophies of education, including adult education, are not neutral, for as Alan Bloom pointed out in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, "every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain and that informs its curriculum. *It wants to produce a certain kind of person.*"²³

What is at stake here is not just competing educational philosophies that might be the subject of debate at an academic meeting. Rather, the prize up for grabs in developing philosophies of adult education is human life: the formation of the minds and

²² See http://www.unesco.org/ui/en/UIPDF/nesico/Information%20Update_CONFINTEA%20VI_July08.pdf. Accessed August 9, 2008.

²³ Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 26 (emphasis added).

character of adult human beings and the kind of impact such adult learners will have in every sphere and walk of life.

C. S. Lewis's philosophy of education articulated in his book *The Abolition of Man* helps us to recognize what hangs in the balance. What a difference different philosophies of education, including philosophies of adult education, make on students and society. As Lewis contends, contemporary educational systems that debunk objective reality and true truth (which he calls by the Chinese term the *Tao*) and that fail to cultivate just sentiments and ordinate affections — trained emotions in accordance with reason — produce human beings with uncultivated souls who are actually barbarians in disguise. Lewis creatively refers to such individuals as “trousered apes,” “urban blockheads,” and in general, “men without chests” (or magnanimity). The great moral irony is that in this context we *still* expect our overrated systems of education to produce men and women of virtue and valor. This is impossible, however, if the education they receive is an education in moral relativism, or what Lewis also called “the poison of subjectivism.”²⁴ “In a sort of ghastly simplicity,” Lewis observes, “we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.” The practical result of this kind of mis-education, Lewis declares “must be the destruction of the society which accepts it” and in the long run will prove to be “the abolition of man.”²⁵

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967). Allan Bloom has updated Lewis's contention about the conduct of modern education in the spirit of relativism by his often quoted statement that introduces *The Closing of the American Mind*: “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that *truth is relative*” (p. 25, emphasis added). In the Points section of the August 10, 2008 edition of *The Dallas Morning News*, editorial writer Rod Dreher, in an article on Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) wrote that while these two modern prophets could bring down Communism, they were much less effective in confronting the fundamental maladies of the modern West. Dreher writes: “The pair spoke truth to Soviet power and it could not withstand the force of their witness. But the power of consumerism, moral relativism, and freedom without responsibility proved [to be] a far more resistant foe.”

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man Or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (New York: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1996), *passim*.

Practitioners of adult education have devised philosophies from several perspectives that just may reflect Lewis's deep educational concerns. Three main schools of thought on adult education may be briefly summarized here.²⁶ *The liberal-progressive tradition* has been central in adult education since its beginning in the 1920s. Those of this mindset respectively focus on the cultivation of the human intellect through the mastery of subject matter and emphasize the educational value of human experience. Both assert that the *telos* (i.e., the end, aim, goal) of adult education is decidedly socio-political, that is, "its purpose is to abet the democratic order, which, although it is good, can be improved."²⁷

The human potential and personal growth perspective draws on the presuppositions of the humanist school of psychology, and tends to focus on the individual person rather than on the collective society as in the previous philosophical construct. According to one practitioner in this camp, the goal of adult education is the development of personal maturity, meaning the growth and development of the individual towards wholeness in order to achieve constructive spiritual, vocational, physical, political and cultural goals. A maturing person is continually advancing towards understanding and constructive action in the movement from mere survival (the state of lower animals) to the discovery of one's self both as a person and responsible member of society. In short, the goal of adult education is to assist adult learners to make choices that maximize human potential²⁸

²⁶ Taken from Hal Beder, "Purposes and Philosophies of Adult Education" p. 44ff.

²⁷ According to Beder, those who embrace this perspective include J. K. Hart, *Adult Education*. New York: Crowell, 1927; E. Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education*. New York: Republic, 1926. P. H. Sheats, C. D. Jayne, and R. B. Spence, *Adult Education: The Community Approach*. New York: Dryden Press, 1953.

²⁸ Here are the following contributors to this outlook according to Beder's analysis. L. P. Jacks, "To Educate the Whole Man," in *Adult Education in Action*. Edited by M. Ely. New York: George Grady Press, 1936; P. A. Bergevin, *A Philosophy for Adult Education*. New York: Seabury Press, 1967; Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*. Revised edition. New York: Cambridge Books, 1980; H. A. Overstreet, *The Mature Mind*. New York: Norton, 1949; J. D. Mezirow, "A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education," *Adult Education* 32 (1981): 421ff.; L. Bryson, *Adult Education*. New York: American Book Company, 1936.

The liberationist or radical Marxist model of adult education, like the liberal-progressive approach, focuses mainly on the relationship of education to society. Advocates in this camp consider societies dominated by capitalism to be intrinsically unequal because the system perpetuates the dominance of the privileged bourgeoisie over the oppressed proletariat. The supremacy of the ruling power is exercised by means of ideological hegemony, and this oppressive social structure is perpetuated through the culture's educational system. Society must be changed, and one way to do it is by means of the counter-cultural critique of adult education which elevates the learners' consciousness and empowers them to act and even revolt on their own behalf.²⁹

To these sets of ideas seeking to influence the direction of adult education and "produce a certain kind of person," the Christian voice and vision must be added. To attempt this not only means to present a positive, Christian, philosophical contribution to adult educational theory, but it also means, in light of the foregoing discussion, (1) to impact in a Christian manner the course of social, cultural and economic events at a national and global level; (2) to influence the lives of ripened adult students personally, intellectually and spiritually; and (3) to perpetuate the Western educational heritage of adult education and to do so on the foundation of the Christian world view (which until recently lay at the root of almost all major educational enterprises in the Western world).³⁰ The opportunity and responsibility is mind boggling.

²⁹ Beder cites the following as adherents to various aspects of this overall general perspective. M. Carnoy, "Education and the Capitalist State: Contributions and Contradictions." In *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays in Class Ideology and the State*. Edited by M. Apple. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982; F. Youngman, *Adult Education and Socialist Pedagogy*. London: Croom-Helm, 1986; A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971; S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976; P. Bourdieu and J. Passeron, *Reproduction*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977; P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970; P. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press, 1973. No doubt recent events in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe will have modified significant aspects of this adult education model.

³⁰ George Marsden, "The Soul of the American University." *Faculty Dialogue* 15 (Fall 1991): 83-118. Originally published in *First Things*, January 1991.

The Biblical-Theological Factor

What, then, are the basic elements that lay the ground-work for adult higher education in Christian perspective? Consider the following summary.

1. The existence, excellent greatness and mighty deeds of the triune God comprise the ultimate foundation of a Christian theory of adult education. Every facet of adult education must be developed on the basis of biblically based, Christian theistic presuppositions and principles.

2. Upon the basis of God's existence, nature and works made known through divine revelation in Scripture, Christian adult education posits an objective, independent reality and the existence of theological, moral, and intellectual truth that becomes the object of search and study in the academic setting.

a. Truth comprehensively grasped should become the focus in adult students' liberal arts education that they might better understand themselves, the world and their place in it

b. The study of world views and philosophy of education gives adult students the opportunity to seek such truth, form a world view, and refine their purposes for education.

c. This quest for truth should be modeled by Christian university professors and administrators.

3. Because the world is God's creation, and because He has made human beings as his image and likeness and directed them in an original commission to establish culture and civilization (the cultural mandate — Gen. 1: 26-28), the Christian adult educator promotes the quest to obtain technical skills and vocational training by which adult learners may not only enhance their own lives but also contribute effectively through their vocational callings to the ongoing development of culture and civilization in business, the arts, sciences, and technology.

4. The notion that human beings have been created as the *imago Dei* has three implications on adult education.

a. Adult educators should recognize the essentially religious or spiritual nature of persons meant for fellowship with God ("O Lord, You have made us for yourself and our spirits are restless until they rest in You" — St. Augustine) and that the desire for God and love of learning are unified. Christian education in all fields is a form of Christian discipleship. It is quite possible to encounter God through the gateway of the academic disciplines and what might be called "academic discipleship."³¹

b. Given this insight into our human nature and purpose, the education of adults in a Christian context should contribute toward their maturation as persons created in the image of God according to the pattern set forth in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, there should be an emphasis on the value of Christian liberal arts education that helps to foster this end.

c. Because all human beings bear the image and likeness of God, university administrators and faculty members should treat one another and all students, including adult students, with the respect and dignity they deserve.

5. The presence of sin and evil which disrupted God's original purposes for human beings and creation, and the provision of a cosmic salvation in Jesus Christ are also essential components of a biblical worldview that serves as the basis of adult education.

a. Because of the ideologies produced in a fallen world, each adult student should be given the opportunity to study the mosaic of meaning systems that make up modern thinking in order to understand themselves, others, academics, and the world in which they live.

b. Because of salvation in Jesus Christ, each adult student should have the opportunity to hear and respond to the content of the Christian gospel. Or if adult students are already Christians, they should be given the opportunity in college "to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3: 18).

6. Believing adult students who graduate from Christian colleges and universities should be infused with a vision throughout their educational experience to become agents of social change and cultural transformation in their areas of influence according to their specific callings from God. As N. T. Wright has written:

We need Christian people to work as healers: as healing judges and prison staff, as healing teachers and administrators, as healing shop keepers 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 with one hand and reach out the other, with wit and skill and cheerfulness, with compassion and sorrow and tenderness, to the places where our world is in pain.³²

³¹ My thanks to John Seel for this useful phrase.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? –

At Dallas Baptist University, these opportunities and challenges regarding adult education have been embraced and the results have been gratifying, and hopefully glorifying to God. Perhaps our program can serve as inspiration for Southwestern College. In DBU's College of Adult Education, entering adult learners can enroll in two foundational courses. The first is optional and is titled *CAED 3303: Experiential Learning for Adult Students*. In this class, students have the opportunity to gain up to thirty hours of academic credit for learning obtained from life and work experience. Such experiential learning is documented through the preparation and professorial evaluation of a professional portfolio. Earning "experiential learning credit" is especially attractive to adults who need to expedite the completion of their undergraduate degrees and who have precious little time to waste. But this is not all.

In a second (and required) foundations course *CAED 3301 Lifelong Learning for Adult Students*, adult students learn about the details of DBU's adult education program, explore their own lives through the preparation of a personal resume and the writing of their autobiographies, examine their vocational histories and aspirations, develop study skills, gain exposure to the concept of service learning, study critical thinking, shape a philosophy of education and examine the diversity of classic and contemporary worldviews. To accomplish this later purpose, all adult students read and study James Sire's book *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*.³³

These introductory courses have transformed the lives of many our adult students. They can earn credit hours earned toward the completion of their degrees.

³² N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 101.

³³ James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*. fourth edition. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

They gain an understanding of world views in general, and of the Christian world view in particular. They develop more sublime reasons for their educational career than just upward mobility. In light of these ideas and others like them, I came to this conclusion:

That the greatest opportunity for *immediate* influence that Dallas Baptist University possesses, in the fulfillment of its calling as a institution of higher education, is by means of the education of the adult student from a deeply Christian perspective.

Given, then, these historical, pedagogical, socio-economic, philosophical and biblical/theological factors that underscore the importance of adult education, Christian colleges and universities must challenge themselves with the following questions, and rethink their outlook on this whole area:

- Has the importance of adult education been forcefully imprinted upon the consciousness of the Christian higher education community thus making it aware of this important aspect of its educational vision and responsibility?
- What kinds of changes in attitudes and actions must be made in regard to adult students and adult education programs that reflect the all-inclusive vision of the kingdom of God and this corresponding educational mandate and social responsibility?
- What kind of deliberate and prayerful planning must be undertaken to initiate adult education programs, or to enhance the quality of existing programs at Christian colleges and universities making them the very best in the nation?
- How will God judge Christian colleges and universities — their faculty, staff, and administrators — who are responsible at this critical moment in human history for providing quality Christian adult education rooted in and guided by the perspective of the biblical world view?

CONCLUSION

In an essay entitled "The Marks of a Christian College," D. Elton Trueblood listed several practical steps by which a model Christian institution might be achieved. His list included the pursuit of excellence, the quality of teachers, the importance of spirituality, and finally, "ADULT EDUCATION!" Writing in 1957, he said:

I predict that the day will come when a good college will have as many students thirty years old and older as those who are eighteen to twenty-two. I don't see

why not. Plato thought that a man really ought to be over thirty before he studied philosophy seriously, and maybe he was right.³⁴

When I first read this, quite frankly I was surprised. Why would someone of Trueblood's stature think that adult education was necessary to create an exemplary Christian college? Because of my own personal experience in adult education, I think now I see why. Trueblood recognized the capacity of adults as learners and the importance of their contribution and influence not only in the classroom, but also in the wider world. For adults are truly the major players in the sum-total human affairs and an educational investment in them makes a Christian college complete. I think Chiefs Burns and Jackson would agree.

The present day "Adult Student Revolution" provides Christian colleges with the rare opportunity to fulfill a unique aspect of the educational task. Our opportunities are historic and we must prove ourselves equal to them. May no adult student be left behind!

³⁴ D. Elton Trueblood, "The Marks of a Christian College," in *Toward a Christian Philosophy of Higher Education*. Edited by J. P. von Gruening. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957, p. 169.