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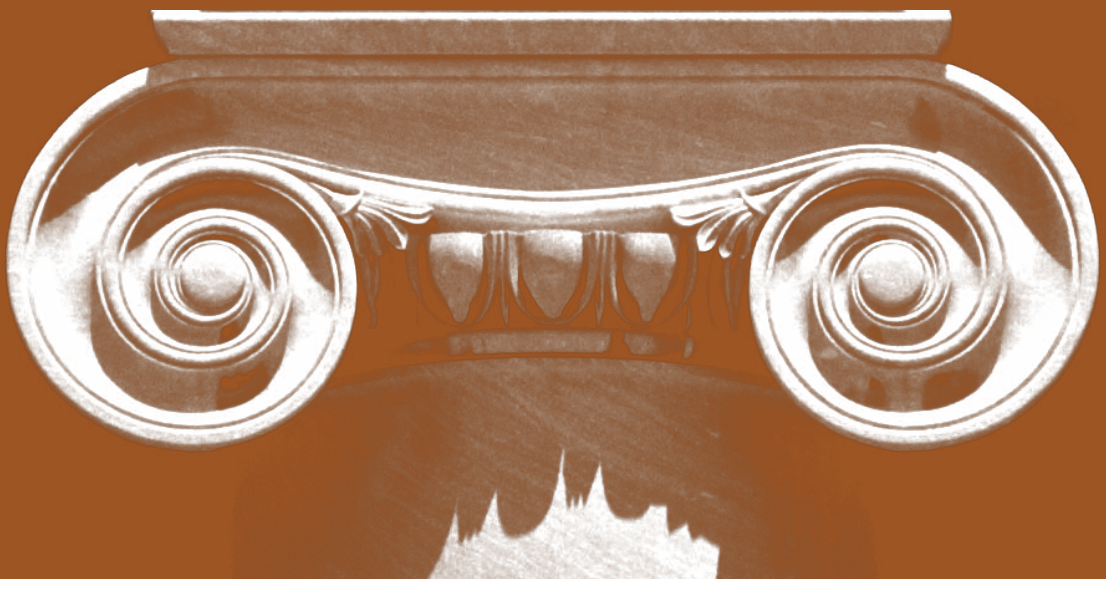

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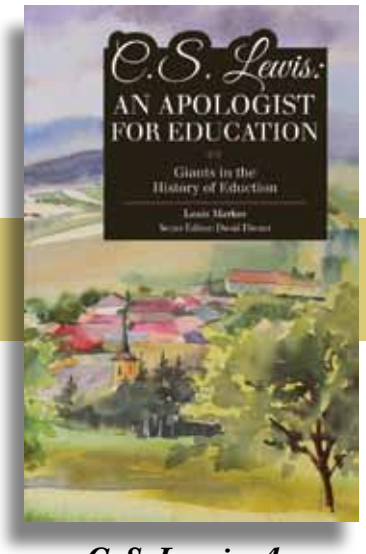

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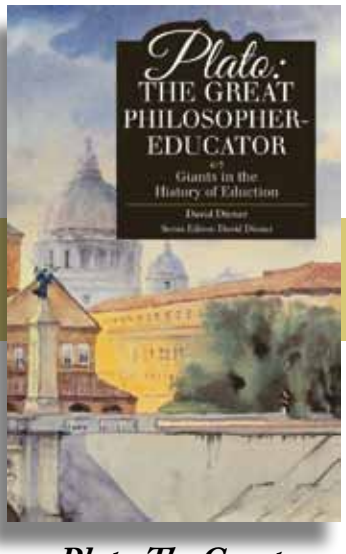

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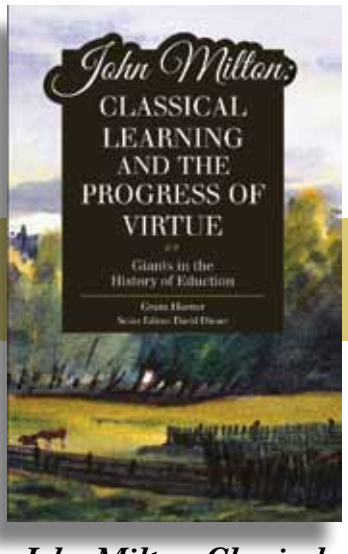

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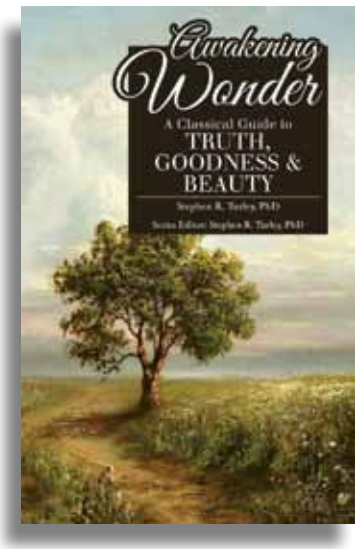

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CONTACT
Association of Classical & Christian Schools
PO Box 9741
Moscow, ID 83843

Phone: (208) 882-6101
Fax: (208) 882-8097
Email: dgoodwin@accsedu.org
Web: www.accsedu.org

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THE PEARL OF GREAT WISDOM: THE DEEP & ABIDING BIBLICAL ROOTS OF WESTERN LIBERAL EDUCATION

by David Lyle Jeffrey, Baylor University

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian famously asked, while St. Jerome related a troubled dream in which "the Judge of all" accuses him of being not a Christian but a Ciceronian, and Alcuin admonished the monks of Lindisfarne, "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?"—each echoing St. Paul in his still more extreme warning to the Corinthian Greeks about both syncretism and idolatry: "What has Christ to do with Belial?"

"Caveat lector!" all three seem to say: a grave risk of theological adultery attends upon dalliance with pagan authors. It is as if they wanted to separate, even cordon off, humanistic learning from more "appropriate" spiritual preoccupations, and typical modern citations of these famous injunctions implicate Christianity in a certain dour abstemiousness where the liberal arts or belle-lettres are concerned.

But does such exclusivism accurately describe the biblical influence on the humanities in Western history? No. The rich tradition of liberal learning in the West has in fact remained at the most fundamental levels more biblical than classical. From the fountain of biblical study flowed not only a high order of widely applicable interpretative skills (*techné*), but, more fundamentally, confidence in the crowning of knowledge with wisdom (its *logos*) continuously to correct and regenerate intellectual culture.

The classical goals of education, *eloquentia et sapientia*, eloquence and wisdom, cannot be successfully realized without a persevering reference to the higher and integrative wisdom of sacred Scripture. Today, I will suggest briefly at the end, we have found to our cost that the secular substitute, lacking transcendence, cannot ground and integrate the humanities.

CITING THE PAGANS

In intellectual history, ironies and contradictions are the norm. Jerome himself defended a notably generous citation of pagan authors in his own writings, but did so ingeniously by an appeal to worthy precedent, namely, the practice of the biblical authors themselves. He thus established a pattern of argument and of intellectual and textual practice that tells us much about how it would be biblical, and not Roman, authors who would come eventually to provide the apologia for humane learning generally.

David Lyle Jeffrey is distinguished professor of literature and the humanities at Baylor University and guest professor of English and comparative literature at Peking University. Among his recent books are Houses of the Interpreter *(Baylor University Press) and two co-authored and co-edited volumes,* The Bible and the University *(Paternoster Press/Zondervan) with C. Stephen Evans and* Christianity and Literature *(InterVarsity Press), with Gregory Maillet. Three of his children teach in Christian schools. This article originally appeared in* Touchstone Magazine *and is reprinted by permission of the author.*

Jerome asserts that the Jewish biblical authors themselves make learned and thoughtful use of Mideastern and Hellenic pagan literature (modern scholarship has confirmed many of his ascriptions in detail) and that St. Paul quotes from the Greek poets, such as Epimenides (Titus 1:12), Menander (1 Cor. 15:33), and Aratus (Acts 17:28). This, he says, establishes an order of appropriation self-confident enough that Paul can make skillful, fitting, often ironic use of alien instruments, much as when (Jerome says rather wryly) David uses Goliath's own sword to hack off the fallen giant's head.

Less humorously and yet tellingly for our subject, after citing the Deuteronomic laws permitting marriage to a captive woman, he asks: "What wonder . . . if I also, admiring the fairness of her from the grace of her eloquence, desire to make that secular wisdom which is my captive and my handmaid a rightful matron of the true Israel?"

Jerome goes on to cite a large bibliography of Jewish and Christian writers, bishops, and apologists, all of whom made deft use of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Virgil, and Quintillian to extend the reach and defend the claims of the gospel. But it is evident that pagan writers have not set the agenda.

Before Jerome, Clement had been a master of Greek literature, yet he celebrated the Hebrew Scriptures as "wisdom in all its splendor," distinct from and superior to the Hellenic foundation. As Robert Wilken noted in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, in Clement's writings the Bible "emerges for the first time as the foundation of a Christian culture."

So Jerome could build confidently upon an already established culture for which the Scriptures have become implicitly (when not explicitly) the primary foundation. Intellectually, as time goes on, marriage to secular wisdom proves more fruitful than celibacy; progeny abound, and in their turn become fruitful.

However, the language this progeny speaks is no longer Greek, but a vernacular version of what the reader's preface to the 1611 King James Bible calls "the language of Canaan" and southerners in the United States call "the language of Zion." Even as metaphor, this indicates a cultural fact of decisive importance.

WISDOM & ELOQUENCE

The development of the humanities in Western culture cannot be fully understood apart from an appreciation of scriptural husbandry and a kind of ecclesiastical mothering that, together, have birthed and nurtured Western intellectual life down to the present.

In brief, I want to support and extend Wilken's thesis that the notion that Christianity was "hellenized has outlived its usefulness" and "that a more apt expression would be the Christianization of Hellenism, though that expression does not capture the originality of Christian thought nor the debt owed to Jewish ways of thinking and to the Jewish Bible."

We cannot trace adequately the shaping of Western intellectual culture in the humane disciplines without considering a certain North African bishop, in particular, his enormously influential *On Christian Doctrine*, which helped to shape the way in which the Bible has come to be institutionalized in Western culture—even when invisibly. What Augustine set out to accomplish in this book was probably much less: really, just a broad-based guide to reading the Bible, sufficient to undergird an intelligent appreciation of Jewish texts in a Gentile culture.

But in its adequation of the goals of Ciceronian education to a biblical order of reasoning about language and truth, Augustine's work became a touchstone for later humanistic authors. The list of those indebted to it is long, but includes Cassiodorus, Bonaventure, Wyclif, Erasmus, Petrarch, Milton, Newman, and C. S. Lewis, to name just a few.

Augustine's pedagogical stratagems for the disciplines required an intelligent reading of Scripture that became

in some ways more influential than his exegesis. They helped to make the Bible not only the historical foundation for humane learning in the West, but also the procedural and methodological basis of nearly all scholarship in the humanities, including textual criticism, philological analysis, poetics, language theory, narrative epistemology, historiography, anthropology, positive law, and natural law.

So what did Augustine do? With regard to the goals of education, he does not seem to differ much from Cicero: eloquence and wisdom are the enduring *desiderata*. But though himself a teacher of rhetoric, he is emphatic that eloquence is an instrument, not an intrinsic good.

Why is this important? Because divine wisdom is essentially the burden of Scripture's content, and superior wisdom in the life of the reader its ultimate purpose. This wisdom is the intrinsic good at which all study should aim. Acquisition of this wisdom in turn provides a more reliable platform for a distinctive and superior grace in utterance. "One speaks more or less wisely," Augustine thinks, "to the extent that he has become more or less proficient" in the Holy Scriptures.

Wisdom, rather than Ciceronian eloquence in itself, is the ultimate justification of all higher learning. Meanwhile, biblical language constitutes a special order of eloquence, "fitting for those of higher authority." These convictions have had incalculable influence on Western culture.

TEXTS ARE MEANS

Yet the instrumentality of language nevertheless requires careful reflection, and texts were for Augustine a means and not an end. He denounced "that miserable servitude of the spirit in the habit of mistaking signs for things," arguing that "it is a mark of good and distinguished minds to love the truth within words and not the words themselves." In the pursuit of wisdom, "we love those things by which we are carried along for the sake of that toward which we are carried."

This image of education as a journey—ours is to be "a road of the affections" on which we learn the good by doing the good—deeply obligated to the stories of Abraham and the Exodus, is charged with implications for the practice of the intellectual and moral virtues. Not everything we use instrumentally is to be loved, but since the end of our pursuit is knowledge of that Being whose image we call "human," knowledge of the human is essential to our own participation in that Being.

These formulations are echoed seven centuries later in Anselm of Canterbury's *Monologion*, as an introduction to all higher intellectual reflection. Implicitly, our participation in the *imago Dei* makes of the study of the humanities something almost sacramental—at least as we acknowledge that much we recognize as the highest human good is not simply a product of our own acculturation, or as we might now say, our "social construction."

Recognition of the magnitude and authority of our exemplar, Augustine wants to say, is essential, and not least because it allows the mind formed by the Scriptures to become capable of a true cosmopolitanism. For example:

> If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use.

Referring to the Egyptians, who "had not only idols and grave burdens," but also "vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to a better use," he writes:

> In the same way all the teachings of the pagans

> contain not only simulated and superstitious imaginings and grave burdens of unnecessary labor, which each one of us leaving the society of pagans under the leadership of Christ ought to abominate and avoid, but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some most useful precepts concerning morals.

That is, truth is truth from wherever it comes. (We can also, Augustine thought, expect there to be a harmonium between the books of Nature and of Scripture, rightly placed and understood.)

Obscurity and figurative discourse in relation to the "big questions" is not necessarily a failure of language or a means of gnostic exclusion of the uninitiated, but even in Scripture itself can be an artfully deliberate means of *inducare, educare*, leading to the Truth. The appropriate method of learned investigation is thus hermeneutically ordered: it is patient unfolding of the layers of meaning "hidden" in the text, separating "fruit" from "chaff"—the prototype of what would be called a millennium and a half later, by professional readers long secularized, *explication de texte*.

THE FOUNDATIONAL BIBLE

We see this double effect of biblical study, of interpretative skills developed in the service of the acquisition of wisdom, growing through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, almost to the present.

It is well known that not only were the monasteries centers for the study of Scripture and theological commentary and for the growth of experimental science and medicine, they were, because their libraries were the repository of Greek and Latin texts, durable centers for the continuation of classical learning as well. But here is the point too often missed: classical learning, indeed all types of learning in the monasteries, was organized around a *studium* whose central preoccupation was the Bible as a foundation for *all* learning.

It was the study of the Bible, far more than the study of Cicero and the classical authors generally, that spread Latin literacy *and* produced also a textual tradition in several European vernaculars. Not only was the Bible foundational for general humane learning in European culture; without it, much of Roman secular learning and the ancient texts themselves would not have survived to be a part of our culture at all.

To be sure, there were convoluted attempts by some among the monastic librarians to justify holding on to texts which were not only pagan in the religious sense but, as in the case of Ovid or Catullus, wondrously lewd, even pornographic. The incongruity has led to not a little learned humor.

But there is more to it. To take but one example, the allegorizations of Ovid represent a tenuous but nonetheless prodigious medieval effort to baptize works of art that could not, in their native garb (or lack of it), have been licitly embraced.

Of course, the liberal arts as we know them did not begin to emerge in their familiar form in Christian Europe until the work of the polymath Boethius (A.D. 480–525), the Roman Christian whose treatises on arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music are foundational for what he himself was first to call the *quadrivium*. Grammar, rhetoric, and logic—the *trivium*—had been standard for some time.

From thence onward to the nineteenth century it is difficult to find a major European humanist whose intellectual formation was not in some way grounded in study of the sacred page. For Hugh of St. Victor, in his magnum opus on liberal education, the *Didascalicon,* the "seven to be studied by beginners" were assigned by the ancients principally as "the best tools, the fittest entrance through which the way to philosophic truth is opened to our intellect." "They are pillars of wisdom (cf. Prov. 9:1) rather than wisdom itself. This approach, which persisted well into the modern period,

presupposes a still higher intrinsic good, and Richard of St. Victor, one of Hugh's students, comments in his *Doctrinale* that "all arts serve the Divine Wisdom," a wisdom found primarily in the close study of Scripture. "Each lower art," he continued, "if rightly ordered, leads to a higher one. Thus, the relation existing between the word and the thing requires that grammar, dialectic and rhetoric should minister to history."

NOTHING SUPERFLUOUS

In Hugh and Richard we can still hear Augustine's voice: the liberal arts function like signs in a meta-language we must learn if we want a full-bodied engagement with human wisdom as it comes to us, both in history and ultimately in sacred history, of which, on the Christian view, all other story is anticipation or refraction.

Although the Scriptures are not finally tribalist or exclusive, their attentive study requires our mastering what will seem to the casual reader apparently "useless and forbidding matter," perhaps especially in the Old Testament histories. Hugh teaches that there is value even in the alien cultural particulars, because in a program of learning focused on Wisdom "nothing is superfluous."

For Bonaventure, a century later, all of the arts are both a means of common grace and a trace (*vestigium*) of that Divine Wisdom of which human flourishing is an axiom. In his *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam* he traces all the arts, and particularly the liberal arts, to what for him is the ultimate source of our knowledge, human and divine, namely, Scripture as articulated divine word.

By "arts," he means secular or empirical knowledge as distinct from the knowledge of God. On this view, all knowledge is a light, or means of our understanding, but the highest of all lights—superior to philosophical knowledge, the knowledge arrived at by sense perception, and the mastery of the mechanical arts—is the "light of Sacred Scripture."

Yet, he writes, the "Wisdom of God which lies hidden in Sacred Scripture is hidden in *all* of knowledge and in *all* nature." In this light, "all divisions of knowledge are handmaids of theology." Here, in short, is yet another medieval affirmation of the providential unity of reason and revelation, faith and reason, making explicit to the reader that sacred Scripture is the key to any possible unity of prospect and any possibility that reason (and the humanities generally) will come to its proper end.

The confidence late medieval intellectuals expressed in this view of the interconnectedness of liberal learning or the products of reasoned investigation with biblical revelation and its progressive understanding in the Church is enduringly impressive. It is also presuppositional to intellectual life in the Renaissance humanist tradition and is regarded by the humanists themselves as liberating.

On the one hand, John Calvin will say in the *Institutes* that once we have acknowledged the Spirit of God to be "the only fountain of truth," it will in fact oblige us "*not* to reject or condemn truth whenever it appears." Anything (natural or human) which is "noble and praiseworthy" can be traced to the hand of God, whether the work be done by fellow believers or by the "ungodly."

On the other hand, other Renaissance humanists sought recovery of the Scriptures in better critical editions and historical commentary alike; the rallying cry of Erasmus was "*Ad fontes!*"—"Back to the sources." To the evangelical humanist movement he exemplified, in which figures such as John Colet, Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, Johannes Reuchlin, and even, in his own fashion, Martin Luther played a part, we owe the dramatic recovery of Scripture to a wider intellectual discourse which became vernacular in the sixteenth century.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

What we witness in such a vigorous renewal of

commitment to Holy Scripture is not, as some have too lightly thought, simply a kind of narrowing bibliocentrism. It is evidence, rather, of a renewed primary engagement with the actual foundation of Western intellectual culture, evidence that Scripture continued to occupy a unique status in humanistic university discourse beyond the High Middle Ages well into the Reformation and the Modern period.

I do not mean that the *ipse verbum* of Scripture is everywhere obtrusively present in phrasing or citation, as we might find it in the early monastic writings, say, or over the centuries in the Scripture-saturated writings of such figures as Bernard of Clairvaux, Jeremy Taylor, Bunyan, and Milton. I mean it formed the presuppositional and teleological framework in such disparate scientists as Boyle, Newton, and Poincarré, in philosophers such as Locke, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Maritain, poets such as Cowper, Goethe, Charlotte Brontë, the Brownings, Eliot, and Claudel, not to mention in legal thinkers such as Henri de Bracton, Sir Edward Coke, F. W. Maitland, and Sir William Blackstone.

In all of these authors, biblical allusion and plenitude of biblical idiom is a reflex of something deeper. The Bible has in the Western tradition become what a Platonist might call the "intelligible object," but I would prefer to call rather an *ontological object* of intellectual reflection—invisible but present—even when the immediate epistemological object is apparently something else.

In fact, the presence of Scripture as an ontological object can often be felt even when it is being explicitly challenged. A notable instance is the opening scene of Goethe's *Faust I*, where we find the ambitious professor Faust determined upon a translation of John's Gospel superior to Luther's, intending to subvert the authority of the original text.

The text of Scripture remains critically "present" throughout his great Romantic drama. It is the highest tribute to Scripture's vital presence as ontological object that all Goethe's ambitions may be summarized as a wish not merely to translate but rather to rewrite the Bible.

The same sort of thing might be said of Rousseau's *Confessions*, in which biblical language is employed to subvert both biblical precept and the intrinsic procedure and methodology of Augustine as a benchmark orthodox reader of Scripture. Rousseau intends a kind of rascal's reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, even (and perhaps especially) if it reveals, *de facto*, an infernal reading of the Bible.

A FRUITFUL SCRIPTURE

Yet not all outgrowths of Romanticism's triumphant subjectivity required such gestures. In the thirties, the Southern Agrarians Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and Allen Tate silently appropriated for their "New Criticism" a methodology evolved for biblical study. In the last two decades, literary theorists like Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, and David Damrosch have put on center stage the ancient and hallowed Jewish traditions of Bible study as an introduction to modern comparative literary theory and criticism.

These efforts have in turn morphed rather quickly into a renewed effort to study the biblical texts in their own right, outside of the dominant professional religious strictures. In Burton Visotzky's *The Genesis of Ethics* and Aviva Zornberg's *The Beginning of Desire,* as more recently in Harold Bloom's *Jesus and Yahweh*, for example, we see biblical texts applied to a kind of new secular humanistic discourse for the marketplace.

Since the 1970s, studies of "the Bible *as* Literature" and "the Bible *and* Literature" have emerged to great prominence in the university. But it might more truthfully be said that this kind of treatment has been emerging since Matthew Arnold's program to re-situate the Bible as the greatest English literary (rather than religious) foundation in the nineteenth century, continued since by influential literary theorists like

Roland Barthes and Northrop Frye.

Within the university, more and more scholars see the value of the Bible and biblical tradition to the liberal arts. Some of this is occasioned by a critique of the state of education for its failure to maintain its focus on the redemptive and broadly humane purpose of a liberal arts education.

Two recent and influential works, *The Decline of the Secular University* by C. John Sommerville and Harry Lewis's *Excellence Without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* both lament our failure to retain at the heart of the liberal arts curriculum the values we have traditionally associated with biblical wisdom. Sommerville writes with the bewilderment of a biblical prophet who cannot quite believe that from his own mouth such words are proceeding: "The academy needs to learn to speak theologically. This undoubtedly sounds alarming, *but* . . . we have been really creating a tacit but unfortunately barren substitute for it all along."

A RICH STUDY

Yes. And what we have found to our cost, as I noted at the beginning, is that the secular substitute for the biblical *studium*, lacking transcendence, fails to provide anything like an ontological object sufficient to ground and integrate the curriculum. According to Sommerville, we need most urgently to see that "the concepts of religion and of the human will survive, witnessing to an ultimacy we can't ignore."

In retrospect, attempts to pursue the liberal arts as though they were in themselves intrinsic goods, and not pillars of wisdom, have not been sustainably fruitful. As the poet Charles Tomlinson puts it, we have discovered repeatedly that "facts have no eyes."

In our sometimes enthusiastic preoccupation with *techné* at the expense of logos, promoting technical excellences over wisdom, we may have committed our own version of the error forewarned against in one of the earliest defenses of the liberal arts, Martianus Cappella's ninth-century *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*.

He argued that the Ciceronian goals of education, *eloquentia et sapientia*, cannot be successfully realized without a perseverant reference for meaning to the higher and integrative wisdom of Sacred Scripture, such as Augustine and others had championed. We can now see, perhaps, a little more clearly what he saw, that it was this "turning of the many toward the One" that allowed the predominant riches of the biblical *studium* to become a constantly flowing fountain, irrigating all of the other arts.

As with most types of effective irrigation, much of this has been most effective when least ostentatious. The commitment to Scripture as our fundamental study has brought us not only a high order of interpretative skills but also a confidence in wisdom that continuously corrects and regenerates intellectual culture. Whether in the medieval university, in the dissenting academy of the eighteenth century, or the American liberal arts college movement of the nineteenth, this recurrent stream has been the lifeblood of vital educational development.

CENTERING ON WISDOM

I wish to conclude with a comment on that higher goal towards which Scripture, more than Cicero, has pointed our traditions: *sapientia, sophia, chokma*. If there is anything we need now to learn from the fruitful centuries of practice in the humane disciplines, it is that we cannot long thrive without a centering of our efforts upon the getting of wisdom.

Hugh of St. Victor already in the twelfth century acknowledged the hypertrophy of disciplines with which we are far more familiar—and the growth of what he called the "appendages of the arts." He warned that those who "willingly desert truth in order to become entangled in these mere byproducts of the arts, will find . . . exceedingly great pains and little fruit."

We who have experienced a far worse hypertrophy of the disciplines and perhaps more than a little

entanglement in the painful byproducts can confirm this. The corrective for Hugh was to recognize that the humane disciplines are instruments to an intrinsic and higher good, namely, wisdom: an abiding, life-changing, and personally transcendent *gravitas*.

We who practice and teach the humane disciplines must remind ourselves that we are not simply in the knowledge industry, but—and more compellingly—committed to the business of wisdom.

EDUCATING ROYALTY

by Roy Alden Atwood

We must teach our children to be Kingdom heirs—not just laborers in the marketplace

"Who are you?" a university student once asked me.

Odd question, I thought. I'd handled countless student questions, but this one caught me unprepared.

"Uh . . . I'm a professor," I answered weakly.

"No!" he shot back. "I don't mean what do you *do*, but *who* are you?"

His question unsettled me. Like most North Americans, I'd been carefully, though not intentionally, catechized since a lad at my parents' side that the first and most important question we ask adults at first meeting (after getting their name) is, "What do you do?"

I'd learned that catechism lesson well, repeating it literally hundreds of times in all kinds of social settings over the years. But that catechism had left me quite unprepared to answer *this* more fundamental question about my personal identity separate from my place in the market.

That grieved me because, as a Christian, I had been better versed in the catechism of secular pragmatism than in Lord's Days 12 and 13 or the Scriptures. And I knew I wasn't the only one.

THE ANSWER THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ* . . . .
>
> — Romans 8:16-17a

As I have reflected on that encounter over the years, I've realized that the biblical and covenantal answer to the question, "Who are you?" is a glorious one that stands in stark contrast to the secular myth that our employment or "career" defines us. Of course, our work and callings as Christians in the marketplace are important. Providing for our families is a great privilege and responsibility. But the priority of work

Starting July 1, Roy Atwood is the Abraham Kuyper distinguished professor of Classics at Morthland College (www.morthland.edu) in West Frankfort, IL. He is the immediate past president of New Saint Andrews College in Moscow, ID, and has been involved with classical and Christian higher education for more than 20 years.
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in both our lives and the education of our children is almost certainly misplaced and overemphasized today in Reformed circles.

Our Calvinistic work ethic and sense of vocation—serving the Lord in all things—are a glorious heritage, but in our twenty-first century context, they have become largely indistinguishable from the middle class idolatry common among our unbelieving neighbors (i.e., having "another object in which men place their trust" [Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 95]).

In fact, [with] over 30+ years of university teaching, evenly divided between secular universities and Christian colleges, I can testify that the one question all parents —Christian and non-Christian alike—ask about higher education is, "*What kind of job* can my kid get when he/she graduates?"

Intended or not, that question reveals deep worldview priorities. And such a question is certainly not the fruit of careful, prayerful parental reflection on what it means to educate covenant children as heirs of Christ who will *seek first* the kingdom.

By contrast, the Scriptures never identify God's covenant children as people with jobs who happen to hold to a particular religious tradition. Instead, the Bible repeatedly calls us heirs of a kingdom, the adopted sons and daughters of the King of the universe. We are not just Christians who happen to have various jobs or work to do. *We are royalty* (Rom. 8:14-17, Eph. 1:3-6, I Pet. 2:9).

We will reign over all creatures with Christ eternally (Heid. Cat., Q. 32). We are the adopted children of God and fellow *heirs* with Jesus, with all the privileges of the sons of God (Luke 2:11, Acts 10:36, I Tim. 6:15, Rev. 19:16; Heid. Cat., Q. 34). We are princes and princesses of the King of kings! *We are royal heirs!*

And that answer to the question, "Who are you?" *changes everything*!

Like young Prince George, the baby heir to the throne of England and the United Kingdom, a day mustn't pass that we wonder who we are, why we are being educated, and what we are being prepared to be and to do. We are heirs to a throne and a Kingdom far greater and more glorious than the one in England. The House of Windsor pales in comparison to Jesus's realm and our divine inheritance! How much more, then, should we, who are heirs of the King of kings and Lord of lords, prepare ourselves and our children to be thoroughly and faithfully educated in everything it means to be a son and daughter of the Creator, Redeemer, and Lord of the Universe. Thoroughly and faithfully educated in everything it means to be royalty.

WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?

If we understand we are educating royalty, how should that impact how we teach, and what we expect?

Then we will understand there is no time for the wicked nonsense about "sowing wild oats" or setting a low bar of expectations for our children. That is the rebellious spirit of prodigals who forget who they (and their children) really are. Those who are in line to take their places in Christ's kingdom as princes and princesses must expect more of themselves and of their children. "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). Because we are royalty in Christ, God has king-sized expectations and blessings in store for us and our children—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The entire book of Proverbs is Solomon's instruction to his royal heirs to

> know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles (Prov. 1:2-6).

Such an education must provide much more than an awareness of fragmented facts or specialized work skills for a place in the job market. Again, that's not to say that facts and skills are not important. Nor is it to say that we should suddenly trade pragmatic, nose-to-the-grindstone sweat of our brows for pious sounding spiritual platitudes.

The issues are

1. where does the education of Christ's royal heirs fit in our list of priorities and
2. what should that education look like?

PRIORITIES: WE ARE ROYALTY. SO START ACTING LIKE IT.

> Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the *instruction* of the Lord, nor be weary when corrected by him. For the Lord *instructs* the one he loves, and corrects every son whom he receives." It is for *instruction* that you have to endure. *God is treating you as sons.*
>
> —Hebrews 12:5-7

Those who are fellow heirs in Christ know that His regal ways are not the power-grabbing, lording-it-over-others, self-seeking ways of the ungodly. Far from it. Christ ascended to His Father's throne only *after sacrificing everything* for His people and His creation. He gave himself away. His royal way is the way of selfless love and sacrifice. He died that we might die to sin and death. He lives that we might live in glory forever. Sacrificial service for the sake of the kingdom is the mark of true kingship, true royalty. It characterizes our Lord Christ. And it must characterize our Lord's true heirs in their lives and in their education.

As Christ's royal heirs, we dare not be content to prepare ourselves or our children merely to be cogs in the economic machinery of our secular consumer culture. Even the ancients understood that slaves are only trained to perform tasks. They have no rights of inheritance, no deeper identity. A slave's identity is his work.

But free citizens and royalty, who will dedicate themselves to the advance of the kingdom, must be educated deeply for the day when their royal leadership and service is expected. Similarly, we are called to a higher purpose and bear greater responsibility for how we live and prepare our children for their royal callings.

Unfortunately, we have, as the author of Hebrews suggests, forgotten the divine exhortation to educate our children in the *nurture and instruction* of the Lord (Eph. 6:4, Heb. 12:5ff). We have forgotten in part because we have forgotten who we are.

A ROYAL EDUCATION: RECOVERING THE LOST TOOLS OF LEARNING

This memory lapse is most evident in *how* we educate our children today. Education, even that which purports to be Christian, is now often devoted primarily to the goal of producing good little workers for the secular labor force, efficient widgets for our economy's production line, and little more.

That falls far short of the biblical expectation that Christian children be saturated in the instruction of the Lord and grow up knowing what it means to be royal heirs of Christ the King. An education bearing the name of the King ought, at the least, to offer His royal heirs . . .

1. A comprehensive and integrative understanding of God's world and of how all things cohere in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4-11).

Such an education will give children the "big picture" of how all things, all spheres of creation, are interrelated in the glory of their Creator.

The university itself was a Christian invention in the Middle Ages (the earliest established between A.D. 1100 and 1200), designed to give students an integrated Christian vision and foundation for all future learning. That was the original purpose of the classical liberal arts (meaning, the arts of a free citizen). For almost a millennium, Christian universities taught the classical liberal arts or the so-called *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*:

- The *Trivium*, or the Three Ways, stressed the good structure of language (Grammar), the way to discern truth (Logic), and how to express truth beautifully (Rhetoric)—all to encourage a student's life-long love of goodness, truth, and beauty in words and language, as typified by the Word Himself in John 1:1-14.
- The *Quadrivium*, or the Four Ways, encouraged a life-long love of goodness, truth, and beauty in the use of numbers (Arithmetic), numbers in space (Geometry), numbers in time (Music or Harmony), and numbers in space and time (Astronomy), revealing the unity and diversity of creation and of our Triune Creator Himself (Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," and Matt. 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the *Holy Spirit*").
- Together, the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*, the original seven liberal arts, offered students essential insights into the harmony and wholeness of God's diverse world and into the interrelated truth, goodness, and beauty of its Triune Creator. They didn't give students just the facts or skills for a job, but the tools of lifelong learning from a Christian perspective.

Unfortunately, today's arbitrarily selected smorgasbord of academic subjects and randomly structured university curricula, following the modern analytic, scientific tradition, tend to do the opposite: they offer fragmented bits of information with no principle of coherence or relationship. But in God's economy, the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. An education that does not teach us *how* to see the *wholeness* of God's creation, and to equip us to understand how *all things cohere in Christ*, inevitably misses the big picture about creation and creation's God. It is a partial, incomplete, distorted education.

Curiously, *specialization* at the undergraduate level was virtually unknown in North America prior to the late nineteenth century. University students did not "major" in narrow academic disciplines or vocational specializations prior to 1879. They couldn't. "Majors" simply didn't exist before then. Instead, all undergraduates received a classical, integrated liberal arts foundation. The universities gave them essential tools for learning that applied to all their various callings as sons and daughters, spouses, parents, neighbors, citizens, providers, voters, buyers and sellers in the marketplace, and parishioners. Their work skills and the job training needed to provide for their families were developed outside the classroom in on-site training or apprenticeships done in the context where the work was actually being done. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Kuyper, C.S. Lewis—all the greatest leaders in our Christian tradition—were so classically educated in the traditional, integrative liberal arts of the Trivium and Quadrivium and practically trained.

But pragmatists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sold their Christian academic birthright for a mess of modernist career pottage. They turned schools into egalitarian job training camps for the workers of the world and abandoned the Christian pursuit of wisdom and knowledge in the Lord. The schools dumbed down and the church has grown steadily weaker ever since.

Reversing that trend will require that the King's royal heirs expect . . .

2. *Truly godly and wise teacher-mentors* (Luke 6:40).

According to Jesus, the teacher—not the curriculum,

not the lesson plan, not the technology, not the facilities, not the accreditation, not the tuition rate—is the single most important factor in a child's education. "A student, when mature, will be like his teacher," Jesus said. All the other bells and whistles may be nice (though they can often be more of a distraction than a help), *but the teacher is key*.

Yet, in my experience, Christian parents often know more about a school's university admission rates, or a college's career placement rates, or tuition rates, or financial aid plans, or sports programs than they do about the character and spiritual health of the men and women who will actually be shaping the minds and lives of their children in and out of the classroom. Sadly, many Christian school administrators and boards aren't much better, giving higher priority to paper credentials and standardized test scores and bricks and mortar than to the character and spiritual integrity of their teachers. Of course, academic expertise and standardized testing have their place. But parents, administrators, and school promotional literature often stress most what actually counts least from a Kingdom perspective. And such misguided emphases have the potential to catechize generations of parents and children in what is least in the Kingdom.

The teacher is so crucial, as Jesus says, because all education is fundamentally *personal*. That's because *truth itself is personal.* Truth is a person. Jesus said, "*I am* the way, *the truth* and the life" (John 14:6). Truth is not some collection of brute facts or scientifically verifiable propositions. It is a living person. Teachers either faithfully represent or embody that Truth before their students or they don't. Parents or educators who misunderstand this crucial biblical principle put their children and students at grave risk of misunderstanding the Truth and being catechized in lies and ungodliness. No matter how much parents think their child can be a "good witness" in a secular education environment, that child is not the teacher, but the one being taught. And no matter how mature we imagine our children to be (often overestimating), their "cement is still wet." They are still students seeking to be taught and led into maturity, readily influenced by others older and more experienced. The question is, *who* will teach them and lead them into what kind of maturity?

Moreover, those who think that new distance-learning technologies will provide a quality education without putting their children at risk under ungodly teachers make a similar mistake. Learning godly knowledge and wisdom is not a data download. A student will be shaped by his or her teacher, no matter who that teacher is, no matter how the instruction is delivered.

Finally, the education of the King's royal heirs ought also to include . . .

3. *The shaping of our desires for the things of the Kingdom.*

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? . . . For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. *But seek first the kingdom of God* and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

—Matthew 6:25, 32-33

Jesus did *not* say, "Seek first vocational-technical training, and all that kingdom of God and righteousness stuff will be added later." Yet to hear parents of university-bound students talk today about their educational goals for their children, you'd think He had. The dominant secular vocational paradigm for higher education has influenced us more on these issues than our Christian schools, our catechism classes, and even our churches. For that, we must repent. Our heavenly Father knows everything we need to live and to thrive,

and He will provide them for us by His perfect means according to His perfect timing. He tells us explicitly not to stress over the little stuff. Grasping at college majors and career preparation will not add one penny to our bank accounts, put one more meal on the table, or add one more second to our lives that He has not already ordained. So stop majoring in the minors. Instead, major in God's priorities: Christ's kingdom and His righteousness.

What our schools and universities must encourage in our covenant children is a deeply held heart-desire for the things of God and of His Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

As Calvinists who take the sovereignty of God—the crown rights of Christ—seriously, we cannot, must not, train our children merely to be good little widgets in the secular marketplace who also happen to go to church each Lord's Day. We vowed to raise them for much greater things at their baptisms.

So, "Who are you?"

- You are the royal heirs of the King of kings; *start acting like it*.
- Your children are royalty; *start treating them like it.*
- Your children are inheriting a Kingdom; *so start educating them for it.*

NOBEL LECTURE IN LITERATURE 1970

by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, ©The Nobel Foundation

The first two of seven parts of this lecture.

1

Just as that puzzled savage who has picked up—a strange cast-up from the ocean?—something unearthed from the sands?—or an obscure object fallen down from the sky?—intricate in curves, it gleams first dully and then with a bright thrust of light. Just as he turns it this way and that, turns it over, trying to discover what to do with it, trying to discover some mundane function within his own grasp, never dreaming of its higher function.

So also we, holding Art in our hands, confidently consider ourselves to be its masters; boldly we direct it, we renew, reform and manifest it; we sell it for money, use it to please those in power; turn to it at one moment for amusement—right down to popular songs and night-clubs, and at another—grabbing the nearest weapon, cork or cudgel—for the passing needs of politics and for narrow-minded social ends. But art is not defiled by our efforts, neither does it thereby depart from its true nature, but on each occasion and in each application it gives to us a part of its secret inner light.

But shall we ever grasp the whole of that light? Who will dare to say that he has DEFINED Art, enumerated all its facets? Perhaps once upon a time someone understood and told us, but we could not remain satisfied with that for long; we listened, and neglected, and threw it out there and then, hurrying as always to exchange even the very best—if only for something new! And when we are told again the old truth, we shall not even remember that we once possessed it.

One artist sees himself as the creator of an independent spiritual world; he hoists onto his shoulders the task of creating this world, of peopling it and of bearing the all-embracing responsibility for it; but he crumples beneath it, for a mortal genius is not capable of bearing such a burden. Just as man in general, having declared himself the centre of existence, has not succeeded in creating a balanced spiritual system. And if misfortune overtakes him, he casts the blame upon the age-long disharmony of the world, upon the complexity of today's ruptured soul, or upon the stupidity of the public.

Another artist, recognizing a higher power above, gladly works as a humble apprentice beneath God's heaven; then, however, his responsibility for everything

Delivered only to the Swedish Academy and not actually given as a lecture. As the Laureate was unable to be present at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm, December 10, 1970, the speech was read by Karl Ragnar Gierow, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

that is written or drawn, for the souls which perceive his work, is more exacting than ever. But, in return, it is not he who has created this world, not he who directs it, there is no doubt as to its foundations; the artist has merely to be more keenly aware than others of the harmony of the world, of the beauty and ugliness of the human contribution to it, and to communicate this acutely to his fellow-men. And in misfortune, and even at the depths of existence—in destitution, in prison, in sickness—his sense of stable harmony never deserts him.

But all the irrationality of art, its dazzling turns, its unpredictable discoveries, its shattering influence on human beings—they are too full of magic to be exhausted by this artist's vision of the world, by his artistic conception or by the work of his unworthy fingers.

Archaeologists have not discovered stages of human existence so early that they were without art. Right back in the early morning twilights of mankind we received it from Hands which we were too slow to discern. And we were too slow to ask: FOR WHAT PURPOSE have we been given this gift? What are we to do with it?

And they were mistaken, and will always be mistaken, who prophesy that art will disintegrate, that it will outlive its forms and die. It is we who shall die—art will remain. And shall we comprehend, even on the day of our destruction, all its facets and all its possibilities?

Not everything assumes a name. Some things lead beyond words. Art inflames even a frozen, darkened soul to a high spiritual experience. Through art we are sometimes visited—dimly, briefly—by revelations such as cannot be produced by rational thinking.

Like that little looking-glass from the fairy-tales: look into it and you will see—not yourself—but for one second, the Inaccessible, whither no man can ride, no man fly. And only the soul gives a groan . . .

2

One day Dostoevsky threw out the enigmatic remark: "Beauty will save the world". What sort of a statement is that? For a long time I considered it mere words. How

One day Dostoevsky threw out the enigmatic remark: "Beauty will save the world."

could that be possible? When in bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything? Ennobled, uplifted, yes—but whom has it saved?

There is, however, a certain peculiarity in the essence of beauty, a peculiarity in the status of art: namely, the convincingness of a true work of art is completely irrefutable and it forces even an opposing heart to surrender. It is possible to compose an outwardly smooth and elegant political speech, a headstrong article, a social program, or a philosophical system on the basis of both a mistake and a lie. What is hidden, what distorted, will not immediately become obvious.

Then a contradictory speech, article, program, a differently constructed philosophy rallies in opposition—and all just as elegant and smooth, and once again it works. Which is why such things are both trusted and mistrusted.

In vain to reiterate what does not reach the heart.

But a work of art bears within itself its own verification: conceptions which are devised or stretched do not stand being portrayed in images, they all come crashing down, appear sickly and pale, convince no one. But those works of art which have scooped up the truth and presented it to us as a living force—they take hold of us, compel us, and nobody ever, not even in ages to come, will appear to refute them.

So perhaps that ancient trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty is not simply an empty, faded formula as we thought in the days of our self-confident, materialistic youth? If the tops of these three trees converge, as the scholars maintained, but the too blatant, too direct

stems of Truth and Goodness are crushed, cut down, not allowed through—then perhaps the fantastic, unpredictable, unexpected stems of Beauty will push through and soar TO THAT VERY SAME PLACE, and in so doing will fulfil the work of all three?

In that case Dostoevsky's remark, "Beauty will save the world," was not a careless phrase but a prophecy? After all HE was granted to see much, a man of fantastic illumination.

And in that case art, literature might really be able to help the world today?

It is the small insight which, over the years, I have succeeded in gaining into this matter that I shall attempt to lay before you here today.

Read the rest of the speech here: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html

RELATED ARTICLE:

1. "How I Helped Alexandr Solzhenitsyn Smuggle His Nobel Lecture from the USSR", http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-article.html.

A RESPONSE TO *TEN WAYS TO DESTROY THE IMAGINATION OF YOUR CHILD*

by Lyn Cunningham, Mars Hill Academy

I am a recovering liberal arts snob.

Liberal arts advocates feel besieged for good reason. Many do not understand the value of the liberal arts; we are often the first cut and the last hired at schools, and people mock us with impunity.

What are the liberal arts? They are the part of college ranging from the common core that all students take to the humanities and fine arts majors. These areas train all of us to create culture and how to live well in civilization. At best, they are programs of study for all students and for a few specialists, whose value cannot be measured in what Scrooge would have called "gain and loss."

People ignorant of their value often call them "fluff" or the "hoops we must jump" to go to college. At some schools, programs are slashed and students viewed as impractical for choosing a liberal arts major. Creating an ugly, but wealthy civilization gives any spiritually sensitive soul the horrors. If you think the arts don't matter, you have fallen into a mental smallness and ugliness of soul. I have addressed this idiocy many times; Dickens describes it better in *Hard Times*.

Reacting to idiocy can produce idiocy, at least it did in me. My particular idiocy was to ignore the second aspect of the *American University*: training for the ministry of work. Work can be a curse, but work is also the play of a human being and would exist without a fall. The pain of work, the gratuitous pain is because of sin: God did not create the Dilbert cubicle, sin did. God did create the joy of creating in a team: the real job.

Training for the workforce, properly done by Christians, is as much training for the work of Paradise as is making art. In fact, a job well done to the glory of God is art. As a kid, defensively, I acted like business classes, nursing classes, computer classes were somehow impure. These programs should be bled, I huffed, for the monetary weight that produced glory.

I thought those who "got it" at college were "pure" liberal arts majors. We took plutocrats' money and purified it by our nobility.

There are three problems with this view. First, it is a heresy. It treats part of man's discovering the Mind of God, like economics and science, as impure. All truth is God's truth and that includes the truth discovered by accountants. Few college grads would be proud to announce they are illiterate, but many liberal arts majors, like I was, will shout out with pride that we are innumerate or economically ignorant.

In my lifetime, I spent a short period of time qualifying in New York to sell insurance and learned more in five months than I did in any year of college. I was forced to think about budgets, the connection of money to living, and the beauty of the free market. I saw

Lyn Cunningham teaches literature and history to eighth graders and upper rhetoric students at Mars Hill Academy in Mason, Ohio. He's also taken an interest in directing some of their dramatic performances. In an earlier version of himself, he also practiced law.

people who warped the free market to be about greed: tyrant capitalists. I saw people who spread freedom to liberate: free marketeers.

I became educated in a huge part of God's creation and gained a respect, that has only grown over time, for humans who can master the skills necessary for those areas. I did this without any sense of self-loathing about philosophy or religious study. Just as gaining knowledge and the ability to appreciate opera (as undeveloped as that remains in me) did not make me an opera star, so learning the value of economics or business did not give me those skills.

The second problem with disdain for the "practical" is that it can lead me to live in a dream. I dare to dream, but I cannot live in a dream. A dream is (I am told) a wish the heart makes when it's fast asleep, but I must live awake: especially mentally. For an adult to expect some "parent figure" to take care of the "practical parts" of his life is living in a infantile state. As a thinker I often dream of what could be, but meanwhile I must live in what is. There is a reason Utopianism, killer of millions, often springs for the liberal arts.

My dreams need not be constrained, but my actions must be. Reality, even our broken reality, counts.

Why do we ignore reality? In me, "ignoring" the practical arts was a form of covetousness that I could hide by snobbery. I had chosen a lifestyle and yet did not want to live with all the consequences: I wanted to study Plato and be wealthy too. Some people make more money as a result of their career choices. If I am not careful, I resent the wages of my choice. My lifestyle is different from an accountant, that is my gain, and my choice, but I cannot also demand the wages of an accountants' choices. If I played the oboe, my scholarship money would be greater. If I chose the flute, it will be less. The flute should not sneer at the oboe as a form of revenge.

Finally, it is illiberal to say that I need only learn some things and reject others. The well-educated person has a curiosity about every field, even if we cannot master or pursue them all. To kill curiosity in myself in any divine or human activity is illiberal and inhuman. The liberal arts snob is no better than the plutocratic snob. The poet who feels proud of his garret, because it is a garret, is as bad as the man who feels superior because of the size of his car.

The vice of the illiberal practical major cannot be chased out with the vice of an illiberal liberal arts major. Instead, God came to me and showed me the beauty of a well-written life insurance policy and said: "Call no field unclean, that I have declared clean." I came to admire those gifted, as I was not, with the ability to grasp financial planning. It was a ministry to humankind that I tried, could not do, but saw as necessary.

Instead, at least at HBU, we are trying to embrace the full task of the American university. We want to expose a student to all of God's creation over four years, but also help them find the main vocation or skill set that will help them create civilization. The human resource manager is a priest and king in the Kingdom of God, the singer is a priest and a king in God's kingdom.

Do we live up to this holistic view? Never. It is a dream and we must acknowledge where we must fall short and where we do fall short, but only so we can slowly, painfully become like Christ. Instead, I aspire and move toward liberal education: knowing all I can and continuing growth into God's Paradise.

Forgive me, Lord, when I call any field unclean; may I eat all the courses in Your great banquet.

EXCERPT FROM *FINDING TRUTH*

by Nancy Pearcey, Houston Baptist University

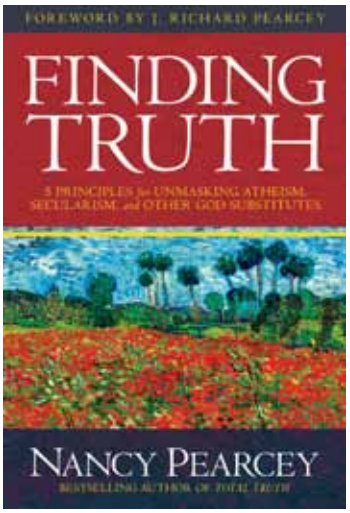
"I LOST MY FAITH AT AN EVANGELICAL COLLEGE"

I was once invited to give a presentation on Capitol Hill, and afterward a congressional chief of staff stood up and announced to everyone there, "I lost my faith at an evangelical college."

How did it happen? Afterward, I sought out the chief of staff, Bill, to hear his story. He explained that the professors at his college had taught the prevailing theories in their discipline—most of which were secular and sometimes explicitly anti-Christian. Yet they did little to offer a biblical perspective on the subject.

Bill even met with several of his professors outside of class, asking them, "How do you relate your faith to your academic discipline—to what you teach in the classroom?" Tragically, not one could give him an answer.

Eventually Bill concluded that Christianity did not *have* any answers, and he decided to abandon it. "I was sorry to give up my Christian faith," he told me. "But it seemed to have no intellectual foundation."



Bill's story reflects an all-too-common pattern today. When young people leave home, they often leave behind their religious upbringing as well. Is there hope? Can a biblical worldview equip us with the resources to meet the challenge, reverse the pattern, and confidently set forth our case in the public arena?

The answer is a resounding yes. *Finding Truth* offers a fresh and original strategy to answer the questions raised by young people—and seekers of all ages. It unpacks five powerful principles from Scripture that cut to the heart of any competing worldview or religion. It highlights the life-giving truths that everyone wants but only Christianity can give.

Nancy R. Pearcey, editor-at-large of The Pearcey Report*, is scholar in residence and professor at Houston Baptist University. She is also a fellow at the Discovery Institute. In* Finding Truth*, she explains five powerful principles that penetrate to the core of any worldview—secular or religious—to uncover its deepest motivations and weigh its claims.*

STUDY YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD

My personal history is similar to Bill's. Though raised in a Lutheran family, I could not get answers to the questions that bubbled up in my mind as a teenager. Midway through high school, I abandoned my religious upbringing altogether. Years later, in a ministry called L'Abri hidden away in a tiny village in the Swiss Alps, I finally met people who could answer my questions. (I tell my story under Principle #5.) My own years of searching and struggling as an agnostic left me with an intense conviction that Christians need to take questions seriously.

The task can seem daunting. At every turn—from the classroom to the workplace to the Internet—ideas contrary to Christianity are clamoring for our allegiance. Learning how to respond thoughtfully to every competing worldview would take a lifetime of study. And what happens when we encounter a *new* idea? Do we have to come up with a new argument every time?

Or is it possible to find a single line of inquiry that we can apply universally to all ideas?

What I have discovered is that the Bible itself offers a powerful strategy for critical thinking—five principles that cut to the heart of any worldview. By mastering these principles, you will be equipped to answer any challenge, while making a compelling and attractive case for Christianity.

GIVE ME EVIDENCE

The key passage is the first chapter of Romans. In fact, we can think of Romans 1 as Paul's apologetics training manual. Where does he begin? His first major point is that all people—everywhere and at all times—have access to evidence for God's existence. How? Through the created order: "the things that have been made." Let's begin with the verses where Paul explains the concept of general revelation:

We all have access to evidence for God through creation.

Romans 1:19—What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

Romans 1:20—His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

In speaking of evidence from creation, Paul does not mean only physical nature. He also means human nature. Human beings are among the things "that have been made" (Rom. 1:20).

How do humans constitute evidence for God? Because humans are capable of knowing, the first cause that produced them must have a mind. Because humans are capable of choosing, the first cause must have a will. And so on. Philosopher Étienne Gilson captures the argument neatly: because a human is a *someone* and not a *something*, the source of human life must be also a Someone, and not the blind, automatic forces of nature.

ATHEISTS' CHILDREN AND THEIR GOD

This may explain why young children in every culture have a concept of God. Psychologist Paul Bloom at Yale University reports that "when children are directly asked about the origin of animals and people, they tend to prefer explanations that involve an intentional creator, even if the adults who raised them do not." That is, even if their parents are atheists.

These findings from psychology may cast new light on what Jesus meant when he urged his followers to "become like children" to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3). Yet if general revelation impinges on all human consciousness, why don't all people acknowledge God? What is Paul's answer? He says we "suppress the truth" taught by general revelation:

We all suppress the evidence for God from creation.

Romans 1:18—[They] suppress the truth.

Romans 1:21—Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.

Romans 1:28—They did not see fit to acknowledge God.

The concept of denial or suppression is said to be one of the most distinctive discoveries of modern psychology. Yet the idea that people often stifle or suppress what they know is nothing new. The Bible taught it long before the rise of modern psychology. Romans 1 says that fallen, sinful humans have a strong tendency to deny what we know about God.

The great drama of history is the tug of war between God and humanity. On one hand, God reaches out to humanity to make himself known. On the other hand, humans desperately seek to avoid knowing him. In the words of theologian Thomas K. Johnson, we "can take the account of Adam and Eve hiding from God behind a bush or tree as a metaphor for the history of the human race."

HOW HUMANS HIDE

How do humans try to hide from God? What is the next point in Paul's dissection of human motivations? They avoid God by creating idols:

We all create idols to take the place of God.

Romans 1:23—[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:25—They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

The first commandment may seem outdated if we think of idols as statues of wood or stone. But Scripture treats the topic of idolatry far more subtly. An idol is anything we want more than God, anything we rely on more than God, anything we look to for greater fulfillment than God. Idolatry is thus the hidden sin driving all other sins.

This explains why, as psychologist David Powlison says, "idolatry is by far the most frequently discussed problem in the Scriptures." In the Old Testament, the prophet Habakkuk describes people whose idol is their military power: "whose own might is their god." Painting a vivid word picture of the enemy's military as a "dragnet" for sweeping up whole societies, Habakkuk says "he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet" (Hab. 1:11, 16).

In the New Testament, Paul treats idolatry with the same penetrating psychological insight. Writing to members of the church in Ephesus, he urges them not to be sexually immoral, impure, or covetous—then adds what may seem a surprising twist: for that "person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world" (Eph. 5:5 NLT). The hidden sin beneath the others is the tendency to make an idol of "the things of this world."

IDOLS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

So here is Paul's diagnosis of the human condition so far: God is constantly reaching out to people with evidence of his existence through general revelation. But humans are constantly suppressing those truths by creating idols.

This pattern of suppression creates an acute internal tension. On one hand, people are aware of the evidence for the biblical God from general revelation. On the other hand, they keep creating surrogate gods in a desperate attempt to suppress that evidence. To borrow a term from psychology, humans are trapped in cognitive dissonance, the mental stress of harboring concepts that contradict one another.

How does God break us out of the trap? He responds in a way we might not expect: He ratchets up the tension. He allows us to live out the consequences of our idols in order to intensify the cognitive dissonance—and

ultimately to press us to the point of making a decision:

God gives us up to the consequences of our idols—to a "debased" mind.

Romans 1:21—Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking.

Romans 1:28—Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind.

What *are* the consequences of serving idols? The Greek word for mind is *nous*, but it has a much richer meaning than the English word. It can be translated reason, understanding, or intellectual intuition. The church fathers often translated nous as the faculty for evaluating and directing the course of one's life: "the eye of the soul." So we can translate the word as worldview, the convictions by which we direct our lives.

Today the word *debased* has a primarily moral connotation, meaning wicked or degenerate. But in the original Greek, the word meant counterfeit money. So a debased worldview is one that offers a counterfeit god.

In the original language, this verse (Rom. 1:28) contains a fascinating wordplay. The word *worthwhile* in the first clause has the same root as debased. The parallel can be expressed like this: Just as people did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, so God gave them up to a worthless worldview: "They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves" (Jer. 2:5 NIV). Here's how Paul expresses the connection:

God gives us up to the consequences of our idols—to "dishonorable" behavior.

Romans 1:24—God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

Romans 1:26—God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

Romans 1:28—God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Once again, the connection is captured by the word exchanged. First Paul says people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" of created things (Rom. 1:23; see also Rom. 1:25). Next Paul shows what this trade-off does to human behavior: "Women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature," and men did the same (Rom. 1:26–27). At the time Paul was writing, in both Greco-Roman culture and Hellenistic Jewish culture, "contrary to nature" was a standard phrase referring to homosexual behavior.

At the time, the term *nature* was not used the way people use it today, to mean behavior observed in the natural world. Instead nature meant behavior that is normative for *human nature*: behavior that fits the way humans were originally created, that accords with God's purpose for humanity, that matches the ideal standard of what it means to be fully human.

In this sense of the term, all sin is contrary to human nature, and Paul goes on to itemize a representative sampling: "They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom. 1:29–31). All these behaviors—and more—are contrary to what it means to be fully human.

In this chapter Paul, then, outlines a clear and calamitous progression: First, "they did not *honor* him as God" (Rom. 1:21). "Therefore God gave them up … to the dishonoring of their bodies" (Rom. 1:24). "God gave them up to *dishonorable passions*" (Rom. 1:26). The principle is that those who dishonor God inevitably dishonor themselves and others. To adapt a phrase, idols have consequences.

FIVE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

In the first chapter of Romans, Paul has unfolded a series of actions—a drama of divine-human interaction—whose plot line provides the underlying rationale for a biblical apologetic. From it we can extract five strategic principles to identify the key elements in any worldview. A unique feature of the Romans 1 strategy is that it can be applied universally. No more memorizing different arguments for each theory. We can be confident that Romans 1 applies to them all.

PRINCIPLE #1—IDENTIFY THE IDOL

An idol is anything in the created order that is put in the place of God. This definition not only gives us tools to identify our personal idols, it also gives insight into the world of ideas. Philosophies and worldviews can also function as counterfeit gods.

As a matter of sheer logic, any explanation of life must have a starting point. It must trace the universe back to something that functions as the primal reality, the self-existent cause of everything else. Those who do not honor the transcendent God beyond the cosmos must make a divinity out of some power or principle immanent *within* the cosmos.

What about matter? Is matter part of the created order? Sure it is. Thus the philosophy of materialism qualifies as an idol. It claims that matter is the ultimate reality—the uncreated first cause of everything else. It denies the existence of anything beyond the material world, such as soul, spirit, mind, or God. New Atheists like to think of themselves as nonbelievers, but they believe devoutly in matter (or nature) as their substitute religion.

What about reason? Can it be an idol? Certainly. The philosophy of rationalism puts human reason in the place of God as the source and standard of all truth. Albert Einstein once described himself as "a believing rationalist." He understood that it was a full-blown creed.

PRINCIPLE #2—IDENTIFY THE IDOL'S REDUCTIONISM

Romans 1 tells us that idolatry leads to a "debased" worldview, which opens the door to oppression, injustice, and all the other evils listed at the end of the chapter. What is the connection between idols and immoral behavior? The link is that idols always lead to a lower view of human life.

The Bible teaches that humans are made in the image of God. When a worldview exchanges the Creator for something in creation, it will also exchange a high view of humans made in God's image for a lower view of humans in the image of something in creation.

To translate Paul's argument into modern language, we need to master one philosophical term: *reductionism*. It means *reducing* a phenomenon from a higher or more complex level of reality to a lower, simpler, less complex level—usually in order to debunk or discredit it. For example, you have probably heard people say that Christianity is nothing but an emotional crutch. Or that ideas are nothing but products of chemicals reacting in our brains. Or that living things can be explained solely by physics and chemistry. These are all forms of reductionism.

Reductionism is a strategy for suppressing the truth: For if we can *reduce* humans to machines operating by natural forces, then we can explain their origin by purely natural forces.

PRINCIPLE #3—TEST THE IDOL: DOES IT CONTRADICT WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD?

Romans 1 teaches that some things are knowable by everyone—the truths of general revelation. It follows that any truth claim must match up with general revelation. If a *worldview* contradicts what we know about the world through general revelation, then it fails.

And we can be confident that every idol-based

worldview *will* fail. Why? Precisely because it leads to reductionism. If reductionism is like trying to stuff the entire universe into a box, inevitably something will stick out of the box. A box that deifies a *part* of creation will always be too limited to explain the whole. Whatever does not fit into the box will be denigrated, devalued, or dismissed as unreal.

Think again of the example of materialism, since it is the dominant view in academia today. When it reduces humans to complex biochemical machines, what sticks out of the box? Free will. The power of choice. These are dismissed as illusions. Yet in practice, we cannot live without making choices from the moment we wake up every morning. One philosopher jokes that if people deny free will, then when ordering at a restaurant they should say, "Just bring me whatever the laws of nature have determined I will get."

PRINCIPLE #4—TEST THE IDOL: DOES IT CONTRADICT ITSELF?

Idol-centered worldviews not only fail to match the external world, they also collapse internally. They are self-refuting. For example, a person may propose cultural relativism, which claims that there is no universal truth. But that statement itself makes a universal claim. Thus it contradicts itself.

As apologist Greg Koukl says, it commits suicide. When it own definition of truth is applied to itself, it undercuts itself.

This argument is a standard tool in every apologist's toolbox. But *why* does it work? Again the key is reductionism. When a reductionistic worldview leads to a lower view of humanity, that includes the human mind. It reduces human reason to something less than reason. Yet the only way any worldview can argue its own case is by using reason. By discrediting reason, it undermines its *own* case. It is self-defeating.

To illustrate how the argument works, let's use the example of materialism once more. Materialism reduces thinking to biochemical processes in the brain, akin to the chemical reactions in digestion. But digestion is not something that can be true or false. It is just a biological fact. If thinking is reduced to brain processes, then our ideas are not true or false either. But in that case, how can the materialist know that *materialism* is true? The philosophy is self-refuting.

Christianity does not have this problem. Because humans are made in God's image, human reason has the high dignity of reflecting the divine mind. Ironically, then, adherents of reductionist worldviews have to borrow Christianity's high view of reason *in order to support their own view*. They have to rely on Christianity even as they reject it.

PRINCIPLE #5—REPLACE THE IDOL: MAKE THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY

In Principle #5 we uncover several more examples of secular thinkers who borrow from Christianity. For example, where did the concept of human rights come from? The late philosopher Richard Rorty was an atheist and Darwinist, yet he admitted that in the Darwinian struggle for existence, the strong prevail while the weak are left behind. So evolution cannot be the source of universal human rights. Instead, Rorty said, the concept came from the Christian claim "that human beings are made in the image of God." He said he was happy to borrow the concept of universal rights from Christianity. He literally called himself a "free-loading" atheist.

No wonder Paul proclaims that he is "not ashamed" of the gospel (Rom. 1:16). Christianity is so appealing and attractive that adherents of other worldviews keep free-loading the parts they like best.

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