TEACHING IN THE RUINS

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A transcription from Dr. Mohler's plenary address at the 2015 Repairing the Ruins conference in Dallas, Texas.

I want you to know how impressed I've been by being here with you. It's been sheer delight to be here, to share experiences like that dinner last night, and the conversations that are taking place after the session and elsewhere. I am with you in common cause, I greatly respect what you are doing. I come to encourage you and to do everything I can to encourage the extension of this movement and the planting and flourishing of schools committed to classical and Christian learning.

It was very impressive this morning to hear Colby. [Colby was the 2015 ACCS Chrysostom Oratory second prize winner.] It's a remarkable achievement to speak at 8:00 in the morning on contemplation, to an audience rapt in attention. It's an indication, along with the artwork that accompanies me on this platform today, of the fact that your concerns are not in the abstract. They are in the concrete of students who are in your care and for whom you care a great deal. The pride you feel in a morning like this is an indication of what you should feel every morning in your schoolroom, every morning in the work that you do. It's just impossible, given the fluctuations in the human spirit, to be equally encouraged all the time. So, be encouraged.

Yesterday, I spoke of Augustine and the two cities as a framework for understanding the task of being a faithful Christian in a fallen world until Jesus comes. Each of these two cities is driven by its own love: the city of God driven by the love of God, the city of man driven merely by love of man. Once we come to understand the atonement accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and His purpose in establishing a church—or as the apostle Paul says, "citizens of a heavenly kingdom"—the question for Christians is NOT, why are we now in that heavenly city? The question that comes to us is, why then are we still in this world? What is God's purpose in the city of man?

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When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He responded by saying to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and *mind*." But then he continued and said the second is like unto it, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Putting that into context, the answer Jesus gave concerning the first commandment would not at all have been a surprise. The *shema* found in Deuteronomy, the first verse—that a child in Israel would have memorized—that central verse is, "Hear O Israel the Lord thy God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength." But that second one—and you'll notice that Jesus said it so quickly, as if you can't have the one without the other, not in this life, not as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ—"The second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is rather an obscure verse in Leviticus, raised by Jesus up into the level of being the **second greatest commandment**. "On these two hang all the law and the prophets."

That first commandment is the driving energy, the life of that first city, the city of God. But love of neighbor explains to a great degree why we are still in this world. It is for the task of missions and evangelism; Paul makes that very clear in a text like Romans 10. But it is also for the vale of soul-making. It is also so that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be the salt and light in a world that is desperately in need of an authentic Christian witness and testimony to Christian truth. Thus we have an important task to do, but we understand what the stakes are. The headlines announce them even if we try to hide ourselves. The stakes are incredibly high because the culture is turning in open antipathy to the very essential truths that made that civilization possible. We are finding ourselves facing a society that repudiates it own patrimony, is undercutting and subverting its ability to sustain itself. We see the evidence of this new Dark Age living before us. It is no exaggeration to say that there are barbarians who are now largely in control of much of this civilization.

But here I want to cite a more recent source, the late novelist Flannery O'Connor, who said that "we must push back against the age as hard as the age is pushing against us." It's a good thing to remember. We feel the age pushing against us, but Flannery O'Connor was certainly right when she said we had to "push back against the age as hard as it is pressing against us."

This morning I hope to press against the age just a bit by recapturing sixteen words that I hope will be helpful to us as we consider what it means to learn and to teach, to consider what it means to teach in the ruins, to rebuild education, and to serve a kingdom. Sixteen words.

Repairing the Ruins, by the way, is a theme in which I just find delight. I mentioned the fascination with ruins before. I learned a great deal several years ago when I was in Ephesus, ancient Ephesus. If you have been to Ephesus, you've seen an ancient city from centuries before the time of the apostle Paul—very important to us in biblical understanding because of the apostle Paul. The library that is there is an amazing thing to see. Here's the deal. You want the Germans to get there before the British, because the British carted everything off back to London. You also want the Germans to get there ahead of the Americans, because the Americans, following the current canons of archeology, believe that you should leave everything where it's found and just label and document it. The Germans love LEGO®. When they see ruins, they put them back together

again. It was a German archeologist who was put in charge of Ephesus and he basically glued the ruins back together. That has the marvelous advantage of being able to see something that you can say "that's a library." You look at this and imagine what it was like to walk along the pathways where the apostle Paul walked—to see from the Colosseum to the other ruins there in Ephesus, remnants of a culture that is long gone and was already waning in so many ways when the apostle Paul was there. Teaching amidst the ruins is not new for Christians. In its own way it's glorious.

Sixteen words. The first word is **love**. It need not be emphasized that the word love has been horribly corrupted in terms of our cultural conversation. But I intend to explain love not only in its complex biblical frame, but specifically as it applies to teaching. My witness in this is none other than Augustine. In order to have a full understanding of Augustine's understanding of the role of love in teaching, you have to put two of his works together: *De Doctrina Christiana* [*On Christian Doctrine*] and his book on the instruction of new believers [Editor's note: *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, or *For Instructing the Unlearned*], which is one of the most marvelous Augustinian works. It was written at the request of a deacon in another church, who wrote and asked Augustine to explain how the faith should be taught to new believers. It brings out the pastor in Augustine.

But love—in terms of teaching from a Christian worldview perspective, a biblical perspective—Augustine encapsulates it better than anyone, I believe, before or since in terms of the Christian tradition. He reminds us that teaching is an act of love. Teaching actually demonstrates and requires three different loves. The first of these is love of God. The Christian teacher teaches because the teacher loves God and it is God who has given teaching to His church. It's by teaching that God creates Christians and disciples, by the means of grace, by the preaching of the Word. But it is in the role of teaching, and as Augustine was specifically speaking of the teaching of new believers, it was the biblical instruction whereby new believers, the catechumen, would be developed in faith. He did so first of all because of God. He loves Christ. He loves Christ's church. He is animated by the love of God. Before there is a student in the room, before there is a *catechumen* in the room, Augustine loves being a teacher because he gets to teach that which glorifies God.

But the second love that Augustine indicated is love of the student. Actually, when we reflect upon it, it is virtually impossible to successfully and faithfully teach someone you do not love. You really can't hurl instruction at someone. Even though you may have wondered about this at times, you can't inflict instruction on someone. The only way to actually have a successful transfer take place in teaching and learning is for love to be a bond that draws teacher and student together. Love becomes an animating purpose of the teacher because the teacher loves those whom he/she teaches.

Now as a teacher in the classroom, I will tell you that this is one of the greatest surprises. It was a surprise to me. It was a surprise to me in a way different than the more familiar context, to me, of pastoral ministry. There is something about the sustained classroom experience that builds a relationship and makes possible a relationship that just isn't going to take place anywhere else. Think about the importance of what you do; just think back to your own days as a student and recognize just what kind of a bond there was—maybe not apparent or palpable every day, or every moment, or every class, or every lecture. But a bond, nonetheless, that was there in which you wanted to know more about this—at least in part—because this one who loved you wanted you to have this.

There's a third love. And that is the love of that which is taught. I think even the secular world understands that it is very difficult to successfully teach that which does not excite you. But the love of the subject matter

is something that we shouldn't be at any way reluctant to embrace and to articulate. We should expect that those who teach will be excited about that which they teach and will love it. They will find great pleasure in it. They will find themselves loving it in the sense as Augustine says they are drawn to it, they are drawn into it. You know that's so when you imagine it when you are not reading it, or teaching it, or preparing to teach it. That's what makes real education, and—in particular as Augustine understood it—general Christian education so powerful.

We have to rescue love from mere sentimentality and mere emotionalism. It has those dimensions. But as the New Testament reminds us, it is love that endures all things and bears all things. That's not something reducible to an emotive state.

The second word is **truth**. This is one of the most endangered words in our contemporary cultural moment and it's been endangered for some time. Stephen Colbert coined a word not too many years ago, "truthiness," as being what our society seems capable of either expecting or upholding as a standard. It doesn't actually have to be true in terms of corresponding to any objective reality; it doesn't have to have any ontological basis whatsoever, its just truthiness. Some years ago, Edmund Morris wrote a biography, or what was presented as a biography, of Ronald Reagan entitled *Dutch*. You may recall that he combined fictive and traditionally truthful, biographical techniques in this book. The publisher actually said that it was an improvement upon the traditional category of biography—truthful by being "*truthy*," a word that didn't yet exist. But nonetheless, that is where we are. When I became president of Southern Seminary one of the first works that I did was on postmodernism; that was what everybody was talking about, and necessarily so. Postmodernism is what the prophets of the mid-twentieth century saw coming in the collapse of modernity's audacity and its false claims. Eventually, the secularity of modernity and its totalitarian claims collapses into the idea that there can be no truth, there is no meta-narrative, there is no objective truth whatsoever. The problem is that just doesn't work. It's not a problem for us. The problem with postmodernists is that you can't be consistent postmodernist.

Richard Dawkins, one of the four horsemen of the new atheism, pointed out that there are no postmodernists at 33,000 feet. You are pretty much a modernist at 33,000 feet. I pointed out many times that you might want a postmodern historian, but you don't want a postmodern cardiologist. The folks who were insisting that the author is dead, and the text is indeterminate, and that reading is sheer subjectivity, and that it's a totalitarian imposition of a patriarchal authoritarianism to insist that the text has some stable meaning, they meant that about *Beowulf*. They didn't mean that about their tenure contract.

Postmodernism is now *passe* in the academy. But be not encouraged. It hasn't been replaced by something better. The barbarism on the American college and university campus is now being replaced by an open hostility to any enduring truth claims.

The third word that we have to recover is **beauty**. I have to make very clear that when we are talking about truth—and I thought this was the tautology at the time when Francis Schaffer used to say we have to talk about "true truth"—once we have made very clear we are talking about true truth, we have to talk about "true beauty" as well. This is one of the most injurious elements of marketplace evangelicalism. It is one of the most injurious dimensions of cultural Christianity. It is the deadly confusion of the pretty for the beautiful. They are not the same thing. In our fallenness, we are far too easily bought off by pretty and we lose beauty. The difference for the Christian should be abundantly clear when you consider the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ is not pretty, but it is infinitely beautiful.

The Christian worldview explains why the face of a child with Down syndrome is infinitely and eternally

more beautiful than the fashion model on the front of the fashion magazine. It is because the Christian worldview is based upon an understanding of the unity of the transcendentals, one of the most important issues intellectually that we can keep in mind. This is a theological principle that reminds us that according to the biblical worldview, it is not because of the unity of the transcendentals in themselves, as the ancient Greeks might have thought, but rather the unity of the transcendentals **in God**—who alone is true, who alone is beautiful, who alone is good. The good, the beautiful, and the true are the same thing. We are living in a time of brokenness as C. S. Lewis and so many others saw, and those who came before him even saw in the late eighteenth century. It is the intentional effort in the Western world to separate the good, the beautiful, and the true that leads to the moral horrors of the most unimaginable twentieth century.

We have to recover the fact that the transcendentals—the good, the beautiful, and the true—are at core the same. But in our fractured fallenness, we require different categories to describe different dimensions of what is one reality. The good, the beautiful, and the true, find their only source, and their only ultimate fulfillment in the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We have to reclaim beauty.

We have to show the beauty of truth and the splendor of beauty. We have to show it in literature, we have to show it in art, in human expressions, and in culture. We have to show it in relationships. We have to show it also just in terms of everyday life where we show the beauty of a mathematical equation. It is, when it is *true*, beautiful. We have to show the beauty of human endeavor when a human being, made in the image of God—whether he or she knows it or not— demonstrates that glory in devising a vaccine, or building a bridge, or for that matter, holding the hand of a child. We must teach in order that the beauty that God has embedded in His creation—that is sometimes hidden from view in terms of a sinful world—is made evident by our teaching, so that we make very clear that not only is what we are teaching true, what we are teaching—because its *true*—is beautiful. And it's not only a matter of aesthetic consideration; it is that. It is more.

And then there is **goodness**, the other of the transcendentals here that we have to teach in such a way that we rescue goodness. And in this sense, it is inherently, irreducibly, inescapably moral. This society has lost any conception of the good life. It has lost any agreement or consensus on moral goods. It is losing its sanity as to whether or not it even believes that there is a goodness that might exist or be defined, even as aspirational. One of the main tasks of Christian education in our times is to rescue goodness and to make very clear there is an objective moral frame of reference that is revealed in Scripture. And that not only is it revealed in Scripture, which is our ultimate authority, it is even embedded in all of creation, as Paul makes clear in Romans 1.

To be made in the image of God is to have—as a part of what it means to be human in the *Imago Dei*—an instinct, not only for the reality of the true and the beautiful, but also of the good. That is to say that all instruction is moral instruction. There is no teaching that is not laden with moral importance. There is no effect of any teaching that is not eventually—and that usually means very soon—moral in its reality and in its expression. 2 + 2 equals 4 may not appear to be a moral statement, but it is. Thus it is not only wrong, it is immoral to suggest that 2 + 2 might equal something other than 4, rooted either in confusion or an attempt to deceive. The more complex the equation, the more complex the text, the more complex the curriculum, the more enters in a danger to lose the true, the beautiful, the good.

Fifth, we have to rescue **knowledge**. It is an amazement to me but I was recently talking to a secular educator about controversies over—you aren't going to

be surprised at this—Common Core. As an educational authority I said, "I'm just trying to get into the inner logic of this." I said, "I did you the disfavor of reading your text. Because now I have to ask you, over here in these teacher aims, you say that the effort of the teacher should be to inculcate a certain kind of knowledge that students should be able to repeat on a test, etc. But over here you just list subjects and knowledge disappears. You clearly don't think knowledge here is possible." That's the kind of world we are living in, a world split apart. Our task as Christian educators is to redignify knowledge. That is an amazing thing. I can't imagine going to my primary school teachers and saying, "One of the purposes of my adult life is going to be to recover the dignity of knowledge." "What do you think we are doing here?" "Well. What she was doing there is not what is being done now, I can tell you that."

At the highest levels of the academic establishment, knowledge itself is increasingly subverted. Everything is being exchanged from knowledge for theory. And this is now taking place, most frighteningly, even in many of the disciplines and arenas of higher education that were thought to be largely immune from this: mathematics, the hard sciences, the applied sciences. It was considered for many years that it's one thing for the English department to go nuts; it's another thing for the engineers to lose their minds. It goes back to the problem of postmodernism. No one wants a postmodern engineer. You just want a postmodern architect, you want it to look like its defying truth, but the superstructure is going to have to be true. But discipline by discipline, this corruption of knowledge has filtered down.

When I was in middle school myself, I can remember a teacher saying, "I don't really believe that anything meaningful is learned by memorization." It's like we were supposed to have an emotional experience with the subject matter. The only way I got through it was by memorizing it. One of the glories of the Christian worldview revealed in Scripture is that *knowledge is bankable*: "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." You know it's bankable. Every mom, every parent, knows that knowledge is bankable. You are actually investing in a knowledge account in a child's mind, in a child's soul, in a child's heart. That child might not even know he knows—and most certainly might not even know why he knows it.

But you are recovering and rebuilding education understanding that knowledge itself is dignified by the Christian worldview. There is no apology for inculcating knowledge by the old means of memory, and recitation, and repetition, and honoring knowledge.

The sixth word is **wisdom**. Here again Scripture is so clear. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing. They are inseparable, but they are distinguishable. When you are looking at knowledge you are looking at that which we know. But wisdom is that ability to see through that which we know, to see what lies behind it and before it, its ultimate source in God, and its ultimate application in this life, its truthfulness and endurance in the life to come. Scripture tells us to prize wisdom. The Scripture also makes very clear that wisdom is that which we should seek; but ultimately, it is an act of God's grace—wisdom is a gift of God. It's that gift that you get to see. But one of the most frustrating aspects of education at any level, whether its kindergarten or all the way up to the Ph.D. seminar, is you really don't get to see. You can test knowledge. You really don't have the opportunity, in the crucible of that classroom, or seminar room, or educational experience, to test wisdom. That will come later as it's tested by experience and tried by fire. The reality is we are desirous that our students would learn to lean into wisdom and to seek it, and to pray that to their knowledge God would add wisdom, that they could apply truth to every dimension of their lives for as long as they will live.

The Christian teacher understands that wisdom isn't just a matter of intellectual activity. Again Scripture

helps us to understand this. The Scripture reveals to us that wisdom is something that eventually changes how we feel, our affective dimension, our intuitions. In my middle-aged years, this is one of the things I pray most for myself. I pray that my intuitions are ordered according to truth and wisdom. The longer I live the more I feel the urgency to pray that my initial response, my emotional responses—before any extended cogitation—would be ordered by wisdom.

The seventh word is **tradition**. It's just an undeniable fact that the name of your organization includes some fighting words: *classical* and *Christian*. Classical. You guys are reprinting really old stuff that you had to go find somewhere. And you are doing so without apology. You are saying that dead people have a voice in the most important education that you can offer today. Chesterton, you'll recall, referred to tradition as the democracy of the dead. It's where the dead get to show up and speak and in a certain way to vote.

I was greatly informed in my doctoral work by the Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan, who reminds us that "tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." That's the distinction. We are not worshipping tradition, we are not seeking tradition as a dead thing to which we are nonetheless obligated and committed. *We are seeking to be a part of a tradition*. We are seeking to reclaim it without apology. We want the dead to speak. We want to go back to the patriarchs and the prophets. We want to go back to Christ and the apostles. We want to go back to the fathers, and we want to go back to the reformers, and we want to go back to any number of people in between and beyond, in order to be a part of a conversation of which we are not capable. It is simply a matter of humility that we acknowledge that if we do not reclaim that great tradition of learning, if we do not reclaim that great Christian tradition of thought, if we do not reclaim classical knowledge and wisdom that had been lost, if we do not recover these things, then we will never be able to escape the intellectual, cultural, moral, unimaginative limitations of our own time—and they are massive.

We will cut ourselves off from that which even tells us who we are. So, don't apologize for requiring old books. Don't apologize for requiring old writings. Don't apologize for inviting people dead for centuries into your classroom. Don't apologize for introducing them and making clear that they matter. And in some sense, because of what they wrote and what they said and what they did, they are still here, as Chesterton would have us to understand.

Language is the eighth word. Not too long ago, I was in a debate having to do with what makes human beings distinctive. When are you debating someone who operates from a consistently secular worldview on what makes human beings distinctive, they come up with some amazing things. They do believe that human beings are distinct in some way, because after all we get driver's licenses and bears don't. (And even though a New York judge recently gave two chimps their day in court, the chimps didn't show up in court, and their attorney was not a chimp.) In this debate, a social scientist said, quite seriously, what differentiates homo sapiens from other advanced primates is our ability to cook! I just want to tell you I'm not going to hang human dignity on that because I've eaten some food that calls that into question! But there is something to that, there really is. I hadn't really thought of that before; that is a distinction. After all, it's the bears that come across our campfires, we don't come across theirs. But if human dignity is going to be reducible to the ability to cook, most millenials are sub-human. That's not going to work. Now again, if you are going to reject the Imago Dei, if you are going to reject the biblical anthropology, then you are going to have to come up with something crazy! At least throughout most of more recent centuries, and even going further back to the ancient Greeks, there's been the understanding that what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is language.

Language is one of God's gifts. And Scripture has an entire meta-narrative just on language. Just think of the Tower of Babel. Thank of the table of the nations. Think of Peter at the day of Pentecost and Paul at Mar's Hill. Think about the marriage supper of the Lamb and you realize language is playing some very, very, important roles here—what it means to be made in God's image. We are the creatures with the ability to use language to communicate. Of course we understand that with language we can say things that are good and beautiful and true or we can say things that are evil and horrifying and ugly. But we have to recover language as one of God's gifts to us. Linguistic ability is part of the Imago Dei. We have to recover language and we have to help our students to love words, and love language, and learn how to express good, beautiful, and true things in language.

Now it's very easy at a point like this simply to say the world's going to hell in a handbasket called an iPhone. But the world is going to hell in a hand basket called an iPhone in a sense—when you look at this you realize increasingly it is not just young people (I'm not going to just throw young people under the bus here)—it's increasingly an entire civilization that is reducing itself to emoticons and text messages. You have to wonder how many people are actually going to read books or have an extended conversation.

I am writing a book right now entitled *The Art of Christian Conversation*. It's not going to be massive. It's going to be a fairly small book, but it's a book I'm writing out of frustration. It's not just generational, but it's somewhat generational. There are so many people who lack the ability to have a conversation. It just seems that somehow we are going to have to tell people how to have a conversation. By the way, there were conversational guides that were written back in the age of the gentlemen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because during that time it was believed that conversation was one of the most essential social responsibilities and a discipline and art that had to be learned. It turns out that is true and when it's not learned around the dinner table, and when it's not learned in the organic context that we would expect, it's going to have to be learned somewhere. Language itself is something that is just disappearing from our culture. The vocabulary of the average eighth grader today is significantly reduced from the vocabulary of the average eighth grader twenty years ago. That's a big problem. You are a big part of the answer to that problem.

We are the ones who understand that by being made in the image of God, we are giving the gift of language such that it can be deployed, it can be received, it can be understood. It reveals every dimension of fallen humanity in terms of the ability to say the good things, the ugly things, the true things, or the false things. We are not human without language.

The ninth word is **reading**. Once again, have no apology for requiring reading. I have parents who come to me all the time because I talk so much about books and reading, and they say, "How can I get my child to read; I can't get them to read." And I say, "Yes, you can; yes, you can." Now I will say there is a problem here already. Most children are naturally drawn into reading by having books read to them, such that at some point, having been exhilarated and enriched and their hearts shaped and warmed by the relationship that comes from a parent or a grandparent reading a book to them, or an older sibling reading a book to them, they want to be able to do this for themselves and find themselves in the glory of reading. Increasingly, it is something that we are having to teach people to do, in the hopes that doing it they will learn to love it, even if at far later ages than outside that organic context. But give no apology for an education that is classical, an education that is Christian, in reading.

I've come to the conclusion that what is read gets to the heart faster than almost any other means of transmission—and more lastingly. There's an interesting study—there is a difference between young girls and

young boys in this, even more so for boys. Some of you have no doubt seen this research, that reading a text is now measurably different on a printed page than on a screen. It's because, for one thing, there is a tactile experience to holding a book. There's also a visual experience that is tied to the sensory capabilities in which turning a page and holding a book creates a wholly different experience than holding a flat screen and simply moving a finger. There's more to it than that, but not less than that. It simply reminds us that we have to recover reading without any apology.

Augustine heard those words "*tolle lege*," take and read. The apostle Paul, at the very end of his life, writing to Timothy said to "bring the books and parchments. Come if you can before winter." It's a reminder to us of the importance of reading, the dignity of reading, the glory of reading. We've got to recover this. It's not just reading strategies. That's what's being taught increasingly in higher academia—that's ideology again, that's theory. We are talking about reading.

Moms usually ask me this, dads too sometimes: "How can I get my 10-year-old son to read?" It's as if they have to get the kid's permission before they can read. You are the parent—make him read. Test him on it. Have you ever thought about this? Test him on it at the breakfast table! "You aren't going to eat." The other thing I said is, "Look, you are not the most reliable guide to what is going to be interesting to a 10-year-old boy." My parents just let me read. I don't mean indiscriminately. When I was interested in sharks and rattlesnakes or whatever, I had to do all the stuff I had to do, but then I could read anything I wanted to read on sharks and rattlesnakes—which was just about everything that was ever printed on sharks and rattlesnakes. My capacity and love for reading were such that I just wanted to get to the next one, get to the next one, get to the next one.

The **teacher** is the tenth word. In the eighth grade my family moved from a small southern town to the megalopolis of south Florida. But I moved in more ways than one; I moved from a junior high school to a middle school when I shifted one grade. I moved from a classroom where there was a teacher in the front, and desks, and we all sat up straight. We stood up when the teacher entered the room. We did the pledge of allegiance in the morning. Then, I walked right into Greenwich Village for the eighth grade. It was one of those experimental schools; my parents had no clue what I was getting into. There were no classrooms. It was one giant room with 880 middle schoolers in one room because "walls are divisive; we don't want to divide." It was the school without walls—don't you love that? And we didn't have teachers. I had a teacher in the seventh grade; I didn't have a teacher in the eighth grade—we had a facilitator. Now, I had no idea what was going on at Berkeley in the 60s when I was in the eighth grade—well, I kind of did, because I was staring at it. But I had no idea what this was looking like and where it had come from. Back in the 60s and 70s they were saying, "We don't need any sage on the stage, we just need a guide on the side, man." You had the subversion of the teacher as authority in the classroom. The teacher is now just a facilitator, because otherwise it's going to be a totalitarian imposition of curriculum and didactic authority in the lives of these otherwise genius children. I can still remember thinking, "No one is in charge here; we're not learning anything." I went home. "What are you learning?" "Nothing. I'm not learning anything." I just went into refuge in my own world during all of this. I just watched this chaos. It was a year lost to me in terms of the classroom experience. I can't remember learning *anything* other than survival in that setting. But I very clearly understood these people did not want to teach me anything.

We need teachers to teach. Here again the biblical worldview helps us a great deal. There is authority in teaching. There's supposed to be authority in teaching. The teacher is there for a reason. The teacher is there not only to impart knowledge but also to guide this process

and to make certain that the classroom is an experience in which learning can take place. It is a verb "to teach." The teacher is the one who does that. It's not fair to make the contrast "the sage on the stage versus the guide on the side." Let me be very, very blunt: we need someone on the stage. And we need someone doing more than guiding from the side.

The eleventh word is **school**. We have to redignify the idea of the school even as the early church came to understand the school of Christ and as the early church appropriated classical models of schooling. We do understand that there is something powerful, important—there's a stewardship that is palpable. There is an opportunity that is precious. In putting together a school in which you have an organized context for learning, something happens because students and teachers are together in the context of disciplined and intentional learning that isn't going to take place anywhere else.

So without apology, when you have as the name of your organization the Association of Classical and Christian Schools, be schools. Don't just be places where people show up to do the same sort of stuff. Make certain there is a unity of vision, a unity of mission, a unity of conviction, a unity of worldview, a unity of purpose. Make certain that it's something other than being in the same rough geographic proximity, or moving from one classroom to another, from one grade to another. Let there be a unified school that is represented by what you do to recover that.

Child is the twelfth word. Here again, going back to Rousseau and any number of developments—especially in the Enlightenment—is the confusion about what the child is. The 1970s, the 1960s, were filled with all kinds of arguments, basically coming from the most humanistic directions imaginable, like the Summerhill experiment and all the rest. You had a revival of Rousseau, in which the child is just basically good, and what you have to do is avoid doing anything to harm the child's natural development along the path of enlightenment.

We have to recover the biblical understanding of the child. It is a far more accurate picture to say the very least; it's also a far more endearing picture. We understand what it means to embrace the biblical understanding of the child, we come to understand that we are *not* looking at *tabula rossa*, we aren't looking at blank slates, we are looking at little sinners—glorious, little wiggling sinners. And we come to understand that God has created us such that by His glory and intentionality, we are not born as adults but rather we are to develop along a timeline in which childhood is so very, very important. What you do in influencing children, as children, is priceless and infinite. Enjoy it. Enjoy it! Enjoy working with children, as I know you do. What an incredible opportunity for parents to entrust to you their children in order that their children might be not only more educated but more godly, more moral, more attracted to the good, the beautiful, and the true, more grounded not only for this life, but also for the life to come.

We also have to recover the idea of the **adolescent**. A recent headline in the *New York Times*, just this week, writes of how young must you be to demand transgender surgery—it's a horrifying article at every conceivable level. One of the things it's talking about is that children as young as X or Y, should now be able to demand and receive this kind of surgery. Talk about a rebellion against a created order. Talk about a horrifying embrace of irrationality. It's just horrifying! Look at what it also says about the disappearance of adolescence. One thing we have is the extension of adolescence, in which adolescence is now being redefined into the late twenties and thirties, sociologically speaking. I'm talking about that period educationally defined in which the transition is being made from the child to the adult. There is an intellectual component that is traceable to the development of two things in particular, and that is abstract thinking and a moral crisis.

This is what I try to help Christian parents understand. You want that moral crisis to happen, because without it they will never grow to become mature believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference between the eight-year-old and the thirteen-year-old is that the thirteen-year-old is asking questions knowing that it might have been otherwise. She could have been born to Hindu parents in India. This might have turned out differently had this happened. The moral crisis that comes with adolescence is something that virtually every wise civilization has understood in order to surround adolescents at that stage with moral maturity and moral truth and with loving moral guides to help them through the moral crisis. Today, this society is trying to seduce adolescents into an enduring moral crisis.

Christian education is committed to seeing them through to the other side of it. This is where I often cite an unlikely source and that is Oliver Wendell Holmes who said that there are two forms of simplicity. There's the simplicity on the near side of complexity, and there's simplicity on the far side of complexity—and the latter is far to be preferred over the former. With a child you have simplicity on the near side of complexity. They don't understand moral complexity. They can't think as other minds would think. They can't abstract themselves. They are not capable of that type of abstract thinking. There's simplicity there and it's sweet, but it's not going to be sweet in a forty-year-old. In this world, in this age, it's growing far more rare to find someone who achieves what we biblically would define as a simplicity of truth, a simplicity of affirmation, a simplicity of conviction, on the far side of complexity—having worked through the issues, having been guided through a process of careful thought and responsible conversation. Our goal is to help students, especially in the high school and the college experience, attain a simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Let's recover **time**. As you know, education isn't instant. There are instances of recognition, instances of understanding. There are flashes that just happen, and when they happen they are glorious. You can sometimes see a student's face come alive when, all of the sudden, at one moment in time they get it and they love it and they are excited by it—there's that "aha" moment. But those aren't all that often if we are honest. We are sowing seeds for a very, very long cultivation, for a harvest that we may never actually get to see ourselves. But that should not dissuade us in any way for understanding that time is also a gift; we can't download an authentic education. It has to be received over time, seasoned over time, contemplated over time, tested over time, and demonstrated over time.

We need to remember that education is **basic**. By this I mean what the Catholics refer to as subsidiarity. It's the principle that that which is most basic is most powerful—which is to say, if the family breaks down you can't have a welfare system to replace the absence of parents. That which is more basic, the family, has to be strong if civilization is going to be strong. You can't have a strong society if the bases of society are destroyed.

So in terms of this particular conversation, I want to remind us that what we are really trying to do is to encourage parents to be the teachers of their children and to hopefully work in concert with or under the direct supervision of churches that are assuming their responsibility, which is prior to the responsibility of the school. We understand that the school cannot replace—must not dare idolatrously replace, arrogantly or overreachingly replace—the family or the church. Rather, do everything to serve the church and families in such a way that that which is more basic than what we schools do may be encouraged and not subverted by our task.

The last word, as we think about all of this, is **kingdom**. We are not seeking merely to build a civilization. That's one of the nice by-products. We are not primarily concerned about the culture and the society—that's the responsibility, that's part of what it

means to be the city of man, that's part of what it means to bear this responsibility as image bearers and as a redeemed people. We are ultimately serving a kingdom. It's that city of God that is ultimately the source of all of our confidence. If our hopes are for this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. Every one of those students you teach is going to die. Everything you have done will eventually die with you in the city of man. Nothing is actually lasting in the city of man. Nothing.

But in contrast, nothing in the city of Christ, in the city of God, is ever lost. Nothing in Christ's kingdom is ever lost. Given the stresses and strains in education, given the pressures and the continual political battles, given the economic issues, given the structural problems, given the students and parents and donors, just given the weight of all of this and the increasing complexity of all of this, if I thought I was doing this merely for the city of man I would quit. And if you do it long enough, merely for the city of man, then you are going to be even more disappointed because you are going to find out that a lot of your students don't turn out like you intended. At least, it doesn't look that way.

On the other hand with a kingdom perspective, we are eschatological in our educational mission. We are driven by the gospel and by the love of God to do what we do knowing that nothing that is done in the kingdom, for the kingdom, will ever be lost. You are not merely teaching students. You are shaping citizens of a heavenly kingdom. And in that sense, nothing will ever be lost.

So while we seek to recover and rebuild in the ruins, people are scratching their heads all around us trying to figure out, why are these people doing these things? "Why are all these books by dead people showing up? Why are these thirteen-year-olds memorizing stuff that other thirteen-year-olds don't even care about or know about? Why? Why? Why?" We can say, "To put the matter bluntly, it's because this is what education actually looks like." And then we can say, "But we aren't doing it merely for this reason. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom by God's grace seeking to form, to upbuild, to encourage, to educate, to inspire little citizens of a heavenly kingdom to one day take their place in that kingdom and do what we do till Jesus comes." Amen. God bless you all.