

Mike Goheen

Who Turned Out the Light? Educational Light in a Dark World

THE PHILOSOPHERS OF the eighteenth-century Enlightenment confessed with great confidence that they had discovered the light of the world. In the luminescence of human reason the problems of the human condition could be resolved. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the light of the Enlightenment is failing to illuminate our path to the better world it promised. Our educational systems, shaped as they were by the Enlightenment, mirror this broader cultural crisis. In this time of growing darkness the call of God's people is to reflect the true light of the world for the public life of our culture. For those called to the educational sector of cultural life the light of Christ must illumine their endeavours, witnessing to the true end of history. In this article I explore what this might mean with reference to Philippians 2:14-16.

Keywords: postmodernity, witness, syncretism, Kingdom.

The Growing Darkness of Our Times

Friedrich Nietzsche's parable 'The Madman' prophetically captures the post-modern spirit. With penetrating insight he saw that when God is eliminated from the life of a culture there is only darkness – no right or wrong, good or bad, true or false. The world of the late 19th century was not ready for his message. Today, however, his words connect with new resonance. He is hailed as 'the patron saint' of postmodernity.

'Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market place calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why! Is he lost? said one. Has he strayed away like a child? said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage? Has he emigrated? – the people cried out laughing, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?" he called out. "I mean to tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers! . . . Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? . . . Do we not hear the noise of gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell divine putrefaction? – for even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And

we have killed him! . . . Shall we not ourselves have to become gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event . . .” Here the madman was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. “I come too early”, he said, “I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling – it has not yet reached men’s ears. . . . This deed is as yet farther from them than the farthest star – and yet they have done it!” It is further stated that the mad man made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his *Requiem aeternam Deo*. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: “What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?”¹

In this parable Nietzsche says that we (in Western culture) have killed God. He refers to the growing practical atheism as a result of enthroning the authority of autonomous reason as the ultimate authority. Public truth is reduced to what can be verified by the scientific method. Since God is not open to such verification, He is eliminated from the public square. Moreover, Nietzsche sees the terrible consequences of this rejection of God: ‘Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?’ He rightly recognizes that without God there can be no meaning to history, no standards for true and false, right and wrong, good and bad. While the public life of Western culture continued to live on the capital of the Christian faith, Nietzsche saw clearly that the ‘death of God’ meant increasing darkness. As for the Christian churches, they were monuments and tombs of God. They were simply relics of a bygone era or fossils – the remains of something that was once alive.

Nietzsche rightly saw that the full implications of that event had not yet reached the ears of his contemporaries. However, it has reached the ears of the Western masses at the end of the 20th century. Postmodern society grows increasingly cold and dark as it struggles to come to terms with an absence of meaning in history.

To understand our present darkness we need to return to the Enlightenment. At that time western humankind believed the light had gone on; they now possessed the light in which they could rightly understand and control the world. This light would illumine the way to a new world of freedom, justice, truth, and happiness.² This newly discovered light was best expressed at the time in the couplet of Alexander Pope: ‘Nature and nature’s laws lay hid in night; God said ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light’.³ The light was the scientific method formu-

1 Nietzsche, Friedrich, ‘The Madman’ in *The Joyful Wisdom translated Thomas Common. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Volume 10*, ed. Oscar Levy, 1964, pp. 167-169.

2 Hazard, Paul, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Meridian Books, 1963) pp. 14-33.

3 Randall, John Herman Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1940) p. 275.

lated by Newton. Autonomous human reason was able to employ the scientific method to come to a true understanding of the world. Understanding the world, they could change it.

This confidence in the scientific method remained rather limited in scope at first; only the scientists were really aware of the significance of Newton. However, two things happened that produced a widespread confidence among Europeans that the scientific method was the key to future human happiness. The first was the incredible results of the scientific method. As never before, a method produced spectacularly tangible results and produced them quickly. The second was the religious wars of the same time period. Unfortunately, at the same time that the scientific method was producing unity among scientists about the truth of the physical world, the gospel was producing terrible bloodshed.⁴ The common person drew the obvious conclusion: the gospel produces hatred, bloodshed, and division while the scientific method produces unity, agreement, and cooperation. Europe found a new light and was soundly converted.⁵

This new light was employed to illuminate human society. If the scientific method could produce such spectacular results in physics and astronomy, then surely its application to politics, society, economics, and education would produce a similar result. This is the birth of the human sciences.⁶ Confidence is placed in science to produce a new social order.⁷ Moreover, confidence in the light of science produced the conviction that humankind was progressively and inevitably moving toward a better world. It was simply a matter of time before the power of science would bring Western humankind to the heavenly city of man.⁸

It is during the Enlightenment that we find the birth of modern education. Richard Tarnas expresses it like this:

'Proper education of the human mind in a well-designed environment would bring forth rational individuals, capable of understanding the world and themselves, able to act in the most intelligent fashion for the good of the whole. With the mind cleared of traditional prejudices and superstitions, man could grasp the self-evident truth and thus establish for himself a rational world within which all could flourish. The dream of human freedom and fulfillment in this world could now be realized. Mankind had at last reached an enlightened age.'⁹

4 Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Christianity in a Secularized World* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) pp. 11-19.

5 Newbigin, Lesslie, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) p. 30.

6 Randall (1940) pp. 308-333.

7 Hazard (1963) pp. 145-198.

8 Tarnas, Richard, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (Toronto: Ballantine Books, 1991) pp. 322 ff.

9 Tarnas (1991) p. 281.

Education had an extremely important role to play in realizing this Enlightenment dream. The formation of good rational citizens would produce the heavenly city of the Enlightenment dream.

In the next century the light appeared to burn even brighter. The Industrial Revolution produced a marriage of science and technology that gave humanity the power to control the forces of nature. Technology demonstrated the practical value of science and appeared to be producing the world promised by Enlightenment philosophers. This confidence peaked in the secular decade of the 1960s. Yet during this same decade of the 1960s another movement was afoot which would prove to be more important for the future. This was the emergence of a youthful countercultural movement that shouted a loud 'NO' to the light of science and technology. Theodore Roszak argues that 'the leading mentors of our youthful counter-culture have, in a variety of ways, called into question the validity of the conventional scientific worldview, and in so doing have set about undermining the foundations of the technocracy'.¹⁰ It is increasingly clear today that the idolatry of science and technology produces fatal effects – ecological, psychological, economic, military, social. The light of science, is not only beneficial; it is also detrimental.

The most characteristic feature of our contemporary postmodern situation is its loss of confidence in big stories of progress. Jean Francois Lyotard has given the most well-known definition of postmodernity: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernity as incredulity toward metanarratives'.¹¹ Metanarratives are big stories of progress; postmodern humanity is losing confidence in these stories. In the light of the gospel these growing problems are signs of the failure of our idols.¹² We have placed our faith in human ability, reason, science, and technology to redeem us and produce a new social order. They have failed; the light of the Enlightenment is growing dim.

The famous Hungarian philosopher of science Michael Polanyi used a powerful image to describe the latter part of the 20th century.¹³ He said the explosion of modernity (the burst of light from the Enlightenment to the 20th century) is the combustion of the flame of humanistic rationalism and the oxygen of the Christian worldview. Our postmodern condition is the result of the burning away of the oxygen of the gospel by the flame of scientific humanism. However, with the burning away of the oxygen – what Nietzsche called the death

10 Roszak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) p. 205.

11 Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. xxiv.

12 Goheen, Mike 'Charting a Faithful Course amidst Postmodern Winds' in Hans Boersma (ed) *Living in the LambLight: Christianity and Contemporary Challenges to the Gospel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001a) pp. 17-31.

13 Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) pp. 265f.

of God – the light of humanistic rationalism is flickering and about to die.

It is not surprising that the failure of the Enlightenment dream has large implications for education. If the whole educational enterprise was shaped by the Enlightenment, and that view of the world is failing, the question arises as to the role of schools. If there are no more big stories of progress to give meaning to education, then what is its purpose? The whole educational enterprise embodies a worldview, a story about the world. The educational systems of the past couple hundred years have been moulded by the story of the Enlightenment. If that story has been discredited, why have education in a postmodern world?

The answer that seems to be driving educational institutions and philosophy today is that education is to equip students with the necessary skills – especially computer and information technology – to compete in the jungle of the market. Since our postmodern world is characterized by the dominance of global, consumer capitalism, education must contribute to that end. The school is a vendor of useful information and marketable skills that will enable the privileged to compete in the market place.¹⁴

Shining Like Stars in the Darkness

Paul describes the Roman culture as a 'crooked and perverse generation' (Phil. 2:15). We find the origin of those words in Deuteronomy 32:5. They describe a culture that has turned from the living God to serve dead idols. It is a society that finds its centre not in Yahweh but in idolatry. That was the Roman empire in which the Philippian church lived. That is also the postmodern world in which we live. Nietzsche said that churches in a postmodern world were monuments and tombs. Paul has a very different view: 'Shine like stars as you hold the word of life'. In the midst of darkness, the Christian community is called to let the light of the gospel shine in all their endeavours and thus point to the true goal of history.

We can only shine like stars if we 'hold the word of life' (Phil. 2:16). The New International Version translates this 'hold *out* the word of life' with the notation that this could be translated 'hold on to.' The sense is then: 'Shine like stars in the universe as you hold *on to* the word of life'. Hold on to, hold out; hold fast, hold forth. English translations are split. I suggest that Paul chose the word precisely because it had both meanings. It is more common in Eastern cultures to choose words that have a fullness of meaning. The implication then is: We shine like stars as we *both* hold on to and hold out the word of life.

Let me rephrase what Paul is saying: 'In the midst of a culture whose story is failing, live fully in an alternative story.' That is what it means to hold on to the word of life. But we are also to invite others into this counterstory that stands in contrast to the Western story. That is what it means to hold out the word of life. The Bible also tells a story about the world. It tells us that through tremendous conflict the world is moving toward the kingdom of God. The death and resurrection of Jesus has revealed and accomplished that end. That is the true story

14 Postman, Neil, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

of the world. Paul calls us to live fully in the story of the Bible inviting others into that story.

To do so, we must shake ourselves free of the idolatry that clings to us. Paul exhorts the Philippian church to be 'pure children of God' (Phil. 2:15). The word here for pure carries the idea of undiluted. Pure wine is wine undiluted with water; pure gold is gold undiluted with impurities. To shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation, the people of God are to be undiluted by the idolatry that shapes their culture. Lesslie Newbigin has remarked and demonstrated that the church in Western culture is in 'an advanced state of syncretism' (1983:23).¹⁵ Syncretism is the union of two incompatible worldviews; each is compromised. Newbigin suggests that the people of God in Western culture have accommodated themselves to the idols of western culture. Instead of offering a different story to our contemporaries, we have been absorbed into the same story.¹⁶

Christian schools have not escaped this syncretism.¹⁷ Perhaps this is most clearly seen in how the *purpose* of education has been shaped by a story rooted in economic and technicistic idolatry. What Joel Carpenter has said about evangelical universities is also true of many Christian elementary and secondary schools. In a comment summarizing one section of his paper, he notes that most evangelical universities are 'preparing their students for productive lives in

15 Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983) p. 23.

16 The primary way the Christian community has been syncretistically absorbed into the reigning Western story, according to Newbigin, is by accommodating itself to the fact-value dichotomy. Science arose in the 17th century to be the most powerful culturally formative force in the West. Science became the undisputed authority for truth. All other authorities – including the Bible – had to be conformed to its rule. All truth claims about the world had to be judged at the bar of science and reason. This produced a dichotomy that lies at the root of our culture between facts and values, truth and opinions, knowledge and faith, public and private. The gospel is confined to the realm of the private, a value, an opinion that can be held in the privacy of our homes and churches but has no right in the classroom, the courts, the media, the government, the market place. Unfortunately, Christians too easily accepted this kind of dichotomy (Newbigin, Lesslie, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989)). It is not hard to see how this has disemboweled the church's witness. Instead of standing against this dichotomy witnessing to another authority – Jesus Christ and His Word – we have accepted the authority of scientific reason.

17 Al Boerema, principal of a Christian school in British Columbia, points to a number of ways the Christian schools have accommodated themselves to the cultural story. Among others he notes a rational control to manage the educational process; evaluation and assessment to measure performance; specialization that leads to disintegration; individualism and competition in the learning process; a uniform educational program in keeping with a humanist worldview of state; trans-

the new global technologically driven economy'.¹⁸ Productive lives are defined by employment and participation in a market-driven society rather than by a faithful witness to the kingdom. Referring to this same economist reality as 'Mammon', Calvin Seerveld also notes that Christian schools have been too much shaped by this force. We sink enormous amounts of money into computers to teach information technology skills while at the same time removing art and music programs.¹⁹ Perhaps more disturbing is the lack of courses that analyze globalism, consumerism, and social impacts of technology in light of the Scripture equipping Christian students with the insight to criticize the spirit that shapes information technology. Often this syncretism is covered with language that speaks of 'productive lives', 'professional success', 'responsible citizenship' and the like.

We live in a culture in which the story that has shaped it for several hundred years is in decline. The educational system tied to that story is also experiencing crisis. The call to the Christian community in terms of its educational task is to embody a different story in our schools. The Enlightenment dream has shaped the purpose of education, the curriculum, the pedagogy, the structures, the internal theoretical structure of the various disciplines. Increasingly, with the failure of the Enlightenment story, a new global, technologically driven economy shapes the educational enterprise. The task of the Christian school is to reject the idolatry that has shaped the humanistic schools and embody a contrast story. We must ask, 'where have we been diluted by Western idolatry in our educational practice?' Further, we need to ask 'What would a school look like if it were radically shaped by the gospel, by the Biblical story, rather than the story of our culture?'

If our educational endeavours are to be faithful, they must be shaped by the

ferring education entirely from the home to educational experts (Boerema, Al, *Educating Faithfully: Is It Possible In Schools?* Unpublished paper submitted for Education 621 class, Trinity Western University, July 2000, pp. 8-10, 12-16). Elaine Brouwer points to an inconsistency between teaching content and educational practices: 'It is grossly unfair to expect students to formulate the biblical answers when schooling practices model other answers, when they encourage individualism rather than community, competition rather than mutuality, consumption rather than stewardship' (Brouwer, Elaine, *Embodying the Story in Our Schools*, Unpublished paper presented at the Third Leadership Enablement Conference, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia, October 1999, p. 2). She attributes this to Christian schooling structures and practices shaped by a different story than the story of Scripture.

- 18 Carpenter, Joel, 'New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in a World System, or Players in a New Game?' in Ogbu Kalu (ed) *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).
- 19 Seerveld, Calvin, *Through the Waters: Christian Schooling as a City of Refuge* (Toronto/Ancaster: Institute for Christian Studies and Ontario Christian School Teachers Association, 1998) p. 13.

Scriptural story. Put another way, our schools must work in the light of Jesus Christ rather than the light of scientific rationalism, relativistic pluralism, or global consumerism. If the Bible is to shape our lives and educational practices four things are necessary: we must know and feel the thrust of the story of the Bible as it moves toward its goal in Jesus Christ; we must know our place in that story and its significance; we must know the creation, fall, redemption story line; we must understand how that Scriptural teaching can be brought to bear more specifically on the educational practices of the Christian school.

Our Place in the Biblical Story: Witness to the Good News of the Kingdom

To challenge the growing capitulation of education to the global market, I want to focus on the second question: where are we at in the Biblical story? One way to gauge whether or not we 'feel' deeply our place in the Biblical story is by asking: 'Do we recognize the question in Acts 1:6 to be the most natural question in the world?' The disciples ask Jesus: 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' Initially this criterion may sound strange but it does reveal whether or not we understand how the Biblical story shapes our lives today. The expectation of every Jew living at the time of Jesus was that the Biblical story would close with the climactic, immediate, dramatic, and visible coming of the kingdom of God ushered in by the Messiah in the power of the Spirit. When Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, he immediately gained followers but most fell away when he did not fit their expectations. But a few disciples continued to believe and hold fast to Jesus. Even though Jesus tried to help them understand the necessity of His death, they could not comprehend it. Finally, Jesus was crucified and that little band of disciples was scattered. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead. He gathered them again together and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. They were coming to see the significance of the crucifixion. Now the kingdom could come; now the Spirit – which the prophets portrayed as an end-time gift – could be poured out; now the end could come. Jesus promises the coming the Spirit, the coming of the kingdom. So they ask the most natural question in the world: 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' If you are filled up with the Old Testament story, living in that story like the disciples were, you would expect the Messiah to usher in the end. A crucified Messiah would not fit; however, when you came to understand the necessity of the crucifixion, you would think that the way was now paved for the end. Now you are going to restore the kingdom, right?

Jesus' answer is extremely significant. It is no doubt very perplexing to the disciples. He tells them that the end will be delayed. He also tells them the significance and meaning of that delay; in other words, what their calling is in the time before the end would be. The Spirit will be poured out and you will be witnesses.

The prophets portrayed the Spirit as the one who brought the salvation of the end-time kingdom. With the outpouring of the Spirit, the church now has begun to experience the salvation of the end. An illustration can serve to make this clear. The gospels often compare the kingdom to a feast, a banquet. When the end comes we will enjoy the full banquet of the kingdom. However, the peo-

ple of God have been given a *foretaste*.

A foretaste of the kingdom constitutes us as witnessing community. The reason we have been offered a foretaste of the salvation of the end is so that we can witness to that salvation. Another illustration from our present culture elucidates this. The people of God are like a movie preview. A movie preview gives *actual footage* of the movie that is coming in the future so that people will want to watch it. The people of God are a kingdom preview. We embody (actually possess) the salvation of the kingdom that is coming in the future so that people will see it and want it. That is what the witness is all about.

It is important to say one more thing about the nature of salvation of which we have a foretaste. Unfortunately, the pagan roots of our western worldview in Plato have reshaped the Biblical idea of salvation. In the Bible salvation is the restoration of the creation from sin. The Bible tells a story that culminates in resurrected bodies, on a new earth, living the fullness of creational life, redeemed from sin. Salvation for many in the west, however, is the salvation of ethereal souls in heaven. Salvation is *escape from* the creation rather than *renewal of* the creation. Salvation is the renewal of our marriages, the renewal of our families, the renewal of politics, economics, education and more. Our witness is to Jesus Christ who is the Creator and the Redeemer of all things. Witness is the embodiment of this comprehensive renewal of human life not only a restored relationship to God.

Witness defines our place in the story. The Bible pictures a time when the final judgement and consummation has been delayed so that there is a space for folk to repent and believe the good news about the kingdom come in Jesus. The way that people will realize that the good news is true is by seeing a community that embodies that salvation in the whole of their lives – and this includes our schools.

Witness: A Clash of Ultimate Commitments

This means that our witness will be a clash of ultimate faith commitments. The Western cultural community has placed its faith in science and technology, and more recently in tolerance and the global market, to redeem us and usher in a new world. The story of the Bible pictures a clash between the gospel and all other worldviews that will ultimately culminate in the victory of the kingdom. The Christian community in the West is shaped by two fundamentally different stories. They are rooted in different faith commitments and they will shape every part of human life – including the whole educational enterprise – in a different way. Witness means the embodiment of an alternative story – a story rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus assures the faithful church that this will mean an encounter, struggle, and probably suffering. When there is a clash of stories or ultimate commitments, there are only two choices: accommodate yourself to the reigning story (syncretism) or be faithful and expect conflict. This includes education.

This is what Jesus calls the disciples – the nucleus of God's people – to do. They were to be witnesses to the coming kingdom. They were to embody in the whole of their lives the story of the gospel *in contrast* to the reigning assump-

tions of the Roman world.²⁰ They did; they suffered; and the attractive alternative drew numerous converts. People were converted from understanding and living in the world according to the public doctrine of the Roman empire to understanding and living in the world according to the gospel. The church grew dramatically and began to exercise a formative influence on the Roman empire. Then something totally unexpected happened about three hundred years after Jesus; the Roman emperor converted to Christianity. The Christian faith which had been an illegal religion now became the religion of the empire. Instead of an encounter, the church now became part of the Roman empire. The church took its role and place within the culture rather than challenging it in the name of Jesus.²¹ The Christian community in the West developed its characteristic attitude toward culture during a period when it was established as one thread in a larger cultural fabric. It learned to play its role as part of the broader cultural story; witness to a different way of living in the world was obscured.

The call of the gospel to educators is to be witnesses to the coming kingdom in our educational institutions and practices. That is, to carry out every part of the educational enterprise in the light of the gospel over against an educational system that works in a different light – to witness to the coming of the kingdom in our schools.

Education and Witness

We can define the relationship between witness and education in two ways. First, education is for witness. There are a number of good suggestions offered about 'education for.' For example, Stronks and Blomberg speak of education for responsive discipleship;²² Fowler, Van Brummelen, and Van Dyk speak of education for freedom;²³ Wolterstorff speaks of education for responsible action;²⁴ Thiessen speaks of education for commitment.²⁵ All are helpful as they point to some aspect of Scripture's teaching. My intent is not to discredit any of these suggestions. Rather the word witness may be an appropriate one for our post-modern times. It is important to stress that the task of the Christian school is to

20 Lohfink, Gerhard, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

21 This was not all bad; many good things resulted from this symphonia. But that topic would take us beyond our current concern.

22 Stronks, Gloria & Blomberg, Doug (eds.) *A Vision with a Task: Christian Schooling for Responsive Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).

23 Fowler, Stuart, Harro van Brummelen & John Van Dyk, *Christian Schooling: Education for Freedom* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Higher Education, 1990).

24 Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

25 Thiessen, Elmer John, *Teaching for Commitment: Liberal Education, Indoctrination, and Christian Nurture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993).

train students, transmit insight for the purpose of equipping them for faithful witness to the gospel in the whole of their lives.

The reason witness is an appropriate word is that we are, as Newbiggin suggests, in an advanced state of syncretism. Too often we train our students, not to lovingly challenge the existing culture, but to accommodate themselves to it, to fit into it as 'responsible citizens'. Too often our goal as Christian educational institutions is to establish ourselves and gain recognition according to prevailing standards – even when those standards are derived from an alternative worldview. For example, the curriculums of Christian schools in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia are shaped by standardized tests given by the government at the end of each school year. Yet this curricular testing is not neutral; John Van Dyk rightly notes that curriculums are designed to implement a way of life.²⁶

In contrast to our syncretistic tendency we need to develop a missionary mindset. When missionaries go to another culture, they strive to recognize the underlying religious worldview that shapes the whole culture, including the language and institutions, so they won't be conformed to it. There are two sides to this witness. On the one side, she will want to be part of that culture, make it her home, participate in its life, contribute to a healthy development, live out her life according to the patterns of that culture, witness in ways that are familiar. Yet on the other side – and this is what I am now stressing – the missionary will not accommodate herself to the culture; that would be disastrous. She will recognize that culture to be idolatrous. Her antennae will be up; there will be a constant dialogue between the gospel and the culture. She will be aware of the core religious assumptions that are shaping the whole of that cultural life. Witness will bring about an unbearable tension between the gospel and the host culture. It is this kind of mindset we need to recover for Western culture is idolatrous as well. Witness indicates a clash of fundamental faith assumptions as they are lived out in various spheres of life. Education for responsive discipleship, for freedom, for responsible action, for commitment are all Biblical phrases. But they can be misunderstood – contrary to the framers' intentions – and read in terms of education to *fit in*. Witness states more clearly that we cannot be conformed to this culture. Witness means an encounter.

The second relation between the two is education as witness. Not only do we equip our students for faithful witness in their callings, our very institutions and processes of education ought to be witnesses *in themselves*. In the very act of educating in the light of the gospel we are educational witnesses. Our purpose, curriculum, pedagogy, structures, leadership, theory shaped by the Biblical

26 Vriend, John et. al., *To Prod the "Slumbering Giant": A Christian Response to the Crisis in the Classroom* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1972) p. 95. The British Columbia public school system spells out quite clearly the way of life it wants to develop in its mission statement: 'The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.'

story should encounter the same in the public system as a witness to Christ's rule over education. It is much safer and more comfortable to withdraw into our education enclaves in distant safety from the public schools. A challenge to the dominant patterns of education may mean the loss of funding, marginalization, loss of recognition, maybe hard questions we cannot answer. In a dark world where education is breaking down under the weight of idolatry, we need to clearly point to a different light – the light of Jesus Christ.²⁷

A Faithful Educational Witness

There have been two continual dangers for the Christian community. The first is to lessen the encounter and accommodate ourselves to the culture with its reigning idolatry. The second is, when we see the irreconcilability, to some how withdraw so we can live out our commitments in peace. Both are unscriptural. We are called to live as members of our culture, participating with love, sympathy, compassion, and justice in cultural development. However, we are to continually live out that responsibility in the light of the gospel. That will mean an encounter. And the Bible is very realistic about this. We are not to expect a final victory until Christ returns. We are to expect opposition, rejection, and even suffering (John 15:18-20). Our task is not to build the kingdom; but to be faithful witnesses to it.

Two qualifying statements are in order lest what is being said be misunderstood. First, the stress here is on the antithetical responsibility we have in our cultural calling. However, this is not the whole picture. As Christians we are called to participate in the cultural development of the societies in which we live, not simply stand in perpetual protest. The second qualification is this: the gospel has had a salting impact on Western culture and therefore the encounter is not as sharp as it might be in, say, a Muslim or Hindu culture. It is precisely for this reason the antithesis needs to be emphasized. It is too easy for us to forget the antithetical side of our calling when the sharpness of the encounter is reduced. Our culture is one that serves idols and is rightly called neo-pagan. That idolatry has deeply shaped our educational institutions and therefore an antithetical stance will be an essential component of faithfulness.

All of this can be pulled together by focussing on the centre and supreme witness of our faith – the cross of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, the cross was God's ultimate expression of his love for the world. It was an act of solidarity with the sin and suffering of the world. It was an act of identification with idolaters he loved and came to save. On the other hand, the cross was God's ultimate expression of judgement on the sin and idolatry of the world. It was an act of separation from the sin and idolatry that shaped culture. It was an act of rejection and opposition to that which destroys his creation. It was therefore an act of solidarity and separation, identification and rejection at the same time. Believers called to take up the cross and follow Jesus must assume this same stance: a faithful witness (including education) will involve both sides of the cross. On the one hand, we live in solidarity and identification with our con-

27 Fowler, Stuart, 'Communities, Organizations, and People' in *Pro Rege* (June 1993) p. 24.

temporaries, our educational colleagues who are attempting to transmit insight to the next generation. Education is a good part of cultural development. On the other hand, we stand against, reject, and separate ourselves from the sinful idolatry that shapes the humanistic educational institutions of our day.

This twofold stance will require discernment and wisdom. Its form will be different in each place. Discernment is not a matter of intelligence but of wisdom and spiritual sensitivity that comes with a close walk with Jesus Christ. Spiritual discernment will have the following five elements if a faithful educational embodiment is to take place.

First, we must understand the Biblical story as one unfolding story that reveals to us universal history and our place in it. When the story is broken up into devotional, theological, historical-critical, or moral bits it is easily absorbed into the reigning cultural story. Holding fast the word of life means holding fast the Bible as one story that begins with the whole creation and ends with its renewal.²⁸

Second, we must understand much more adequately the foundational idolatrous assumptions and currents that are shaping western culture. We have been deceived by the myths of a Christian culture or secular neutral culture. A Chinese proverb says: "If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish." If you want to know about Western culture, don't ask someone who is Western! Yet the thriving churches in other parts of the world have enabled us to have a new set of eyes to view our culture. Let us struggle to understand the idolatry (and created goodness) of our culture.

Third, we must have a cultural strategy for dealing with the idolatrous forms of education that are prevalent in our culture. We cannot simply reject them nor adopt them. In every pedagogical theory, every curricular philosophy, every academic discipline, indeed every educational product, we find both creational insight as well as idolatrous distortion. The educational forms of our culture must be subverted.²⁹

Fourth, we must be ready to work and suffer. It will take hard work to understand the Biblical and cultural story. It will take hard work to discern idolatry and creational insight. Faithfulness will also bring suffering. Paul makes it clear that those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer (2 Tim. 3:12). When the church is faithful in challenging the idolatrous culture of its day, it is bound to pay the price. Perhaps radical Christian education will make it difficult to graduate students who can participate in the area of business driven by the profit motive or the area of social work formed by humanism. If status in the educational world and success defined by employment are more important to us than faithfulness, we will not shine as lights but will inevitably adopt the prevailing norms.

28 Bolt, John, *The Christian Story and the Christian School* (Grand Rapids: Christian Schools International, 1993).

29 For an example of subversion in the area of educational leadership see Goheen, Mike, 'Educating Between the Times: Postmodernity and Educational Leadership' in *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, Vol 5 No 1, Spring 2001b) 27-39 (pp. 31-36).

Fifth, Christian schools must assume a posture of prayer and repentance. Perhaps if Paul wrote his letter today, with our broader understanding of astronomy, he would have written: Shine like *moons* in a crooked and perverse generation. Moons, of course, have no light of their own; they reflect the light of the sun. Neither does the believing community have any light of its own. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. It is only in the light of his life, death, and resurrection that the world can be seen for what it truly is. We can only reflect that life if we abide in Him as branches in the vine so that sap of his life might flow to us. Christian schools ought to be vital communities of prayer and worship. From that radiating centre the gospel should permeate the whole educational enterprise. Only then can we shine like moons, reflecting the life of Christ in the midst of our culture. And since the conforming of our education systems to the gospel is a spiritual battle, and not simply getting our worldviews straight, constant repentance will be part of that prayer and worship. We bring to Christ and to the foot of the cross our dreadfully compromised educational practices; we ask his forgiveness; we ask for his wisdom; we ask for his empowerment to take a few more baby steps toward faithfulness. And – this is essential – we joyfully take up our task knowing that the kingdom belongs to Him. He will bring his purposes to pass, of that we can be sure. Unlike the idols of the Age of Reason God delivers on his promises. As so we rejoice, and hope, and seek to embody a little more faithfully this good news.

Bibliography

- Boerema, Al, *Educating Faithfully: Is It Possible In Schools?* Unpublished paper submitted for Education 621 class, Trinity Western University, July 2000.
- Bolt, John, *The Christian Story and the Christian School* (Grand Rapids: Christian Schools International, 1993).
- Brouwer, Elaine, *Embodying the Story in Our Schools*, Unpublished paper presented at the Third Leadership Enablement Conference, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia, October 1999.
- Carpenter, Joel, 'New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in a World System, or Players in a New Game?' in Ogbu Kalu (ed) *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming). [The paper is presently on the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education's website.]
- Fowler, Stuart, Harro van Brummelen & John Van Dyk, *Christian Schooling: Education for Freedom* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Higher Education, 1990).
- Fowler, Stuart, 'Communities, Organizations, and People' in *Pro Rege* (June 1993).
- Goheen, Mike 'Charting a Faithful Course amidst Postmodern Winds' in hans boersma (ed) *Living in the LambLight: Christianity and Contemporary Challenges to the Gospel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001a) pp. 17-31.
- Goheen, Mike, 'Educating Between the Times: Postmodernity and Educational Leadership' in *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, Vol 5 No 1, Spring 2001b) 27-39.
- Hazard, Paul., *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Meridian Books, 1963).
- Lohfink, Gerhard, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
- Liotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

- Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983).
- Newbigin, Lesslie, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
- Newbigin, Lesslie, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).
- Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 'The Madman' in *The Joyful Wisdom* translated Thomas Common. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Volume 10, ed. Oscar Levy, 1964, pp. 167-169.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Christianity in a Secularized World* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
- Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- Postman, Neil, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
- Randall, John Herman Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1940).
- Rozzak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969).
- Seerveld, Calvin, *Through the Waters: Christian Schooling as a City of Refuge* (Toronto/Ancaster: Institute for Christian Studies and Ontario Christian School Teachers Association, 1998).
- Stronks, Gloria & Blomberg, Doug (eds.) *A Vision with a Task: Christian Schooling for Responsive Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).
- Tamas, Richard, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (Toronto: Ballantine Books, 1991).
- Thiessen, Elmer John, *Teaching for Commitment: Liberal Education, Indoctrination, and Christian Nurture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993).
- Vriend, John et. al., *To Prod the "Slumbering Giant": A Christian Response to the Crisis in the Classroom* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1972).
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

Theology from Paternoster

COVENANT THEOLOGY Contemporary Approaches

Mark Cartledge

The theme of covenant is one of the unifying themes of scripture. This book is a dialogue between liberal and conservative theologians on significant aspects of this subject. Contributors include **James Dunn** and **John Goldingay**.

1-84227-007-9 / 229 x 154mm / pb / 192pp / £14.99



Paternoster Press, PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK