

# The Christian Pursuit of Higher Education

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Since secular culture was nonexistent in ancient times, the modern conflict between religious and secular society was nowhere foreshadowed. Near Eastern civilizations mirrored not a conflict with atheism but rather a conflict between rival gods.

In noteworthy contrast to contemporary treatises on education, one will not find either in the Old Testament or in the New an exhortation to pursue education for its own sake, or primarily to earn a living, or simply to prepare one for a contribution to culture and the achieving of an ideal society. Nor is education commended by the Bible on the supposition that if they only know what is good, people will assuredly do the good.

The biblical world-life view, for all that, nonetheless assigned to education a distinctive and indispensable role. Its main object was to transmit to oncoming generations a specific spiritual tradition and inheritance, more explicitly the revealed truth and will of the self-revealing creator, redeemer and judge of the universe. Hebrew education, in short, was intensely theistic. Its aim was to prepare successive generations to live by God's commandments and to make known his redemptive grace. Even the modern Hebrew term for education derives from a semantic root meaning "to train," as the classic text Proverbs 22:6 exhorts: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Yahweh says that He chose Abraham "that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righ-

teousness and justice" (Ge 18:19).

The goal of Hebrew education was a proper human relationship to Yahweh as set forth by the Torah. The Hebrews honored God's verbal revelation and were people of the Book. Education was connected with the tabernacle and the temple. Knowledge of God was a spiritual imperative. Priests were responsible for transmitting God's laws. Long before Israel conquered Canaan in the thirteenth-century B.C. ancient non-Israelite civilizations like Sumer and Egypt had developed schools that provided formal learning, mostly for sons of wealthy families or other upper-strata males. Such education always included writing; often it involved wisdom sayings, and sometimes vocational training also. Theories that the Sumerian and Egyptian schools directly influenced nomadic Hebrew tribes are highly speculative, although once Israelite tribes settled in Canaan they were doubtless vulnerable to Canaanite educational emphases.

Education in Israel, connected with the family, was largely informal. It was not primarily for the well-to-do or exclusively for males. Not alone private devotion but social justice as well was linked with God's righteousness. Proverbs 1:7 locates true wisdom in "fear of the Lord" and in this context the Hebrews contemplated God's past disclosure, his ongoing blessings, and his promises for the future.

The Graeco-Roman approach, by contrast, emphasized the competency of human reasoning. Education was mainly for the nobility. It spoke abstrusely of meta-

physical realities in contrast with Hebrew-Christian specificity about the reality and nature of God.

In summary, the main features of Hebrew education embraced an explicitly revelatory content with Scripture as the authoritative text (Dt 6:4, 7); family instruction as a parental duty (Dt 11:19); dedication to the imperatives of personal and social righteousness; and the expectation of divine messianic salvation. The core of religious instruction was the *Shema*: "The Lord our God is one God" (Dt 6:4). The global and enduring significance of Yahweh's truth and commands was assured by Yahweh's monotheistic unity; He could not be splintered into rival polytheistic divinities, but reigned supreme as Sovereign creator and judge of all. Yahweh's revelatory message called for universal and abiding proclamation. It anticipated a future when knowledge of God would prevail worldwide (cf. "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea," Isa 11:9), and moreover it forecast the universal divine education of mankind ("all your sons shall be taught by the Lord," Isa 54:13).

The question inevitably arises of the relation of Hebrew learning to the educational content of nonbiblical civilizations. The Hebrews were warned by Yahweh against assimilation of pagan mythologies, idolatrous deflection, and acceptance of alien lifestyles. Some critical scholars have claimed that the book of Proverbs incorporates wisdom materials taken directly from Egyptian sources. But other biblical interpreters explain in conflicting ways the similarities between one segment of Proverbs (22:17-24:22) and the Egyptian instructions of Amenemope, and they insist that this supposed depen-

dence is speculative theory.

Wisdom literature is not salvific in content, yet its orientation must not on that account be declared secular. Its concern is not simply with abstract ideals. Far less does it anticipate the modern existentialist view that life and the world have no other meaning than what we impute to it. Wisdom literature falls rather into the category of scripturally-validated general revelation. It attests that Yahweh is at work in all aspects of Israel's life and in the whole of creation, so that the entirety of existence is subject to God's will. It mirrors the divine demand for righteousness in private and public life throughout the created order. The New Testament does not hesitate to invoke it as Scripture.

There are two places, however, where the nonbiblical learning of the ancient Near East and the specifically Hebrew redemptive tradition come into direct confrontation and correlation. One concerns the education received by Moses in Egypt when he was nurtured in the house of Pharaoh, and the other the determination of Babylonian rulers to impose Chaldean learning upon Daniel and his friends.

What Moses learned in the course of his education in Egypt remains somewhat obscure. Some Hellenistic Jews portrayed Moses himself not only as the founder of all science and culture, but of Egyptian civilization as well. But Stephen is notably more modest when in Acts 7:22 he states that Moses was "educated in all the learning of the Egyptians." To be sure, as a lad incorporated into a royal family Moses doubtless had the best education that Egypt offered, the education given an Egyptian prince. Hebrew tradition exaggerated this point, however, for Philo writes of Moses' teachers being imported from Assyria and Greece, and of Moses

posing questions that none of his mentors could answer.

The book of Exodus, by contrast, records only the fact of his distinctive education, and Stephen adds that Moses was “a man of power in words and deeds.” The Exodus record simply passes over the supposed glories of Egyptian civilization and learning. The writer of the book of Hebrews comments that Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb 11:26). Moses was undecieved by status in the royal household and by the prerogatives and pleasures of the royal court, and counted identification with Christ far superior. The Bible portrays Moses as liberator in a spiritual contest with Pharaoh.

Hebrew resistance of an alien culture is illustrated by Daniel’s refusal to mold his outlook by “the letters and language” of the Chaldeans. After having besieged Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar enlisted the most promising young Hebrews for government service. Daniel and his three friends were indoctrinated in Babylonian culture. They were given new names related to pagan gods and were put in charge of the royal court. They were committed to a mastery of the Chaldean language, exposed to Chaldean literature, perhaps also to Akkadian literary classics, and to Sumerian astrological and scientific studies.

The devout young Hebrews refused to eat meats forbidden by the Levitical dietary laws. Daniel is introduced as an example of spiritual obedience to Yahweh in an obtrusive pagan environment.

Although paganism is indeed rejected in the Bible wherever and whenever it encroaches on the religion of the Hebrews, the Book of Daniel goes beyond merely an unmitigated repudiation of an alien

culture. The narrative mirrors Yahweh’s providential care over his trusting people. It asserts Yahweh’s lordship over individuals and nations and affirms also Israel’s special destiny as God’s elect, the redemption of God’s people in this world, and anticipates Messiah’s coming to crown Yahweh’s culmination of history.

While Daniel is depicted as in a spiritual conflict with Nebuchadnezzar, it would be too much to say that Chaldean culture was necessarily to be shunned in its entirety. Daniel notably used the Chaldean language to communicate the truth of the one true and living God. When we turn to the New Testament conjunction of Hebrew and Greek culture we find that the Apostle to the Gentiles similarly employs *koine* Greek to convey the Christian message to the Roman world.

During the reign of Hellenistic culture most Jews resisted, to be sure, efforts by their contemporaries to impose Greek perspectives and practices. Hellenism did not stimulate a desire among the Jews for education of the Greek kind, although it nonetheless encouraged Jews to speak the Greek language.

Hasidic Jews, zealous for the Hebrew heritage and separatist in spirit, promoted synagogues and elementary schools in Jewish communities that studied and applied the Torah. The synagogue likely originated either during the exile or in the time of Ezra, and provided a setting where Jews in every Palestinian community and the Diaspora could meet to study the law. Formal study of the Torah gave synagogues the character of a school. The synagogue provided mass adult education involving weekly study of the Torah. Sometime after the return from exile, public elementary education was also organized for small boys, involving mostly

oral indoctrination and memorization.

The Hebrews had no schools of art, architecture, music, painting, sculpture or theater—not even schools for teaching trades, which were learned instead by apprenticeship. Education was not concerned with the natural sciences of chemistry, physics, biology and psychology but rather with the will of the self-revealing God. The Hebrew philosophy of education focused on training not primarily in survival skills, but specially in the ultimate source, meaning and goal of life.

A. W. Morton notes five basic pedagogical principles of Hebrew instruction: education was to begin at an early age (Ps 8:1 ff.); its content was to correspond with the child's level of learning (Isa 28:10, 13); morning, when one was fresh, was considered the best teaching time (Isa 50:4); education proceeded from the known to the unknown; and repetition preserved and reinforced learning.<sup>1</sup> Hebrew teaching was directive, not speculative and impersonal. The teacher's authority lay in adherence to God's teaching; the task of teaching was associated with what the Lord God had revealed. Education presupposed the need of an appropriate relationship to Yahweh, one that shapes personal morality, neighbor relations and community conduct. To quote Clyton Jefford, instruction elicited the hearer's "active participation in response to both the teacher and what is taught."<sup>2</sup> The "way of wisdom" channeled into the "way of uprightness." Wisdom literature speaks often of father-son relationships and of neighbor-relationships rooted in fear of the Lord.

Schools teaching philosophy arose later among the Greeks amid confidence in philosophical reasoning and the quest for a comprehensive cosmic explanatory

principle. Higher education was initially a novelty sponsored by the Greek Sophists, who for a high fee taught techniques for personal success. Institutional schools did not arise in Greece until the fourth century B.C. Hellenic education nurtured cultural appreciation. Its emphasis was aesthetic more than moral. Its aim was to prepare for citizenship. By New Testament times the Greeks applauded rhetoric as the major educational achievement. The apostle Paul rejected a regard for persuasive speech as the supreme test of human cultivation (cf. 1 Co 1:17 ff., 2:4 ff.) and stressed service of God above service of the state and culture. It was to the dearth of educational ideals that Sir William Ramsay attributed the decay of the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>3</sup>

The apostle Paul is often depicted as standing in unique relationship both to Graeco-Roman higher education and to the biblical heritage, and therefore as a definitive judge of their comparative significance. Tarsus in Asia Minor, Paul's home city, ranked after Athens and Alexandria as a center of Greek culture. Tarsus gained fame as a university center, as a crossroads of east and west, and as a city known also for its luxury and frivolity.

Paul's father must have been a Roman citizen since Paul says he was born "free" (Ac 22:28). According to Jerome, Paul's parents migrated to Tarsus in 63 B.C. at the time of the Roman conquest of Palestine. Although Paul lived in the Diaspora, he was not an assimilationist Jew.

Many Jews resided in Tarsus. It is possible if not likely that one of the Roman rulers, perhaps upon visiting the city, conferred citizenship on Jews as a benefit. There is no incontestable evidence, however, that Paul pursued formal education in the schools of philosophy or rhetoric in

Tarsus. W. C. Van Unnik argues persuasively that Acts 22:3 (“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers...”) must be construed to mean that Paul, born in Tarsus and raised to maturity in his parental home, was then educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel.<sup>4</sup>

Paul’s parents adhered to the Pharisees (Ac 23:6). As a pupil in Jerusalem Paul studied under the most illustrious Pharisee of his time. During his rabbinic training under Gamaliel he might well have received an elemental survey of Greek culture.

In any case, Hellenism and Judaism often interacted and somewhat influenced each other. Paul’s familiarity with the Stoic poet Aratus (Ac 17:27) might have derived from broad cultural familiarity. Yet it is conjectural whether Paul resided long enough in Tarsus to grapple with Hellenistic thought, since Paul affirms that he was “brought up” in Jerusalem (Ac 22:30). But even in Judea, Hellenic interest in Homer, other Greek poets, Stoic philosophy, and the mystery cults was part of the cultural atmosphere.

Yet whatever use Paul may have made of such elements, he carefully distinguished them from the Gospel, and transformed them through the redemptive presuppositions of Hebrew religion and its scriptural affirmations. He persecuted the infant church not for concessions supposedly made by Christians to Hellenism, but rather for their departure from Judaic legalism and for their claim that the crucified Jesus is the Messiah of Old Testament promise.

Paul tells us that after his conversion he went to Arabia (Gal 1:17) and moreover that he did not revisit Jerusalem until the third year thereafter, and then did so in order to interview Peter and James

the Lord’s brother. He emphasizes that the Gospel was not received by him from man nor was it taught to him by man (Gal 1:12); he had received it rather by transcendent revelation. What Peter and James contributed were supplementary details.

In any case, in Gamaliel Paul studied under a scholar of superior intellect, renowned as one of Judaism’s greatest teachers. Gamaliel was specially honored as a leader of the school of his grandfather Hillel. Hillel not only knew the Law in detail but also avidly studied Greek literature.

Roman domination stimulated emphasis on study of the Torah more than on its practice. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were astonished at his spiritual learning despite the fact that He was not formally trained (Jn 7:15). His critics notably had formal training, yet they distorted the Torah’s application and intention.

It is noteworthy that the New Testament virtually shuns the Greek term *arete* and the concept of virtue implicit in it. In contrast with the term’s very frequent appearance in Greek literature, it occurs only twice in the New Testament bearing the sense of moral excellence (Php 4:6 and 2 Pe 1:15). In the Philippians reference Paul instructs Christians to ponder “whatsoever things are true... honest... pure... lovely... of good report.” But Paul comments that “if there be any virtue” they are nonetheless to do the things that they “learned and received and heard and saw” in Paul, so the God of peace will attend them. The notion of pagan philosophers that the ideal life is attained by the gradual improvement of human nature is countered by the New Testament emphasis on the death of the old nature and birth of a new nature through spiritual regeneration.

While the Bible does not specifically refer to formal academic instruction, since

the center of learning was the home and the synagogue or temple or church, it nonetheless illumines the role and nature of teaching and learning. The content of learning was not centered in family values or social ideals but in God-given commandments. Children learned trades by apprenticeship; they were not educated without prospect of earning a livelihood.

The goal of Christian learning was not reducible to aesthetic appreciation, private virtue, or even uprightness in dealing with others. Educational content included penetrating references to the fallen condition of man, the availability of spiritual redemption, the salvific significance of the crucified and risen Christ, the renewing moral power of the Holy Spirit, and the divine imperative of interpersonal love and social righteousness (Eph 4:11-16; Col 2:2-7).

Jesus' role as a teacher, and the regard of His followers for His teaching, contributed in an important way to the nature and function of Christian education. Jesus was often addressed as "rabbi" or teacher. He attended often and on occasion taught in synagogues, in public places such as the Temple courtyard, in open air assemblies, but not least of all one-on-one. He taught by both word and example, and what he taught was taught to others by his disciples.

Numerous books have been written about Jesus' teaching method. His teaching was accompanied by miracle, to be sure, but His own example was no less powerful. He employed discourse, parable, proverb and quotation. He spoke with astounding authority (Mt 7:28). He exemplified grace in conversations with the immoral woman at the well and with both physical and moral lepers. He took examples from everyday life ("consider the lilies of the field"); he asked questions ("whom do men say that I am?"); he was

accessible to his disciples and invited interaction; he called for self-evaluation of effort, as when He sent out the disciples to witness and requested that they report back (Lk 9:1-10); he used symbolism and illustration (as when washing the disciples' feet). Jesus seemed perpetually in motion with his disciples, but always observing human nature in its spiritual responses and everyday life. In this context he delivered many of his discourses and then, apart from the crowd or general audiences, he would discuss with his disciples the import of that teaching.

Even so, however creative teaching methods may be, they are not finally definitive, since they can be employed to advance competing and conflicting views of reality and life. For Jesus truth and love and justice were the great assets of revealed religion. He pressed his hearers to know and to appropriate spiritual realities, to make the grace of God their own, to live a life of perpetual devotion to the Father, and to share with all humanity the good news of redemption.

Yet it is remarkable how little we know of the education of Jesus. Joseph and Mary as pious and God-fearing Jews would no doubt have fulfilled family responsibilities, and Jesus also customarily attended the local synagogue (Lk 4:16). But he did not study under a prominent rabbi. He learned carpentry as a trade, as had Joseph. He attended the great spiritual festivals at Jerusalem. But he was learned in the Scriptures. He himself emphasized that "my teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (Jn 7:16).

The apostle Paul presupposed from the Old Testament (2 Ti 3:15) the parental duty of teaching children and exemplified the importance of teaching converts the Word of God. He ranks teachers after apostles in

order of ministry. In contrast to much contemporary preaching, in which teaching is marginal, the apostles emphasized teaching no less than preaching.

For formal education the early Christians had to attend pagan schools. There selections of Homer were taught for moral instruction. The curriculum included rhetoric, useful in public vocations. Tertullian (c. 160-225) prohibited Christians from teaching in such institutions. Not until late in the second century did distinctively Christian schools emerge. The Christian mandate to convey a peerless message to every last human being in some respects nurtured the conception of universal education. When Julian "The Apostate" sought in the fourth century to destroy Christianity and to restore paganism, Christians, who until then had guardedly used existing formal education programs, now probed possibilities of a separate system.

The modern university as an institution of higher education evolved in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries from earlier medieval study-centers for priests and monks. Cambridge (1209), Paris (1215) and Oxford (1224) were among the earliest such universities. Heidelberg (1386) was the oldest in Germany; St. Andrews (1412) oldest in Scotland; Dublin (1591) oldest in Ireland. The university was therefore a Christian creation.

Speculation no doubt attends any effort to shape an ideal academic program and method from New Testament precedents. Some may critique Western university and seminary teaching that relies on books, lectures and examinations, and champion instead the British tutorial system in which the mentor serves also as a role model. This alternative is commended also by some who promote a re-

search university where it would doubtless have noteworthy values. The method lifts mass market education measured only by quantitative fulfillment to a preferable approach that preserves the personal dimension, although many students need to master a shared content before they are ready for creative interaction.

Yet many of these values can be advanced by professorial interest in students beyond the classroom and by building into class schedules an adequate opportunity for questions and discussion and individually-tapered assignments. Those of us who have experienced European learning know how often professors turn the classroom into an occasion for reading manuscripts soon to be published, whatever the student's interests.

To be sure, Jesus did not establish formal classroom procedures. He administered no formal exams. As far as we know he wrote no books or letters, announced no required reading assignments, and called for no term papers or dissertations. The Torah was assuredly read without pre-stipulated term-by-term segments that would get the disciples through the whole literature on schedule.

Yet one is hard pressed to infer from this that Jesus' followers would in principle interpret Ecclesiastes 12:12 ("of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body") as implying that all reading other than the Torah is a sheer waste of time. The Pauline request for "parchments" (2 Ti 4:13) is too obscure to count here, since expositors are unsure whether the Apostle meant blank writing sheets, a collection of accumulated notes, or legal documents validating his citizenship. Paul himself, albeit as divinely inspired, wrote some of the most profound letters in the history of religion. The New

Testament gave unprecedented significance to Gospels and Epistles.

There are values, nonetheless, in a tutorial system in which a tutor has general supervision of a small group of students and directs their studies. The program facilitates personally directed questions and provides personal criticism and encouragement that sharpens technical skills. Such training may more readily prevent students from depicting secular alternatives only as straw men or from cushioning the ruling presuppositions so that they are viewed merely as linguistic alternatives.

This leads forward to the subject of the teacher as role model and of the relationship of moral integrity to intellectual competence and reliability. The matter of the bearing of the scholar's moral and spiritual life on cognitive ability is highly complex. Surely an atheist may know accurately the outlines of Christian theology, even as a Christian may factually depict Buddhism or atheism. The theological or philosophical brilliance of a teacher need not imply moral excellence.

Not only scientists who have cheated on research grants but some philosophers also and theologians as well (for example, Paul Tillich) have considered a pedagogue's moral compromises irrelevant to the quality of his thought. Only the constellation and correlation of ideas counts, they say; theory they detach from the inner self. The private sex life of the politician is now often isolated from the real political animal; private ethical life is considered irrelevant to public competence.

The relation of one's self to his or her philosophy remains one of our generation's critical disputes. Owen C. Thomas traces to Western religious tradition through Moses and Jesus, and Western philosophical tradition through

Socrates and Marcus Aurelius, the emphasis on the "ideal of the unity of life, of the integrity of life and thought."<sup>5</sup> In our time deconstructionists and postmodernists disavow the unity of thought, person, and behavior. They skeptically dismiss all derivation of concrete judgments from objective logical and moral considerations. The loss of this unity underlies the contemporary forfeiture of the unity of the true and the good. Thomas calls for a recovery of the mutual coinherence of these two transcendental truth and good. He affirms the "identity of the true and the good in God. To know God is the ultimate truth, and to love and obey God is the ultimate good." Evangelical Christianity has historically acknowledged God as at once the true and the holy.

Some scholars insist that grave moral flaws in a scholar will inevitably damage his cognitive competence and achievement. This has sometimes led to the extreme claim that only regenerate scholars can properly engage in theology and that theology and philosophy and art done by unregenerate scholars is barbarian. Yet regenerate theologians too have at times done highly objectionable theology. Some have lived immoral lives, and in any event all are sinners.

One doubtless needs to be alert to areas of invalidity and of immorality in the life of the thinker who forsakes logical consistency. The same presuppositions are sometimes held to issue in conflicting actions; moreover, some identical actions derive from a variety of beliefs.

Much contemporary philosophy accommodates the disjunction between the true and the good. Thomas notes that tributes to Heidegger, as one of our century's most influential thinkers, seldom mention his sustained relationship with the Nazis.



Yet, as Thomas indicates, Heidegger had himself earlier written that he worked “concretely and factually out of my own ‘I am’ ....” Paul Tillich’s erotic life provoked his wife Hanna to portray him in *From Time to Time* as an undisciplined womanizer given to erotic sex and pornography. Surely a sex addict enslaved to the erotic will not expound a balanced view of *eros* and *agape*. Without awareness of a seriously flawed life one might not thoroughly critique his theory. But do moral flaws translate into correlative intellectual flaws? Thomas suggests that if “reason or conceptual thought can transcend its personal, social, cultural, historical context” the thinker’s moral/political life may not be relevant to the assessment or perhaps even the interpretation of the thought, and *vice versa*.” Jesus sheds some light on the complexity of relationships between thought and life. He affirms that the self’s moral implications are directly relevant to human thought (“a good tree bringeth forth good fruit,” Mt 7: 17). There is some entailment between ontology and ethics and conduct. One’s lifestyle reflects one’s doctrine. But the connection is not solely logical; it involves the volitional also. Jesus affirms: “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32) and “if anyone chooses to do God’s will, he shall find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” (Jn 17:7). The natural man is morally enslaved; extended spiritual disobedience expands alienation. The content of intellection is not unrelated to man’s volition. Spiritual comprehension is not a byproduct only of learning skills but is assisted also by obedience to truth already known. The Christian’s supreme role model is Christ Jesus; the apostles urge their disciples to follow them as they

follow Christ (Php 4:9; 1 Pe 1:21).

The tutor’s role as mentor, no less than the teacher’s role in the classroom, may also be viewed negatively when personal prejudices are subtly conveyed. A good tutor will float private convictions in the larger history of ideas and in the context of divergent books. Critical theories pursued in dissertations can mirror tutorial influence. Yet inter-personal dialogue provides a more natural context for raising counter-questions and counter-emphases, and the responsible tutor will familiarize young scholars with a wide span of reading.

Catholic control of the medieval university was challenged by Renaissance humanism. Yet humanist interest in ancient texts simultaneously revived attentiveness to the original Scriptures more than to current Scholastic disputations. On balance, however, Renaissance humanism signaled a return to Hellenic sources of Western culture. It celebrated humanity’s excellence as a mirror of divinity and overshadowed the Bible.

The magisterial Reformers championed higher education in contrast to widespread anti-intellectualism. The Reformation spawned new Protestant universities, the first being Marburg (1527). Calvin founded a university in Geneva that attracted Protestants from near and far in Europe. Mark Noll comments that Protestantism “marks the start of the move to universal education in Europe because its leaders insisted that all individuals had a responsibility to understand the world in which they lived and the spiritual world held out to them by Christian teaching.”<sup>6</sup> Jesuits gained control of older Catholic universities and formed new ones, with Rome gradually becoming the site not alone of the papal university but of universities also for all the large Catholic orders. In the United States

the earliest universities were founded by church denominations, the first such being Harvard (1636). They pursued Christian theology as the context for dealing with all the major disciplines and sought thereby to educate the clergy for effective ministry. William and Mary was established for similar purposes in 1693, Yale in 1701, Princeton in 1746, Pennsylvania in 1749, Columbia in 1754, Brown in 1763, Duke in 1838.

The humanist curriculum was, however, soon universally distributed and dispensed through state schools and it gradually shaped a new intellectual spirit and a new culture. The book of nature, it was said, was no longer written in Latin but in mathematical formulas. Growing utilitarian concern focused interest on observational approaches. State universities emerged as a vital part of the public school system, over which they asserted growing influence. Denominational universities and religious colleges faced declining prestige; many lost their spiritual heritage, and some lost legal independence as well.

Whether separate Christian colleges are desirable was itself debated by evangelical academicians. Some held that the uniqueness of the biblical world-life view requires distinctive education; others that the ideal of effective penetration of all learning requires affiliation with prevalent institutions; and still others that separate academic centers are justified only when an entrenched and highly prejudiced educational philosophy is routinely erosive of the younger generation's evangelical beliefs.

The term "higher education" is itself highly ambiguous. Very different models exist. A UNESCO conference in 1962 generalized that it characteristically requires prior completion of secondary education, enrollment for study usually at about age

18, and conferral by the sponsoring institution of an award (e.g., a degree) upon satisfactory completion of studies. Numerous American universities now offer highly specialized studies such as journalism, television, computer use and word processing.

The past generation has seen the multiplication of institutions of higher learning, increasing correlation of higher education with economic considerations, growth in the number of women students, and steady increase of enrollment, including a rising proportion of students pursuing post-graduate studies. Towering above all such demographic factors stands the academic lack of philosophical cohesion and unification. The study of philosophy itself has been preoccupied with problems of language, symbolism, interpretation, and communication.

Whereas it once was widely believed that moral feeling would properly guide an intellectually-stocked mind, emerging postmodernism today rejects objective goodness, truth and meaning, and dismisses morality as simply the interpreter's preference. The modern vision of human perfectibility has yielded instead to doubt that evolutionary mankind has any anchored essence.

Georges Paul Gusdorf, professor of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, France, declares to be "outdated and discredited" the humanist scholarship that "made the human form the center and measure of all things." "Modern education is in a crisis," he affirms, "and has been seeking in vain for a new foundation on which to base the training of individuals in contemporary society.... The present-day proliferation of theories of pedagogy has too often developed within an abstract space from which the face of man has been banished. This pedagogic malaise reflects the crisis of

civilization.”<sup>7</sup> More is needed, however, than simply a more comprehensive humanism. It is not the face of man only but, even more basically, the visage of God that has been obscured. In the intellectual history of the West the affirmation of Theism prevailed for almost twenty-five centuries until the recent modern era’s infatuation with naturalism. The cultural death-of-God has led on to postmodernist theory that is plummeting contemporary life into an abyss of meaninglessness. Academic eclipse of the conviction that significant intellectual life requires a comprehensive worldview embracing the essentials of science and religion leaves contemporary society stalemated in coping with both enterprises. Science is faced by horrendous moral, environmental, and political problems while religion loosed from the self-revealing God leads to the loss of ethical imperatives.

The contest for the future of the academic mind turns today on the educational elite’s aggressive promotion of an essentially naturalistic view. Naturalism is prevalent on most state and private secular university campuses. This emphasis provides a stark contrast to theistic affirmations championed by approximately one hundred evangelical universities and colleges represented in the Christian College Coalition and the Christian College Consortium that enroll some 100,000 students, and by 226 Roman Catholic universities and colleges that enroll about 638,000 students. The theistic option is affirmed by the Society of Christian Philosophers and reinforced by books, articles, and lectures. It has support also from an influential cadre of scholars teaching in secular institutions and on many campuses where evangelical student enterprises like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade

for Christ, and Navigators maintain active programs. There is also a segment of broadly orthodox denominational colleges where biblical loyalties vary in depth from campus to campus and in individual faculty commitments. Many reasons can be given why the Christian community needs actively to relate itself, both positively and critically, to the cultural mentality of the age. Since the presuppositions that govern modernity shape the contemporary cultural context and the secular mindset permeates the atmosphere definitive of current thought, some interaction is inescapable. Not to be conscious of the prevailing assumptions is to be victimized by them. Even parental education of children requires some awareness of contrary lifeviews which confront the younger generation inevitably as children venture into a larger community and face social institutions and their spokesmen. Such enlarging contact is today as simple as turning on television or radio. On every hand inherited values are challenged by modern conceptions of the self, the family, and society. From dress and diet to preferred virtues and values, conceptual pressures are exerted by public schools, by the media, and by the political arena.

Nowhere is such adverse intellectual and moral impact more evident and demanding than in the current devaluation of religion and of the transcendent world. The radical Marxist view of absolute separation of church and state stripped religion of public significance and tolerated its private relevance only. But even religion’s private significance is now often demeaned, the implication being that religion is for nerds. The long regnant biblical view of God along with its moral demand is caricatured not alone by some educators but at times even by some fron-

tier churchmen. Many of the academic elite assume that religious expression is not only sub-rational and but also more hazardous than other cultural forces.

Stephen L. Carter protests that, "In contemporary American culture the religions are more and more treated as just passing beliefs—almost as fads, older, stuffier, less liberal versions of so-called New Age rather than as the fundamentals upon which the devout build their lives."<sup>8</sup> This devaluation of religion as a serious human activity is reflected in the secular belittling of spiritual devotion and satirizing of believers. An intellectual elite and the popular culture as well detour around the inherited Judeo-Christian worldview and insinuate alien life-outlooks into influential institutions.

The advocacy of Naturalism, Postmodernism, New Age philosophy, the psychology of self-esteem or of positive thinking readily takes place in ever more culturally-diverse contexts. In these circumstances relativism easily becomes a synonym for tolerance. Relativists contend that no truth-claims are universally valid except, of course, their own and that one's view is merely a matter of personal prejudice. This notion—that truth claims are culturally conditioned and historically located—is increasingly rampant on American campuses today. One is granted liberty to cherish one's beliefs as long as one does not imply that the contrary beliefs of one's neighbors are wrong.

Such notions readily accommodate Postmodernism, which avers that there is no objective truth or meaning, and no objective self either. In reading a text the interpreter allegedly creates his or her own meaning. To hold that there is objective truth to which all minds are answerable is not only politically inadvisable, it is considered politically incorrect and

philosophically arrogant.

To be sure, relativists exempt their own views from this insistence that any particular claim to be inherently superior is unacceptable. On the surface this denial of absolutes extends a ready welcome to plural outlooks, and implies a tolerance of all conflicting and competing views. But all the while it secretly ascribes objective meaning and makes objectively valid claims for deconstructionism and postmodernism. Relativists want to redistribute logic in order to promote their own perceptions of truth and right. They champion a notion of truth without sharp borders, one that accommodates contrariness and contradiction, and that easily glides into merely an emotive response to felt needs. Feeling counts for more than logic; the invitation is extended to "come out of the Middle Ages" or be reckoned an exclusivist or bigot.

Yet one distorts the American condition—in fact the human situation—to imply that in the United States nobody takes religion seriously, since for many tens of millions religion remains the shaping life force. Christian interaction with the mindset of modernity is essential. The Christian system of truth must be expounded and clarified not just to distinguish it from alien worldviews and to prevent its groundless distortion and pseudo-refutation. It must offer its adversaries a superior rationale and durable hope. The Christian task is not exclusively or mainly counteractive and nullifying. It takes the initiative as an apologetic for truth. The apostle Peter accordingly exhorts God's people to be always ready to give to everyone who asks "the reason for the hope that you have," and to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pe 3:15).

The Christian is therefore not only a

bearer of truth but a carrier also of hope. Loosed from its transcendent anchor, the world is at a loss for both truth and hope. The Bible portrays Christians as aware not alone of the singularity of the Christian truth-claim, but of a distinctive hope as well.

Correlation or contrast of the Christian option with the regnant secular philosophy has yet another and equally profound concern. Not only must Christianity address the governing cultural assumptions, and publicly articulate the rationale that undergirds enduring hope, but it is called upon also to exhibit the humanities and sciences in grand coordination with the Christian ontological axiom, *viz.*, the existence of the creator, preserver, redeemer and judge of life. If, as scholars have said many times since Augustine, that all truth is God's truth and that in God's light we see light, the whole arena of the liberal arts must reflect the cohesive centrality of Christ. For He is the eternal Logos, the primeval creator of every created thing, the head of the church, and the final judge of men and nations, the one in whom all reality finds its consummatory climax.

Beyond doubt, many Christian colleges now neglect their duty to exhibit a Christian world-life view on a curriculum-wide basis. But the imperative of interrelating all arenas of learning, and of exhibiting the epistemic significance of all aspects of higher education, must not be forever evaded. It is compatible with the God of historical surprises that some secular campus, being chastened and nauseated by the perturbing instability and intellectual nihilism to which Postmodernism leads, might through re-exploration of the history of thought, venture once again, through its evangelical remnant, to reconsider the Judeo-Christian theistic option and through earnest intellectual activity

theoretically acknowledge again its compelling logic and experiential power. To have some modest part in such a conceptual recovery is the opportunity that now overhangs the life of the Christian at the turn of the centuries.

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Morton, "Hebrew Education," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Vol. 2*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 221ff.

<sup>2</sup> Clyton Jefford, "Teach," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Vol. 4*, ed. Geoffrey Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 744.

<sup>3</sup> William Ramsay, *The Education of Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902; rpt. Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1981) 86.

<sup>4</sup> W. C. Unnik, "Essays on the Gospel of Luke and Acts," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of Die Nuwe-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid Africa* at the University of South Africa 11-13 July 1973 (Pretoria, South Africa, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Owen C. Thomas, *Presidential Address to the American Theological Society* (1944).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 37.

<sup>7</sup> *The New Encyclopedia Britannica. Macropaedia*, 15th ed., s.v. "History of Humanist Scholarship," by Georges Paul Gusdorf.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).