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Don H. Olive, Sr.
Dean of Humanities and Professor of Philosophy
Editor

Mark A. Heinrich
Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs
Managing Editor

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A Word from the Editors

Since last *Carson-Newman Studies* was published, the two chief academic officers of the college have moved. Dr. Cordell Maddox, after twenty-two years as President and a period of service as interim President, finally was able to retire in January 2000. Dr. Michael V. Carter, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, as well as co-editor of this journal, resigned late last summer to become President of Campbellsville University, a sister Baptist institution in Campbellsville, Kentucky. The campus keenly feels the loss of these two leaders.

At the same time, we welcome Dr. and Mrs. James Netherton as President and First Lady of the college. Already the campus has come to appreciate the kind spirit and energy that they bring. President Netherton's support of the intellectual life of the campus has already been felt and appreciated. Welcome, Dr. and Mrs. Netherton.

As in previous years, *Carson-Newman Studies* continues to seek to preserve the various ideas that have challenged the academic community within the past year. Various lecturers have enriched the campus life as well as the academic program through their presentations. But first and foremost *Carson-Newman Studies* continues to seek to present the intellectual endeavors of the faculty and staff—papers, reflections, devotions, remarks, and observations.

The Distinguished Faculty Award Address sets a high standard for all that follows in this year's publication. Charles Moffat's inimitable history of academic freedom sets before the college the challenge of maintaining an essential feature of education. Carson-Newman College, a Baptist institution of higher education, has affirmed at considerable cost that academic freedom is essential to the college's mission.

The articles following the Distinguished Faculty Award address reveal no clear, single theme. Several of the articles set forth some of the thoughts of the faculty and staff and others concerning the issues of identity and self-understanding of Carson-Newman College. Through devotions, reflections, remarks of distinguished alumni, examination of the educational process, instruction by lecturers, and sev-

eral other means, the college seeks to define itself in these fractured times.

As in past issues, we have chosen to include some articles produced by Carson-Newman community members other than faculty and staff. Melodi Goff and Nathan Miles are both Carson-Newman graduates and work for the college. Ms. Goff's confessions of the singularity of Jesus Christ and the exclusivity of Christianity remind readers of the emphasis these have received in Baptist history. The article by Nathan Miles is in honor of and reflects the thinking of his grandfather, Professor Herbert J. Miles, who taught sociology at the college for many years and in retirement published *The Evangelical Dilemma*. Bellicose biblicism has been and continues to be a part of Baptist life, as is evidenced by recent changes in the *Baptist Faith and Message*. Mr. Miles' article is sermonical in nature and reflects a position that is not that of the college as a whole or the Religion Department of the college.

Included, also, is an article by Ms. Wendy Trundle, a freshman honors student from Knoxville, Tennessee. The rare publication of a student's work seems justified in light of its relevance to the current debate over public education in the United States. The core of this article was developed out of research she did for the freshman honors course, *Humanity and the Cosmos II*.

This year's issue concludes with a personal and particular tribute to Robert M. Shurden, Professor of Religion, upon his retirement from Carson-Newman. The graying of the faculty is evident in the significant number of retirements of faculty members of long tenure. The publication of this particular tribute is in no way intended to single out Professor Shurden and exclude others. The editors hope that it will be read as a representative tribute to the many faculty members who have literally given their lives to this institution. Their accomplishments on campus have been great, and their lives impact many beyond the walls of academe. Thank you, Sandra, for your words to your father. They are words for all who have taught inside and outside the classroom, who have taught others' children, as well as their own.

Don H. Olive, Editor

Mark A. Heinrich, Managing Editor

A History of Academic Freedom

[1999 Distinguished Faculty Award Address]

Charles G. Moffat

It is often said that a person never really appreciates something until he loses, or nearly loses, it. Here at Carson-Newman College we should be very appreciative because we nearly lost the thing that is most valuable to any college, the thing that has taken fifteen hundred years to acquire and is the reason for our very integrity as an institution of higher learning, our academic freedom.

The reason that it has taken so long for this precious thing to emerge and also for our intellectual heritage to develop is because fifteen hundred years ago our civilization collapsed. On the last day of December in the year A. D. 406, the Rhine River froze solid. That was something that hordes of hungry German barbarians had been waiting to happen. This illiterate matted mass of uncouth people had been held off by the Roman legions for centuries, but now only a thin demoralized line of legionaries was there on the west bank of the Rhine.

The barbarians, mostly belonging to a tribe known as the Vandals, surged across the ice and broke through the weak defenses and into the civilized empire where they proceeded to destroy and pillage everything in their path. The Vandals gave us a word in our language. This marked the beginning of a flood of barbarians that over the next century brought down the Roman Empire in the West, and with it went civilization. All of the great continental libraries and the schools had soon vanished, and even their memory was erased from the minds of the new Europeans. It marked the beginning of a dark age in which literacy disappeared and civilization literally regressed.

Only one part of Western Europe remained untouched by the barbarian invasions, Ireland, an island that had never been within the Roman orbit but had been a recipient of its learning and its Christianity. Here monks kept literacy and literature alive, and generations later their

descendants traveled over to the continent and established monasteries from which the things that they knew, the Bible and classical literature, were passed on. Latin literature would almost surely have been lost without the Irish. Without them not only literacy would have died out in Europe but also that which comes from it, the state of mind that encourages thought and progress. Wherever the Irish monks went throughout Europe they took their love of learning and their carefully preserved books. They saved civilization. That fact is usually forgotten, but it should not be.

After the Irish breathed the spark of new life into the culture of Europe, it was to be centuries before what we would call higher education made another appearance. Eventually, schools developed in cathedrals and monasteries, and by the twelfth century some of these became the first universities. This coming together of scholars and advanced students was a natural evolutionary process, but for higher education to continue to develop a necessary step was to create a condition in which faculty members would be free from control over what they said and thought. As long as that freedom exists, pursuit of knowledge and intellectual progress is assured.

Some early scholars endangered themselves and faced harsh penalties for expressing any idea that was contrary to accepted orthodoxy. The best example is Peter Abelard, a twelfth century professor at the premier institution of higher learning in Europe, the University of Paris. Abelard taught his students to doubt accepted authority and use their reason to arrive at their own logical conclusions even concerning the substance of theology. His reward was that he was hounded out of teaching and treated by many as an enemy of Christianity.

Scholars were forbidden to study and teach the works of Aristotle because he had been a pagan and because his works had been transmitted to Europe by way of the Moslems of Spain. The real conflict was between faith and reason. Reason was regarded by many in power as an enemy of faith. It was held that knowledge like faith descended to man from the mind of God, and the application of reason to knowledge was an attempt by humans to subject divine revelation to question and doubt. Unless reason was given at least an equal place with faith, however, there could be little intellectual progress.

Finally, in the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas, a scholar at the University of Paris, resolved the question by maintaining that both faith and reason were gifts from God; and, so, they could not contradict each other. If reason was kept within its own sphere, the understanding of the physical world, then it could not conflict with faith. Scholars were now more free to use their reason except in certain and specific areas where faith was untouchable.

In the Middle Ages tradition and dogma were very formidable, but to say that originality of thought was crushed would be doing the scholars of the era an injustice. Except in certain instances the influence of those in power was primarily psychological rather than physical. Medieval thought often displayed an originality that was surprising. From a modern point of view, one would be horrified by the oppressive nature of the restrictions placed on a search for knowledge, but this was a different world and it should not be judged by our standards.

The fields of philosophy and theology were the most controversial and certainly not the freest, but scientific subjects were studied with relative freedom, and in some of the sciences the groundwork was laid for the developments of the early modern age. It was also a time in which literature of various types flourished. We must conclude that the medieval period was neither the nightmare of dogma and suppression that it was once held to be, but it was also not an age for free expression either. Academic freedom still had a long way to go.

In the era of the Renaissance, scholarship moved more outside the realm of the Church. Secular scholars known as the humanists made an attempt to recover the civilization and literature of the Greco-Roman world in order to find there a philosophy of life that went beyond the dictates of the medieval church. The idea of the liberal arts education was born which was designed to give the student the ability to excel in anything he attempted and to be able to make the most of the opportunities of the world.

The coming of the Protestant Reformation further strengthened this movement toward something new. Traditionally, Protestantism is said to have brought about immense gains in personal freedom by the refusal to accept traditional authority, by creating religious diversity and by asserting the rights of individual conscience. These good things, however, were not a part of the original Protestant movements.

During the earlier period the Protestants were no more indulgent than the Roman Church had been. Their orthodoxy was just as strict. Toleration and religious freedom eventually made progress not because people were wise enough to be immediately repulsed by persecution but because they had to see and endure that persecution for more than two centuries after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the church door at Wittenburg, in 1517. In the universities, progress toward freedom of thought and conscience was especially retarded because of the different religious denominations that sponsored higher education and made accommodation with their particular view imperative.

In 1575, the University of Leiden was founded in the Netherlands. The Dutch were engaged in both a war of religion and one for national independence against the Spanish. The city of Leiden had

withstood a siege, and in honor of that the leader of the Dutch revolt, William the Silent, Prince of Orange, had authorized the founding of a free university. Leiden reflected the cosmopolitanism and liberalism of the Netherlands and became the earliest university in Europe to follow an intentional and consistent policy of what we could loosely term academic freedom. The professors were not required to make any kind of statement concerning a religious viewpoint but only a simple oath of loyalty to the school and the city. Jews were admitted as students and private teachers. A Catholic professor, previously forced to resign by Protestants, was invited to return. Throughout the seventeenth century Leiden held the reputation for unparalleled freedom of thought.

By the early eighteenth century, when colleges were just beginning to be formed in America, European universities were still largely bound by the rules of orthodoxy. Leiden had been the exception not the rule. A scholar could free himself from the limits imposed on him by a denominational position only by migrating to a region where his views were compatible with those of the people in power. Generally speaking, one could not exchange views and freely discuss all questions within the walls of a single institution.

It is strange to think that an autocratic government can occasionally be enlightened enough to realize that intellectual freedom and the liberty to teach and learn that nourishes it, is beneficial. That was the case in nineteenth-century Germany. It was there that the modern conception of academic freedom came to be accepted. In Germany, the universities became places where scholars were expected to pursue the truth and then transmit it to the students. By this process, the students learned to pursue truth for themselves. Scholars from other countries were attracted by this idea and its results and came to Germany to study at the universities. A number of these were from the United States.

Americans were completely converted to the idea of academic freedom and brought it home. This occurred in the period following the War Between the States. There were several factors that were present in the United States that made the concept of academic freedom acceptable at that time. These included the emergence of professional scholars engaged in research whose activities were not wholly confined to campus duties.

Another factor was the rise in importance of the social sciences as opposed to the earlier concentration on moral philosophy. It was also at this time that the idea gained acceptance that those with academic credentials should properly apply their knowledge to various problems of life outside the campus. The result was that professors began to function in the areas of social and political action, and to do that effectively they required the freedom to express their opinions on even

controversial subjects. All of these things were buttressed by the century long American tradition of liberty.

In Europe, academic freedom usually meant that the university was protected from church and governmental interference. On some of the campuses there the police were not allowed to enter without special permission. This was necessary in Europe, for neither professors nor students were guaranteed by law freedom in matters involving church and state. Yet, in many cases, enlightened individuals in power realized that the function of the university requires that professors be free to form and profess independent views and students to learn from them. The privilege of academic freedom, therefore, was granted.

In the United States freedom is not a privilege; it is a right constitutionally granted to all the people. Academic freedom here has developed somewhat differently than it did in Europe. In this country the need is to protect the independence of professors from administrators, governing boards, their colleagues, students, alumni and public opinion. It protects them from the threat of dismissal because they have carried out their duty to form and profess their views independently. Faculty members are guarded against threats of dismissal because they have carried out their duty to form and teach their views independently. What is protected is the freedom of the intellectual life of the college, which is the thing that gives it its reason for being. The college is free when its governing board accepts the mission to protect and advance this educational freedom to seek and teach knowledge.

Genuine teachers and students are interested in learning for its own sake no matter what utility it might serve or what consequences it might bring. Both want to seek and discover the truth. The business of the scholar is to study whatever data he can find and then draw conclusions about what it means. When he says something is true, he means that is true in so far as our knowledge goes, no further. The truth is never absolute; it is always a work in progress. In that sense it differs from what is claimed to be divine or authoritative truth. Scholarly truth is never the whole truth about anything, our knowledge is never that complete, but the effort to determine that truth is the essence of education and has raised humanity through progress from the dark ages to the present. Trouble comes when those who control a college misunderstand one type of truth for the other, when virtually all truth becomes authoritative and designed to support some pre-conceived notion. That attitude can destroy the academic freedom of an institution and reduce education to nothing more than propagandizing and slogan shouting.

What constitutes knowledge is not the data as such; not the figures or documents or statistics but the conclusions rationally derived from the data. Galileo never would have been dragged before the Inqui-

sition if he had merely presented the data of his experiments and not drawn conclusions concerning the motion of the earth through space. Unfortunately his findings were contrary to accepted orthodoxy. Mere items of information do not constitute knowledge. Those who say that the scholar should not go beyond the data, beyond the "facts," do not understand what knowledge is. The scholar takes the data and tries to explain relationships and the meaning of things. In doing so, he might disturb opinions that are held to be true especially when his conclusions run counter to preconceptions that uphold some group interest or a dogma based doctrine of any kind.

Academic freedom is, therefore, a right claimed by the professor as an investigator and a teacher to interpret his findings and communicate his conclusions to his students and his colleagues without being subject to any interference, molestation, or penalization, even if his work is unacceptable to some authority inside or outside the college. That is the simple core of the doctrine of academic freedom. This must be regarded as one of the great achievements of man, but at the same time the slender thread by which it all hangs must appall us. Anyone who believes in democracy and understands what it means must also accept the principle of academic freedom and agree that it is far more valuable than any objective that might be gained by its suppression.

Yet, even in the United States large numbers of people, who claim to believe in the ideals of democracy, ally themselves with the enemies of academic freedom. The threat comes from both the right and the left. Religious fundamentalism is no more threatening than political correctness. Both attempt to implant a dogma that will smother academic inquiry and freedom as surely as the vandals burned the libraries.

The self-righteous and dictatorial personality will usually envision the intellectuals and artists in a community as the greatest threat to his orthodoxy and go after those groups with the intention of silencing them. In our own time we have seen dramatic examples of this occurring. In the early 1950s, in this country, the vicious witch-hunt known as McCarthyism resulted in dozens of professors, as well as persons in other fields, losing their positions because they might hold views counted as unacceptable.

In the 1960s in China, during that upheaval known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, intellectuals and artists were persecuted, tortured and even killed because they might challenge a rigid dogma. In more recent times, again in this country, reactionary groups have tried to eliminate the funding for the National Endowment for the Arts because some buffoon took a half-dozen photographs that were

offensive and that provided an excuse to attack all the arts as dangerous and irreverent.

Carson-Newman College has faced two great crises that have threatened the school's very existence. The first came in 1862, when almost the entire student body, along with the President, joined the Confederate Army, and the school was forced to close. The occupation and destruction of the buildings followed that by Union troops. There was virtually nothing left, but on that occasion the college was brought back to life by people who believed that it should continue to exist.

The second great threat came in 1998, when a group who had no sympathy for academic freedom attempted to take control of the governing board. They planned to alter the traditions of the school and implant a dogma that would poison and kill real education. A science department can not be based on the miraculous; social sciences can not be based on pre-conceived ideas; humanities can not be based on whether or not they are compatible with some notion of what is suitable. With academic freedom suppressed, those things would have been the likely occurrence. It would have meant the beginning of an academic Dark Age.

We must acknowledge the fact that no knowledge is absolute. Professors who teach at a denominational college must assume a positive relationship with the sponsor and support the traditions of the school. Failure to do that would be completely illogical. It must be understood, however, that those who choose to maintain such an institution of higher learning cannot place obstacles in the way of an honest search for truth. That would destroy the value of their contribution.

The college is there to serve a community or a constituency and also serve the region from which most of the students come, but there is a higher responsibility. The college serves the whole of mankind, for knowledge is universal. It has no frontiers, and the value that knowledge creates is at the service of everyone in the world. The college is not a church or a missionary society. Although a part of the mission of the denominational college is to encourage those organizations and support their activities, to expect the college to do the work of these is improper. Persons who make such demands generally do not appreciate the service the college renders and are likely to have little regard for academic freedom. They tend to have the misconception that the college consists of irreverent scholars, skeptics who feel that it is their duty to cast doubt on the values that other people hold dear, or of radicals who want to undermine the social heritage.

In fact, the college is engaged in perpetuating that heritage and making it relevant to changing times. Unless traditional values are reinterpreted and made understandable to a new generation they can stag-

nate, lose their value, and die. The scholar is the person who preserves and transmits the great traditions of the ages by making them intelligible to an evolving world. He keeps alive the legacy of what has been good, beautiful and true as well as the understanding necessary to discern what is bad, ugly, and false.

The search for knowledge is a moral discipline. It brings about the liberation of the mind from intolerance, error, and complacency. Scholarship allows the student to open his mind and be able to contemplate the works of man and nature. It frees him to be able to accept the inevitability of change. The student is encouraged to try to understand the ways of other people and to effectively communicate with them for the betterment of the world.

Where the search for knowledge is controlled or stopped altogether, the whole of society is imprisoned. If freedom is suppressed anywhere then the whole civilization suffers. When the Nazis, for example, came to power in Germany one of the first things that they did was to turn the famous universities there into instruments of indoctrination. There was no truth except for their truth. There were no standards of right or wrong except for whatever utility might be served for Nazi ideology. The central issue between democracy and dictatorship is that on one side the spirit of free inquiry is banned and any version of truth other than what is dictated is crushed.

When things such as this happen, where intellectual freedom is suppressed, human dignity is buried in the same grave with integrity and liberty. The attack on academic freedom is an attack on those same values. An institution that would, or would allow itself to be compelled to, ignore topics for consideration in class or for inquiry because those topics might offend the ideas or beliefs of someone in power, or an institution that would rely on traditional or irrational explanations in place of empirically proven scientific knowledge is a ship of fools, a meaningless and futile gesture at education, a farce.

The right to freely pursue knowledge is an essential part of that great liberating tradition that has developed over the past eight hundred years in the West, which has established the creative culture of today. An essential part of that culture is its refusal to take as true any conclusion that has not met the test of investigation. The universities and colleges were among the forerunners in promoting the spirit of free inquiry, but the western acceptance of that principle was itself a somewhat late development of a much longer movement. This freedom of thought was rooted in a vast system of evolution which included the overthrow of feudalism, the establishment of nation states, the successful challenge to absolute monarchy, the weakening of the oligarchic

class system, and the coming of the scientific and industrial revolutions.

Implanted within these changes was a new tradition, a new way of thinking that proclaimed the right of a person to develop his own ideas, worship in his own way and compete for power on equal terms with his fellow men. If this democratic claim is taken seriously, if it is accepted that opinion should be free from suppression or control, it necessarily follows that one must support the academic freedom of the scholar.

The idea that men who have no scholarly credentials could penalize him for the opinions he holds in his field is contrary to the spirit of democracy and to the elementary decencies of civilized life. Those who would commit this crime against the institution of learning are not much different from the hoard of Vandals who crossed the frozen Rhine in A. D. 406, to bring down the Roman Empire and bring on the Dark Ages. The only hope for democracy is freedom of the mind, and for that to exist academic freedom is necessary.

The threat to academic freedom recalls the problem that exists at Carson-Newman. Academic freedom, freedom of inquiry, and freedom to teach were all almost lost at this college. What recently happened was a more serious threat than when the Yankees destroyed the school facilities. In A. D. 1998, once again the barbarians, the intellectual descendants of the matted and uncouth hoards of Vandals and Visigoths, were prepared to invade, conquer and bring down civilization in their own small corner of the world and bring on another Dark Age.

This time, however, the defenders were ready for them, and under the war cry, "Carson-Newman's academic integrity is not for sale at any price," the barbarians were defeated and driven back into the outer darkness. They managed to carry away some plunder, but our academic freedom, which we here at Carson-Newman have mostly come to take for granted, was preserved. Most of us here were very relieved, but few probably stopped to realize what a profound and sublime victory that really was.

It is always a temptation to look for validation when something says something that he feels is important. For this purpose persons of Scottish ancestry, like your author, will frequently search through the works of one of the greatest of all poets, that brilliant student of human nature, Robert Burns. In all likelihood, whatever you have said Burns already said it better. I found that Burns had his own Vandals and Visigoths to deal with in 18th century Scotland, and in his own special style proceeded to dissect them.

An honest man may like a glass,
 An honest man may like a lass'
 But mean revenge, and malice fause
 He'll still disdain,
 And then cry zeal for gospel laws,
 Like some we ken.

They take religion in their mouth;
 They talk o' mercy, grace an' truth
 For what?---to gie their malice skouth
 On some puir wight
 An' hunt him down, owre right and ruth,
 To ruin straight.

But I gae mad at their grimaces,
 Their sighin, cantin, grace-proud faces;
 Their three mile prayers, an' half-mile graces
 Their raxin conscience
 Whase greed, revenge, and pride disgraces
 Weur't not their nonsense.

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Saving Guesses: Peirce, Chance, and Faith

D. Brian Austin

Mrs. Smith was a sweet elderly lady who taught Tommy in Sunday School throughout his elementary school years. Tommy learned Bible stories, memorized verses, mastered the “Bible drill,” and asked a lot of questions. Some questions Mrs. Smith answered forthrightly and cheerfully. Other questions were met with silence and a glare of disapproval. A good Christian, he was told, should never ask some questions. He learned his lessons well, and one of those lessons was the impropriety of doubt. Serious questions had no place in church, since those questions had long ago been answered and were no longer negotiable. Being a generally compliant and well-mannered child, Tommy knew when to shut up.

As a young adult, Tommy’s faith suffered a series of storms that weakened its foundation and then an earthquake that left it in ruins. The storms were a whirlwind of science courses that he took in college. These science courses presented powerful evidence of an ancient, expanding universe, evidence of the chemical basis for thought, emotion, and behavior, and evidence of chance variations leading to the origin of species, including the human species. In a person not so well trained in the suppression of irritating information, this evidence might have instigated a season of grappling, reinterpretation, revision, and growth. But for Tommy these irritations were swept under the carpet of conscious awareness, where they took up residence like so many incubating pathogens, in his unconscious psyche.

The earthquake came near the end of his senior year, when his fiancée died of a freak infection just a couple of months before they were to be married. Tommy withdrew from the world in bitterest agony. That pain and bitterness have abated somewhat in the years since the tragedy. But his relative ease was bought at the price of sacrificing those non-negotiable, not-to-be-questioned convictions of his youth. Because they were off-limits to analysis and reformulation, the only real choice for Tommy was to jettison the lot of them, like throwing weight off of a sinking ship. He concluded that Mrs. Smith had just

been plain wrong in her uncompromising insistence on a Creator and Redeemer God who loved all the creation and had a plan for it. Tommy felt lost, but at least not tormented.

There was something inadequate in the “faith” that Tommy had absorbed from Mrs. Smith and others. Of course, he was responsible as well for his refusal to seek deeper understanding in those moments of doubt; but the environment in which his religious sensibilities took shape was also to blame. In that environment, “faith” had come to mean “the rigid adherence to claims taught to me in church.” Hardly ever was he instructed in the New Testament meaning of “belief” as “trust.” Many religious environments today suffer the same failure. The persistence of this failure is fed by the still predominant modernist view that our declarations of truth can be made in permanent and unambiguous fashion, and that nothing is more important than accepting as many of these “correct” declarations as possible. There is a better way of understanding faith, a way that is conservative of the values of the past yet open to the possibility that new discoveries really do matter. And this better way of understanding faith holds the promise of bridging the chasm that has emerged between the worlds of science and faith since the beginning of the 20th century, and thus healing the destructive schizoid existence that many persons like Tommy are forced to endure.

American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) provides a powerful set of tools to help the contemporary world understand that faith and science need not be adversaries, and in fact are in many ways leading persons in the same directions. Faith understood in terms of trust, an expectant hope of future consummation, need not fear the pronouncements of scientists and philosophers, and can provide a flexible foundation that will withstand the storms and earthquakes of life. Modern builders of structures ranging from skyscrapers to bridges no longer believe that the way to withstand twisters and temblors is rigidity. In fact, the most rigid bridges and skyscrapers are the first to crumble during these crises. The most quakeproof and weatherproof of structures are those that are able to bend and sway, *within limits*, under the seismic and meteorological pressures of their unpredictable environments. *This kind of swaying is not a sign of weakness; it is the essence of strength.* The philosophy of Peirce can help Christians build this kind of resilient faith.

Overview

In the brief comments that follow, two of Charles Peirce’s key notions about knowledge and reality will be explored, shown to be

credible within the worldview endorsed by modern science, and shown to be friendly toward substantial affirmations of faith. This credibility and affinity toward both science and faith can provide some mutual ground upon which a meaningful dialogue can take place. There are many more than two areas in which the philosophy of Peirce can be profitably applied to the life of faith, but these two are crucial. Peirce's ideas concerning 1) chance and habit and 2) the fallibility of human knowledge will each be argued to be essentially correct and allies both of the scientific worldview and Christian affirmations of faith.

Chance and Habit

Peirce was the first significant Western thinker in about two thousand years to affirm a substantial role for chance in nature. Epicurus had done so in the 3rd century BCE, but practically no one endorsed and developed his ideas in this area after him, until Peirce. For Peirce, nature was regular, but not everything happened according to strict laws. There was room for spontaneity, or chance, within the boundaries of a pervasive regularity. Both in Epicurus' time and in Peirce's, the suggestion that anything could happen purely by chance was considered radical. It is an insult to most rational sensibilities to propose that some events can happen for no reason at all. To say that something happens by chance is to say that there is no explanation of a given kind for its occurrence. To claim that something happens by chance is to claim that no further information of a given kind can be found about the event in question. So, quite understandably, claims of chance events were, and are, met with skepticism. Such claims are a kind of throwing in the towel.

Yet for Epicurus and Peirce (and for many others since Peirce's time), there have been good reasons for suggesting that not everything happens for the kinds of reasons sought. Peirce (and probably Epicurus as well) thought that the human experience of free choice required that there be an element of chance in nature; otherwise our apparent choices were not really choices at all, but rather the unfolding of some kind of necessary script, whether written by divine fiat or by inexorable laws of nature. If everything that happens is the result of strict causal necessity, for example, then I am not freely choosing to write this paper, or to help the child escape the oncoming train, or to follow Jesus, or whatever. If laws or divine volition direct every detail of creation, then I am some sort of automaton, unknowingly living out the program written for me from the beginning.

In addition, Peirce and Epicurus had a kind of a hunch that the universe even beyond the human will was, in a sense, free. An unbiased look at nature around us, according to Peirce, did not yield the conclusion that every event was predetermined. The fall of a leaf or of a sparrow, the wind that blows this blade of grass just this far, the mutation of a gene in a human or in a bacterium, did not seem to be a rule-governed event. Why insist that the laws of nature or the will of God are always in every instance obeyed? Does it not match our experience better to suppose that, though laws can explain most events and patterns, nevertheless some portion of these events cannot be so accounted for? Is it more than an unfounded presumption to insist that every event must fit into *our desired patterns* of explanation?

Peirce's view of the world as regular but chancy was deeply informed by the science of statistics. Tremendous regularity, approaching lawlikeness, occurs when large numbers of independent random events are considered. For instance, if there are a billion trillion molecules in a fluid, then the random motion of each individual molecule can all but be ignored, because the collective will behave in very predictable ways. Laws of nature, according to Peirce can be accounted for in analogous ways. It is not *necessary*, for example, that what goes up must come down, but that's the way to bet. And in certain kinds of extremely sensitive and complex systems, expectations of regularity are frequently and very visibly disappointed.

How do these sensitive and complex systems (such as living things) come into being? For Peirce they are the result of the universe's lengthy employment of "habit-taking." All regular structures in the world are the result of habit-taking. Whether we speak of streambeds, organisms, or the laws of nature themselves, we are speaking of accumulations of habits taken on by the universe. The universe has become more regular as more habits become engrained. In the beginning, the pre-history of any series of habit taking, there is chance. Some chance events will engender habits that persist; other chance events are damped out and lost to history.

So, the early universe for Peirce is primed for the formation of habits, and all it takes for a cascade to start is the right chance event at the right time. In his words habit-taking "is a generalizing tendency; it causes actions in the future to follow some generalization of past actions; and this tendency is itself something capable of similar generalizations; and thus, it is self-generative. We have therefore only to suppose the smallest spoor of it in the past, and that germ would have been bound to develop into a mighty and over-ruling principle, until it supercedes itself by strengthening habits into absolute laws regulating the action of all things in every respect in the indefinite future (CP 1:409)."

There are at least two developments in twentieth-century science that have served to corroborate Peirce's conjectures about chance and habit. These cannot be described adequately here (for a more extended treatment consult my *The End of Certainty and the Beginning of Faith* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000)), but it is widely agreed that quantum mechanics and chaos theory have put scientific meat on Peirce's philosophical skeleton. And though the scientific synthesis of these two major revolutions is probably still decades away, fruitful insights may nevertheless be drawn from the current consensus.

Quantum physics has convinced the majority of scientists working in that area that chance is an irreducible part of contemporary physics. There is simply no prospect, according to the majority reading of quantum theory, of achieving the Newtonian dream of a complete analytical mathematical description of subatomic reality. We will forever be required to utilize statistical explanations when describing the most fundamental constituents of the material world. There is an upper limit to our ability to specify relevant information about subatomic matter. Thus we are forced to say things like "there is a 50% chance that a given atom of uranium will decay in the next 4.5 million years."

This fundamental limit has led some thinkers to affirm, as Peirce had done a generation before quantum mechanics, that there well could be events that happen purely by chance—events which, even from a perfect vantage point, are not causally predetermined. In philosophical terms, these events might be called "ontological causal randomness"—meaning that there *is no* causal explanation for their occurrence. They just happened. Of course, such a contention could never be definitively proven, since the possibility always exists that there are causal explanations yet to be found. But the kind of chance recognized by quantum mechanics has opened the door for a revival of the Epicurean atomic swerve theory, and for Peirce's more scientifically informed "tychism" (the name Peirce gave to his theories of chance events, from the Greek *tuche*, "chance").

Another major recent set of scientific breakthroughs, often labeled by the name "chaos science," seem to affirm Peirce's hunch about the habit-taking nature of the universe. Among other things, chaos theory affirms the ability of complex physical systems to take on new large-scale behaviors at the slightest instigation. Among the pioneers in this area is Belgian chemist/physicist Ilya Prigogine. His groundbreaking studies focused on the behavior of far-from-equilibrium chemical and physical systems. He showed that nature is full of such systems that, under the right conditions, become highly unpredictable. This unpredictability is exactly the result of their exqui-

site sensitivity. At certain crucial stages of their development these systems can go either one of two (or more) different ways, and none of our calculations can confidently predict which. We can only make statistical predictions like “there is X chance that this solution will turn from blue to pink at this moment.”

It seems to me that this sort of scenario can be profitably described in Peircean terms. A system that is near the pointing of going down one path or the other can be said to take on a new habit due to a chance influence. If the solution turns from blue to pink in its far-from-equilibrium state, then the persistence of pink becomes a new habit. This new habit might even have been launched by an ontologically random event (if these in fact happen). And if the pink habit is encouraged by the environment, it will persist. As the sciences of complexity (chaos and its cousins) advance, it seems that this rough scenario can be applied to the emergence of countless systems and forms throughout the universe. Some description like this may even begin to account for the origin of life on earth, for life is a habit that perpetuates itself at a far-from-equilibrium locale.

So if it is granted that contemporary science appears to provide further reasons to accept a Peircean view of chance and regularity in nature, how can this possibly be of help to persons of faith or to the religion/science dialogue? There are many ways; but I will briefly mention two. First, this chancy view of natural processes is much more amenable to a vibrant faith than is the dominant scientific worldview that it would supplant. That Newtonian/Cartesian worldview insisted that all nature operates according to predetermined (if not “pre-known” by humans) mathematical formulae. Its mechanical metaphors for natural processes (though the descriptions were not usually admitted to be metaphorical) portrayed all physical processes, including those of the human body, as clockwork. Sometimes the clockwork was too small or too large or too complicated for us to uncover accurately, but it was presumed to be present and ticking perfectly at the bottom of it all.

That view, of course, provided no room for human choice and responsibility. For our bodies, whether enlivened by “souls” or not, were seen as machines, hence the part they played in either philanthropy or murder must happen by mechanical necessity. All of Descartes’ pleading that the presence of the soul obviates this unfortunate mechanical conclusion were, in the end, ineffective. By extension, my decision, for example either to be baptized or not, since it involves obvious physical motion, must likewise be the result of mechanical necessity. Even the decisions made with no apparent physical effects can now be shown to be rooted in electrochemical events in the brain. Brain

imaging shows different levels of blood flow in different regions when, for example, I act graciously than when I act territorially.

Many thus argue, in a Cartesian fashion, that all of my apparent choices are really the result of the “laws of nature.” Such a view is incompatible with a number of key elements of the Christian faith, especially the faith of the free church tradition, which includes Baptists. If, however, there really were chance events in nature, then there is at least room for causation other than by mechanical necessity. This is not to say that chance accounts for freedom; it does not. But some sort of openness in the causal chains of matter seems a necessary condition for the existence of real choice and thus real responsibility.

It may seem paradoxical to assert that the presence of chance events, perhaps even at key moments in the development of life on earth, can be friendly to the claims of faith. But I think it is very friendly. Thus the second main reason why Peirce’s notions of chance and habit might be friendly to faith and to science (and thus to their fruitful dialogue) is because it insists that chance and habit are two sides of the same profoundly fertile coin. Chance as described by Peirce takes place within the overall context of increasing regularity, of the continuing creation of cosmos out chaos. For there is no region of the universe governed by pure and absolute chance (and “pure and absolute chance” is probably an incoherent notion). There are regularities, and they provide the boundaries within chance events may happen and perhaps have a great eventual influence. People of faith should be exceedingly encouraged that Peirce provides a way in which chance and law, or randomness and regularity, may be seen not as mutually exclusive explanations, but as complementary principles that energize the dance of life in the universe.

To say that an event happens by chance is not to say that absolutely anything could have happened. The chance event is always constrained by regular patterns already established. It may be partly by chance, for example, that my eyes are blue. Some tiny influence during my pre-natal development may have accounted for this. But my eyes (almost assuredly) could not have turned out orange, and I (almost) certainly could not have mutated into an orangutan or a microwave oven. Patterns persist and comprise the fences around the playground of chance.

Thus can the universe be simultaneously expressive of order (or law, or regularity, or pattern, or, if you like, plan) *and* chaos. In fact, it may be that some partnership scenario like this is necessary to explain the incredible variability and diversity of life found on Earth. According to the Peircean view suggested here, chance and law are not antagonists, but dancers swirling in a passionate embrace on the mag-

nificent stage of creation. Complete chance is anathema to faith. Complete law likewise. The creative interplay of order *and* chance creates the kind of fertile ground where the seeds of faith can really take root and grow. And human belief itself is another example of conservative habits occasionally infused with the new and creative seed.

Chance, Habit, and Belief

One of the most attractive features of Peirce's philosophy is its consistency across so many different domains. His theory of habits forming from the infinitesimal germs of novelty has the potential to illuminate not only the changing colors of chemicals and the shapes assumed by streambeds, but the very structure of human belief itself. Like the course of a stream or a river, human beliefs are very persistent *but changeable*. Peirce insisted that thinkers admit the fallibility of their current beliefs.

For Peirce a belief, like every other stable structure in the universe, is a habit. More specifically, a belief is a habit of mind that predisposes its possessor to act in certain ways in the future. Like the streambed or the pink chemical solution, the habit will persist until some experience induces it to change. A new obstacle may change the course of a stream. An earthquake may drastically redirect the course of the Mississippi River (as has actually happened). Analogously, I will continue comfortably with a belief until some event, whether a small irritation or a mighty earthquake, leads me to change it. Changes in extremely important and very successful beliefs will be infrequent and usually minor. Smaller and less successful beliefs may change more readily and more thoroughly. It is very likely that a minor belief about a non-crucial type of event might even be wholly abandoned.

For instance, I believe that a certain type of golf club will produce desirable results on the golf course. It won't take much for me to re-evaluate this notion. Any number of events might cause me to call that belief into question. But I am extremely unlikely to change my belief that I should be faithful to my wife or, even more importantly, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (II Cor. 5:19). These beliefs have served so well for so long, have proven so successful in navigating a huge variety of experiences, and have withstood the threats of so many obstacles so far, that they are remarkably well-entrenched (for Peirce, infinite long-term success of a belief is a sign of its *truth*, but that is the subject of another paper). And one of the keys to the durability of these beliefs has been their flexibility.

A number of nuclear missile silos maintained by the United States armed forces are “hardened.” A hardened silo is one that especially resistant to damage from an enemy’s attack. What does it take to “harden” a silo? Paradoxically, the hardened silo is one that is able to move, to sway in response to the shocks of an incoming enemy bomb. Like the skyscrapers and bridges mentioned earlier, these silos will last longer because they have a built-in shock-absorber system. There is an analogy (albeit imperfect, of course) to our key beliefs. My understanding of the concepts of “faithfulness” and “reconciliation,” for example, have undergone quite a bit of adjustment since I first affirmed the above beliefs in my youth. A number of crises and assaults have bent those structures to and fro. Though these threats were painful and frightening at the time, the end result is a deepened understanding of the key ideas that give shape to my actions and beliefs even now. I knew then, as I know now, that my current understanding of important concepts is imperfect, that there will very likely be new threats and opportunities that will irritate and confound me. This is to be expected in a world where the established regularities are not completely fixed and where the creative power of God and God’s universe is active yet.

It is at this point, I think, that Peirce’s message to science is the same as his message to religion, because the scientist, too, must be willing to admit that the current consensus is not the last word. Science has progressed in part due to the willingness of its great geniuses to question the prevailing understanding of the universe. The relativity physics of Einstein posed a severe challenge to the Newtonian absolutist vision of space and time. Those who insisted on the Newtonian universe as the last word were left behind, but not before they performed the important task of clinging to the cherished beliefs so that they would not be abandoned prematurely. However, even the victory of the Einsteinian view did not result in the dismissal of the marvelous Newton. Newton’s theories still work. They are still taught to schoolchildren around the world and used to chart the trajectory of modern spacecraft. But physicists have a different understanding of Newton’s laws than they did one hundred years ago. His physics only told part of the story; Einstein’s tells more. Newton has been reinterpreted and reapplied for a new and different era.

What Peirce has to say to religion and to science is thus a marvelous salve to both. Hold on to your cherished beliefs; they are not to be altered or dismissed lightly. But be alert to the winds of creativity that blow where the spirit blows. For your current interpretation of the universe, of God, of the Scriptures, of yourself, of your loved ones, is surely not the best you can do. This kind of attitude toward the changing world might have done Tommy a lot of good (and it yet might). His

beliefs were rigid but not hardened. The storms, the attacks, the earthquake caused a structural failure. Had he been able to see the world, the processes of the universe, including the development of his own belief system, as regularities that were susceptible to spontaneous changes of direction, he might still have an enlivening and fulfilling faith. May the God who is ever new, who creates each day a really *new* morning, find him yet.

Of Jane and Robins

[May 25, 1996]

Celia B. Ferguson

Yesterday the three young robins were about to overflow their nest in the hanging basket of trailing geraniums on the front porch. The birds had grown and filled out and were closer to the look of adult robins, only still a bit gawky looking. During the afternoon they would sometimes puff up in size, ruffling their feathers out, as if to see what these wings were really for and what could be done with them. The young birds would sort of pick at their wings as if trying to unfold the layers of fuzz and feathers. And then sometimes they would stand up in the nest, awkwardly bumping up against each other almost like they were pushing and punching a brother or sister. After they had been standing up seeming to be stretching themselves as tall as possible, they would often nestle down low in the nest and make themselves small and flat, pulling in their necks and becoming barely visible to anything outside the nest. They seemed to be following some internal rhythm of expansion and contraction, over and over again.

At times, it seemed that they were walking around the edges of the nest, peering out in all directions with their beady little eyes. (Before this spring, I'd never realized that birds' eyes really are beady.) And I would wonder if they knew which direction to fly, if they were scared, if they were excited, if they were hungry. And then I'd remind myself that they are **birds** and that I was attributing human characteristics to them, that this was a merely normal and ordinary everyday happening for such creatures. Yet, I was hooked. The afternoon hours passed quickly, as I brought into the living room all kinds of ways of being (yoga, drinking tea, sitting) as well as tasks to do (laundry to sort, bills to pay) so that I could continue watching these three little birds figure out how to leave.

When their mother/father came to the nest, there would be such a lot of noise! The young would suddenly look so helpless, with eyes closed and beaks turned upward and wide open, waiting for a worm or other delicacy to be dropped in. However, unlike the hundreds of times before today, none were offered. Instead, the adult bird seemed

to be just stopping by, checking in, and being present with them. The adult bird would then fly away: demonstrating how to do it? Showing the way? Encouraging? Letting them be until they were ready?

I had watched this nest for many weeks, finding it by accident one day while watering the plants. I even had touched the inside of the nest before realizing what it was, so I had figured that the mother bird wouldn't even come back. I was wrong. She later laid three small, "robin's-egg-blue" eggs. Over the next weeks I watched her as she sat quietly on the nest, flying away when we'd suddenly open the front door to go out onto the porch. And then I had noticed that she (and maybe another robin--the daddy?) had become very active, bringing worms to three hungry, chirping little birds. And I had watched the threesome grow from tiny, wet skinny little things into restless young creatures.

Besides the robin's nest in the hanging basket, there had been another nest in the holly bush adjacent to the porch; and from the living room window I had watched both the robin and a cardinal sitting on their nests. There were three speckled eggs in the cardinal's nest, but one day I had noticed that the cardinal never sat on the nest anymore. I had looked; the nest was empty. I don't think that I had missed their hatching and flying away, but maybe I had. Or maybe an animal found the eggs. I won't ever know.

But I do know that yesterday I received one of God's moments of grace. I was paying attention to something that spoke to me where I was: in the middle of all those mixed emotions about our daughter's high school graduation. I had been to the senior breakfast and assembly and had been reminded of one of the ways that she and I are **different**. During the proceeding days she had seemed to want plenty of space from me in order to enjoy and cope with all the excitement and activity and ceremony, symbols of this important rite of passage. I, on the other hand, had wanted to give and receive expressions of affection and to feel welcome in her world. Unfortunately, I tend to forget that she's also a lot **like** me, in that her needs for connection and space vary from time to time. So even though I still sometimes forget this fact and get my feelings hurt and feel pushed away, I am beginning to trust that - when I don't crowd her too much--she **does** welcome me.

It's just that I forget to expect her changes in needs for connection and space, so sometimes I get my feelings hurt and feel pushed away. The thing is that I, too, am one who needs lots of space as well as connection; and others sometimes forget to expect changes in **my** needs as well. I do tend to forget that Jane's a lot **like** me, too.

So, the birds' leaving was a great distraction and also a great lesson. I watched on and off from 11:30 a.m. till 7:00 p.m. One of the

three flew away while I was folding clothes in front of the window. I looked away to put down a towel; and when I looked back, it was gone. It was several hours later when the second one left; again, I missed the launching. I did see each of those first two birds standing on the edge of the hanging basket several times; but then they'd each settle back down inside the perimeter of the nest to wait a little longer before leaving.

And then around 7:00 p.m., as my husband Andy and I were closing the front door and walking down the porch steps, the last young bird leapt from the edge of the basket, wings fluttering rather unsteadily but working just the same. And at the same time, what a ruckus from two or three adult robins! They began to dive-bomb us and a mockingbird that was close by. They were screeching and doing fly-byes, successfully drawing attention away from the young bird hopping across the front yard. We saw it trying its wings and hopping along all by itself *while the community of robins joined in to create a safer, if not particularly peaceful, atmosphere for trying.*

Epilogue [Four Years Later]

That high school graduation and bird watching happened in May 1996. Now, during the first two weekends of May 2000, our family has celebrated both our daughter's and our son's *college* graduations. In addition, my husband and I are preparing to move to a different community at the same time that our two young adult children are moving into new communities and jobs and homes of their own.

As we approach these current leavings and new beginnings, each of us is a little like those three young robins and their parents:

- stretching up and looking out while also pulling in and becoming barely visible to the outside world;
- peering out from the edges of comfort to choose direction;
- feeling excited and scared and even a little hungry for whatever comes next;
- feeling helpless and hungry at times;
- being able to comfort and be present with ourselves and with each other;
- experiencing restlessness as well as hesitancy to leave for lands unknown;
- feeling unsteady and awkward but also confident and sure;

- being alike and being different, needing space and needing connection.

Like those young robins, we are not alone in our endings and our beginnings. We have communities who join in to create a safer, although not always peaceful, atmosphere where we can try our wings. Our communities are made up of those who encourage and show us direction, who hunger and thirst for Life, and who also will *wait and be with* us . . . surely God's love incarnate among and within us all . . . even in foreign lands.

Devotional on Matthew 22.34-40

[Southeast Regional Meeting of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, McAfee School of Theology, March 10, 2000]

Merrill M. Hawkins, Jr.

Having read the sacred, let me read the profane, and profound, and have these two texts dialogue for a moment. In *Brother to a Dragonfly*, Will D. Campbell has a conversation with P. D. East, an iconoclastic Mississippi publisher who admired Campbell, but stood even further from the institutional church. East asked Campbell to define the Christian faith in ten words or less. Campbell answered, “We’re all bastards but God loves us anyway.”

Now, this was profound, shocking, new information for East. It was hardly the definition of his youth. But it is East’s response that completes the story. To Campbell’s definition, designed to enlighten by shaking his world, East responded, “If you want to try again, you have two words left.”

We’ve taken a look at a “sacred” text with words about the essence of true religion and at a text that gives a picture of Campbell the teacher providing theological wisdom to the inquiring, yet distant student.

I still think of myself as new to the profession or calling of teaching in a church related, Baptist institution. Yet, I am not terribly new. I have finished a fifth year, and this year has been a time of reflection for me, to be honest. Why do I do what I do? What do I have to share with my students? What does it mean to teach?

Is teaching a one-way dispensation of knowledge—my students sitting there as communicants, ready to take the blessed eucharistic wine of historical criticism, of the study of the church as an institution that had a history between 90 A. D. and the present. Am I there as a priest, ready to hand it out, and they ready to accept it, hands open, in need of redemption? This model of education is the one many of us first encountered, and it may even have been a model that attracted us to the profession.

That model need not be totally abandoned. There is still something for me to give them that most do not have. I have some ideas to share with them, some facts to dispense, and some ways of thinking to provide. But, I have changed a bit. I have come to see teaching as a dialogue. I have something to say, something to tell the students; and they have something yet to say or to teach me. And we all have something to say to one another.

Now, five years ago, I was where Campbell was in his dialogue with East: I had the right answer, I was dispensing it to the student, but the student did not necessarily have anything to tell me. So, I heard from the student, to my answers, not “wow” or “Eureka,” but “you still have two more words left.”

Well, what is it that we as academicians, as people somehow confessionally identifying ourselves as members of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, to say or to teach?

1. **Love the God with your mind.** When I introduce students to the world of religious studies, to the historical examination of Christianity, to freshman courses in Old and New Testament, how many times have I said, “this is not Sunday School?” I want my students to know that a balanced healthy commitment to the life of faith involves the cultivation of the mind. To serve God is not only to know God. It is to know something about God. I can carry that idea further. To learn new ideas is, in a healthy religious worldview, necessarily to receive something from God, even if God is never mentioned. And knowing something means knowing some new things, hearing some things not heard before. This is the lesson that I am dispensing, and it is a lesson I want my students to take in deeply.
2. **Turn the lights on.** Teaching religion is the type of stuff that opens minds, turns the lights on, and looks at things from different angles. It is probably the thing, if we are honest, that attracted us, most of us, to teaching and writing in our context. And it bothers us a bit when the lights don’t come on, or there is resistance to learning or seeing things from a different angle. But we persist, and we should. We are faithful to the words of Jesus when we do, and we echo Anselm (1033-1109), “I desire in some measure to understand thy truth, which my heart believes and loves.”
3. **Serve God with your heart.** In the world of the academy it is the students who have reminded me, “shocked me,” into remembering the other part of religion, the part of religion/Christianity, that is

practiced and lived. You recall parts of the conflict between Reinhold Niebuhr and Billy Graham. Niebuhr didn't like what he thought to be Graham's adolescent religion. In a 1956 editorial in *Christianity and Crisis*, Niebuhr dreaded the prospect of Graham's coming crusade as "presenting Christianity as a series of simple answers to complex questions" and feared that the event might have "the vulgarities of the message of Billy Sunday." Editorial board member Henry P. Van Dusen, president of Union, responded, "There are many, of whom I am one, who are not ashamed to testify that they would probably never have come within the sound of Dr. Niebuhr's voice or the influence of his mind, if they had not been first touched by the message of the earlier Billy . . . There may appear in the classrooms and churches of Billy Graham's severest critics not a few who will be glad to give parallel testimony to his role in starting them in that direction." A number of things start our students in "that direction," and the lesson my students have for me is to teach me to remember who they are, and what they are about, and bring them along. The closer I can start to where there are, the closer I can bring them to where I want them to be. They need to hear me, but I also need to hear them.

Seeking Ancient Wisdom: An Introduction to Marilou Awiakta

Ernest D. Lee, Jr.

In the fall of 1999 the Center for Educational Service to Appalachia (CESA) at Carson-Newman College presented its annual award for outstanding contributions to education and the community in Appalachia to the Cherokee/Appalachian writer Marilou Awiakta, a native of Oak Ridge who now lives with her husband Paul in Memphis. As always, the presentation of the CESA award is a memorable moment in the history of Carson-Newman and the region itself, but in my mind this celebration of Awiakta and her achievements and gifts is of particular significance because it serves as a kind of atonement and a public reaffirmation of our respect for our neighbors and for our desire to develop a truly inclusive and expansive community through our Appalachian programs.

Earlier in the history of Carson-Newman College (1884-85) when Cherokee students attended classes briefly through an agreement with the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the attempt to develop an educational partnership with the Cherokee failed, and the program was cancelled. Apparently, for whatever reasons, the time just was not yet right for such a venture. And so now our acknowledgement of Marilou Awiakta and her contributions and our mutual friendship, work, and respect bring us full circle to a most promising and celebratory beginning for a new century of community development and achievement in Appalachia and in community-based educational programs. In light of our celebration of Awiakta and her work and heritage, I would like to offer some reflections and a brief introduction to her writing and vision which I hope will spark others to read her works, especially her book *Selu: Seeking the Cornmother's Wisdom*.

In the spring of 1996, I and two of my students, Dana Quarles and Beth Lewis, traveled to Memphis to interview Marilou Awiakta about her work and about her vision of life and poetry. We were beginning our work on a book about Tennessee poets (*Always at Home*

Here: Poems and Insights from Six Tennessee Poets. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997) , and this first interview proved to be extraordinary. We discovered firsthand the poetry of Mariou Awiakta, and we learned more about what we had glimpsed in our own reading and discussions of her book *Selu*: that for Awiakta, all of life is poetry, that there is not separation, no system of ordering which assigns poetry to some exercise or discipline separate from life itself. In fact, we came to understand that for Awiakta life and poetry actually are not fixed in time or space, that experience is not necessarily linear, that vision at its best is neither individual nor static but rather is collective and perpetual in nature, that there are wisdoms interwoven in time, and that poetry is a collection of voices both contemporary and ancient.

One of the most striking comments that Awiakta made early in our conversation that day was this remark in response to my question about how she defines poetry: “The way I feel about poetry is that all of life is poetry.” She went on to say that poetry is “a life force” and that it has multiple dimensions: “It’s not a genre to me, and it is not a profession, but it is more a way of thinking, to see the world in images.” Speaking from the experiences born from her own unique heritages, she said, “I think that it is in Cherokee and Celtic and mountain folk to see the reality beyond the mountain. . . . That is why I think poetry is in most people; it is a response to what is beyond them in the tangible world. It is in people, and part of my work as a poet is to listen for the poems in other people, and if they don’t want to sing them themselves, then to sing them on their behalf.”

Her remarkable book *Selu*--a blending of poetry, folklore, myth, fiction, and nonfiction--unveils for us in detail the complexities of the interwoven nature of life, and she particularly proclaims that for life to have balance and respect and beauty and regenerative power, we must draw from the wisdoms of our ancestors and see that these wisdoms can be translated into our modern lives, and in fact, must be translated into our actions and whole beings if we and the planet are to survive and prosper, in the best sense of the word. The book itself is an interwoven complexity weaving names and stories and symbols and images together. It becomes by example a revelation of the potentiality of interweaving modes of thought and diversities of form and structures.

She suggests that we can learn “to think from the center of one’s being”(17), which involves a unified way of thinking with intellect, heart, and spirit as one. She draws upon not only her Cherokee/Appalachian heritages, but also on her scientific heritage—the atomic age symbolized by the atom and by the “Atomic City,” Oak Ridge, Tennessee. She looks both to science and to mystical Cherokee

visions and myths and Appalachian folklore as sources for what she calls “unified thinking.” Her vision involves moving “from life on the square to life in the round, and from the line to the curve of time” (168).

I would like to consider two of Awiakta’s ideas as a springboard for my reflections on her vision and work: 1) the idea of ancient wisdom and 2) the idea that our memory must be expansive and collective and transcendental in nature. As the speaker in her poem “Out of Ashes Peace Will Rise” proclaims, “Our courage is our memory”(7), and it is the nature of our memory that I want to consider in the light of Awiakta’s words, for I believe that she powerfully reveals to us that our memory is in bad need of refinement and “spiritual recommitment,” to borrow a term from my Baptist youth.

In his book *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the contemporary Native American writer N. Scott Momaday describes a scene in which he watches his grandmother, naked to the waist and with her hair unbraided, as she bows to chant her evening prayers. In a moment of vision and wonder, he comes to realize that she has about her what he calls “a sense of ancient awe.” It is this sense of ancient awe which he undertakes to discover by journeying to Rainy Mountain-- that is, journeying back into his own heritage.

In *Selu*, Awiakta similarly shows us the way to travel toward restoring “ancient awe” in ourselves and in our culture. She refers to these ancient wisdoms as “survival wisdoms,” for as she demonstrates, the ancient, “time-tested “ wisdoms of her Cherokee ancestors are not defunct, but rather are essential to us now, and so she considers specifically how we can apply these wisdoms to life, to government, and as she puts it , to “our general good.” In short, Awiakta goes another step: she shows us that we can come to know and to apply these ancient wisdoms now, and that here at the beginning of a new millennium, we are in critical need of the application of these survival wisdoms. She embraces time-honored Cherokee traditions that respect gender balance and community-based decision making.

She reveals to us that we must learn to re-vision our world if we are to apply these wisdoms. We must be able to see not just literally, but also metaphorically, and we must realize that our best metaphors are those which have been drawn from nature itself and from cultural experiences and subsequent stories, poems, and myths. These are metaphors which connect us to the cycles of life and which help us to see that our lives are, like the corn plant, perpetual and symbolic, and that we must learn to recognize and appreciate the seasons of our lives and our culture. And she reveals how these metaphors are preserved and perpetuated in Native American stories and forms of ritual and

government and family, and how they can live on now to provide wisdom to our modern age and diverse culture.

In his amazing autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth proclaims that there are in our existence certain “spots of time,” moments which we later may realize are the defining moments of our lives, and that our memories of these moments, planted in what he calls the “celestial soil of the imagination,” later can germinate and live in us to guide and sustain us. What we see in Wordsworth is the idea that the individual memory, if it is nurtured and habitually renewed by nature, is the source that enables us, as he says in his poem “Tintern Abbey,” to “see into the life of things” and to “become a living soul.”

What Awiakta proclaims to us in her work, especially in *Selu*, is that our strength lies not just in our individual memory, but rather in our collective memory, and if we do not renew and foster our collective memory, if we do not learn from the ancient memory which is our heritage, we will grow weak and sick and die. We are out of balance (our souls are not fully living) because we are losing touch with our intuitive, holistic memory and vision, and the result is that we paradoxically seek to live in the present without recognizing that the seeds of life are drawn from the harvest of the past.

Awiakta not only proclaims the necessity of ancient memory in *Selu*, she shows us where we must go to seek this memory: it is embodied in the images and voices of our stories and in our symbols and ancient forms of government and relationship. As she shows us, by forgetting our past and our heritage, we kill our own seed. When the mother which nourishes us becomes lost to our memories, when we see the earth as an it and disrespect it, rather than as our source of life, we murder ourselves.

The ancient stories teach us this through metaphor and parable; our ancestors have bequeathed these wisdoms to us in the form of our collective myths and symbols. But as the contemporary writer Wallace Stegner tells us, something will have gone out of us as a people if we lose the idea of our own heritage and our own connection to the cycles of nature. If we can not conceive of life as unified here on the earth, then we become lost, as Awiakta suggests to us in *Selu*: “Western thought is based on dichotomies, which separate spirit from matter, thought from feeling, and so on. Inherently, its language is detached, and that detachment has increased in society now geared to technology and the domination of nature.” Thankfully, though, Awiakta suggests, there still remains the seeds of unified thinking: “Even in a high-tech society most of us have moments when we experience unified think-

ing.” The secret is that we must “think in the unity of heart/mind/soul” (161-164).

Ah, there’s the rub. How can we learn to think holistically? Here is where Awiakta must go out on a limb, so to speak, in *Selu*. What she says to us through her stories and poems and their unique interweaving is that we must trust all of our abilities. We must learn to be comfortable with thinking in more fluid and mystical ways, which means, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggests, a “willing suspension of disbelief.” We must learn to see that objects and forms and events can be seen metaphorically as well as literally, symbolically as well as functionally. Our children can learn to see holistically, she suggests, only if we offer to them ancestral voices, stories that teach by example and ritual and symbol.

Henry Beston, after living for a year on the great beach of Cape Cod, concluded that what he learned from living in harmony with the tides and winds and birds and other cycles and entities of nature is that modern man is losing touch with the poetry of the external world because he is becoming increasingly isolated and insulated. He proclaims, “Creation is here and now. So near is man to the creative pageant, so much a part is he of the endless and incredible experiment, that any glimpse he may have will be but the revelation of a moment, a solitary note heard in a symphony thundering through debatable existencies of time.

Poetry is as necessary to comprehension as science. It is as impossible to live without reverence as it is without joy”(399). This is the wisdom which Awiakta offers us, and what makes her work so rich and powerful is that she shows us through the symbol of the double-woven basket and through the rituals and cycles of corn and its symbolic manifestations, for example, the possibilities that experience and quiet observation and respect and stillness can bring to our perceptive powers.

In her poem “Star Vision,” the speaker boldly challenges us to accept and receive wisdom in a mystical and visionary way, to believe that if we trust in our own being and heritage, we can gain a vision that leaps beyond knowledge. In this poem the speaker reveals that as she sat against a pine under a star-filled sky, suddenly, “her Cherokee stepped in my [her] mind” and for a moment she became visionary and one with “the vast expanse of light.” While she returns inevitably to “bone and flesh,” the memory remains, embodied in the poem (65). It is a risky revelation, by modern standards, but it is the courage to embrace revelation that helps make *Selu* such a powerful and promising book.

Awiakta's vision challenges us to break away from limited modes of perception and communication. She calls upon us to seize opportunities to learn from other cultures and traditions as well as our own and to apply the ancient wisdoms bequeathed to us as we enter a new century in which we seek a more satisfying and sustaining sense of place and community. She continues to reach out to students throughout Appalachia to help foster a comprehensive understanding of community and an optimistic vision for the individual self and for all Appalachian people.

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The Home Field Advantage: The Role of Place in Twentieth Century Irish Writing

[Part of the Raymond B. Preston Lecture Series at the Henderson
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Shawn O'Hare

Ask Tubby Smith or Hal Mumme and I'm sure that he will tell you that nothing beats the home field advantage. The dead spots on the court, the mysterious upward slope on the field, the roar of the home crowd, and a detailed knowledge of swirling winds can all make a difference. In short, there's nothing like the home turf. Believe it or not, the same theory applies to literature. Well, at least it is true for Irish literature, and as far as I know that's all that really matters. At least that's what my Irish grandfather always told me.

To be honest, arguing that place is important in literature is pretty much a no-brainer. Clearly, the beautiful Lake District of northern England greatly affected the writing of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the hot and dusty environs of Algeria impacted much of Albert Camus' work, and of course, Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau's favorite hang-out, helped shape American thinking and writing. Indeed, even in this fine state, your writers have been shaped by Kentucky's rich variation of topography, from Eastern Kentucky's Appalachian roots as seen in the work of Harriet Simpson Arnow, to Central Kentucky's rich farmland illustrated in the work of the poet, essayist, and farmer Wendell Berry, to, of course, the detailed rural settings in much of the work from Western Kentucky's Bobbie Ann Mason.

Now, if one of my students came to me with a thesis like this—A writer's surroundings can mold her work—I would have a one word reply: And? But since this is my thesis, I'll ask myself a similar question: So what? Well, it is place—the green fields, soupy bogs, steep cliffs, barren rock-packed acres, and dirty, developing cities—that set the scene for Ireland's creating the greatest and most important literature of the last century. Ah, now that's a thesis: the literature from

Ireland during the 20th Century is the greatest body of work ever produced by a nation in a 100-year time period.

Perhaps now you are thinking to yourself, “This guy is crazy” or, if you are up-to-date on your Irish idioms, “He’s an eejit.” While either reaction might be true, they have nothing to do with the fact that Irish writing is unsurpassed as the millennium ends. Yes, you can say “What about the United States, or England, or France, or Russia, or Mexico, or South Africa, or China?” They are all fine countries and have produced some important works, but in a 100-year period they can’t compare to what the Irish writers accomplished.

Here, let me prove my point. In the 20th Century, Ireland boasts four winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature: William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Seamus Heaney. Amazingly, that list does not include perhaps the most important 20th Century writer, James Joyce. Still, four Nobel Laureates in a space of 70 years are very impressive (especially when you consider how political the award can be). Don’t be surprised if a fifth Irish writer wins in the next few years, with Brian Friel, Edna O’Brien, and Paul Muldoon being worthy candidates. In fact, if we took the ESPN and Sports Illustrated approach and made an all-century all-star team, it would be filled with Irish writers: Poetry—Yeats, Heaney, Patrick Kavanagh, Louis MacNeice, Eavan Boland; Theatre: Shaw, Beckett, Sean O’Casey, Friel; Short Fiction: Joyce, Frank O’Connor, Sean O’Faolain, Mary Lavin; the Novel: Joyce, Flann O’Brien, Edna O’Brien, Roddy Doyle; and Autobiography: O’Connor and of course Frank McCourt.

Now that’s an all-century team. Especially when you consider how small Ireland actually is. In fact, Ireland and Northern Ireland combined (and for the purpose of this discussion when I talk about “Ireland,” I am referring to the entire island) is smaller than Kentucky (32,588 square miles compared to 39,732 square miles of the Bluegrass state), and has a population of just more than 5 million people (the United States’ population is more than 270 million, while Kentucky is approaching four million citizens). Add to this the fact that during the 19th Century an abusive and all-powerful British government and a devastating potato famine all but killed off the native language (Irish) and cut the population on the island in half, and the Irish rise to literary prominence is even more impressive.

There are, of course, a variety of reasons why Irish writing is so dominant. Perhaps it stems from the Blarney Stone and the gift for gab. More likely, the long-reviled tradition of story telling—a way of preserving the past and ensuring the future—certainly makes for a culture that values a good narrative. Some would suggest that the proliferation of Irish writers in the English language is just payback for the

English taking away the Irish language. If that is true, then Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is the ultimate revenge. Undoubtedly, the answer lies somewhere in the middle of all of these explanations. And, then, of course, there is the land. Now that's something worth more consideration.

Any discussion of 20th Century Irish literature should probably begin with William Butler Yeats, the great Irish poet and father of what we have come to call the Irish Literary Renaissance. Yeats, I would contend, is the great poet of our century. He's our John Milton, our William Shakespeare. The brilliance of Yeats' career is that he was outstanding for such a long period of time. Some writers—William Wordsworth comes to mind—have a great stretch, but few can keep it up for fifty years. Yeats did. Yet, no matter what stage Yeats was in—as his career progressed, Yeats moved from being a Romantic poet in love with Nature, to a love sick poet pining for Maud Gonne, to an Irish nationalist poet concerned with the political future of his country, to an introspective aging artist assessing his life's work—his poetry was constantly excellent.

During the course of his fifty years of writing Yeats, understandably, had a variety of sources. However, his admiration and connection to the Irish land is one that is constant during all stages of his writing. On one hand this may seem a bit odd, as Yeats came from a wealthy Protestant family who lived in County Sligo. Yeats' father, John Butler Yeats was an artist, and the poet's younger brother, Jack Yeats, is considered by many to be one of Ireland's great 20th Century painters. I make this point as a way of saying that, while Yeats did not have much physical contact with the land—he was never a farmer and did not have to worry about chopping his own wood or slicing his own peat moss—he was very much attached to the land on a spiritual and artistic level.

In fact, considering the beauty of Yeats' beloved County Sligo, the idea that the natural world would have such an impact on his writing is not surprising. Early in his career, Yeats was very much influenced by the Romantic Era poets, especially William Blake and William Wordsworth. The Romantic poets were great admirers and celebrators of nature, and this is evident in Yeats' poetry as well. From early on, it was clear that Yeats' relationship to the land, or more specifically Country Sligo, would set the tone for his artistic vision.

Take, for example, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," written in 1890. This poem is an escape from "the modern life" and celebrates a return to a simpler life, something we all desire come Friday afternoon.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,

Once more the storm was howling, and half hid
 Under the cradle-hood and coverlid
 My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
 But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
 Whereby the haystack- and roof-leveling wind,
 Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
 And for an hour I have walked and prayed
 Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

In those eight lines, Yeats uses the approaching violent weather to represent the sleepless night spent worrying about the future of his daughter, which is the main subject of the poem. That symbolism, it seems to me, is the genius of the poem. Yeats has taken one of the truths of Ireland that the Irish Tourist Board (Bord Failte) never talks about—winter in the west of Ireland can be amazingly cold, rainy, and windy—and makes that the core of the poem.

If Yeats' poetry is sometimes dark and brooding, which it is and is one of the reasons I like him so much, that is because as an artist he is striving to capture the realities of life. And for that reason, the Irish weather and landscape is honestly portrayed. Just down the road from Yeats' Thoor Ballylee tower lived his good friend Lady Augusta Gregory. Her large home and its surrounding grounds, Coole Park, also played an important role in Yeats' poetry. For Yeats, Coole Park represented all that was good about rural Ireland, and Lady Gregory's property served as a setting in many of Yeats' poems, including "The Wild Swans at Coole," "Coole Park, 1929," and "Coole and Ballylee, 1931." In each of these poems, Yeats celebrates the beauty of this corner of County Galway. In "The Wild Swans of Coole," Yeats tells us that,

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
 The woodland paths are dry,
 Under the October twilight the water
 Mirrors a still sky;
 Upon the brimming water among the stones
 Are nine-and-fifty swans.

In "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," the poet says about Lady Gregory's lake:

What's water but the generated soul?
 Upon the border of that lake's wood
 Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun,

And in a copse of beeches there I stood
 For Nature's pulled her tragic buckskin on
 And all the rant's a mirror of my mood:
 At sudden thunder of the mounting swan
 I turned about and looked where branches break
 The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Like the Romantic poets, Yeats' regards "Nature" with a "N." Nature—the west of Ireland—is a spiritual place for Yeats, and in many ways Coole Park is his Mecca for Irish artists. Without such a retreat, we can only wonder if Yeats would have been the same poet. My guess is probably not, and we would be the worse for it.

In fact, Yeats' took this obsession with the Irish landscape with him to the grave. Literally. In one of his last poems before his death in 1939, "Under Ben Bulben," Yeats left explicit instructions for his interment. He wanted to be buried in the shadow of Ben Bulben, a small mountain outside of Sligo City that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean. That spot has now also become a tourist attraction, indeed it is almost a place of pilgrimage for poetry fans, and it is one of my favorite places in all of Ireland. The last stanza of the poem reads:

Under bare Ben Bulben's head
 In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid
 An ancestor was rector there
 Long years ago, a church stands near,
 By the road an ancient cross.
 No marble, no conventional phrase;
 On limestone quarried near the spot
 By his command these words are cut:

*Cast a cold eye
 On life, on death.
 Horseman, pass by.*

I can tell you that Yeats did pick a beautiful spot, and with the majestic Ben Bulben rising in the distance, and the Atlantic Ocean and Lough Gill nearby, there is little wonder that he wanted such a final resting place. Clearly, he recognized how much the land of Ireland meant to him, and he knew the view he wanted for eternity.

The Irish landscape, though, did not just serve as an aesthetic tool for the island's poets. Ireland is, and has always been, an agricultural nation, and the fact that the green fields and steep cliffs are beautiful did very little for people who were hungry and needed land that was farmable. In fact, quality land is rare in some parts of Ireland, and the

damp—no, make that just plain rainy—weather is not the best for most crops. Except for, of course, potatoes. The stereotype is true: potatoes are the staple of the Irish diet. It is not uncommon to have, as your choice of vegetable in Ireland, a selection that includes mashed potatoes, baked potatoes, boiled potatoes, or chips (french fries). Maybe that's why I love Ireland so much—not a brussel sprout in sight!

The 20th Century poet most associated with the farmer's life and celebrating the land is Patrick Kavanagh, who lived from 1904-1967. Kavanagh's poetry, unfortunately, tends to get lost in the towering shadow of Yeats' work, yet there is no doubt that he is one of the great writers of his era. His best-known work, indeed some would say his masterpiece, is a long poem called "The Great Hunger." In this poem, Kavanagh addresses what life truly is like for the Irish peasants. His is an art of realism, and because Kavanagh grew up in the poverty-stricken midlands of Ireland, he knew intimately the subject matter.

It is also important to keep in mind just how devastating the potato famines of the 1840s and 1850s were for the Irish people. Essentially, their land and primary crop were infected, and the national memory of people starving, eating grass, and dying on the side of the road just reinforces how dependent the Irish were on their land and that one crop. Add this to the fact that much of Ireland is not suitable for farming—it is either too rocky, or the soil is not of decent quality, or it is swampy, bog land. This makes quality land even more valuable. Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" is a poem about a man called Maguire who must deal with the realities of famine. The first stanza of the poem captures the desperation of a man whose existence depends on his crop, and the land that is not well-suited for such a responsibility:

Clay is the word and clay is the flesh
 Where the potato-gatherers like mechanised scarecrows move
 Along the side-fall of the hill—Maguire and his men.
 If we watch them an hour is there anything we can prove
 Of life as it is broken-backed over the Book
 Of Death? Here crows gabble over worms and frogs
 And the gulls like old newspapers are blown clear of the hedges,
 luckily.
 Is there some light of imagination in these wet clods?
 Or why do we stand here shivering?

The inhospitable clay fields only taunt Maguire and men like him. What good is a beautiful land if it cannot support its people? By the end of the poem, Maguire has been defeated by the Irish country-

side, and like many who faced the famine, perhaps indeed even some of our ancestors, there is nothing he can do:

He stands in the doorway of his house
 A ragged sculpture of the wind,
 October creaks the rotted mattress,
 The bedposts fall. No hope. No lust.
 The hungry fiend
 Screams the apocalypse of clay
 In every corner of this land.

One of the reasons I like Kavanagh's poetry so much is that he mutes the image of Ireland portrayed by Hollywood. His Ireland--the Ireland of the first fifty years of the 20th Century--is not the Ireland of John Ford's *The Quiet Man* or David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter*. Films such as those, as well as *Far and Away* and *Waking Ned Devine* romanticize the Irish landscape. While that may work well for films, which for the most part--Hollywood films at least--serve as a vehicle for visual escape, for serious and introspective literature, those stereotyped notions offer little value.

In many ways, Kavanagh's portrayal of the land is much more honest, and the power of his poetry has its roots in that honesty, no matter how brutal and unattractive it is. In fact, this approach by Kavanagh made him unpopular with many people in Ireland. His detractors, however, missed the point. In capturing the struggle with the land, Kavanagh also gives us a genuine picture of a people who are heroic in their struggle. If Kavanagh's Ireland was the Ireland of postcards and posters, then what would he, as an artist, have to write about? Poetry about green fields and happy sheep would be boring, but poetry about man's struggle to survive in the natural world captures the most basic question the human race faces. As difficult a life as Kavanagh faced, and I can't think of an Irish writer who lived a life as poor and disadvantaged, without such experiences with the land his poetry most likely would not have been as emotionally powerful.

Good land, or at least land where crops will grow, is also at the heart of one of the best Irish plays of recent years, John B. Keane's *The Field*. First performed in 1987, *The Field* is a drama that illustrates just how far some people will go to secure good land: murder. In fact, you may remember the film from 1989, which starred the Irish actor Richard Harris and also earned him an Oscar nomination for his performance as Bull McCabe, a tough, selfish, self-reliant, and proud farmer who wants more than anything to own the four-acre piece of land the Maggie Butler, a recent widow, must sell. Actually, in Bull's

mind he should be allowed to purchase it at a low cost because he leased the land from her for the five previous years. Mrs. Butler's asking price is £800, while "the Bull," as he is called, figures that £400 is a better fit from him. Plus, as he is quick to point out to the townspeople when he is reminded that the land is some of the finest in the area:

Oh, I'll admit it all right, but 'twas the manure of my heifers that made it good. Five years of the best cow-dung in Carraigthomond and £40 a year for grazing. That's £200 I paid her, not counting the cost of the cow-dung and the thistles we cut year in year out. To me, that field isn't worth a penny over £400. I reckon if she got £200 more from me she'd be well paid.

An important aspect of the play (and film) is the stubbornness and spitefulness of Bull McCabe--certainly one of the nastiest characters in recent Irish literature--but this all comes about because of the desire for land. The farmers in the south-west of Ireland, the setting for the play, literally live and die by what the land produces, and Keane, as Kavanagh did, reminds us that the beauty of the Ring of Kerry won't feed a farmer's family. The play is particularly intense, which is unusual for Keane's work, as he is best known as humorist. But in *The Field*, Keane trades humor for realism, and the result is his most respected work.

The true horror in *The Field* is that Bull McCabe is willing even to kill to own that patch of land. Not only is he willing to do it, but he actually does murder William Dee, an "outsider" who wants the land for his own purposes. Bull McCabe even passes on this obsession to his son Tadhg, and tells him "Marry no woman if she hasn't land." Tadhg follows that advice and has hopes of marrying a local girl for that one thing: the land that will be part of her dowry. When Tadhg tells his father about the girl and her nine acres, Bull McCabe replies, "I know there's nine. A good nine. Good man yourself. I reared you well. . . . Nine acres o' land. Think of it! Keep your napper screwed on and we'll be important people yet, important people, boy!" Obviously, for the McCabe men, owning land is their number one goal in life, even if that means other things must be sacrificed. This probably explains why it has been eighteen years since the Bull spoke with his wife, even though they live in the same house. The subtext is that she has nothing to offer him (land), and thus she is of little use. Such is the thinking of a truly obsessed man.

Lest you think that an admiration for the land always leads to insanity in Irish literature, I am glad to say that is not always true. Many writers find their figurative roots in the land, and draw strength

from a hard-working, dedicated, honorable background. This is certainly the case with poet Seamus Heaney, who often celebrates his rural past. In the tradition of Yeats and Kavanagh, Heaney uses the Irish landscape as a source for his poetry. His best known poem, "Digging"--which is also the first poem from his first collection--, deals directly with the question of what he should do in relationship to the land. Heaney's dilemma is whether he should follow the ways of his forefathers, or clear his own path as an artist. "Digging" is about that most personal inner struggle:

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.
 But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
 The squat pen rests.
 I'll dig with it.

This poem is clearly a celebration of Heaney's family and the way they have always survived off the land. Yet, the poem is also a struggle as the young poet--Heaney was twenty-seven when he wrote this poem--realizes that as Ireland begins to change from its agricultural past in the 1960s, he too must decide what changes he will make. Luckily for us, Heaney decides to be a poet. That does not mean, however, that he is rejecting the ways of his forefathers. Instead of cutting turf to heat the family home like his grandfather or growing potatoes for the family like his father, Heaney declares that he will be a poet. And where his grandfather used a scythe to slice the peat and his father a hoe to dig the potatoes, Heaney's digging tool is a pen. Like his grandfather and father, Heaney works the land, but he does it in a metaphorical sense. That is, though he is in a room writing poetry, that sense of the land is always in his consciousness. In his poetry, Heaney can never escape his farm-based past, nor does he want to do that. The Irish landscape--County Derry in particular--serves as a great inspiration and continues to guide his work more than thirty-five years after "Digging" was written.

Thanks to a very aggressive Irish tourist board, almost 100 years of motion pictures, popular shows such as *Riverdance*, and products such as Lucky Charms cereal, the image of Ireland in the minds of most people is a long stretch of field, forty shades of green. Ireland also has, however, developed cities, and that landscape has had a great impact on 20th Century Irish literature as well.

The prime example of this is, of course, James Joyce. Joyce is considered by many to be the great prose stylist of the 20th Century, and for good reason. While I have the feeling that he is one of those writers who, sadly, is more talked about than read, there is no denying his influential role in how art developed during the past century. That he earned such a reputation is even more impressive when we consider that he produced only five books in his lifetime: *Poems Pennyeach*, a brief book of poems; *Dubliners*, his master short story collection; and three novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. You may recall that *Ulysses*, which was first published in 1922, was recently ranked by the Penguin Modern Library as the best English language novel of the Twentieth Century, and while I find

much to disagree with on that list, I will admit that Joyce's masterpiece is worthy of the number one seed.

If the Irish country landscape is the inspiration for writers such as Yeats, Kavanagh, Keaney, and Heaney--and I certainly hope that it is or I've just wasted thirty minutes of your life--then it is safe to say that Joyce takes his inspiration from the other side of Irish life, best represented by Dublin, the capital of Ireland and as big as big city life gets on the small island. Though Joyce put himself in self-exile from Ireland for most of his life--living in Switzerland, Italy, and France--he loved Dublin. In fact, he never really left Dublin far behind. When visited by his countrymen in France, Joyce would often interrogate them for information about Dublin, and sometimes these question-answer sessions bordered on the ridiculous, with the writer asking people how high a specific wall was on a certain street, how many paces it was from one building to the next, and what kind of tree was it that grew on such-and-such corner. Joyce's claim that if, God forbid, Dublin was every destroyed it could be put back together brick-by-brick from his writings is not far from the truth.

All of Joyce's work takes place in or around Dublin City. *Ulysses*, for example, follows protagonist Leopold Bloom for an entire day and evening, and we tag along with the hapless salesman as he makes his way around Dublin on June 16, 1904. In fact, many Dubliners wished that Joyce had not given such a thorough tour, which includes the darker side of Dublin nightlife called Nighttown. That partially explains why the novel was originally banned in Ireland, as it was in England, the United States, and most of the world. Eventually, however, the ban was lifted, and though many years of anti-Joyce feelings followed, he is now properly regarded in his hometown. In fact, Dublin has learned that Joyce sells, and there are Bloomsday celebrations every June 16th, statues, museums, and even bronze plaques in the Dublin sidewalks that mark Leopold Bloom's journey in *Ulysses*.

The ultimate concession to Joyce's impact on Dublin and Ireland is certainly his presence on the £10 note. When a country puts a writer on their money, you know you are in a place that truly values literature. It is fitting, then, that on the reverse side of the note with Joyce's portrait is a street map of the heart of Dublin. That is the ultimate compliment to an artist whose career depended so much twenty square miles of territory.

Following in Joyce's footsteps more than fifty years later is Frank McCourt. McCourt's city, however, isn't Dublin but rather Limerick. And McCourt's genre is the autobiography instead of the novel. But like Joyce, McCourt draws his story, indeed the power of his story, from the city. His 1996 memoir *Angela's Ashes* surprised everyone,

dominated the best sellers' charts, and won a Pulitzer Prize; it is probably one of the most difficult books I've ever read. The abject poverty of McCourt's childhood is awesome, and in reading his life story, we can't help but wonder how he survived. The key to the book, it seems to me, is the humor. *Angela's Ashes* is filled with dark, black humor, the kind that is the staple of such Irish writers as Flann O'Brien and Samuel Beckett. Anyone from an Irish family knows that humor in the worst of situations is the only way to survive and keep one's sanity. McCourt learned that at an early age.

As fascinating as McCourt's characters are, equally significant is the setting. The very poor, dirty, and depressed Limerick City is as important as any person in the book. For good and bad, the state of Limerick is what controls the McCourt's lives, which led some to argue that his portrayal of the city was unfair and biased (the actor I mentioned earlier, Richard Harris, makes that claim, and says that McCourt has shamed his native Limerick). For his part, McCourt claims, rightfully I believe, that he is merely telling his story in *Angela's Ashes*. Regardless, it is evident that, yet again, the Irish setting places a tremendously important role in this important book.

Gee, there seems to be a pattern here.

That said, and it seems like I've said a lot this evening, the fact that these Irish writers are so connected to their home turf should not really surprise is. Just look at the United States and you'll see that much of Irish immigration was affected by place. According to recent census figures, there are more than 40 million people in the U.S. who claim Irish ancestry, which translates to almost 15% of the U.S. population. If we think about the places the immigrants settled over the past 150 years, we should not be surprised that they often picked locals that reminded them of their native land. Many Irish, for example, settled in my hometown of Albany, New York. The green fields and beautiful mountain ranges undoubtedly reminded some of Ireland, perhaps County Donegal in particular. The Scots-Irish mostly settled my new home, the Appalachian region of East Tennessee,, and I can see shades of Northern Ireland, especially County Antrim, in the Smokey Mountain area. In fact, the state of Kentucky also saw its fair share of Irish people searching for a new home. A neighborhood in Louisville is called Limerick, and in the 19th Century was populated by the numerous Irish who worked on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad line that helped settle the American West.

So, what does it mean that the Irish are so connected to their land? Sigmund Freud says that the Irish are the only group that CAN'T be psychoanalyzed, so I'm wary about making judgments about my ancestors. One thing is for sure, and from this I speak with first-hand

knowledge, the Irish are a proud people who value family, religion, hard work, a good time, and a rich history that has as much to do with their native land as anything else. Oh yeah, and they can also write pretty well.

What Is Intelligence For?

[Student Honors Day Banquet Address, April 11, 2000]

Guy L. Osborne

Introduction

Good evening. I really appreciate being invited by the Honors Council to say a few words to such an august and accomplished group! Congratulations again to everyone who has been recognized today. Well done!

I want to spend some time this evening talking with you about the purpose of intelligence. There is certainly a lot of intelligence in this room, but what is it for?

In psychology, intelligence is always a hot topic. We are still arguing about *The Bell Curve* and debating, "Is it nature or nurture?" These days we are especially interested in whether intelligence is a single, global ability, or rather a set of distinct competencies. And we are very interested in gender variations--women's ways of knowing versus those of men.

Some social historians have pointed out the destructive potential of intelligence. It was Elie Wiesel who noted that the people who designed the system of death camps in Germany during the Holocaust were among the brightest minds of the Third Reich (Orr, 1994). How could that be?

Tonight I want to add yet another angle to this discussion, and look at intelligence from an ecological psychology perspective. I want to pose the question for your consideration, **why** do we have intelligence in the first place; **for what purposes** are we gifted, intellectually speaking?

Put another way, **why does God make smart people?**

To begin our look at intelligence, I'd like to first tell you about a little environmental IQ test I have developed. It is a simple object identification test I use in my Psych One class when we are studying perception. The students see 20 objects in all: the first ten being differ-

ent kinds of trees, and the second set, different kinds of automobiles. The students' job is simply to identify the kind of tree they are looking at on the basis of its leaf pattern, and the make of car they are looking at on the basis of its trademark or emblem.

I shot all but one of the pictures walking around campus one day, so I figure my students should all be very familiar with these kinds of trees and automobiles. After they have had time to look at all 20 pictures and write down their answers, I go over the correct answers and ask them to take note of the trees and cars they correctly identified.

For your information, the trees I show are the most common hardwoods in our region: oak, pecan, sweet gum, dogwood, sycamore, maple, sassafras, magnolia, poplar, and redbud. Likewise, the cars are typical of the makes you can see everyday: Chevrolet, Ford, Honda, BMW, Toyota, Mercury, Nissan, Oldsmobile, Saturn, and Mitsubishi. Now put yourself in my students' shoes. How many of these trees and cars do you think you could identify?

When I do this exercise in class, almost everyone tests out rather decidedly, ecologically dumb! We know a lot more cars than we do trees. Most students get at least seven or eight of the cars correctly, but only one or two of the trees. The psychological point I am trying to make is, what do we know and why do we know it? It may mean we spend more time inside watching TV commercials about cars than we spend outside getting to know trees. It certainly means we pay more attention to cars--which last only 5-10 years, pollute our air and cost us as much as a college education--while ignoring trees, which are living things we depend on for the oxygen we breathe, paper to write on, and wood for our houses. Why?

Car makes are more a part of that cognitive domain Noam Chomsky calls, our "thinkable thoughts," than kinds of trees. Information on cars is literally programmed into our minds by the real *Matrix*, our commercial culture. Trees are not. This is only one small example of how culture and commerce "manufacture" the content of our minds and our "consent" to it, as Chomsky would say (Chomsky, 1987).

The right use of intelligence is knowing about our whole world, not just the parts someone else chooses for us to know. One answer to the question of what is intelligence for, then, is to achieve a certain degree of intellectual independence; to know trees **and** cars, for example.

I want to expand this idea of intellectual independence by telling you a little about my most favorite course to teach, ecological psychology.

Ecological Psychology

Ecological psychology is an emerging discipline that conceptualizes human development and behavior within the whole web of life (see Winter, 1996; Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Like family systems theory, ecological psychology understands that behavior always occurs in some context. For human beings, that context is our social and natural ecosystems. To an ecological psychologist, our identity--our "self"-- takes form within the interactions people have with these multiple system.

The systems we study in ecological psychology are things like economics--whether you grow up rich or poor or middle-class and in what type of economic system, like capitalism or socialism. Other systems we're interested in would be one's culture, how reality is depicted in commercial media, the prevailing political system, and especially, how we understand and relate to the natural world--whether we grow up close to the land as in a farm family, for example, or far removed with little direct experience with plants and animals, sky and mountains, rivers and forests; whether we grow up experiencing wilderness undisturbed or seeing it paved over to make shopping malls; and so on.

The important thing in ecological psychology is that the systems themselves are interacting, so that our lives take on a very dynamic quality. Economics shape political systems, which affect culture, which impacts communities and families. Like the proverbial flap of a butterfly's wings in Kansas that changes weather patterns in Japan, alterations and movements in one part of the web of life can set up reverberations in multiple systems, changing the context of human development and the self who emerges. Conversely, a single charismatic individual like a Martin Luther King or a Mother Teresa, or a collective movement of even a relatively small number of persons, can set off reverberations that eventually affect large portions of the web of life in all manner of directions.

Understanding our interconnections with the whole web of life is a prerequisite both for appreciating our place in the beauty and majesty of Creation and for coming to grips with our worsening environmental crisis and our part in it. Intellectual independence enhances our awareness of all our interconnections, and also helps us see the possibility that **we** are the agents for creative healing and social change. "If it is to be, it is up to me." More on that in a minute.

Ecological Intelligence

Ultimately ecological psychology seeks to promote or restore

health and well-being to the individual and the whole Earth community by fostering sustainable behavior. Sustainable behavior means living responsibly within the restorative capacities of the Earth; not taking from the Earth more than can be replaced; minimizing or eliminating "waste;" preserving Nature for future generations; improving or fixing the social systems that drive unsustainable behavior; changing human behavior; changing our behavior.

To foster sustainable behavior, we must somehow recover the intelligent capacity to see reality the way it is. Dr. David Orr, conservation biologist at Oberlin College, refers to this capacity as "biocentric wisdom" or "applied ecological intelligence."

Orr worries that too often we settle for mere cleverness instead. In his book *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*, he states:

Intelligence, as I understand it, has to do with the long run and is mostly integrative, whereas cleverness is mostly preoccupied with the short run and tends to fragment things. This distinction has serious consequences for our willingness and ability to conserve biological diversity.

. . . If there is such a thing as a societal IQ, what we call "developed societies" would be judged to be retarded. . . . Overflowing landfills, befouled skies, eroded soils, polluted rivers, acid rain, and radioactive wastes suggest ample attainments for admission into some intergalactic school for learning disabled species.

. . . I conclude it is possible for a person to be clever without being very intelligent, or as Walker Percy put it to "get all A's and flunk life." [1994, 48-51]

What I hear Orr saying is, intelligence is being able to discern what is really important. It is the ability to discern the present historical moment. How are we doing, really? With the stock market soaring, are these indeed the best of times, with just some minor fine tuning needed? Or is something ominous going on that really needs our attention, but we're just too busy looking in the other direction?

What is intelligence for? Our second answer is, we need intelligence to discern what is truly important and what is really going on.

On Sunday afternoon, day before yesterday (April 9), I attended a rally in Oak Ridge sponsored by the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance. OREPA is a citizens' watchdog group trying to educate the public about nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War world, and specifically about what's going on in Oak Ridge. Pretty important stuff. You may have heard of General Lee Butler, the former commander of

the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal, who is now calling for a dramatic curtailment in U.S. nuclear weapons research and development, and a drastic reduction in our arsenal of nuclear weapons. Basically, OREPA is trying to do what General Butler says we need to do, but for moral as well as strategic defense reasons.

At the rally a friend of mine got arrested for blocking the entry way into the Y-12 plant, as an act of civil disobedience. Her name is Anne Hablas. Anne is about 70 years old, maybe 5 feet 2 or 3 and a hundred pounds; a former Catholic nun who has been working on behalf of peace and justice in Appalachia for 30 years. It was an amazing thing to see two Anderson County deputies each 6' 2" or 6' 3" and 200 pounds of big guy muscle, removing her from the entry gate to Y-12 and into a police van.

Now you can argue about whether Sister Anne is right or wrong about nuclear disarmament and about whether civil disobedience is a good thing for citizens in a democracy to do. But I think we all can agree she is right about nuclear weapons as a pretty important thing to think about.

Think of all the other, less critical things we spend our time and resources on in east Tennessee. "Gooooo Vols!!!"

Scott Peck once defined mental health as the capacity to tolerate emotional pain so we can learn to see ourselves more realistically, come to terms with ways we are sick and in of need change, and acquire the behavioral skills that can effect this change (Peck, 1978). Likewise, real intelligence requires that we develop the capacity to tolerate our despair, anxiety, and shame, and pay attention to things that might not be pleasant but are important nonetheless: Nuclear weapons, for example; and the deterioration of the natural world happening all around us.

The news about the environment should alarm us all. To quote again from Orr:

Male sperm counts worldwide have fallen by 50% since 1938. . . . Human breast milk often contains more toxins than are permissible in milk sold by dairies. . . . At death human bodies often contain enough toxins and heavy metals to be classified as hazardous waste.

If today is a typical day on planet earth, we will lose 116 square miles of rain forest, or about an acre a second. We will lose another 72 square miles to encroaching deserts. . . . We will lose 40 to 250 species. . . . Today the human population will increase by 250,000. And today we will add 2,700 tons of chlorofluorocarbons and 15 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.

Tonight the earth will be a little hotter, its waters more acidic, and the fabric of life more threadbare. . . . [This year as we begin the new century] perhaps as many as 20% of life forms [alive] on the planet in the year 1900 will be extinct. [1994, 1; 7]

Psychologists, too, are worried about the manifestations of this present age of environmental loss in our emotional and social lives. We are living in what some are calling the "golden ghetto."

In his essay on "Wealth, Well Being, and the New American Dream," psychologist David Myers notes,

In 1957 . . . Americans' per personal income, expressed in today's dollars, was \$8700. Today it is \$20,000. Compared to 1957, we are now the 'doubly affluent society'--with double what money buys. We have twice as many cars per person. We eat out two and a half times as often. . . . Since 1957 [however] the number of Americans who say they are 'very happy' has declined from 35 to 32 percent. Meanwhile the divorce rate had doubled, the teen suicide rate has nearly tripled, the violent crime rate has nearly quadrupled . . . and more people than ever (especially teens and young adults) are depressed.

Myers continues,

I call this soaring wealth and shrinking spirit 'the American paradox.' More than ever we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale, secured rights and diminished civility. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life. We celebrate our prosperity but yearn for purpose. We cherish our freedoms but long for connection. In an age of plenty, we feel spiritual hunger. (Myers, 2000)

In addition to saying some insightful things, Myers is expressing the kind of intelligence I am talking about--the ability to see past the glitter of our apparent prosperity to discern something true and important about our present age. We are not well.

But isn't it more than that? To be intelligent, don't we have to go beyond knowing and discernment?

Absolutely, and for multiple reasons. The search for solutions is critical not only to make things objectively better but to sustain our mental and spiritual health. In his second book, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, David Orr elaborates about where this search will take us:

The study of environmental problems is an exercise in despair unless it is regarded as only a preface to the study, design, and implementation of solutions. The concept of sustainability implies a radical change in the institutions and patterns that we have come to accept as normal.

. . . Sustainability . . . emphasizes democratic participation, the extension of ethical obligations to the land community, careful ecological design, simplicity, widespread competence with natural systems, . . . sense of place, . . . human scale technologies and communities. . . [Sustainability] is grounded in the belief that

life is sacred . . . and leads . . . towards prudence, stewardship, and celebration of the Creation. [1992, 94-95]

Here we have the third answer to what intelligence is for: To figure out the problems we face as a community, as a people, as a human race, and fix them.

What I like about what Orr is saying is, we need to re-connect intelligence with citizenship, with action. Knowing your trees is good, but knowing your trees and doing something to preserve trees is better. Someone once said, "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now." The farmworkers movement is more blunt: "Without action there is no knowledge."

We are part of the web of life. Through our interconnections we can make a difference. Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only way the world has ever changed."

But how is such intelligence to be nurtured? With the world the way it is, where will it be found? David Orr, in *Ecological Literacy*, looks to our liberal arts colleges as uniquely qualified for this task:

A genuine liberal arts education will equip a person to live well in a place. . . [It] will foster a sense of connectedness, implicatedness, and ecological citizenship, and will provide the competence to act on such knowledge.

. . . A genuinely liberal education will produce whole persons with intellectual breadth, able to think at right angles to their major field; practical persons able to act competently; and persons of deep commitment, willing to roll up their sleeves and join the struggle to build a humane and sustainable world.

. . . Above all, they will make themselves relevant to the crisis of our age, which in its various manifestations is about the care, nurturing, and enhancement of life. [1992, 102-103; 108]

I believe Carson-Newman is committed to being the kind of place Orr is talking about, where genuine liberal arts education takes place. Our Appalachian Center and curriculum, and our new interdisciplinary concentration in Environment and Community are but examples of programs designed to nurture the ecological intelligence of our whole community of learners.

What more fitting vision for Carson-Newman in the 21st century and our next 150 years than to renew our commitment to teaching students to live as whole persons within the web of life--connected not only with economic systems and the built environments of our urban and indoor worlds, but also with the rivers and the winds, with Brother Son and Sister Moon and the whole Earth community. What if we committed to teach our students to be proficient in technology and the realities of globalization but competent also to dwell in a particular place as citizen and neighbor? What if we committed to teach more about our interconnections and the really important things and about taking humane and just action as the necessary and expected outcome for education? What if we committed to teaching students that the purpose of education is to "make a life not just a living?"

What Is Intelligence For?

So, what is intelligence for? Why does God make smart people?

* One, to achieve a certain independence of thought; to know intimately our natural world; not to be simply programmed by the *Matrix*, our commercial culture, to know some things and not others;

* Two, to discern what is important and the true nature of the present historical moment; to see reality as it is in all its wonder and scariness; to know about important things like nuclear weapons, the decline of natural ecosystems, and what a sweet gum tree looks like, and a sycamore; where we are on the map and what's here to know and enjoy and care about;

* And three, to figure out what needs to be done and do it; not in service to self alone but to the whole human and Earth community, of which we all are a part and upon which we profoundly depend. In the web of life, truly we are all in this together.

I don't believe God makes smart people so that they can make

a million dollars by the time they are twenty-four. I don't believe God makes smart people to build better death camps or to more efficiently destroy the environment in pursuit of the Almighty Dollar. Intelligence is not for disconnecting us from each other or the web of life; but for this: **The purpose of intelligence is to help us know we are members of the whole Earth community with an important job to do—restoring Creation, promoting the common good, peace- and justice-making, caring for life.**

The good news is, ecological dumbness will not prevail! The created order, though fallen, is fundamentally good and very good. Like human beings, the whole of Creation is loved by God, so loved that God sent his only begotten son. The Creation is redeemable, and it will be redeemed. Even now glimpses of redemption are at hand.

We are steadfast in this hope. The only question is, will we be partners in redemption or its opponents? It is the same question asked in every age, as in the lyrics of the old labor song: "Which side are you on; which side are you on?"

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Mathematics Program Evaluation and Improvement: A Model for Design and Implementation

Stephanie O. Robinson

One characteristic of a profession is that it has a base of research knowledge and that it uses research to inform its practices. Education has such a body of research. As one component of educational research, educational evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of information to make judgments about the worth of a particular part of the educational process. Evaluation of discipline-specific school programs adds to the general body of research and provides a school information needed to move toward excellence and equity in education.

A major component of school improvement is a self-study at the building level. Within a school's self-study is often found the evaluation of discipline-specific programs, such as the mathematics program. The design of such an evaluation can be a collaborative effort between higher education and public schools, as was the case with a nearby K-8 school in East Tennessee and Carson-Newman College. This article will describe the philosophy, design, and implementation of such an evaluation model.

A Vision for Mathematics

To reform is to improve or amend by change of form or removal of faults or abuses, to change for the better. The history and future of education must be dynamic, one of change, one of reform. Since *A Nation at Risk* (National Committee on Excellence in Education, 1983) raised the question of a national curriculum, the discussion of national goals and standards has been a priority of the educational community. At the forefront of this reform, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) developed, and is continuing to develop, standards for mathematics education in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Several factors have contributed to the need for change and have influenced these goals and standards. The shift from an industrial society to an information society, the infusion of new technologies into society at all levels, the knowledge about learning and teaching, changes in the knowledge about and application of mathematics--all demand change in mathematics education.

Much attention has been focused on the teaching, learning, and assessment of students. For change to be successful, however, the teaching, learning, and assessment of teachers and the mathematics programs in schools must also be an emphasis. According to the constructivist perspective of learning, students build their own interpretative frameworks for making sense of the world, including the mathematical world (Schoenfeld, 1987).

Students construct their own knowledge by engaging in problem solving, and actively reorganizing their own experiences (Cobb, Yackel, & Wood, 1991). As students of mathematical and pedagogical knowledge, teachers also learn by constructing their own knowledge based upon their previous experiences. Often teachers teach the way in which they have been taught. Research and school program evaluations must provide the knowledge base for teaching teachers, in preservice programs as well as in-service and professional development activities.

The overall goal of mathematics education is for students to learn and experience the power of mathematics (NCTM, 1989). Understanding mathematical concepts is the key to success and power in mathematics. A curriculum that is active and conceptually oriented is recommended to assist students in gaining the foundations for mathematical understanding. The vision is one of a mathematics classroom that is different, perhaps very different, from the one in which we as teachers of mathematics participated when we were students of mathematics.

As the mathematics education standards continue to be discussed and refined, there is the need to assess the ability of educational communities to implement individual components in concert with the overall themes of the standards, and the impact of those revised programs in the classroom. School improvement plans and program evaluations are the means to that vision of change and improvement.

The desired learner outcome for schools is for students to reach their full academic potential, in the case of this evaluation, in mathematics. This was investigated by looking at the specific learner outcomes as designated in the NCTM standards. These outcomes, or Standards, provide "an ambitious and comprehensive set of goals for mathematics instruction" (NCTM, 2000, p. 2). The first five Standards present goals for content areas of number and operations, algebra, ge-

ometry, measurement, and data analysis and probability. Standards six through ten include the processes of obtaining those curricular goals, which are problem solving, reasoning and proof, connections, communication, and representation. These provided the specific goals, or learner outcomes, upon which the evaluation was based.

The Standards are based upon five principles that should guide the decision-making process in mathematics education at all levels. These principles are listed below as stated in the Overview from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000, pp. 3-6).

Equity. Excellence in mathematics education requires equity – high expectations and strong support for all students.

Curriculum. A curriculum is more than a collection of activities: it must be coherent, focused on important mathematics, and well articulated across the grades.

Teaching. Effective mathematics teaching requires understanding what students know and need to learn and then challenging and supporting them to learn it well.

Learning. Students must learn mathematics with understanding, actively building new knowledge from experience and prior knowledge.

Assessment. Assessment should support the learning of important mathematics and furnish useful information to both teachers and students.

This foundational philosophy guided the design and implementation of the K-8 mathematics program evaluation.

Model Design

Based upon the school improvement goals, several questions were developed. These were then organized into the following areas of study:

1. The form and origin of the goals for the mathematics program. Does the school have a unified math plan (K-8), that is articulated among the grades or grade clusters? Do individual teachers have math goals and what is the source of those goals?

2. The relationship between school goals and the national and state standards for mathematics. What are the desired learner outcomes? What strategies do teachers use to teach and assess the learner

outcomes? What materials are available and utilized as tools to achieve the outcomes?

3. Student outcomes. Are student outcomes consistent with the math goals? How do our students compare, achievement-wise, with other populations? (County, State, Nation)

4. Relationship to the school specific goals and desired learner outcomes.

Each of the faculty members that teach mathematics was observed and interviewed. Information was collected and analyzed by grade clusters, K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. In addition, school and district administrators were interviewed, as were media and computer lab personnel. A time line was established for the evaluation.

Participants

The evaluation team was composed of internal and external members. The internal team was composed of the Assistant Principal and teachers from each grade cluster. The primary purpose of the internal team was to define the focus of mathematics, gather and summarize survey data, TCAP information, and research current practices, such as multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, and curriculum mapping. The faculty member at Carson-Newman College with other members headed the external team from surrounding school districts. The external team observed and interviewed mathematics teachers in all grades. In addition the external coordinator interviewed school and district administrators, and compiled the final report.

Instruments

Instruments included surveys for teachers, parents, and students; observation forms and interview questions for each grade cluster (K-2, 3-5, 6-8); interview questions for administrators and media personnel (library and technology center).

Instruments focused on several main areas of interest, including what was being taught, how it was being taught, and how it was assessed. Specifically questions related to curriculum topics, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and resources, available and utilized.

A small sample of lesson plans was also reviewed for curriculum topics, teaching and assessment strategies, and materials.

Operational Definitions

Curriculum standards included Number and Operation; Patterns, Functions, and Algebra; Geometry and Spatial Sense; Measurement; Data Analysis, Statistics, and Probability; Problem Solving; Reasoning and Proof; Communication; Connections; and Representation.

Teaching strategies included teacher explanations, worksheets, whole class discussion, working in small groups, writing assignments, student presentations, projects, and use of real-life problems.

Assessment strategies included worksheets, tests, projects, group work, writing assignments, oral presentations, observations, books, and portfolios.

Materials included computers, manipulatives, textbooks, and calculators.

Procedures

An initial team training session was held. During the morning session the internal and external teams reviewed the mathematics standards from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Tennessee Frameworks for Mathematics K-8. Team members participated in mathematics activities through which they focused upon the content and processes embodied in the standards. In the afternoon session the external team focused on training for the observation and interview process. They observed a video clip of a mathematics lesson at the elementary school, scoring it with the proposed observation form.

The discussion that followed ensured that all were scoring and recording anecdotal evidence in a similar fashion. Interview questions were suggested that would explore aspects of the lesson, compare and contrast what the teachers themselves saw with teacher survey responses, and record additional suggestions.

Responses from the teacher surveys had been summarized for each grade cluster by the internal team, and these were shared with the external team. Evaluators provided their observation schedule for their assigned grade and teachers.

Over the next six weeks the internal team distributed, gathered and analyzed the student and parent surveys, and reviewed and summa-

rized results from standardized test data. The external team observed and interviewed teachers, personnel, and administrators.

The external evaluation team met to consolidate their information. By grade clusters, the team members shared data from the various means of collection, observations, surveys, interviews, and test data. Referring to the evidence collected, they summarized findings regarding the curriculum, strategies for instruction and assessment, materials available and used, focusing on the original study questions. They included statements regarding the strengths of the mathematics program, and recommendations for improvement. These grade cluster reports were compiled into the composite report of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Report of Findings

Findings were reported by grade cluster, and summarized by the original questions of the evaluation study. Data was collected by means of surveys of teachers, parents, and students, observations and interviews of teachers, interviews of administrators and other personnel, standardized test data (TCAP), and lesson plans. Although results were reported for each grade cluster, overall findings relating to the study questions were also summarized.

Next Steps in the Model

From the results of the evaluation, an action plan would be developed that would include the major recommendations from the study. The means to reaching goals for mathematics (or any other program) are by providing opportunities, incentives, and accountability for new knowledge and growth. Professional development for teachers and administrators should be based upon the results from an evaluation model such as the one described here. Key steps to program improvement include:

- U – Unity in philosophy and purpose of education
- O – Opportunity for growth and new knowledge
- I – Incentives for expending the time and energy necessary
- E – Experiences in apply new skills and knowledge
- A – Accountability for integrating these skills and knowledge into the classroom.

Once an evaluation model has been implemented and results obtained specific to that school, the action plan is devised, and professional development can begin. Reform of a educational program begins with the individuals associated with that program: teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The result is renewed spirit and progress toward the goal of achievement of academic potential by all students. As the education profession continues to seek excellence and equity for all students in all aspects, program evaluation and professional development of teachers will continue to be the means to that end.

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A Historical Perspective on the Perception of Wilderness

Rebecca Van Cleave

Having worked as both a park ranger and social sciences researcher for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I have had an interest in peoples' perceptions of wilderness recreation environments and natural areas in general. I had noted on numerous occasions that visitors to the park engaged in rather abuse behaviors towards the natural environment or were fearful of being in the park and sought to find an explanation for differences in perceptions of this environment. Because the culture in which we are raised tends to influence our perception of many aspects of our world I thought it would be interesting to look at how cultures of the past perceived natural wilderness environments.

How people perceive natural environments, especially wilderness areas, has changed dramatically over the centuries. Wilderness nowadays is perceived by many in a favorable light. Wilderness is something exciting to be experienced, and thus there has been massive growth over the past century in wilderness recreational areas. Some people plan their leisure time toward the goal of visiting a natural area and "seeing" the wild, rugged scenery, untouched by human hands. They want to experience "being one with nature," escaping the stresses of everyday life, getting away from other people, etc. This favorable perception, however, has not always been the case, and is still not embraced by all people.

Old World Attitudes

A bias against the wilderness has its roots in attitudes held centuries ago and not yet altogether dismissed. Wilderness was the unknown, the wild, and the disordered and uncontrolled environment. The roots of the word "wilderness" date back to the eighth-century poem Beowulf. The term "wildeor" referenced savage, fantastic beasts inhabiting dismal forests. From this term, "wilderness" evolved meaning "place of wild beasts" (Nash, 1982). Wilderness also sprang up in mythology and folk-

lore, and always referred to an area of evil and foreboding. Wilderness had dark, mysterious qualities where evil lurked and demons lived.

The wilderness symbol of evil permeated early Christian writing, which further reinforced the perceptions of natural areas as undesirable. The evilness and undesirability of wilderness even pre-dates the Christian era. The Greeks and Romans likewise found wilderness to be repulsive, as is reflected in many of their writings. The Roman poet Lucretius thought that it was a serious "defect" that so much of the earth "is greedily possessed by mountains and the forests of wild beasts" (Nash, 1982, p. 10).

Classical mythology also had forests full of gods and demons that would carry off any poor soul who ventured too far into the woods. The word "panic" stems from the mythological creature Pan, who would terrify people who passed through his woods. There are many other examples of historical writings and folk-lore, passed down through the centuries, which portray natural areas as places which man would be best off to avoid. These early writings, especially the Bible, reinforce the classic good (man) vs. evil (wilderness) conflict.

Early Settlers' Perceptions

Early white civilizations thought of the wilderness as something to be conquered and controlled--made civilized by humans. Failure to conquer the wilderness in colonial America could mean failure of an entire colony to survive, and on occasion did. Environments that were perceived as desirable were areas such as rolling pastures, cultivated fields, and carefully controlled formal gardens, environments which were created by man's taming of the wilderness (Lucas, 1970). Thoughts of recreation taking place in wilderness areas were abhorrent. Early settlers of the U.S. took great pride in their ability to tame the wilderness, to turn wastelands into productive farmlands, to create order out of chaos and gain a moral victory over evil.

The Puritans had somewhat contradictory ideas about the wilderness they came to in New England. Their perceptions were based largely on Biblical metaphors, and identified the New England wilderness with Biblical wilderness, thus defining their experiences in this new wilderness as parallel with experiences in wilderness during Biblical times. New England wilderness was a place to escape to from English oppression and worldly corruption, a place of religious insight where they were "tested" by God through the hardships of living as a condition of salvation, and paradoxically, a place of sin and evil which they must convert. Again, based on Biblical teachings, it was thought that they were com-

manded by the Lord to "subdue the earth" (Genesis). Thus they felt justified in moving further into the wilderness and turning more and more of it into productive land (Carroll, 1969).

While the Puritans in England talked at great length about the virtues of beauty and plenty in New England, as a way to convince more of their people to go, they had serious doubts about the spiritual health of such a vast wilderness area. The early settlers saw the Devil lurking in the wilderness and Satanic power was evidenced by the "savage state" of the American wilderness. Indians were, of course, "slaves of Satan" in desperate need of salvation. They also believed that Satan would do everything in his power to stop them from settling in this "realm of the Antichrist." (Carroll, 1969). Thus, as in Biblical times, wilderness was seen as the battleground between good and evil, a place to be tamed, conquered, and saved from damnation.

Turning "raw wilderness" into an environment "suitable for human occupation" was a major goal of the early settlers. Cotton Mather, at the end of the seventeenth century, summed up the prevailing attitude and pride of accomplishment of the times when he exclaimed "Never was any plantation brought unto such a considerableness, in a space of time so inconsiderable, for a howling wilderness in a few years became a pleasant land, accommodated with the necessaries - yea, and the conveniences of humane life." (Carroll, 1969, p. 199).

Throughout American history, rugged individuals such as Daniel Boone became heroes to many people as expansion moved westward. Although he respected wilderness, Daniel Boone was not a preservationist, but rather a wilderness "tamer." The difference was that he and those who followed did not see wilderness as evil and demon possessed, as was thought by the Puritans, but rather was seen as the "great challenge." To overcome the obstacles and hardships was seen as the ultimate human accomplishment. There also were, during this period, a handful of "mountain men" who truly did live in harmony with the wilderness and the Indians. These people were not as revered by the general population as were the "tamers" such as Boone.

Present Day "Antiwilderness" Perceptions

This image of man and the wilderness locked in mortal combat in part still persists, and this perception, based in our cultural history, is not one to lightly dismiss. Lyndon Johnson spoke of taming the wilds of Texas. In a 1965 editorial to the Washington Post, Robert Wernick asked, "Why shouldn't we spoil wilderness?" His description of wilderness lovers reflected his attitude quite well, "they affect old rumpled clothes, un-

shaved jaws, salty language; they spit and sweat and boast of their friendship with aborigines." (Nash, 1980, p. 238).

He thought that if people wanted a wilderness experience they should go to Mars or Alpha Centauri. Wernick's negative attitude toward wilderness preservation stemmed from his belief that man must continually work toward controlling the opposing force: wildness, and to relax his vigilance was to risk undoing man's primary achievement. His ideas mirror the early Puritan tradition of perceiving man and wilderness in an adversarial relationship. In speaking of wilderness preservationists, Wernick concludes they should accept the inevitable--wilderness will give way to civilization.

Wernick is not alone in his thinking, as is evidenced by the total disregard for the environment in some practices today, for example the massive clear cutting of the rain forests for agricultural use. It is still considered "progress" to clear areas of wilderness for human use, unfortunately, usually to the long-term detriment of all.

Influences of Old World Perceptions on Recreational Choices

Psychology acknowledges that the culture in which we live greatly influences our attitudes and perceptions about the world. This includes our cultural history. Old cultural values and attitudes about wilderness persist in some people today and are manifested in the behaviors, which they exhibit in wilderness areas.

When choosing a location for recreation, some people avoid all contact with the wilderness and simply choose recreational activities elsewhere. Others, who do venture into a wilderness recreation area, do so with a great amount of caution. This could explain why the 1985 Visitor Use Survey, done in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, found that 17% of visitors never turn off their car engine while in the park (Peine and Renfro, 1988). Some may simply be afraid to venture out into this "wild place," or to lose the security of a ready means of instant escape, lost if the engine is not running. Too, if it is shut off, there is a possibility that it may not start again.

I also observed this fear of wilderness at a trailhead when a woman stopped, looked down the trail, and commented that she would not go a step further into that "snaky-looking place." In a survey I conducted for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which contained sentence completion items, 32.6% of those surveyed said that "when in the woods a person should not be alone." This type of response also may indicate an attitude of caution in or fear of wilderness areas.

Perceptions of wilderness such as these examples will obviously influence the type of recreational activities a person chooses when in a wilderness recreation area. It is highly unlikely that someone who perceives the woods as snaky or feels one should not be alone in the woods will take off on a solitary backpacking trip. It is more likely someone with this perception will choose group activities in a "safe," open area.

Based on the historical view that wilderness is something to be conquered, some people may feel that a wilderness recreation area is a perfect place to prove their superiority over such an environment. They hold the old values of the early settlers: The wilderness is something to impose order upon and to "humanize." This frequently results in abusive behaviors in an area such as a National Park, where a person may feel compelled to "tame this wilderness," even in a recreational setting. These thoughts of "taming the wilds" may not even be conscious, but nevertheless are manifested in behaviors such as chopping down any convenient tree in order to build a campfire (a practice I observed on many occasions). To a person with this attitude, the tree is there simply for man's benefit, to be used however necessary to assure man's comfort.

The New Wilderness Perception

It is interesting to note that the perception of the wilderness by cultures such as the Native American Indians was different. A Sioux chief once made the comment that "only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and . . . the lands 'infested' with wild animals and 'savage' people" (Nash, 1982, p. xiv). To the Native Americans there was no "wilderness," as there was no distinction between nature and man; man was part of nature and co-existed with it. The "back-to-nature" movement popular in the 1960s also embraced this perception of wilderness, with more and more people moving into "untamed" areas of the country and living "in tune with nature."

This "new" perception of wilderness areas has only become widespread in the past century, although the beginnings date back to the Romantic period of the nineteenth century. The change in attitudes towards the wilderness began in the period of the Enlightenment when European astronomy and physics set forth the idea that we exist in a vast, complex universe that is a harmonious creation of God. The idea that natural, wilderness areas were the work of God was opposed to the idea that the wilderness was evil and demon possessed. Writings of philosophers such as Burke and Kant portrayed natural areas such as mountains, deserts, and forests as places of wonder and awe (Nash, 1982).

In 1913, this "new" perception of wilderness began to get much public attention when a man named Joseph Knowles went off into the wilderness for a two month period, taking nothing with him (including clothes) to "live like Adam." Newspapers throughout the country carried detail accounts of Joseph's "adventure"; and, when he returned to "civilization," crowds of 10,000 came out to hear him speak. He published a very successful book about the wilderness experience and toured on the vaudeville circuit with top billing (Nash, 1980); all because he spent two months alone in the woods.

Nowadays many people choose wilderness areas such as National Parks for recreation in order to get closer to God or to experience a oneness with nature--to become a part of that wilderness. It is interesting to note how the biblical interpretation of wilderness has changed over the centuries. As was mentioned before, Puritans interpreted the biblical accounts of wilderness as the "house of Satan" (possibly stemming from the account of Jesus spending time in the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan). A more modern interpretation is that wilderness is God's creation and therefore is good.

Some people are also looking for solitude in their wilderness experience; wanting to be alone in the woods is not as "strange" as it once was. Wilderness now can have a healing effect on some people, an escape from everyday "civilized" pressures.

For the most part, the cultural value of wilderness (at least in this society) has changed from wilderness being evil and needing to be made totally habitable by man, to a type of environment worth preserving. Preservation of wilderness areas has become a very important political and social issue in today's culture, reflecting the continued change in perceptions of wilderness.

Where before, taming the wilderness was perceived as essential for survival, today preserving the wilderness is viewed as essential for survival. More and more National Parks are being given wilderness status to further protect them from being developed and preserve their wilderness qualities. Unfortunately, this move is often met with strong resistance. There are many who still cling to the "evil, demon-possessed" perception of wilderness that must be tamed and made habitable for man.

Conclusion

When examining the differences in perceptions that visitors have when in natural recreational areas, the cultural history of perceptions towards wilderness should be kept in mind. A lot of our knowledge is based in our cultural history--our parents' and grandparents' attitudes and values.

Because of this there will be a large diversity of attitudes and perceptions between visitors to a wilderness area. Although these attitudes are not set in concrete, and can be changed through education and experience, they also can have an influence on choices visitors make and behaviors they exhibit in wilderness recreation areas such as National Parks.

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1999 Alumni Awards Day Addresses

[April 4, 2000]

Distinguished Alumnus Award

David C. Dale

It is wonderful to be back at Carson-Newman today. This year, it will be thirty-eight years since my graduation, and I now live far away in Seattle, Washington. But being here even for a short time—the familiarity of the campus, the hills, and the spring flowers—makes me feel that I left only yesterday.

I came to Carson-Newman, familiar with the college and its traditions, because my family had lived in East Tennessee for a long time. My brother, John, and my sisters, Diana and Patricia, as well as several other family members and many friends, attended this college. I came to Carson-Newman already committed to becoming a physician and interested in the Pre-Med program.

I love sports and arrived at Carson-Newman in August 1958, before classes began, to try out for the football team. I remember how hot it was, and how tired and lonesome I often felt. I missed my high school sweetheart, Rose Marie, who stayed in Knoxville to attend UT. I recall so well counting the sidewalk blocks from the Barn (the dormitory where we stayed then) to the old college cafeteria over and over again.

As I look back, my most enduring memories are of my teachers. Dr. Bahner headed the Department of Chemistry. I will never forget the private sessions I had in his office, turning in answers in the Quantitative Analysis course. Anyone who took this course will remember him saying, “You got it right,” or “Sorry, you’ll have to do it again.”

The other Chemistry professor, Dr. Albert Myers, taught us with enthusiasm. I vividly remember how he performed Physical Chemistry calculations in his head. Even now, I wonder how he ad-

justed to pocket calculators, which came along several years after I finished college.

Like many other students of my era, I regarded Joe Chapman, Head of the Biology Department, with special affection. I enjoyed so much the field trips I made with him to the Smoky Mountains for the Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage. The warmth and caring of the faculty of the Department of Biology were a very important support to my interest in the Pre-Med program.

Professor William Bass, with his impeccable dress, his precise English, and his high standards was another favorite teacher of mine on all but one occasion. In the freshman English Composition class, he demanded not only excellence but also perfection. I did well in the course, except on one essay about the college. I misspelled "Carson-Newman" three times because I omitted the hyphen. In those days, misspelled words on a paper earned an automatic failing grade. Since then, I have written scores of papers and essays; I have never again forgotten to hyphenate "Carson-Newman."

I remember my fellow students very well; I remember best my teammates in sports, and the students with whom I lived. At my graduation class' 25th reunion in the '80s, I stood next to one of my old teammates at the Carson-Newman football game. I asked, "What's the difference between the team now and when we played?" You probably know, the teams of my era were not nearly so successful as the Carson-Newman teams have been more recently. The answer I got was, "They're just better than we were, David." This could be said also of the whole college. The steady but sure growth of the stature and recognition of the College has added to the value of the diploma I received from C-NC. This trend should add to the value of your diploma as well.

As a senior, I lived with Gordon Senter, an outstanding student from Charlottesville, Virginia, and also a chemistry major. We both wanted to go to medical school; and we talked together often about applying to Harvard, Johns Hopkins and the other top-ranked schools. Because we feared competing with one another, we flipped a coin to decide who would apply to which schools. I know that sounds like gambling, not a part of the Carson-Newman tradition; but that is what we did. I applied to Harvard; Gordon to Johns Hopkins; and we both got in.

I remember that I rode all night on a bus to Cleveland first, to interview at the Case Western Reserve School of Medicine; then I took an overnight train to Boston. My Harvard interviews went well and the Director of Admissions became a lifelong friend. I also remember how I felt as if I was a part of an affirmative action program, being one of the few students in my Harvard class from a small Southern school.

The values my family instilled in me, my religious upbringing, and the wonderful support of Rose Marie, my high school sweetheart by then my wife, helped me through the rigors of medical school, residency training, and advanced training in research at the National Institutes of Health. I have had a wonderful career in medicine, serving on the faculty of the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle for the last 26 years.

I have cherished the challenge of being a physician and the pleasure of being a being a mentor and teacher for students, interns, and residents. I have also enjoyed being a father and an active member in my church and my community. I have known the deep pleasures of helping many people. I have also seen the sorrows of failures of treatment and the limits of our knowledge in the practice of medicine. No career could be more rewarding or stimulating.

These reflections are about my life, but I only tell you about them with the hope that they will be meaningful to you. I am pleased to receive this honor; but most of all, I came for a word with today's Carson-Newman College students. I want to offer encouragement and help you to be proud of yourselves and of the college you are attending.

Outstanding Professional Achievement Award

Stanley E. Romanstein

I am a high school dropout. At the tender age of sixteen, I announced to my parents that I wanted to go to college. High school no longer held any attraction, and I was ready to be on my way. With my parents' blessing—a blessing born out of confusion, but a blessing nonetheless—I applied to Carson-Newman.

What did I know about the College? Nothing. Carson-Newman was little more to me than a name and some data on pieces of paper that collectively formed the college catalogue. And what did the College know about me? I, too, was little more than a name, supported by some data of pieces of paper—high school grades and ACT scores. I took a chance on Carson-Newman; and, more importantly, the College took a chance on me. I've never regretted my choice, and it seems that the College feels okay about it as well.

In addition to the Alumni Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement, I'm deeply indebted to Carson-Newman for giving me two things: opportunity and guides.

Opportunity

I was a naïve teenager when I first set foot upon this campus in the fall of 1972. I am grateful to the College for offering me an opportunity to prove myself, and to the faculty for helping me to understand one of life's great lessons: that with opportunity comes responsibility. As a liberal arts college, Carson-Newman gave me the opportunity to explore the natural and social sciences, literature and the humanities, even as I mastered my chosen major—music.

As a first year student, my responsibilities were minimal: get up in the morning, go to class, take good notes, study well. Even though the College asked reasonable things of me as a first year student, I'm sorry to say that I didn't fulfill my responsibilities very well: I slept through too many morning classes, I took lousy notes, and I studied far too little. My first semester grades arrived in the mail, and I saw something that I'd never seen on a report card: the grade C—and not just one C, but lots and lots of them. Carson-Newman had given me the opportunity to learn; I just failed to do my part.

To the College's credit, they continued to offer me opportunity; and, to my own credit, I suppose, I got better at accepting responsibility. And, as I grew more able, Carson-Newman required more of me.

In the spring of my senior year I made my way one sunny afternoon from the tennis courts to Davis Recital Hall. I had played a few glorious sets of tennis, and I presented myself—covered in perspiration, dressed in shorts and tennis shoes—to hear that day's music recital. No sooner had I sat down than Dr. Louis Ball, then Chair of the Music Department, came over to me and said, "Do you intend to come to the recital dressed like that?" "Would you prefer that I change into something more appropriate?" I replied. "No," said Dr. Ball, "I would prefer that *you* would prefer to change." His point was well taken, and I accepted it. Dr. Ball was asking me, as a senior, to act thoughtfully, professionally, and responsibly.

The Baltimore School for the Arts, the institution I now direct, is a national leader in preparing students for careers in the arts. I have occasion to talk frequently with our students about what it means to be a professional, about the notion that being a professional means—first and foremost—that one is in the right place, at the right time, and that

one is prepared to do the day's work. I first learned that lesson at Carson-Newman College.

Guides

In addition to the opportunity, Carson-Newman offered me mentors—guides, if you will. I still remember the first time I heard the Carson-Newman College A Cappella Choir. I am a singer by nature, and I had never in my life heard such glorious sounds as I heard that day. I dreamed of singing like that. I auditioned for the Choir; and, to my great delight, I was accepted. I walked into my first rehearsal with the Choir absolutely scared to death. The Choir's conductor, Professor Emeritus Charles Jones (known to generations of students as 'Fessor) began working in his demanding, no-nonsense way; and I knew that my fears were completely justified. "Miss notes! Miss words! But don't miss *rhythm!*" he would shout. And, not more than five minutes later, "Miss the rhythm! Miss notes! But how can you miss those *words!*"

'Fessor taught me how to make music and his wife, Professor of Music Ann Jones, taught me how to sing. The Joneses impressed upon me that the essential, irreplaceable ingredient in transforming one's dreams into reality is work. Hard work. It's the only way to put muscle to thought, to give power to one's fantasies.

'Fessor and Mrs. Jones guided me and nurtured me during my four years at Carson-Newman—as did many of this College's wonderful faculty—and I cannot thank them enough for all that I have learned from them. As I guide faculty and students at the Baltimore School for the Arts, I hope and trust that I can bring inspiration to them in the same way that Louis Ball, and Charles and Ann Jones inspired me so many years ago.

I hope you enjoy your time at Carson-Newman; I did mine. And I hope that, as you go forth from this place, you too, will be able to say that the College offered you opportunity coupled with responsibility, and caring, demanding guides.

Thank you very much.

Outstanding Young Alumnus Award Address

F. Clark Denton

It is indeed an honor to be given this award. Carson-Newman has had a profound impact on my life from the instant I started as a freshman in 1988. This school has given me the ability and confidence to do what I feel is God's plan for me. When I was preparing for this talk, I thought of at least four core values that I use every day and that I can partially attribute to learning here those four years I attended.

The first is **People Count**. Take a walk around campus, and you can see the friendliness of this institution. Abroad, you notice the school's mission trips, which are usually coordinated around spring break; and then there are the domestic trips to help people ravaged by natural disasters. When I was here, we sent several hundred students to help the people devastated by Hurricane Andrew. People do count.

The second is **Integrity and Honesty**. There is no way you can build a good reputation without integrity and honesty. No matter your major here at the school, if you only look out for number one and will do anything to accomplish the task, unfortunately, you will conform to the vast majority of people. The cream really does rise to the top and with a positive work ethic and mutual respect for everyone you encounter, you will become outstanding.

The third value is **Good Stewardship**. God has given so much to my wife and me and everyone who can hear my voice. Once you leave this big metropolis of Jefferson City, you will see that some of the richest people may not have a ton of money or fame; but instead have lived quiet lives for God. They give of their time and energy to make the world better. They have been good stewards with what God has given them.

The fourth value is **Personal Responsibility and Partnership**. For the last couple of years, I have been so proud to be a graduate of Carson-Newman College. I have seen our Board of Trustees work night and day to partner with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. Regardless of the outcome, and regardless of where you personally think this college should be aligned, the leaders of this institution have truly led by example.

This is why this award means so much to me. To be labeled outstanding by this college leaves me feeling very undeserving and very thankful. Herb Kelleher, the President of Southwest Airlines, when asked what made his organization so successful, was quoted as

saying, "Culture is the number-one priority." This college has something organizations and companies really covet: an effective culture.

Once a culture has been established, you cannot change it; it will change you. To have this kind of culture of 150 years is truly amazing. We celebrate the school's 150th birthday in the fall of 2001. It is a time to look back at our heritage and forward to the future. It is a time of optimism, because this kind of liberal arts education produces the best whole person. I heard a quote the other day from a colleague of mine in Indiana. He said, "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift; that's why we call it the present." Thank you, and make every day count.

Christian Faith, the Enlightenment, and the Life of the Mind

[Fall Faculty Workshop Presentation, August 19, 1999]

Richard T. Hughes

Some time ago, I spoke to the faculty and administration of a midwestern Lutheran college on the power of the Lutheran tradition to sustain the life of the mind. Because I am convinced that Lutherans possess theological resources that are uniquely situated for this task, I urged those in my audience to do all they could to enhance the Lutheran character of the school.

Later, I received a letter from a retired member of that faculty, writing to express his skepticism that what I had commended could ever be achieved. It was clear that he took no joy in this report. He wrote that while many of the older faculty cared deeply about the Lutheran character of the institution, these people were in the process of retiring. Typically, he said, their younger replacements were not committed to the Lutheran character of the college, but rather “to excellence in their disciplines and, in many cases, to the goal of greater diversity in the college community.” Accordingly, he wrote, many of the younger faculty “would find a discussion of the issues you raise[d in your presentation here] to be uninteresting and irrelevant to [our modern] world.” In fact, he concluded, some will view the college as fundamentally “tribal . . . until most vestiges of Lutheran connections are eliminated.”

My correspondent described in almost classic terms, it seemed to me, the dilemma that faces countless church-related colleges and universities. We might state that dilemma in the form of a question: How can those of us who work in the field of Christian higher education nurture diversity, openness, and academic freedom, on the one hand, and at the very same time encourage a serious commitment to the Christian faith?

If some faculty and some institutions resolve this dilemma in favor of diversity and academic integrity and, in the process, slight the Christian faith, faculty who teach in more conservative church-related

schools often work in the opposite direction. Typically, if they have to choose—and they often feel that they do—these people are far more concerned to nurture the Christian character of their institutions than to nurture traditional academic values. Not surprisingly, these institutions seldom compete at the highest academic levels, but they are very good at sustaining religious commitment.

The problem we face is obvious: how can an institution like Carson-Newman College honor the integrity of the Christian faith, on the one hand, and the integrity of the academic enterprise, on the other, and do both at the very same time? And to make that question even more pointed, is it possible for these two sides of the equation to sustain and reinforce one another?

The Meaning of the American Enlightenment

We might begin exploring this question by asking about the meaning of the American Enlightenment. It seems appropriate to begin this way for two reasons. First, American higher education is in many ways a child of the American Enlightenment. In making this assertion, I do not mean to suggest that the Enlightenment was the only intellectual tradition that has shaped American higher education. But I do mean to suggest that for almost two hundred years, American higher education has embraced a set of values that were fundamental to the Enlightenment in the United States. Preeminent among those values was the commitment to search for truth through free and open discussion. Thomas Jefferson put it well when he wrote

that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate¹

This commitment stands so completely at the core of higher education in the United States that when we hear of institutions that curtail the right of free and open discussion, most of us conclude that those institutions can hardly be regarded as serious players in the academic arena.

¹Thomas Jefferson, “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1950), p. 549.

But there is a second reason for beginning our exploration with a consideration of the American Enlightenment. In spite of the pivotal role the Enlightenment has played in American higher education, a growing number of Christian scholars have embraced the position in recent years that the Enlightenment is fundamentally inhospitable to Christian faith. They seem to suggest that so long as rational judgment and scientific norms control the academy, Christian faith will never get a fair hearing. On the other hand, they welcome the emergence of the postmodern world as a context in which Christianity might at last be taken seriously. After all, if the postmodern project is by definition open to the claims of any non-Christian or anti-Christian agenda whatsoever, consistency demands that it be open to the claims of Christian faith as well.

This judgment strikes me as dubious, indeed. Why would any Christian scholar imagine that the postmodern project is even remotely hospitable to genuine pluralism, much less to the particularistic claims of Christian faith? Genuine pluralism, after all, draws its strength from the *assertion* of particularities and can thrive only when those particularities are taken seriously. Why, then, would any Christian scholar take comfort in a worldview that relativizes truth claims or that views those claims as nothing more than subjective preference? This is why I stand amazed when Christian scholars embrace postmodernism as a potential ally.

But I also stand amazed when those same Christian scholars castigate the Enlightenment as the root of secularization and the enemy of Christian faith. It strikes me that if one takes this position, one concedes that when all is said and done, there can be no serious dialogue between Athens and Jerusalem and, finally, no real possibility of higher education in the Christian genre.

This is why we must rethink the meaning of the American Enlightenment. Are there ways in which the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and Christian faith, on the other, can sustain each other? Or must we assume that the values of the Enlightenment and the values of the Christian faith stand inevitably at odds?

To answer this question, we must first acknowledge that when Christian scholars dismiss the Enlightenment, they often do so as if the Enlightenment were a homogeneous phenomenon. But this view is far too simple. It is true that some Enlightenment thinkers embraced an empirical bias that left little room for faith, for the unseen, or for religious considerations of any kind. But other Enlightenment thinkers grounded their moral vision squarely in a religious framework. The truth is that important strands of the *American* Enlightenment reflected

a profoundly religious vision. To help us understand those strands more fully, we need to look briefly at the work of Sidney E. Mead.

The Work of Sidney E. Mead

Widely known in the 1960s and 1970s as the dean of historians of American religion, Mead spent a lifetime exploring the religious dimensions of the American Enlightenment. In one of his books, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, he developed an extended argument for how religion sustained—and continues to sustain—the democratic institutions of the United States. Mead’s argument holds great implications for those of us who work in the field of Christian higher education. After all, to ask how religious faith might sustain the democratic traditions of the nation is not radically different from asking how religious faith might sustain the life of the mind in the context of American higher education. I trust the relationship between these two questions will become more obvious as we move along.

Before exploring Mead’s argument, two caveats are in order. First, we must acknowledge that the faith that sustains the Republic is not orthodox Christianity by any stretch of the imagination. But we should not for that reason dismiss this vision as secularism, humanism, or atheism, as many Christians over the years have been prone to do. We are dealing here with a profoundly religious faith. And second, it is not my purpose to commend the civic faith of the Republic as the proper foundation for Christian higher education. But I do hope to ask what we as Christian scholars can learn from that faith. And I do hope to ask how the faith that sustains our Christian schools can interact in fruitful and productive ways with the religious faith that sustains our democratic institutions. That must be our fundamental question if we have any hope of resolving the dilemma with which we began, that is, if we have any hope of nurturing simultaneously the life of the mind, on the one hand, and particularistic Christian faith, on the other.

We turn now to examine Mead’s argument in some detail. Mead argued that American democracy rests upon a theological foundation that he often described as “the religion of the Republic” or, alternately, “the theology of the Republic.” We can best understand this religious vision if we pay close attention to the *Declaration of Independence*. Most Americans recognize the *Declaration* as a political document, but the *Declaration* was and is a theological document as well. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson rooted the *Declaration* squarely in the religion of the American Enlightenment, that is, classical Deism.

What was Deism, and who were the Deists? The Deists of the seventeenth century had searched for a way to terminate the religious wars that plagued Europe in the aftermath of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The Bible, they argued, was in many ways the cause of these conflicts because the Bible was both complex and susceptible to a host of interpretations. But God had authored, they claimed, a second book, a book they called the Book of Nature. If the Bible was complex, this second book was simple. And if the Bible was susceptible to a host of conflicting interpretations, this second book taught clearly and unambiguously the essential doctrines of every major religious tradition.

We must come to see that the political affirmations of the *Declaration* rest squarely on the cardinal principles of the Deist creed: the twin affirmations that God exists and that His existence guarantees the moral structure of the universe. The *Declaration*, in fact, never invoked the God of the Bible or the God of traditional Judaism or Christianity. We find here no appeals to “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” or to “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Instead, the *Declaration* appeals clearly and deliberately to “Nature and Nature’s God,” that is, the God that all human beings can know in God’s second book, the Book of Nature. Likewise, the *Declaration* proclaims that the universe embodies a fundamental moral structure. Jefferson described that moral structure with these words.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

When we understand the theological dimensions of the *Declaration of Independence*, we begin to understand what Mead had in mind when he spoke of “the theology of the Republic.” In Mead’s judgment, this theology legitimated the right of every human being to search for truth and to frame the truth as he or she saw fit. It was this same “theology of the Republic,” therefore, that legitimated the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” And “the most constant strand” in this “theology of the Republic,” Mead believed, was “the primacy of God over all human institutions.”

To this point, we have explored only half of Mead’s “theology of the Republic.” If Mead began by affirming “the primacy of God over all human institutions,” he stated time and again the corollary to that

proposition, namely, the fact that “no man is God.” That affirmation, Mead wrote in an especially poignant passage,

is what I understand to be the functional meaning of “God” in human experience. Whatever “God” may be, if indeed being is applicable to “God,” a concept of the infinite seems to me necessary if we are to state the all-important fact about man: that he is finite. This is the premise of all democratic institutions. It is the essential dogma of the religion of the Republic.²

Two themes, then, stand at the center of Mead’s understanding of the “religion of the Republic”: the finitude of humankind and the primacy of God over all human institutions. According to Mead, this profoundly theological vision has made possible the democratic experience that Americans have enjoyed now for well over two hundred years.

The “Religion of the Republic” and the American Churches

Yet, as Mead points out, in spite of its profoundly theological core, and in spite of its appeal to the sovereignty of God over all human life, Christians have often assailed the religious foundation on which the American experience was built as little more than rank infidelity. Why would this be true?

The reason is not hard to find. The Founders embraced the “religion of the Republic” as a *universal vision* that would legitimate diversity in the Republic. Put another way, here was a *universal vision* to which all people could relate, regardless of their particular religious persuasions. Indeed, Mead argues that the “religion of the Republic” is “not only *not* particularistic; it is designedly antiparticularistic.”³

On the other hand, many Christians in those early years of the Republic longed for a nation that would be grounded in *particularistic* Christian faith. In other words, they wished for a particularistically Christian America. The First Amendment to the Constitution, however, made it impossible for Christians or anyone else to impose particularis-

²Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, pp. 9-10. See also p. 119.

³Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, p. 22.

tic faith on the Republic, either by law or by other means of coercion. But there still remained the possibility of persuasion. And so, Christians throughout the nation launched in the early years of the nineteenth century a great revival that we know today as the Second Great Awakening. Indeed, one might well interpret that revival as, at least in part, a massive attempt to Christianize the Republic by persuasion, since it would now be impossible to do so by force of law.

In addition, many Christians who sought to Christianize the Republic by persuasion sought at the very same time to discredit the cosmopolitan “theology of the Republic” that made possible a pluralistic nation. As far as they were concerned, the Founders who had framed this theology were “infidels,” and the theology they articulated, because it lacked sufficient particularity, was nothing short of “infidelity.”⁴

Several examples will suffice. Reverend John M. Mason discovered in 1800 that Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia* contained the assertion that “the legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty Gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket or breaks my leg.” To Mason, Jefferson had preached both “atheism” and “the morality of devils.” Another preacher, the Reverend Clement Clarke Moore, objected to the same Jeffersonian text. Upon reading the *Notes on Virginia*, he found himself “surprised that a book which contains so much infidelity, conveyed in so insidious a manner, should have been extensively circulated in a Christian country, for nearly twenty years, without ever having received a formal answer.”⁵

Perhaps the most significant Christian leader to respond to the religion of the Enlightenment was Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, president of Yale College from 1795 to 1817, and one of the chief architects of the Second Great Awakening. For Dwight, as for

⁴On this development, see Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, pp. 122-23; and *The Lively Experiment*, pp. 38-54.

⁵John M. Mason, *The Voice of Warning to Christians, on the Ensuring Election of a President of the United States* (New York, 1800), p. 20; and Clement Clarke Moore, *Observations upon certain passages in Mr. Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia, which appear to have a tendency to Subvert Religion, and establish a False Philosophy* (New York, 1804), p. 5; both cited in G. Adolf Kock, *Religion of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968; orig. pub. 1933), pp. 271-72.

so many other Christians of that age, “infidelity” was a synonym for the religion of the Enlightenment. Accordingly, “infidelity” was a plan “for exterminating Christianity” and offered “no efficacious means of restraining Vice, or promoting Virtue, but, on the contrary encourages Vice and discourages Virtue.” In fact, “so evident is the want of morals on the part of Infidels . . . that so say ‘A man is an Infidel’ is understood . . . as a declaration that he is a plainly immoral man.”⁶

This attack which Christian revivalists marshaled against the religion of the Enlightenment bore long-term effects that are with us yet, and it is precisely here that Mead’s analysis can be helpful to those of us who work in the field of Christian higher education. Indeed, Mead observes that the evangelical attack on the Founders drove a permanent wedge between the particularistic theologies of the churches, on the one hand, and the religion of the Republic, on the other. But it did much more than that. It also drove a wedge between the churches and the centers of higher learning. For if the churches have sought to maintain their particularistic theologies, colleges and universities have sought to maintain a context in which a wide variety of perspectives could thrive. For this reason, Mead writes, “the[se] two parts of the culture simply went their separate ways. . . . The intellectual and religious lives have . . . been separately institutionalized in the universities and denominations respectively. Universities define the intellectual life; denominations define the religious life.”⁷

But there is more to the story than even this, for the nineteenth-century contest between evangelical Christians and the Founders foreshadowed in certain important respects a very similar struggle that would play itself out in church-related colleges in the United States for over two hundred years. After all, the contest between evangelical Christians and the Founders was a struggle between particularity and universality or, put another way, a struggle between particularity and the affirmation of diversity. It is this very same struggle that has been the curse of church-related higher education in the United States for a very long time.

⁶Cited in Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, p. 70.

⁷Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, p. 124.

Resolving Our Dilemma

We now must ask, does Mead provide any solution to the problem he identifies? How is it possible, in other words, for Christians in the United States to resolve the tension that has always plagued the relationship between particularistic Christianity and the religion of the Republic? And by extension, how is it possible for those of us in Christian higher education to resolve the tension created by our simultaneous commitment to diversity, on the one hand, and to a highly particularistic Christian vision, on the other?

Mead does, indeed, offer a solution to this problem. Quite simply, he urges Christians to break through the particularity of their own traditions. Since Mead borrows this concept from the theologian, Paul Tillich, we need to hear the way Tillich frames this issue. After exploring the relationship between Christianity and the world religions, Tillich concludes like this:

Religion cannot come to an end, and a particular religion will be lasting to the degree in which it negates itself as a religion. Thus Christianity will be a bearer of the religious answer as long as it breaks through its own particularity. In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence.⁸

Reflecting on this passage, Mead wrote, "without claiming to understand exactly what Tillich meant by those words, I have my opinion of what 'that' is to which 'every living religion points,' namely, that no man is God."⁹ In other words, that to which all religions ultimately point is finally nothing more and nothing less than the affirmation of the Infinite, on the one hand, and the affirmation that all human beings are finite, on the other.

As far as Mead is concerned, this is precisely the vision that animates the "theology of the Republic." Thus, Mead wrote,

⁸Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 96-97.

⁹Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, pp. 9-10.

When Franklin spoke of “the essentials of every religion” he added that these were “to be found in all the religions we had in our country” though in each “mix’d with other articles” peculiar to that sect. This is not to create a syncretistic common core, but to plumb for the universal which is dressed and disguised in the particularities of doctrine and practice that distinguish one sect from another. This conception enabled them to distinguish between the substance of religion, and its forms exemplified in sectarian tenets and observances.¹⁰

Accordingly, Mead concluded that “Tillich’s view seems . . . implicit in the whole American experience with religious pluralism.”¹¹

What Might It Mean for *Christians* to “Break through the Particularities of Their Own Religious Traditions”?

Over the years I have given considerable thought to the question of what it might mean for *Christians* to “break through the particularities” of their own religious traditions. After struggling with this concept for a very long time, I have finally concluded that it holds some very positive implications for the practice of Christian higher education.

At the same time, I have found that this concept is easily misunderstood. Many Christian scholars who hear this notion for the first time quickly conclude that it means the destruction of particularities. Nothing, in my judgment, could be further from the truth. But the notion that we should “break through the particularities” of our faith does involve a paradox. The paradox lies in the fact that when we affirm a particularity, we break through it at the very same time, only to affirm it again and break through it again, and on and on we go, simultaneously affirming and breaking through, affirming and breaking through, affirming and breaking through.

I would argue, in fact, that if we seek to be faithful Christians, we have no choice but to embrace the paradox of simultaneously affirming and breaking through the particularities of our faith. This is true for three distinct reasons.

First, the object of our faith must always be God: the Infinite One, the Ultimate One, the Alpha, the Omega, the Creator of All, and

¹⁰Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, p. 60.

¹¹Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, p. 63.

the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. Yet, even though this God must always be the object of my faith, my very finite humanness finally means that I have no ability even to conceptualize or describe this infinite God. The best I can do is to operate with symbols that *point to* the Reality that is God. These symbols comprise the particularities of my faith. But even though these symbols are the only means at my disposal that give me the power to speak of God at all, they are grossly inadequate. Their inadequacy arises from the fact that I am finite, my thoughts are finite, and my words are finite. But I seek with these very finite thoughts and words to speak of an infinite God.

By now, it must be obvious why I claim that if we seek to be faithful Christians, we have no choice but to embrace the paradox of affirming and breaking through the particularities of our faith. To break through the particularities of our faith means that we allow those particularities to point us to the Ultimate God. Conversely, it means that we refuse to view those particularities as ends in themselves, and we refuse to erect those particularities as brittle standards of orthodoxy that never point beyond themselves to the God who should be the singular object of our faith. The frightening truth of the matter is simply this: if we refuse to break through those particularities but absolutize them instead, then we have engaged in a reprehensible act of idolatry.

Let me give some examples. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther embraced the formula, “justification by grace through faith.” This notion was for Luther a powerful and dynamic idea, but its power lay in the fact that it pointed beyond itself to the reality of God who offered His grace to sinful human beings. Later in the sixteenth century, however, other Lutheran theologians whom we now call the Scholastic theologians radically transformed Luther’s original idea. They still used the words, “justification by grace through faith,” but in their hands, that phrase became a litmus test for orthodox Lutheran belief. In other words, it became an end in itself, not a symbol that pointed beyond itself to the One and Only Source of “justification by grace through faith.”

For a second example of what it might mean to affirm and break through the particularities of our faith, we might focus on the Bible. We might begin with the simple question, “What kind of book is the Bible, after all?” Surely the Bible is not a rulebook, or a scientific manual, or a legal code, or a divinely authored constitution. Instead, the Bible is a theological text, that is, a book about God. According to this conception, the Bible is not a book whose contents we can master, but instead points us to a God Who masters each of us. According to this conception, the Bible points us not to itself, but rather to the infinite God Whose understanding no human being can fathom and Who stands

in judgment on all our claims that, somehow, we have captured ultimate truth. This conception of the Bible leaves no place for human pride, but forces each of us to humble ourselves before the throne of God and to acknowledge with Job,

I have uttered what I did not understand
 Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . .
 I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
 But now my eye sees thee;
 Therefore I despise myself
 And repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:3-6)

Or again, if we allow the Bible to point beyond itself to the infinite God, we finally have no choice but to confess with Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5)

Can the Bible, viewed in these terms, sustain the life of the mind? Without question, it can, for if the Bible points beyond itself to the infinite God, we have no choice but to search for truth. After all, when we view ourselves in relation to God, we understand how abysmally ignorant we really are. And if the Bible points beyond itself to an infinite God, we have no choice but to engage in serious conversation with a variety of conversation partners, for we know that all perspectives may well shed light on God’s eternal truth. And if the Bible points beyond itself to an infinite God, we have no choice but to engage in critical thinking, for we must now discriminate between competing worldviews and perspectives as we seek to understand more fully the nature, the glory, and the will of our Creator. And finally, if the Bible points beyond itself to an infinite God, then we must reach toward that God through expressions of creative imagination.

But there is a second reason why, as faithful Christians, we must break through the particularities of our faith. The Christian gospel always points in two directions: vertically to God and horizontally to the neighbor. In fact, we could summarize the gospel by saying that just as God extends His grace to us, so we must reflect that grace to the neighbor. But how many of us have been guilty, from time to time, of transforming the Christian faith into a set of orthodox propositions that simply stand there in all their splendor and do nothing to connect us either to God or to the neighbor?

In this connection the Old Testament prophet Amos quickly comes to mind. The people Amos addressed carried out their worship with scrupulous attention to the law, but seldom allowed their worship

to point beyond itself to the needs of the neighbor. Accordingly, Amos has God cry out,

I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
 I cannot stand your assemblies. . . .
 Away with the noise of your songs!
 I will not listen to the music of your harps.
 But let justice roll on like a river,
 Righteousness like a never-failing stream!

We think as well of the Pharisees who scrupulously performed the duties of the law, but seldom understood that the real purpose of the law was service to the neighbor. No wonder that Jesus assailed them with these words: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” Then Jesus concluded, “You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” In other words, there is nothing wrong with orthodox beliefs. But those beliefs must never become ends in themselves. We must affirm them so long as they are biblical and true, but we must at the very same time break through them to those realities to which every Christian doctrine finally points, namely, to God and to the neighbor.

No one can help us grasp this point more clearly than can Jesus. Indeed, Jesus offers a far more powerful basis for the practice of cultural diversity than does the religion of the Republic. This is the crucial point that those of us working in the field of Christian higher education must grasp if we hope to connect Christian faith with the life of the mind.

There can be no question about the fact that Jesus affirmed his own particularity time and again. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” he said. Or again, “No one can come to the Father but by me.” Nothing could be more particular than this. And yet, Jesus never called His disciples to worship Him as if He were a wall or a monument, or some kind of unmovable image, or simply an end within Himself. Instead, His life was a window through which the light of God illumined those He came to serve. In this way, Jesus broke through His own particularity time and time again.

For example, Jesus defined His ministry in terms of service to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, and the oppressed. According to the biblical text, Jesus was in the synagogue in Nazareth when the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he

has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then, in one of the most stunning passages in the entire New Testament, Jesus told his hearers, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:17-21)

Moreover, the ministry of Jesus transcended race, color, creed, or social standing. He reached out to the powerful and to the marginalized, to Jews and to Greeks, to men and to women, to slaves and to free Roman citizens, to prostitutes, to tax collectors, and to thieves. If He were here today His compassionate concern would focus on every single person in this multicultural world in which we live: Asians and Africans, Hispanics and Native Americans, Buddhists and Hindus, Jews and Christians, men and women. When it comes to compassionate concern, Jesus leaves no one out.

When we were children, many of us learned a song that went like this:

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world;
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

This means that if we ask Jesus to define for us the meaning of diversity, we must be prepared for an answer that is absolutely inclusive. In Jesus' world, all human beings are infinitely valuable. From the rich young ruler to the woman caught in adultery, Jesus took everyone He encountered with complete and radical seriousness. These are just some of the ways in which Jesus broke through His own particularity.

And so we are now left with the question: Can we serve Jesus and celebrate diversity at one and the same time? If we understand anything at all about Jesus, the question answers itself. The truth is, we cannot serve Jesus *without* celebrating and serving the diversity of peoples and cultures that abound in our world.

Finally, we must ask, what does all this mean for Christian scholars? It means that if we seek to be His disciples, we must break through our particularity, just as He broke through His. If we will be His disciples, He said, we will take up the cross on behalf of those around us. If we wish to save our lives, we must lose our lives in service to the neighbor. We serve Him best, he explained, when we serve "the least of these"--the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor, the sick, and those in prison.

But there is more, much more. For we cannot serve other people as we should unless we take them seriously as human beings--human beings with their own unique stories, their own histories, their own cultures, and their own religious traditions. How can I serve children, for example, if I know nothing about children? How can I serve the poor who populate the inner city if I am ignorant of who these people are, where they come from, what they think, and how they feel? How can I prepare to serve people of other ethnic traditions or people in other parts of the world if I know nothing of their histories, their cultural traditions, and their religious commitments?

The point is simply this: if we commit ourselves to following Jesus in service to those around us, we must take diversity seriously. This means that in the context of higher education, we must commit ourselves to teaching and learning about the diversity of peoples with whom we share this globe, and to do so in the name of Jesus, not in spite of our Christian calling, but precisely because of that calling.

But there is one more reason why Christians must learn to break through the particularities of their faith: the gospel requires that we surrender the single dimension of ourselves that each of us holds most precious, namely, our egos. In other words, the gospel demands that we admit that we are not self-sufficient, that in spite of all of our pretense to the contrary, we are finally nothing more than finite human beings--broken, alienated, fragmented, and estranged. In a word, the gospel demands that we bow before the sovereignty of God and confess that we are only human beings who cannot possibly save ourselves from the ambiguity of the human situation.

The implications of this insight for higher education are enormous, for if I confess the sovereignty of God and the finitude of human kind, I confess as well that my reason is inevitably impaired and that my knowledge is always fragmentary and incomplete. Quite simply, this position means that I could be wrong.

After all, the fact that I am a finite human being means that I am a creature of a particular time and a particular place and a particular culture. How can I possibly transcend these limitations? After all, I am not God.

This confession empowers me to critically scrutinize my own theories, my own judgments, and my own understandings. Once I make this confession, it becomes very difficult to absolutize my judgments and interpretations or to elevate my opinions to the status of an orthodoxy to which everyone else must conform. No, once I make this confession, I must be open to other voices--voices from other cultures, other races, other ethnic traditions; voices from different places and different historical periods; yes, even voices from other religions. Put

another way, once I make this confession, I then begin to understand how very much we really do need each other.

This is what we mean when we suggest that the Christian gospel enables us to break through our own particularities. This is what we mean when we suggest that the Christian gospel can sustain the life of the mind. And this is what we mean when we suggest that the Christian gospel is a fundamental presupposition for coming to terms with ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity.

Conclusions

I want to conclude by making this simple observation. The religion of the Republic has sustained diversity in the United States for over two hundred years. But why should Christians do any less? Why should anyone think that Christian institutions of higher learning lack resources to sustain diversity of every kind? When Christian institutions reject diversity in the interest of orthodoxy or some other kind of uniformity, they witness against themselves and against the gospel they claim to represent. And they witness as well against the cause of higher learning.

Christian colleges and universities must take seriously the religion of the Republic and the Enlightenment tradition from which it comes. More than this, Christian colleges and universities must interact with that tradition in positive ways. They must do this, not because Christian institutions are *Christian* in their orientation, but because they are first of all institutions of higher learning, rooted in the democratic traditions of the western world.

But Christian colleges and universities are also grounded in a particularistic Christian vision, and for that reason, they are uniquely situated to sustain the life of the mind quite apart from the resources offered by the Enlightenment or the religion of the Republic. The single greatest resource available to Christian institutions is not Deism. Rather, our single greatest resource is the Christian gospel that points beyond itself to the grace of God that has revealed itself in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and that demands that each of us reflect that grace to the neighbor. To the extent that we take seriously the Christian gospel, Christian colleges and universities can indeed sustain the life of the mind.

Rural Churches in America: A Theological Primer

[T. B. Maston Lecture I]

Bill J. Leonard

I grew up going to rural and semi-rural churches in Wise County, Texas, and other regions of the Lone Star State. Indeed, one of my dad's favorite church stories was of the Sunday he came in late to the little Baptist church in Cottondale, Texas. When he did, an old deacon on the front row got up and changed the attendance sign on the wall from 46 to 47. Counting the sheep is important in whether you worship at Willow Creek and in Cottondale.

Tonight, I am a poor substitute for poet/prophet/Kentuckian Wendell Berry, but Dan Aleshire's invitation gave me opportunity to reflect—albeit hurriedly—on my own experiences as both teacher and learner in and around rural churches. Building on some of my work in Southern religious studies, Appalachian studies, and Texas roots, I decided to entitle these remarks: “Rural Churches in America: A Theological Primer.” My all too easy thesis is this: In some respects, though certainly not in others, rural churches are seedbeds (dare we say seminaries) of theological reflection and practice. Acknowledging that may be helpful for understanding both the past and the future of these very American communities of faith.

Having said this let me enter a quick caveat. My own Baptist heritage calls me to resist sentimentalizing these communions or ignoring the realities of their brokenness, dysfunction, and sinfulness—realities that exist in all segments of Christ's church. Some of the worst theology I have ever heard came from country church pulpits. The earliest experiences of terrible racism that I remember also came from such environments. Meanness does not stop at the city limits. I once was guest preacher at a little church out from Louisville, and the pastor warned me: “This is a tough congregation. It's so tough . . . that the women stand out in front and smoke with the men before they come in to worship.”

That said, let me suggest, very briefly, and therefore with some generalization, that implicitly or explicitly, many rural churches provide significant and insightful theological education for their members, and perhaps for the rest of us. First, for example, rural churches—many of them—continue to illustrate the power of oral tradition as a means of passing on theological and spiritual knowledge and experience in American religious life. In fact, they may be one of the last bastions of such a noble tradition. Early on in American history, particularly on the frontier, oral tradition was the chief way of passing on religious knowledge. Many people could not read; and, even if they did, they may not have owned Bibles.

Doctrine, spirituality and “Bible” as they might have said were passed on orally. Even when folks did learn to read, simply hearing sermons and scripture passages read aloud, put words into their mouths. Remember when we Protestants used ONLY the KJV of the Bible, heard its cadences read across the Christian years? How many people over fifty can say most, if not all, of the Christmas story from Luke’s gospel from memory from the KJV? Oral tradition—popular preaching—in Baptist pulpits turned Calvin’s Perseverance of the Saints into “Once saved always saved,” in my view a very different theological construct, long before it was ever written down.

I learned about the continuing oral tradition in contemporary rural contexts from hearing holiness preachers in Appalachia. Arnold Saylor, a holiness preacher that Dr. Daugherty and I got to know a decade ago, was at best semi-literate, but had committed large segments of the Bible to memory, largely by hearing them read and recited in mountain holiness churches. I also saw him and the worshiping community teach homiletics on the spot.

It was a hot day in June 1990; and MLD and I went with him up a holler from Berea, Kentucky, to a family reunion, outdoor worship service, snake handling, and dinner on the ground. When the preaching started, they began with a young man just learning to preach. He tried it for almost an hour, but couldn’t preach a lick. The crowd tried everything to assist him: feeding him Bible verses, calling them out, shouting, amening, all to no avail. At one point, somebody even yelled: “Well, hep him Jesus, hep him.” Well, even Jesus couldn’t hep him in the end. Finally, the women picked up guitars and started “singing him down;” and we all knew his time was up.

At such services I also learned the power of oral tradition to become a rhetorical device for sermon preparation on the spot. At first glance, Pentecostal and Primitive Baptist preachers seem to preach spontaneously, without any preparation or even thought. But to listen again is to realize that they use many phrases learned from other

preachers across the years—blood bought, bible believing, saved and sanctified—couched in a rhetorical style that has enough gasps and pauses to allow them to think again what they are going to say—amen, praise god, thank you, Jesus. Every time I am in such contexts I am stuck by the continuing power of oral tradition to pass on doctrine, teach preaching, and stir the soul. It can also anger: "That ain't Bible and I ain't listening."

Second, rural churches illustrate again the power and significance of symbols, sacraments, and signs within the community of faith. As a Baptist, the power and imagery of outdoor immersions always profoundly touch me, with the congregation gathered all round, drying off newly baptized sisters and brothers and welcoming them home. It is a ritual that these modern indoor fiberglass baptisteries--full heated, fresh water, no muss, no fuss--cannot duplicate.

Likewise, I am struck by the way in which many rural churches, especially in my experience in central Appalachia, retain traditions that were passed on by their forbears for re-imagining the communal nature of Christian living. Consider the creative symbols that many of these churches shared, even formed, on the American frontier. They include: the washing of feet (a grand and powerful symbol of servanthood and community); memorial service (an annual gathering for remembering and honoring the dead); the fellowship meal (bringing all God's children to the table), the right hand of Christian fellowship, and the kiss of peace (sensory elements of welcome and relationships inside the family of faith).

These symbols were not without dangers, as one Primitive Baptist preacher observed: "We used to greet one another with a holy kiss, but we had to give it up when some folks 'lingered' a little too long." I know some symbols don't translate into other kinds of churches and were pretty hokey anyway. These include "wave a dollar at the devil" offerings, missionary birthday offerings, and gimmicks for getting people to the revival.

Ritually, the serpenthandlers illustrate my point as well. In reading Mary Lee Daugherty's now classic article, "Serpenthandling as Sacrament," and in seeing the rituals acted out, I have concluded this: In serpenthandling the sacrament is alive, and it can kill you. Thus, every time one comes to worship it is a matter of life and death. Whatever else sacraments may be, there is an element of danger in them—water can drown, wine can intoxicate, etc. These are powerful visual lessons from rural communities.

Third, theology, rituals and traditions in many rural churches may help us learn something about hermeneutics. Because of some of the really bad theology, or at least the lack of theological training

among rural laity and clergy, we often fail to see the value of those churches in helping us understand how hermeneutics are always shaped by community, knowingly or unknowingly.

Again, two serpenthandling preachers, Arnold Saylor and Carl Porter, taught me such lessons. They had never been on a college or seminary campus until I invited one to Louisville and the other to Wake Forest University. But they lectured in my classes and produced a communal hermeneutic on their favorite doctrine that was a powerful illustration to students.

1. Mark 16 passage: not in original mss—"If Jesus hadn'ta wanted it in there, he wouldn'ta put it in there."
2. Paul doesn't list serpenthandling among the gifts of the spirit in Galatians 5. "Yeah, but it does in Mark 16 and 'Jesus is the one who's doing the talking.'"
3. "If we don't do it, God will raise up a people that will do it."

All this illustrates something of David Tracy's observation that ancient texts resist domestication, and whatever else we may say about real religion is that it resists domestication. These are powerful lessons that we may learn in rural churches.

This brings me to a final observation, and perhaps some time for you to talk back to me. We need to listen to these faith communities for hope and courage to face the future.

A Crumbling Empire: Is There a Baptist Future in the South?

[T. B. Maston Lecture II]

Bill J. Leonard

On the eve of the American Revolution, Anglican Parson Charles Woodmason described the carryings on among the people called Baptists as observed in the "Carolina backcountry." His assessments were anything but flattering. Woodmason wrote:

They don't all agree on one Tune. For one sings this Doctrine, and the next something different--So that Peoples' brains are turn'd and bewildered. And then again to see them Divide and Sub divide, split into parties--Rail at and excommunicate one another--Turn (members) out of one meeting and receive (them back) into another. And a Gang of them getting together and gabbling one after the other (and sometimes disputing against each other) on abstruse Theological Questions. . .such as the greatest Metaph[ys]icians and Learned Scholars never yet could define, or agree on--To hear Ignorant Wretches, who cannot write . . .discussing such Knotty Points for the Edification of their Auditors. . .must give High offence to all Intelligent and rational Minds.¹

As far as I can discern, some Episcopalians have pretty much felt that way about Baptists from that day to this. Indeed, Anglicans were among the earliest critics of the Baptist communities in England. Their assessments indicate that being Baptist has never been all that respectable. As their earliest critics saw it; Baptists were not simply heretical; they

¹John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass south, 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 8, citing Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 109.

were ignorant peasants who simply had no class. In 1646, the Reverend Daniel Featley, Anglican priest, wrote a scathing denunciation of a new and unruly sect rampant in England. Entitled, wonderfully, *The Dippers Dipt or, the Anabaptists Duck'd and Plung'd over Head and Ears*, it observed cynically:

They preach, and print, and practice their Hereticall impieties openly; they hold their conventicles weekly in our chief cities, and suburbs thereof, and there prophesie by turnes. They flock in great multitudes to their Jordans, and both sexes enter into the River, and are dipt after their manner with a kinde of spell containing. . . their erroneous tenets. As they defile our Rivers with their impure washings, and our Pulpits with their false prophecies and phanaticall enthusiasms, so the presses sweat and groan under the load of their blasphemies.

Featley also delineated the so-called "heretical" ideas of the 17th century Baptists. Some sound familiar three and a half centuries later.

First, that none are rightly baptized but those who are dipt.

Secondly, that no children ought to be baptized.

Thirdly, that there ought to be no set form of Liturgy or prayer by the Book, but onely by the Spirit.

Fourthly, that there ought to be no distinction by the Word of God between the Clergy and the Laity, but that all who are gifted may preach the Word, and administer the Sacraments.

Fifthly, that it is not lawful to take an oath at all, no, not though it be demanded by the magistrate.

Sixtly, that no Christian may with good conscience execute the office of a civil magistrate.²

Suffice it to say that colonial Baptists generally remained anti-establishment in both Puritan New England and the Anglican South. They invented Rhode Island, the first colony to give complete religious liberty, for belief or unbelief, to its citizens, thereby drawing such a religiously rough crowd that it was called "Rogues' Harbor." In the South, Baptists like John Leland lobbied for the first amendment and worked with Jews to keep references to Christ out of the Constitution. On the western frontier

²Daniel Featley, *The Dippers Dipt, or the Anabaptists Duck'd & Plung'd over Head & Eares, at a Dispute in Southwark* (London: 1646), 36.

during the early 19th century, they were a genuine peoples' movement, provoking even the Methodists, themselves a crowd of populists, to severe criticism and ecclesiological apoplexy. Peter Cartwright, the Methodist Circuit rider, had little good to say about the frontier Baptists with whom he was in constant competition for converts. He wrote of their activities:

We (Methodists) preached in new settlements, and the Lord poured out his spirit, and we had many conversions. It was the order of the day, though I am sorry to say it, that we were constantly followed by a certain set of proselyting Baptist preachers. These new and wicked settlements were seldom visited by these Baptist preachers until the Methodist preachers entered them; then, when a revival was gotten up, or the work of God revived, these Baptist preachers came rushing in, and they generally sung their sermons; and when they struck. . . their sing-song mode of preaching, in substance it was 'water!' "Water!" You must follow your blessed Lord down to the water!" Indeed, they made so much ado about baptism by immersion, that the uninformed would suppose that heaven was an island and there was no way to get there but by diving or swimming.³

As Cartwright saw it, Baptist beliefs were not only unbiblical; their methods were tricky and manipulative. Being Baptist was disgraceful, and apparently, everybody knew it. By roughly 1830, however, many Baptists in the South were, with the Methodists, a numerical majority with churches in the countryside, but also in the towns and cities. First Baptist Charleston, the oldest in the South, was served by the erudite Richard Furman, a "Gentleman theologian if ever there was one. Likewise, Furman's 1822 defense of human slavery gave "biblical and moral" grounds to support the South's Peculiar Institution. It was slavery (euphemistically referred to as "sectionalism" by generations of Southern Baptist Historians) that led to the split between Baptists north and south in 1845.

The result of that schism was the Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination linked irrevocably with the Confederacy. Devastated by defeat, it rose again from the ashes, first as one of the leading ecclesiastical proponents of what Charles Regan Wilson calls "the religion of the Lost Cause," and then as one of the region's most extensive ecclesiastical systems. The Convention system utilized for the first time by a Baptist denomination in the United States linked local congregations with regional and national organizations and enterprises, creating a framework

³Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1856), 133.

for cooperation and action among a people who claimed to distrust and resist “hierarchies.”

A zeal for evangelism helped to create a numerical explosion and by the late 19th century Southern Baptists were establishing a religious hegemony as the “Catholic Church of the South.” Indeed, writing in the 1970s, historian Martin Marty described southern Protestantism in general and the SBC in particular, as among the most intact religious subgroups in contemporary America. Intactness meant that the SBC retained a sense of continuity with its past and provided a powerful identity for its members in the present. Such a tradition, Marty believed, revealed “regularities of behavior and consistent norms for evaluation.”⁴

The Southern Baptist Convention evolved (some would hate my use of that word) into an elaborate system, creating a powerful identity for its people. That system was grounded in a powerful cultural and religious ethos linking significant elements of Southern culture with a denominational program that carried constituency from the cradle to the grave.

Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, growing up Southern Baptist seemed relatively easy. You knew where you stood on Sunday’s and throughout the week. Sunday’s meant church, all day church. So off you went, armed with the three great symbols of Southern Baptist faith: A King James Version of the Bible (zipper edition); a Sunday School “Quarterly” which contained the weekly lesson studied by all Southern Baptists from Richmond to El Paso; and an offering envelope in which you placed the weekly tithe and on which you recorded your “spirituality” through the “Six-point Record System. Check marks detailed such things as: Studied lesson, attendance, staying for church, offering, visits made and Bible brought. Convention-wide programs were carried out through Sunday school, Training Union, seasonal revivals, and special Sunday observances for missions, stewardship, youth and children.

The system also provided for the training of future generations. Churches taught children, who were sent to Baptist colleges and universities that kept the Baptist identity alive through chapel services, mission trips and Baptist Student Union. Those called to ministry then went to one of six national seminaries that networked them into pastoral or staff ministry, missionary service, denominational administration or teaching. An array of literature provided instruction for bible and doctrinal study, church/Baptist history, specific age groups, and

⁴Martin E. Marty, “The Protestant Experience and Perspective,” in *American Religious Values and the Future of America*, ed. Roger van Allen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 40.

mission education. Suffice it to say that those systems and methods inculcated a powerful identity in the Baptist multitudes whose sheer numbers meant that they developed an undeniable hegemony over religious life in the American South.

As one observe noted, "In the South, Baptists are the center of gravity." In 1948, Alabama Baptist leader Levi E. Barton declared: "I am more tremendously convinced than ever that the last hope, the fairest hope, the only hope for evangelizing this world on New Testament principles is the Southern Baptist people represented in that Convention. I mean no unkindness to anybody on earth, but if you call that bigotry then make the most of it."⁵ The once persecuted minority had become an establishment. Southern Baptist identity and hegemony in the South endured throughout much of the twentieth century. In fact, it endured longer than many might have supposed. At century's end, however, the SBC system is (choose your best phrase) coming apart, being re-defined, in dynamic transition, disconnecting, in disarray, experiencing schisms, implicit and explicit. Reasons are numerous and complex. For the sake of discussion, I survey a short list.

First, Southern culture, never homogenous, witnessed major transitions related to, among other things, race, marriage and immigration. Old boundaries and divisions, social, ecclesial and political, were challenged by the Civil Rights movement. Southern Baptists, who generally acquiesced (there were significant exceptions) in the South's segregationist society. Wayne Flint's new history of Alabama Baptists provides a powerful survey of transitions in that region and the work of certain Baptists for and against the Civil Rights Movement.

Likewise, as Southerners moved outside the region and non-Southerners moved in, the old cultural and religious boundaries were challenged. Southern Baptists doing "pioneer" work in Pennsylvania, for example, in the 1970s wondered out loud why the "natives" failed to appreciate the traditional schedules for worship, Wednesday night prayer meeting and other aspects of the SBC system. Inter-marriage of Baptist youth to non-Baptists, and God forbid, non-Southerners, also brought many persons into Baptist congregations who had little or no experience with the system. (Inter-marriage also brought Baptists into the ranks of other traditions, as Episcopalians might well mourn.)

Second, a twenty-year controversy pitting so-called fundamentalists and moderates against each other for theological and political hegemony inside the denomination, ultimately found its way into every

⁵ Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), vi.

corner of SBC life. I, along with others, have written extensively about the controversy, and as most of you know, it has been in all the papers etc, ad nauseum.

Suffice it to say that the controversy has impacted the stability and system of the denomination in multiple ways. These include the following:

1. While fundamentalists won control of the national denomination including mission agencies, publishing houses, and six seminaries, they have watched as many of the old connections to churches and other institutions changed, were redirected or disappeared.
2. State Baptist Conventions, a significant part of the old denominational system, have chosen multiple responses to the fundamentalist control of the national system. Some—South Carolina, Florida, Georgia—have generally supported fundamentalist orientations. Some—especially Texas and Virginia—have identified themselves as moderates, creating actual schisms with fundamentalists in those states. In both Texas and Virginia there are now two state conventions, the old system controlled by moderates and a new organization of fundamentalists. Most states—Kentucky, North Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi—have sought to steer a course somewhere between the two groups.
3. Many moderates have moved toward new Baptist societies organized out of the controversy. These include the Alliance of Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and Texas Baptists Committee. Many of the churches linked to these organizations still retain “official” membership in the SBC, though there seems to be an effort to reevaluate that relationship on the part of a growing number of churches.
4. Some moderate congregations, long affiliated with the SBC have actually dropped their affiliation. These include First Baptist Churches in Raleigh, NC, and Greenville, SC, both of which antedate the founding of the convention in 1845. Other moderate churches, while retaining membership in the SBC, have essentially disengaged from financial, missionary, or other direct involvement in the denomination.
5. All this and other developments means that the old convention system described earlier in this essay is collapsing or in many cases already has collapsed in its ability to create a common iden-

tity in an ever unruly constituency. Indeed, churches across the theological spectrum are stepping outside the convention system for literature, missionary experience, funding, theological education and other areas of church life. Many churches of varying theological and liturgical orientation are even dropping the Baptist name, fretting that it scares people off as a result of the twenty year denominational dysfunction, or simply that “brand name” religion no longer attracts.

6. At century’s end statistics and demography are catching up with the divided denomination. In 1998 the SBC posted its first (acknowledged) membership decline in over thirty years. Most acknowledge, however, that of the 37,000 churches claiming affiliation with the denomination, some seventy percent are plateaued or declining. While the SBC claims some seventeen million members, those figures often include such categories as “non-resident” and “inactive members, numbers that might account for almost half of the seventeen million figure.

Which brings me to the third major point in this address. All this suggests that Baptist identity is certainly in major transition at every level of the old SBC system. Younger members—age 45 and younger—were not reared in the days of the intact system. Inter-marriage has brought many into congregations who have no frame of reference for why Baptists practice immersion, temperance communion, and missionary imperatives. Generation Xers increasingly reject sectarian divisions in favor of a kind of generic Christianity, highly individualized and often charismatic.

Fourth, the denominational controversy has in many ways obscured significant theological problems that are only now becoming evident and are generally unaddressed. Two examples must suffice. While talking extensively about the importance of biblical inerrancy, fundamentalists now acknowledge that there are multiple “Types” of inerrancy, some of which are more orthodox than others. Thus, underneath the litmus test of inerrancy is another level of tests as to what kind of inerrancy is acceptable and what kind is not.

Likewise, Southern Baptists, in my view, have never really dealt with the impact of American revivalism on the nature of Christian evangelism. Issues of child conversion in a denomination which touts a believers’ church, transactional conversionism in which the sinner simply repeats a prayer, means it and is in forever, and the ever-spiraling number of Southern Baptist church members who have received baptism multiple times are hard questions which few seem willing to con-

front. All this contributes to a kind of evangelical confusion about the nature of conversion, the nature of baptism, and the meaning of faith itself.

One other influence on the breakup of SBC influence involves the rise of the mega-church and its tendency to minimize denominational identity and distinctives. Mega-churches are congregations of several thousand members, led by a CEO charismatic pastor, providing specialized services for target groups, and organized around intentional marketing techniques. Mega-churches are mini-denominations, providing in one congregation many of the services and options previously provided by the denominational structure. These churches, some inside and most outside the SBC, challenge traditional ways of networking, educating, publishing and missionizing (is that a word?). Many reflect a worship style that is highly popular, combining elements of a production, incorporating praise chorus music, skits, practically oriented sermons, and great informality. Many Baptists, moderate and fundamentalist, are leaving traditional SBC churches for the mega-church nearest them. Some Baptists are seeking to apply the mega-church model, while others eschew it completely. It remains a powerful influence for the new century.

The result of these transitions, in my view, has been to weaken substantially the Southern Baptist hegemony in the South. Will the SBC disappear? Not any time soon, I would suspect. But its constituency is clearly changing, its old system breaking apart, and its identity as a Baptist communion uncertain. There are, however, signs, if not of hope, then possibility.

1. New communities—churches, localism, regionalism. There is some indication that local churches are discovering the need to pass on identity, to form new regional connections to other Baptists, and to create new networks with other religious traditions. Local churches across the theological spectrum are literally shopping around for diverse educational materials, resources and missionary connections. Many are discovering that they must learn to network with various Christian groups. This is often as true for ultra conservative Baptists as for more moderate to liberal Baptist churches.
2. New pluralism and a response to it. One fascinating area of contemporary Baptist life involves responses to the new pluralism of American life. Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists no longer live in “foreign lands,” but across the street. One of the major challenges to Baptists in the new century is how to remain unashamedly

Christian while learning to live in tolerance and respect for other world religions. Inside the church the new pluralism is blurring the lines between old traditions. I need only say two words—charismatic Presbyterians—to illustrate my point.

3. New institutions—theological education. For moderate Baptists, one of the most fascinating changes involves the development of some 10-11 new theological schools in less than a decade. These schools—divinity schools, seminaries, and houses—are beginning to educate a new generation of ministers. Likewise, many Baptist students are going to a variety of theological schools from Harvard to Fuller Seminary. Churches are learning slowly but surely to look to those schools for ministers. That in it involves new networks outside the old systems and it promises to bring new energy, theology and controversy into Baptist life in the South.

In the South, Baptists are no longer the center of gravity. In the Kingdom of God they never were. So it goes.

Getting to Tomorrow from Yesterday

[Family and Consumer Sciences Honors
Banquet, April 13, 2000]

Joan M. Young

In 1866, twenty-two year old William Young left Ballysadare on the west coast of Ireland and sailed across the ocean, entering the United States through the port of Detroit with two of his five older siblings. Eventually, he and his brothers heard of the iron ore discovery in the wilds of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and were some of the first settlers, walking through the wilderness and arriving in 1882. He and his brothers helped clear the land and plot the streets for what are now Iron River and Stambaugh. William homesteaded land there and became a mine-owner. He became a very prominent citizen in Stambaugh and a major supporter of the town's churches and schools.

In 1937, William's son Andrew received an official notice from the U. S. Civil Service Commission, offering him the post of security guard for the U. S. National Gallery, which is more commonly known today as the Smithsonian Institution. He was assigned to work in the main Smithsonian building, then and now, referred to as the Castle because of its nineteenth century architectural style and nine towers. From the top of the tallest tower flies the United States flag. Andrew Young sent a color postcard of the Castle with its flag to his wife in Michigan on December 1, 1937. He wrote "I have to take down this flag once a week. You take an elevator to the top."

Andrew eventually took the risk of moving his wife and four children to Washington, D. C. and spent twenty years at the Smithsonian. By now you may have surmised that these Young's are my ancestors. Andrew was my grandfather. I never knew him since he passed away when I was nine months old, but everyday I walk on the National Mall and look up at the flag that flies over the Smithsonian Castle and am struck by the echoes of history. I wonder what his life at the Institution was like. How did he feel about making such a major change in his life by accepting the Smithsonian job? For that matter, how did Wil-

liam Young feel when he left Ireland and embarked on his journey? It is that sense of history that binds us and remains as threads through our lives. It is my passion for history that led me to the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum of American History.

History of any kind--personal, national, and institutional--is all about growth, development, and change. It can be dynamic, in constant motion, and provide valuable information to help us understand our past, present, and future. My own history led me to this opportunity to speak with you tonight.

At the National Museum of American History, where I manage preservation services, our mission is the collection, care, and study of objects that reflect the history and experience of the American people. Specifically, our mission statement says, "the Museum dedicates its collections and scholarship to inspiring a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples. We create learning opportunities, stimulate imaginations, and present challenging ideas about our country's past." This statement serves as the focal point for exhibitions, research, collecting, and public programs. Our work is audience focused and about the products we produce for the public.

Yet the Museum that today embraces that mission statement is dramatically different from the one I entered in 1985. From the time the Museum opened in 1964, until a dramatic reorganization took place in 1994, the Museum was a traditional hierarchical organization with top down management where the director gave orders to his immediate subordinates who gave orders on down the line. And the line was long.

There were many supervisors and a rigid management structure with little open communication, particularly up to management. Jobs were very narrowly defined, and each staff member had a specific specialization. In this environment a large number of objects were collected and put into historical survey exhibits that primarily presented the objects in chronological order. That is not necessarily a bad organizational structure, and the Museum did a fairly good job of presenting the history of America. There were many important and well-received exhibitions during this period.

Two changes occurred, however, that impacted the American History Museum. In the early 90s, the Federal government faced its own budget challenges due to a soaring deficit. The response was that the government was reinvented. This resulted in streamlining and a reduction in the government workforce. The American History Museum lost over 30% of the staff. As federal budgets remained static year after year, only rarely were any of those positions filled. In addition, the Smithsonian was beginning to explore outside funding and corporate sponsorship for many of its programs.

At the same time the Museum community was changing. Museums everywhere were focusing more on their audiences and embracing them as if they were customers and the Museum had a product to sell. Audience surveys were conducted to see what people expected in a museum experience because Museums needed to compete with a variety of other activities for the public's leisure time.

Concurrently, technology mushroomed in the areas of the World Wide Web, graphic design, video-conferencing, and multimedia. Museums had to develop the means to keep up. This meant many new and exciting public programs to accompany exhibits. These programs now needed to be dynamic learning experiences that utilized all the latest technology. The focus was away from collecting objects and hiding them away in storage for research purposes only. The focus was upon serving the Museums' many, diverse publics. Access to collections was the goal in the 90's, whether it was physical or electronic.

Unfortunately, the National Museum of American History was unprepared for these changes. We now had fewer people to do more work, and we were being asked to operate more flexibly, at a faster pace, and in areas, such as technology and fundraising, where no one on staff had the appropriate skills. The hierarchical management structure was rigid with a specific set of rules and regulations that did not really allow for flexibility or change.

There was also an imbalance of knowledge, skills, and workloads. Some people were overwhelmed with work; others were hidden away doing very specialized research that had no place in the current public programs. Some people were being asked to perform new duties but provided no training to develop the necessary skills because there was no money. No one was really held accountable for producing measurable products or outcomes. Everyone was being asked to work more efficiently, but no one was sure how to do that.

The Museum was at a low point—morale was poor, rumors of layoffs abounded, and the staff was overwhelmed, stressed, frustrated, fearful, full of anxiety, and barely speaking to each other. None of our internal work processes functioned effectively. A healthy dose of cynicism permeated the air, because no one believed that anything could be done to change the state of the museum.

Just when we thought change was an impossibility, the Director of the Museum resigned. And an interesting thing happened. The Acting Director was appointed from within the staff of the museum. Dr. Spencer Crew, a noted historian, at that point had been with the Museum for over ten years. He was deeply committed to public history, the collections at the Museum, and the staff. He also had first hand

knowledge of the problems within the museum, particularly with staff resources.

Management philosophies in most organizations, not just cultural, had begun to shift and Dr. Crew initiated strategic planning to take the American History museum into the twenty-first century, basing much of the planning on some of the cutting edge management strategies utilized in the corporate world. His vision for the Museums' future so inspired the staff that when the official position of Director was advertised, they started a grassroots campaign through emails and memos to the Smithsonian Secretary, who leads all the Museums, to lobby for the permanent appointment of Dr. Crew. For the first time in the Museum's history, a director was hired from within.

That support from the American History staff encouraged Dr. Crew to continue the strategic planning he had begun as Acting Director. The goal of this effort was to find new ways to deal with the shrinking resources, develop new and better programs and exhibitions, and create more efficient work processes.

All across the museum staff from a variety of units and positions, not just management, were brought together in focus groups to express their ideas and provide input on what the organizational structure should look like and what the roles, responsibilities, and authorities should be. Interviews with every one of the over 300 staff members were held. The overall strategic planning process would look at the mission of the museum, its objectives, its educational purpose, its collecting purpose, and its organizational structure. The focus groups analyzed what work needed to be done, what skills were needed to do the work, where the work should be performed, and what our products should be.

Management and business terms such as reinventing, streamlining, and reengineering were heard all around the museum. After two years of strategic planning, a new organization was announced. The change was sweeping and dramatic. People moved both physically and organizationally all around the museum. Completely new units were formed. For example, twenty very specialized collecting units were combined into six broad categories to allow more cross-functional use of the collections in exhibitions and programs. Many unit names now ended in the word "service" because that is what we provide to our public externally and to our colleagues internally.

The rigid organization was broken down into a flexible and dynamic environment. Communication flowed up and down and across. Staff input was actively solicited. Yearly strategic objectives and goals were developed and communicated at town meetings. The Director established an open door policy to all staff and held monthly

brown bag lunches to encourage communication. A set of operating values to guide all daily activities was established. Commitment, service, excellence, creativity, respect, openness, cooperation, and integrity are expected of each and every staff member. The working management model became fewer supervisors, more managers/leaders, and a team-based approach to all work.

As a manager in this organizational structure, I do not supervise in the traditional definition of the word; instead I manage resources--people, money, equipment and collections towards the common preservation goals of the Museum. Leaders at the Museum are mentors, coaches, stewards, and teachers tasked with motivating and developing the staff resources. I am responsible for ensuring that people work together with a shared vision, goals, and values; that people continually expand their capabilities to understand the complexity of their work and seek consensus based solutions to problems. In this environment, assumptions about how something must be done are challenged and processes and procedures are continually improved upon and learning, growth, and personal development are a critical part of the culture.

My job is not really about being in charge—it is about ensuring that the staff who work in the unit have the necessary tools to perform their work whether the tools are physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual. I am also tasked with ensuring that the staff in Preservation Services are held accountable to the goals, objectives, stated priorities, and values of the Museum; and to that end we constantly reevaluate our working models to improve our service to the Museum and our public.

What I have just presented in a very brief manner is a case study for how you get to the twenty-first century from a nineteenth century foundation. Of course, it is more complicated than this short summary; and it has actually taken the Museum five years for the changes to become an integrated part of the organizational culture. For people to thrive and function in the new twenty-first century organizational environment, they must possess wide-ranging skills and attributes.

As I reflect on my personal and professional history, I know many of the skills that allow me to succeed in this dynamic environment were developed at Carson-Newman College, with its multidisciplinary, liberal arts approach to education. Carson-Newman builds leaders who possess vision, who can think creatively and flexibly, who can strategize and solve problems that may be complex, who can communicate effectively, and who have knowledge and perspective that is multi-faceted and cross-cultural. Most importantly, Carson-Newman provides a spiritual foundation for students who will enter organizations in the twenty-first century, students who consider values such as

respect and integrity equal in importance with knowledge and skills. I encourage each of you to pause and reflect on your own history and the knowledge, skills, and values that you bring both to your personal and professional life. Ask yourself some probing questions—

- What are your successes and what are your failures and more importantly, what did you learn from these experiences?
- What mix of skills do you bring to your life or your job?
- How can you view those skills in a new, cross-functional way?
- What is your vision, what are your values?
- Do you embrace change or fear change? Can you operate in a change oriented, flexible environment?

I can assure you change is a constant. The National Museum of American History is not static, even after our reorganization. Most recently, we embarked on new changes with the arrival in January of a new Secretary of the Smithsonian. Lawrence Small comes to the Institution from the corporate world and is reorganizing, reinventing, and reengineering all of the museums and bureaus with new vision, goals, and priorities for the year 2000 A. D. He did not plan to come lead the Smithsonian; in fact, he planned to retire from Fannie Mae, one of the largest lending institutions in the United States. Instead, the Smithsonian Board of Regents encouraged him to come and lead us for ten years.

In remarks to the staff in the Museum of American History just last week, Mr. Small advised us that life is often accidental and we should not become arrogant in our planning. I, in fact, did not plan to become the Manager of Preservation Services. Sometimes life has other plans for us and change is always just around the next corner. What we can plan is to be prepared for change and new opportunities. Somewhere in the middle of our sweeping reorganization, I came around a street corner on a trip to London, and noticed one of those beautiful black, Rolls Royce type cars parked on the street near a traffic sign that said--"changed priorities ahead." I thought, what a great philosophy! I cannot tell you what it meant to traffic in London, but I took a photo, framed it, and put in my office. It reminds me daily of where both the museum and I came from, where we are now, and where we are going.

Thank you.

Each Altogether Alone

Melodi B. Goff

An Associated Press headline from February 14, 2000, declared, "Scholars Seek New Image of God." A panel of seven individuals--five Christians, one Jew, and one Muslim--participated in a "God at 2000" conference at Oregon State University. I could not help but wryly note that Oregon was in the news on Sunday, the 13th, for the City of Portland's ruling that a Methodist church had to limit its worship attendance. Later in the week (Friday, I believe), Oregon was again in the Associated Press news for a church issue: a Presbyterian church was given zoning approval for holding services--exclusive of weddings and funerals.

Interesting as these articles may be, the condition of religion in Oregon is not my focus here. Nor is it so much those things said by the "God at 2000" conference organizer, Marcus Borg. Mr. Borg, however, was quoted as making one valid statement, which will be very important to what I wish to say here: "The whole point of religion is 'simply' to guide people to God, not to serve as an end in itself." This is true: man's religious drive is his impulse to seek God, to reach God . . . and man will stop at nothing--not even murder--in his attempts to satisfy that yearning.

Without reciting the entire article, I would like to point out a few of the comments made by the members of the interfaith panel. Harvard theologian Diana Eck "talked about the vast richness of Hindu imagery, with its multitude of faces for a single God, both masculine and feminine." She noted that there "already are in the United States more Muslims than Presbyterians and more Hindus than Episcopalians." But "none of us owns the universe of faith" she said.

Karen Armstrong, a former nun from Great Britain, noted church attendance in Britain is six percent of the population and said she "finds herself unable to pray, even though she has drawn together elements of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to fashion her own religious beliefs." Ms. Armstrong made her comments after Rabbi Kushner "likened religions to mountain guides. Different religions offer different equipment and different paths to God at the mountaintop, but even-

tually ‘they all get to the same place.’” “The problem,” he said to laughter, “comes when they argue about what to wear.”

The idea that all *religions* are of equal value is correct. But it is a null value. Borg was correct in saying that the purpose of religion is for man to reach God. What these scholars, and many “good religious folk,” have failed to comprehend is that the Christian faith is NOT a religion. The star of Bethlehem did not point to the heavens, but to a trough in a stable. Jesus Christ did not spend his three years preaching “inner peace” or “nine steps to holiness”—he spoke of earthly things, of personal relationships and private prayer. Our Lord did not die on the cross so that mankind could have another religious symbol, but so that we could know his great love for us.

That same Jesus conquered death and arose from the grave, not as some spiritual entity or force, but as a man who could be seen and touched. Christ is not the founder of one of the world’s great religions, even of the greatest religion: he is “God with us.” He is THE WAY—and that way is anti-religious. Humanity’s pitiful, ridiculous attempts to find God with its own understanding are hopelessly doomed from the start. Jesus Christ came to man, because man is utterly unable to reach God.

What do we mean when we say “God?” The Creator, the Almighty—these are terms to indicate That Which We Cannot Know. God is beyond human comprehension. Our minds are too weak and small and finite to comprehend the infinite and Eternal. “God” is a boundary term—it designates the limits of human understanding. We cannot get our minds “around” the concept of God, to understand God. We are told as much in the scriptures: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Is. 55:8).

Scholars seek a new image of God? Yes, because the human understanding of some things has changed. We try (pointlessly) to identify what human understanding cannot know. Such nonsense results in absurd statements of dualism such as this one made by Borg: “The true essence of God...was more a duality – a distant and transcendent force that encompasses the universe while simultaneously dwelling inside each person, immanent in each living thing, tying them all together.” Logical contradictions like this one are normal and perhaps inevitable elements of man’s attempt to “make sense of” God. Don’t we all tend to babble nonsense when we try to explain what we don’t understand? But the Good News, the Gospel message, is that Jesus Christ came to save us – if we just recognize our sin and failure, and confess that all our most noble and pious and devote religious efforts amount to nothing. Howsoever faulty our comprehension of God, he has made manifest his love through his Son. And suddenly we have terms we can un-

derstand, concepts that are familiar and allow us to know how we should live this life. We still do not understand God, for we are and always will be human. But through Christ we can call him Father.

Father. Those of us who are now parents, or who are at least now grown, can understand this. Remember when you were a child, and you thought your parents were indestructible entities of all knowledge, power, and wealth? Remember also how you couldn't understand how such magnificent beings could at the same time be so completely unfair, harsh, and demanding? As a child, you could not understand--could not get your mind around--the concept of being grown up. Didn't you think you'd never be that old? Days lasted forever and weeks were eternal?

Well, now you have grown up and you see parents from a different perspective--you can relate to them as equals, you can understand. But the corollary doesn't go that far with God the Father. We will not "grow-up" into gods, no matter how many years we live on this earth or in the timeless Ever-after. We are given hints that perhaps, in the life to come, our understanding will be complete: "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face," (I. Cor. 13:12). And that is a marvelous thing to think on--to know, even as we are known. (Although the thought is not altogether without sadness, if we think back on childhood and see now how we misunderstood our earthly fathers, and wonder just how poorly we've grasped even the most basic commands of our heavenly Father).

But that knowing is not now, that is not for this life. For this earthly existence, we have Christ. We have his teachings, his promises, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. That is the essence of Christian faith: that Jesus Christ was born a man and was crucified, died, and rose again. He is God--God as we can understand him, God with us, God among us and for us.

And just as I believe that it is human nature to try to reach God through religion, I believe it is that same human nature that drives the popular inclusiveness found in today's modern intellectual religious circles. Why? Maybe because most people are social creatures--we want to belong, to be a part of something bigger than we are; and we want all humans to belong to the same group, to feel the safety of numbers and like condition, to "be in this all together." And that desire reflects a basic truth: we are all "in this" together, if by "this" we mean the lost, sinful human condition.

The popular religious emphasis misguides, however, by omitting this: Christ is The Way out; the Way out is an individual, and must be taken individually. The gate is narrow, the path hard, and we enter and walk alone. Nobody is saved as part of a group. Our salvation is a

most personal matter, worked out in the utter seclusion of our own hearts, with no one else but Christ. Others can testify to their experience with Christ, yet no one but Christ brings salvation to a person. Nor can any person tell another what Christ would have them do.

Paul used the imagery of a race to talk about the Christian faith, and his choice was good. As Christians, we are not part of a mountain expedition trying to reach the great god at the mountain peak, but we are marathon runners, endurance racers who have their eyes on the goal of completing the race well. And marathons are not relay races or a team sport event--everyone must run alone, each and every step of the way. We don't have cheering fans to inspire us; we don't have teammates who will pick up our slack, if we falter. Yes, there are other runners, individuals of like mind who have also entered this marathon and who understand what we suffer and what we rejoice, but they cannot run for us. They may at times run alongside us, and we can feel encouraged from their companionship. But we all run alone.

It is that understanding that I believe the world--religious or not--needs to hear: we are, all of us, each utterly alone in our salvation. It is an awful loneliness at times, a burden and responsibility that most people shudder at and try to shoulder away from. We want someone to tell us just exactly what we have to do, preferably what group we must belong to or what activities we must participate in, to earn or win or be accepted for salvation -- to find a way to God. We do not want to be responsible for ourselves; we do not want to be alone accountable for our souls.

But the awful truth is that salvation comes through Christ alone when we are alone with Christ. We gather on Sundays to encourage one another and worship together--a weekly "running alongside," as it were. Throughout the week we may interact with one another--helping with the cares of this world, listening to the breathless panting of those needing a second wind, and sharing amazement when the second wind comes--but never do we save another, never can we take from another the burden of their salvation. Other burdens we can share, and should as much as possible; but in the matter of salvation each person is answerable only for the self. Each must stand alone to account for his or her life to Christ Jesus the Son, in whom alone is our hope and salvation. "Who with me my burden shares? None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee!"

Jesus Loves Me This I Know, “*For the Bible tells me so . . .*”

Dedicated to the memory of my Grandfather, Dr. Herbert J. Miles, who was Professor of Sociology at Carson-Newman College for 19 years (1953-1972).

Nathan K. Miles

I believe that every person has a spiritual void in his or her life. Before I became a Christian, this void in my life was expressed with sincere questions originating deep within my soul. One of my main questions was “What happens when I die?” According to the Bible, I was a sinner (Romans 3:23) who was destined for an eternity apart from God (Romans 6:23). According to the Bible, my sins could be forgiven through the substitutionary death of Jesus (Romans 3:22). I wanted desperately to believe these claims because they sufficiently answered all of my spiritual questions.

However, I had a major problem: I doubted the Bible. I didn’t have any problem believing that Jesus was the Son of God or that God would forgive my sins, if I could only be assured that the Bible was telling me the truth. Without this assurance, my spiritual questions would *never* have solid answers. I thought, “What if the Bible is not true?” or “What if someone just made it all up?” “How would I ever know if the claims in the Bible are true?”

If the Bible were not true, I would have been left in a hopeless situation to guess at my eternal destiny. Fortunately, God’s faithfulness to me was greater than my doubts; and the truth of the Bible was still true despite my doubts. In desperation, I prayed, “God, if you are there, please forgive me for my sins. Come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior.” ***At that moment I knew undoubtedly that my salvation through Jesus was as certain as the validity of the Bible.***

I have learned over time through a combination of Bible study, prayer, and affirmations of the Holy Spirit in life situations, that the Bible is undoubtedly true. I have learned that the Bible is God’s revela-

tion of absolute truth to man for the purpose of salvation and “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV). I now know without any doubt what happens when a person dies and what is required to spend eternity with God. Knowing this truth gives rest to my mind, peace to my soul, and freedom to my life. The Bible, divinely inspired by God, sufficiently answers my spiritual questions. *The Baptist Faith and Message* describes the Bible accurately when it says:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter...” (*The Baptist Faith and Message*, 1963).

We live in a world today that is hostile to truth, proclaiming a philosophy of relativism. We are told that absolutes do not exist. When biblical truth is proclaimed, accusations of intolerance and hate are returned. We live in a world today that prefers to view “truth” as a matter of perspective. Right and wrong are often determined by the situation rather than by biblical principles. Some Christians have decided that it is impossible to understand God’s message to us with any certainty. Some have even decided that the Bible is not the truth of God. ***It is important that Christians know they do not have to doubt God’s Word.***

When I first placed my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I was not yet at a point where I had removed all of the doubts from my mind as to the validity of Scripture and was searching for assurance of the Bible’s truth. As I started my Christian journey, I asked God to remove my doubts. As I grew as a Christian, the Lord began to work in my life in numerous ways. I was experiencing the fulfillment of God’s promises to me in the Bible. I was astounded to see how the Lord always answered my prayers.

I grew to understand that these wonderful expressions of the Holy Spirit in my life were always based on biblical truth and never disagreed with the Holy Scriptures. I learned that the Bible is a completely reliable source for my spiritual guidance. The perfect agreement between the Scripture and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in my life showed me that the Bible really was the truth of God. It was God’s Word working in my life that removed *all* of my doubts completely.

My purpose in writing this essay is to explain how Christians may be assured that the Bible is the revealed truth of God and a reliable source of knowledge that we may turn to for answers to our spiritual questions. In this essay, I will (1) explain the relationship between ob-

jective and subjective knowledge in specific regard to Scripture, (2) list several examples from the Bible that claim itself to be truth from God, (3) describe how a person can be assured that the Bible is true, and (4) show the premises and end-results of philosophy that claims “no scriptural absolutes.”

Objective Knowledge and Subjective Knowledge

It is important that Christians understand the difference between objective and subjective knowledge because: (1) It is the combination of these two types of knowledge that can remove doubt that God’s word is true and (2) a philosophy of “no absolutes” confuses and misuses these two types of knowledge.

When we say that knowledge is objective, we are saying that we have an object of reference by which we have our knowledge. Objective knowledge is based on an object that exists independently of man’s perception. What the Bible says is objective. The Bible is the source (or object) of our Christian knowledge.

When we say that knowledge is subjective, we are referring to knowledge based on feelings, experiences, or beliefs. The Holy Spirit’s working in a Christian’s life is subjective. What we think the Bible says is subjective.

To know for certain that the Bible is the Word of God, a Christian must first treat the Bible correctly. He must understand that what the Bible says is objective and what we believe about the Bible is subjective. Christians must understand that faith in God should not be completely subjective, based only on our feelings, experiences, or beliefs. Rather, Christian faith should be balanced with knowledge of Jesus Christ, as He is objectively revealed in the Bible.

Noting that it is important to affirm the objective character of God’s revelation, Dr. Ronald Nash points out in *The Word of God and The Mind of Man* that “the basic error of religious subjectivists is that they confuse the proclamation or delivery of truth with the reception of truth.”¹

Christians who do not accept objective biblical truth inherently treat the Bible with complete subjectivity, opening themselves up to accepting *anything* as truth (based on their own subjective reason-

¹ Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and The Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 53.

ing). Biblical knowledge is treated as nothing more than mental perceptions. The words in the Bible are treated as having no meaning apart from a thinking mind. In other words, the Scriptures are not true in and of themselves. Rather, the Scriptures *become* “true” as a person gains understanding through a completely subjective “faith-encounter.” This view is known as *neoorthodoxy*. The neoorthodox view is contrary to both biblical teaching and *common sense*. Those who have read the Bible know that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NIV) and that “God . . . gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish” (John 3:16, NIV). These claims are objectively made, and the validity of these claims is not dependent on a person’s understanding or acceptance of them. In *The Evangelical Dilemma*, Dr. Herbert J. Miles asks:

Since the neoorthodox teach that sinners do not get knowledge or information about their lost condition from the Bible prior to conversion, **from where do they receive it?** Does God “stuff” it into sinners in the encounter experience? . . . **How can sinners respond to an encounter with Christ** when they have no knowledge from which to respond? . . . Where do the neoorthodox get their information about what God can or cannot do? It certainly does not come from the Scriptures. How can the Bible not be the Word of God before the encounter and then become the Word of God immediately after the encounter?²

Dr. Miles also points out that denying objective knowledge is unscientific. He explains that:

Thousands of scientists, evangelicals and otherwise, know that the objects they deal with in research are real objects composed of ‘real’ stuff-- molecules, atoms, protons, and electrons. Whenever a scientist says that things (roses, trees, rocks, and ink on paper) are not real but are perceptions of a thinking mind, he has moved into the realm of philosophy and has ceased to be a scientist. Evangelicals [who accept objective biblical truth] are happy to have scientists on their side . . . the message of God to sinful man is contained in the letters, words, and sentences of printed ink on the paper of the leaves of the Bible. That message is real. We do not cre-

² Herbert J. Miles, *The Evangelical Dilemma* (Dallas, Texas: Criterion Publications, 1987), 43.

ate the message or change it in any way by reading it, knowing it, or experiencing it.”³

Christian faith should be based on both objective biblical revelation and the subjective workings of the Holy Spirit in our heart and life. Dr. Nash notes:

The two modes of revelation complement each other. To experience genuine encounter [with God] requires information about God and about human need for God. In order to distinguish genuine encounter from the ever-present threat of religious experience, we need information about God. We need information about how to manifest love for God. And we need divinely given interpretations of God’s mighty acts in history if we are to penetrate beyond a historical enigma to the truth.⁴

The Bible Speaks for Itself

The Bible contains numerous Scriptures that claim divine inspiration by God. These Scriptures are objective knowledge. There is *no question* that Jesus Himself and the authors of the Bible believed the Scriptures to be the very Word of God. Listed below are only a few examples of such Scriptures.

Jesus treated the Scriptures as authoritative truth from God. “The Scriptures” that Jesus referred to was the Old Testament. His high regard for Scripture is clearly seen in Matthew 5:17-18.

17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

18. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (NIV)

Other verses that indicate Jesus was thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures and regarded them as the ultimate authority include Matthew 4:1-11, Matthew 24:35, Mark 12:24-27, John 10:35, and John 17:17.

³ Herbert J. Miles, *The Evangelical Dilemma*, 63-4.

⁴ Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and The Mind of Man*, 47.

Paul considered the Scriptures authoritative truth from God. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul writes to Timothy:

- 16. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,
- 17. so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NIV)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul wrote:

- 13. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (NIV)

Paul's writings were not treated as a mere human message, but as words from God.

Peter affirmed the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter assures his readers of the divine origin and trustworthiness of the Scriptures:

- 20. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.
- 21. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (NIV)

Many other verses also testify to the truth of Scripture including Psalm 19:7, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 40:8, Ephesians 3:4-5, and Hebrews 4:12.

Nowhere in the Old or New Testament does any human author even hint that they distrusted the Scripture or considered any part as being unreliable. They treated the Scriptures as the very Word of God. Billy Graham explains in his book *The Holy Spirit* that:

Hundreds of times the Bible uses phrases like "God said," or "The word of the Lord came unto me saying." It is also interesting that Jesus never once told us to doubt the difficult passages of the Old Testament Scriptures. For example, He accepted as fact, not fiction, the stories of Jonah and the fish, Noah and the Ark, and the creation of Adam and Eve. If these stories had not been literally true, He surely would have told us so. But time after time Jesus (and the New Testament writers) quoted the Scriptures as authoritative and as the very Word of God. . . . To reject the authority of either the Old Testament or the New Testament is to reject the au-

thority of Christ. It is supremely because we are determined to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord that we submit to the authority of Scripture. . . . Submission to Scripture is fundamental for every day living, for without it Christian discipleship, Christian integrity, Christian freedom, and Christian witness are all seriously damaged if not actually destroyed.⁵

How can a person know for certain that the
Bible is the truth of God?

A person can know for certain that the Bible is the truth of God by (1) letting the Scriptures objectively speak for themselves AND (2) by letting the Holy Spirit subjectively confirm in our hearts through His working in our life that the Scriptures are God's truth. The *combination* of these two revelations in a person's life can bring assurance that the Bible is the truth of God.

This assurance can be difficult to find for someone who has allowed his mind to be filled with a "no absolutes" philosophy. I would encourage anyone who is in doubt of God's Word to honestly evaluate the Bible to see if it holds true to its claims. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (NIV).

First, a person must clear his mind of all bias against the Scriptures and ask the Lord for His wisdom (James 1:5-6). This is easier said than done, because persons must let go of their pride to honestly approach the Bible with an open mind. Next, they should regularly read and study the Bible, praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Since the Holy Spirit divinely inspired the Bible, it must be read and understood through His leadership (John 16:13-14).

As we read the Scriptures, we must respond obediently to conviction from the Holy Spirit concerning sin in our life (Luke 11:28). In doing this, we give our doubting heart to God and rely on His faithfulness (Romans 3:3-4). In time, we will begin to see God's promises fulfilled. We will begin to experience true love, joy, peace, etc. that the Holy Spirit brings to our lives through the truth of Scripture. We will begin to see prayers answered. ***It is in these subjective experiences, based on the objective Word of God, that we can know for certain that God's Word is true (Romans 8:16).*** The chorus of the hymn "**He Lives**" states it well when it says, "*You ask me how I know He lives,*

⁵ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco, Texas: Word Books), 43-4.

He lives within my heart."⁶ The words to "**Jesus Loves Me**" also state it well: "*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*"⁷

Premises of a "no absolutes" philosophy

The Christian who has accepted a philosophy of "no scriptural absolutes" has replaced the authority from God's Word (objective Christian knowledge) with something deemed more authoritative (subjective reasoning). Instead of man's reasoning conforming to the truth of the Bible, the truth of the Bible is changed to conform to man's reasoning. Dr. Miles writes:

I cannot understand why some moderates play down the concept of 'absolutes.' If they do not recognize God as revealed in Christ and the Scriptures as absolute, then they have to fall back on their own ideas, their own minds to determine what is absolute, if there be absolutes. Therefore, in reality they are assuming that their own ideas and interpretations are final--that is, absolute.⁸

The non-absolutist elevates his own reasoning and understanding above God's authority. This is known as *humanism*. Humanism relies on man's understanding and wisdom instead of God for final authority. No matter how many religious words may be used to dress up the philosophy of "no absolutes," it is still humanism, which is hostile to biblical authority.

Philosophy that attempts to redefine truth as something abstract and unknowable is based on the same premises and beliefs of liberal philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Soren Kierkegaard. Kant was a skeptic who believed that God has not spoken to mankind through knowledge (biblical revelation) and cannot do so. Following Kant's ideas, Schleiermacher believed that God cannot be known through biblical knowledge, but only through experience.

⁶ Alfred H. Ackley, *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1991), 533.

⁷ Anna B. Warner, *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1991), 344.

⁸ Herbert J. Miles, *The Evangelical Dilemma*, 58.

Nietzsche was an atheist who promoted the idea that all truth is relative. Kierkegaard believed that man was too finite to understand truth from an infinite God and that God was limited in His ability to communicate to man through words and phrases in the Scriptures. Kierkegaard emphasized a “faith-encounter” with the Holy Spirit, but neglected the Scriptures that told us about the Holy Spirit in the first place.⁹ ***Christians should realize that those who claim “no scriptural absolutes” are relying on these humanistic premises in their attempt to discredit the Holy Scriptures.***

The end-results of a “no absolutes” philosophy

Aside from the fact that the statement, “There are no absolutes” is a logical contradiction (this statement is asserting an absolute), there are many other weaknesses and unfortunate end-results that should be pointed out. Basing one’s life on a philosophy of “no absolutes” leads to the following:

A weak view of sin

One of the main characteristics of a “no absolutes” philosophy is a weak view of sin. This makes sense because, without absolute truth, there is no clear definition of sin. Consequently, things the Bible says are sinful become accepted. For example, homosexuality becomes “diversity,” “sexual orientation,” or an “alternative lifestyle.” Abortion becomes “a woman’s right to choose” or “reproductive rights.” Since man’s reason is treated as the final authority, moral decisions are often made on what is the most practical, the most efficient, the most pleasing, or other worldly reasons (as opposed to the moral standards God gives us in the Bible). Romans 1:25-28 tells us that, “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie . . . since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (NIV).

⁹Herbert J. Miles gives an excellent analysis of these philosophers and their influence on neoorthodox beliefs in Chapter 5 of *The Evangelical Dilemma* (Dallas, Texas: Criterion Publications, 1987).

A negative presupposition towards Scripture

Since non-absolutists presuppose that the Bible is not true, they approach the Bible with a negative, skeptical attitude. Honest, thorough Bible study is often replaced with a biased attempt to discredit the Scriptures. Higher Criticism, which studies the historical and literary context of the Scriptures, has made a great contribution towards understanding the background of the Scriptures. However, Higher Criticism is often misused by non-absolutists as a tool to search for “errors” in the Bible. Non-absolutists have misused Higher Criticism to claim that biblical accounts (such as the Creation and the Flood) did not really happen, but are myths.

Some question many of the traditionally accepted biblical authors and dates of authorship. Some have suggested that the miracles of the Old Testament are Hebrew folklore and legend. Some believe the miracles of Jesus to be pagan miracle stories. Some extremists even question the biblical teachings of the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Second Coming. Non-absolutists delight in pointing out alleged biblical errors and often accuse those who challenge their methods of being uneducated, unwilling to learn, or reluctant to view things from a different perspective. Dr. Miles writes that,

Many evangelicals are deeply concerned about how the theology of some laypeople has been corrupted by the theories of higher criticism. . . . In general, higher critics have been rough and merciless as they have ripped and torn asunder the holy and sacred teaching of the Word of God.¹⁰

James 1:5-8 reminds us that, in our desire to know God and His Word, we must not begin with a skeptical, doubting attitude.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does (NIV).

¹⁰ Herbert J. Miles, *The Evangelical Dilemma*, 49-50.

Hostility towards those who accept biblical truth

Non-absolutists are irritated when someone asserts the existence of biblical truth. They accuse those who believe in biblical truth of being arrogant. They accuse those who take biblical stands on moral issues of being judgmental. They accuse those who teach sound biblical teaching of being guilty of indoctrination. They claim “academic freedom” as an excuse to impose doctrine on students that is contrary to God’s Word. They view doctrinal confessions of faith, such as *The Baptist Faith and Message*, as creedal. They accuse those who believe in biblical truth of “worshipping the Bible.”¹¹ These reactions are not surprising since Romans 8:7 tells us, “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (NIV).

A never-ending search for truth

Inherent in a philosophy of “no-absolutes” is a continual search for “truth” (because nothing absolute is ever found). Non-absolutists pride themselves in being open-minded, proclaiming academic freedom, and continually accumulating knowledge. Although these traits are admirable, they are of little value when no absolute truth is ever identified. Many non-absolutists deceive themselves into thinking that truth actually lies within the search itself. This is a self-defeating lie. My prayer is that anyone who falls into this category would end their frustration by honestly and desperately opening their minds to the unchanging truth of Scripture. In John 8:32, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (NIV).

A desire to argue rather than answer spiritual questions

1 Timothy 6:3-4 says: “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching . . . he has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words . . .” (NIV).

¹¹Herbert J. Miles provides a thorough examination of common accusations made by non-absolutists including arguments surrounding academic freedom, creeds, and “bibliolatry” in Chapter 9 of *The Evangelical Dilemma* (Dallas, Texas: Criterion Publications, 1987).

Spiritual uncertainty

A philosophy of “no absolutes” provides no concrete answers to spiritual questions such as, “What happens when I die?” and “How can I be saved?” It will not bring rest to the mind or peace to the soul. It has no foundation capable of withstanding the trials of life. Simply put, a philosophy of “no-absolutes” just does not work. It is my prayer that non-absolutists would face these serious questions and honestly open themselves up to the truth of Scripture instead of being like the man Jesus described in Matthew 7:24-27, who built his house on the sand. When the storm came, his house fell with a great crash because it had an insufficient foundation. If, however, we choose to build our house on the rock by basing our life on God’s Word, we will stand through the storm because our foundation is completely sufficient and reliable for spiritual guidance.

Causes others to stumble

A philosophy of “no absolutes” is deceptive and confusing to someone who is honestly searching for answers to spiritual questions. In Matthew 18:6-7, Jesus warns those who cause “one of these little ones who believe in me to sin. . . . Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!” (NIV).

Conclusion

I have written this essay to emphasize, as Dr. Miles wrote, that “the Bible, in words, phrases, and propositions written on its pages, does contain objective information from God to mankind about His self-revelation in Christ.”¹² My prayer is that Christians would analyze their approach to the Bible and their relationship to God to see if they truly have solid answers to their spiritual questions. “What happens when I die?” “How can I be saved?” “How can I know what my purpose is in life?” “How can I have peace and joy in my life?” If someone does not have solid answers to these important questions, my prayer is that they will accept the truth of God’s Word, which tells them of Jesus, His love, forgiveness, and purpose for our life. ***Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.***

¹² Herbert J. Miles, *The Evangelical Dilemma*, 65.

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In Defense of the American Educational System

Wendy Trundle and Don H. Olive

A major issue in the United States is the condition of the country's educational system. Many argue that our students do not receive a quality education, especially when compared with other countries. This view is not new. The argument intensified in 1983, however, with the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's findings on the American educational system. Since then, excellence in education has been a major issue in every presidential race, a topic frequently seen in the press, and a concern in the back of many parents' minds.

We shall make several counter-points to these all-to-common and mistaken criticisms of the American education. Focus will be directed to the Japanese education system, because America is often unfairly compared with Japan in terms of education. While room for improvement in our education practices definitely exists, the United States is much better off than the public is led to believe.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education set out to "examine the quality of education in the United States and make a report to the nation" (Wallinger 81). The committee examined the amount of time students actually spent on academic subjects, the strictness of graduation requirements, and the quality of teacher preparation (80). Its findings, titled "A Nation at Risk," reported that students did not spend a significant amount of time on academic subjects when compared with other countries. Students were allowed to graduate without knowledge of subjects considered important to success in life.

This study served to do two things: it alerted the nation to the problems with its schools, and it set in motion improvements to the system. More than fifteen years later, however, the public still criticizes the schools without realizing that many of the recommended improvements have actually served their purpose; the system and our students have significantly improved. Since the release of "A Nation at Risk" high school drop-out rates have declined, college attendance has risen,

and more high school students have been enrolling in Advanced Placement courses (Allen par. 5).

The media is responsible for a part of the public's failure to recognize the significant changes and resultant quality of the United States' educational system. Daily newspapers with large national audiences seldom print articles praising the American educational system (Wallinger 81). In addition, many of the published studies only focus on math and science. In 1995, Sandia National Laboratories conducted a study of thousands of students in thirty countries. The United States was ranked number two in reading, surpassed only by Finland. Only USA Today covered the story with a small article (Hodgkinson 620).

The United States believes in "equal access to education for all children, regardless of background differences" (Wallinger 83). We are the only country in the world that does not discriminate in providing education and that makes attempts at universal education for children. Other countries only educate a small percentage of their school-age children to the level to which we strive (84). This is notably true of the Japanese system. The United States has set a goal of high school completion for all students. In Japan, education is compulsory only up to the ninth grade (Watanabe 33).

Many reasons are circulated as to why the United States' schools are failing. Opponents of our system claim that we are the "only country in the world whose students fall farther behind the longer they stay in school" (Allen par. 7). These are quick to point out that American students consistently rank poorly on tests when compared to students in other countries. The longer the students are in school the lower the test scores are when compared with other countries. Our elementary students compare well; however, the scores fall farther behind in middle and high school testing. These same opponents point out that our Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have fallen. While these data are in general correct, the conclusion that the American school system is in fatal decline is incorrect.

The raw test scores do not show that American schools are cheating students out of a quality education. Instead, they give evidence of the fact that America is encouraging students to learn and to complete their education to a level beyond that of most major nations. The kindergarten through twelfth grades that we know today were created to serve all students for thirteen years and not weed students out when it becomes apparent that they are not in the higher percentiles in learning (Kirst 614). This lack of selectivity has resulted in more students staying in American schools until they graduate from high school than in other countries.

In Japan and China students are weeded out when it becomes apparent that they are not as successful as their classmates are. In many European countries, the slowest students are transferred to vocational schools, which, of course, are not included in the testing. Obviously, American students are going to have lower test scores when compared with the higher-grade students in other countries. By that time, many other school systems have selected the students who will continue in education. Obviously these more capable students will have higher scores. All levels of ability in America are being compared to only the higher levels of ability in the countries noted.

On the surface, the raw scores for the SAT, a common pre-college test, show a decline in the knowledge of students since the inception of the test. Again, critics do not either have or give all of the facts. The accepted SAT score was set in 1941, by an elite group of test-takers (Wallinger 82). At that time the students taking the test were northeastern white males who were going to attend Ivy League colleges.

Since that time the test-taking pool has changed drastically. It has increased in size, and more minorities are taking it. As the greater number of students remaining in school causes the scores to drop, the greater number of students taking the test will also cause the scores to decline. The states with the highest proportion of students taking the test had the lowest scores (Rotberg 297). To take the SAT one is no longer required to be in the higher percentiles of students. More students in the lower sixty- percent of their classes are taking the SAT (Freeman 2). This understanding of the decline in raw scores is further supported by the fact that if the scores of a control group of students such as those in 1941 are examined, the scores have in fact risen thirty points (Wallinger 82).

That the quality of the United States' educational system is actually improving is evidenced by the fact that more students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses than ever before. Scores on tests taken in these areas are not falling. They are steadily rising, showing that above-average students are doing better than ever before. In fact, the scores are rising so much that some colleges are reconsidering allowing credit for a score of three on these tests (Bracey, "Eighth" 116).

While critics are quick to claim that the United States does not compare well with international education standards, signs are that we have some of the best schools in the world. Even a casual observer will note the large number of international students coming to the United States to be educated, including a large percentage of students from our "rival" system of Japan (Stevenson 20). In addition, the United States is leading in many technical fields, including patents, medical research,

and space exploration (Wallinger 83). We produce more science and technology publications than any other country. Forty-percent of all research articles in the world are published by American scholars (Hodgkinson 622). No other nation publishes more than seven percent.

Many critics of the United States point to higher scores from international student tests. But the criticism is often misplaced, for the results are not comparable as they stand. An in-depth look behind the testing factors is also needed in order to compare the tested students. In America students know that their test scores in most instances will have no impact on their self-esteem or educational futures. In other countries, however, students consider scoring well a show of honor for their country (Wallinger 83). Such different mindsets, by all accounts, affect the amount of effort put into the tests and thus the test scores themselves.

Most standardized tests focus on mathematics and science. American students tend to do well on reading-related subjects (Wallinger 83). In earlier tests, the United States' students did just as well as students of Asian countries on reading and vocabulary (Bracey, "International" 8). However, the test makers and givers dropped these subjects from future research because math and science are easier to standardize. One other often quoted test is the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) given in 1987 (5). In this study, the United States ranked twelve of twenty in algebra, fourteen out of fifteen in advanced algebra, and twelve of fifteen in geometry and calculus.

But again careful attention to the scoring reveals that raw comparisons cannot be made. Often the tested students are not taught the same material at the same level. On a test that includes geometry, given to thirteen year-olds, American students cannot be expected to do well, because they are not usually taught geometry until age fifteen. And the average American student is not taught algebra until high school (6). In other countries virtually all of the already selected students take calculus classes. In the United States only one-fifth of students take a calculus course during high school (Rotberg 298). Obviously, our students should not be criticized for failing to do well on subjects they have not been taught. Students in other countries are required to take the courses earlier because they are not expected to stay in school until they graduate (Berliner 638). Because our students are not allowed to drop out at a young age, the United States can afford to teach subjects later, when students have a greater ability to understand the concepts.

In 1995, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) was given to fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades (*Highlights from TIMSS 1*). TIMSS tested a half million students in forty-one

nations. On the fourth grade level, American students scored above the international average, beaten by seven countries in math and only one in science (2). The number of topics in United States' math texts was above the international average (3). On the eighth grade level, American students scored above average in science and below average in math, but, again, because they had not studied the tested algebra (4).

On the twelfth grade level the scores drop, causing critics to charge that the longer our students are in school, the farther they fall behind. Students scored below average in both subjects. However, at this level in other countries, below average students have already dropped out or have been sent to a vocational school. In the United States, no student was exempt from the test. Our high number of students on the twelfth grade level is one significant reason for the low test scores. However, American AP calculus students scored well above the international average when compared with advanced students in other countries (9).

When discussing the educational system in America, comparisons are often made with the system in Japan without taking into account differing theories of education. It is with this difference that all comparisons must begin. America seeks to provide an education to all, without discrimination based on ability. The Japanese believe in "equal education;" every student receives the same education, regardless of ability or disability (Goya 126). Their system is based on trivalent personal qualities: motivation, discipline, and competitiveness (DeVito 22). Because of these differences in theory and design, the United States and Japan are guaranteed to have differences throughout their educational systems.

The media often portray the Japanese as excelling in learning. Their successes are promoted as examples America should follow (Goya 126). However, the media are not doing their duty to the public by presenting only some of the facts. The Japanese curriculum is of higher difficulty than that of the United States; this is not argued. However, the media do not present the fact that while "the curriculum in Japan is demanding, achievement on that curriculum is low" (Bracey, "International" 7). The Japanese government is very strict about which of their schools can be observed; the press is often given access to only those schools the government selects. Obviously, these are going to be the most successful schools.

Furthermore, the Japanese "successful" educational system has a truly dark side. As mentioned earlier, the educational system in Japan is based on the theory of equal education for all. There are no gifted education programs and no remedial programs. All students receive the same education, regardless of ability, temperament, and styles

of learning (Goya 128). While the successful Japanese students do have high test scores, independent creative thinking is discouraged in Japanese students (DeVito 22). Conformity is stressed. In contrast, "American students are some of the most creative and spontaneous children in the world" (Berliner 638). This fact is well known and envied by the world. Asian ministers of education have begun to appoint committees to find ways to foster more creativity in their students (Stevenson 19).

In theory, instilling discipline in students is desirable; and Japan has succeeded. Indeed, in academic pursuits discipline is encouraged more than ability (DeVito 22). It begins early; elementary school teachers assign large amounts of homework and these young students often study with their parents or hired tutors. Such discipline is part and parcel of the Confucian philosophy that prevails in Japanese thinking. This philosophy includes much respect for teachers (Young 132).

This discipline and respect are often, however, taken too far. While corporal punishment is formally against the law in Japan, this law is not enforced. Corporal punishment is reported to be harshly practiced (130). There have been many cases where students have been severely injured for speaking out of turn or not doing homework. In addition to student injury, parents who complain about harsh punishment are told it is their fault for not raising the child properly (131). The school informs the local parent-teacher organization and the parents are ostracized from the group.

The Japanese claim that this early discipline helps their students to succeed later on in school. It is true that a high level of personal discipline is necessary to pass the college entrance examinations. However, a passing grade on these tests is not a measure of how well the student has been taught. "Many Japanese students are not educated; they are trained" (Young 130). High school education in Japan is based on memorization of facts. The concepts are memorized and not learned so that they can be put into practice. It has been found that many Japanese students do not actually understand what the teacher is talking about (Goya 126).

Three powerful forces shape a high school education in Japan: the national curriculum, a memorization-oriented instructional approach, and the importance of the university exam (Bracey, "Asian" 642). This extreme pressure to succeed on one test attempt causes many problems with students' self-esteem. They are so anxious toward the end of their senior year that they can not be quiet or sit still (642). Suicides are often an easy way out from the intense pressure to succeed.

Only thirty-eight percent of those who take the exams pass (642). However, virtually one hundred percent of students would fail the exams if they were taken on the basis of public school education

alone (Goya 128). The secret to education in Japan is the *juku* or “cram” school. They are “numerous, expensive, and indispensable to the Japanese system of education.” Many parents enroll their children by the time the children are in the first and second grades. Students attend these schools after the regular school hours for about three days a week. They review continually the material that will be on the exams. If a student fails the exam, they study on their own all day and attend a *juku* every night until they can take the exam again (Bracey, “Asian” 642).

The highly touted Japanese educational system perhaps works for the Japanese society. That it could be transplanted to the American society is highly unlikely. The American system has different goals and desires a different outcome. These differences must not be neglected in any fair evaluation of the American educational system. Pointing out differences in test scores of dissimilar groups is inadequate to establish the claim that American students continue to be at risk. What a correct reading must show is that the American educational system is still the envy of most nations in terms of its scope, its effectiveness, and its products. As Berliner notes, American students “go on to more challenging schooling at the college level in numbers that are the envy of the world” (638). We should be proud of our educational system and encourage our teachers and students.

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A Retirement Tribute

[Robert M. Shurden Retirement Dinner, April 30, 2000]

Sandra Shurden Rowcliffe

I can hardly believe I'm at a retirement dinner, for as long as I can remember, you've been a teacher or at least going to school to become one. In fact, one of my early childhood memories is of your walking across the stage in cap and gown to receive your doctorate and being so grateful that Mom wouldn't have to type anymore for a while.

I am one of the few in this room who can say that I've never heard a classroom lecture from Dr. Robert Shurden. However, I have heard several other lectures, all of them well deserved, I have now come to know, even if I didn't think so at the time I received them.

I am very fortunate in that even though I have never taken a course from you, I have been taught many life lessons from you, and it is a few of those that I wish to share.

You taught me how to ride my bike without training wheels. My saying, "Daddy, don't let go, don't let go!" as you ran alongside me. Your saying, "I won't let go, Sandy. I won't let go!" Eventually, of course, you let go. I now know it was much harder to let go knowing I would eventually fall than to keep holding tight to that seat. Well, I did learn to ride that bike. I also learned that some risks are worth taking.

You taught me that people should be judged for their character, not for the color of their skin; so, when the time came in third grade, and all the white boys were picking on one black boy, I took up for Roosevelt.

You always taught me that children are important people. So, when Charlotte and Bill Bruster wanted to go to a nice restaurant and leave their children and me with a sitter, you asked my preference. When I said, "No!" the Brusters and the Shurdens loaded up all the children and went to the Cross-Eyed Cricket instead. You always made me feel so important that when I said my prayers, after thanking God for my family and friends, I often thanked God also for me.

You taught me that teenagers are important and deserve to be respected. When you started to hug me as we walked into the TG&Y, and I said, "Dad, don't touch me!" you didn't touch me.

You taught me that women are strong and have an opinion by the way you listened to my mother and me. (Some people, including my husband, probably wish you had not taught me that lesson quite so well and that I didn't have such a strong opinion about certain things.)

My mom taught me the basics of how to drive a car, but you taught me how to be a defensive driver--always checking my mirrors for what lay ahead and what might be creeping up behind. You taught me how to change a flat tire when I hit a bump in the road. I could probably use a refresher course on this.

You taught me it's definitely OK to cry especially at events like this. On behalf of the Rowcliffe clan, let me say congratulations on a wonderful career. The teaching profession's loss is definitely our gain for, as you well know, Gary and I have provided for you four new pupils who will need answers to all the really tough questions. Recently, when I read the story of Moses and how he parted the waters to my oldest daughter, Eliza, she looked up and asked, "Mom, is this true or just a legend." After pondering this question, I very knowingly said, "You know, I think Bobob could probably answer that better than I." We love you, Bobob; and we are all very, very proud of you.

I love you, Dad.

Contributors

- D. Brian Austin, PhD (1995)—Associate Professor of Philosophy, Carson-Newman College
- David C. Dale, MD (BS, 1962)—Professor of Medicine and Dean of the University School of Medicine, University of Washington; Editor-in-Chief of *Scientific American Medicine*; Recipient of Distinguished Alumnus Award, Carson-Newman College
- F. Clark Denton, MBA (BS, 1992)—Representative for Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., Recipient of Outstanding Young Alumnus Award, Carson-Newman College
- Celia B. Ferguson, PhD (1999)—Assistant Professor of Counseling, Carson-Newman College
- Melodi B. Goff (BA, 1992)—Part-Time Instructor in Developmental Studies, Carson-Newman College
- Merrill M. Hawkins, Jr., PhD (1995)—Assistant Professor of Religion, Carson-Newman College
- Richard T. Hughes—Distinguished Professor of Religion, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California
- Bill J. Leonard—Dean of the Divinity School, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
- Nathan K. Miles (BA)—Computer Technician, Carson-Newman College
- Charles G. Moffat, PhD (1969)—Professor of History, Recipient of the 2000 Distinguished Faculty Award, Carson-Newman College
- Shawn O'Hare, PhD (1996)—Assistant Professor of English, Carson-Newman College

- Don H. Olive, PhD (1975)—Professor of Philosophy, Chair of Philosophy, and Dean of Humanities, Carson-Newman College
- Guy L. Osborne, PhD (1979)—Professor of Psychology and Chair of Psychology, Carson-Newman College
- Stephanie O. Robinson, PhD (1998)—Assistant Professor of Education and Chair of Education, Carson-Newman College
- Stanley E. Romanstein, PhD (BME, 1976)—Director of the Baltimore School for the Arts, Baltimore, Maryland; Recipient of Outstanding Professional Achievement Award, Carson-Newman College
- Sandra Shurden Rowcliffe—Daughter of Robert M. Shurden, Retired Professor of Religion, Carson-Newman College
- Wendy Trundle—Carson-Newman College Freshman Honors Student, Knoxville, TN
- Rebecca Van Cleave, PhD (1994)—Assistant Professor of Psychology, Carson-Newman College
- Joan M. Young (BS, 1977)—Manager of Preservation Services, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D. C.