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Secular Chaos or Christian Truth—The Educational Options

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Yale was recognized for its annual “Sex Week” on campus; an event started by students but now supported by Yale faculty members and administrators. Some of this year’s events were co-sponsored by Wicked Pictures, an “adult film company” that also provided one of its porn stars as a keynote speaker. The web site for the week is pornographic in itself—and that’s the point. Pornography is a big subject on college campuses today, not as a moral issue, but as a topic of academic “research.” That’s what won the tie for U.C. Santa Barbara. A student on that campus received accolades from administrators and professors for his thesis entitled, “Gay Men of Color in Porn.” According to the Collegiate Network’s press release, the presentation of this thesis “included showing clips from pornographic films and a lengthy discussion of how negative stereotypes of men of color in gay pornography adversely affects the men who watch it.” How’s that for missing the obvious?

What can explain the chaos on America’s elite college campuses? The undeniable fact is that education is in big trouble. Americans now lack any common conception of education in terms of its content or its process. The elite academic institutions of the nation have been taken hostage to the postmodern worldview and the educational system seems trapped in a web of confusion and politics. There is little hope for a secular recovery. The major institutions of higher education are now almost entirely captive to radical perspectives and the secular ideologies that compete for primacy on each campus. Though stalwart conservative professors continue to fight the good fight in these schools, they are outnumbered and outgunned.

This is a good time to remember that the Christian church has been the central patron of education in Western civilization. It was the church that developed the schools, established the medieval universities, and founded most of the great colleges and universities of this nation. The loss of so many great institutions should serve as a warning and an example—it will happen to any school that severs its commitments to Christian truth.

Far too many Christians neglect to pay attention to what is distinctively Christian about Christian education. In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” That powerful sentence represents the very heart of Christian education. Rather than conforming to the prevailing worldview of the secular culture, Christian education is to be transformative—demonstrating the power of God’s truth in human lives.

A true Christian education is like a light shining in the darkness. In a day when the prevailing secular culture is not even certain that truth exists, Christian education is established in the name and to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

Transcendent truth, truth revealed by the living God, is the basis of all true education. We affirm that God's truth is absolute, knowable, and unchanging. This very affirmation sets the Christian worldview apart from all others. Every worldview has a starting point for all thinking and certain propositions that frame all others. For Christianity, the existence of the self-revealing God, ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ, is the starting point for all other thoughts.

The modern academy is a circus of competing worldviews. Most of these highly secularized worldviews are of fairly recent vintage. Sadly, far too many Christians have succumbed to the spirit of the age and operate out of explicitly non-Christian worldviews. Claiming the name of Christ, they think and live out of a non-Christian frame of reference—often without even the slightest understanding of what they are doing. Like the fish in Aristotle's parable, they do not even know they are wet.

A true Christian education is not only established in the transcendent truth of God's Word, but encompasses a comprehensive Christian worldview. This worldview establishes reality in the eternal God who created the world, understands human beings as men and women made in God's image, understands human sinfulness as the most basic problem of human existence, and points to the redemption accomplished through Jesus Christ our Lord as the only means of recovery.

While secular worldviews attract the attention of so many in the academy, an authentically Christian education must take root among God's people. Christians must learn once again to be thinking disciples, constantly at work learning God's truth for God's glory.

This is no time for intellectual sloth or sloppiness. The secular world is hard at work, framing its secular worldviews and exercising an incalculable influence on the broader culture. Now is the time for vigorous Christian thinking, for the development of authentic Christian scholars who are able to confront the wisdom of the world. Generations to come will be shaped by the worldviews that prevail in this age. We dare not look on the battle of worldviews as mere spectators—we must enter the battle of ideas with both credibility and vigor.

The moral vacuum of the postmodern age is the direct result of an education that denies absolute truth and universal meaning. As C.S. Lewis once warned, such an educational system produces "men without chests." They lack the crucial faculty of moral reasoning that links facts to feelings. Lewis warned that a generation of "men without chests" would lead to the virtual abolition of humanity.

A quick look at so much of what is produced by "modern scholarship" proves Lewis' point. So much intellectual energy is committed to matters of virtually no consequence for peripheral issues of political correctness. The Christian worldview alone knows the unity of the good, the beautiful, and the true, refuses to separate fact from value, and insists that all truth finds its proper source and place in the one true and living God.

Without apology, we must stand for the total truthfulness of God's Word and for the comprehensive meaningfulness of the Christian worldview. Ultimately, the only alternative to the Christian worldview is secular anarchy and a descent into moral oblivion. Just ask the students pondering Sex Week at Yale.

