

False Worldviews in Christian Education

In her book *Total Truth* Nancy Randolph Pearcey describes her departure from Christianity as a young adult. Having just finished her senior year of high school during which she had rejected the Christian faith, she found herself seeking out books at a university to confirm her unbelief. She came across author Alan Watts who was key in introducing Eastern religions to the West in the 1960s. In his books he advocated universalism in combination with relativism. She writes,

Now, I had gone to church all my life (my parents made sure of that) and also attended Lutheran elementary school. Over the years, I had memorized hymns, Bible verses, the creeds, and the Lutheran Catechism, and I remain immensely grateful for that background. Yet I had never been trained in apologetics, or given tools for analyzing ideas, or taught to defend Christianity against competing “isms” – and so when I read Watt’s book, I was entranced. Through trips to the local bookstore, I brought home more of his books, along with works by Aldous Huxley...and Teilhard de Chardin (who offered a mystical spiritual evolution).

The only person who looked over my shoulder and offered a critical perspective was my troublesome older brother Karl, who was annoying enough to point out that the content of these books deviated far from orthodox Christianity. But of course that was precisely their appeal.¹

Confessional Lutherans know that challenges to Christian faith and knowledge will come from secular or heterodox institutions. Examples are endless. But what is less expected is how the same could occur at good Lutheran schools. It can and does. It can happen in the same way it does at secular schools – through the teaching of false worldviews and their assumptions.

The concept of worldview is closely related to and sometimes synonymous with the terms philosophy and religion. It is a set of presuppositions or assumptions to which one holds that helps organize one’s view of life. A worldview can be compared to a pair of glasses – when putting on different lenses of different strengths; one gets a different view of the world each time. The worldview a person “puts on” gives him a certain perspective; it is how one looks at life and the world. It determines how he thinks, what he believes about nature and the supernatural, what he values and to what extent, how he views issues like homosexuality, what he thinks sin is or if it even exists, whether or not truth can be known, who Jesus of Nazareth is (or was), where truth comes from, what the nature of man is like, what purpose reason serves, etc. In short, a worldview determines how one sees every aspect of life. Obviously, there is a biblical, or confessional Lutheran, worldview. Putting on biblical or Lutheran “glasses”, and keeping them on, would give a truly objective and realistic view of life overall.

HAVE LUTHERANS EVER DEALT WITH FALSE WORLDVIEWS?

Here is one example. The Lutheran Confessions refer to medieval scholasticism (or Sophistry) dozens of times, pointing out how it is responsible for distortions regarding the doctrines of original sin, justification, confession, repentance, the sacraments, as well

¹ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p. 124.

as advocating false notions about the invocation of saints and the mass. Scholasticism was nothing to sneeze at; it attacked the essence and foundation of the Christian faith. But who are the scholastics and where did they come from? They were men such as Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, and Gabriel Biel – all church theologians. They not only developed the theology of the church of the Middle Ages, but of the Roman Catholic Church right up until the time of Pope Benedict XVI.² Thomas Aquinas was the most esteemed of these “Schoolmen.”

Thomas was canonized by John XXII, 1323, and raised to the dignity of ‘doctor of the church,’ 1567. In 1879, Leo XIII, commended him as the corypheus and prince of all the Schoolmen... In 1880 this pope pronounced him the patron of the Catholic schools. In the teachings of Thomas Aquinas we have, with one or two exceptions, the doctrinal tenets of the Latin Church in their perfect exposition as we have them in the Decrees of the council of Trent in their final statement.³

But scholasticism was not merely a theology (as if any theology is *merely a theology*), but a worldview. It was not only religiously but also philosophically based.

It was the aim of the Schoolmen to accomplish two things, – to reconcile dogma and reason, and to arrange the doctrines of the Church in an orderly system... They were the knights of theology, its Godfreys and Tancreds. Philosophy with them was their handmaid – *ancilla*, – dialectics their sword and lance... Revelation and reason, faith and science, theology and philosophy agree, for they proceed from the one God who cannot contradict himself... The chief feeders of Scholasticism were the writings of Augustine and Aristotle.⁴

As Leo XIII said of Thomas, he “set to rest once for all the discord between faith and reason, exalting the dignity of each and yet keeping them in friendly alliance.”⁵

It is this worldview that the scholastics brought with them to faith and practice; it is what they taught in their universities. And it was a worldview which the Lutheran confessors correctly judged:

Now the scholastics mingled Christian teaching with philosophical views about the perfection of nature and attributed more than was proper to the freedom of the will... As a result they failed to see the inner impurity of human nature. For this cannot be diagnosed except by the Word of God – something the scholastics do not often use in their discussions.⁶

² “From the beginning, Christianity has understood itself as the religion of the *Logos*, as the religion according to reason...It has always defined men, all men without distinction, as creatures and images of God, proclaiming for them...the same dignity. In this connection, the Enlightenment is of Christian origin and it is no accident that it was born precisely and exclusively in the realm of the Christian faith....It was and is the merit of the Enlightenment to have again proposed these original values of Christianity and of having given back to reason its own voice... Today, this should be precisely [Christianity's] philosophical strength, in so far as the problem is whether the world comes from the irrational, and reason is not other than a 'sub-product,' on occasion even harmful of its development—or whether the world comes from reason, and is, as a consequence, its criterion and goal...In the so necessary dialogue between secularists and Catholics, we Christians must be very careful to remain faithful to this fundamental line: to live a faith that comes from the *Logos*, from creative reason, and that, because of this, is also open to all that is truly rational. (Cardinal Ratzinger on Europe's Crisis of Culture (Part 4), Christianity: "The Religion According to Reason"; 2005-07-29; <http://www.zenit.org/article-13705?l=english>)

³ Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907) vol. V, p. 662.

⁴ Schaff, p. 589-591.

⁵ Quoted in Schaff, p. 662.

This inherited sin has caused such a deep, evil corruption of nature that reason does not comprehend it; rather, it must be believed on the basis of the revelation of the Scriptures...
Therefore, the scholastic theologians have taught pure error and blindness against this article...⁷

Melancthon states the trickle-down affect:

And yet these things are said among the scholastics who improperly mingle philosophical or social ethics with the gospel. These things were not simply debated in the schools, but, as often happens, instead of remaining purely in academe these ideas spread among the people where they prevailed and fostered trust in human powers and *suppressed the knowledge of the grace of Christ.*⁸

Thus a pair of lenses – a worldview – , emanating from both Greek philosophy and church fathers and taught by Christian theologians at the leading universities, determined the answers to the most basic and important questions that anybody could ever ask: what is the nature of man and how can one be spared the judgment of God? Scholasticism undermined “the knowledge of the grace of Christ.” And rarely does the common man question the wisdom of the world. But the confessors did. They dealt with a false worldview, exposed it, and condemned it.

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

The Greek philosophers Democritus (ca. 460 BC – ca. 370 BC) and Epicurus (341 BC – 270 BC), and later the Roman poet Lucretius (1st century BC), “taught that the universe consisted solely of atoms in motion, combining and recombining to form living things by sheer chance. As Lucretius declared in *On the Nature of the Universe*, living things were brought about by ‘the purposeless congregation and coalescence of atoms.’”⁹ If this sounds strangely similar to what is today often called materialism (or naturalism or Darwinism or evolution), it is. Epicurus developed an entire worldview based on his materialism, including an epistemology: empiricism – knowledge is based on what we know through the senses which alone can read the natural world, and a system of morality: hedonism –good and evil are based on the sensations of pleasure and pain. Today, too, empiricism and hedonism go hand and foot with the materialistic worldview. The materialism of Epicurus was challenged by both Plato (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) and Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC). They argued there was more to life than atoms or matter: there was also the reality of Forms or Ideas which ordered and gave a transcendent basis for knowledge and morality. “Morality is not based on the senses (pain and pleasure), as the Epicureans taught; it is based on transcendent Forms like Goodness and Justice.”¹⁰ Prior to Christianity, these two philosophies or worldviews – Platonism and Epicureanism – battled each other decade after decade.

With the advent of the New Testament Church, Christian thinkers found themselves in alignment with Plato and Aristotle and denouncing Epicurus, while at the same time creating their own apologetic for Christian truth and virtue. They effectively

⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II: 12-13, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 114.

⁷ Smalcald Articles, III:1:3, Kolb/Wengert, p. 311.

⁸ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II: 44, Kolb/Wengert, p. 118; emphasis added.

⁹ Pearcey, p. 389.

¹⁰ Pearcey, p. 390.

attacked Epicurean materialism which went underground for more than a millennium, at least as a popularly held worldview. Then at the beginning of the scientific revolution, there was a keen interest in the study of creation by means of the senses – an empiricism – which scientists like Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton, who were devout Christians, could distinguish from the materialistic empiricism of Epicurus. But not for long. The camel’s nose was in the door and in less than two centuries after Newton, materialism was back in vogue, having been thrust onto the scene above all by Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. What Darwin provided more than anything else was the mechanism for materialism – natural selection. Darwinism is nothing more than Epicurean materialism with “here’s how it works.” And from there the other disciplines quickly fell in line. John Dewey, the most influential individual in 20th century American education, stated in his famous essay, “the Influence of Darwin on Philosophy”, that the transcendent (both the Platonic and Christian versions) was to be abandoned in favor of the “genetic and experimental”¹¹; that is, in favor of what only nature and the senses reveal. So this is nothing new.

The same can be said of New Age and pantheistic worldviews. They’re not new. Many of their basic assumptions can be found in the neo-Platonism and Gnosticism of the early centuries after Christ. Their methods and tools included mystical meditation, ascetic measures, and denial of bodily desires. One can see their impact in the mystical nature and practices of Church through the middle ages. More recently, these things are flourishing in the revival of Gnosticism, spiritual feminism, transcendentalism, radical environmentalism, various pantheistic groups, and the popular Process Theology.

There really is not much new under the sun, and if there is, it is usually just a variation of something old. And since these worldviews do not seem to go away (at least on any permanent basis) it is important for Lutherans to discern and reveal not only false worldviews as a whole, but also their mechanisms, their methodologies, and their assumptions that can easily creep into the unsuspecting Christian mind and institution.

THE WORM IS IN THE WOOD

Pastor Ed Bryant wrote in his 2006 E.L.S. convention essay, “It is at the level of presuppositions that the educational battles are really fought...It is at the level of assumptions, of presuppositions, that life, thought, knowledge, and truth are unified.”¹² The importance of this insight cannot be overstated. But the way that false assumptions most easily take captive the Christian – instructor, student, and/or school – is not by means of a frontal attack where the false assumptions are right in front of one’s nose. As C. S. Lewis states,

Our faith is not very likely to be shaken by any book on Hinduism. But if whenever we read an elementary book on Geology, Botany, Politics, or Astronomy, we found that its implications were Hindu, that would shake us. It is not the books written in direct defence of Materialism that make the modern man a materialist; it is the materialistic assumptions in all the other books.¹³

¹¹ John Dewey, as cited by Pearcey, p. 391.

¹² Edward Bryant, “For You and Your Children”, 89th Annual Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Report, 2006; p. 44.

¹³ C. S. Lewis, as cited in Bryant, p. 44.

It may not be the biology science textbook used in Christian schools with its in-your-face Darwinism that threatens the Christian integrity of student and school, but the other textbooks and literature and other resources in other disciplines that contain the materialistic presuppositions. One worm in the wood, or a little leaven, is all it takes.

If Lewis noticed this 60 years ago, it is not surprising to find a glut of anti-Christian assumptions in education today tucked away in unexpected places, including books and materials that easily find their way into Christian schools undetected. Presuppositions of Darwinism, relativism, postmodern constructivism, pantheism, and neo-Marxism can be found in standard textbooks and recommended literature. Dr. Ryan MacPherson of Bethany Lutheran College, in his review of Allen Quist's books *Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum* (2002) and *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (2005)¹⁴, asserts that his independent research supports Quist's claims that these false worldview assumptions are alive in curriculum and books: The federally directed Center for Civic Education undermines biblical and natural law morality in its *We The People* textbooks; future language-arts teachers are advised to have stories read that encourage children "to formulate their own concepts of right and wrong"¹⁵; sex education models for middle school children guide them away from the biblical definition of family and rightful use sexual relations; "the National Council of Social Studies recommends children's literature books... that advocate environmentalism in pantheistic terms"¹⁶; and mathematics courses that advocate a neo-Marxist message. "These are not isolated instances," MacPherson states. In one interesting paragraph he says,

I discovered the preceding examples [of radical, multicultural morality] by briefly skimming the texts used by Elementary Education majors at Bethany Lutheran College – one of the least likely campuses for such literature. To find postmodern assaults on biblical and natural law morality embedded even in Bethany's curriculum suggests that Quist's data in *Fed Ed* and *America's Schools* are not anomalous, but rather linked to a far-reaching development in our nation's educational system, from kindergarten through college.¹⁷

He goes on to say,

This is not to imply that Bethany's own professors have compromised the Christian mission of the college. Rather, it is to acknowledge the special challenge faced by the college's Elementary Education Department, which selects textbooks that must sufficiently conform to government standards for graduates to receive state licensure as teachers ... When handling standards that would compromise the Christian faith, one professor has told me he takes the following approach: "I 'cover' such standards by teaching against them."¹⁸

Hats off to Bethany and its Elementary Education major. May you remain vigilant.

THE TWO-REALM EXPLANATION OF TRUTH

¹⁴ Ryan C. MacPherson, "Book Review Essay: Training Children As They Should Go? Evaluating Government Education Standards That May Impact Lutheran Elementary Schools," (Lutheran Synod Quarterly, March 2007, Volume 47, No. 1, pp. 106ff.).

¹⁵ Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson, *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2005) as cited in MacPherson, p. 114.

¹⁶ MacPherson, p. 116.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

I recall a rather intense discussion some twenty years ago between confessional Lutheran pastors. Some took the view that certain pieces of music fell into the category of good and beautiful in an absolute sense, and other music did not (or, at least, had strayed some distance from the good and beautiful). The others disagreed. If I remember correctly, they claimed that music was relative and that from a divine perspective one could not say some musical pieces were actually better or more beautiful than others. Their argument seemed to be based on the assumption that the Bible is the only source of divine truth. Only biblical truth is absolute truth, otherwise it is not truth, but man-made. But we must make a distinction here. To say that the only truth we can know with absolute certainty is biblical truth is not to say that other truth (philosophical, scientific, mathematical, historical, beauty, etc.) does not exist. We may not know this other truth with as much certainty or in the same way, but we can still know it, *especially* if the Bible says we can know it. This is the area of epistemology. One's epistemology is one's theory of knowledge – what we believe regarding the origin and limits of our knowledge. The Christian's epistemology is the Bible. But in saying that, we must not conclude that only what is in the Bible is true. When we say the Bible is our epistemology that means we acknowledge that truth or knowledge can come to us in the way the Bible states truth or knowledge can come to us. And how does the Bible say truth comes to us? Only through study of God's Word? No. It comes to us through our reason, senses, and conscience. Or, to put it another way, we not only subscribe to the Second and Third Articles, but also to the First Article, and this article clearly implies that I can have true knowledge of certain things apart from the Bible, for it ascribes to me the gifts of "my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses..." (see also Job 12, Ps. 19). This is why both the Christian and the non-Christian alike, to use the illustration of C. S. Lewis, can call a waterfall sublime¹⁹. The judgment is not merely a statement of our feelings, a personal liking, but a real truth that all people of all time would naturally make, made possible by reason and a real sense of beauty which the Bible says people have: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). If we deny the possibility of knowledge and truth by this manner we actually deny what the Bible says.

But also the danger here is that one easily can fall prey to the two-realm explanation of truth in which one realm is deemed not as reliable or knowable or true as the other. Here is a more typical example where this is seen:

At a Christian high school, a theology teacher strode to the front of the classroom, where he drew a heart on one side of the blackboard and a brain on the other. The two are as divided as the two sides of the blackboard, he told the class: The heart is what we use for religion, while the brain is what we use for science.²⁰

Here we see the two-realm theory of truth entering in, where one realm is superior to the other. The message left in the minds of the students is that religious knowledge is not real knowledge or at least not as true or real as scientific knowledge. Religion is not to be connected to the brain where one *knows* things. This is the typical taken-for-granted approach in education at all levels, secular and Christian. It assumes the two-

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*.

²⁰ Pearcey, p. 19.

realm theory of truth in which one realm is not as reliable or knowable or as true as the other.

Here are examples, past and present, of the two-realm divide.

The Left Realm	The Right Realm
Plato's Form (eternal reason)	Plato's Matter (eternal formless flux)
Enthusiasts	Dogmatists
Romanticism (religion and the humanities)	Enlightenment (science and reason)
Theism	Deism
Pietism	Rationalism
Faith	Reason/Knowledge
Church	State
Sacred	Secular
Private	Public
Emotions and Volition	Reason
Subjective	Objective
Non-rational (non-cognitive)	Rational (cognitive, verifiable)
Mind (spirit, thought, emotion, will)	Matter (mechanical, deterministic machine)
Value (meaning)	Fact (verifiable truth)
Postmodernism (humanly constructed truth)	Modernism (objective, universally valid)
Religion	Naturalism, Materialism, Darwinism
Beauty, Goodness, Justice	Utility, Pragmatism
Faith and life	Doctrine
Evangelicalism	Classical Calvinism
Pantheism	Atomism

Sometimes the one realm is seen as being opposed to the other, sometimes they are viewed as complementary (perhaps naively so), and sometimes as peacefully coexisting though not necessarily equal. More often than not in current culture the Left Realm (or the Subjective/Value Realm, as I will call it) is viewed as less real or true or knowable than the Right Realm (the Objective/Fact Realm), with notable exceptions being Platonism, postmodernism, pantheism, and confessional Lutheranism. The reason for this is the dominance of materialism in much of the Western world since the tremendous influence of Darwin on science and, shortly thereafter, on the humanities, social sciences, and religion.

But this supremacy of materialism has led to some strange bedfellows in educational institutions, including Christian. The arrangement is sometimes uncomfortable, but most often it is quite peaceable – as long as materialistic Darwinism can maintain its overall authority. It happens in Christian colleges and universities where pietism or neo-orthodoxy is in vogue. And whereas there is tension between them and Darwinism, both pietists and the neo-orthodox lack any firm foundation for their religious claims. After all, the materialists deal with “facts”, while the pietists and neo-orthodox theologians are concerned with ideas and lifestyles that cannot be verifiably tested – they are promoters of a lesser knowledge at best. As Dr. Phillip Johnson states, this understanding of the value/fact split “allows the metaphysical naturalists to mollify

the potentially troublesome religious people by assuring them that science does not rule out “religious *belief*” (so long as it does not pretend to be *knowledge*).”²¹ As long as beliefs and lifestyles are classified as subjective, they can peacefully coexist with scientific naturalism and materialism. Under these circumstances, religious beliefs are no threat to the materialist mindset.

One of the most frustrating things about this is that the neo-orthodox, the pietists, the evangelicals, the liberals, and even confessional Lutherans have readily conceded this arrangement. Professor James Burtchaell notes this in his thorough study of Christian colleges and universities which were able to disengage themselves from their churches:

Religion’s move to the academic periphery was not so much the work of godless intellectuals as of pious educators who, since the onset of pietism, had seen religion as embodied so uniquely in the personal profession of faith that it could not be seen to have a stake in social learning... They willingly forwent any crucial concern for the work of the intellect, and accepted comfortably enough that religious enterprise at a college or university might direct itself to the welfare of the learners but not to that of the learning... Thus, from the very start, the educators did not imagine themselves to belong to a communion that had credibly received a faith once delivered to the saints, a faith which bound them in closest fellowship to all those who had shared it since the apostles, and which would allow them, the more educated they became, to become all the more able to share judgments, both constructive and critical, of their country, their culture, and their church itself.²²

Similarly, History and Education professor Douglas Sloan comments on the neo-orthodoxy of Paul Tillich:

“Science,” Tillich said, “is the cognitive approach to the whole of finite objects, their interrelations and their processes. Religion is the total approach to that which gives meaning to our life... All statements about fact, structures, processes and events in nature, man and history, are objects of scientific research and cannot be made in the name of religion.”

As long as religion was conceived as having no cognitive dimension, then, of course, Tillich was correct that it should make no statements about our knowledge of the world...

Science and religion could not conflict because “scientific truth and the truth of faith do not belong to the same dimension of meaning...” In essence Tillich’s was a total embrace of the dichotomy between science as fact and religion as meaning, and in the end a simplistic one at that. Because they belong, Tillich insisted, to “different dimensions,” he was able to claim that there was no conflict between science and religion. “There is no religious statement,” he said, “that can contradict a scientific statement if religion is understood in its fundamental sense as ultimate concern and science is understood as the inquiry into the finite facts and their relations.”²³

As confessional Lutheran and professor of Philosophy, Dr. Angus Menuge, summarizes:

Others [in the face of Darwinism] were more determined to retain an orthodox Christian faith. Following Karl Barth the Neo-Orthodox placed salvific Gospel events (*Geschichte*) in a separate self-validating realm of suprahistory where they could not be falsified by the fact of history, no matter how recalcitrant. The Gospel events then show that the Lord is a loving God, regardless of what natural science turns up. However, it was pointed out by many that

²¹ Phillip E. Johnson, as cited in Pearcey, p. 21; emphasis added.

²² James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: the Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 842f.

²³ Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press; 1994), p. 126.

this falsifies the true “scandal” of the incarnation – that God became man in the same grimy history that the rest of us inhabit – and that it also removes the distinctive advantage of historicity that Christianity holds over the plethora of other religions and cults.²⁴

As soon as religious beliefs are considered to be a non-cognitive, non-objective experience, materialism is free to reign. But such a non-factual way of thinking about religion also opens the Subjective/Value Realm to any and all beliefs, including panentheism, pantheism, animism, and, of course, postmodernism. Neo-orthodox theologians like Paul Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr correctly understood that reason and materialism were insufficient for obtaining any real meaning and fulfillment in life. At the same time, ironically, they assumed a materialistic methodology to explain structures, processes, nature, history, man, and even the Bible. Their answer to the Darwinists was a faith based on what they called an “ontological reason”, which in the end was nothing more than a mystical and inward natural religion. The Bible served a purpose for them, but because it was itself subjected to the materialistic methodology – i.e., historical criticism – its historical events were nothing more than “symbols”. They detached Christian beliefs from real historical events because historical events could only be understood by means of materialistic methodology. For them there was no God who had really created all things *ex nihilo*; there was no man who had really been created in the image of God; and there was no real only-begotten Son who had really entered time and space to really redeem man from the realities of sin, death, and the devil. These theologians played right into the hands of the Darwinists, giving them legitimacy, while relativizing Christian truth and doctrine.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The neo-orthodox and the pietists (and more recently the process theologians) have contributed greatly to the view that Christian faith is less than fact and less than absolute truth. They were shrewdly led or encouraged there by the overbearing and arrogant Darwinian evolutionists. At the same time, though, we confessional Lutherans do nothing for confessionalism when we take and apply the tools of the trade that belong to false worldviews. A case in point is the “Religious Studies Division” approach to teaching religion. Burtchaell calls this approach a “mode, in which students are invited to study the ‘phenomenon’ of religion as outsiders, rather than as believers...”²⁵ According to Douglas Sloan, this way of teaching religion is merely “[p]luralism in the guise of academic breadth and objectivity...”²⁶ Sloan is basically correct. But its subtlety and appeal make it very easy to digest. Bethany Lutheran College dealt with this ten years ago when a professor of religion, now in a different fellowship, proposed that Bethany adopt a Religious Studies Division approach to teaching students religion. I do not know if he truly understood what he was advocating, but what he wrote and presented on the topic was clear. In one paper²⁷ he compared the differences between the Religious Studies Division approach and the Religion Division approach (the way Bethany professors had generally taught religion). Here is what one finds in his paper:

²⁴ Angus J. L. Menuge, “Interpreters of the Book of Nature,” *Reading God’s World: The Scientific Vocation* (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2004), p. 103.

²⁵ Burtchaell, p. 494.

²⁶ Sloan, p. 90.

²⁷ Daniel Metzger, “Some Thoughts on a Religious Studies Program,” delivered to Bethany’s Religion Division Oct. 8, 1996; unpublished.

1. The Religious Studies Division approach (RSDA) is always described in terms or phrases that are positive and academic:
 - “normally associated with university or college learning”
 - “a valid academic, scholarly focus and approach”
 - “[instructors would have] real expertise and knowledge”
 - “a more...academic, objective approach”

With the Religion Division approach (RDA), on the other hand, the descriptive terms are pejorative or could easily be interpreted as such:

- “parochial”
- “sectarian”
- “narrower”
- “indoctrinate”

(It should be pointed out that there is absolutely no reason to assume that the traditional approach used at Bethany is and must be less academic. This is merely a straw man argument being used against Bethany’s time-honored teaching method.)

2. The RSDA is portrayed as objective and fair, while no such wording is used for the RDA, leading to the implication that the RDA is biased and unfair:
 - “It is not clear that standards of fairness and objectivity [under the RDA] can obtain where such discussion, new thoughts, different perspectives, etc. are quashed or discouraged”
3. The only purpose of the RSDA is academic and temporal, and any spiritual and eternal benefit would be purely incidental:
 - “The study of religion [from the RSDA] in all its aspects is seen as a legitimate academic activity entirely apart from the faith-life of the student or professor”
 - “Goals for [an RSDA] would be described in ways quite different from words like ‘pastoral’ or ‘that the student grow in faith and grace...the goals would be described in terms of the ‘kingdom of the left,’ rather than His right”
4. This in turn means, most significantly, that the RSDA instructor is not obligated to teach truth as truth.
 - “[The RSDA] does not *have to* mean that the instructor *would have to* leave confessional commitments outside of the classroom. There is room for the advocacy...but it does require some extra care and thought” (emphasis added)
 - “It is not the case, of course, that faith and the truth claims of any particular denomination *can have no place at all* with religious studies programs and courses. But it is the case that such concerns become, at least in theory, *tangential to and byproducts* of a more purely academic approach” (emphasis added)

Notice that the two realms are being represented here. And it is clear that the one that is “objective”, “academic”, “fair” is given preferential treatment.

LUTHERAN NEUTRALITY?

A couple other points need to be made here, especially in regard to the “objectivity” of the Religious Studies Division approach. This word is used relentlessly

with impunity everywhere today – it is what fair-minded people are; if you are objective that is good! “Objectivity” calls upon the instructor to remain neutral – he is not to take sides. He simply lays out the teachings, including contrary ones, while refraining from any judgment of true or false. For this reason the former Bethany professor appeared to have no qualms with a non-confessional Lutheran or even a non-Christian teaching religion at a confessional school as long as he was “objective”:

In the same program in which the ... conservative Lutheran is teaching about Islam, one could envision a Muslim teaching about Lutheranism... The Muslim would obviously not be concerned about arguing for Lutheranism’s truth-claims, but he or she could be expected to make an honest and correct presentation of the content of Lutheranism whenever the matter came up. The same would apply, for instance, if Bethany should hire a woman with a Ph. D. in scriptural studies... Should she find herself discussing those passages routinely referred to by fundamentalist church bodies as the *sedes* for denying ordination to women, she would be expected to give an objective presentation of those passages...²⁸

Can a confessional Lutheran school and the theologically-called instructors justify such an approach to teaching religion? Can we be content with “objectivity” as an end in itself? Will we not “be pitied more than all men” if we teach about Christ “only for this life” (1 Cor. 15:19)? Are we not to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 1:3)? Must we not “*always* be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15)?

The second point to be made regarding “objectivity” has to do with the magnitude and importance of the topic being taught. A math teacher, for example, would typically be outraged if such an approach would be suggested for his discipline – neutrality on two different answers to the square root of 104,976 would be insane.²⁹ At some point math teachers need to teach and students need to learn the answer 324 is true and the answer 323.9 is wrong. *How much more when it comes to questions on justification, the person of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the eternal destiny of man?* “Objectivity” is often used to prevent judgments from being made where and when they should be made – in the area of religion – thereby giving the impression that religious “truth” is somehow a lesser truth than, say, mathematical truth. And lest we think that an “objective” approach shows some sort of recognition of or respect for the efficacy of the Word, the confessional Lutheran must never forget that neutrality toward Christ and his word is clearly and always condemned. Never do the apostles and prophets display such an attitude, and neither are called servants of the Word to do so in any age.

Because the “objective” approach is such a widely accepted method of teaching in almost every discipline today – Sloan refers to it as “the cult of objectivity”³⁰ – the conservative Christian school will often feel compelled to offer an “objective” along with a “pastoral” approach in teaching religion. Some classes can be taught “objectively”, while others have a more pastoral or parochial or indoctrinating tenor to them. I would submit, however, that this is a false paradigm. I would suggest that the biblical paradigm is not a choice between being pastoral/parochial and objective, but between being

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ However, we should not be surprised to discover that such a postmodern approach to math does exist within schools today. See Allen Quist, *America’s Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*. See also, Michael Chapman, “Worldview War in the Classroom,” *No Retreats, No Reserves, No Regrets*, ed. Brannon Howse (St. Paul, MN: Stewart, 2000), p. 149.

³⁰ Sloan, p. 90.

pastoral and apologetic (in a wide sense). We proclaim the truth or we defend the truth, and often we do both. This is how the Christian instructor is to view himself. We do not have the luxury of being neutral.

This does not mean the Christian instructor comes out with “guns a’blazin”. There is wisdom, “great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2), the apologist must use. The apologist instructor has a number of tools at his disposal, one of which is “objectivity”, *but only as a means and not as an end*. For example, on many occasions a teacher in class, in catechesis, in congregational Bible studies, and even from the pulpit, can be neutral, saying here is what this side says and here is what the other view is – kind of feigning neutrality. But he does so only to make a point, to eventually reveal the underlying assumptions, to help the student or listener understand that there are contrary teachings, to finally reveal how a popular way of thinking or worldview is contrary to one or more biblical truths. A Christian may use objectivity as a tool, but finally at some point in some way he is required to teach truth as truth and error as error.

Bethany now has a Religious Studies Division. It used to be called the Religion Division. Is this just a change in name and not in approach? If the four baggage containers described above are avoided, this is good. But just as important is that the religion professors view themselves in all their religious teaching as either pastors or apologists. These are the only two options. I would assume this is what they do in practice. But they along with all pastors in the synod must ask: is the worm in the wood?

NEUTRALITY IN NON-RELIGION COURSES?

The confessional Lutheran must keep in mind there is, ironically, a true relativity that is to be acknowledged and respected – the whole area of *adiaphora* both in and outside of the spiritual realm. The danger comes, however, when the concept of true relativity is applied to other disciplines, or aspects of a specific discipline, when it should not, the result being that absolutes within a discipline become relativized. And when relativity in the name of objectivity is applied to one discipline, or when a student is encouraged to apply it to some absolute truth in a specific discipline, the domino affect can begin. In the end, as this false assumption takes a firmer grip on one’s thinking, it is applied to Christian doctrines as well, without the Christian even realizing it. This is often found in teachings regarding marriage, family, and homosexuality. I will never forget the Bethany graduate who called me while attending her junior year at Minnesota State University. She told me she had struggled with her sociology major at MSU, but that things were going better now. When I asked her why, she told me she was being taught things about the family in conflict with what she had been taught at home and in her church. What helped, she said, was an *assessment* she and all students in her major had to take, an assessment that indicated she was “too narrow” in her views and needed to learn to be more “tolerant.” This made sense to her, at which point she started struggling less. My deep regret is I did not have time in that brief conversation to explain that her Christian faith was under attack by a hollow and deceptive philosophy. Her MSU class used the “objective” approach to relativize that which should never be relativized; but also, most seriously, to formulate within her a mindset that could be applied to other absolutes as well.

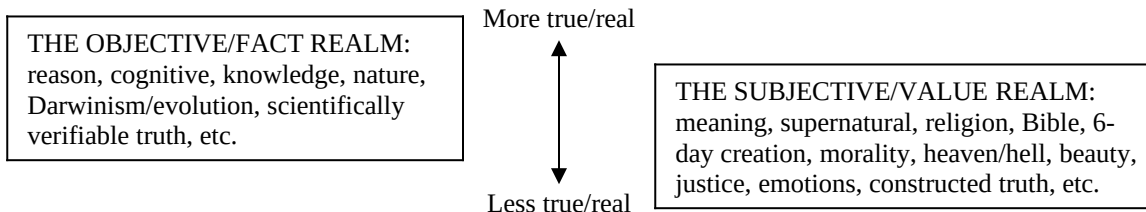
So the Christian school and instructor must distinguish between the relative and the absolute, they must teach accordingly, and they must develop an apologetic so

students will be able to defend their beliefs when confronted by culture. They must not unintentionally imply relativism across the board by saying things like, “The textbook has one view on homosexual marriage, and I have my own *personal* view. You will each have to make *your own choice*” (imagine a math teacher taking this approach!), and simply leave it at that rather than intelligently and insightfully defending the God-ordained view (using an apologetic from God’s word, natural law, natural religion, or science). For if relativity dictates for a person his view on marriage (which God has not placed in the realm of adiaphora), then it can just as easily determine a person’s understanding of other areas where God has also clearly spoken, including Christianity’s exclusive view of salvation – “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE TWO REALMS

As was mentioned earlier, confessional Lutheranism does not give priority to the Objective/Fact Realm. To this degree it is in agreement with the pantheists and the postmodernists. But this is not to say that Christians defer to the Subjective/Value Realm. True, we do not say that the Objective/Fact Realm is more knowable, more true, more real than many aspects of the Subjective/Value Realm. At the same time we do not say the Subjective/Value Realm is more knowable, more true, more real than the Objective/Fact Realm. Christianity is quite different. There are knowable truths in both realms. We say this because of our epistemology – *Sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* should not be seen as merely residing in the Subjective/Value Realm. Rather, it is the overriding principle or foundation that interprets, guides, and oversees both the Subjective/Value Realm and the Objective/Fact Realm. The Bible – God’s Word – is magisterial, in one sense, even when reason is the only and correct method to use in a certain situation. The Word of God is magisterial at all times and in all situations. Differences between the commonly accepted, but flawed, view and the biblical view can be illustrated as follows:

COMMON VIEW:



Vs.

BIBLICAL VIEW:

<p>GOD’S WORD: The only source by which man can know the true God and the way of salvation. It oversees and speaks to both realms below.</p>	
<p>THE OBJECTIVE/FACT REALM: knowledge verified by reason, senses, science, observation, etc.</p>	<p>THE SUBJECTIVE/VALUE REALM: Truths verified by natural law and natural religion, as well as relative truths</p>

A good example of this is the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms – Church and State. We know there are two kingdoms because the Bible tells us so. But this is not to say that the Christian should seek to have the left hand kingdom ruled by the Bible as it rules the right hand kingdom; on the contrary, the Bible allows and mandates that the State be ruled by reason and natural law. At the same time, however, the Bible helps us to know when the State goes beyond its functions and interferes with God’s ordained estates of the Church and the Family. That is, the Bible gives knowledge and truth regarding both kingdoms even though it rules only in one.

The same is true for other areas, like biology, the study of life. This world is opened up to us through the use of research and empirical studies – “our reason and all our senses.” But over and above this realm is the Bible which of course has much to say about life, especially human life. So if the Darwinist teaches we can only really know what nature tells us, or that nature is all there is, or that all life is the product of time plus chance, or that everything has evolved over millions of years, or that man is different from everything else only in the sense that he is more highly evolved, the Christian biology instructor recognizes these assumptions as faulty because of his epistemology – *Sola Scriptura*. He then may and many times must seek to refute the Darwinist on his own turf, using his reason and his senses. For if we only combat errors and false worldviews from the perspective of the Bible (“Thus says the Lord..”) and do not do so from the perspective of reason and science when it could be done so, we will leave the impression, in view of the current preference for the Objective/Fact Realm over the Subjective/Value Realm, that our defense is merely subjective, less real, and less true. That is, we play into the hands of the materialist which is exactly what the neo-orthodox and pietists have done.

The Christian instructor approaches pantheism and any of its assumptions the same way – biblical assumptions or doctrines are the final authority. The pantheist promotes the equality of all living things, often expressed in extreme environmentalism which typically values the life of the tree as much as the life of man. The Christian with his epistemology recognizes there is value to a tree because God made it and he made it “good” and it has divine purposes. At the same time the Christian distinguishes between man and the tree (and the rest of creation) because man was made in the image of God and the tree was not; because the tree was made to serve man and not man the tree; and because man is called upon to be over the tree as its wise steward. The tree is not our brother. The Bible trumps the pantheistic and radical environmental view.

The same in the case of postmodernism. Postmodernism is really the logical conclusion of modernism (or Darwinian materialism) for postmodernism accepts the materialistic assumption that matter is all there is. The only difference is postmodernism recognizes that modernism provides no real answers to the most important questions. Postmodernism thus concludes that all truth is socially or individually constructed; that in the end all is relative, having no transcendent meaning. The Christian accepts the postmodernist’s conclusion that modernism leads to a dead end. But because of his *Sola Scriptura* foundation, he goes well beyond that; he knows there is truth beyond the group, viz., the ultimate and eternal truths of the Bible, and truths that are discoverable through natural law, natural religion, and the conscience of man. The Christian knows that man and life have value beyond the culture.

“OF ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE”

With this simple statement of the Nicene Creed, we have the directive that God’s Word is to rule the mind of the Christian in spiritual and secular matters. Since God created all things, seen and unseen, the physical and the spiritual, God is therefore the interpreter of all things (and so is man to the limited extent that he can know the mind of God through his Word or through man’s natural gifts). The Christian cannot leave behind biblical and confessional presuppositions when doing business, playing soccer, cleaning the yard, teaching math, lecturing on chemistry, having his students interpret *Of Mice and Men*, or explaining the differences between cultures. Again, it is not that the Bible is a “how to” manual on how or what specifically to teach; we leave that daunting and misleading task to pietistic evangelicals. But when the Christian teaches he must not forget basic Scriptural assumptions – basic Christian doctrines – that directly or indirectly affect his discipline. In the words of Pastor Bryant,

It isn’t that there is a Lutheran view of Arithmetic, Spelling, or Geography, as such, but that all such texts may still reflect the truth of Scripture, on the level of their assumptions. No subject is so compartmentalized that it doesn’t relate to Scriptural truth on some level.³¹

It can also be explained in terms of the doctrine of Vocation: God is hidden in us so that he might carry out *his* purpose through our various vocations; that we might help our fellow man and glorify God. We do not benefit man nor glorify God when we leave students at the mercy of false worldviews which move in by stealth through unrecognized or unchallenged assumptions.

Nancy Pearcey suggests a rather simple method for judging worldviews, something she gleaned from the reformed/evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer.

A wonderfully simple and effective means of comparing worldviews is to apply the same grid of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. After all, every worldview or ideology has to answer the same three sets of questions...Every worldview or philosophy has to start with a theory of origins: Where did it all come from? Who are we, and how did we get here? ... Every worldview also offers a counterpart to the Fall, an explanation of the source of evil and suffering. What has gone wrong with the world? Why is there warfare and conflict? ... Finally, to engage people’s hearts, every worldview has to instill hope by offering a vision of Redemption – an agenda for reversing the “Fall” and setting the world right again.³²

She correctly points out, e.g., that Marxism’s counterpart to Creation is “Self-creating, self-generating matter”; its counterpart to the Fall is “The rise of private property”; and its counterpart to Redemption is “Revolution! Overthrow the oppressors and recreate the original paradise of primitive communism.”³³ She demonstrates the same with Rousseau, Margaret Sanger (the founder of Planned Parenthood), and New Age pantheism.

Creation, Fall, and Redemption are very helpful and essential tools. But they do not go far enough. Lutherans recognize more clearly than anyone the importance of the

³¹ Bryant, p. 53.

³² Pearcey, p. 134. Actually, there seems to be some confusion here by Pearcey. She includes a number of things under the category of Redemption that actually belong under the heading of Sanctification. To put the best construction on it, she includes Sanctification under Redemption.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 136f.

Third Article. Whereas we agree with Pearcey and Schaeffer on using the Creation and the Fall (the First Article), and Redemption (the Second Article) as litmus tests against which to measure worldviews (and other religions for that matter), we also plainly see the great significance of the Sanctification article. It is this Third Article that tells us that reason must serve a ministerial role in matters of faith. It is this article that keeps the enthusiasts at bay. On the basis of this article we reject the false worldviews of Roman Catholicism, classical Calvinism, Lutheran pietism, Baptist fundamentalism, and popular evangelicalism, all of which, to a greater or lesser degree, reject the biblical understanding of the means of grace. “[T]hrough Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”; the Spirit, that is, who has bound himself to Word and Sacrament.

These Christian heterodox “isms” have all been influenced by philosophies that give man and his reason (the Objective/Fact Realm) or man and his emotions and volition (the Subjective/Value Realm) much more credit than they deserve. This Third Article, therefore, helps us keep up our guard against these secular philosophies as well.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We all need to have great respect and compassion for our teachers, professors, administrators, and school board members who are faced with a unique challenge. They, more than most of us, have to face the “patterns of this world” (Rom. 12:1) on a regular basis since so much of education comes out of the non-Christian realm – from the universities and from the secular researchers. Much of what they pass on is extremely valuable and necessary (for they, too, have God-given reason, senses, consciences, and they live in the same created world that we do). But much of what they think and advocate is false and misleading. It is not always easy to distinguish between the good and the bad, and this, of course, is Satan’s design. So what does this mean for Christian fellowships, educational institutions, and instructors? I would propose the following.

First, there must be an unwavering devotion and allegiance to *Sola Scriptura* in all areas of life, by all concerned – the fellowship of believers, pastors, teachers, administrators, and school boards.

Second, there needs to be a thorough understanding of the First, Second, and Third Articles of the Creed; again, not just by the instructors, but the synod and pastors as well. Basic doctrines must not only be believed, but also grasped with the mind so when false worldviews sneak in to challenge Christian doctrine, the Christian mind is prepared. Special emphasis needs to be placed on the doctrines of Creation, the Fall, Justification and Redemption, the Means of Grace, Vocation, the Two Kingdoms, and the Authority, Inspiration, Infallibility, and Efficacy of the Word.

Third, there needs to be an ongoing, active discernment regarding worldviews *and* the specific assumptions on which they are based. It is not just a total false worldview that is dangerous, but just one single assumption of that worldview. It’s the trickle down affect, the worm in the wood, the little leaven, the one false assumption that can begin the spiritual decline of an individual, a school, or a church body. We seem to do well when it comes identifying the specific tenets, doctrines, or assumptions of Catholicism, Calvinism, Pentecostalism, and pietism, but I am not convinced we have been able to do the same with the specific assumptions of Darwinism, postmodernism, neo-Marxism, and pantheism, especially when these assumptions are promoted in materials and methods

that seem to have little or nothing to do with the particular “ism”. To this end, I would suggest that schools address themselves to helping faculty identify false worldviews and their assumptions, e.g., through workshops or classes on current popular worldviews. Great care also has to be taken in the education of our teachers. When they go off to get a degree, they must recognize that there will be assumptions taught to them at variance with their faith. Whether they realize it or not, when they go off to a secular or heterodox institution to earn a degree, they are going off to war if *Sola Scriptura* is not the foundation. Thus Luther’s warning:

I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s word becomes corrupt ... I greatly fear that the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on the young students, are wide gates to hell.³⁴

We do not want our instructors returning from war unknowingly promoting some aspect of the enemy’s cause. The goal of faculty development and pursuing terminal degrees must not simply be for instructors to go out and “learn more” about their discipline (especially in view of the fact that faculty and future faculty will be trained in the assumptions and methodologies of false worldviews), but to develop an apologetic, using their own discipline to challenge the false worldviews and assumptions. The Christian teacher’s mind needs to be engaged in the careful analysis of assumptions with which he may be challenged. We must not simply proceed with the mindset of learning more, but of vigilance as well. If we merely count on a teacher’s Christian faith to guard him without an accompanying mind and knowledge that will enable him to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5), we relegate Christianity to what is generally considered the inferior Subjective/Value Realm. We must not live in naivety.

The fourth proposal is partially understood by the Roman Catholic James Burtchaell:

What the academicians ignore, partly because they do not wish to know it and partly because their Christian colleagues have so feebly manifested it, is that the gospel within the church has continually been at the center of intense and critical dialectic: textual, hermeneutical, historical, intercultural, philosophical, theological.³⁵

We are not the Church Nice, or the Church Let’s-All-Get-Along, or the Church Tolerant. We are the Church Militant. We are this by nature and necessity, and therefore we have to be this by choice as well. We have Jesus Christ and his Gospel alone to thank for this (and it is an honor). It’s not a matter of if we will have to fight, but when and where. Satan, that invisible creature who rebelled against the Triune God shortly after the Creator had done his marvelous work, is “hell bent” on undermining the work of Christ and the forgiveness he has won for the world. He is unyielding, ruthless, and determined. He is also cunning – “on earth is not his equal.” And so “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). We have no choice but to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”

³⁴Luther, M. (1999, c1966). *Vol. 44: Luther's works, vol. 44 : The Christian in Society I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Vol. 44, Page 207). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

³⁵ Burtchaell, p. 850.

(2 Cor. 10:5). We are God's masks. He chooses to fight through us, especially his called public servants. We are "in the stead of Christ." We are to fight not just until we get tired, and not just until people within our ranks are upset with us and want us to be quiet. But we fight as long as the enemy attacks. I am concerned that the desire for external peace, external unity, will be used as an excuse not to fight. This is what pietists do, but not confessional Lutherans. We condemn and "antithesize" as is shown us dozens of times by the men responsible for *The Book of Concord*. And the reason we do so is out of the most profound love for God and man. When it comes to man, we are to love gently and kindly, but there is also a tough love, something that is not tolerated by the "tolerant" community. The love of Christ compels us. The salvation of children, youth, and young adults whom we educate at our institutions is at stake.

Finally, our teachers must always be encouraged to approach their vocation with zeal and excellency. "And whatever you, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him...Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (Col. 3: 17, 23, 24). We should seek to outshine the "shrewd stewards" (Luke 16) of this world by using our "body and soul, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses" for what they were designed and for the best possible good of our neighbor. I will always remember the dedication of my professors at Bethany who took this approach and led me back to Christ and firmly grounded me, in spirit and mind, in Christian doctrine. And I know the same takes place today, with professors such as Chad Heins whose fervor for teaching his students about God's nature was so evident every time he brought a class to the 700 acres of the Schwan Center that he himself had thoroughly explored and where he had identified 150 species of birds. He always took the greatest delight in sharing God's creation with his students. This is a Lutheran and Luther approach to teaching:

We are now living in the dawn of the future life; for we are beginning to regain a knowledge of the creation, a knowledge we had forfeited by the fall of Adam. Now we have a correct view of the creatures, more so, I suppose, than they have in the papacy. Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interests him little how the fetus is made, formed, and developed in the womb. Thus he also fails to prize the excellency of the state of marriage. But by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers when we ponder His might and His goodness. Therefore we laud, magnify, and thank Him. In His creatures we recognize the power of His Word. By His Word everything came into being. This power is evident even in a peach stone. No matter how hard its shell, in due season it is forced open by a very soft kernel inside it. All this is ignored by Erasmus. He looks at the creatures as a cow stares at a new gate.³⁶

To God alone be the glory.

Pastor David Thompson
October 3, 2007
Evangelical Lutheran Synod General Pastoral Conference

³⁶ Martin Luther as cited by Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought* (St. Louis: CPH, 1958, reprinted in 2005; translated by Martin H. Bertram), p. 153.

False Worldviews in Christian Education
Pastor David Thompson
Bloomington, MN

APPENDIX A: A Comparison between Postmodern/Secular (“Type A”) and Traditional/Classical Christian (“Type B”) Education

[The following, used with permission, are portions of a draft being developed by Pastor Edward Bryant. This very insightful and helpful comparison is used by Pastor Bryant as he promotes Lutheran Schools of America (LSA).]

An Inventory of Educational Philosophy

Diligent educators in Christian schools have been able to benefit from research in learning theory and from advances in methods and technology, and have incorporated them into our schools. In addition, our schools have been beholden to the publishers of textbooks and other curriculum materials for use in our schools. While the research and the resulting textbooks may be ideologically neutral, often they are not. As a result, we end up implementing a program of education that conveys assumptions which are at odds with our own philosophy of education.

The following sets of comparisons will help us discern whether our own school program tends toward a philosophy that is more humanistic or more traditionally and Biblically based.

* * *

Which of the following types of teaching best describes what is going on in your school? Which type of teaching is to be preferred? Why?

Curriculum

Type A — Each teacher teaches what she wants to teach each year without any particular awareness of what is being taught in the grades prior to and after the year she teaches – and with no particular attention to the desired goal which each student should achieve in the course of time at the school.

Type B — The course of studies is seen as a continuous whole from Pre-K through the University. There is a clear picture of what a student will have at the end of his term at the K-8 education. All classes are taught with the goal in mind. As a general rule, books and subjects that are not directly relevant to the goal are considered superfluous; a major portion of time and resources are not devoted to such things. Brief digressions from the syllabus are occasionally beneficial, but generally, there is some way that it can be demonstrated that it fits into the overall picture of things.

Syllabus

Type A — When doing lesson plans, the teacher simply writes out what pages will be covered in the textbook and perhaps also what problems will be assigned as homework. When it's time for the lesson to begin, she knows where to turn in the textbook to begin reading with the class.

Type B — When doing lesson plans, the teacher considers what leading questions will draw the students' interest into the subject matter. She lists what resources besides a textbook need to be prepared for the class. The methods used in the class are not dictated by the textbook, but by the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and understanding of the best ways to import it. The repertoire of classical methodology is drawn upon, viz. memorization, recitation, dialectic, etc.

Mastery

Type A — Mastery of Techniques. The training of teachers consists largely of learning methodologies, teaching techniques, and learning modalities of students. The thought is that if teachers are taught *how* to teach, they will be able to take any subject and teach it, using the textbooks that are given them. These teachers tend to read “trade” journals which constantly offer new methods and tips for teaching without any particular reference to subject matter.

Type B — Mastery of Subject Matter. The training of teachers is devoted primarily to the learning and mastery of *subject matter* to be taught. While the major portion of time is devoted to mastering the subject, teachers also learn the classical *methods* of dialectics, tutoring, and lecturing — as well as classroom management skills. The primary goal of training teachers is to have teachers acquire a deep familiarity, insight, and understanding of the subject matter they will teach. These teachers tend to spend more of their time reading in order to deepen and broaden their understanding of the subject matter instead of attempting to acquire new methods. Northrop Frye — “What inspires a good teacher is a clarified view of his own subject.”

Textbooks

Type A — Teachers tend to follow a textbook-driven curriculum almost exclusively. The teacher teaches the textbook. Teacher reads or gets students to read the textbook aloud in class. The teacher redefines the definitions of key words. The teacher asks assorted questions about the chapter. The teacher hands out worksheets. After a couple of chapters proceeding in this way, the teacher has a unit test.

Type B — The teacher has a curriculum, the subjects of which need to be covered in the course of the year using various sources, some of which include textbooks. The teacher teaches the subject matter to the students rather than merely teaching the textbook. From her own understanding and mastery of the subject matter, the teacher, according to the age of her students, engages the students with Socratic questions, leading them to *discover* the facts. The teacher draws on research through the internet, library, multi-media, museums and other places to provide illustrations and other items to deepen and broaden the student’s understanding and to whet the appetite for further study. A test is given when these items have been covered.

Source Material

Type A — Teaching from Secondary and Tertiary Sources. Teachers rely on summaries and explanations of historical items as found in textbooks.

Type B — Teaching from Primary Sources. Teachers strive to expose the students to the actual letters, diaries, biographies, historical documents and contemporary accounts of the material they are studying, and uses textbooks and other devices to provide context for these data

Corroborating Facts

Type A — If the text says it, it must be right. Little effort is expended to check or compare sources and versions of the information found in the textbook.

Type B — The topic and information in the text is compared to other sources for corroborating the stated facts, either verified or contrasted. In addition, the students are taught to think critically, that is to identify the underlying assumptions beneath the material in the textbook.

Reading

Type A — Reading as a process. Teachers are primarily concerned that children learn *how* to read without being especially attentive to *what* the children read. Stories are selected because they are entertaining, cute, or well-illustrated, assuming that such things will motivate the children to like books and encourage them to read books of substance which have no pictures. Teachers in the lower grades assume that students will be able to read the great books of the Western world sometime later in their academic career.

Type B — Reading as communicating content. Teachers are concerned not only that students read well but also that they be well-read. Reading material is selected not only because of its appropriate reading level but also because of a “great idea” that it communicates. Teachers understand that reading is never simply a matter of merely learning decoding skills, but is always a matter of communicating content. Teachers select books not on the basis of what will entertain them, but on the basis of that which will help them develop their minds as they grow into the great ideas of the great books of the Western world. Books are also selected for the values that they reflect, especially the values not overtly expressed.

Familiarity

Type A — Read something once and consider the work to have been done with.

Type B — Read works worthy of being read several times at various stages of development and understanding, deepening one's perspectives and appreciation of the work. See C.S. Lewis' work *On Stories*.

Feedback

Type A — Satisfied with feedback from worksheets, quizzes, tests. Essay questions are viewed as a burden on both teachers and students.

Type B — Conversational; opportunity for student to express in dialogue what they have learned, both verbally and in writing.

Scope of Thinking

Type A — Linear Thinking. Students are drawn over many various details and facts. When they are done with one chapter or subject, they simply go on to another subject, perhaps never to consider the matter again in the course of their studies.

Type B — Lateral Thinking. Students are generalists. They learn specific facts, but always in the context of the big picture. Teachers deliberately and regularly demonstrate how the material in one lesson links together with other subjects and applications. Material that is associated with the big picture is more easily retained than dissociated facts and figures. Once students have gotten the big picture in the Trivium, they will be ready to specialize in the Quadrivium.

Critical Thinking

Type A — Critical Thinking as a mere process. Critical thinking is taught in an abstract manner, as if a kind of critical thinking could be done without particular attention to the content.

Type B — Critical Thinking is not isolated from its content. Students learn to think mathematically, geographically, theologically, scientifically. Students learn to identify the assumptions upon which materials are based and are able to compare content and assumptions both to appropriate norms.

Memorability

Type A — Unmemorable. Students go through a lesson unit, but in a month's time, they are not able to remember what they learned.

Type B — Memorable. Students' education is directed so that through discoveries and through a systematized curriculum they are able to retain what they have learned.

Creativity

Type A — Students are encouraged to be "creative" without much structure or data. "Do your own thing."

Type B — Students are not asked to be creative until they have mastered the grammar of the subject.

Rote Memory

Type A — Rote memory discouraged. The memory of facts, *e.g.* state capitals or U.S. presidents is seen as being unimportant. There is a tendency to think of fact/data memorization as superficial knowledge at all ages.

Type B — Rote memory encouraged. Children cannot think in a vacuum. Facts are the raw material of thought. In the Trivium, rote memory is most appropriate for the Grammar stage, but much less for the Dialectic and Rhetoric stages. Students in the latter two stages draw on the data from the Grammar stage as they learn to think and create.

Purpose

Type A — Students study in order to get a grade. Children view course work and homework primarily in terms of getting a good grade with the promise that good grades will get them good jobs, etc.

Type B — Students study in order to learn. The innate curiosity of children is guided to satisfy their desire to understand what it means to be human in a way that corresponds with their neighbor and their environment. The full development of one's talents is viewed as a way in which God makes each of us His blessing to others in the world through our vocations. Learning is like all things Christians do, for our Lord. We learn so that we can understand and communicate the Holy Scriptures.

Objectives

Type A — Vocational/Technical. Students are taught subject matter which is deemed to be applicable and practical primarily in terms of what will help them to land a good-paying job. The school-to-work philosophy basically believes that the goal of education is to place children in the work force so that they may be good producers and consumers of marketable items. Beyond that, they are to understand what it is to be human, and to apply that as the measure of their lives and of the world around them.

Type B — Liberal Arts. Students are taught subjects that are practical and applicable to what it means to be human in service to God in faith and our neighbor in love.. Life is more than work. Life is more than material goods. When people face life's crises, it will mean relatively little if they are a very gifted computer technician, plumber, salesperson, financier or auto mechanic. They will profit best from understanding how the whole of life fits together, having a deep understanding of the great ideas which have faced crises in the past as well as an understanding of human nature. These latter are taught through good literature, a math and science curriculum which includes a biographical aspect of mathematicians and scientists, reasoning and logic skills, and language skills (English and Latin).

A Christian so equipped is prepared as an effective instrument to express and uphold the truths of holy Scripture in an unbelieving world, especially the glorious truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX B: A Book Review and Reaction by Prof. Andrew Overn of Bethany Lutheran College

[*The Dying of the Light*, summarized with commentary by Prof. Overn below (used with permission), illustrates the various ways in which Christian colleges and universities end up straying from the church body which sponsors them. Estrangement occurs not just through contrary worldviews or ideologies held and taught by professors, but through a variety of corridors that make the introduction of false worldview more welcome. Much of what is said in the book applies equally as well to Christian grade and high schools. The book encourages Christian vigilance in all Christian institutions.]

The Dying of the Light; The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches, by James T. Burtchaell³⁷

After an exhaustive study of a (large) number of colleges and universities who began as institutions of the church but have since severed ties with their church sponsorship, *the author* recognizes a number of recurring themes (summarized below).

Part I: Recurring *causes* for the distancing of the school from their denominational sponsor:

1. The initial connection between church sponsor and school was not strong at the outset.
2. Once independent sources (non-church) of money were found, there was less need to submit to the accountability of the church.
3. Religious study was seen to be inferior to other, secular subjects, making serious religious scholarship easy to push aside.
4. An enlightenment, materialist philosophy is in vogue, casting doubt on matters of faith. (823)
5. Fatigue with centuries of theological dispute have led to a watering down or elimination of doctrinal differences.
6. Actions by the *president* of the institution, though never overt, often begin the process of disengagement. In public, their rhetoric never matches the things they say in private. (826)
7. The disengagement first becomes overt always at the *faculty* level. *The first signs of this are silence and then absence* (from religious activity/events – i.e. chapel services). Additionally, over decades, faculties have abandoned their responsibility to safeguard the morality of the student body. The administration took over, but eventually just gave up.
8. The overall desire to appeal to *all* available potential students and later, the desire for diversity. Ironically, this quickly produces homogeneity among all schools (the same philosophies and political correctness become common to all). (833)
9. The prevalent feeling that the free inquiry required by higher education demands that they be answerable to “no one” (church body). This is replaced, however, by the rush to subject themselves to the influence of the academy. Accreditation associations assume much more influence than they previously had.
10. Theology is separated from the realm of social (collective) learning, replaced by the simpler notion of faith as a purely personal experience. In turn, this produces relativism regarding statements of faith, making it easier to remove faith from the areas of “legitimate” learning. (842)

³⁷ James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: the Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

11. The progressive watering down of theology for inclusiveness' sake makes it easy to discard altogether.
12. Once church ties are severed, what little remains of the Christian legacy is left to the mercy of the academy and the rationalism it engenders. For a time, universities attempt to retain the pious by-products of faith ("friendliness," temperance, self-control, etc.), without the Christianity that is the true source of such things. With no foundational truth, these aspirations die quickly.
13. A trend is noted towards empty, simplistic pietism that begins not in the school, but with the sponsoring church body. This precedes the eventual disregard for the type of theological scholarship necessary for a thriving, regenerating faith.
14. Rather than encouraging the type of scholarship that can keep theology vibrant and relevant, a number of instances are noted where some in the church loudly and clumsily voice their criticism of any new educational initiative in their attempts to keep the school from severing ties. Their anti-intellectual attempts backfire, producing sympathy for the victim of their attack, usually the president of the college or school, causing an acceleration of the very thing they were trying to avoid.
15. The failure to retain the idea that the Gospel is the true and indisputable power of God Himself (real, objective truth with a capital "T"). The author notes: "Both educators and church officers have been persuaded that their churches *have no intellectual insight or critical gift* that would distinguish them as academic mentors." (emphasis added - 850)

Summary quotation:

The elements of the slow but apparently irrevocable cleavage of colleges from churches were many. The church was replaced as a financial patron by alumni, foundations, philanthropists, and the government. The regional accrediting associations, the alumni, and the government replaced the church as the primary authorities to whom the college would give an accounting of its stewardship. The study of their faith became academically marginalized, and the understanding of religion was degraded by translation into reductive banalities for promotional use. Presidential hubris found fulfillment in cultivating the colleges to follow the academic pacesetters, which were selective state and independent universities. The faculty transferred their primary loyalties from their college to their disciplines and their guild, and were thereby antagonistic to any competing norms of professional excellence related to the church. (837)

Part II: My reactions and other items drawn from the book that I think may be beneficial:

1. Stress the importance of the mission and the institution *over* the career of the individual. Hire only those who agree with these priorities. Beware any policy that may entrench those faculty that may be at odds with our mission. Case in point: Harold H. Ditmanson, veteran religion professor at St. Olaf, wrote the following (privately) to a colleague in 1974: "...just between you and me, it is my considered judgment that IF the present faculty were to be tenured, St. Olaf could forget about being a Christian college. I simply can't understand why some teachers who say openly that they have no sympathy with the aims and objectives of St. Olaf want to stay here and wreck the tradition that has made this the kind of place at which you and I are willing to spend our lives."
2. The author speaks at great length about how the marketing rhetoric of the institution typically became more "religious" in nature while the faculty that had *already been hired*

- was antagonistic towards (or at least unsupportive of) the mission. The marketing promised something the school was already unable to deliver. (834)
3. When *our own constituency* ignores Bethany for whatever reason (pastors that don't actively pursue students in their own congregations, etc.), they are, in effect, pushing us towards secularization. If we cannot fill the dorms with our own constituents, the school (like so many others) may be forced to fill the dorms with students far less interested in or supportive of our mission.
 4. The author stresses that when faculty are encouraged to (or choose to) specialize in any one specific area 100% of their time, they are less likely to be able to approach their classroom activities with any kind of overarching perspective. As a result, no "permeating" mission will filter down to the student and it's less likely that any modeling of professional, Christian behavior may be found. (836)
 5. We should encourage in our staff "the thoughtful critique of the world and culture" (836). This is made more effective by the insight provided by a Christian worldview.
 6. A strong link to the sponsoring church body needs to be maintained, since the church is more resistant to change (it happens more slowly) compared to institutions of higher education. (838)
 7. We need to hire (in the words of the author): "...learned and articulate believers who [are] not only open to all truth, but [possessing] of advantages in approaching all truth: graced master insights, an interpretive community, and an authentic tradition. The great need [is] *not to equalize all truths but to order them.*" (844)
 8. In other words, we need to encourage "meaningful, critical Christian scholarship based on our unique *advantage* in approaching truth."
 9. Resist attempts to separate personal faith from historical religion and wisdom (see following quotation).

Christian scholars knowledgeable in the long dialectical tradition of their faith know that it has zestfully grappled with criticism in diverse cultures for centuries... But if they lose their nerve and are intimidated by their academic colleagues, as is true of most of the characters in these stories, they, too, will end up judging the church by the academy and the gospel by the culture. In time, they will probably lose the capacity to tell them apart. They will fail to judge the academy, or to notice intellectuals who are in thrall, not free; argument that is not rational; judgments that have become dogmas roughly enforced. (851)

APPENDIX C: Luther the Role Model – His Understanding of Nature

[The following Luther quotes are taken from *Luther's World of Thought* written by Heinrich Borkamm and translated into English by Martin H. Bertram. In these quotations we see Luther's intense fascination with and observation of the created world which probably had much to do with begetting modern science, and at the same time we see his understanding that all God's creative works "declare the glory of God."]

If you really examined a kernel of grain thoroughly, you would die of wonderment.³⁸

They are so accustomed to them [i. e., God's works of creation]; they are as permeated with them as an old house is with smoke; they use them and wallow around in them like a sow in an oats sack. Oh, they say, is it so marvelous that the sun shines? That fire heats? That water contains fish? That hens lay eggs? That the earth yields grain? That a cow bears calves? That a woman gives birth to children? Why, this happens every day! You dear dolt Hans, must it be insignificant because it happens daily? If the sun ceased to shine for ten days, then its shining would surely be regarded as a great work. If fire were to be found only in one spot in the world, I judge that it would be esteemed more precious than all gold and silver. If there were only one well in the world, I suppose that one drop of water would be priced at above 100,000 gulden and that wine and beer would be considered filth by comparison. If God created all other women and children of bone, as He did Eve, and but one woman were able to bear children, I maintain that the whole world, kings and lords, would worship her as a divinity. But now that every woman is fruitful, it passes as nothing. If a magician could make a live eye, one able to see for the distance of a yard, – God help us, what a lord he would become on earth! Yes, anyone who could fashion a real leaf or a blossom on a tree would have to be elevated above God and receive the admiration, the praise, and the gratitude of the whole world. But is it not vexing to see the accursed ingratitude and blindness of mankind? God showers man with such great and rich miracles, but man ignores them all and thanks God for none.³⁹

We are now living in the dawn of the future life; for we are beginning to regain a knowledge of the creation, a knowledge we had forfeited by the fall of Adam. Now we have a correct view of the creatures, more so, I suppose, than they have in the papacy. Erasmus does not concern himself with this; it interests him little how the fetus is made, formed, and developed in the womb. Thus he also fails to prize the excellency of the state of marriage. But by God's mercy we can begin to recognize His wonderful works and wonders also in the flowers when we ponder His might and His goodness. Therefore we laud, magnify, and thank Him. In His creatures we recognize the power of His Word. By His Word everything came into being. This power is evident even in a peach stone. No matter how hard its shell, in due season it is forced open by a very soft kernel inside it. All this is ignored by Erasmus. He looks at the creatures as a cow stares at a new gate.⁴⁰

³⁸ Martin Luther as cited by Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's World of Thought* (St. Louis: CPH, 1958, reprinted in 2005; translated by Martin H. Bertram), p. 152.

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Ibid.*, p. 153.

APPENDIX D: God's Purposes in Nature

1. Nature Provides Necessities
Gen. 1:29; Gen. 9:3; Acts 14:17
2. Nature Educates
Job 12:7-8; Ps. 19:1-4
3. Nature Inspires with Beauty and Awe and Brings Joy
Ps. 68:15; Job 31:26; Luke 12:27
4. Nature Testifies to the Existence, Glory, Power, Kindness, and Incomprehensible Nature of the Creator
Ps. 19:1; Acts 14:17; Job 36-41
5. Nature Testifies to the Fall of Man and the Righteous Judgment of God
Gen. 3:17-19; Job 40:4; Job 42:3-6; Rom. 8:19-22

APPENDIX E: Natural and Supernatural Revelation

[The following quotation from Joseph Stump has been used by Pastor David Jay Webber at the Confessional Christian Worldview Seminar. I have found it to be a good and easily-grasped explanation of the differences between natural and supernatural revelation.]

We can know God only to the extent to which He has revealed Himself to us. The Scriptures declare that ***“He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen or can see”*** (1 Tim. 6:16). But, ...He has revealed Himself in two ways: by a natural revelation, on the one hand, through conscience and nature; and by a supernatural revelation, on the other, through His dealings with men in history. He speaks to men in the voice of conscience (Rom. 2:14,15), which tells them that there is a Higher Being to whom they are accountable; and in the voice of the universe in which we live (Rom. 1:19,20; Ps. 19:1 seq.), which tells them that there is a Creator and Designer who has fashioned the world with wondrous power and wisdom. But He also speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:19), in which are recorded the words and deeds by which He has made Himself known to men in times past. The knowledge gained from conscience and nature supports and corroborates much of the knowledge gained from the supernatural revelation. Left to himself, that is, to the natural revelation, man has been able to know God only in a very limited way. He knows that God is, and cannot escape the consciousness of His existence. The idea of God is a constant in his thought along with that of self and the world. He knows that God is just and holy, because these attributes are impressed upon him by his conscience. And he knows from the world in which he lives that God is a being of vast intelligence and power. The degree of this natural knowledge varies with different nations and individuals. Even at best, however, the natural knowledge of God is defective and mixed with much error. And it is utterly insufficient, because it tells and can tell absolutely nothing concerning the way of salvation for mankind. God is the God of salvation and cannot be known apart from Christ. For ***“no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him”*** (John 1:18). Only in Christ can the right conception of God and His saving love be obtained.⁴¹

⁴¹ Joseph Stump, *The Christian Faith* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932], pp. 31-32.