Life at the Cross-Roads: Education and Scholarship

Before you start...

- Do the pre-reading for this week (see Unit Guide p6 + uploads on Moodle) + Forum Post
- From the reading, come prepared to share a question, challenge, implication & application
- If it’s your turn, come prepared to share about your vocation or current affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

This module we continue our exploration of how we may live faithfully at the crossroads—that is, at the intersection of the competing stories of the (post)modern world, and a Biblical worldview. Our central focus this week is on Education and Scholarship.

After student interaction/sharing and unpacking the pre-readings in the first session, we’ll deconstruct the modern educational endeavour, focusing on our own experiences of education, and some contemporary critiques of the strengths and weaknesses of our educational systems.

In the final session we’ll attempt to reconstruct education and scholarship as part of a biblical worldview—or, as Nicholas Wolterstorff calls it, consider what it means to be educating for shalom. As always, we will consider: Where can I see creational intent? How has cultural idolatry of the fall twisted this good gift? And how may I faithfully participate in the Biblical story with healing action?

Everything is seen with the filter of creation, fall, and redemption.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this module are to:

1. Consider education/scholarship from the angle of creational intent, cultural idolatry, and healing action
2. Strategise for educational forms that emerge from a biblical worldview, using the heuristic of commend, challenge, barrier, bridge (cf. module 7)

OUTCOMES

On completion of this module, students shall be expected to explain how creation, fall, and redemption shape our view and engagement of education and scholarship.

SESSION FLOW (lecture runs 1:20-4:50pm, with breaks from 2:10-3:05pm, and 3:55-4:00pm)

1:20  Student Sharing (Praying the News + Vocation) & Review of Readings (50 mins.)
3:05  Deconstructing 21st Century Education (50 mins.)
4:00  Reconstructing Education & Scholarship toward Shalom (50 mins.)
2. INTERACTION: CURRENT AFFAIRS, GOD@WORK + REVIEW READINGS

Activity 10.1: Praying the Papers
BBC + Prayer (10 mins.)

“The Pastor and the Faithful should not deceive themselves into thinking that they are a religious society, which has to do with certain themes; they live in the world. We still need—according to my old formulation—the Bible and the Newspaper. ... [So] take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”—Karl Barth

Each week, one student will share a newspaper article or media clip concerning events in the public square. The grid of creational intent, cultural idolatry, and healing action (creation, fall, restoration) should be used in evaluating this aspect of local or global news. (Perhaps the one minute BBC world summary will give you some stimulus: www.bbc.com/news/av/10462520/one-minute-world-news.)

First, share your initial reflections from a Christian worldview. Second, as a class we’ll consider what a faithful and embodied Christian response may look like—a response that addresses both our thinking, and cultivating practices/liturgies that direct our heart to desire and represent the Kingdom of God. Third, we’ll bring this aspect of the world to Jesus in prayer.

Class Activity 10.2: God @ Work (10 mins.)

Each week one or two students will share for 3-5 minutes concerning his or her main vocation, and how to live faithfully at the crossroads. You’ll work through the same questions as used in the various “God @ Work” interviews/transcripts each module.

1. Describe your vocation
2. Where do you see creational intent in this vocation (designed for good)
3. How has cultural idolatry (sin) warped this vocation? (damaged by evil)
4. How might you participate redemptively with healing action as you seek first the Kingdom of God? (restored for better ⇒ sent together to heal the world ⇒ a taste of when God sets everything right)

Afterward, we’ll pray for you, dedicating your vocation afresh to the glory of God.

(n.b. You may find, in preparation for sharing, the Module 2 “Kingdom Gap” graphic a helpful frame)
Class Activity 10.3: Reading Review (25 mins.)

In response to the pre-reading for this module, students will be chosen to share on one of the following:
- a question — something you don’t get, or want to clarify
- a challenge — something you disagree with, or want to nuance
- an implication — “so what” for our apologetic practice
- an application — something useful right now in your context

The whole class can then contribute to further discussion, bouncing off their own forum posts. The aim is to ground the readings and apply them to one’s life in general and ministry context in particular.

This is the ideal time to bring up whatever is confusing, or questions you have in regards to the course material, so don’t be shy!

Pre-Reading for this Module ... What are your key questions and insights?

Living at the Cross-Roads, pp146-173 [here]

Gore-Tex Curriculum Resists the Good Book [here]

Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to X’n Philosophers” [here]

“God’s Curriculum: ReImagining Education As a Journey Toward Shalom” [here]

“Why We Need the World: Musings from the Interface of Education and Theology” [here]

“Locating Learners in God’s Big Story” [article; presentation]

“[Un]Common Good: Peaceable Dialogue for Partisan Times”
[2016 Tinsley Lecture; essay; video]
3. DECONSTRUCTING 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource 10.1: Where is Modern Education Going?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following are some key books to help analyse contemporary education:</td>
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Concerning the emerging Australian Curriculum, the following web-sites may be helpful:

- Home page for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority [here](#).
- "The Melbourne Declaration" espousing the philosophy undergirding ACARA for 2008-2018 [here](#) (later expressed through the 2012 “Shape of the Australian Curriculum, version 4.0” [here](#), which supersedes "The Adelaide Declaration” from 1999 [here](#)).
- Here for (hyper-) critical perspective on the Australian Curriculum, arguably from a politically conservative modernist paradigm by [Chris Berg](#) from the [Institute of Public Affairs Australia](#) here and [here](#).

For my own thoughts and [PhD project](#) (extended version) reintroducing the study of Sacred Texts into Australian Public Education (overview [here](#); [proposal](#); [background](#)), see multiple Moodle articles/resources and my Wondering Fair post “Gore-Text Curriculum Resists the Good Book” [here](#).

- “God’s Curriculum: Relimagining Education As a Journey Toward Shalom”
- “Why We Need the World: Musings from the Interface of Education and Theology” presentation on engaging public education, part of the 2017 Morling College “Not In Kansas Anymore” event
- “Locating Learners in God’s Big Story” (aka GBS 2.0), [essay](#) + [workshop](#), for Christian Schools Australia 2017, as a framework for integrating a biblical worldview with Australian Curriculum
- “Uncommon Good: Peacable Dialogue for Partisan Times” 2016 Tinsley Lecture
- “Curriculum Visions: The Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and Dwayne Huebner Discuss Civics and Citizenship”
- “Shalom and Sustainability: God’s Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum Converse Over Creation and Geography” (pp60-67 of AJMS 20.2 [2016] [here](#))
3.1 First Thoughts

Education may seem like a fairly innocuous task—teaching people what they need to know to make their way in the world. Yet, ask a few questions, and you discover how shaped the educational vision is by our overall vision of the world:

What does it mean to be human? What counts as knowledge? Indeed, what is education for?

Class Activity 10.4: Towards a Worldview of Education

In pairs, take 5 minutes to answer the following two questions, before discussing as a class:

- What is education? Come up with a 1-2 sentence definition
- If you were given the task of re-designing Australia’s education system (a task undertaken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority), list the most important five deeper worldview questions that you would need to answer before you could evaluate what is presently happening, and determine both the content and approach to a new educational system.

Next, as a class, watch this youtube clip, by educational expert Ken Robinson here (full talk here):

- What stood out most in his critique? (See also his TED talk here, “Why Schools Kill Creativity”)
- With what do you agree or disagree? (cf. Alain de Botton, School of Life, “What’s Education For?”)

Thinking now from a Christian worldview, we’ll employ a heuristic from Module 7, section 4.3.2, p20:

- What can I commend (champion, praise) in this cultural aspect?
- What should I challenge?
- How does this cultural aspect form a barrier (blockage) to people experiencing Christ’s Kingdom?
- How does this cultural aspect offer a bridge (connection point) to the Christ’s Kingdom?

3.2 Common Critiques

As Ken Robinson pointed out in the video we just watched, almost every country is currently reforming public education. At a superficial level, one may think this is simply because the world is changing: any education worth its while must adapt to match the world in which we live. Thus, new forms of education acknowledge how quickly we change careers, the exponential expansion of (technical) knowledge, and the global-nature of life through immigration, travel, and the free market—so the delivery of education is shifted to emphasise adaptability, technological literacy, ability to access and evaluate information, and multicultural awareness particularly of the Asian nations on our doorstep.

Stepping back and delving deeper, however, there is a crisis of educational vision. Neil Postman in his insightful critique of contemporary education—The End of Education—calls the above modifications “the engineering side” of education—questions of content, delivery, and mechanics. Instead, Postman shifts to the metaphysical question: we’ve lost our vision of what education is for. What is the telos of education?

(Watch an interview with Postman here, also his 2 x 2minute youtube videos on “Education as a Cure for Stupidity”! & !)
Education has always been sustained by some ‘god’—that is, a larger and central story or set of values that justify the massive expenditure of time, energy, and money to keep people in class for so many years. Yet, the story—and subsequently the ‘god’ that directs education—has shifted significantly in recent centuries.

A simple (arguably simplistic) sketch of this shift might go like this:

**Premodern Education:** At its best, premodern education acknowledged that God has given us life and a mandate to bear His image as stewards. Thus—beginning with the family—we are to help form people to take part in this world as active contributors who love God, love others, and cultivate the world toward flourishing. At its worst, education was a didactic/catechetical (direct delivery/rote learning) transfer of absolute truths and unchanging tradition from unquestionable civic and religious authorities—Kings and Popes—to sure up the status quo in unthinking conservatism. (Though this is more caricature than reality.)

**Modern Education:** As trust in God’s revelation and its powerful mouthpieces waned, and Enlightenment optimism about our own abilities grew, mass public education was spawned with a vision for societal progress. This would be achieved through cultivating rational and autonomous individuals who knew truly through scientific objectivity controlling and directing both nature and society. Education became the vehicle for making this modern dream a reality—a blessing to be exported to the rest of the world toward harmony and flourishing. Later in this dream, education was seen as a force for emancipation (e.g. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and other authors like bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, following Habermasian critical theory and liberation theology).

**Postmodern Education:** After the failure of scientific rationality seen in the world wars (climaxing in the Holocaust), increasingly educational philosophers have come to see that we are not autonomous rational beings. We are shaped by our culture, influenced by our emotions and bias, and thus knowledge is less ‘discovered’ than constructed as we together engage the world. This modern metanarrative of progress through scientific control has been used to eliminate otherness and silence less powerful voices. Additionally, it has formed people who over-consume and harm our planet through technical control. Thus, we have a fragmenting of the purpose of education. Even the vision of education for emancipation has come under fire: Whose emancipation? Through what means? Isn’t this, again, one local and particular story claiming to speak for everyone? A variety of educational visions emerge, including focus on the development of children to become fully human in capacity (Piaget and Dewey), to work together through experiences that help construct knowledge for the common good (Vygotsky, Matthew Lipman), and to subvert dominant stories through encouraging a proliferation of local narratives that help diversity flourish (Lyotard, Usher and Edwards).

Meanwhile, the modern vision remains—particularly in the sciences—highlighting that there are multiple ways of being ‘modern’, and that these visions are often incommensurate (see Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*), such that we struggle to even decide upon a common set of values to direct the modern educational endeavour.
Take, for instance, contention over how the emerging Australian Curriculum described *science*, as part of an overarching statement introducing the syllabus for physics, chemistry and biology for Years 11 and 12, entitled “A view of science and science education”:\(^1\)

> “Science is a social and cultural activity through which explanations of natural phenomena are generated. ... Explanations of natural phenomena may be viewed as mental constructions based on personal experiences and result from a range of activities including observation, experimentation, imagination and discussion. ... Accepted scientific concepts, theories and models may be viewed as shared understandings that the scientific community perceive as viable in light of current available evidence.”

The view of science as outlined by the Queensland Studies Authority was utterly rejected by the Australian Council of Deans of Science, representing the heads of science faculties in the nation’s universities. The council’s executive director, John Rice from Sydney University, said it was a misleading view of science and misunderstood "the unique way in which science goes about understanding things." "That statement makes scientific knowledge sound as though it’s no more than the fantasies of a bunch of scientists," he said. "That’s quite wrong. It fails to understand the way in which science grounds itself in observation and testable hypotheses."

The Queensland Studies Authority said the statements concerning a view of science and science education should be read in the context of the entire syllabus and it was not, and was never intended to be, a definition of science. The authority said the statement was "intended to reflect the complex nature by which scientific understandings have progressed."

Long story short, with the partial collapse of the (modern) Enlightenment story, there is little agreement as to precisely what education is for. We may continue to debate ‘engineering’ issues of how to be more efficient and effective delivering particular content, but there is a lack of clarity and considerable disparity as to what education is, and thus our vision of how it should be.


3.2.1 Provocative Quotes Critiquing Contemporary Education


“Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity’s ‘grand narratives’, the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised. The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on modernity’s self-motivated, self-directing, rational subject, capable of exercising individual agency. Postmodernism’s emphasis on the inscribed subject, the decentred subject constructed by language, discourses, desire and the unconscious, seems to contradict the very purpose of education and the basis of educational activity.” (p2)

“We take the view that education is itself going through profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods. These changes are part of a process that, generally, questions the role of education as the child of the Enlightenment. Consequently, education is currently the site of conflict and part of the stakes in that conflict. … In a sense, the postmodern perspective is a confrontation with epistemology and deeply embedded notions of foundations, disciplines and scientificity.” (p3)

“The faith in rationality and science with its promise of inevitable progress in the task of human betterment is perhaps the feature of modernity which has come under most significant attack. … Human progress through the progress of scientific knowledge is one of those ‘metanarratives’ or ‘grand narratives’, the higher-order metaphysical forms of legitimation which, according to Lyotard (1984), are marked out as subject to ‘incredulity’ in postmodernity. Consequently, the notion of inevitable progress has been thrown into doubt, rendered ‘incredible’, by the continuation of want, disease, famine, destruction and the recognition of the ecological costs of ‘development’. … In postmodernity, the breakdown of the faith in science and rationality has further ramifications and associations. We witness a questioning of the scientific attitude, a denial of modernist scientificity with its emphasis on the universal efficacy of scientific method and of the stance of objectivity and value-neutrality in the making of knowledge-claims. … The epistemological stance which sees scientific method as producing value-free and therefore ‘true’ knowledge is no longer so readily accepted. There is an increasing recognition that all knowledge-claims are partial, local and specific rather than universal and ahistorical, and that they are always imbued with power and normative interests—indeed that what characterises modernity is precisely the concealing of the partiality and rootedness of knowledge-claims in the cloak of universality and value-neutrality. … In effect, in the condition of postmodernity, there is a questioning of the modernist belief in a legitimate and hence legitimating centre upon which beliefs and actions can be grounded.” (p9)

“Education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is founded in the modernist tradition. Education is very much the dutiful child of the Enlightenment and, as such, tends to uncritically accept a set of assumptions deriving from Enlightenment thought. Indeed, it is possible to see education as the vehicle by which the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, humanistic individual freedom and benevolent progress are substantiated and realised. As Lyotard argues, the project of modernity is deeply intertwined with education, modernity’s belief being that progress in all areas will emancipate ‘the whole of humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness, despotism . . . thanks to education in particular, it will also produce enlightened citizens, masters of their own destiny’ (Lyotard 1992: 97).” (p24)

Lytotard refers to our present postmodern predicament as a “crisis of narratives” (Lyotard, *PMC*, xxiii).
“Lyotard, like other writers within the postmodern moment, argues that resistance and subversion are the key postmodern condition that replaces the emancipatory promises of modernity. Given education’s central role in the modern project, questions arise about how it does this and how it can respond in the postmodern moment.

We have seen how the grand narratives of modern science provided the basis for particular forms of educational practice. The grand narrative of progress, where the development of scientific knowledge supposedly results in the emancipation of humanity, is most closely associated with the project of modernity. Here scientific knowledge replaces myths, beliefs and superstition by discovering the ‘truth’ of the world. Science becomes the guarantor and route to truth and emancipation. The emancipation of humanity thus requires that people are given access to scientific knowledge, since the condition of their emancipation is that they live subject to the ‘laws’ uncovered by science. Thus, as we have seen, the educational programme which is legitimised here focuses on primary education as a condition for initial schooling of everyone into science. The state takes responsibility for education and different groups play different roles according to the amount of education they receive. Thus teaching and learning are the main concerns of education within this grand narrative.” (p172)


"At its best, schooling can be about how to make a life, which is quite different from how to make a living. ... In tracking what people have to say about schooling, I notice that most of the conversation is about means, rarely about ends. Should we privatize our schools? Should we have national standards of assessment? How should we use computers? What use can we make of television? How shall we teach reading? And so on. Some of these questions are interesting and some are not. But what they have in common is that they evade the issue of what schools are for. It is as if we are a nation of technicians, consumed by our expertise in how something should be done, afraid or incapable of thinking about why.

I write this book in the hope of altering, a little bit, the definition of the "school problem"—from means to ends. "End," of course, has at least two important meanings: "purpose" and "finish." Either meaning may apply to the future of schools, depending on whether or not there ensues a serious dialogue about purpose. By giving the book its ambiguous title, I mean to suggest that without a transcendent and honorable purpose schooling must reach its finish, and the sooner we are done with it, the better. With such a purpose, schooling becomes the central institution through which the young may find reasons for continuing to educate themselves.” (p x-xi)

“Without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention. This is what my book is about.” (p7)


“Any ideal of critical openness that fails to take into account the psychological and sociological constraints on our attempts to be rational is simply unrealistic. Any ideal of critical openness that fails to take into account the human need for security or the need to come to some fairly definite conclusions ("functional absolutes") simply in order to live is being unrealistic. Critical openness taken to the extreme might be appropriate for the gods, but not for human beings. What is needed is a new concept of normal critical openness that is realistic, that recognises the limited degree to which human beings can and should be critical and have open minds.” (p154)
“Western society has undergone a process of secularization which involves a gradual erosion of the influence of religious ideas and institutions on all aspects of society, culture, and thought. This process was related to the growth of science and the acceptance of the scientific ideal as the norm for all areas of thought, and it has influenced the ideal of liberal education. Hence the increasing reluctance to acknowledge that initiation into a particular religion might be an essential element of a liberal education. ... If it is generally felt that God does not exist, then any aspect of education that might relate to God would obviously be viewed with suspicion. I suggest that much of the suspicion that surrounds Christian nurture is grounded in a naturalistic metaphysics. Charges of indoctrination against Christian nurture beg some important questions. Does God exist? Or, might he exist? It should therefore not surprise us that discussions of indoctrination are invariably coloured by strong anti-religious sentiments. As I have argued, however, there are problems with the dogmatic empiricism that often underlies the scientific ideal and the secularist frame of mind. What I am proposing in my reconstruction of the ideal of liberal education is that we do not beg any metaphysical questions and that we therefore allow for the possibility of a broader metaphysics which acknowledges a transcendent reality. This is not at all to suggest that liberal education must include initiation into a particular religion. Secularists should certainly be free to fill the ideal of liberal education with secular content. I am only insisting that religious people be allowed similar privileges. I am therefore calling on liberals to be true to their liberalism and to avoid making dogmatic assumptions in defining the metaphysics underlying the ideal of a liberal education.” (p216f)

“Public education today is very much governed by principles that are in keeping with the Enlightenment liberal ideals of science, rationality, autonomy, and critical openness. However, I have argued that each of these liberal ideals must be seriously qualified in order to be philosophically defensible. Hence there is also a need to reassess the system of state-maintained education that we, in most of the western world, have come to take for granted.” (p273)


“My deepest belief has remained unchanged: that a college or university is not just a place for the transmission of knowledge but a forum for the exploration of life’s mystery and meaning through the careful but critical reading of the great works of literary and philosophical imagination that we have inherited from the past.” (p6)

“Our lives are the most precious resource we possess, and the question of how to spend them is the most important question we face. The lives we actually lead are the more-or-less well-thought-out answers we give to this question. Our answers depend, of course, on what we value and where we find fulfillment. How should I spend my life? That question immediately invites another. What do I most care about and why? For the sake of what—or who—am I living? What is my life for?” (p9)

“[T]he question of life’s meaning has not always been neglected as it now is. Once upon a time, and not all that long ago, many college and university teachers, especially in the humanities, believed they had a responsibility to lead their students in an organized examination of this question and felt confident in their authority to do so. They recognized that each student’s answer must be his or her own but believed that a disciplined survey of the answers the great writers and artists of the past have given to it can be a helpful aid to students in their own personal encounter with the question of what living is for—indeed, an indispensable aid, without which they must face the question not only alone but in disarray.” (p35)
3.3 The Australian Curriculum

Class Activity 10.5: Engaging ACARA

In light of the above critiques, in this activity we will consider the philosophical framing of the Australian Curriculum. In threes, open the 2012 pdf “Shape of the Australian Curriculum v4.0.” (It’s on Moodle here, or online here. The more indepth “Melbourne Declaration” is here.)

- Together, skim pages 5-9, outlining the rationale and goals of the Australian Curriculum.
- What stood out most in these pages?
- Using the simple (simplistic) summary of trends in education above (section 3.2, premodern ⇒ modern ⇒ postmodern education), where would you place this curriculum? In what ways does it reflect elements of each approach to education?
- Again, using the heuristic of commend, challenge, bridge, barrier, how might you critique the telos of the Australian Curriculum from a Christian worldview?

Now, rejoin as a class and share some key insights.

Reflection Activities 10.1 & 10.2

Journal at least 30 (meaningful!) words in response the following questions, and tick off the related boxes on pp. 14/15 of the unit guide.

#10.1 From Class Activity 10.4, what are five key questions that need to be answered before you can wisely consider the practicalities (‘engineering’ issues) of educational content and delivery?

#10.2 From Class Activity 10.5, and using the heuristic page 5 applied to the rationale and goals behind the Shape of the Australian Curriculum (pp5-9 of version 4.0 here), answer these four questions from a Christian worldview:

What can I commend (champion, praise) in this curriculum?
What should I challenge?
How does this cultural aspect form a barrier (blockage) to people experiencing Christ’s Kingdom?
How do this cultural aspect offer a bridge (connection point) to the Christ’s Kingdom?

Now, rejoin as a class and share some key insights.
3.4 Extra Notes, Summarizing Goheen and Bartholomew, Living @ the X’Roads

Secular-Apostolic Dilemma
- Apostolic identity: Christians are “sent ones” - Sent to witness to the Lordship of Christ over all of public life
- Secular setting: Involved in culture that serves different lords
- Dilemma especially acute in education

Educational dilemma
- State mandates education for its purposes
  - Christian education may be subversive
- Gospel offers different vision of purpose of education
  - Public education inculcates dangerous worldview

Enlightenment and Education
- More treatises written during Enlightenment period than all other centuries put together
- Public education: Primary instrument to implement Enlightenment vision

Sketch of Human Progress
“We shall point out how more universal education in each country, by giving more people the elementary knowledge that can inspire them with a taste for more advanced study and give them the capacity for making progress in it, can add to such hopes; how [these hopes] increase even more, if a more general prosperity permits a greater number of individuals to pursue studies, since at present, in the most enlightened countries, hardly a fiftieth part of those men to whom nature has given talent receive the education necessary to make use of their talents; and that, therefore, the number of men destined to push back the frontiers of the sciences by their discoveries will grow in the same proportion [as universal education increases]. We shall show how this equality of education, and the equality that will arise between nations, will speed up the advances of those sciences whose progress depends on observations repeated in greater number over a larger area . . .” (Marquis de Condorcet, 1743-1797)

Enlightenment and Education
- Pass on a unified body of universal scientific knowledge
- Equip a world of rational citizens
- Build a more rational world leading to freedom, justice, truth, and material prosperity

Postmodern Challenge to Modern Education
- If (in modernity) education was guided by the story of progress towards a better society by science and technology but we are increasingly sceptical of that story...
- If (in modernity) education was to pass along a unified body of universal knowledge but we more and more question that such a thing exists...
- Then what is the purpose of education?
Breakdown of Modern Story: Purpose of Education?
Consider the role of the Western story of progress in education. Again, Usher and Edwards are helpful: “Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity’s ‘grand narratives,’ the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realized.” Take away this story of civilizational progress and the modern mass education loses a central dimension of its raison d’etre (Brian Walsh).

Gods of Education Today
- ‘god’: “... a comprehensive narrative about what the world is like, how things got to be the way they are, and what lies ahead.”
- gods shaping education today: economic utility, consumerism, technology, multiculturalism

(Neil Postman, End of Education)

Education Today
- Vendor of useful information and marketable skills
- Enables student to compete or survive in the jungle of the market

Breakdown of Modern Story: Evangelistic Opportunity?
The issue [is] not whether education is rooted in a grand story, but which grand story it shall be rooted in? If the tale of capitalistic progress is beginning to fray at the edges then perhaps this is an evangelistically opportune time for Christian education to offer another story--one that replaces the self-salvation of economic progress with the tale of a coming Kingdom of redemption (Brian Walsh).

Critical Participants in Educational Enterprise
- Participants: Engaged with our cultural contemporaries in educational task
- Critical: Engaged in critical way from standpoint of gospel

Participants!
- Danger of isolation and withdrawal
- Especially in separate Christian schools and home-based education

We are not called to establish closed Christian communities in the world, but to penetrate as salt into the world. Our Christian communities deserve the label “Christian” only so far as they facilitate penetrating this world in keeping with Jesus’ words to his Father concerning his disciples in all ages: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). It is valid to maintain Christian schools and colleges as manifestations of our community in Christ. They are not valid if they function within a closed Christian educational network. To be authentic they must be open to other educational communities in the world around us. We do not maintain our Christian integrity by isolating ourselves from the world around. Rather, such isolation denies our calling and falsifies our witness (Stuart Fowler).
Critical participants
- Based on different faith commitments
- Grasp insights of public education system
- Reject idolatry of humanist education

How do we proceed?
- Three possible responses: Christian schools, home-education, work within public school system
- Insights from Christian school movement (especially Kuyperian tradition) valuable for all
- Aiming for Christian education, settling for Christians educating (John Hull)

Aiming for Christian Education
- Alternative kind of education to public school system
- Rejects cultural idolatry that shapes these schools
- Based on distinctive and comprehensive philosophy of education
- Christian approach transforms the whole enterprise: goals, curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, structure, etc.

Settling for Christians Educating
- Christianity-enhanced public school education
- Adds moral integrity, devotional piety, and biblical insight to select topics (like Genesis 1)
- Maintains status quo about education

No icing on the cake!
Relating the gospel to education is not simply a matter of putting religious icing on an otherwise secular educational cake. Those who confess the Name of Christ are called to develop learning and teaching which is based on the Word of God. Recognising Christ’s creation-wide redemption, Christians will produce fresh and new approaches in education: a brand new cake! (Jack Mechielsen)

What is the purpose of education?
In tracking what people have to say about schooling, I notice that most of the conversation is about means, rarely about ends. Should we privatize our schools? Should we have national standards of assessment? . . . How shall we teach reading? . . . Some of these questions are interesting and some are not. But what they have in common is that they evade the issue of what schools are for. It is as if we are a nation of technicians, consumed by our expertise in how something should be done, afraid or incapable of thinking about why. (Postman)

Education will serve some god
Education needs a god, “a comprehensive narrative about what the world is like, how things got to be the way they are, and what lies ahead . . . [for] without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention.” (Postman)
Purpose of Education in Modern Narrative
- Pass on a unified body of universal scientific knowledge
- Equip a world of rational citizens
- Build a more rational world leading to freedom, justice, truth, and material prosperity

Purpose of education in postmodern perspective
- Vendor of useful information and marketable skills
- Enables student to compete or survive in the jungle of the market

Insights in cultural story
- Modernity
  - Education can equip students for productive role in culture
  - Education can aim toward better society
- Postmodernity
  - Education can provide insights and skills to provide for needs of family

Idolatries in cultural story
- Modernity: Trust in science to build better world
- Postmodernity: Consumerism as goal of human life

What is Education for . . . Some answers from Christian Educators
- for responsive discipleship (Stronks and Blomberg)
- for freedom (Fowler)
- for responsible action (Wolterstorff)
- for shalom (Wolterstorff)
- for commitment (Thiessen)

Education for witness
- Equipping students to witness to God’s kingdom with the whole of their lives
- Highlights antithetical encounter (Christians are to challenge the prevailing culture where appropriate)
- Highlights urgency of mission
- Challenges triumphalism
Education as witness
- Witness of the gospel to faithful education
- Challenges potential ghetto mentality of home-educators and Christian schools

Some Issues in Education
Some story will shape every aspect of the educational enterprise including:
- Purpose
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Leadership
- Structures
- Student evaluation
- Subject matter of each discipline

Faithful Christian Education?
- Need to define purpose of education
- Then: What needs to be taught to equip children for that purpose? (Curriculum)
- Then: How can this be achieved? (Pedagogy, structures, evaluation)

Questions: e.g., Curriculum
- What needs to be taught to equip students for witness?
- How does this differ from state requirements?
- Are there any specific omissions?
- How does modern and postmodern worldview affect curriculum?

Engaging Public Education
- Critical participation
- Discerning insights and idolatries

A Model for Thinking About Christian Education
Story \rightarrow Worldview \rightarrow Philosophy (ontology, anthropology, epistemology) \rightarrow Philosophy of education \rightarrow Various areas of education (curriculum, pedagogy, etc.)

Relating to Public Education
- Home-education? Christian schools?
- Involvement in public education?
Questions to home-educators

- What forms of community aid you in the task?
- What is the goal of home education?
- How can a ghetto mentality be avoided?

Questions for Christian schools

- Are Christian schools really different?
- How can a Christian school overcome the formidable obstacles that hinder it from being truly and faithfully Christian?

Some obstacles to being truly Christian

- Power of the humanist tradition
- Expectation of parents
- Limited time, ability, and training of teachers
- Pressure of governmental expectations
- Pervasive understandings of academic excellence

Conclusion after studying numerous Christian schools . . .

On the whole, there was nothing distinctively Christian about these schools in terms of their curricular design, pedagogy, evaluation procedures, organizational structure, or the lifestyle of its students (John Hull).

Are Christian schools different?

As far as I can tell, Christian schools do not provide an alternative Christian education, if by that term we mean that our biblical perspective on life leads to a biblical model of education (John Hull).

Questions to those who remain in public school system

- What forms of Christian community can help in the difficult task?

  Assumes:
  - Tremendous power of humanist educational tradition
  - How easy it is to resort to a dualism
  - Difficulty of going it alone
4. RECONSTRUCTING EDUCATION & SCHOLARSHIP TOWARD SHALOM

**Resource 10.2: Education for Shalom**

**The following web-sites and interviews will be helpful in capturing a deeper vision for education:**

- “What If” Learning; “Transforming Lives” Teaching; Trevor Cooling (Canterbury Christ Church University) National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) and the “Stapleford Centre”; “Cardus Education”; John Stackhouse’s work; David I. Smith’s books and work at the Kuyers Institute; The Excellence Centre and Heterodox Academy with James Dalziel (Morling College).
- Q Ideas has some great articles and videos on Education from a Christian Perspective [here](#).
- Nicholas Wolterstorff gives his advice to “those who would be Christian scholars” [here](#). Also, check out Alvin Plantinga’s advice to Christian Philosophers [here](#).
- Interview with Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, on being Christian in the academy [here](#).
- George Marsden—author of The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship—gives advice for “How can Christian scholars avoid privatizing their faith?” [here](#).
- John Stackhouse shares some of his thoughts on education [here](#).
- Stanley Hauerwas is a leading thinker on the nature of University + education as apprenticeship. Explore his blog [here](#), and articles on “What is a University for?” [here](#). Also, it’s well worth reading his 2010 First Things piece “Go With God: An open letter to young Christians on their way to college” [here](#). (Cf. “Religion & the Idea of a Research University” Cambridge project.)

**I’ve uploaded some fantastic (and short-ish) essays to Moodle, Module 10, Extra Resources:**

- Cf. Resource Box 10.1 for my educational/PhD work, including Ch. 5 “Theology of Education”

**For some great reading on Education from a Christian perspective:**


4.1 Christian Principles of Education

Class Activity 10.7: What Is Education For?

Think-Pair-Share. **What is Education For?**

Write down what you think are the two most fundamental purposes of Education from a Christian perspective. (And if possible, link each to a key Bible passage to warrant your selection.)—2 mins.

Now, pair up with another person, and share your answers, forming a list of four purposes.—3 mins.

Finally, each pair is to pair up again, and agree on four purposes.—4 mins.

List these principles on the board.

Now, watch the following 10 minute clip on *What If Learning*, by Trevor Cooling and Tom Wright:

“The Classroom and the Kingdom of God”

What impacted you most in this clip?

In this vision, what is education for?

Do you see any problems—especially from a Christian worldview—with this proposal?

What modifications would you make to his proposal if you were based in a “secular” school?

For an alternative take on “Christian” Schooling, drawing from the philosophy of classical education, see Davies Owens, “*Ancient Future Education.*” The same questions should be answered—particularly as this vision, whilst “Christian” in title, is a somewhat problematic fusion with Greek and Enlightenment ideals.
4.2 Getting Creative

For my dissertation (extended version on Moodle here; esp. Ch. 5), I placed education within a broader theology of life. That is, education exists to serve our overriding human mission in the world.

Thus, education serve to help us:

**Love God**
— to understand and engage God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37-38)

**Love Others**
— to understand and serve ‘the other’ with an unconditional will for their good (Matthew 22:39-40)

**Cultivate the World**
— to grow in knowledge and skill as we together pursue shalom for the common good: flourishing and right relatedness with God, each other, self, and all creation (Genesis 1-26-28; Jeremiah 29:5-8; Luke 2:52).

Following John Stackhouse’s frame in *Making the Best of It*, each of these purposes has both a creational aspect (pursuing shalom), and a redemptive aspect (pursuing salvation), given that we live in a fallen world. For instance, cultivation is both positive in seeking flourishing, and negative in addressing injustice.

Following James K. A. Smith’s book used in this course, these three purposes—to love God, love others, and cultivate the world—run deeper than engaging our minds. These purposes tie together in forming people holistically who desire the Kingdom of God (Mt 6:33; cf. here, here, and with David I. Smith, here and here). As Nicholas Wolterstorff argues, seeking shalom is both our duty and our delight.

In this, students are not seen as autonomous and atomised individuals who objectively engage the world in a purely clinical and rational way. Rather, we are seen as communal beings who must grow together, humbly feeling our way forward using the good gifts of God’s revelation and reason to engage the world—body and soul—toward the common good. Indeed, there is no knowing apart from trust, and no faithful action apart from empowerment by God’s Spirit.

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3 This would include ‘vocation’ as a driving theme. Education is cheapened when its primary purpose is to serve getting a job and becoming a unit of production within the general economy. Yet, a Christian view of education recognises our duty and delight to cultivate this world, and the sin of sloth in failing to use our gifts and abilities as stewards of God’s creation and culture makers. Education for shalom embraces knowledge, skills, growth and societal transformation. Respectively, then, it embraces the concerns of scholar-academics, social efficiency and learner centred advocates, and social reconstructionists (cf. Michael Schiro’s curriculum narratives, p. 7 above).
With modification, this vision may equally serve a ‘Christian’ and a ‘Public’ school, as the broader framework within which we conceive education. (For instance, love of God may be reframed as making space for the transcendent aspect of life, asking life’s deepest questions, engaging the beliefs of others in a pluralistic society, and encouraging students to integrate their life under an overriding metaphysic.)

### Class Activity 10.7: Reconstructing Education for Shalom

In groups of three, it’s time to get creative!

Each group will adopt one of the above four purposes, that together constitute the telos of education.

**Love God**

**Love Others as Self**

**Cultivate the World (Shalom/Vocation)**

**Desire the Kingdom (holistic community/formation)**

Picture that you are starting a brand new school. Focusing in on your particular aspect of Education, **what form could this take in practice (e.g. considering class structure, dynamics, curriculum, content and delivery)** that would reflect a Christian worldview? You might even think of a particular subject, and apply Trevor Cooling’s *What If …* approach to learning, working through the three step process:

1. **Seeing Anew**—curriculum links to faith, hope and love;
2. **Choosing Engagement**—finding a teaching approach and strategies that aim at God’s Kingdom
3. **Reshaping Practice**—changing the class context and routines to embody shalom

Resist the temptation to judge each idea you generate. Rather, **brainstorm** as many creative (even crazy!) ideas (5 minutes) before settling on just one or two ideas that you will share with the group (5 minutes to crystallise the idea, and 1 minute per group to inspire and share with the class).

### Reflection Activities 10.3 & 10.4

Journal at least 30 (meaningful!) words in response the following questions, and tick off the related boxes on pp. 14/15 of the unit guide.

**#10.3 From Class Activity 10.6,** what did you most and least like about either the “What If” approach to learning, or Davies Owens’ vision of “Ancient-Future Education”? What’s one aspect of this vision that would have improved your own schooling experience?

**#10.2 From Class Activity 10.7,** choose one of the four purposes of education, and come up with 5 creative ways this vision may be expressed. Which idea do you like best, and what difference for society as a whole would it make (in terms of the ‘common good’) were education to function like this?
4.3 God’s Curriculum and the Journey to the Common Good

Under Moodle, I’ve uploaded the “Thesis Proposal” for my PhD, entitled:

*Schools, Scripture and Secularisation: A Christian Theological Argument for Incorporating Sacred Texts in Australian Public Education.*

In particular, if education’s your thing, you may find Chapter 5 (also uploaded) interesting. It’s my crack at forming a narrative theology of education. I’ve made a few assumptions that playfully guide this project:

1) Education is for life, not simply an abstracted activity for kids to build skills and get a job
2) Biblically understood, the richest purpose of life is *shalom*: holistic flourishing through right relatedness with God, others, self, and the world. It includes both duty and delight. In secular terms, this may be understood as education for the “common good”, open to a transcendent take on life (revelation)
3) *Education* derives from *educere*, the drawing and leading out of people from slavery to rightly construed freedom. Similarly, the Bible can be read as “God’s Curriculum”, the divine pedagogue leading us out from immaturity to come of age as fully human.
4) Curriculum involves both content (what we learn *about*), and process (how we may actively live out what we learn). It is both a noun (curriculum as a course of study) and a verb (*currere* as the running of that course).
5) Thus, we can read the 6 acts of the Biblical story (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, New Creation) as a story of *learning about* shalom, and *participating with* the God of the journey, toward life abundant.
I’ve given you a summary of this vision below Class Activity 10.8, further reworked in a four lenses frame of “Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration” alongside Christian Schools Australia, “Locating Learners in God’s Big Story” (GBS 2.0; slides here). The telos of this curriculum is forming **WISE PEACEMAKERS**.
### Wise Peacemakers | Knowledge & Understanding (46ff, 82ff)

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**OVERVIEW:** The duty and delight of Work

- The promise and peril of Knowledge
- Cooperation and Justice enroute to Salvation
- The virtues and vision grounding our hope

### Wise Peacemakers | Skills & Dispositions (49ff)

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**OVERVIEW:** Cultivate God’s garden, bringing out the latent potential in all creation

- Repent over the ways we’ve deformed shalom, rethinking what is true, good & beautiful
- Love sacrificially, in God’s grace, to bridge divides and truly bless the world
- Create inspired signs of the future City of Peace, out of gratitude and in worship for God’s glory

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**Life at the X-Roads: Education & Scholarship**

**Module 10-24**

**PE310/510-D**
Based on the Biblical narrative of creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, Church and New Creation, God’s Curriculum may be understood as learning about work, knowledge, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness and hope. In turn, we participate with God as we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile and worship.

Imagine, then, that you are employed in a non-Christian State (“Secular”) school as a Year 10 English teacher. You are asked, among other objectives, to teach a unit on Literature that “compares and evaluates a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts” (objective ACELT1639).

Break into 6 groups, and brainstorm how the learning about/participating curriculum vision may shape what you cover and how you teach this unit.

**CREATION:** work + cultivate … secular equivalent = education for responsibility

**FALL:** knowledge + repent … secular equivalent = education for knowledge

**ISRAEL:** wisdom + bless … secular equivalent = education for understanding

**JESUS:** reciprocity + love … secular equivalent = education for care

**CHURCH:** holiness + reconcile … secular equivalent = education for character/inclusion

**NEW CREATION:** hope + worship … secular equivalent = education for integration

Put together just *one* rich idea for this unit, shaped by this vision. Share with the whole class.

Would this work in a secular setting? What safeguards would need to be in place?

How might you seek first the kingdom of God in this context?
4.4 Human Participation in Divine Pedagogy

In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I have argued that “education” and “religion” are twin pursuits. Both endeavours are framed within a larger story of who we are, where we came from, what went wrong, and how to lead humanity to flourishing. As such, the sharing of stories, particularly those considered revelatory by contemporary communities of belief, is a powerful process by which these trans-disciplinary perspectives may cross-pollinate. As we dialogue, we must recognise *curriculum* as the course we follow (what we “learn about”), and *currere* as the transformative communal journey (which we are “called to”). This accorded with my particular concern, to construct an evangelical narrative theology of education and the place of Sacred Texts therein, built on the metaphor of pilgrimage.

Thus, I re-told the Biblical story of our collective journey in six stages. In this travelogue, we considered God’s Curriculum by which humanity comes of age and discovers life abundant, that all of creation may flourish under the dominion of its stewards. We were infants in Eden, making *shalom* as we learned about the duty and delight of work, called to cultivate God’s garden. And yet, as toddlers throwing a tantrum at Babel, breaking *shalom*, we learned about the promise and peril of knowledge, called to repent over the tower. The divine pedagogue then focused in on the few as a medium to rescue the many. The children of Abraham, as wanderers seeking *shalom*, learned about obedience to the way of wisdom, called to bless from the tent. Despite glimpses of the Promised Land, the elect also went awry, retaliating against rather than blessing the nations. Thus, the Teacher embodied our telos. Through Jesus’ exemplar, instruction and sacrifice, God was saving *shalom*. As adolescents with a real choice to make, we learned about reciprocity, called to love on the mountain. Through the Spirit, then, God invited all people to eat together in harmony at the table of friendship, embracing *shalom*. As emerging adults in the upper room at Pentecost, we learned about the responsibility of holiness to sustain such a community, called to reconcile in the house. Finally, we are invited into full maturity as God’s image bearers, entering *shalom* in God’s glorious presence. With our feet set toward the destination, we learn about hope, called to worship in the city.

In short, the course of curriculum covers work, knowledge, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness and hope. And we walk with the Creator on this transformative journey as we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile and worship. We may thus affirm John Milton’s vision of education as “repairing the ruins” of humanity’s fall into sin. And yet, contrary to some undercurrents of conservative evangelicalism, the narrative I have told disallows elitism, insularity, exclusivism and escapism. God’s curriculum calls all people to seek *shalom*, starting with our shared secular existence in the here and now. As James Smith argues, redemption is “as big as creation, [and as] far as the curse is found.” In broadest terms, then, the telos of a Christian vision of education may be understood as human participation in divine redemption, that every dimension of creation may find its fullness, to the glory of God.

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6 Cf. Is 61:4. John Milton wrote an eight page pamphlet in 1644 entitled “Of Education” (see www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/of_education/index.shtml, accessed November 23, 2012) in which he described the aim of education thus: “The end then of learning is to *repair the ruins* of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.” This theme has been picked up by Classical Christian Education advocate Douglas Wilson, *Repairing the Ruins: The Classical and Christian Challenge to Modern Education*, 2d ed. (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2006).
7 James Smith, *Discipleship in the Present Tense: Reflections on Faith and Culture*, 3-10.
The idea behind this segment is simple: **what you do with the majority of your hours matters; it's a spiritual act of service as you seek first the kingdom of God** (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:17). We all have a ‘vocation’—where we invest the majority of our hours, whether as a mum or a student, as a 9-5 factory worker or a legal eagle. It’s great for us each to invest ‘spare time’ into volunteering through a church-based ministry. But your greatest ministry of all may well be the ‘church’ (those called out by Christ and sent into the world on mission) deployed during the week, as we more intentionally direct our efforts toward restraining sin and promoting shalom—flourishing through right relatedness with God, each other, and this world God loves.²

This module you’ll hear from an **Apprentice Academic and PhD student, Elizabeth Nichols**. It’s tempting to think that “study” is not a vocation. It’s something you do on the way to a vocation. Granted, it chews up hours of dedicated time. But like being a work-at-home-mum, it doesn’t pay. Yet can I suggest we reframe.

God’s original and ongoing calling for all mankind was to tend and care for his garden planet. Imagine you were dropped in a foreign field, and asked to cultivate the land, making it fruitful. What would you do first? Would you race out and start digging holes, planting seed, and watering the shoots? How did you know to do that? And with what tools did you dig, plant, and water? Cultivating the world takes technique—it takes technology. The shovel, rake, and watering bucket are faithful manifestations of our dominion mandate. And each adaptation—particularly in a complex and fallen world like ours, replete with thorns and thistles, waste and want—takes study. Which seed should I plant? Which weed should I remove? Why should I work?

**Science** comes from the Latin scientia, which simply means “to know”. Any time we follow our calling to cultivate the world, we must first spend time getting to know creation. This, too, is a vocation. This, too, is an act of worship. As we read in Psalm 111:2: “Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.”

Even Jesus—the Logic (Logos) animating this world—**grew** in wisdom, in stature, in favour with God and with all people (Luke 2:52). The Word of God wasn’t born speaking fluent Hebrew. When God stepped into this world, for the unique vocation as Saviour, He took time as a teen to question at the Temple, and soon after Jesus learned a trade. In a very real sense, the all knowing God was a student. And praise God that he was, for without it, we would be lost. As Hebrews 5:8 makes clear, “Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

So as you slave over the books and cram for those last exams, know that Jesus truly is our great high priest, able to sympathise with our weaknesses, temptations and trials (Hebrews 4:15). Invest ten minutes now, over a nice cup of coffee, to learn what the Kingdom looks like as a student. Consider how through Liz, God is at work, learning.

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² Need convincing? Find out what a TRADER is at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiAh31Yo6k4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiAh31Yo6k4).
Tell us about your vocation?

I am an Associate Lecturer, which means that I am an apprentice academic, at the University of Queensland Business School. This position requires the balancing of two roles, being a teacher and being a student. I am involved in the large first year ‘Introduction to Management’ course where I assist with the weekly tutorial programme. Across one year this course may have around 1700 students split across two semesters. On a weekly basis I am directly teaching around 220 students each semester. This role also includes a large amount of administration associated with the tutorials and course work. I have a number of casual tutors who are employed to help with the teaching and marking and are themselves PhD students. It’s a great privilege teaching into the lives of the next generation of graduates and future leaders.

The second part of my position is being a student through the writing of a PhD. The day-to-day tasks of being a student are an incredible amount of reading, thinking, collecting information for analysis followed eventually by writing. A big part of being a student is staying really focused on my research. This involves being disciplined with my time and blocking out large chunks of my week to work on, at the moment, the reading and the writing phase. This can get quite tedious especially when my supervisors are demanding and want to expose me to new ideas and ways of thinking, when all I want to do is go and collect my data. The exciting part occurs when I suddenly connect all the dots and some of these ideas fit together in my head. This can often happen in the most unusual and inconvenient times so I always carry around paper then I can get my thoughts down before I forget them.

Every vocation reflects God’s ‘very good’ over creation, the thorns and thistles of missing the mark with the fall, and the foretaste of all things being made new through redemption. So what do creation, fall, and redemption look like in your vocation?

My research topic—An evaluation of business leaders’ opinions of sustainability and its impact on the implementation of sustainability principles in business—hits this question squarely through looking at the relationships between business, the environment and society. My personal faith makes me see the beauty of God’s creation and hear one of God’s first instructions to us in Genesis of “tend my garden”, which God proclaimed as being good. Yet there is this rampant desire to dominate and destroy that garden for personal wealth and gain. In Christian circles we talk about stewardship, and wisely looking after what God has given us. The more biblical term of stewardship has morphed into the trendy term of sustainability in recent years, which has given me the opportunity to research into an area that I am passionate about without being seen as odd and fanatical.

In broad terms my topic involves business and sustainability. Through my research I hopefully will be able to look at and investigate alternative ways businesses are implementing practices to lessen their impact on society and the environment; or in some cases enhance society and the environment. I’m allowed to argue, question and challenge current business mindsets and practices.

Redemption is difficult to identify in a business school. Does redemption come through aiding organisations to be more understanding of their impact on future generations? Does redemption come through the teaching side of making the next generation more aware of the impact people and commerce have on the planet and others? Or through challenging their current thinking that money equates to success; or through the development of future business leaders who have integrity and an ethical approach to conducting business?
I also see God’s reflection of creation through the creativeness of colleagues’ research and the huge amount of brain power that God has bestowed on some people. Yet with great power comes greater responsibility and at times I despair at how immense intellect is used for personal gain and the commercialisation of ideas rather than being used to enhance other’s lives.

**What does it mean through your vocation to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness-justice"?**

Weaving my faith in with my research is difficult at this stage. Being a student is a stepping stone to God’s actual calling on my life. My research has to be supervised, so I can’t openly place my faith in the centre of it. The topic is God inspired but the study and writing has to be firmly planted in the world. All of my current work has to go through several stages of review and critique and any overt Christian view would be exposed, questioned and probably removed. I find that academics can be the hardest group to challenge when it comes to things of faith, even though they should be the most willing to explore new (and yet old) ideas. An enquiring mind is central to our training and occupation.

It is after the PhD is complete and I graduate that I can then be more open through what I research. Is it hiding my light under a bushel? Perhaps, but at this point I think it is wise, as being a student is only a temporary phase and the future has to be firmly kept in mind.

Over time, and God-willing, I may eventually be at the forefront of enabling businesses to recognise and modify their impact on others and the environment. God’s creation doesn’t have a voice of its own, so it relies on people of passion who become nature’s mouthpiece. I want to keep my research grounded in the practical. ‘How will or could my research make this planet better?’ is the question that I constantly reflect on. Do I get jaded and wonder what the point is at times? Yes, especially as I come from a country of extraordinary beauty, New Zealand, which unfortunately has a dubious reputation of being one of the countries with the greatest number of species extinctions due to human habitation. I restore my soul and purpose by getting back into creation. I saw a dugong in the wild on the weekend, which was exciting as there are only about 800 left in Moreton Bay. Was my soul and purpose restored? Absolutely.

The greatest way to seek first God’s kingdom though is to not be so absorbed in my research that I forget about the people around me: fellow students, fellow academic staff, my tutors, and the general staff. Research can be isolating, yet there is so much need for others to have someone to talk to when the going gets tough. Many of my fellow students juggle their study, part time tutoring work, and young families. I firmly believe that my mission field is where I am. There is a great need in society for people to have others interested in them. To me it is a great privilege to have fellow post-graduate students come and share their problems and aspirations with me—to be that sounding board. I try and ask the awkward questions that often aren’t asked, like: “What is your passion?” “What excites you as a person?” “What are your future plans?” “How are you going to juggle an academic career with its many demands for publishing, teaching and travel with having a family?”

It is often the last question of family and maintaining relationships that is not addressed. I asked one particular student these questions and I got a lovely email back saying that I had helped clarify his future for him, and he was researching where he wanted to do his PhD. Another has asked us to his son’s christening and I was told by his wife that “I was part of the gang”. I thought it a great compliment considering I am at least 20 years older than the rest of the ‘gang’! I get excited when they get excited talking about their vision for the future. They are young enough to be idealistic and want to conquer the world (or at least their version of it!). Yet they are also old enough to know that it is a difficult path.
As disciples, we are called to be witnesses who point people to Jesus. So what inroads specific to your vocation have you found to tell the Big Story of God’s reign through Jesus?⁹

Being a student is only a temporary vocation; it is a means of gaining knowledge and skills to progress. For me the future is hopefully to become a teaching and research academic, so the following is more a reflection on what my future vocation will look like.

The question is then, where does an academic vocation fit into God’s big story. As church attendance continues to drop, there becomes a need for biblical teaching to filter into society through other means. An academic vocation is one way of enabling access to future leaders to place that seed of biblical understanding. As already mentioned it may have to be through alternative words, for example sustainability instead of stewardship. To me, getting God’s message into the world requires a two pronged approach. The first is through the ministry of the many Christians that work with those in society who have great physical, psychological and spiritual needs. The other prong is to change the system from the inside out, “discipling the nations”. This requires the building of people who have some form of Christian base through their education who then eventually enter the business or political environment. This can be through unChurched people who have a worldview tinged with biblical principles.

Areas such as ethics, integrity, trustworthiness and Christian caring can be taught in the framework of modern management. It is interesting looking at some of the modern management research themes such as social responsibility, sustainability, servant leadership, trust, wisdom—which we with our God-centred view can see coming directly from the bible. Often the researchers in these areas have no church affiliation and do not realise that their research has biblical foundations. What is even more important though is as a Christian academic that I put these principles into practice. I try to constantly evaluate whether I have acted as a person of integrity, both in my research and my teaching.

This whole journey into a new vocation has been an adventure. Taking me from being a mum and a chef into a totally different world of academia has required a life-shift which I am often asked about. Through all the trials and tremors, (yes, I am from Christchurch) God is still dedicated to reclaiming this world He designed for good. Jesus deals with our brokenness and sin, and—if we let Him—restores us for better. As we’ve done this, God has given my family what we need to live our calling, being sent together to help heal the world. And I am constantly in awe of how God works out the details along the way. I also feel blessed to be surrounded by people who are encouraging and inspiring when it comes to my research and teaching, especially my husband. Many of these people do not personally know God. I always think it is special when God uses people and institutions, who do not have a personal faith, for His Kingdom’s purposes without them realising it. This is something I’m always happy to share.

(Watch this clip concerning being a Christian in academia)

4.6 Extra Notes, Summarizing Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living @ the X’Roads*

Scholarship
George Marsden and *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*

- Genuine Christian scholarship is rare
  - Keep religious beliefs private (as price of acceptance into academia)
  - Product of formative power of academic community
- Genuine Christian scholarship is outrageous
  - Takes gospel seriously
  - Challenges assumptions of academy

Dearth of Christian scholarship distressing . . .
- Because it is scholarship ‘conformed to the world’ (Rom 12:1-2)
- Because of the cultural power of the university and scholarship

Cultural Power of University
This great Western institution, the university, dominates the world today more than any other institution: more than the church, more than the government, more than all other institutions. All the leaders of government are graduates of universities, or at least of secondary schools or colleges whose administrators and teachers are themselves graduates of universities. The same applies to all church leaders. . . . The professionals—doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.—have all passed through the mill of secondary school, the college and the university. And the men of the media are university trained. . . . The universities, then, directly and indirectly dominate the world; their influence is so pervasive and total that whatever problem afflicts them is bound to have far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire fabric of Western civilization. No task is more crucial and urgent today than to examine the state of mind and spirit of the Western university (Charles Malik).

Power of Scholarship: Ideas have legs
Ideas have legs in the sense that they are not the disembodied abstractions of some ivory-tower academic, but are real spiritual forces that go somewhere, that are on the march in somebody’s army, and that have a widespread effect on our practical, everyday lives (Al Wolters).

Power of Ideas
The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt, from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. . . . I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas (John Maynard Keynes).
Power of ideas

- Facts-values, theory-practice
- “My point is that in such seemingly innocent-looking words and phrases a whole idolatrous perspective on the world, a whole distorted mind-set and humanistic thought-pattern is subliminally propagated in our civilization” (Wolters).

An example of the impact of a powerful idea - Laissez-faire economics

- Neo-classical theory: Laissez-faire Market is machine; let it function freely
  - Implications:
    - unemployment
    - exclusive health care
    - poverty for many
    - environmental damage

Keynesian response

- Keynesian interventionists - Market needs government intervention/maintenance
  - Implications:
    - debt grows larger
    - totalitarianism may result
    - produces welfare state which may breed dependancy

Behaviourism in Psychology

- Behaviourism: humans are complex machines; behave in predictable ways
  - Stimulation → Behavioural response → Reinforcement

Only a theory?

- Shapes policy of mental health hospitals
- Shapes educational theory
- Shapes advertising policy
- Shapes business management
Christian scholars participate in two traditions:

- Western academic tradition (back to ancient Greece)
- Christian tradition of involvement in scholarship (beginning with church fathers)
- Unbearable tension (Christian academics can feel “at home” in academia but should also feel “at odds” with it!)

**Critical Participants in Cultural Academic Tradition**

- Participants
  - Share in academic task with colleagues who don’t share our religious commitment
  - Not to seek academic ghetto
  - At home in academia

- Critical
  - Shaped by gospel
  - Encounter with others who have different religious commitments
  - At odds with academia

**Critical participation means**

- True insight into creation by all
- Yet idolatry will distort that insight to some degree
- Twofold task of Christian scholars
  - Celebrate true insights
  - Uncover idolatry that twists them

**Scripture . . .**

- Offers foundation and direction for academic work
- But how?
Rejection of two approaches: Biblicism and Dualism

**Biblicism**
- Bible gives direct answers to contemporary questions in academic disciplines (over-stating what the Bible says!)

**Dualism**
- Christian belief applicable only to the realm of theology
- Keeps biblical teaching completely separate from theoretical work (under-stating what the Bible says!)

**Biblicism**
- Rightly understands Bible must speak to all of life
- Does not recognize:
  - Redemptive purpose of Bible
  - Cultural gap between Scripture and contemporary scholarship
- Deceptively simple line between Bible and scholarship

**Dualism**
- Rightly understands Bible does not speak so simply to scholarship
- Redemptive nature of Bible
- Misses cosmic scope of gospel
- Blind to importance of biblical view of world
- Simply accepts idolatrous status quo
- Negates Christian scholarship

**Three positive ways Bible can inform scholarship**

1. As true story it gives direction and purpose to scholarship
2. Biblical worldview provides context for Christian scholarship
Christian worldview and scholarship

- Elaborating creation, fall, redemption
- E.g., creation order challenges naturalism of natural sciences and relativism of social sciences
- E.g., idolatry can help spot reductionist scholarship

Three positive ways Bible can form scholarship

3. Specific biblical themes can guide scholarship

In political science one would be guided by such biblical themes as the sovereignty of God, the God-given authority of government, the task of the government to promote (the biblical norms of) justice, liberty and peace, and the required obedience of citizens. In sociology one would take into account the biblical norms for marriage, family, and other societal structures. In psychology one would view man not as an animal that can be conditioned, nor as a machine that can be programmed, but as a creature of exceptional worth because man alone is made in the image of God. . . . In economics one would want to take into account the biblical ideas of justice and stewardship, of ownership, of work and play (S. Greidanus).

Nature of Christian Scholarship

- Inner connection between Scripture and scholarship
- Critiquing foundational idolatrous assumptions
- Acknowledging legitimate insights into creation

Inner Connection between Scripture and Scholarship

A distinctive element of Christian scholarship is its deliberate attention to the inner connection between Scripture and scholarly inquiry, that is, the normative bearing of Scripture on the making of theory. We see it as our responsibility to apply the biblical story and a biblical worldview to the basic religious, ideological, and philosophical assumptions that form the foundations of all academic work. . . . The crucial insight we wish to guard is that there must be an inner connection between the Gospel and scholarship (Cross and Our Calling).

Examples

- Behaviorism: Insights and idolatry
- Marxism: Insights and idolatry
- Romantic literature: Insights and idolatry
- Global free market ideology: Insights and idolatry
Spiritual power of secular scholarship and the need for prayer

“... science, secularized and isolated, has become a satanic power, an idol which dominates all of culture. ... Our vocation [is] to war against the spirit of apostasy...” We cannot “battle this spirit in our own power. The warfare to which I refer is one of faith, a struggle even with ourselves, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a struggle which finds its dynamic in a life of prayer” (Herman Dooyeweerd).

For more, read:


5. DOXOLOGY

Remember, we are not simply “thinking things” but “desiring creatures”. Developing a Christian Worldview is not just about understanding rightly, but loving truly. That is, we must be intentional in our habitual practices (or ‘liturgies’) so that our hearts are formed to love the Kingdom of God. As J. I. Packer was fond of saying, “All true theology begets doxology.” Learning is in the service of worship. Thus, as we will do each week, let us close by singing the **Doxology**:

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

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**Forum Activity Module 10**

As part of engaging with the set text and extra required readings, address each required reading for this module, and comment on at least one other person’s post to advance the dialogue.

Clearly address the following four categories:
- a **question**—something you don’t understand, or want to clarify
- a **challenge**—something with which you disagree, or want to further nuance
- an **implication**—‘so what’ for how this teaching shapes your worldview
- an **application**—something useful right now in your context, to live out the text

Be sure to post these thoughts **prior** to each week’s class, as we’ll use these reflections as the basis for an in-class discussion, where you will be expected to contribute in response to the readings.

Also, be sure to interact with at least one other student, advancing the conversation with a question, challenge, elaboration or related story. This *isn’t* counted in the 200 word post.

**Put your response on the Moodle Forum (200 words)**

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**Preparation for Next Week …**

- Pre-reading, as per Unit Guide p6 ... **Post to the forum and come prepared to share on each of the following:**
  - a **question**—something you don’t get, or want to clarify
  - a **challenge**—something you disagree with, or want to nuance
  - an **implication**—“so what” for our apologetic practice
  - an **application**—something useful right now in your context

- If it’s your **turn**, come prepared to share a newspaper article or media clip concerning events in the public square, and your initial reflections from a Christian worldview.

- If it’s your **turn**, come ready to share with the class for 3-5 minutes concerning your main vocation (whether present or future). Where do you see **creational intent** and **cultural idolatry** in this vocation (designed for good, damaged by evil)? How might you participate redemptively with **healing action** (restored for better so we are sent together to heal the world, a taste of when God sets everything right) as you seek first God’s Kingdom?
What do you do with the majority of your hours? Right now, as both a lecturer and a recovering post-
PhD student, I seem to spend the majority of my waking hours reading and writing.

Perhaps that sounds depressing to you! At times it does to me. I wear a grungy ‘trainer’s choice’ wrist
guard on my left arm any time I sit down at the computer, an embarrassing result of a ‘nerd-injury’:
too much typing. I love people, but I seem to hang out more with obscure authors I’ve never met,
trying to catch their heart through words on a printed page.

And yet ... I can picture Jesus sitting down with me to study. If he truly did empty himself of the
privileges of deity—such as omniscience (Matthew 24:36)—and was born as a baby, then I figure
learning was high on his agenda.

So, putting it in simplest terms: education is most certainly a vocation—whether you’re giving it, or
getting it, I can hear God’s “well done good and faithful servant” over me as I go through the motions
of scanning a page, memorizing a saying, and touch typing my latest screed.

May you, too, sense God's grace over your life as you work through this subject. Let me close, then,
with some encouraging words from Stanley Hauerwas's pen, in his First Things letter to young
Christians on their way to College: “Go with God”, in full here.

★★★★

Christ’s call on you as a student is a calling to meet the needs of the Church, both for its own life and
the life of the world. The Resurrection of Jesus, Wilken suggests, is not only the central fact of
Christian worship but also the ground of all Christian thinking “about God, about human beings, about
the world and history.” Somebody needs to do that thinking—and that means you.

Don’t underestimate how much the Church needs your mind. Remember your Bible-study class?
Christians read Isaiah’s prophecy of a suffering servant as pointing to Christ. That seems obvious, but
it’s not; or at least it wasn’t obvious to the Ethiopian eunuch to whom the Lord sent Philip to explain
things. Christ is written everywhere, not only in the prophecies of the Old Testament but also in the
pages of history and in the book of nature. The Church has been explaining, interpreting, and
illuminating ever since it began. It takes an educated mind to do the Church’s work of thinking about
and interpreting the world in light of Christ. Physics, sociology, French literary theory: All these and
more—in fact, everything you study in college—is bathed in the light of Christ. It takes the eyes of
faith to see that light, and it takes an educated mind to understand and articulate it. ...

Your calling is to be a Christian student. The Christian part and the student part are inseparable. It will
be hard and frustrating because you won’t see how the two go together. Nobody does, at least not in
the sense of having worked it all out. But you need to remember what Christ said: “I am the Alpha
and the Omega.” However uncertain we are about how, we know that being a Christian goes with
being a student (and a teacher). ...

To worship God and live faithfully are necessary conditions if you are to survive in college. But as a
Christian you are called to do more than survive. You are called to use the opportunity you have been
given to learn to construe the world as a creature of a God who would have us enjoy—and bask in—
the love that has brought us into existence. God has given your mind good work to do. As members of
the Church, we’re counting on you. It won’t be easy. It never has been. But I can testify that it can also
be a source of joy. What a wonderful adventure you have before you. I wish you well.