

A Prophetic Warning to Christian Educators

Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus warned His listeners, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25). This applies directly to our Christian colleges, universities and seminaries. If we try to save our lives by capitulating to worldly standards, we will lose our lives in the process.

More than 20 years ago, a fellow-Old Testament scholar talked with me about the challenges his seminary was facing. At that time, there was a dispute about women in ministry, and his school was receiving some pressure over the issue. But that, he explained, was minor.

The day might well come, he said, when they would have to make a choice. If they wanted to remain accredited, they would have abandon the biblical teaching on homosexuality. If they wanted to hold to scriptural orthodoxy, they would lose their accreditation. For him and his school, being strongly conservative, the choice was easy: They would lose their accreditation rather than lose their soul.

After all, what’s the use of being accredited as a seminary if you no longer uphold Scripture? What’s the use of being recognized by people when you are no longer recognized by God? How can you train your students to stand fast for the gospel, no matter what, when you have chosen to compromise rather than suffer loss? And what will you say to Christians around the world who refused to renounce their faith with a gun to their heads when you surrendered your principles at the threat of a non-violent educational agency?

In an article in *First Things* last month, Carl Trueman, himself a seminary professor, warned that “the cultural Battle

of Waterloo will be won—or lost—on the campuses of Christian colleges.”

What if these schools are threatened with the loss of federal funding because of their failure to conform to government sanctioned, LGBT activism? (For anyone following the news, this is not an abstract question.) What if they’re threatened with the loss of accreditation? What if they face the wrath of the left-leaning NCAA, making it virtually impossible for their student athletes to compete in meaningful ways?

What if the schools are told they cannot uphold their codes of sexual morality for faculty and students? What if some of their classes are deemed unacceptable? What if they are required to change their housing regulations? What if they are directed to expand their view of “gender,” following in the steps of a school like Princeton, which now gives 6 gender options to their students (including, not surprisingly, “other”)?

Conservative journalist Rod Dreher echoed Trueman’s concerns in two articles, in the first quoting extensively from Trueman and noting that, *“Dialogue is not possible with power-holders who think you are evil and that goodness requires you to be crushed”* (his emphasis).

Then, in his second article, responding to a Christian college professor who seemed to suggest that there might be some constructive compromises to make, Dreher closed with a dire warning: “Neuhaus’ Law holds that, ‘Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed.’ You watch: Within 10 to 20 years, every college involved in this conversation that believes that Christian orthodoxy on the LGBT issue is optional will have become a college where Christian orthodoxy is anathema.”

Dreher has hit the nail on the head, whether his time frame is accurate or not.

If we cave in here, we will cave in elsewhere. In fact, if we cave in here, that is probably evidence that we have already caved in elsewhere.

In the height of the Civil Rights movement, followers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., paid a high price for their confrontational, non-violent resistance. It was a costly stand to take, and some of the leaders recommended that they step back from their activism, because of the very real risks they were taking.

King addressed these concerns in a classic speech in Selma, Alabama, March 8, 1965. Speaking to a packed house in a church building, with others listening outside, he said this, “if a man happens to be 36 years old as I happen to be and some great truth stands before the door of his life—some great opportunity to stand up for that which is right—he’s afraid his home will get bombed or he’s afraid he will lose his job or he’s afraid that he will get shot or beat down by state troopers; he may go on and live until he’s 80, but he’s just as dead at 36 as he would be at 80 and the cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.

“A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right; a man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice; a man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true. So we’re gonna stand up right here amid horses; we’re gonna stand up right here in Alabama amid billy clubs; we’re gonna stand up right here in Alabama amid police dogs if they have them; we’re gonna stand up amid tear gas; we’re gonna stand up amid anything that they can muster up, letting the world know that we are determined to be free” (my emphasis).

Note again those highlighted words, which articulate the warning of Jesus about trying to save our lives. To cave in is to lose our soul—to lose our integrity, our principles, our heart. To compromise and capitulate is to lose our honor, even

more, to lose our freedom.

Will we live as free people before God, or will we be slaves to the praise of man or the approval of man? Will we do what is right, or will do what it is expedient? (Here's a great moment to ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?")

In my forthcoming book *Saving a Sick America: A Prescription for Moral and Cultural Transformation*, I devote one chapter to the subject of "Reclaiming Our Schools and Learning How to Think Again." There, among other things, I address the issue of bowing down to the accreditation system, writing that we must "develop more Christian alternatives for undergraduate and graduate studies, with the end goal of either influencing current accreditation institutes (which often lean left) or rendering them unimportant."

And as an educator and professor myself, I addressed the issue of bowing down to the god of secular academics, asking, "But why must the state (or accrediting agency) set the standards? What if that school has a unique purpose and function? What if it needs to major on things the state considers minor and minor on things the state considers major? Why must it conform? To offer degrees, of course! This too is idolatry."

The bad news is that, barring a radical turning of the cultural tide in the next 10 years, Christian schools (all the way down to elementary education) will face increasing pressure to conform or else. The good news is that we can set our own course by choosing to do what is right. And if we will honor and uphold God's principles, He will bless the labor of our hands.

Eventually, either those opposing us will blink first, or we will establish something new and better that displaces the old system. After all, weren't schools like Harvard and Yale and Princeton and many others all founded by Christians?

What is interesting is that Rod Dreher and I agree on the

urgency of the hour, recognizing how sickly the patient (our nation!) is right now. But we differ on the prescription for the patient, he in his book *The Benedict Option* and me in *Saving a Sick America*.

He writes in his book, "Could it be that the best way to fight the flood is to ... stop fighting the flood? That is, to quit piling up sandbags and to build an ark in which to shelter until the water recedes and we can put our feet on dry land again? Rather than wasting energy and resources fighting unwinnable political battles, we should instead work on building communities, institutions and networks of resistance that can outwit, outlast and eventually overcome the occupation."

Yet his recent articles, focusing on the predicament of Christian schools, remind us that we *must* fight the flood today. Do we really have a choice?

So, while Dreher calls us to retreat and rebuild, I believe we must do the opposite, shining ever more brightly in the heart of the darkness and refusing to bow down to the pressure of the world, fortified by our faith in God.

The only question is: Will we? That is a question Christian educators cannot avoid.