

# WHY?

## (Reflections on the secular drift in Christian education)

by Boyce Mouton

Life does not occur in a vacuum. For every effect, there is a cause. When something happens, someone ought to ask, "why"? Apples have been falling from trees since Eden, but Sir Isaac Newton dared to ask "why?" His curiosity led to the discovery of the law of universal gravitation. Newton's discoveries about gravity and the laws of motion have dominated the scientific view of the universe for the last three centuries. They were even a key component in enabling us to put men on the moon. Kudos to Sir Isaac Newton! Truth thrives upon investigation. Certainly, no honest person should ever be afraid to ask why.

Now let's take a look at Christian education. There have obviously been changes. Dare we ask why? The issue came to mind recently during a conversation with a close personal friend. Not long ago he was invited to join the faculty of a Christian college, but then the invitation was rescinded. Why? There had been a change. Now he does not have enough advanced degrees. The same thing happened to him with a Christian publisher. Several years ago the publisher was eager to review his manuscripts, but now there has been a change! Same reason - not enough degrees. Something is changing! Why?

Christian historian, David Barton, points out that the first college in America was Harvard College in Massachusetts. The official motto of Harvard was "For Christ and the Church". William and Mary College was founded in 1692 by the Rev. James Blair to propagate the Christian faith. Yale University was founded in 1701 by ten Congregational ministers to plant and propagate the blessed Reformed, Protestant religion in the wilderness. In fact, Barton points out that 106 of the first 108 colleges in America were founded on the Christian faith. Today, however, virtually all of these institutions have abandoned their original purpose. Why?

Wilson Lee Thompson did his doctoral dissertation on this very subject. He received his doctorate from the University of Oregon in 1978. His dissertation focused on: "Small Colleges and Goal Displacement: a Study of Christian College Secularization". His research involved the doctrinal drift in four small Christian colleges. Unfortunately, the problem involves far more than four Christian colleges. It seems to be a trend in Christian education, and for some reason the drift always seems to be in the same direction. Christian colleges consistently become secular, but have you ever heard of a secular college becoming Christian? Why?

Dr. Thompson offered this penetrating quote from H. Richard Niebuhr: "*A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross*". How sad that such a charge has any credibility. How sad that this paradigm shift in Christian education is always downward. How sad that Christian Colleges have dared to make a deal with academia: "We will call you Christians, if you will call us scholars".

The more dogmatic and impassioned that preachers become, the more pressure there is not to be like them. Consider these words from Ezekiel: "**Son of dust, your people are whispering behind your back. They talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors, saying, 'Come on, let's have some fun! Let's go hear him tell us what the Lord is saying!' So they come as though they are sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them to; they talk very sweetly about loving the Lord, but with their hearts they are loving their money. You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings lovely songs with a beautiful voice or plays well on an instrument. They hear what you say but don't pay any attention to it! But when all these terrible things happen to them-- as they will-- then they will know a prophet has been among them.**" (Ezek 33:30-33 The Living Bible)

Since Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, He obviously faced the same temptations then, that Christian educators do today. Rather than seek approval from the educational establishments of His day, however, He seemed impervious to their influence. His humble beginning in Nazareth, as you know, did not happen by accident. The fact that He would be called “Nazarene” was predicted by the prophets centuries before it happened (Matt. 2:23). God knew that this would be an embarrassment in society (John 1:46). God knew that the intellectual elites would belittle Christ and malign His apostles. It is easier, however, to acknowledge that Jesus was “despised and rejected of men”, than it is to experience such rejection in our own lives. Many Christian kids on the college campus have had their faith “smiled away” by pressure from their academic peers. This problem is nothing new. John wrote: **“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12:42-43)** While the problem is not new, it is certainly serious. Paul wrote that if he were trying to please men he would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Turning stones into bread represents the financial pressures that can lead to compromising our convictions. Leaping from the temple represents the strong desire for public acceptance that often beguiles the unstable. Bowing down before Satan involves seeking to acquire the splendor of earthly kingdoms as opposed to worshiping and serving only God. Jesus, as you know, refused all these temptations and would not compromise. Neither would Paul. In fact, he considered his intellectual achievements a loss for Christ (Phil. 3:4 - 21). As we ponder “why” we are so prone to seek the approval of men, let us remember:

- There was not one scholar among the original 12 apostles.
- Jesus deliberately chose common men whom the world considered foolish weak, lowly, and despised (1 Cor. 1:27)
- Jesus was thankful that God chose to hide things from the wise and learned and reveal them unto children (Matt. 11:25).
- Jesus did choose Paul, who had impeccable Jewish credentials, but then sent him to the gentiles where these credentials meant nothing.
- Jesus chose Peter to be an apostles to the Jews even though they considered this Galilean fisherman to be unschooled and ordinary (Acts 4:13, Gal. 2:9).
- Paul considered his credentials to be a hindrance (Phil. 3:7).
- Paul deliberately declined to rely upon excellency of speech or men’s wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1).
- The strategy of God was obviously successful for by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, the Gospel had already been preached to every creature under heaven (Col. 1:23).

Dare anyone ask: if this strategy was so successful in the First Century, why are we so anxious to abandon it today?

There seems to be a pattern here. God’s ways are not our ways, and God’s thoughts are not our thoughts (Is. 55:8 - 9). These verses, as you know, precede the promise that God’s Word will not return void. Unfortunately, it seems that many have more confidence in the wisdom of man than they do in the power of God. Moses apparently thought this way at one time. Because he was the son of Pharaoh’s daughter with powerful connections in the Egyptian government, he assumed that the people of God would understand that he was going to deliver them. But they understood not! (Acts 7:25). Even though Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action (Acts 7:22), he did not deliver anybody with his earthly

power. Moses, with all of his credentials, was a failure.

As you know, Moses fled to Midian and became a shepherd. Nothing could have been more degrading to Moses, or more offensive to the Egyptians. Remember! **“All shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians” (Gen. 46:34)**. As if to emphasize His disdain for human credentials, the Sovereign of the Universe even commanded Moses to take his shepherd’s staff into the presence of the Pharaoh (Ex. 4:17). This staff, the symbol of the detestable shepherds, became the vehicle God used to overcome Egyptian society, both civil and religious. The credentials Moses displayed were not of an earthly nature. From the human point of view this stammering shepherd was an embarrassment. We need to remember that those who are new creations in Christ Jesus no longer look at anything from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16 - 17). In Christ, the emblem of suffering and shame represents the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:24).

## CHURCH GROWTH

No matter where you look, or how you analyze it, Christianity in America is not a stellar example of church growth and evangelism. While the church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is experiencing dramatic growth, the church in America is not. Yet, the church in America does not want to be a “third world church” so we seek to emulate our intellectual brethren in Europe. It is in Europe that brilliant scholars question the integrity of the text, and parse and criticize the Scriptures as archaic and out of date. It is in Europe that ego centric scholars dare to suggest that God is dead. It is in Europe that earthly credentials conferred by men mean more than spiritual gifts conferred by God. It is in Europe that statisticians actually predict a decline in the growth of Christianity. Yet, like the blind leading the blind, the American church seeks to accommodate and emulate the failed policies of the European intelligentsia.

As Christians we are held to a very high standard. Whatever we do in word or deed we are to do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:17). Undoubtedly, many Christian scholars seek their higher degrees out of their devotion to Christ. Undoubtedly, many Christian colleges endeavor to improve their academic credentials for the same reason. Fortunately, God, the Righteous Judge, will ultimately determine their destiny and to their own master they will stand or fall. It is appropriate, however, like Paul, to sound the alarm. It is important to warn our beloved brothers about the danger of being beguiled and led astray by the subtly of Satan (2 Cor. 11:3). We need to try the spirits and exercise caution for Satan himself can appear to be an angel of light.

## REVIVAL ON CAMPUS

Even though colleges, as institutions, may be beyond redemption, it is still possible for Christianity to triumph on a personal level. Consider, for example, the remarkable ministry of the late Frank Buchman. In January 1909, he began working on campus at Penn State University. At the time it was described as one of the most godless universities in the country. Although saloons were forbidden by state law, there was plenty of alcohol on campus. Gilliland, the school janitor, was a bootlegger with a brisk business. It was said that if 600 students showed up for a ball game, all of them might be drunk. On the night that Buchman arrived there were a score of liquor parties in progress. Another bootlegger on campus was a swashbuckling character named Bill Pickle. He was the illegitimate son of a Civil War colonel and sported a furious walrus moustache. He looked like a roaring pirate and often was heard to say that he would like to stick a knife in Buchman’s ribs.

Against all odds, Bill Pickle gave his heart to Christ and gave up both bootlegging and

drinking. His wife and 12 children lived in an unpainted house on what everyone called "Pickle Hill". Since Bill found writing difficult he asked Buchman to write his wife a letter of apology for the way he had treated her in the past. Converts like Bill Pickle were urged to evangelize, not by matching wits with the intellectuals on campus, but merely by sharing their personal testimony. Bill Pickle was the world's greatest authority on his own conversion and he could tell the story with both confidence and passion.

While the movement began on campus, it soon spread to the town. Buchman divided the town into ten sections and assigned a team of helpers to each section. The following year Buchman invited 150 helpers from most of the East coast colleges. A Yale University publication noted on March 3, 1915 that the religious revival in colleges began on campus at Penn State under Frank N. D. Buchman. They continued: *"This new evangelism of the second decade of the twentieth century is transforming our colleges"*.

Soon there were campaigns at Illinois State; Williams; Cornell; Estes Park, Colorado; Northfield, Massachusetts; Rochester, Kansas City, and other colleges across America. Buchman's approach to evangelism was built upon four principles (1) Absolute honesty, (2) Absolute purity, (3) Absolute unselfishness, (4) Absolute love.

As the movement spread to other countries it was first known as the "First Century Christian Fellowship" and later as the "Oxford Group". The name "Oxford Group" came from a campaign in South Africa. A railroad porter wrote that name on the window of compartments reserved for Buchman's college students who came from England. Buchman described the group with these words: *"The secret is God Control. The only sane people in an insane world are those controlled by God. God-controlled personalities make God-controlled nationalities. This is the aim of the Oxford Group. The true patriot gives his life to bring his nation under God's control. Those people who oppose that control are public enemies... World peace will only come through nations which have achieved God-control. And everybody can listen to God. You can. I can. Everybody can have a part."*

## WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

This is, of course, a valid question. Jesus promised that He would not leave us like orphans (John 14:18). He promised to return as the Holy Spirit to give guidance and direction (John 14:26). The essence of the Gospel is "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Jesus in you, however, can lead different disciples to do different things. Like different members of the same body, we have different gifts and different callings (1 Cor. 12:14 - 31). Some by be led to work with innovative technology not known in Apostolic times. Consequently, we must guard against sitting in judgement on another for not doing something specifically mentioned in the Bible. God is the Judge, and to their own master all of our brothers with either stand or fall (Rom. 14:4). Whatever we do, however, we are to do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him (Col. 3:17).

The focus of this article is on Christian education. While we are warned in Scripture against divisive and judgmental thinking, the question is still valid. Why do so many colleges drift from being Christian institutions to secular ones? The fact that secular colleges do some good has little redeeming value. In fact, the original sin involved a tree, or source of "knowledge", that was both "good and evil".

Jesus, as you know, remained secure and confident in what He was doing and how He was doing it. He overcame the world, not the other way around. The idea that Jesus would appeal to the Sanhedrin, or any other group of men for validation, is inconceivable. The thought that Jesus would change His curriculum in order to conform to human wisdom borders on blasphemy. The early church also seemed impervious to outside pressure. They did not waver in their Biblical

convictions even though they were persecuted by both religious and governmental institutions. In fact, when the kings and rulers of earth opposed them, it only fortified their resolve. They drew courage from the inspired words of the second Psalm that all the obstacles of earth only cause God to laugh and hold earthly systems in derision. How sad to see men eagerly seek after the earthly power and prestige that God holds in derision. Paul wrote: **“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”** (1 Cor 2:4-5) If Paul was truly an inspired apostle, why are so few people in academia listening to him?

#### WHERE TO FROM HERE?

When Paul spoke to the philosophers on Mar's Hill, there were three different responses.

# 1 - **“Some of them sneered”** (Acts 17:32).

# 2 - **“Others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ ”** (Acts 17:33).

# 3 - **“A few men became followers of Paul and believed”** (Acts 17:34)

I want to be among those who join with Paul, and believe, and **“who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—”** (Phil 3:3)

#### WHAT ABOUT YOU?

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