EDUCATION IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY

Harry Fernhout
Institute for Christian Studies
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A. Orientation Points

[1] Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's essay, "What Kind of Society," and his paper on "Can a Modern Society be Christian" provide fertile ground for a consideration of issues central to our understanding of education in a religiously pluralist society. For the purposes of the present discussion I wish to identify three seminal themes in Newbigin's papers as orientation points for my own reflections. Since these themes are further elaborated in Newbigin's major book, <u>The Gospel in a Pluralist Society</u>, I will refer to this work as well. (References to the latter work will be identified with the abbreviation, GPS).

[2] **I**. Newbigin asserts that modern secular ideology, rooted in the spirit of the Enlightenment, affirms the myth of the neutrality of the public domain. Religion (and religious freedom) is deemed to belong to the private sphere. Religious choice and the expression of religious views can be tolerated as long as they do not impinge directly on (i.e., seek to control) what happens in the public square. (See "What Kind...," paragraphs 8 and 20; "Can a Modern...," pp. 1 and 2).

[3] It is indisputable that this secular worldview has had an immense impact on education. While modern secular society leaves room for certain religiously-motivated educational choices in the private domain, formal education (schooling) is deemed to be something which must advance the public interest. Since religion is a matter of private opinion, it cannot be allowed to control what happens in the public institutions of schooling.

[4] **II**. Since he firmly believes that the secular claim to public neutrality is invalid, and that "society always embodies certain fundamental faith commitments, even if they are not consciously expressed" ("What Kind...," para. 14), Newbigin expresses profound concern about the "schizophrenic state" of contemporary Christians. The claims of the Gospel are such that they cannot be confined to the private sphere; the Gospel of Christ claims the whole of life. Faced with two competing and encompassing truth claims, Christians find themselves in an unbearable tension. Usually the resolution of this tension is achieved by domesticating the Gospel, limiting its claims to the private domain. Christians then accept a kind of schizophrenic dual identity.

[5] Newbigin emphasizes that schools play a key role in this struggle of competing claims. Since there is no such thing as public neutrality, schools teach children to believe <u>something</u>, and not something else (GPS, p. 224). The public truth taught in schools is either in conformity with truth as given in Christ, or it is not (GPS, p. 222). When schools are guided by a secular worldview, they play a key role in domesticating the Gospel both in the sense of `re-making' Christianity in the image of Western culture and in the sense of `taming' the Gospel by keeping it caged in the private realm (see GPS, 96).

[6] In the "Christian society" envisioned by Newbigin this unbearable tension would presumably be removed (or at least alleviated), enabling Christians to overcome their schizophrenia. Public policy for education in such a society would be such that it would allow a fundamental resonance, rather than dissonance, between what is taught in society's schools and what is taught in the home and church.

[7] **III**. Newbigin sees the conflict of competing and encompassing truth claims as a conflict of <u>stories</u>. He writes that "post-enlightenment modernity tells its own story about who we are and where we have come from and where we are going." This story "is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian story of creation and fall and redemption and of the ceaseless activity of God to bring his fallen world to the true end for which he made it." ("What Kind...," para. 16). Newbigin considers it a great illusion to think that the "meta-narrative of the Gospel and the meta-narrative of the Enlightenment could be fused into a single story of the march of Christian civilization." ("Can a Modern...," p. 2).

[8] Schools, according to Newbigin, are guided by ultimate stories. He thus finds it intolerable that "one story is told in school and another story is told in the church." ("What Kind...," para. 16). A "Christian society" as envisioned by Newbigin would presumably provide an environment in which efforts to fuse the Christian story and the Enlightenment story could be resisted, and in which the confinement of the Christian story to the private realm would be eliminated. Such a society would make it possible for the same story to be told in (at least some) schools and the church.

[9] Given these orientation points, in this essay I will explore and develop several themes relevant to Newbigin's discussion:

> (A) My point of entry will be Newbigin's references to meta-narratives. I will explore how encompassing stories function, according to Newbigin, in helping people make sense of life. I will then connect this discussion with the strong emphasis, in Reformed thought, on the role of worldviews. I will suggest that the Reformed understanding of worldviews needs to be refined in light of an awareness of the role of encompassing stories. A worldview is a story-formed pre-conceptual lens, I will suggest, with four functional components: memory, vision, symbols, and ethos.

> [10] (B) Against this background, I will suggest that it is fruitful to conceive of education as a process of cultural story-telling. I will indicate how this image of education fundamentally challenges the myth of neutrality, and suggest how it provides constructive points of entry for considering some of the challenges and problems of education in a secular society.

> [11] (C) Building on the conception of education as cultural story-telling, I will suggest possible aspects of a pluralist framework for education in a "Christian society" as envisioned by Newbigin.

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Narrative Plausibility Structures

[12] In The Gospel in a Pluralist Society Newbigin provides a very insightful discussion of how human beings (tacitly) indwell a cultural tradition. A culture, says Newbigin, is "a whole way of understanding and ordering things which is embodied in language, story, and all the forms of social life which are made possible through a shared language and a shared story." (GPS, p. 35). Our culture provides us with a whole set of tools (words, language concepts, etc.) on which we tacitly rely while we focally attend to new areas of learning. Newbigin continues:

> Most of this we learn, or perhaps one might say absorb, during the first few years of our lives as we learn to talk, to read, to share in the common story of our people. Normally we simply take it for granted. We are not conscious of it. Like the lenses of our spectacles, it is not something we look at, but something through which we look in order to see the world.... We indwell [these lenses]. So also with the vast amount of our culture -- its language, its images, it concepts, its way of understanding and acting. (Ibid).

[13] This image of "lenses" through which we attend the world is very closely related to Newbigin's reference, in various contexts, to what Peter Berger calls the "plausibility structure" of a society. Plausibility structures are "patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not." (GPS p. 8; see also p. 53). Our plausibility structure, we could say, has to do with the fundamental shape of the cultural lens which we indwell (i.e., it has to do with how these lenses have been ground). Our plausibility structure is our basic framework, our comprehensive tool, for "the whole way of understanding and ordering things" which, for Newbigin, constitutes our culture matrix.

[14] For our present purposes the interesting thing to note is that for Newbigin plausibility structures have a narrative cast. This is certainly true in the case of the Christian Gospel. Newbigin asserts that "the gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel." (GPS, p. 9). At heart, what is revealed in the Gospel is not a set of propositions but a story. "The Christian faith, rooted in the Bible, is -- I am convinced -- primarily to be understood as an interpretation of the story -- the human story set within the story of nature." (GPS, p. 13). By implication, other plausibility structures also have a basically narrative cast, providing those who indwell them with an interpretation of universal history and the place of their culture in that history.

[15] This characterization of the narrative character of plausibility structures accords well with the recent widespread discussion of the narrative sub-structure of human experience and knowing. Scholars in a wide variety of fields of study have taken note of the fact that story is present everywhere in human life. Theologian Michael Novak remarks that "the human being alone among the creatures on earth is a story-telling animal: sees the present arising out of a past, heading into a future; perceives reality in narrative form" (Novak, 1975: 175). In his contribution to Why Narrative? Stephen Crites writes that experience is an incipient story because (i) experience is temporal (i.e., it takes place in time and thus has a sequential character), (ii) past experience is not lost but retained in memory, and (iii) humans illuminate new experience by consulting memory and "placing" new experience within a (narrative) recollection of the past.

(Crites, 1989: 72-3) In <u>Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences</u> Donald Polkinghorne suggests that:

> narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. (Polkinghorne, 1988: 11)

[16] Whatever the strengths and weaknesses (and biases) of the views of these individual authors, it is clear that they resonate with Newbigin's approach in two ways: (i) in a particular cultural setting humans indwell that culture's pattern of ordering and making sense of experience, and (ii) this pattern (plausibility structure) has a fundamentally narrative character. Newbigin's approach thus has the potential for creative dialogue with scholars in fields as varied as theology, hermeneutics and developmental psychology and, importantly, education. (For an extensive summary of the "rediscovery of narrative" and its relevance to education, see chapter 5 of Bolt, 1993.)

Plausibility Structures and Worldviews

[17] It seems to me that Newbigin's understanding of a tacit cultural plausibility structure belongs in the same conceptual neighborhood as what people who stand in the neo-Calvinist tradition of Abraham Kuyper call a "world and life view" (or, more recently, simply a "worldview"). Walsh and Middleton, for example, define a worldview as a shared perceptual framework, a shared way of seeing the world. They stress that a worldview is not just a model <u>of</u> the world (i.e., an interpretive framework), but that it also guides its adherents <u>in</u> the world. A worldview has a built-in normative thrust which issues in a way of life (Walsh and Middleton, 1984: 32).

[18] For people in the neo-Calvinist or Reformed intellectual tradition, "worldview" has not typically been understood as a <u>narrative</u> framework. Despite the influence of a covenantal, redemptive-historical reading of Scripture, with its awareness of the creation-fall-redemption sweep of the biblical story, the notion of worldview has been susceptible to being construed quite intellectualistically in the neo-Calvinist tradition. A Christian worldview is sometimes thought of (and taught) as a sort of conceptual picture of things, or a conceptual way of looking at the world. The very term "worldview" perhaps already embodies (or is susceptible to) elements of the distancing which is characteristic of conceptual knowledge. The term can easily be understood to imply that we humans can attain a certain detachment from the world and have a view <u>of</u> it.

[19] The dangers of an overly conceptual or intellectualized understanding of a worldview, particularly in the area of education, have been clearly articulated by Nicholas Wolterstorff. One of the strengths of the neo-Calvinist, Reformed tradition, says Wolterstorff, is its emphasis on Christian education oriented toward preparing growing young persons for `Kingdom citizenship;' i.e., a life of participation in culture guided by the principles and values of God's Kingdom. Wolterstorff applauds this breadth of vision. However, in their educational endeavours

Reformed christians have invested heavily in the education of the intellect. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on the development of a Christian <u>mind</u>, a Christian worldview grasped intellectually. The result, says Wolterstorff, is that Christian education in the Reformed tradition has fostered a way of <u>thinking</u> <u>about</u> rather than a way of <u>being</u> <u>in</u> the world. It has been assumed that as long as education builds a Christian mind, the practical implications for a life of discipleship will take care of themselves. Wolterstorff argues eloquently that this is a false assumption. Especially in a culture in which they are socialized every day into a way of life which does not reflect the Christian mind, growing young christians are likely to practice a type of cultural schizophrenia: while they can articulate a "Christian mind" intellectually, they are ill-equipped to carry it into cultural practice. (see Wolterstorff, 1984)

[20] One way to address this crucial concern, it seems to me, to move away from understanding a worldview as a conceptual construct, instead highlighting its narrative matrix. In this connection the work of British New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, which is based on the contribution of Walsh and Middleton, is extremely helpful. Wright asserts that a worldview has to do with the deepest presuppositions of a culture or society, and that it thus underlies and shapes that culture or society's conceptual understanding of the world. In language which echoes Newbigin's, Wright states that:

Worldviews... are like the foundations of a house: vital but invisible. They are that <u>through</u> which, not <u>at</u> which a society or individual normally looks; they form the grid according to which humans organize reality, not bits of reality that offer themselves for organization. They are not usually called to consciousness or discussion unless they are challenged or flouted fairly explicitly, and when this happens it is usually felt to be an event of worryingly large significance. (Wright, 1992: 125)

[21] According to Wright

there are four things which worldviews characteristically do, in each of which the entire worldview can be glimpsed. First... worldviews provide the <u>stories</u> through which human beings view reality. Narrative is the most characteristic expression of worldview...
   Second, from these stories one can in principle discover how to answer the basic <u>questions</u> that determine human existence: who are we, where are we, what is wrong, and what is the solution?...
   Third, the stories that express the worldview, and the answers which it provides to the questions of identity environment, evil and eschatology are expressed... in cultural <u>symbols</u>....
   Fourth, worldviews include a praxis, a way-of-being-in-the-world. The implied eschatology of the fourth question (`what is the solution') necessarily entails <u>action</u>....
The choice of life aim reflects the worldview...; and so do the intentions and motivations with which the over-all aim goes to work. (Wright, 1992: 123-4)

[22] These four interacting functions of a worldview can be sketched as follows:

Story

Praxis   Questions

Symbols
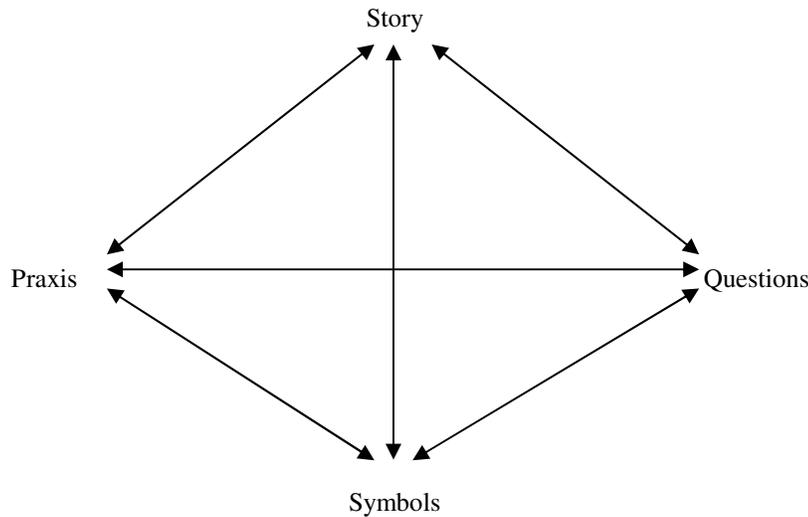
[23] I want to suggest that Wright's own formulation of these four functions of a worldview suggests that the element of story is more basic, more fundamental in this configuration than the others. Wright states that narrative is the most characteristic expression of worldview, and notes that the "questions" and "symbols" are rooted in the worldview story. In another context, Wright states that stories are "a basic constituent of human life;" human life can be seen as "grounded in and constituted by the implicit or explicit stories which humans tell themselves and one another." (Wright, 1992: 38) In light of this, and against the background of Newbigin's insight into the fundamentally narrative character of plausibility structures, I suggest that story is best understood not as one "function" of a worldview, but rather as the matrix of a worldview. A worldview does not, as Wright suggests, provide stories; rather, an embracing, plausibility-giving story provides a worldview. A worldview is story-formed; we could say that a worldview is a kind of condensation or shorthand (a first ordering) of a life-shaping story.

[24] In light of these considerations I suggest the following modification of Wright's sketch of the functional components of a worldview:

Story-formed Worldview
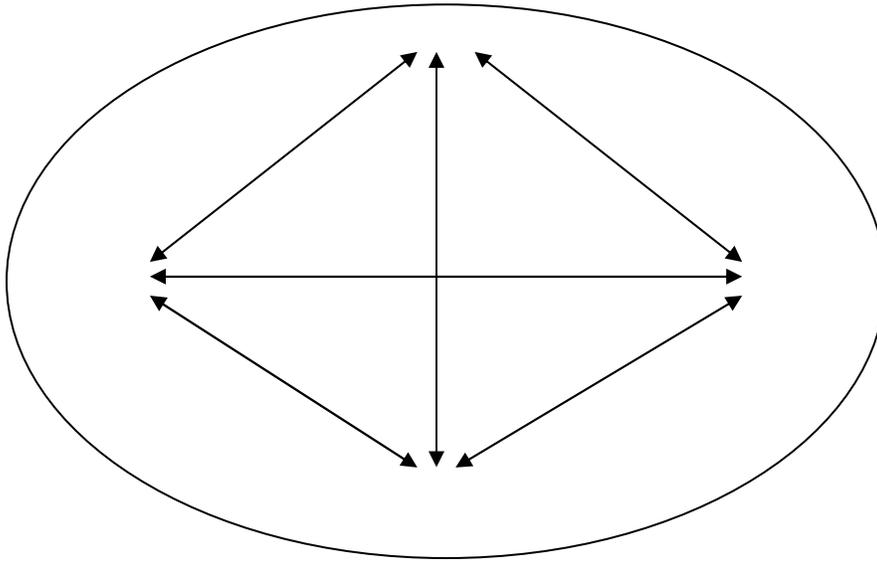
[25] In this configuration <u>memory</u> refers to a community or a culture's response, through time, to the worldview questions identified by Wright (who are we, where are we, what is wrong, and what is the solution?). In memory the response to these questions is oriented to where the story has been in the past. A living memory is essential; Stanley Hauerwas is correct when he observes that if a story is to remain vibrant and formative, there must be a community of people capable of remembering and reinterpreting that story. In a living story, he maintains, people draw strength by remembering. A remembered story renders a community or culture capable of ordering their new experience in a manner consistent with the story. (Hauerwas, 1981: 54) Or, as Newbigin puts it, "a society which has lost its memory is like a ship which has lost its rudder. It can only drift with the tides." ("Can a Modern..., p. 3).

[26] The element of <u>vision</u> (or critical imagination) is deeply rooted in memory and also embodies a response to the basic worldview questions. But here the `beckoning' aspect of the worldview story is central. The focus is not on what has been but on what ought to be. As Walsh and Middleton (and also Wright) assert, the worldview questions elicit not only a descriptive response, but simultaneously a visional response; a worldview embraces an understanding <u>of</u> the world and <u>for</u> the world (see also Olthuis, 1985). There is always an awareness, made explicit in the third and fourth worldview questions, that things are (not yet) as they should be. A worldview story, by providing its adherents with the resources to envision something different and better, inspires people to live toward the vision. This dynamic is clearly visible, for example, in the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

[27] Because it is oriented to what ought to be, vision has the quality of being critical of both the present and the past. In a story-formed worldview, then, the present moment of a community or culture stands in a creative tension between the resources of memory and the critique of vision.

[28] As noted by Wright, worldview stories are also embodied in key cultural symbols. These symbols, he suggests, can often be identified by the fact that challenging them produces anger or fear. Symbols can be events, rites, or things. Some of these will be cultic in nature. Cultural symbols are often expressed in architecture; modern secular cities are dominated by office towers rather than cathedrals. (The Toronto skyline now expresses cultural identity in the side-by-side symbols of a communication tower and a sports stadium.)

[29] Finally, a story-formed worldview incorporates an ethos. This dimension brings into view an understanding of the fundamental vocation of humans in the world. In terms of the Christian story, this vocation might be characterized as "stewardship of creation," or "responsible discipleship." The ethos dimension focuses on key life aims in terms of which people are prepared to invest their energies and talents. This basic life aim serves to define a sense of character, i.e., a sense of the kind of life practice the story calls forth.

Education as Cultural Story-telling

[30] Education can be understood as a mutual undertaking (or covenant) between generations to learn a cultural way of life in the setting of the vast theatre of creation. In this covenant an older generation undertakes to share with a younger generation what that generation needs to know in order to live well and to carry forward a story-formed tradition into the future.

[31] The image of "covenant" clearly signals that education is not merely something one generation does to another. True, setting the direction and the framework of education is primarily the responsibility of those who have reached a certain stage of maturity. But education is never a one-way street. The providers of education also benefit from the engagement. The process of education enables an older generation to deepen its appropriation of a tradition in all the dimensions discussed in the preceding section (memory, vision, symbols and ethos). And members of the younger generation bring their own unique gifts, their own often profound insight and sensitivities to the covenant of learning. They are active participants in the process.

[32] Education is always a pressing human concern for two key reasons. The first reason has to do with the design of the human maturational process. Humans go through a long, drawn-out process of growth and development. Consequently education is necessary; the wisdom and knowledge we need to live in the world is gained gradually, over time. Human knowing-for-life cannot be imprinted on a computer chip and installed in a machine brain, ready to be switched on.

[33] The second reason education is such a basic concern is that no human being, since the dawn of time, has appeared on the scene at the beginning of human cultural development. In biblical terms, from the beginning humans have been busy "dressing and keeping the garden." This process of exploring and interacting with the whole host of creation is inherently a learning process. A culture or way of life develops as people who share a bond of time and space give shape to a pattern of living which embodies this learning. This pattern will include the development of distinctive ways of interacting with other people, with animals and vegetative life, with the inanimate world, and with what that culture takes to be God. Over time, a culture

develops a fund of what people have learned, in experience, in these various kinds of interaction. Each generation is concerned to share this fund, this inheritance, with the rising generations.

[34] In the dynamic interaction of these two factors (the stretched-out maturing process and the cultural accumulation of learning) the process of education takes place. Each new generation is called to grow to maturity, and each new generation needs to be initiated into the accumulated knowledge embodied in a culture's shared way of life. Education is a process of bringing a new generation into full participation in a way of life, so that eventually the new generation can take responsibility for shaping that cultural way of life into the future. Education, in this broad sense, readies young learners to become responsible carriers of a cultural tradition, and enables older learners (teachers) to remain creatively involved in deepening their own knowledge-for-life. In modern societies a very significant part of this process has been institutionalized in a system of formal schooling.

[35] If, as Newbigin suggests, the plausibility structure of a cultural tradition has a narrative cast (or if, in my words, a community or cultural worldview is story-formed), then it makes sense of conceive of education as a process of cultural story-telling. When we educate we are engaged in an inter-generational transaction of telling the next generation the cultural story of what previous generations have found important to know in order to keep their way of life healthy and flourishing. In education, we tell the rising generation (those who represent the future) about the past learning experience of our culture or community, in order to enable them to understand where we have come from, and why certain things are important.[1]

[36] Although education involves development in all four dimensions of a story-formed worldview, in elementary and secondary education the memory dimension must receive particular attention. The early years of the educational process are a time primarily of cultural initiation, a time of incorporating a new generation into a tradition. Earlier I noted that a cultural tradition develops a fund of what people have come to know in encountering their world. This fund constitutes the curriculum of the educational process. The process of education allows the rising generation to "catch up" with cultural developments, as it were, and equips them to turn the cultural <u>fund</u> of knowledge into cultural <u>capital</u>; i.e., resources for maintaining and shaping a way of engaging in life. Through the process of education learners develop an ownership stake in a living cultural memory.

[37] In various contexts Newbigin signals a keen awareness of the importance of a process of initiation in cultural memory. Comparing school learning to learning to ride a bike, he stresses the need to submit oneself to the "tradition of bike riding" until one has internalized that

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[1]   Walter Brueggemann in his book <u>The</u> <u>Creative</u> <u>Word:</u> <u>Canon</u> <u>as</u> <u>Model</u> <u>for</u> <u>Biblical</u> <u>Education</u> points out that in the Old Testament Scriptures, whenever the younger generation asks "What does it all mean?" the response of the older generation is to tell the old, old story (the story of what God has done, is doing and will do, and of how Israel is called <u>participate</u>, not spectate in this drama). He points out that story is the primal mode of learning in the Bible. To "give Torah" is to give instruction, and the Bible does this in the first place by telling a story. (Brueggemann, 1982: chapter 1)

tradition. (GPS, p. 43) He asserts that a young scientist must submit herself to the authority of a tradition for a long time before she is ready to work alongside someone doing original research. (Ibid, p. 45) But submitting to a tradition is never the end of the matter. Newbigin writes that teachers should never be content that students accept something on their authority; they must strive to reach the point where students come to see for themselves that something is true. (GPS, p. 41) The authority of a tradition (i.e., cultural memory) can never serve as a substitute for a personal grasping of truth. Acceptance of the authority of a tradition should always be directed to the point at which people see for themselves that something is true (or not true). (GPS, p. 48) Such persons are ready to carry a tradition forward innovatively, and to re-forge a tradition in the light of new experience.

[38] While Newbigin here highlights the gradually emerging role of personal responsibility (ownership) in learning, it seems to me that the development of the <u>vision</u> (critical imagination) dimension of a worldview is also in play. A one-sided stress on memory can be extremely stifling. In schooling, a <u>fixation</u> on memory is often associated with what is called "traditional" education, which strongly emphasizes the handing on of important bodies of knowledge. In a classical traditional education these bodies of knowledge, accumulated in the past, are treated as if they are essentially complete; the tradition is a received tradition, and the teachers job is to pass it on.

[40] The vision dimension of our community and cultural stories highlights the fact that a cultural way of life cannot simply be past-oriented. Vision invites and beckons those who live in the story to orient themselves toward an image of how life ought to be. Guided by the visional element, the educational story told to each new generation must be open to being reshaped. A story emphasis thus acts as a safeguard against rigid educational conservatism.

[41] The interplay of memory and vision in education becomes clearly visible if the nature of the educational curriculum is understood in the light of education as cultural story-telling. The curriculum of education provides an overview and systematization of what participants in a culture have learned in past engagement in and with the world. This implies a dynamic understanding of curriculum. It does not consist of fixed bodies of knowledge, as in traditional education. Rather, the curriculum is a fund of knowing which we retell to inspire a faithful way of life in the rising generation.

[42] When the systematized curriculum becomes an end in itself i.e., when `covering' bodies of knowledge (information) becomes the thrust of general education, something has gone wrong. Perhaps an analogy is helpful in this regard. The systematic curriculum is to a cultural story what systematic theology is to the biblical story. Systematic theology is important, but it is not an end in itself. Focusing just on systematic theology is not the most effective way to incorporate learners into active participation in the biblical story. Similarly, while a teacher probably needs a good conceptual grasp of systematic curriculum, teaching organized bodies of knowledge should not become an end in itself in general education.

[43] If we apply this approach mathematics, for example, we need not regard math as a body of information, quite fixed and unchanging because it simply copies a fixed order of reality. Rather,

math can be seen as a <u>record</u>, an <u>account</u> of human knowing in relation to the numerical possibilities (order) of creation. In other words, math can be viewed as a compilation of the fruitful results of such exploration. As such, the mathematical record is open to reinterpretation. Innovations occur in mathematics. Sometimes, as a dimension of cultural change, new systems of math arise, if they seem to promise more fruitful, more explanatory possibilities for our knowing of, our relating to, numerical reality. But in any particular period of time, education must make the existing and relevant cultural fund of mathematical knowing available to the learner. A growing young person cannot fully participate in culture unless he/she has some handle on the cultural fund of our knowing in relation to numerical reality. But, especially in elementary and secondary education, the focus remains on the numerical dimension of concrete reality as an arena of human engagement, and not on an abstracted science of mathematics. And even our knowing of numerical reality, as recorded in mathematics, must remain open to further transformation in light of the visional dimension of our story.

[44] If education is, at bottom, a process of cultural story-telling (i.e., if its underlying aim is to foster participation in a cultural story and `absorption' of its plausibility structure), then the dynamics of education cannot possibly be a matter of indifference to Christians. As Newbigin asserts, the Gospel story is a full story; it provides a full set of answers to the basic worldview questions, and it is universal in its scope and claim. The educational engagement of Christians, then, should be oriented to that story. The educational efforts of Christians should be imbued with, penetrated by the biblical story and its life-world (plausibility structure). Each new generation of Christians needs to be steeped in that story so that their lives can tell the same story as the biblical story.

[45] In Newbigin's terms, what I am highlighting here is the importance of a community which <u>indwells</u> the biblical story. The important thing for Christians is not so much understanding the biblical text as it is understanding the world <u>through</u> the text (see GPS, p. 98). Christians are to live in the biblical story as the community whose story it is, and from that indwelling they try to understand and cope with the events of their time in order to carry the story forward (GPS, p. 99). A plausibility structure, Newbigin continues, is necessarily embodied in an actual community which carries forward a tradition as it meets new situations (Ibid). The Christian community is "invited to <u>indwell</u> the story, <u>tacitly</u> aware of it as shaping the way we understand, but <u>focally</u> attending to the world" that community lives in, so that the community can confidently (though not infallibly) increase its understanding of the world. (GPS, p. 38) For Newbigin, this is a key dimension of the meaning of the biblical theme of the "renewing of the mind." (Ibid).

[46] As Newbigin notes, however, in a modern pluralist society Christians encounter competing and conflicting stories. This situation is complicated by the fact that one particular story may gain a cultural advantage by dominating the cultural mind set and controlling the means of education. As Charles Scriven puts it,

> our world sustains a variety of shared stories and shared histories. These nourish and authorize a variety of ways of life. Within a region, country or civilization, certain commitments broadly shared may unite the existing diversity into a prevailing cultural outlook that is the dominant vehicle of challenge to Christian existence. (Scriven, 1988: 62)

[47] On Newbigin's analysis, this is exactly what has happened in secularized Western culture; the story of post-enlightenment modernity has dominated the public square of our culture, and has won control of the cultural story-telling in our societies educational institutions.

[48] This situation raises two important challenges for contemporary Christians who seek to indwell the biblical story in the area of education. First, they face the challenge of maintaining a keen critical consciousness with regard to their own educational efforts, and with regard to the education of their children. As responsible followers of Christ, Christians need to ask whose memory, what vision, and which symbols and ethos are present in the education they offer, and particularly in the education they and their children receive. The teaching of history or science or any other subject will always embody an ultimate story. The basic allegiance of Christians is to the story told in the Bible. The challenge facing Christians is to measure, by the standard of this story, the cultural memory, vision, symbols and ethos communicated to the next generation. For Christians who are concerned that education enable a new generation to indwell the biblical story, these cannot be matters of indifference.

[49] The second challenge facing contemporary Christians has to do with their stance with regard to the dominant worldview and its cultural embodiment. If the Gospel is an embracing story, then Christians cannot avoid challenging its rivals. In particular, the cultural dominance of the story of post-Enlightenment modernity (and its myth of neutrality) cannot be permitted to stand unchallenged. But how should this challenge be framed? According to Newbigin, the whole orientation of Christians should be one of witness to the Gospel. The biblical story challenges the claims of the reigning worldview primarily "through the witness of a community which indwells the story the Bible tells." (GPS, p. 97). By "acting out" the story, and by articulating what this story means for cultural policy and practice in areas such as education, Christians witness to the truth of the Gospel story. In such efforts Christians are, in fact, engaged in cultural evangelism.

Implications

[50] With this foundational perspective on the nature of education in hand, we can now explore some implications for educational practice in the "Christian society" envisioned by Newbigin. Two characteristics of such a society are crucial for this consideration. First, Newbigin's Christian society would require "a sufficient number of Christians sufficiently articulate in their faith to exercise a real influence in the public square" ("What Kind..., para. 23). Newbigin here carefully distinguishes influence from control. This distinction reflects a second characteristic of the Christian society, namely, that it must guarantee religious freedom for all. "It is the truth itself that we proclaim in the gospel which requires us to tolerate the power of the untruth" (What Kind..., para. 21). Since he unequivocally rejects the Enlightenment heritage which confines the free expression of faith to the private domain, Newbigin clearly advocates a version of religious freedom which would permit the public expression of non-christian life perspectives, also in education.

[51] Reflecting on the nature of educational practice in a "Christian society" is complicated by the fact that in most Western jurisdictions Christians are a long way from attaining a critical mass of people "sufficiently articulate in their faith" to influence the public square with regard to education. In fact, many Christians and (non-Christians) uncritically accept the dominance of the secular modernist story in education. A great deal of energy is required to challenge the hegemony of this life perspective. This means that the educational practice of Christians seeking a Christian society would have to be multi-faceted, advancing on several fronts at once while manifesting the above characteristics noted above.

[52] Some possible dimensions of the educational practice of Christians seeking to give expression to a Christian society are the following:

[53] I. If the whole orientation of Christians is to witness to the gospel story by indwelling that story, then one of the key cultural responsibilities of Christians today is to develop schools which tell the same story as the gospel story. A key feature of such schools should be that they function as a witness to and <u>for</u> society; the adjective "Christian" applied to these schools must not denote ownership, but character. Since the purpose of Christian witness is to invite people into the Kingdom, such Christian schools should practice an open admission policy. An integral educational witness through such schools would require a learning program steeped in the biblical story (including a curriculum which thoroughly reflects the beauty and complexity of God's world). The challenge of cultural discipleship (i.e., following Christ in and through the world) would need to be presented in winsome ways. In such an environment the matter of personal commitment would come up quite naturally. While such schools would not exist explicitly for evangelistic purposes, the personal commitment of students could become, as it were, a wonderful byproduct of the school's primary task (i.e., to educate). The provision of such schools, I suggest, would constitute a key aspect of the contribution Christian can make to the well-being of society.

[54] My reference to an open admission policy signals the fact that the schools I have in mind would not exist on the fringe of society as a private enclave, but would exercise their witness in the midst of society. Since public policy in many political jurisdictions currently does not encourage but actively discourages such public cultural participation by Christian schools, an effort to reshape public policy must be another key part of a Christian educational strategy. And, in keeping with Newbigin's emphasis on religious freedom and the toleration of dissent, Christians should advocate the same public policies fostering free educational expression for those whose lives are part of an encompassing religious story other than the Gospel. At the same time Christians should be in the forefront of efforts to design broad educational standards which all schools should meet. For example, a study of education in the province of Ontario led to a proposal that the government adopt a definition of "satisfactory instruction" which all schools must meet. This definition was, as might be expected, shaped by a secular modernist ideology of schooling. Christian and other "independent" school leaders banded together to articulate an alternate definition of "satisfactory instruction" which, among other things, resisted the secular silence on the role of fundamental life stories in education. At the same time, this alternate definition sought attain sufficient breadth to accommodate Jewish, Islamic, native Canadian, secular, as well as Christian life perspectives.

[55] II. In the preceding point I focused on the responsibility of Christians to give specific educational expression to their indwelling of the gospel story. The implications of the Gospel also extend, however, to Christians' responsibility, as citizens, for the healing and well-being of education as a whole, including secular education. (The "satisfactory instruction" example hints at this.) This requires a direct challenge of the secular myth of neutrality, with its claim that "the world can be adequately understood and coped with without reference to God" ("What Kind..., para. 24), and, that "to teach children that, in order to understand and cope with the world, we need to know something about God is... brainwashing" (Ibid). If, from a Christian perspective, a thoroughly secular account of reality is inadequate, then it follows that a thoroughly secular education is an inadequate education. Students schooled in Enlightenment-inspired story of modernity are being deprived of a crucial dimension of the human story, and are being shortchanged in their development as full, spiritual creatures.

[56] Since the modern secular story is still firmly entrenched in public education, Christians will find no shortage of opportunities to challenge this story, and to "subvert" it in loving ways. To cite a personal example: a few years ago the Ministry of Education in Ontario issued a new policy memorandum governing teaching about religion in public elementary schools. "Teaching about religion" is a formulation which accords well with the myth of neutrality, and reflects public education's paranoia concerning the possibility of religious indoctrination. I was asked to serve on an advisory committee to help the Ministry draft a "Resource Guide" to help school trustees and teachers deal with "teaching about religion." Several Christians on this committee, joined by Jewish and native Canadian members, spoke for a broad and embracing understanding of religion, and for an appreciation of the relevance of religion for the education of the "whole" child. As a result of these efforts, perspectives which "subvert" the "teaching about religion" approach made their way into the Resource Guide. This dissonance may play some small role in challenging the myth of neutrality. Multiplied thousands of times, initiatives like this can constitute a powerful Christian witness which seeks the best, most honest and most complete education possible, also in secular schools, for the benefit of the next generation and for the benefit of the future of our culture.

[57] III. As the example in the previous point suggests, "religious education" as a curricular component has been and continues to be a key battleground in relation to the educational hegemony of the secular story in the public arena of education. Consequently this area of education requires the serious attention of those who wish to witness to the Gospel in secular culture. A christian contribution to society's perplexity concerning religious education should be developed in such a way that it addresses broader educational issues as well. This approach could include the following considerations:

> [58] i. Propose the diversification, on an optional basis, of religious education. In a religiously pluralist school setting this would create optional opportunities for students to be instructed in a particular faith story or tradition, while also learning of the role of other religious traditions and ideological perspectives in shaping culture.

[59] ii. Propose alternative models of "religious education" which highlight the role of story-formed worldviews, or which focus on religious commitment as something which informs one's "life-stance" and thus provides one with orientation to ultimate questions concerning identity, the nature of the world, and the purpose of life.

[60] iii. Draw attention to "religion across the curriculum." Beginning at the elementary level, curricula in all schools should not hide or ignore the fact that religious commitment is an important factor shaping individual and cultural activity. Wherever possible the formal curriculum should incorporate explicit reference to the role, relevance and importance (both positive and negative) of religion, both for specific fields such as history or music, and for the development of culture as a whole.

[61] iv. Draw attention to the implicit curriculum, i.e., the attitude to faith and religion which schools implicitly convey. Education should communicate a sense of wonder and awe about life. When formal schooling implies that the world is a closed, mechanical system, then a deep religious understanding of life is hampered. If schools convey a sense of wonder and mystery, learners will be better able to develop an awareness of themselves as part of a wider spiritual reality.
[62] A second aspect of the implicit curriculum has to do with the attitude to religious traditions conveyed outside the formal learning program. The ambience of the schools should not demean or marginalize the religious beliefs and values represented in the learning community, particularly if that community is a religiously pluralist public school. The schools implicit attitude will emerge particularly in its attitude to religious practices and festivals. If the school implicitly sends out a message that religious beliefs, practices and outlooks are irrelevant and unimportant, it quite likely actively modelling a secular outlook. Christians should be in the forefront of those who challenge such implicit dominance of secularism.

Closing

[63] Two things stand out as I conclude my reflections in this essay. First, the field of education continues to be a field white for harvest; it is an area sorely in need of integral Christian witness. Second, the possibility of stimulating a more ecumenical dialogue among Christians regarding their educational calling in society appears promising. I trust that our upcoming colloquium may play a role in realizing this possibility.

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