

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 *Corinthians* 10:3-6)

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A Plea for the Future

By John W. Robbins

It's June 2000. Do you know where your children (or grandchildren) will go to college? We have a suggestion.

For the past 20 years The Trinity Foundation has been publishing Christian books that accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture. In all its activities, The Foundation is guided by an explicit and increasingly detailed theology and philosophy that seeks to include every aspect of human study and life—to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. We have taken very seriously Paul's warning to the *Colossians*: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

This has not been our own doing. God has preserved us and enabled us to present to the world more than 50 books, on every subject from epistemology to economics, nearly 200 issues of *The Trinity Review*, almost 100 audiotapes, and a large and growing website that is visited by people from locations around the world every week. That website now has tracts in English and German available, and soon we will be adding Russian and Spanish, God willing.

We are deeply thankful for all of this—that God has caused us to serve his people in this way, and we have received hundreds of letters testifying to the benefits people have received from our work.

But it is time to take the next step into the future—not to discontinue our publishing, but to expand it by offering something you readers have

been demanding for the past twenty years: an affordable Christian liberal arts college to which you can send your children and your grandchildren.

For the past five months I have been heavily engaged in negotiations to rescue and reorganize a 220-year-old school into a Christian liberal arts college for the 21st century. The school, Washington College Academy, here in beautiful eastern Tennessee, was established by Presbyterian minister Samuel Doak in 1780 as a high school and expanded into a college in 1795. It has a wonderful history and heritage, but it has been terribly mismanaged, being operated as a private boarding school, and it is now on the brink of complete collapse.

When we began our negotiations with WCA last December, we had a few financial supporters who had expressed their interest in seeing a Christian college established on the same philosophy that guides The Trinity Foundation. (We have published two books about our educational philosophy, *Education, Christianity and the State* by J. Gresham Machen, and *A Christian Philosophy of Education* by Gordon H. Clark. We also wrote about the need for a Christian liberal arts college in *The Trinity Review* in two essays, "The Educational Establishment versus Civilization" and "A Christian University." These essays and books are available at our website.) But as our negotiations with Washington College Academy continued, and even as opposition to our proposal from some members of the board of WCA was eliminated and the school

agreed to our terms, these financial supporters became hesitant to proceed. Their reasons were sound, given their individual situations: One had not liquidated his companies as soon as he had hoped and could not supply the needed funds. Another thought the risk was too great and that perhaps the school might have to go through bankruptcy. Other potential supporters had other reasons.

The school does indeed have serious problems—that is precisely why we have this opportunity. If the school were flourishing, its board would not listen to our proposal, let alone agree to it. The school's acting president is enthusiastic about our proposal to re-establish a four-year Christian college. Ironically, just as the governing board of the school has agreed to step aside and allow us to assume full control of the institution, its history, and its assets, our benefactors have withdrawn.

And that is the reason for this plea.

The people of God sorely need a Christian college that will pass the truth on for generations to come. As many of you readers have learned, reading our books is good, but not enough. We need an institution in which young men and women can be thoroughly educated; where they can develop those habits of mind that will enable them to conquer new intellectual territory, to teach others, and to raise their children; where they can be equipped for the propagation of the faith, so that they can fulfill the tasks of the 21st century. There is no such institution as we propose to establish. Most nominally Christian

colleges do not deliver in the classroom what they promise in the catalogue. I received my own education in spite of what most of my teachers taught me. But that is not the way education is supposed to be, and we intend to change that.

But to succeed we need your help. The men who have agreed to serve as the new board of Washington College Academy—men whose academic backgrounds as well as professions of faith are impeccable—desire to proceed with plans for a new Christian College, whether the negotiations with Washington College Academy succeed or not. We already have applications from men who want to teach at the new college, as well as others who would like to help out in any way possible. For all these reasons we are establishing a Christian College Fund to which contributions of all types and amounts are welcome—cash, stocks, bonds, life insurance, real estate, and so forth. This Fund will be used for creating a new Christian College for the 21st century. It may still be possible to acquire Washington College Academy—we certainly will continue to try, but if God prevents us from doing so, we will be looking elsewhere for another opportunity. Please consider giving as much to the Christian College Fund as you can.

Below is the text of the Founder's Day Address I delivered at Washington College Academy on February 11, 2000. It provides much more information about both the school and our vision for a new Christian College.

The Path to the Future Washington College Academy Founder's Day Address

Four centuries ago, when this continent was still a wilderness, a small band of English men and women, blown off course by the winds of the Atlantic, landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts. Sixteen years later, in 1636, after building their homes and meetinghouse, they started a college, so that the knowledge of Christ and his Gospel would not disappear in the vast expanse of the New World. They gave the name Harvard to that college, in honor of one of its first and most generous benefactors,

John Harvard, a young man who lived as an American for only 14 months, dying at the age of 31.

One-and-a-half centuries later, history repeated itself, here in Tennessee. Samuel Doak, whose grandparents lived in Pennsylvania and whose parents lived in Virginia, migrated to the Southwest and entered a wilderness we now call Tennessee. For the same reason that the Puritans built Harvard College in New England, Samuel Doak built Martin Academy in the great Southwest—to keep the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Gospel alive in the

wilderness. Fifteen years after its inception, Martin Academy was invested with authority to operate as a college, and it became Washington College, the first college to bear the first President's name.

It is noteworthy that both Samuel Doak and John Harvard shared an interest in education, and that they both helped establish schools in a wilderness. But even more noteworthy is the reason for their interest in education: Both Samuel Doak and John Harvard were devout Christians who understood that the primary purpose of education is to transmit revealed truth to the next generation. Their interest in education cannot be understood apart from their interest in Christian theology. Their theology explains their desire to support higher education.

Samuel Doak, because he believed the Bible to be the Word of God and therefore infallible not only in its general principles and ideas but also in all its details, desired to obey the command of the Holy Spirit, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (*Ephesians* 6:4). Dr. Doak desired to obey the command of the Holy Spirit speaking through Moses: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates" (*Deuteronomy* 6:6-9). According to the Scriptures, the Word of God is to be the possession of the fathers, the environment of the child, and the curriculum of the student.

This was the sort of education that prevailed in colonial America. The charter of Harvard College required that each matriculating student be clearly informed that "the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ...and, therefore, to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." The College curriculum was to be the culmination of a Christian education that began at birth. The first textbook printed in North America was the *New England Primer*. Its first line was "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." One historian, not a Calvinist, reported that "In colonial America, everyone with the rudiments of

schooling knew one book thoroughly: the Bible. And the Old Testament mattered as much as the New, for the American colonies were founded in a time of renewed Hebrew scholarship, and the Calvinistic character of Christian faith in early America emphasized the legacy of Israel" (Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*, 45-46).

Samuel Doak, the founder of Washington College, received that sort of education, completing it at the College of New Jersey in 1775. Doak belonged to the generation of Americans that fought the War for Independence, wrote the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as well as state constitutions, and established a new nation under God. As a graduate of the College of New Jersey, later known as Princeton, Samuel Doak had been a student of John Witherspoon, the only pastor to sign the Declaration of Independence. Doak's generation was a generation of bold and godly men, a generation that made new beginnings. Some men made great contributions to government; Doak made great contributions to education.

Like Princeton, his Alma Mater, Samuel Doak's own Washington College and Academy educated many illustrious men. The tally includes 22 college presidents, 28 Members of Congress, and 3 governors. If a school is to be judged by its graduates, certainly Washington College was to be commended. It had a good foundation and an exemplary beginning. But it has been affected by the changes that have swept over American schools and colleges, and not all those changes have been for the good.

When Walter Lippmann delivered his 1940 address before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, "Education versus Western Civilization," he argued that the problem with education in the twentieth century is that it has abandoned the old curriculum—the Christian liberal arts curriculum that had shaped America. The result is that civilization itself is being destroyed by its own educational system. In Lippmann's own words, "deprived of their cultural tradition, the newly educated Western men no longer possess in the form and substance of their own minds and spirits the ideas, the premises, the rationale, the logic, the method, the values of the deposited wisdom which are the genius of the development of Western civilization."

Why did American schools and colleges abandon the Christian liberal arts curriculum that sustained Western civilization? Chiefly for two reasons, both of them dishonorable: Arrogance and fear. Modern educators, like most modern scholars, are confident that they have discovered a method, a path if you will, that leads to truth—a method that does not depend on propositional revelation from God. That method is science. Science, not the Word of God, is “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.” By science, modern men have “proved” that men have descended from animals. By science, modern men have “proved” that the universe is, if not exactly eternal, at least far older than the Bible seems to allow. By science modern men have “proved” that morality is culturally determined. In the late nineteenth century, the phrase “It has been scientifically proved” replaced “Thus says as the Lord” as the voice of authority. Of course, science, properly understood, is a very useful discipline, an important part of both an educational curriculum and a free economy. But elevated to a position in philosophy and in the curriculum to which it is not entitled, science becomes a usurper and a tyrant.

There is a second reason why the old curriculum of studies has disappeared from our schools: fear. Educators of the twentieth century are afraid of the old curriculum. They fear the idea of truth. They fear truth itself, for truth is authoritative; it demands our belief. Truth implies that some things are not true, that some things are false—that there is an antithesis between good and bad, sin and righteousness, right and wrong, true and false. Modern educators embrace the notion that there are many points of view, all equally valid. This relativism, sometimes masquerading as diversity, and more recently called postmodernism, is the popular philosophy of contemporary America. But before it was popular, it was taught in the classrooms and preached in the pulpits of America.

To be sure, there are still sectors of American society that do not operate on the principles of relativism. Your bank still stubbornly believes that if you have \$500 in your account and you write checks for \$1,000, your account is overdrawn. The bank does not accept the prevalent notion that all opinions about your account balance are equally good; the bank lives by the ancient rules of arithmetic and the

ideas of right and wrong. In some schools, children are still being taught that 9×8 is 72, and that other answers are not equally valid or acceptable. But in other schools the philosophy of relativism has burrowed into the elementary classrooms, and children are now being taught creative spelling and creative arithmetic. Decades ago they were taught creative theology.

Now what we take as absurd in banking—the notion that all opinions are equally valid—modern men affirm as the profoundest wisdom in theology, philosophy, and education. But the notion makes even less sense in those disciplines than it does in arithmetic. Unfortunately, the absurdity of relativism is not so easily seen in theology as it is in arithmetic, nor are the damaging consequences of relativism in philosophy so easily understood as the overdrawn notice from your bank. Because the consequences of relativism are more difficult to trace in education than they are in banking, they are far more likely to do harm. And harm has been done. The victims of this philosophical foolishness are the schoolchildren and college students that have been taught falsehoods and told they were as good as true.

Relativism was not the view of the Puritans who immigrated to New England or of the Scotch-Irish who immigrated to the middle colonies and settled the Carolinas and Tennessee. They left England because they believed, correctly, that God had spoken in his Word, and they must obey, no matter what the King and Bishop said. The opinions of the King and Bishop were not as valid as the Word of God. Relativism was not the view of either Samuel Doak or John Harvard. Had Doak and Harvard been of the opinion that the Bible is a pretty good book, but not revealed truth, they would not have supported Harvard and Washington Colleges. There would have been no point in doing so, if all religious opinions were equally valid. Those colleges were established only because their founders correctly believed the Bible to be the uniquely true Word of God.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me be perfectly plain: The principal reason this institution was founded 220 years ago—the principal reason this country was founded 212 years ago—is that the Americans of Samuel Doak’s generation were genuine Christians, not relativists; they were believers in truth, not in the

opinions of men. They were men convinced that the Bible is right on every subject it addresses; they were men who affirmed and taught that the Bible is sufficient for all of life. It is this confidence in the Word of God that was lost in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and it is this loss of confidence in the Word of God that characterizes education and explains its failure in the twentieth century. Theology and philosophy, which so many regard as irrelevant and impractical, have very practical consequences. The good and noble qualities of America are consequences of the theology of the founders; our contemporary problems are the consequences of modern false theologies and philosophies. Neither banks nor nations can survive on relativism.

Ironically, as the schools, colleges, and universities of the United States have lost their bearings in the twentieth century, they have attempted to indoctrinate us with the dogma that education is our salvation. They have used the corrosive of relativism to disarm opposition to their ideas; then they have dogmatically asserted new “truths” that they have allegedly discovered by modern methods. We are told, for example, that public education is the salvation of democracy. Lippmann knew better six decades ago: He argued that public education is a destroyer of liberty and civilization. Not just public education, but the whole educational system, from kindergarten to university, has rejected and abandoned the good way, striking out in new directions, with neither compass, nor map, nor light.

Modern education—education without truth—is a very dangerous thing. In the first half of the twentieth century, Germany was the best-educated nation on Earth; it had thousands of PhDs, a thriving university system; and most of the nuclear and rocket scientists in the world. After World War II, both the United States and the Soviet Union imported their entire rocket programs from Germany. But German education, as technical and as rigorous as any on Earth, was education without truth, and that education enabled Germany to plunge the world into two great and bloody wars. Their vaunted educational system merely made the Germans more dangerous, more of a threat to freedom and civilization. The educated German people were putty

in the hands of a master orator and demagogue. Hitler had shrewdly seen how the greatest scientific superstition of the twentieth century—the doctrine of evolution—could be used to justify both war and genocide—the survival of the fittest. What had once been a Christian nation was made ripe for destruction, not by Hitler, but by its universities and churches in the nineteenth century. German higher criticism had undermined confidence in the Word of God; and German philosophy had banished God himself from the universe. Adolf Hitler was simply an effect—an inevitable result—of a system of education that had ignored or rejected a Christian view of God and man.

Today the United States, like Germany a hundred years ago, is traveling a path that leads to destruction. We have no reason to think that just because we are Americans, we will avoid that destination. We live in a land settled by Christians and blessed by God, but Germany was the land of Martin Luther and the Reformation, and Germany was reduced to rubble for abandoning the faith of its fathers. Luther had warned, “Above all things, the principal and most general subject of study, both in the higher and the lower schools, should be the Holy Scriptures.... Everyone not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.... I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to Hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures....” But Luther’s warning went unheeded. The Antichristian philosophers that Luther warned his countrymen against prevailed in the nineteenth century; and their ideas destroyed Germany in the twentieth. Theology has consequences.

We Americans live in a land of plenty, but Israel was a nation not only chosen by God, but also a land flowing with milk and honey. Yet God destroyed Israel for abandoning his covenant. In fact, as we can see from a study of the Scriptures, God judges those individuals, institutions, and nations that have been given light more severely than those who have not been so enlightened. Therefore, we can take no pride in, we can receive no protection from, the actions of our founders, if we ourselves have rejected the principles and ideas that made them and the institutions they established admirable and noble. If Washington College Academy is to have a noble

future, it will only be because it returns to the principles of its founder, Samuel Doak.

In the year 2000, 220 years after the founding of Martin Academy, we are once again living in a wilderness—not a geographical wilderness as the Puritans and Samuel Doak faced, but a spiritual and intellectual wilderness. Perhaps in your studies of history you have read of the fall of Rome or other ancient civilizations. Sometimes we are misled into thinking that a civilization collapses like a building—all of a sudden, and with a great, loud crash. But, as the saying goes, “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” so we must realize that Rome didn’t collapse in a day. We are living in the midst of the collapse of American civilization: The magnificent building that sheltered our fathers and grandfathers, the building constructed 200 and more years ago, is deteriorating; its foundations are cracked and crumbling, its walls and roof show gaping holes. The systems that supply the building are shutting down. And as the building crumbles to dust, the wilderness is encroaching, growing up around us; its vines and brambles, its thorns and weeds grow higher and thicker each year, crowding out the cultivated flowers of truth, morality, and beauty. And as the wilderness returns, the predators that inhabit it return as well.

If we are to imitate the Founder—if we are to rebuild a school in a wilderness—we must begin by looking at the confession of faith that Dr. Doak affirmed, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Far from this *Confession* representing the views of a religious cult, sect, or fringe group, as some have alleged, it is the most accurate summary of the principal teachings of the Bible to emerge from the Reformation. It ought to be believed by all Christians, and it was indeed the *Confession of Faith* of nearly all Presbyterians until the twentieth century. The *Confession* was written in England during the same period the Puritans in New England were founding Harvard, and both the *Confession* and the Harvard charter state the fundamental importance of Scripture for all of life and learning.

The first chapter of the *Westminster Confession* points to the Bible as the infallible and sufficient source of all the truth a man of God requires in order to be complete, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 *Timothy* 3:15-17). That is, the *Confession* points to the Bible as the only Word of

God—a book that has been legally banned from most schools in the United States. The Bible says this about itself, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Psalms* 119:105). If that is true, then we ought not to be surprised that when this divine lamp and light is extinguished, we wander in darkness. David, the Psalmist, wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep your Word” (*Psalms* 119:99-101). But educators in the twentieth century think they need neither God nor his Word.

The ejection of the Word of God from the modern curriculum has opened the door to all sorts of philosophies of education and experimentation in our schools and universities. Students in our schools and colleges have been treated with all the respect accorded to laboratory rats on which the latest theories of the educators are being tested. One ought not be surprised at this, of course, given the dogma of evolution that pervades our educational system, for that dogma says that students are indeed related to rats. The Christian view of children is that they are made in the image of God; the scientific view of children is that they are trusered apes. Our schools tell students they are the descendants of animals, not the creatures of God, so we ought not be surprised when they behave like animals. What is worse, is that these educational experiments that have harmed the children have been carried out in the name of the children.

But how do we reintroduce the Word of God into the curriculum? How do we even begin to rebuild? That question has been capably discussed by two of the greatest educators of the twentieth century: John Gresham Machen and Gordon Haddon Clark. Dr. Machen’s book, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, explains how schools and colleges ought to educate their students. An even more insightful and detailed answer is provided by Professor Gordon Clark, in his book, *A Christian Philosophy of Education*; the book is the blueprint for a system of Christian education from kindergarten through university. Obviously, I do not have the time to discuss these books in detail today, but I do call them

to your attention, for these men have blazed a trail through the wilderness that we all should follow. They have taken what the Word of God teaches about education and applied it to contemporary America. If our goal is to ensure the future of Washington College Academy as an educational institution, it is to Drs. Machen and Clark, to their *Confession*, which was the *Confession* of Samuel Doak, and to their source of authority, that we must turn for guidance.

In conclusion: Two hundred twenty years ago Samuel Doak had a dream. The dream was an educational institution that combined both a Christian college and a Christian academy. This institution, Washington College and Academy, was intended to provide an education that would thoroughly equip its graduates to excel in government, in the church, in education, in business. The time has come to re-build Doak's dream. The hour is late, but it is not too late, if we have the wisdom to see what must be done, and the courage to do it. Let me urge you to recover what has been lost, to repair what has been broken, to rebuild what has been neglected. That is the way to truly honor the Founder of Washington College Academy. Thank you.

To contribute to the Christian College Fund, simply make your check out to The Trinity Foundation and designate the gift for the Fund. For other types of gifts—stocks, bonds, life insurance, real estate, wills, and so forth—please contact us directly. All donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Thank you for your help.