



Johnny's Teacher

THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION



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The Problem and the Solution

While I am grateful to Glen Schultz for the invitation to address such a distinguished association of educators, I must tell you that I am as astonished to be here as you are to see me here. If the local posse had mounted up with the intent of apprehending and hanging a scholar, I would not even feel the necessity of riding south for Mexico. I am a Texas cowboy, a traveler, and an observer of people and nature. Of course, I have the appropriate scholarly credentials; wrote the customary doctoral dissertation on a subject about which no one else ever thought; serve as president of an institution committed to research and post-graduate education; drive a presidential-looking automobile; live in the big house on campus; and raise a ton of pesos to keep the whole enterprise afloat. I have even authored my share of monographs, contributed articles to elitist journals, and with some regularity attended the rather eccentric assemblies of ivory-tower investigators, which are euphemistically dubbed “learned societies.”

But the truth is that I am just about as uncomfortable in that whole milieu as a rattlesnake in a corral full of spooked zebras. You see, I never intended to be what I am. I harbor a growing suspicion for accrediting associations, which clearly discriminate against the small, the poor, and the evangelical. Accrediting associations are increasingly enamored of political correctness, and the nature and scope of their expectations force just about everyone in education to abandon much of the instructional task in order to fondle ever increasing mounds of paper in a frantic “contemplate-your-navel” syndrome based on the latest educational theory. Furthermore, I remain an ardent opponent of “tenure,” a system designed to produce mediocrity and to preserve the immunity of the faculty to all legitimate forms of effective evaluation and public accountability.

Much more scintillating to me would have been a small 30,000-acre western spread with cattle, sheep, goats, some exotic stock, a ranch house with a large library room overlooking a table-top plateau, an abundance of wildlife, a four-wheel-drive Jeep, a pick-'em-up truck, a few hounds to run the critters, a fireplace, and my family — ah, that's the life! Then God said, “You must go out for Me.” Well, now, that was not what I had in mind. But even for a Texan, God must be acknowledged as God, at least in public. So, I assumed I'd be an evangelist. I didn't own a tux, a bright coat, or anything else to produce the needed sparkle for television. My name and stock were common. I had never

been in prison, never had a drug or drinking problem, had never absconded with somebody else's dinero or consorted with someone else's squaw, and I had enough stealth not to get caught in what mischief and pranks I did do. These disadvantages to evangelism notwithstanding, believing that folks were lost and that only Jesus could save them, I had a hankering to share the Good News; so I embarked on a journey that has taken me over this globe to 120 nations and all 50 states, and this adventure has been more fun than a Saturday night rodeo.

Then, after a flurry of events too involved to relate here, I have found myself an educator for the past 31 years and a seminary president for the last 14 years, living at one point, of all places, on the densely populated Eastern Seaboard. And if all of that is not enough to churn buttermilk, here I address a group of sophisticated educators who have in their sacred trust the lives of the next generation of leaders in this society. Furthermore, I address them in a time of national debate that has surfaced with the allegation that "Johnny cannot read." Books such as Allen Bloom's "The Closing of the American Mind," George Marsden's "The Soul of the American University," Thomas Sowell's "Inside American Education," and Charles Syke's "Profscam" and "The Hollow Men," among others, have chronicled the problem. The November 5, 1995, edition of the Washington Post's "Education Review" published book reviews of a number of recent attempts to answer the critics and advance the thesis that whatever its failures, American public education is still the best in the world and that its critics merit all the credibility of Chicken Little.

But the problem will not go away. En route to Atlanta on Delta Airlines, I glanced at Sky Magazine, one of those slick airline in-flight publications whose greatest contribution to society is normally the crossword puzzle. But this October 1995 issue carried the story of English Professor Richard Barr's imminent departure from Rutgers University. According to Timothy Harper's account, Barr enjoyed enormous popularity with students, was a fabulous classroom instructor, and spent many hours with his students beyond the confines of the classroom. But he was not gaining tenure at Rutgers; and, hence, he was having to leave because he did not pursue an adequate program of research resulting in publication of articles in so-called "refereed" journals. As the article's author noted, "In fact, Barr believes — heresy to some academics — that students are as important as teachers." You see, Barr negotiated the same didactic obstacle course traversed by the "research scholars," but he believed that teaching the next generation was just as important as "new" research. Further, he was convinced that some scholars have a propensity for research and publication, while others find their gifts and calling in instructional and relational arenas.

A more balanced perspective will even generally acknowledge the problem.

For example, a recent essay titled “Accountability of Colleges and Universities,” co-written by Patricia A. Graham, Richard W. Lyman, and Martin Trow, noted that:

Much has been said about the incompatibility of research and teaching or the neglect of teaching by a research-oriented faculty. Research and teaching are not inherently at odds; on the contrary, the close connection between teaching and research has been a source of the preeminence of American research universities throughout the world. Undergraduate education is weaker than it should be, not because of research, but because of the lack of status and attention teaching is given by the academic community. Despite institutional staff development offices and a substantial body of knowledge about improved teaching, few academics use those resources. They are left to graduate students and new appointees. Colleges and universities need to attack these problems by encouraging or requiring faculty to improve their teaching skills and by linking their rewards more closely to their performance in teaching as well as in research.

Even if the problem has been overstated and Barr’s case is still exceptional, problems clearly do exist. The Philadelphia Inquirer in 1987 surveyed freshman students at one of the most prestigious state universities in the East and found:

. . . 69 percent could not identify a single African country between the Sahara and South Africa (there are 28); less than half could name the two largest states in the United States; 88 percent could not identify the five Great Lakes; and only 27 percent know that Manila is in the Philippines. In 1987, a survey at another university found that 25 percent of the students in a geography class, could not locate the former Soviet Union on a world map. On a map of the 48 contiguous states, only 22 percent could identify 40 or more.

But as students languished, prospective research scholars labored in their carrels to produce Ph.D. dissertations on critical subjects such as “Submerged Sensuality: Technology and Perceptions of Bathing,” “A Functional Approach to Interruptions in Conversation, a Mathematical Analysis,” and “Using Television to Alleviate Boredom and Stress: Selective Exposure as a Function of Induced Excitational States.” Meanwhile, classes were offered at Middlebury College in

Vermont on “Popular Culture, Eroticism, Aesthetics, Voyeurism and Misogyny in the Films of Bridgette Bardot,” and at the University of Massachusetts on “Slimnastics” and “Ultimate Frisbee.” My son was required to have an “arts” course at the University of Texas. He signed up for “Improvisation” and found among other ludicrous assignments that he was required to lie on the floor and make reptilian advances and movements to get “in touch” with that part of his “nature and heritage.” It seemed to me to be a strategic retreat from education because my son was a master of these techniques around his first birthday. Admittedly, he may have been a bit rusty since he had little occasion to revisit these skills through his years of maturation.

Ten years ago, there came to my desk a listing of papers to be presented at annual meetings of the Society for Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion. Membership in these organizations ostensibly represents the apogee of scholastic achievement among the nation’s biblical scholars and theologians. Here is a selection of the epoch-making diatribes offered at these 1996 orgies of thought:

Killing Us Softly: How Women Kill in the Bible

Alice Bach, Stanford University

Witchcraft, Evil, and Memnoch the Devil: Esoteric Theosophical Themes in Anne Rice’s New Orleans Fiction

Massimo Introvigne, Center for Studies on New Religions

From Queen to Excrement: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative in 1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 9

Deborah Appler, Vanderbilt University

Virtual Torah, Digital Mourning: Communal Experiences in Cyberspace

Oren Baruch Stier, University of Cape Town

Bodies as Objects, Objects Inscribing the Body

Body as Ritual Actor and Instrument of Praise: Verna Maynard’s Experience in the Kitchener Church of God

Donna Lynne Seamone, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Border Crossings: Fall and Redemption in “Blade Runner” and “Thelma and Louise”

Mara E. Donaldson, Dickinson College

The Physiology of Tantric Yoga

James F. Hartzell, Columbia University
Lesbian-Feminist Issues in Religion Group

How Much Should We Reveal?

Grace G. Burford, James Madison University

Ritualistic Touching: Gender Formation through Worship Performance in Southern Antebellum Evangelical Protestantism

Laura Hobgood-Oster, St. Louis University

Gay Men's Issues in Religion: *Workshop on Queerness, Racism and Power*

Charles Sykes, author of "Dumbing Down Our Kids," identified part of the problem as "the professor." Sykes opined,

The professor must be an obscurantist or he is nothing. He has a special unmatched talent for dullness; his central aim is not to expose the truth clearly but to exhibit his profundity — in brief, to stagger the sophomores and other professors.

And further,

The story of the collapse of American higher education is the story of the rise of the professoriate. No understanding of the academic disease is possible without an understanding of the Academic Man, this strange mutation of 20th-century academia who has the pretensions of an ecclesiastic, the artfulness of a witch doctor, and the soul of a bureaucrat.

Critic Rex Roberts, writing in the November 17, 1996, *The Washington Times*, was reviewing a satirical monograph about academia titled "The Handmaid of Desire," by John L'Heureux. Roberts commented on the difficulty of writing such a commentary.

More recently, authors have had a difficult time parodying campus life. The doctrines of political correctness and multiculturalism, combined with ever more arcane theories and impenetrable argot, have turned campuses into asylums

for the rationally challenged. Writers needn't invent comedies when life itself is absurd.

By contrast of influence, consider the reminiscence of my favorite liberal theologian, Harvard Divinity Professor Harvey Cox, as he recalls the ministers of his youth in his book "The Seduction of the Spirit."

The ministers who came to our little congregation for what was usually a short pastorate, probably because they were paid so poorly, were a varied, eccentric and completely un-stereotyped lot. They could hardly have been cum laude seminary graduates to find themselves in what must have been an un-prestigious outpost even in its own denomination. Still they were always larger-than-life figures to me. Their black suits and booming voices set them apart from other mere mortals. Their sheer knowledge seemed amazing to me and their confidence and poise unbounded. But at the same time they were invariably friendly and accessible. They even wanted to know me. They were a little like God. Although ministers obviously commanded respect and even deference, they also weeded their tomatoes, had sickly wives and squawking children, and sometimes seemed discouraged or angry. Besides, they had huge collections of books, were actually paid to read them and to prepare sermons. They knew, it seemed to me, almost everything, and they didn't seem to be afraid to die. How else were they able to talk about it when nobody else did? I can't remember when I didn't want to be a minister when I grew up.

Now, if Johnny has trouble reading, thinks that Iceland is the skating rink at the mall, and that an epistle is a female apostle, then we probably have a problem with Johnny's teachers, including his parents. We need to recruit neither a behaviorist shrink nor an astrophysics theoretician to ascertain that much of the remedy for this lies in the teaching enterprise. Since I lack both the erudition and the sesquipedalian vocabulary to propose and support any novel theories about how this task is to be tackled, I shall rather invite your attention to one of the most profound passages in Scripture concerning our responsibilities to the emerging generation. In so doing, I do not propose to teach you anything new, but simply remind you that the tested principles of the late 15th century B.C. are still the key to good educational methodology some 3,500 years later. Please note Deuteronomy 6:1-12.

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Here therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (KJV).

The first important principle for Johnny's teacher is in verse six: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart." The principle is this: It is fundamentally impossible to teach that which you do not know.

When I first arrived at college in West Texas, I was informed by upperclassmen that the sport du jour at the university was rodeo, and that all the "real men" participated. For a Texas tadpole, macho is a much more likely personality trait than discernment, and I was no exception. Besides, these proud buffoons had questioned my manhood. I headed down for the arena, taking along a suitemate who claimed to have been reared (in Texas we say "raised")

on a ranch.

“What do you want to do?” a smiling senior with a cocked, black cowboy hat asked wryly. “What’s hardest?” I swaggered. “Oh, I dunno,” he paused thoughtfully but I suspected knowingly. “Maybe bull riding,” he finally ventured, fighting back a grin. “Bring ‘em on,” I said confidently, remembering the old cowboy adage that there was never “a bull that can’t be rode,” but forgetting the last of it that adds that there was never “a cowboy that can’t be thrown.”

Now, certainly my “knowledgeable” friend from the ranch would instruct me. I drew a sorrelled bull named Cream Puff, whose general demeanor convinced me quickly that he loved neither God nor man. “How do I stay on that critter?” I queried my friend. “See them horns,” he said, pointing toward the bull. He might as well have asked a terrapin marooned in the middle of I-35 whether he saw an 18-wheeler. I not only saw the horns, I saw what seemed to be a 10,000-pound killing machine with two, 30-foot scimitars on his head and a considerable attitude problem. I remember asking, “Who did sin, this bull or his parents, that he was born irritated?”

My friend now informed me that I needed to stay away from the “business end” of the bull. “Sit as far back from the horns as possible,” he said. Now, I should have known better. Any casual observer could deduce that this bovine of the male gender didn’t possess a “non-business” end. In retrospect I realize that as bad as this advice was, growing up on a ranch and knowing that horns are dangerous is no substitute for the experience of actually riding bulls. My friend knew nothing of the physiology of bovine backbones or the simple physics that the one locus on the bull that moves the least is about half way between the two business ends.

When the gate opened, I was positioned almost on the rump of that commandeered beast. The first buck out of the chute sent me airborne, but this was not the problem. My hand was still anchored in the rope around the critter’s waist. Sitting as far back as I was, in the first pitch I was sent up high enough that by the time my posterior reached its zenith and plummeted down, Cream Puff’s posterior had already returned to its starting point to be recharged by every muscle in his hind quarters. He was now on his way back up with twice the velocity of my descent. Our derrieres met, void of compassion each for the other.

Every time I watch a punt in a football game, I relive the experience. Although it was a very long fall and a very steep grade, I was grateful that Cream Puff wasn’t there when I came down. As I lay there wondering how much was broken, I saw just about everyone on the ground at eye-level reduced to an unforgettable moment of hysteria. My friend was at my side. “What went

wrong?” he asked. Cream Puff had turned at the other end of the arena and was heading back. Incentive and enlightened self-interest suddenly triumphed over injury and humiliation, and I was on my feet running. As I did, I recall saying to my friend, “Don’t ever try to teach what you do not know!”

To be an effective teacher, your subject matter has to be in your heart, not just in your head. Only if you have a devotion to your subject, a fascination with its potential, and a determination to make it sprout feet and walk around the classroom will you ever be a good teacher. One of the finest teachers in an Ivy League university broke all the rules. He had no syllabus, no text, no lecture, no notes. His classes filled first and always had waiting lists to get in. His subject? German! Seated in a circle, students were scolded and sometimes physically shaken for a wrong answer, hugged and sometimes kissed for a right one, but at the end of one semester students were conversational in German.

If your subject is important enough to be taught, then let it consume you. Find new ways to make it live. Give the students a vision for how their lives will be transformed by this discipline or weakened and endangered without it. If you know it thoroughly and have a passion for it, you can sell algebra, chemistry, or physical education even to the student who seems to be the most inept.

The second important principle from Deuteronomy 6 is found in verse five: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

All truth is God’s truth. The discovery of truth, whether scientific, mathematical, philosophical, historical, or theological, is the discovery of the ways and orderings of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. To love or even tolerate ignorance within oneself is inconsistent with the recognition and love of God. To love God with your heart (the seat of affection in Hebrew thought) is to love Him passionately. To love Him with one’s soul is to love Him with the devotion of the whole life. To love Him with one’s strength is to pursue Him, His will, and His ways. In a Christian academy, every pupil should be unalterably convinced that the teacher loves God in all those ways. If the student knows that the teacher loves God in all those ways, it will never occur to the student to question the teacher’s love for the student.

My wife is a devotee of English high teas. That we are married surely constitutes irrevocable proof that opposites attract. Consequently, you will probably understand when I tell you that she was less than favorably impressed with the three nights’ camping on the Zambezi River above Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, even though they did serve her a cup of tea! Crocodiles crawling past the tent, a lion stalking in nearby fields and trumpeting of a lonely pachyderm bore more resemblance to the Great Tribulation than to

the Millennium as far as my wife Dorothy was concerned. She did not even appreciate the provisions we had made for a hot outdoor shower and other, well, “facilities” which are not a part of the normal landscape. For me, however, it was a priceless combination of Utopia, Heaven, and Texas, all mixed into one.

So, can you imagine my presiding over high tea at the Ritz in London? One redneck buddy of mine said, “How can you do it, Paige?” Answer, “I love Dorothy, my sweetheart.” So I have to learn her ways and to love her ways as well. The same hand that field dresses the warthog has learned delicately to embrace a china tea cup, pinky appropriately extended. The same tongue that relishes a fresh kudu steak has learned to distinguish between Devonshire cream and its inferior substitutes. I am now a connoisseur of scones with an occasional hankering for cucumber sandwiches.

When you love God, you love His person and cherish His presence most of all. Like Adam and Eve, you treasure the walks with the Savior in the cool of the day. But you also learn to be fascinated by and a student of all that He has made and of all the ontological and cosmological statutes that govern His domain.

For example, is biology fun? Did you know that your body boasts more than 60,000 miles of interstate highways, state highways, and farm-to-market roads? We call them arteries, veins, and capillaries. Through these flow the crimson of life that carries needed food and oxygen to every bodily extremity. Furthermore, on the journey back to the heart (the total journey takes just under a minute for any one cell of blood) the blood picks up the trash and delivers it to the appropriate organs for the purging of body waste. Small wonder that Leviticus 17:11 says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”

You see, a little biology and physiology assist me in understanding my Bible and building my theology. Now I understand why God said “the life of the flesh is in the blood,” and now I know why we are cleansed by “the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Deuteronomy 6:7 also suggests a third principle — creativity in teaching: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

Too many of us are wed to a single method of instruction. The point of this Mosaic admonition is that teaching is something that happens all day long in a variety of places and in a plethora of ways. The sensitive teacher never misses the opportunity, knowing that he may save a life if he is effective.

Like people, horses often need shoes. Watching a blacksmith shoe a horse

can be wonderfully helpful, especially when the smithy is a good teacher. Front hooves are not too difficult. But, oh those back hooves. When you operate on one of these you have to pick up the hoof and grip it between your legs with your back to the horse, which I remind you has one additional untouched hind leg. The whole idea of cradling that massive hoof between your legs is a less than salubrious thought for the male homo sapien. Now, if you do not crave an aerial perspective of the adjacent county with a horseshoe brand permanently imprinted on the seat of your jeans, this operation must be effected with great care. A professorial smithy once showed me how, and I never forgot. “Never simply grab a back foot,” the smithy demonstrated as he talked. “Begin at the horse’s shoulder and make a long rub down his back, past his hind quarters, and right down to his foot. Never startle the horse.”

To shoe a horse or to educate a student is never easy. But it can be easier or more difficult, or even dangerous, if your methodology is bad.

Four affirmations about pedagogy are discernible in verses seven to nine. **First, the ministry of teaching is to be discharged diligently.** Haphazard, lackadaisical, disinterested careerism has no place in a laboratory of souls. Seize every conceivable teaching moment. Give the effort every energy you possess.

The **second** insight reveals that the **world is the classroom.** You talk of the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, the last thing at night, and the first thing in the morning. The first thing visitors to Japan often notice is the preponderance of schoolchildren everywhere. One of the reasons for the general success of Japanese education is that the field trip is more than just teacher’s day out. While I am personally committed to the lecture as a pedagogical method that will outlast its critics, “lecture” should take place in various places and elicit the participation of the class in unique ways.

Verse eight gave rise to Jewish phylacteries. In Jerusalem or New York, you can see the orthodox Jewish worshippers with leather bands around head and left arm. The tiny box attached thereto contains passages from the Torah kept close to the head and close to the heart. The **third** principle here is to **keep the Word of God in your mind and in your heart**, in your contemplation and as an object of your devotion and affection. The same is true to only a lesser degree of all knowledge.

Finally, write the Torah on the doorposts! What you visibly emphasize and place regularly before your pupils in various illustrative forms will find lodging in their minds in ways and to a degree never anticipated.

Moral courage is one of the most important lessons for every teacher to impart. Note why Moses has given this particular instruction to Israel.

And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 6:10-12, KJV).

The Promised Land was inundated by Canaanites, Hittites, Philistines, and other groups of varied cultures, strange gods, and contradictory morals. Everyone knows that youngsters are impressionable. How were Israel's youth to be protected from the destructive influences of these civilizations and, hence, ultimately from the certain judgment of God? The key was to communicate the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments so that the pupils were challenged to develop the moral courage to stand alone.

Precisely how important this moral courage is has been rather forcefully and painfully suggested to my mind in the past years. During the 15-year confrontation over the question of the reliability of Scripture in the Southern Baptist Convention, neither the skepticism of the secular world nor the liberalism of the Christian world gave me the greatest consternation and sorrow. Rather the insipid, shrinking, innocuous, and paranoid fears of conservative, Bible-believing Christians that led so many to act in the best interest of their personal careers or denominational preferment rather than on behalf of the truth they verbally confessed, proved to be both astonishing and disappointing. Prior to their departures for heaven, Lutheran reformer Robert Preus and Reformed scholar Francis Shaeffer expressed similar disappointments.

The May 1995 issue of *The Catholic World Report* featured a poignant analysis by James Hitchcock titled, "Conservative Bishops, Liberal Results." The author chronicled the strange phenomenon of conservative ecclesiastical appointees from the Vatican presiding over leftward drifting dioceses. Hitchcock noted that while the new bishops were personally conservative, most had no stomach for confrontation, and would "go along" to "get along." Courage had simply failed them.

The contemporary teacher must not only teach truth but also instill courage to stand, even if this posture is maintained while all others kowtow to the philosophies of secularism. John Hus of Bohemia was burned at Constance-by-the-Lake in 1415. On May 30, 1416, another pre-Reformation

reformer was tied to the stake and asked if he had final words to offer. As he was speaking, the executioner slipped behind him clandestinely to ignite the pyre. Jerome of Prague stopped in mid-sentence when he sensed what was happening. "Do not light the fire behind my back," resonated Jerome. "If I feared it, I would not have come here."

My son Armour is an avid student of the history of the West and a vigorous, unrepentant outdoorsman. He is anything but perfect; but if you ever have to go to war, you want him with you, and not just because he can shoot the ticks off his dog at 50 paces with his .45 pistol. His best qualities are ferocious loyalty and indomitable courage. He learned much of this from his study of the American Indian and, he claims, from observing his father. In reality, he taught me much about both. In the midst of one of the great crises of my life, Armour gave me a picture of a mounted Indian warrior, courageous and loyal. Beneath the picture and beautifully framed with it was a poem he had written about that warrior and his father:

For a warrior who stood alone,
Who spilled his own blood,
And never feared for his own life,

Who rode boldly through the storms,
Stood unwaveringly in winds of strife,
And withstood lonely winters and long nights,

Who was undaunted by threat and attack,
Willing to lead when others would not follow,
And loyal and caring always to his own,

The war goes on always.
But though the flesh weakens,
The spirit and the heart remain strong.

When the storms come again,
The wounds sting and the blood spills,
And the valley of the shadow of death is at hand,

It is only the beginning.
The good fight has been fought.
The war's end is night.

The sun sets in its splendor of this earthly battlefield;
Peace flows in the whispers of the night's wind,
And joy comes in the morning.

Armour never knew that at that moment I was barely holding on to the side of the precipice, sustained only by finger-tip grip. When I read the poem, I realized again that for the sake of my children I must have courage, I must hang on. Today that picture and poem hang in my seminary office as a perpetual reminder to me.

My challenge to you teachers and administrators gathered here today is that you teach Johnny not only how to read but also how to live and how to die, for Johnny must someday do both.

There is one concluding nugget to be mined from the rich veins of Deuteronomy 6. You will note that the passage is not actually addressed to church, state, or school, but rather to parents and grandparents. The first insight to be affirmed here is that parents and grandparents are the first and most responsible teaching unit in the plan of God. Part of the school teacher's responsibility is to recognize and honor that priority and to join with parents in the instructional endeavor.

By extension, however, one may venture the suggestion that the most effective teachers are always those who come to view their pupils as their children. When I address graduates each semester at Southwestern, some are as old as I, and some are graduating with doctor's degrees. Some may find it odd that I tell them that I view them now as my children. In the years ahead when they hurt, I will hurt; when they rejoice, I will rejoice; when they succeed, I will be grateful; when they fail (if I know of it), I'll be there to pick them up. My heart, my emotions, my desires, my hope is bound up with this stewardship of life that God has committed to me.

As a child I remember what was to me one of the strangest of all the phenomena on this sphere that is our orbiting home. Several of my teachers just really did not like children. Oh, I am sure the news that the red-haired, freckled-face, preacher's kid Paige Patterson was assigned to their class was enough to evoke thoughts of immediate retirement for even the hardest, veteran teachers. "Isn't he the kid that put the live garter snake in Miss Best's desk drawer? And didn't he pull the fire alarm and dismiss the whole school when Miss Best was racing down the hall screaming?"

But it wasn't just I. Some of these people just did not like children nor did they understand them. I even suspected that if you raised the north window of your domicile on a moonlit night, you could see such an individual ride by on her broom!

Teachers, if you cannot love children and love them as though they were your very own, please do something else. Life is too short and the stakes are too high to risk your spiritual and psychological sanity, to say nothing of the well-being of the child.

Magdalena was born to Martin and Katy Luther on December 27, 1529. Luther viewed her as another gift of God at Christmas. Few adored their children more than this former Augustinian monk. He knew well the grace of God that he would ever be married, let alone the father of children. He loved them, taught them, played with them, and reveled in their progress. Fourteen years later, Luther sat by the fire in his home with a broken heart. He held his beautiful 14-year-old Magdalena in his arms as she drew her final breath. With tears cascading down his face, this warrior-theologian uttered softly these words,

Magdalena, my little girl, you would like to stay with your father here, and you would be glad to go to your Father in heaven. How strange it is to know that she is at peace and all is well, and yet to be so sorrowful.

If the sort of pathos that characterizes that incident ever grips the soul of our teachers, inducing in each the compassion of a parent for a child rather than merely the teacher for the pupil, Johnny will not only learn to read, but he will also be uniquely prepared for life and death. In fact, Aristotle's three canons of rhetoric remain serviceable as an assessment of any teacher's success as an instructor. They are — to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance — ethos, pathos, and logos. **Ethos** has to do with the character of the teacher. Is he credible? Does he embody the truths that he advocates? **Logos** refers to the content that he teaches. Is he delivering substantive truth to the listener by all means possible? **Pathos** is about his passion. Does the teacher make truth come to life, leap from its lair, and lay hold of the auditor with such vibrancy that he is compelled to submit to the **logos** presented by the **ethos**-laden instructor?

Now, we must conclude: Johnny is not just the little boy in your class that will in young adulthood become John and in full maturity John William the something or other the III. Johnny is a sacred trust from God who, all looks to the contrary notwithstanding, made him. It is his life, and maybe his eternity, that has been placed in your care.

My name is not Johnny, but I know him well. I was not a good student in elementary, junior high, high school, or the first two years of college. I actually flunked first grade. I was timid, bored, preoccupied, and mischievous. I couldn't do grammar "too good;" I still spell better in Greek or Hebrew than

in English; and to this day I cannot solve one of those questions about the trains leaving opposite locations at differing speeds and determine where they will meet. It always seemed better to me if they didn't meet, at least not at those speeds.

But I had one teacher who believed in me. At least if she didn't, she had the best dog-and-pony show I ever saw. She kept me reading stories that she knew would charm my curious mind, like "Silver Chief, Dog of the North," an adaptation of the novel by Jack O'Brien. Even now I can nearly quote it to you. She kept telling me I was smart and that someday I would make good grades. Later, when I began preaching, her husband bought me books on theology and biblical studies and discussed them with me endlessly. Perhaps they imagined that their red-headed, freckled-faced imp had a lot more potential than he thought he had. They even bought him an airplane ticket and took him to 13 nations when he was only 16 years old because they wanted him to know his world and care about what happened to it and to its people.

The teacher and her husband are in heaven now. I could not tell you for sure what they are thinking. But they were both with me the day I was awarded my doctoral hood; and as I left the platform, the teacher and her husband — my mother and father — met me, hugged me, and said, "Now son, take all that God has given you and give it away to all who cross your path in need of a better way."

In gratitude to God and my parents, to this day I have sold myself to that assignment. If God permits, I shall give myself to it until the trumpet beckons me to the happy reunion. So to you, teacher, I issue this challenge, "Now go, take all that God has given you and give it away to all the little Johnnys and Jills who cross your path in need of a better way." And may God heap upon you and all that you love the riches of Heaven itself.



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