

## Dangers and Benefits of Higher Education

From the moment a seventeen-year-old enters the doors of his high school on that last year as a senior, he is faced with the question of what he will do when he graduates. And looming above the head of every twelfth grade student is whether or not he will pursue a higher level of education. In our day and age, it is a common, even popular, decision to attend college after graduating from high school. With or without a specific direction in mind, hundreds of students send in their applications and start filling out financial aid forms. But the choice to pursue a higher degree of education should be made with utmost care. There are many dangers to be aware of, as well as great benefits to consider. As children who walk in the light, we must guard against the dangers that accompany higher education, while seeking to obtain its benefits.

Of course, there are dangers in pursuing a higher education and we must be aware of these threats if we are to protect ourselves from them. The greatest danger lies within our own hearts, and it is the sin of pride. Since the moment Eve reached out her hand to take the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, man has desired to be like God. From the building of the tower of Babel to Darwin's theory of evolution, man in his pride has envied God, sought to be like him, and facing failure, rejected him. Thus began the philosophy known as humanism. Professor

Dykstra defines humanism in his *Standard Bearer* article, “Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R&R” as, “The belief that man is the measure of all things.”<sup>1</sup>

Humanism is more prevalent in our society today than it has been at any other time throughout history. Prof. Dykstra warns us, “... We live in the end of the ages, in which the root of this evil [humanism] is grown up and producing its ugliest, and most potent fruit.”<sup>2</sup> This dangerous philosophy exalts mankind. It urges men to philosophize, rationalize, and theorize, while dismissing faith as old-fashioned and irrelevant. The power of the mind is celebrated and man’s ability to reason is hailed as the greatest instrument.

This presents to us the greatest danger in pursuing higher education: That in our learning and instruction, we will begin to value the works of man higher than the works of God; that we will place our trust in the theories of science rather than in the infallible Scriptures; and that in gaining knowledge of the world, we will lose our childlike faith in God. For this exact reason, the prophet Isaiah laments the state of the nation of Israel. The pursuit of knowledge had become a stumbling block for the children of Abraham, and Isaiah reproaches them, saying, “For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. *Thy wisdom and thy*

---

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Russell Dykstra, Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R& R, *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 79 (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003), 370.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me”* (Isaiah 47:10). In fact, the wisdom and knowledge of the nation of Israel had so perverted them that God allowed them to be destroyed by the Assyrians. A sobering example of the danger of pride.

The pursuit of higher education presents a second danger due to the age at which it is normally pursued. Not in every circumstance, but often, it is young adults who pursue higher education. Newly graduated from high school with maybe nineteen years of life experience, and off we go to colleges and universities that tell us to follow our dreams and build a career and change the world. It is an extremely impressionable time of life, and the grand institutes of learning take advantage of this. We are the perfect testing ground for their theories. We are the blank pages on which they can write their worldly, humanistic philosophies.

In Proverbs 7 Solomon describes the ease with which a young person can be led astray. He depicts a young man “void of understanding” (v. 7) who follows a harlot to her bed. The wisest man who ever lived explains the behavior of the young man, saying, “With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him” (v. 21). The way of the world is similar to that of the harlot. She entices the youth of the church while their minds are still pliable, and under the guise of “liberal arts,” she feeds them her honeyed lies and sweet deceptions.

This leads us to the third danger of pursuing higher education, which is the false teachings that a college or university student will invariably encounter. Upon leaving the sheltered environment of our Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, young adults seeking higher education find themselves under a barrage of false doctrine. Whether attending a state institution, a private university, or a Christian college, a student will be presented with information and material that is contrary to what we believe. In a so-called Christian college, the lies may be more subtle and harder to detect. In a state university, they will be displayed with pride. For decades now, the insidious lies of Darwinism have been accepted and promoted in almost every institution of learning. The first chapter of the Bible has been dismissed as a myth and the magnificent power of God in Genesis 1 has been attributed to man himself. Again, we see the menaces of humanism in those “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25).

Also, following the post-modern mantra of tolerance, schools of higher education across the country have spoken out in support of homosexuality, gay rights, and transgender students. Almost every university, including the one I attend, has an LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Trans) Resource Center where students who have “alternative lifestyles” can gain support and encouragement. Those who

speak out against this sin are accused of hate speech, homophobia, and being “unchristian.”

The false teachings of the world assault students on every side. Leaving the secure parameters of our godly schools and attending a college or university gives the world a perfect opportunity to fill our minds with their earthly philosophies. It is a danger that cannot be taken lightly.

However, even under the instruction of worldly men and women who may have erroneous views concerning science and society, the child of God can profit intellectually. We are reminded of the words of Article 4 in the Third and Fourth Heads of the Canons of Dordt, “There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things...”<sup>3</sup> Professor Engelsma explains this in his book *Reformed Education*, saying,

“He [the ungodly man] can uncover many facts, invent and compose, and do many astounding things in medicine and science. This is not due to grace, nor are these deeds pleasing to God. But we may not react to the erroneous description of them by the advocates of common grace by denying the Christian’s right to use what unbelievers produce. Many are God’s good gifts *to us* through wicked men.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Canons of Dordt, Third and Fourth Heads, Article IV, *The Psalter*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. David Engelsma, *Reformed Education*, (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 58.

We can attend state colleges, we can learn from worldly publications, and we can use man's inventions because they are all part of God's good gifts to us. This is how we see the benefits of pursuing a higher education.

There are wonderful benefits of pursuing higher education. College is a time of learning and maturing for the young adult. Professor Gritters points out in *The Standard Bearer* in an article entitled, "Should I Go to College?" that "For many, it is the years of college that transform a young person to an adult."<sup>5</sup> Without the direct oversight of teachers and parents, students are forced to be responsible in their studying and time management. It is a time where young people learn to be accountable for themselves and realize the consequences of failing. It is often while pursuing higher education that a student recognizes he is learning because he *wants* to, not because he has to.

Attending a college or university will also give a young person added skills to live successfully in the world. Prof. Gritters goes on to suggest, "A good education gives you the ability to manage your business, communicate with customers, study new methods of your particular field, etc."<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that these things cannot be done successfully without a college education, but it is true that a trade school or business college will offer valuable hands-on experience

---

<sup>5</sup> Prof. B. Gritters, *Should I Go To College?*, *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 64, (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1988), 186.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

within the safety of a school program and without the pressures of a real job. Here a student may study mechanics, accounting, nursing, or marketing, and learn how to fix a transmission, create a budget, take blood pressure, or pitch a product—all skills that will truly help them in their future careers.

The greatest benefit of all in choosing to pursue a higher degree of education is that it may help us to use our talents to better glorify God. If we have been given the blessing of a strong mind and the ability to learn and apply knowledge, we should not waste those gifts, but rather put them to use for the good of the church. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul encourages his student Timothy to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Furthering our education must stem from a desire to please God, not to increase our own earthly knowledge.

In addition, we must never forget how much there is to learn and discover about the vast and marvelous creation that God has placed us in. Article 2 of the Belgic Confession declares the universe to be “before our eyes as a most elegant book.”<sup>7</sup> It is the pages of this most elegant book that we must seek to study, and it is the words written by Jehovah that we must desire to read.

Although there are dangers that accompany a pursuit of higher education, we must not let those dangers frighten us into a life of world-flight. God has provided

---

<sup>7</sup> Belgic Confession, Article II, *The Psalter*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927), 35.

us with the tools and instruction to defend ourselves against these dangers. It is true that our corrupt nature can lead us to exalt our own learning above the wisdom of God, but armed with the warnings and admonitions of scripture, we continue to fight against our prideful tendencies. With Solomon's words from Proverbs 16:18 in our minds, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall," we strive to keep the glory of God as our goal.

Nor should the impressionability of our youth cause us to discourage a higher level of education. The wise king of Israel laid these fears to rest over three millennia ago when he declared, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Our work as believing teachers and parents begins the moment a covenant child is conceived. "We have the calling," Prof. Engelsma asserts in *Reformed Education*, "to rear our children in...the pure Reformed faith as handed down to the Protestant Reformed Churches and developed by them."<sup>8</sup> We must teach our children from infancy the wonderful, soul-searching truths of the covenant so that when they are grown, they will be firmly rooted in the Reformed doctrines and the false teachings of the world will hold no sway over them.

God instructs us specifically how to do this in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, saying, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And

---

<sup>8</sup> *Reformed Education*, 14.

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.” If we raise our children with the commandments of God always before their eyes, from their first breath in the morning to their last whispered prayer at night, the worldly philosophies taught in schools of higher education will never shake their faith.

The benefits of obtaining a higher education cannot be ignored. We should encourage our young people to examine their God-given talents and abilities to determine whether further education would be an appropriate decision. Young men should consider the availability of jobs and how they plan to support a family. Young women should consider their intellectual gifts, as well as their calling to be a wife and mother in the home.

Higher education can often be used to serve the good of the church. It takes years of study beyond high school, but higher education can grant men the ability to be ministers in our Protestant Reformed Churches or teachers in our Christian schools. Earning a business degree may help a man provide jobs for fellow church members or aid men who might serve as future officebearers. Using our gifts and abilities for the good of the church is one of the highest goals we can strive towards, that we may hear the words of our Lord, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

The great dangers and blessed benefits of pursuing higher education make the decision a weighty one for the child of God. However, with the glory of God always at the heart of our goals and desires, the decision to pursue higher education will be well-guided.

### **Bibliography**

Belgic Confession, Article II, *The Psalter*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927).

Canons of Dordt, Third and Fourth Heads, Article IV, *The Psalter*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927).

Dykstra, Prof. Russell. Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R& R, *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 79 (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003).

Engelsma, Prof. David. *Reformed Education*, (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000).

Gritters, Prof. B. Should I Go To College?, *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 64,  
(Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1988).

*The Holy Bible*. King James Version. (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, Inc.).