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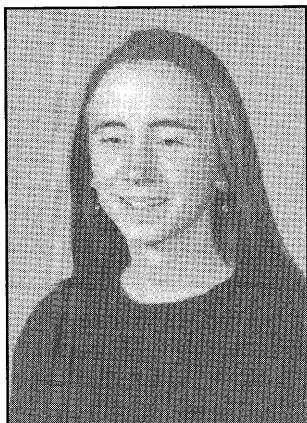
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Engaged Praxis and a Reformed Worldview



by Emily Hutten

My response to Walsh’s paper is not a critique as much as an application or a means of asking “what now?” As a student studying within a postmodern context and studying at a college that seeks to proclaim the lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of life, I sense a vitality in the ideas raised in this paper. Students at an institution like Dordt need to listen seriously. We need to begin to explore with Walsh the implications of our world-and-life-view in our own context. Where would our exploration lead us?

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It could be said that Dordt, like the author of Colossians and the ancient philosophers, is concerned with educating “neophytes” or “novices” in a philosophy and moral perspective. We are learning how to see the world through the lens of a Reformed worldview. It is the hope of the Dordt community that we as students will leave here having “internalized” and understood this worldview in relation to our life work.

This is a good hope. The reason I have continued studying here is to understand more fully this perspective and its implications for my life within our society. However, your paper brings me to consider what we really are learning here at Dordt.

During my three years at Dordt I have heard muttering and grumbling about this “Reformed worldview” we all are learning. Some students are tired of the jargon. Ideas like “creation-fall redemption,” “calling,” “stewardship,” and “shalom” are reduced to words that get written over and over in our notebooks. Students who have not been raised in a Reformed Christian community are complaining as well: some feel they are being indoctrinated with a worldview. They have to start talking the language or leave—and some do. They leave this community because they feel rejected, outcast, and attacked.

It is these overheard grumblings that bring me to ask what we are learning here at Dordt. What kind of community are we? Is our learning at Dordt following the footsteps of a tradition or standing in the shadow of the cross of Christ? Are we adopting an ideology or being transformed by the renewing of our minds into followers of the Way?

Some students at Dordt sense the uncertainty and anxiety among our generation. Some of us don't. And all of us are here on our little campus in the cornfields while much of our current culture seems to pass us by unnoticed. Yet all of us are here, whether we realize it or not, to answer big questions about ourselves within our cultural context. Who we are, why we are here, and where we are going are our explorative questions. We want to know who we are in this world. We need some sense of grounding, a foundation. We want to find truth.

This is where the problem begins. We search for truth and receive a worldview that can help us develop some answers. But what is this worldview? Is it developed to attack other views within our culture? Is it antithetical, as Walter Wilson believed Paul's words to be?

Many students leave this place with heads full of an exclusive ideology instead of Paul's inclusive gospel message. We know how to talk the talk. We are very good at discussing the directions we believe God is calling us to take. Yet, shaped by this worldview, how do we understand ourselves in relation to the rest of society? Do we develop an us/them view of those with whom we will work and live?

Your paper suggests that there is somehow a difference between Paul's words to the Colossians and the philosophy which he is refuting. You stated that Paul's words ring true not because they are an effective rhetoric against the ideologies and philosophies of the time, but because the truth of which he speaks bears fruit in the community. The community of which Paul speaks is one that is radically sensitive to the suffering in this world and lives rooted in the overarching promise of the redemption of all creation.

Themes of justice and redemption form the very foundation of our Reformed worldview. In a world which groans and awaits renewal, we are taught to proclaim justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God. At Dordt we are challenged to consider the implications of these

themes within our living and doing. Our faith, we are told, is not only about understanding a theology. It is about seeking consistency between our beliefs and our actions. We are taught to serve, to embrace, and to walk alongside others.

If Paul's call to know the suffering in this world is echoed in our classrooms here at Dordt, why do so many students leave here without taking hold of his challenge? In response to Walsh's discussion, I would suggest that the problem lies in the nature of our world-and-life-view. Perhaps we are receiving a response to our world which becomes more of a fixed ideology than a living and breathing reality. We are members of the Kingdom of Christ and we cannot leave here with an antithetical response to our world and its ideologies and philosophies. If we do, we are merely attacking one ideology with another.

I think it is in this regard that Paul's words can offer new direction to us in our postmodern context. In a time of relativism and pessimism, a declaration of One who is not about being right or wrong, dominant, or exclusive rings out loud and clear. This is Good News of liberation and salvation.

Walsh's discussion raises some important questions for us as a community seeking to proclaim this Good News. Are we accepting an ideology, a view antithetical to our society? How are we to engage with our culture? How do we need to change the way we have interacted with Scripture? Even more, I am challenged to consider the nature of a worldview and its relation to our daily lives. In our present context, we are focused on studying theories and ideas about how to view the world. This focus is the very nature of an academic institution. In this context, how do we understand the relationship between a view of the world and an active response to the world? This paper's arguments challenge us to become a place where we hear the cries for liberation and proclaim with Paul the news of salvation. How do we become a community of engaged praxis?