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The Glories of Scripturally Informed Natural Law in Secular Education

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Abstract: Today's culture is becoming increasingly secularized and characterized by social fragmentation. Christian teachers in public schools should no longer expect to share the same worldview as their students. It is only natural to ask the question: can anything good come about in a public-school classroom? This essay outlines a Christian vision for individual educators in public and pluralistic contexts that draws from a scripturally informed view of natural law. This paper answers this question in the affirmative: not only can it be good, but it can also be glorious, even if such glories are diminutive.

Keywords: pluralism; secularism; globalization; natural law; natural theology; education; presuppositionalism; biblical

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1. Introduction

One of the greatest challenges for public education is pluralism—the presence of students in the same classroom who have different cultural frameworks, religions, socializations, and worldviews (Colombo 2013, p. 1). Most Western societies respond to this challenge by requiring a so-called "secular education" that is supposedly free from religion and conversionism (Rushdoony 1958, pp. 4–5). This is particularly true for those communities recently impacted by mass migration, war, and social unrest. The ensuing social fragmentation often creates conflict and dissonance in education (Pazmiño 2008, p. 154). The fact is that teachers can no longer assume that they share the same culture and background as their students. Even where the language is the same, it may be difficult for educators to communicate with students because a loss of shared culture can be a loss of shared meaning. There is a deep gap between teachers and students because "culture is shared meaning" (Peacock 2001, p. 120). This essay attempts to acknowledge that no such realm of unbiased secularism ever exists while dealing with the realities of the public school system. Yet the Christian doctrines of God, scripture, creation, and common grace offer hope. Such doctrines offer the possibility that there might be a single driving vision of education that encompasses the teacher and the students as holistic human beings. This essay moves toward such a vision that can bridge cultural gaps by establishing the proposition that secular education has its glories for a Christian when it is influenced by a scripturally informed view of natural law.

The proposal offered for Christian educators in public education requires some context. It is true that not all Christian educators will experience the problem of pluralism to the same extent. This problem is always relative to the nature of the community, school, and classroom. On a macro-scale, the problem of new demographics is undeniable and is remaking American culture (Frey 2018). Many students think very differently about goodness, truth, and beauty from their teachers because they do not share a common worldview. This is exactly where aspects of shared meaning are lost. Curricula that pursue "multiculturalism" will necessarily entail a variety of views about reality, knowledge, ethics, and the divine. It is especially important to explain that all of those facts about immigration are irrelevant for the argument at hand—they only draw attention to a problem that

always has existed. This is because the methodology of Reformed presuppositionalism is a *theological* and not an existential account of the antithesis between God and a sinful fallen world. Changes in student demographics are not the root of the problem. This theological account of the antithesis between God and the world is a pillar and feature of Reformed presuppositionalism and is not subject to human experience; it is simply held as a biblical doctrine.

The Christian Reformed model of presuppositionalism is often associated with its articulation of "antithesis," which is the radical division between what comes from God and what comes from the world. This antithesis is an attempt to express the major storyline of the Christian canon of scripture and its wide range of texts that pit good verses evil and God versus Satan in a fallen world (e.g., Gen 3:15; Rom 8:7; Matt 13:38; Jas 4:4). For example, the reason why Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) is because he exclusively has these things as God incarnate. Jesus was exclusive about truth and therefore those who claim to follow him also have an exclusive source of truth. Thus, there is always something exclusive about the nature of Christian doctrine and practice (and every other religion also has its own exclusive truth claims). One of the major goals of this paper is to explore how this Christian exclusivity might work in the context of an educational system that denies such exclusivity through its own competing truth claims of secular humanism.

The theological Reformed presuppositionalism of this "antithesis" is found in the writings of Cornelius Van Til, Rousas J. Rushdoony, Greg L. Bahnsen, and John Frame. Broadly speaking, such writers sought to develop theology consistent with the traditional Reformed faith found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). The "antithesis" of Reformed presuppositionalism extends to all things in the world because the entire world "cosmos" is currently under sin and stained by sin. According to the VanTillian model of presuppositionalism that draws from Reformed evangelical theology, all attempts to define goodness, truth, and beauty apart from a scriptural worldview will ultimately be incoherent because there is no longer any unifying root in the one true God.

This entire article works from and within this Reformed presuppositional perspective. In doing so, this paper seeks to ask the following questions: Is there room for nuance when engaging the concept of the antithesis between God and the world? Is there a place for recognizing goodness, truth, and beauty in an educational context that does not formally honor the Christ of the bible? Do the Christian doctrines of common grace and natural law mean that secular education can have its own diminutive glories? Can Christian educators be *in* the world of secular education but not *of* the world of secular education?

2. The Problem of Pluralism

This problem of pluralism is particularly acute for the Christian educator in secular contexts, both public and private, where the institution offers no cohesive framework for education. The only (and ironic) truth for postmodern pluralistic education is that there is no absolute truth. Any claim to a secular worldview is inherently disparate, illogical, and inconsistent because it lacks any foundation for ultimate claims of goodness, truth, and beauty. There is no pure secularism, and every institution will inevitably reflect areas of "ultimate concern" that are inherently religious (Kelsey 2009, pp. 315–27). Moreover, even those institutions that claim to tolerate multiple perspectives for the sake of pluralism will often show explicit antipathy toward the exclusive truth claims of Christianity. This is because educational institutions can never be neutral and every claim to objectivity is a veil for idolatry.

The problem of pluralism in secular education is particularly pointed for those who are evangelicals. Evangelical Christians who are "biblicists" and view the bible as the inspired word of God will inevitably reflect some of the bible's behavioral norms and identity references (Bebbington 1989, p. 12). The trinitarian God of the bible offers a "primal unity" and cohesive framework for all academic disciplines (Sanders 2017, p. 78). And the bible also requires Jesus-followers to pursue the conversion of others. This activity is one of the

hallmarks of "evangelicalism" (Bebbington 1989, p. 12). It is noteworthy that the Roman Catholic tradition of higher education also views itself as offering a cohesive framework for education based on "the self-disclosure of God" (McGrattan 2018, p. 5). The situation of the Christian educator in the context of a pluralistic classroom demands a comprehensive theological vision that can bridge the gap between the biblical worldview of the teacher and the social fragmentation of the students. Christian educators in secular institutions need a theological vision for their task in an age of globalization.

The problem of pluralism is not so easily solved by appealing to a "faith-based" approach. This is particularly true in a cultural context that offers public education for children that is funded by the state. A "faith-based" approach to public education in a pluralistic context cannot be defined by a single religion. In most Western countries, this would mean explicitly favoring one religion over another. It is true that every act of education is implicitly religious, but acknowledging this fact does not tell us who gets to exercise the power to define what "faith" gets to shape the worldview of public education. Tearing down the separation between church and state does not help because there are storied problems with theocracy. Who gets to teach the children what Christian faith looks like, Baptist, Presbyterians, or Anglicans? A mere Protestant vision for Christian education alleviates some of this problem by adhering to the five solas of the Reformation (scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, to the glory of God alone). Kevin Vanhoozer argues that such a vision for "theological unity in ecclesial diversity" has not "been tried and found wanting; it has been found arduous and left unfinished" (Vanhoozer 2016, pp. 3–4). Creating a theological core for such unity has been the goal of those seeking a "mere evangelicalism" (Vanhoozer and Trier 2015). Even if a version of mere Protestant theocracy is possible, it is not currently practical in state-funded education.

The Christian educator in a secular context stands between two theoretical options, each with significant problems. On the one hand stands the option of a coercive Christian theocracy that would theoretically involve a major change in Western civilizations. This vision would break down the division between "church and state" and require a Christian worldview to undergird all of public education. A Christian theocracy would enable Christ to be worshiped in the classroom and a biblical worldview to be explicitly integrated into every domain. Such a vision can (and must) be carried out today, but only in private Christian institutions. On the other hand, we find the ever-idolatrous language of "secularism" with its illusion of objectivity, covering up its own various religious commitments. This essay directs attention to a third option—a scripturally informed view of natural law, which offers a viable path for those individuals working inside publicly funded pluralistic institutions.

3. Scripturally Informed Natural Law

A scripturally informed view of natural law is a worldview in which creation is understood to be a vehicle for God's natural revelation that can be appropriated by human reason. This means that the natural world reflects aspects of God's universal standards of morality that all people can know "simply by being human and by living in the kind of world they do" (VanDrunen 2015, p. 117). The Roman Catholic view of natural law largely echoes the Protestant view, requiring at least three propositions: (1) there are some universal and immutable moral truths; (2) human beings have the capacity to know these moral truths; and (3) human nature is the basis on which these moral truths are known (Beckwith 2019, p. 155). Some argue that natural theology is possible if one works from neutral premises. In contrast, this paper argues that teachers in public school settings should start within faith itself. Alister E. McGrath defines this perspective of natural theology as "the enterprise of seeing nature as creation, which both presupposes and reinforces fundamental Christian theological affirmations" (Dew and Campbell 2023, p. 9).

While natural law has a long and storied history in Reformed and Protestant theology, it has suffered some strong opposition by those who rejected the idea that sinful humanity can know anything apart from Christ, but such an antithesis neglects the equally important doctrine of humanity as made in the image of God. Important Protestant figures who

opposed natural law include Karl Barth, G.C. Berkouwer, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Cornelius Van Til (Grabill 2006, pp. 175–91). Recognizing the existence of natural law does not mean the "book" of creation has any salvific power and only renders people "without excuse" for their moral failures, as Romans 1:20 indicates (Grabill 2006, p. 191).

Educational theory comes from the integration of one's worldview and social science theories (Estep 2008, p. 28). For the Christian, this means biblical theology will always play a part in their worldview and consequently in their educational theory. This means that the "book" of natural law must always be subservient to the "book" of divine revelation in the scriptures. A Christian cannot utilize natural law and pretend to pluck their eye out by suggesting that they are sometimes operating by the book of natural law alone. In other words, a Christian view of natural law must always be a scripturally informed view of natural law.

A vision for education must have three essential components. First, it must have a theological component that reflects the Christian canon of scripture. Every proposed vision for education is theological in some sense, and every Christian is a theologian in some sense. The critical question is not whether theology, but whose theology? Second, any proposal for the mission, model, and method of education must be practical or applicable. And any attempt to be practical must begin in the realm of ideals or it will simply become a passing fad, unable to endure the next wave of cultural change. The practicality of a vision for education is the direct result of its ability to be applied in an infinite number of situations. Third, not only must a vision of education be biblical and applicable, it must also be compelling. It must be able to motivate and move educators through highs and lows of classroom realities. The vision for education proposed herein is arguably expansive enough and great enough and amazing enough to do precisely that because it follows God's own glorious vision for humanity.

Even where the preaching of the gospel is forbidden, as it is in many publicly funded educational situations, the educator can still pursue teaching students about God's world in hopes that they are creating potential or fertile soil for others to water and plant seeds into (Matt 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15). Generalized knowledge of the world does not create potential for conversion, only the gospel does that, but it does create potential for the existence of converts who are educated about God's world. For example, the ability to read greatly enhances the Christian mission to teach people the bible. And converts who are educated by God's world can gloriously live out what it means to be made in the image of God. The Southgate Fellowship Confession on Missions from 2016 (article 3.3.8b) states that "special revelation employs the tools of general revelation." The proposal set for this in this paper is also a reminder that the goals of cultural transformation and evangelism benefit greatly from a literate society (Melton 2005, pp. 343–44).

The day-to-day actions of integrating faith with teaching, learning, and research in the classroom will flow from one's basic theological commitments, whether intentional or not. This is because what we do and what we know is a result of what we believe. Many of the points here are general in nature and can be applied toward any educational domain. The following sections explain how a Christian educator might envision their impact in the context of secular education to be good and even glorious.

4. The Glories of Exercising Dominion

A scripturally informed view of natural law offers a glorious vision for humanity potentially exercising dominion over God's creation. Any vision for education is essentially an ethical vision about what is good for humanity. As such, every vision for education requires an articulated perspective on the human condition. It must answer basic questions about what a person is and what a person should do. This may be expanded to include basic questions about what a good society is, and a good social life is (Higton 2012, p. 41). Education must always go beyond empirical science because the observable world does not tell us enough about what we ought to do or what we ought to learn. A biblical worldview is required to know how to form and fashion people through education. The theological

vision in which "a good education is glorious" requires a doctrine in which the image of God is still fully present in all people, while acknowledging that their ability to reflect God requires renewal or regeneration (Kilner 2015, p. 132).

The first theological point required for a robust vision for education is that all people are glorious because they are made in the image of God. The primary biblical text for this is found in the account of creation from Gen 1:26–28. This text establishes what people are—they are made in the image of God (the imago Dei). Despite the realities of sin and its effects, all people equally share in this God-given status. It also explains the purpose of humanity as image-bearers, to exercise "dominion" or kingship over all the earth. The scope of image-bearing is inclusive of both male and female—both are made equally in the "image of God" (Gen 1:27). There are surely many things that result from being made in the image of God, but the most prominent among them is the ability to rule over the earth. This is an important text because it explains that humanity is exceptional among all of creation because humanity alone is made in God's "own image."

This creation narrative explains why all people, of all capabilities, at all ages and stages of life, are inherently glorious—they are made in the image and likeness of God. Education is an important aspect of being an image-bearer because the ability to exercise dominion over the earth requires a rigorous knowledge of the earth and everything in it. This exercise of dominion is not absolute and derives its authority from God's own dominion over creation (DeYoung and Gilbert 2011, p. 71). And this never justifies the abuse or destruction of the good things God has created.

A good secular education is possible because all people have the potential to be exercisers of dominion over God's creation. The key biblical text for this claim is Psalm 8:

> What is a human being that you remember him,
>
> a son of man that you look after him?
>
> You made him little less than God,
>
> and crowned him with glory and honor.
>
> You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
>
> you put everything under his feet (Ps 8:4–6, CSB)

Here, the Psalmist asks the perennially important question: what is a human? The point of these verses from Psalm 8 is that every human has glory and honor, they are just a notch below God himself in some respect. This passage reflects the theology of Genesis 1, describing people who are made in the "image of God." It is the destiny of people to rule over God's great creation. Such a proposition about a "good secular education" must be qualified that it is not a "great secular education" precisely because of what sin does to human anthropology. Sin breaks a relationship with God, undermines God's glory, and destroys one's honor (Rom 3:23). Here, I am trying to walk a fine line between acknowledging the positive glories inherent in humanity being made in the image of God and the negative aspects of humanity and its sinful condition after the Fall in the garden of Eden.

This dominion described in Psalm 8 is perfectly fulfilled in the person of Jesus, who is the divine creator of all things and the one who rules over all creation from his throne. The apostles understood that Jesus is the Last Adam and the fulfillment of this vision for humanity. They used the language of Psalm 8 to describe the person and work of Christ (1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Phil 3:21; 1 Pet 3:22). Jesus is the "head of a redeemed humanity" and the beginning of a new creation that will carry out God's vision for those made in his image (Peterson 1982, p. 52). God's plan for humanity was not for a generic "image of God" but for people to be conformed to the image of God in Jesus Christ (Kilner 2015, pp. 52–53). Jesus is already a king and those who follow him will also fully share in his kingship. This also means there is no necessary division between glorifying God and glorifying humanity, as long as Christ is in view.

The narrative of creation in Genesis 1 also provides a starting point to discuss what is meant by a "good education." When God had created humankind and everything else, he

pronounced that it was all "very good" (Gen 1:31). This divine speech points to the fact that everything that God created achieves its purposes and reflects his design. The traditional view of Genesis 1 has typically focused on the material creation of the world out of nothing, ex nihilo. But a stronger exegetical case can be made for reading Genesis 1–2 as a narrative about the material creation of the world and how everything in it functions in relation to each other (Averbeck 2015, pp. 226–39; Madume 2016, p. 175; contra Walton 2009, p. 150). When God pronounces something as "good" or "very good," he is blessing its existence and blessing its function as it relates to everything else in the cosmos. This background establishes the foundation for a critical definition: a "good" education is preparing people to engage with God's world, to know it thoroughly, and to be able to rule over it in wisdom.

In the context of secular education, this means that when people grow in knowledge, they grow in their potential to be exercisers of dominion. Perhaps those who learn in a pluralistic classroom will become co-heirs of Christ's kingship who glorify God as future rulers over all of creation. No person is whole or able to reach his or her full human potential apart from Christ. Again, it is vital to note that general knowledge of the world creates potential for conversion through skills such as literacy. And general knowledge of the world creates potential for the existence of converts who are educated about God's world. Education glorifies God because people who grow in knowledge and carry out tasks of dominion in the world do so in God's world, reflecting God's image, and through God's own design.

5. The Glories of Inquiry

A scripturally informed view of natural law can demonstrate that all human inquiry into the design, purpose, nature, and workings of God's world is glorious. The point of this section is to highlight how God's glory is at work in all of the complexity inherent in the act of knowing (Frame 2015, p. 34). By "knowing" I am referring to the broad ability of persons to know propositions as well as our experience with the world (Johnson 2013, p. 157). Amidst the technical philosophical discussions about knowledge, something often gets lost in the shuffle: the glory of it all. People do three glorious things whenever they acquire knowledge through rationality, objectivity, and subjectivity.

First, human knowledge reflects the glory of the rationality God has built into the human mind. This aspect of knowledge is that which is a priori or known independently of sense-experience. An example of this type of knowledge is found in the wisdom literature of Ecclesiastes:

> He [God] has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Eccl 3:11, ESV)

The human experience of having a conscience is another example of something that God has placed into the minds of people (Rom 2:15). All rationality is a glorious revelation of what God integrated into the logical process of those who are made in the image of God.

Second, human knowledge reflects the glory of God through the data-gathering senses built into the body. The things we know come in part from the five senses of hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, and seeing. The five senses reflect God's handiwork ("The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both" Prov 20:12 ESV). This aspect of knowledge focuses on how we know the objective world around us through various types of data. Another key biblical text for this point comes from the wisdom book of Proverbs:

> It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to investigate a matter. (Prov 25:2, CSB)

This short proverb is surrounded by other proverbs about the wisdom required for Israel's ancient kings. But there is also something timeless and universal embedded in these teachings. In this proverb, a contrast is established between God and kings. The ways of God that are not revealed are beyond searching out. Those who exercise dominion, such as Israel's kings, must have knowledge of the world around them to exercise wisdom and rule effectively (Lucas 2015, p. 164). This proverb for the kings of Israel can rightly

be applied to all of humanity. All of humanity bears the image of God for the purpose of kingly dominion and this means all people share in glory when searching out a matter. What God has given to humanity and enabled humanity to know is a gracious gift for the ultimate purpose of knowing and obeying God through Christ. The world is to be ruled in wisdom gained through God's image-bearers who search out what he has made. Even though some truths are hidden, and some are revealed, God never specifies exactly where these lines should be drawn (Deut 29:29). There are no limits on what science can explore or what domains of education are legitimate. A truly biblical understanding of God's creation lays a foundation for exploring all of God's world through the arts, sciences, and humanities.

Third, human knowledge reflects the glory of God through the reflexive act of considering one's self. The central act of knowing one's self is loving one's self. This is the core idea behind the greatest command of the Mosaic law next to loving God: "love your neighbor as yourself" (22:39). The ability to know and love oneself is a presupposition built into the law of Moses. The purposes of this argument, it is vitally important to observe that the Mosaic law was integral to the national covenant with Israel – a nation composed of believers and unbelievers. In other words, this law of love relies on natural law, not upon a spiritual condition. This aspect of knowledge focuses on the subjective state of the person who is engaged in the act of knowing, including their feelings, desires, and thoughts. Christians appeal to this act of knowledge when they reference the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Rom 9:1). Christians know certain things as truth because of an internal experience they have had with God's Spirit.

To summarize: the act of knowing is complex and God's design for acquiring knowledge is glorious. None of these three aspects of knowledge is likely ever pure or totally independent of the others. The salient point here is that the complex act of knowing anything reflects an array of God's glory. Any act of learning will, by virtue of its operations, reveal the amazing design of the knower and the object being known. Every educational endeavor is a glory-filled act that reveals humanity's special status as image bearers of God. Teaching is glorious because it directs students to participate in the glorious act that only God's image-bearers can do: search out the revealed things from God in the world. Teaching in a secular context does not establish God's kingdom but a Christian educator may still do good for their city, do good to all people, and perhaps effect some cultural change (Carson 2008, p. 218).

6. The Glories of Fulfilling Potential

A scripturally informed view of natural law can demonstrate that it is a glory for persons to fulfill parts of the potential for which they were created. This truth is also rooted in the fact that people are made in the image of God. Whereas the first point above focused on the static and unchanging truth that all people are made in the image of God, this point is about the dynamic potential for growth. This means that not every person is as glorious as they could be. God's glory is inherent in humanity simply because they are image bearers. Yet each person can grow in knowledge so that they can become even more glorious. It is clearly established in the bible that knowledge is never for knowledge's sake alone. The purpose of all knowledge is wisdom that knows God personally and responds with reverent fear and faith (Prov 9:10).

This godly wisdom explained above is an ideal that can never be fully recognized in a secular classroom. However, a good education will provide hope for everyone and focus on what God can do through what is learned. Every person, no matter what life stage they might be at, can grow in knowledge, and by God's grace this might result in wisdom. All people have the potential to reflect wisdom and in doing so to reflect more of the glory inherent in being made in the image of God.

This last point helps educators to exercise wisdom in discerning how to evaluate education in a pluralistic context. Is there necessarily a conflict between the Christian mission to make disciples of Jesus (Matt 28:18–20) and the educational mission toward

students in a secular environment? The answer proposed here points to a perspective that does not require these two missions to be at odds with each other. If the educational mission towards students helps them to be able to learn about God's world, it will hopefully aid the task of the Christian mission and evangelism by creating potential. The educator in the context of extreme cultural diversity must view their role as ancillary and their mission as supportive to the evangelistic task.

In this view, the educator's goal is to increase human potential for greater glory by helping students grow in their ability to engage with God's world. Teachers are not responsible for the spiritual formation of a person, but they are responsible for some aspects of growth in relation to their educational domain. Whatever the domain might be, a student's growth in learning to explore God's world reflects common grace because it is a gift from God to learn about the world. The doctrine of common grace is found in the Gospel of Matthew: "For he [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45, ESV).

The concept of common grace is found in the idea that God graciously gives certain gifts to his creation, simply by virtue of being made in the image of God. One of these gifts of common grace is the ability of all people to know things about God's world, even if it is partial. However, the theological concept of common grace is a key framework for bridging the gap between the worldview of a Christian educator and the "worldly learning of the wicked" found in non-Christian viewpoints present in the classroom (Mouw 2002, p. 28). The gift of knowledge through common grace is an act of giving sunshine and rain (Van Til 2015, p. 102).

This "common grace" gift of knowledge is distinct from the special graces experienced by those who are "in Christ." It is also true that sinners who hate God will reject the knowledge of God's world in some manner because they are unwilling to submit to the realities of its Creator. But there is still hope. The key concept here is that those who know according to common grace have potential. There is a crucial distinction at work here between knowing the natural world and knowing the gospel (Rom 1:20). The knowledge of the gospel is the only means through which people may be converted (1 Cor 1:21). But general knowledge of everything else in the world creates potential for people to fully exercise dominion. Growth in learning about any domain of the natural world increases a person's potential to reflect their identity as being made in the image of God.

7. The Glories of Educational Mission

A scripturally informed view of natural law offers a foundation for Christian educators to have an impact in pluralistic educational contexts. A so-called secular education is never truly possible, and such places will always have idols demanding worship. But a public school classroom can also be an incubator for some of God's glories and a place to work out one's personal mission. The academic work of any teacher in any discipline will inevitably reflect their personal relationship with Jesus. This last section flows from the first two. Integrating faith with teaching requires an articulate Christian worldview and an awareness that faith will direct the mission, model, and method of learning. This all-encompassing vision also means that research should reflect personal discipleship, preparation for the classroom, and engagement with the mission of the church in the world.

Practically speaking, educators must presuppose and then teach out of a worldview informed by this storyline of scripture, even if their students do not share this worldview. Despite the fact that there may be no worldview in common, the Christian must teach from the truth. There is no third option between the worldview of the educator and the worldview of the students. Education actually requires faith integration because education always integrates faith. The wise educator must acknowledge that they can do no other. Considering the role of faith is not simply a nice option for dedicated Christians with theological training. Education requires faith integration because we cannot know anything apart from faith. There is no such thing as neutral secular education because human thought is never actually neutral.

The relationship between faith and the act of knowing is difficult to navigate, and thankfully we can stand on the shoulders of giants like Augustine of Hippo and Anselm of Canterbury. They both argued that understanding begins with the act of faith, often formulated as "faith seeking understanding." Whereas many people today assume that information comes before faith, Augustine and Anselm argued that faith is the very basis or presupposition of rational inquiry (Frame 2015, p. 129). No one can think about the world correctly without exercising belief. This is because all human thought is dialectic or circular in some manner and returns back to whatever authority is being used as the ultimate criteria for truth, whether human reason, experience, or divine revelation (Frame 2015, p. 129). This means that the secular classroom can greatly benefit from Christian educators.

The mission of the local church in the world is to make disciples of Jesus (Matt 28:16–20). There is also a personal mission to glorify or make much of God with our lives as Christians (1 Cor 10:31). This means that there are aspects of the Christian life that are God-ward but are not necessarily part of the mission of the local church. For example, a Christian professor may be involved in studying the genetics of corn in order to better feed the hungry. This personal mission can glorify God even though it is not the local church's mission to feed the world or end world hunger.

To be clear: the mission of the local church and the mission of individual Christians can be different. But both must glorify God in the end. When professors use their God-given time, money, resources, energy, and love for their academic research, they can glorify God. There are times when disciplines such as theology and Christian ministry studies explicitly intersect with the mission to make disciples of Jesus. But there are also times when academic disciplines do not explicitly intersect with this disciple-making mission. When Christian professors understand the difference between the mission of the local church and their personal mission to glorify God in all that they do, their educational tasks will have a biblical purpose.

8. Conclusions

A scripturally informed view of natural law offers Christian educators in publicly-funded institutions a vision for a glorious secular education. This proposition must be clearly qualified: such glories are diminutive where Christ is not explicitly honored and worshiped outright. And such glories must be pursued by individuals who operate in ways that require the wisdom of serpents and the innocence of doves (Matt 10:16). Yet there are glories to be found in public schools, nonetheless. This theological vision of education is demonstrably biblical, applicable, and compelling. Christian educators in a religiously pluralistic context must work through these issues if they are going to remain motivated for their daily tasks. A truly biblical vision for education will be bold enough to grip educators and motivate them because it reflects God's own gracious plan for humanity in the world. Only something as big as God and his glory can do this. And the education that glorifies God also offers a glory in which all people can joyfully partake.

There is one last qualification to make: it is precisely because inquiry, knowing, and growing are so good and glorious for those made in the image of God that they can turn into idolatry and reveal humanity's antithesis toward God. Idol worship is "revering anything other than God and humanity loves to idolize knowledge" (Beale 2008, p. 133). The idolatry of knowledge began with Adam and Eve's desire to be God, rather than reflect him (Gen 3). Knowledge will always be twisted into evil by those who reject God (Rom 1:23). General revelation of God and his world is indeed a ground for God's "just condemnation" but it is equally a gracious gift of his common grace (Reymond 1998, p. 1088).

Any model of education will be interdisciplinary because it must draw from ethics, sociology, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy, and theology. Education is always an implicit theological enterprise because it always reflects a perspective about goodness, truth, and beauty in relation to creation—especially glorious humans made in the image of God who are engaging in the glorious task of exploring God's world. This essay emphasizes an often-overlooked topic of God's glory and how it relates to individual educators in a radically pluralistic society. Good things can happen in the public school system, as wicked as its foundations might be. Simply stated, a biblical vision of education can be glorious and therefore compelling for daily work in the classroom, even if it is diminished by the context of humanism, pluralism, and secularism.

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