

# Cultivating Wisdom in Our Christian Schools:

## Wisdom and the Drama of Redemption

By Stuart Elliott

### The Problem of Meaning: What do we mean when we talk about cultivating or pursuing wisdom?

Most who are involved in classical Christian education are aware of the place wisdom has as one of the primary pursuits of the educational endeavour. Many will define classical education partly in terms of cultivating wisdom, or pursuing wisdom, or growing in wisdom or something to that effect. I imagine if I were to ask for a show of hands of how many here would include participation in the cultivation of wisdom as part of your task as teachers and administrators I would see many (hopefully all) hands go up. But If I were to ask what we mean when we say we are cultivating wisdom in our schools I think I might get a range of responses. In some ways this would be appropriate partly because wisdom is not “a word with a single and narrow semantic field.”<sup>1</sup> It is dynamic and encompasses a range of meaning.

Goldsworthy elaborates,

In the Book of Proverbs the wise man is seen urging his pupils in the task of acquiring wisdom or understanding in life. ‘Get wisdom’ he says (Proverbs 4:7), but what is it and how do we get it? It seems to wear many faces, yet behind them all, even the worldly ones, we sense a common factor which is hard to pin down... in the Bible the range of wisdom is no less perplexing. In one place it is a proverb about an ant, in another it is a sublime poem about the Creator and his creation. It is a way of thinking and a way of doing. It is a way of teaching and a way of expressing ideas in writing. On one hand it is to know man and the world, and on the other it is both the way to know God and the reward for knowing him. Then in the New Testament, there is a worldly wisdom which is really foolishness, and there is God’s true wisdom revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Wisdom and its Literature in Biblical-Theological Context* (SBJT 15.3, 2011), 42-55.

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: Gospel and Wisdom* (Paternoster:2000)

So let me try to clarify things by offering a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is showing up to the party without tomato in the fruit salad.

All joking aside, most often when we think of wisdom we associate it with guidance, or making good decisions, or recognizing order in the world: knowing the way things work and applying that knowledge appropriately to different tasks. And there are certainly elements of wisdom in all of those things. However the biblical idea of wisdom (since it is with this the Christian school must be chiefly concerned) encompasses much more than decision making, and guidance and perceiving order. Though these are all worthy to cultivate and we ought to be teaching our students how to pursue these aspects of wisdom, these few things do not ultimately get at what is essential to the biblical idea of wisdom. If we are unable to grasp the breadth and depth, the overall cosmic and ultimate vision that biblical wisdom encompasses we will not be in a good position to cultivate the kind of wisdom that is so desperately needed in our Christian schools.

A philosophy 101 course at a community college has a section on hebrew wisdom literature. In his description of the book of Proverbs the Professor says,

The collection [of wise saying] is preceded by 9 chapters that might best be termed "an exhortation to wisdom." This exhortation is put in the mouth of parents who deeply love their children and who want their children's lives to be as happy as possible and who want things to go well for them. They hope their children will not do the kind of stupid things that will just mess up their lives. They hope that their children will act and live wisely rather than foolishly so that they will be happy, prosperous, healthy and much beloved by others.

I am reminded here of a little book by H Jackson Brown titled *Life's Little Instruction Book* (Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville, 1991). This too is a book of wise little proverbial sayings passed on from a father to his beloved son. In the introduction to that book the author tells us that

This book began as a gift to my son, Adam. As he packed his stereo, typewriter, blue blazer, and other necessities for his new life as a college freshman, I retreated to the family room to jot down a few observations and words of counsel I thought he might find useful.

A few days later his mother and I helped him move into his new dorm room. When he was all settled in, I asked him to come with me to the parking lot. It was time for the presentation. I reached under the car seat and, with words to the effect that this was what I knew about living a happy and rewarding life, handed him the bound pages. He hugged me and shook my hand. It was a very special moment.

I suspect that this is also the spirit in which the *Book of Proverbs* should most fruitfully be read. H Jackson Brown's book includes items like the following:

Compliment three people every day  
Have a dog  
Watch a sunrise at least once a year

Overtip breakfast waitresses  
Say 'please' a lot  
Learn to play a musical instrument  
Buy great books even if you never read them  
Be a student in some kind of class  
Once in your life own a convertible

**These wise little sayings -- proverbs, really -- are passed on from a father to the son whom he dearly loves, in hopes that by following them the son's life will be a happier and better one.**

**I think this may be some part of the spirit in which the *Book of Proverbs* is offered to us.<sup>3</sup>**

Is this the kind of wisdom we are meant to derive from Scripture? Is this what God intends for his people? Is this “happy, better life” what we are teaching our students to pursue?

## Wisdom’s Story: True wisdom is situated not outside, not alongside, but within the drama of redemption

The book of Proverbs begins with an explanation of sorts,

“To know wisdom and instruction,  
to understand words of insight,  
to receive instruction in wise dealing,  
in righteousness, justice, and equity;  
to give prudence to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the youth—  
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,  
and the one who understands obtain guidance,  
to understand a proverb and a saying,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.”

We see there are elements of knowledge, morality, order, understanding, and guidance associated with growth in wisdom. We also see that the pursuit of wisdom is not limited to a particular class of people, but an important endeavour even for the young and especially for the simple. And these are all very important things to recognize. And yet if

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<sup>3</sup> Dr Tom Kerns, North Seattle Community College: <http://philosophycourse.info/lecsite/lec-hebwislit.html>

we don't broaden our view quite a bit we end up offering not much more than what the professor and the father in his example offer. This approach to wisdom, while it is useful in a limited sense, is deficient/incomplete in an ultimate sense. If we view the cultivation of wisdom in this limited way, if we treat it as though its foundations lie outside or even alongside God's covenant dealing with his people and the unfolding drama of redemption, we run the risk of dichotomizing/stratifying the Christian life instead of providing a cohesive world and life view. At worst we turn the cultivation of wisdom into a form of moralistic therapeutic deism, without any reference to the drama of grace and redemption that is at the center of the Christian story. Unfortunately we often approach the wisdom literature in Scripture the way we put magnets on our refrigerators. This takes wisdom out of the context of salvation history and the unfolding drama of redemption culminating in Jesus. This is ironic since I am going to suggest that the very essence of wisdom, according to scripture, makes sense only when it coheres in Christ. "Not only is the true locus of wisdom found in Christ, and him crucified, but such wisdom shows that all human wisdom is folly when it is not founded on Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Paul distinguishes, in 1st Corinthians 1 and 2, between two kinds of wisdom or two approaches to wisdom: worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom. He calls upon the one who is wise, the scribe and the debaters of this age and declares that God has made their wisdom foolish. In what sense is the wisdom of this age foolish? Because as classical educators we spend much time considering the writings and ideas of those we would consider wise in a worldly way even though they would not name the name of Christ. And we spend time in disciplines that don't use as their primary reference the special revelation of God in Scripture. If we pay careful attention to the distinction that Paul is making we will see that worldly wisdom is not entirely worthless (that's not what he means by calling it foolish), and in fact there is a lot of common ground to stand on, but the wisdom of the world is limited to worldly things and is unable to uncover the **secret hidden wisdom of God** which provides for man the narrative context for ultimate meaning and ultimate wisdom. The wisdom of the world is unable to provide a cohesive and meaningful story of reality/existence.

Remember Stephen's description of Moses in Acts 7 when he is making his last earthly stand as a witness to the Gospel? "He was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds." This is a positive assessment of Moses' wisdom education, and yet he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, submitting instead to the direct word of God.

In Proverbs 8 wisdom is personified as "God's companion in the creation"  
"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of old.  
Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

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<sup>4</sup> Goldsworthy, *WLBTC*.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth,  
before he had made the earth with its fields,  
or the first of the dust of the world.  
When he established the heavens, I was there;  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
then I was beside him, like a master workman,  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the children of man.

So we see that from the beginning the “word of God created according to the wisdom of God.”<sup>5</sup>

And many wisdom traditions assume wisdom’s goal is a quest for perceiving the order of creation.

But, “While the Christian accepts his responsibility to search for knowledge, he knows that human effort, discovery and reasoning cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of the universe” (Goldsworthy, GW 369). Discovering order stops short of true wisdom. True wisdom is grounded on the foundation of revelation, a drawing aside of the curtain of the world revealing “what lies behind wisdom’s understanding of life and how to live it” (Goldsworthy, WLBLC). Paul says there is a “secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor. 2:7). This is the once upon a time of redemptive history. We see how central wisdom is to the story of reality, that it goes way beyond the need for guidance in everyday decisions to an overall picture of ultimate reality. Ultimate wisdom flows from a story of reality that has a proper place for man in relation to himself, to others, to the creation and ultimately to God.

This comprehensive understanding of the universe, of how all things are related together, is revealed to us by God in the drama of redemption the climax of which is revealed in the incarnation of his Son, our savior and redeemer, the promised one from the beginning that would bring restoration to the brokenness of the world, bringing new life and new creation. “...the supreme revelation and demonstration of God’s hidden wisdom was... most profoundly,.. Jesus hanging on a cross.”

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<sup>5</sup> Goldsworthy, *WLBTC*.

God's secret wisdom that was hidden is his plan to accomplish the salvation of sinners and the restoration of the perfect environment and perfect relationship he intends to share with them... To see its vast wisdom, the cross must be seen **in context** for God's grand plan for all things, determined before the world was made, accomplished in human history, and coming to its culmination in eternity future... You are a part of a much grander story than just your little life. And the more you see your life in the context of this much bigger story, this much grander plan, the wiser you become as you live it.<sup>6</sup> (Guthrie, *The Wisdom of God*, 22-23)

My favorite hobbit philosopher Bilbo Baggins, speaking to his nephew Frodo, said, "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to." One of the dominant metaphors for pursuing wisdom in Proverbs is that of going down a path or road, on that leads to life the other leading to destruction. "Ponder the path of your feet," Proverbs counsels. The wisdom we mean to cultivate in our schools must provide a path for our students to follow that leads them to the foot of the cross.

1 Cor. 2:22-25 For Jews demand signs and **Greeks seek wisdom**, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I want to suggest that it is the height of wisdom to provide in our schools, for our students, our teachers and staff, our families and the communities we are placed in, a place that clearly operates according to God's story of reality. A place where those who come are immersed and participate in the narrative of redemption that God has revealed and which provides the meaningful context for the cultivation of wisdom that bears its fruit in a cohesive worldview which leads God's people through the tensions of this life that we live as aliens and strangers, as dual citizens, walking by faith and not by sight.

I want to suggest that the cultivation of true wisdom can thrive only if it is tended to in the fertile grounds of the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. This story must become a part of the DNA of our schools so that it can seep into the bones of our students. The cross must be the "functional center of our lives", being the very power behind what forms and informs us. It is this wisdom that will impact every aspect of our lives.

In William Butler Yeats poem "A Prayer for Old Age" he says,

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Guthrie, *The Wisdom of God* (Crossway: 2012) What Guthrie is proposing, understanding our place in God's story, is what I call having a sanctified self-awareness.

GOD guard me from those **thoughts men think**  
**In the mind alone;**  
**He that sings a lasting song**  
**Thinks in a marrow-bone;**

From all that makes a wise old man  
That can be praised of all;  
**O what am I that I should not seem**  
**For the song's sake a fool?**

I pray-for fashion's word is out  
And prayer comes round again  
That I may seem, though I die old,  
A foolish, passionate man.

Though Yeats would pit passions against intellect what he recognizes is the need for a lasting song to come from the marrow-bone, something located deep inside our being, that is situated at a level of our heart, that provides an implicit vision, the often unspoken motivations that give direction to the steps that take us through life and navigates through its complexities. Another dominant metaphor in Proverbs is that of the heart. Proverbs 4:23 keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. The cultivation of wisdom is not merely an intellectual endeavor; its aim is life itself. A life that has its beginnings in the fear of the Lord, the recognition of his authority, his wisdom and power and pursues life within the context of his revelation and in proper relationship to him through Christ.

Ps. 16:5-11:

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;

you hold my lot.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

I bless **the Lord who gives me counsel;**

in the night also **my heart instructs me.**

I have set the Lord always before me;

because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad, and **my whole being rejoices**;

my flesh also dwells secure.

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,

or let your holy one see corruption.

**You make known to me the path of life;**

in your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Timothy Massaro, a Christian writer, quotes Ivan Illich from *Deschooling America*, saying, “Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. Most people learn best by being ‘with it’, yet schools make them identify their personal, cognitive growth with elaborate planning and manipulation.” Massaro adds that, “Participation in a story, a narrative, a life that has others in a web of relationships that create, sustain and enlighten meaning and purpose is the great unspoken desire of people today.”<sup>7</sup>

“human beings need to organize the sequence of individual sensations and life experiences into a particular story “When that story leads somewhere...it give us hope.”<sup>8</sup> (Andrew Delbanco as quoted in Timothy Keller’s *Making Sense of God*)

Travis Prinzi comments on research done connected to narrative therapy. The research indicated that the best predictor of what would make someone a good parent was not their circumstances in life, but their own ability to make sense of their own story. Even if abuse or tragedy occurs in a person’s life, if they can make meaning out of their own story then they can pass on to their children a coherent narrative and legacy that can make sense even out of the most complex and perplexing circumstances of life. There is only one story that can do that. It is this story that gives meaning to all the world’s pursuit of wisdom.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Massaro, *Book Review: You Are What You Love*. (Modern Reformation, Vol. 26 No. 1 Jan/Feb 2017) 62-63

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Delbanco, as cited by Timothy Keller in *Making Sense of God*. (Viking: 2016), 154.

<sup>9</sup> Travis Prinzi, *Tales of the Fall*. (The Rabbit Room Podcast, Episode 40)



John Bombaro, Lutheran minister and lecturer in theology and religious studies, comments on A.S. Byatt, British author and avowed Atheist who self describes as anti-Christian. And yet she laments the loss of the Christian story that served as Western Societies orienting map. Like the maps you see when you go to the mall, it gives you a picture of where everything is and how to get there. It even has a little arrow showing where you are on the map. She says, “it was the Christian metanarrative ...that told us who we are, where we are going and what it all means.” The Christian story didn’t just provide doctrinal truths to profess, **it gave a picture to our imaginations of reality**, an objective world in which we live, move and have our being.” To sustain that picture takes work, Bombaro adds: “storytelling, rituals, contextualizing, the discipline of self sacrifice, and deference to the governing story.”<sup>10</sup>

Try to find your way to a particular store in a mall you’ve never been in without a reference map. You’ll quickly get lost. Byatt is saying that map has been taken away and replaced with something else. The Christian story was an external reference guide to what was real. Now what has that been replaced with? A mirror. The individual self is our ultimate reference guide to make meaning and truth out of relationships, circumstances and the purpose of life in general. The features of the Christian reference guide to reality are what we must recover in order to provide the necessary conditions for the cultivation of true wisdom in our schools. (Our students must know where they are, where the steps of their paths are leading and where home is. The compass of their heart must be calibrated to true north.)

Jennifer Trafton, a Christian children’s book author and George McDonald scholar, though speaking about a theology of new creation, I think what she observes is equally true when applied to the cultivation of wisdom in a biblical-theological context. She says that part of the difficulty in grasping this idea is the enormous demand placed on our imaginations, which is a muscle we are not used to exercising.<sup>11</sup> Massaro adds, “The modern dichotomy of head and heart has led Christians to form people’s minds without looking to the heart’s way of knowing.”<sup>12</sup>

And yet It is this story that corresponds to what is true and serves as the moral imagination, providing the overall vision of the true, good and beautiful for our Christian schools. Our schools must be a place where our students step into this story. It must be the narrative backdrop of all that takes place within its walls.

## The Outworking of Wisdom:

If you are in a river with a swift current the only thing you need to do to float along in the current’s direction is nothing. However if you want to swim upstream you must exert

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<sup>10</sup> John Bombaro, *Face to Face Discipleship in a Facebook World* (Modern Reformation, Vol. 26 No. 1 Jan/Feb 2017) 37-47.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Trafton, *Tales of New Creation (Part 2)* (The Rabbit Room Podcast: Episode 43)

<sup>12</sup> Massaro, *Book Review*

quite a bit of energy. There are however some aids that could prove useful as you attempt to move in the opposite direction of the stream (a raft, a paddle or even a motor).

What is the worldly context in which we are attempting to cultivate biblical wisdom? The world tells us that a commitment to ourselves, our most innate desires, is the way to secure ultimate meaning. A meaningful life is comprised of experiences that enhance and realize our desires. How do we answer such a narrative? By being immersed in a different one, one that seeps into the bone-marrow. "Obedient commitment to Jesus and his words is the only way to secure a life which has ultimate meaning."<sup>13</sup>

Our schools must serve as life rafts that move upstream against the wisdom of this age. Where the wisdom of the world tells us that the past is irrelevant and has nothing of positive importance to give to us, we provide a place that draws deep from the wells of history in order to learn more of who we are, where we came from and where we are going. We make known the mighty acts of God in history as he has revealed himself and his redemptive purpose for the world. Where the wisdom of the world tells us that words are inadequate to convey meaningful truth and that truth itself is **not** something that comes from outside of you but something you construct for yourself from within, we dig our paddles in the water and push against the current of relativism and autonomy by submitting to God's word and the fear of the Lord, "A template for the intellectual task of seeking to know what is in the authentic life and how to cope with its complexities."<sup>14</sup> Where the wisdom of the world tells us that traditional forms of authority, especially in the form of old institutions like the church, are highly suspicious and not to be trusted, we build upon the ultimate authority of God's word, submitting to his ordinary means of growth in knowledge and wisdom and the structures of authority he has built into creation and revealed in his word.

Those that serve in schools where this task is taken seriously undoubtedly feel the pressure that such a concern understandably creates. Teachers feel immense pressure to bring about results. So, it is understandable that we are looking for practical application. However, we must be careful. Because we have developed a much grander vision for what it means to cultivate wisdom, one that answers our need to make sense out of life in terms of a cohesive story, that brings us into the sweeping narrative of redemptive history and confronts us with its central character, wisdom incarnate, we must not turn the secret hidden wisdom of God into something to do when indeed it is someone to know.<sup>15</sup> It is in knowing this person, Jesus, and being brought into the story

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<sup>13</sup> Goldsworthy, *Trilogy*

<sup>14</sup> Goldsworthy, *WLBTC*

<sup>15</sup> We are conditioned to treat all things in a quantitative way. I am suggesting that this has informed the way we treat our approach to the cultivation of wisdom. We want to quantify things. But if Christ is our wisdom, and wisdom is developed as we become more conformed to Christ through the gospel and our self-awareness becomes more sanctified, we cannot treat wisdom in a cause and effect way, like hitting a cue ball in pool. We must be realistic in our schools about what we can measure and what requires faithful reliance on God and his faithfulness.

of the Gospel, made to be “in Christ Jesus”, that he becomes for us wisdom from God.” (1 Cor. 1:30) It is the Spirit of Christ in us that makes us capable as the gospel works its power in us and brings us more and more into conformity to the image of Christ, the greater than Solomon, the most wise man. “Through the gospel we receive an understanding of the ultimate purpose of God for everything and everybody in the universe.”<sup>16</sup> It is through the gospel’s power that we receive from God what enables us to live our lives in accordance with the gospel. God, in his wisdom, has provided an ordinary means to grow in wisdom. Our schools must reinforce and bear witness to the ordinary means of grace. We must encourage our students and families to participate regularly in true worship, to devote themselves like those in Acst 2 to the teaching of scripture and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. We must think as Paul does In 1 Cor. 3 about the cultivation of wisdom in our Christian schools, “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, **but God gave the growth.** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God who gives the growth.**

Our task is to work the ground, to plant and water and tend. But there are tools that the gardener will find useful in his task of cultivation.<sup>17</sup>

Wisdom cannot flourish in sterile ground. We need to surround ourselves with beauty, not just in the arts, but also in the sciences. In what way does an equation reveal the wisdom of God? How do the discoveries of Science speak to the beauty of order in God’s creation? Anthony Esolen observes, “The modern world has destroyed almost as many forms of art- not just individual works of art, but the very genres- as the people of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance invented. Renaissance painting and sculpture, music and poetry, are what you get when a vigorous popular and learned tradition that had already been immensely creative meets again the classics of Greek and Rome. Modern art is what you get when you repudiate the people, the tradition, and the classics.” Remember Treebeards description of Saruman (the white wizard, the wise) in Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*, “He is plotting to become a Power. **He has a mind of metal and wheels;** and he does not care for growing things, as far as they serve him for the moment.” It is this mindset that rips apart the beauty of nature and is unable to understand what is of value in a stained glass window, or a solitary tree standing majestic and mighty, clinging nobly to the earth in the midst of a windswept meadow. “Our young people are not only starved for nature. They are starved for beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

Wisdom cannot grow in a bed of lies. We must use the language of truth and use language to convey truth. Esolen calls this the restoration of truth telling. “Our original sin was a failure to see things as they were. It was to believe a lie. If the shrewd Confucius is right, that the beginning of wisdom is to give things their proper names,

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<sup>16</sup> Goldsworthy, *Trilogy*

<sup>17</sup> If we must measure something this is it. I have suggested three areas (there are more) where the cultural soil is depleted: tradition, beauty and truth. How well are we fertilizing the ground with these things in our schools?

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Esolen, *Out of the Ashes* (Regnery Publishing: 2017), 37

then the beginning of folly is to put any stock in the wrong names... We-and our children- must refuse to utter the lie, or to use its language.”<sup>19</sup> The language of lies pervades our culture and spews its venom especially in regard to our own identities. Our culture gives our children language that allows them to call themselves by what they are not. Though in truth they are made in God’s image with intrinsic dignity and worth, they are told to be accidents brought about by time and chance. Though made male and female by God’s design, corroborated by their DNA and physical characteristics, they are told to self identify using what they feel as their guide. We are not only allowed but encouraged to use the language of lies and treat it as though it is truth. Our schools instead must be permeated with the language of truth. In this regard the unique characteristics of wisdom literature are very helpful. Much of the Bible’s wisdom literature comes to us in the form of poetry. In a review of Anne W. Stewart’s book, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*, Brandon Benzinger says,

the author contends that Proverbs’ literary form is anything but incidental to its ethical and didactic purposes. Instead, the poetry of the book “makes an important contribution to the way in which the book seeks to shape character. Indeed, through its poetic form, Proverbs appeals to the whole human person, attending to his emotions, motivations, desires, and imagination, not simply his rational capacities. In so doing, the book indicates that character formation is more than an intellectual project and, consequently, demands more than appeal to logical reasoning” (pp. 3–4). With respect to the book of Proverbs specifically, neglecting the poetic form causes one to miss the effect of the text’s literary artistry upon the formation of the student” (p. 26). Such an effect lies in part in the propensity of poetry to fuse instruction with wonder, a sharing in delights with an imparting of insight. Accordingly, it exemplifies something of the nature of learning. “Viewed in this light, the poetry of Proverbs is . . . a central means by which the sages teach one how to think, to discern, and to seek wisdom” (p. 42). Specifically, Stewart points to the ways in which parallelism, sound play, terseness, parataxis, and figurative language aid memorability, engagement, aesthetic appreciation, **and a slowing down of the learning process.**<sup>20</sup>

Wisdom will not grow with a gardener who refuses to draw upon the tomes of gardening wisdom from those that have gone before. Carl Trueman, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), points out several cultural factors that have led to a devaluing of the past. He cites the growth of a scientific worldview, which has a built in narrative of progress, as one hindrance to valuing the past. A world shaped by the ideology of scientific progress has a hard time hearing the past speak in any meaningful way to the present. Also, the rise of the technological age has created a situation where the older become dependant on the younger. “Technology, because it is constantly and rapidly changing...will always favor the young. Taken by itself, perhaps, this might not be so significant; but combined with the impact of science as a whole

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<sup>19</sup> Esolen, 14

<sup>20</sup> Brandon C. Benzinger, *Book Review: Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*. Anne W. Stewart (Denver Journal, 01.20.16)

upon cultural attitudes, it undoubtedly plays its role in the bias against age, and thus against the past..." Consumerism and the disappearance of "human nature" also contribute to a devaluing of the past. We are conditioned to be materialists, and "consumerism is predicated on the idea that life can be fulfilling through acquiring something in the future that one does not have in the present." We are what we consume. "If you can be whatever you want to be, then what binds you to your neighbor... what binds you to people in other times and other places? If you are master of your own destiny, then you are free to act toward the past and toward other people in the same way you act toward the goods on the supermarket shelf. You buy what appeals to you and leave behind that which does not." <sup>21</sup>

Our schools must be places that push back against such cultural factors that lie often hidden underneath the routines of our lives. We do so by bringing front and center, for all to see, the wisdom of God and the grand picture and plan for the world he has made. "Growing as a Christian really means learning to apply the fact of the gospel to every aspect of our thinking and doing." <sup>22</sup> We must provide that meaningful setting, that is filled up with gospel wisdom. Though the world sees it as foolishness, it is the wisdom and the power of God. "Jesus came to be wisdom for us. One outworking of this in our lives is that our way of thinking about all things is changed through the Gospel. True wisdom is a result of being related to God through the person and work of Christ." <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Crossway: 2012) 24-37

<sup>22</sup> Goldsworthy, *Trilogy*, 341

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 345