

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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Fourth Level Education

This month marks the return to school for millions of students.

Professor Ralph Wood of Baylor University has suggested four levels of Christian scholarship that can provide a matrix for the kind of education all Christians should pursue. First, there is Christian scholarship that seeks to employ “uniquely Christian warrants for evidence and methods of research,” such as Scripture proofs and citations from creeds and liturgies. Wood calls this the “Bible-college idea of Christian education.”

A second level of education is prompted by a Christian vision of reality while embracing common intellectual standards. This is “Christian faith issuing in a Christian mind...a way of redeeming the terrible fragmentation of human knowledge in our times.” This is the attempt “to bring all thoughts captive to Christ,” as the Dutch leader Abraham Kuyper famously maintained.

A third kind of Christian learning is that of theology itself, or as Wood puts it, learning that “takes Christian things as its central subject matter.” This is the study of Christian thought and tradition.

Finally, there is education for life. One cannot separate belief from behavior, knowing from doing. This is learning *applied*. Or as is often maintained, the carrying out of the *responsibility* of knowledge.

This final level of education should not be underestimated in terms of need.

Wood tells of a new graduate from Baylor who confessed to him that her own college curriculum did not require her to be formed by serious modes of either thinking *or* living. While she assimilated great reams of *information* during her four years in the university, she admitted that she did almost no *thinking*: no tough-minded engagement with life-shaping books and ideas. Her honors degree had never required her to encounter the overarching moral and religious questions,

nor to undertake any serious reevaluation or reliving of her life. She admitted the truthfulness of Walker Percy's aphorism that "You can make all A's and still flunk life."

Kay Haugaard, a professor in Southern California, reported an experience in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that was even more disturbing.

Her twenty students were discussing Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery." The fictitious tale, set in a small town somewhere in rural America, begins with the townsfolk gathering for a ritual deemed critical for the well being of the crops and the community. At the center of attention is the lottery. Soon the story reveals the frightening reality that the drawing is for a human sacrifice. In the end, a woman draws the slip of paper marked by a black spot. Stones are gathered, she is circled, and killed. Even her small son had pebbles in his hand.

When the *New Yorker* first published the essay in 1948, it was met by a storm of outrage. The story's moral - the danger of "going along" in blind social conformity - was repugnant to the generation that had stood up to Hitler.

Times change.

On the warm California night that brought chills to Haugaard, her class registered no moral response at all.

"The end was neat!" one woman offered.

"If it's a part of a person's culture,...and if it has worked for them, [it's okay]" another suggested.

"At this point I gave up," wrote the professor. "No one in the whole class of twenty ostensibly intelligent individuals would go out on a limb and take a stand [even against] against human sacrifice."

Wood is right. There are four levels to education – and the fourth is the most important of them all.

James Emery White

Sources

Ralph C. Wood, *Contending for the Faith: The Church's Engagement with Culture*.

Kay Haugaard, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Os Guinness, *Time for Truth*.

About Serious Times

Launched in conjunction with the release of the book, *Serious Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), the aim of this site is to serve the vision of the book in an ongoing manner. At serioustimessite.com you will find reading lists and book reviews, "whitepapers" on critical issues and strategic links to other sites, small group resources and homeschooling curriculum, tapes/cd's and study guides. You can even sign-up for this bi-weekly "Serious Times Update."