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A Biblical Perspective on Identity, Truth and Culture

1. Introduction.

The purpose of this paper is to show how a biblical perspective on identity, truth and culture can restore an integrated world view to the academic world, while retaining the scope for variation without which an integrated worldview becomes oppressive. As we are dealing here with worldviews, the appeal will not be to logical proof but to goodness of fit. Does the view presented fit the way things are in brute reality? Does it above all find acceptance not only in the mind but also in the conscience of the hearer?

I believe that there is a need to reassess the presuppositions upon which academic and many other types of modern endeavour have been based, increasingly since the Enlightenment and climaxing in the twentieth century. This has been something which western scholarship has been unwilling to do. This may have been because Greek thought does not seem to have allowed for such questioning of presuppositions, or because of a reticence to introduce religious matters into so-called secular concerns following the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The result of this, however, has been to allow all sorts of non-Christian, and ultimately anti-Christian presuppositions to creep in unchallenged, or at least unchallenged at sufficiently deep a level to be effective.

Meanwhile, many Muslim scholars in the post-colonial era have set themselves the task of sifting through the presuppositions they have received from the west in order to make them consistent with an Islamic world-view, "to recast the whole legacy of human knowledge from the viewpoint of Islam" (International Institute of Islamic Thought 1987). However, in doing this, they need to be aware that there is a difference between western thought and Christian thought, and that part of the conflict which Arabs experience when studying in the west is not so much a conflict between Islam and western/Christian culture so much as a conflict between a culture that is based upon transcendent values and a culture that is not.

Let us examine the circumstances out of which the need for a reappraisal of presuppositions arises, especially in the humanities, which are the subject of this conference. There has been first of all an almost total acceptance of a closed universe in which either man created himself by some process of evolution, or a deistic god created the world and then walked away, leaving the world to follow its own devices. In the west many examples can be found of this trend, which can be considered a return to the presuppositions of one school of Greek philosophy. Munitz, for instance, argues (Munitz 1957) that modern science is founded upon the ancient Greek philosophy of the atomists who defined all order in the universe as arising from the blind, random interplay of atoms. In the Muslim world, this materialist trend can be illustrated by the tendency shown at the Ibn Battuta conference held in October last year to dismiss out of hand any of Ibn Battuta's observations that could not be explained within the confines of a closed materialistic universe. Again, in this conference we have heard at least one paper where a totally evolutionist approach has been adopted.

This materialist perspective, however, starting from man as its centre, has led to increasing metaphysical and epistemological problems. In fact, one way of interpreting western philosophy from the Enlightenment up until the beginning of the twentieth century is as an attempt to find an

absolute to put in the place of God. What distinguishes the twentieth century is that man has abandoned this search and accepted, at least with his mind, the basic premise that life is pointless. The belief in absolute truth has been abandoned. In the west this can be illustrated in literature in the works of such philosophers as Jean-Paul Sartre and in the arts, in the Theatre of the Absurd. In Morocco, this sense of the loss of truth and the blurring of the distinction between truth and fantasy can be illustrated by the observation of the hero of Muhammad Souftas's *Fantasiya al-Jahim*:

> "When I crossed the bridge of desire, I found myself drowning in my body. How can I discover the dividing line between fantasy and truth? All truths are the fantasy of a moment. I don't possess any truth. I may master a fantasy but I certainly can't master truth." (Souftas p.38)
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> "Who possesses truth?"
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> "Not me at least. I possess only a small truth, which may seem silly to other people, no matter how deeply I am convinced of it. Similarly, their truths may appear meaningless to me. Truth is fantasy."
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> "Now, in my quiver I have thousands of spaces. Do they change anything?"
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> "Perhaps. But to be sure, you must put all truths in a bag. Try and convince yourself, first of all, that you are eternally convinced of one of them, or all of them, and you will know how difficult it is to choose a refuge in one truth. There are truths but there isn't one truth. The deeper you go in things, the more divided you become. In return, you lose your confidence in things and people because you have come to possess a truth, which is that there is no everlasting truth, nothing which remains the same, not even you." (ibid. p.69)

Relativism is the result, in the realm of morals, in politics, and in the realm of academic endeavour, and there is ultimately no alternative as long as we insist on starting from man as our centre.

Moreover, without an integration point, life has disintegrated into separate compartments. As the Iraqi writer Nazik al-Malaika puts it so well:

> This anxiety takes different forms. There is the simple form which individuals experience as a continual psychological tension, and then there are complex forms, the most common of which is what we call here 'anxiety over values'. We mean by this the shaking of our value systems and their dislocation from any fixed theoretical basis. In general, we are a confused people, without fixed opinions. We do not stick to plans. Even if we have the opportunity to choose an overall plan, we very quickly abandon it before achieving the result. This is simply because we look at issues on numerous conflicting levels, so that our judgments interfere with one another and we have a multiplicity of reference points. There is no society more lost than one which allows different points of view to penetrate its life. Life is full of contradictory concepts and there is no idea that we believe in to which there is not an opposite idea which can be set against it. In this state, our behaviour loses any reference point against which we can measure it, so that we can no longer in fact measure it. In this our behaviour is like speed, which we cannot measure unless we have a fixed point somewhere. The loss of this reference point in our lives prevents us from holding to any final judgment. It always appears to us that every issue we face has two opposing aspects." (AI-Mala'ika 19.. pp.11-12, my translation).

This compartmentalization has had its effects also in the academic world. These effects have been compounded by the rapid development of the mass media, leading to the easy availability of a hundred different ways of looking at the world, geographically as well as in terms of specialization. This conference is one attempt to face this issue. What is needed, though, is a principle of integration that is trans-culturally valid.

As well as separating academic disciplines from one another, the abandonment of belief in absolute truth has also had the effect of separating academia from the world of everyday activity. Fundamentally, this has been because belief in reliable correspondence between the impressions made upon our senses and what actually exists in the world out there, is based upon faith in a God who will not willingly deceive us. Without that faith, there is no basis for confidence in such a correspondence. This is reflected in philosophy where in the Anglo-Saxon world so much effort is now being put into the study of the function of words rather than what those words signify. It is reflected in linguistics by Saussure's long dominance of the field of semantics. The signifier is the word, but the signified is not the thing itself but the concept in the mind of the addresser/addressee. There is no place for the real world referent.

Springing partly from this Saussurean dichotomy are the various deconstructionist schools of literary criticism, casting doubt on the ability of the reader to come to any reliable reading of the text. We can no longer arrive at a reliable estimation of historical events, and even in science the focus of study is on the sociological influences on scientific progress rather than on the rational. Some of these are healthy developments, a vigorous reaction to the proud attempt to deny man's epistemological subjectivity. However, the overall effect has been that the academic world, and particularly the humanities, have climbed out onto a branch and then proceeded to cut themselves off from the mainstream of civil life. If there is no such thing as absolute truth, then the thirst for truth becomes a meaningless illusion. If there is no correspondence between our senses and what lies in the world out there, then in whatever discipline we are operating we are just playing games. We are left with a mass of facts which we cannot trust and from which we cannot generalize, and a mass of technological applications. If a path of research does not pay short-terms dividends, there is no point in pursuing it, or providing funds so that someone else can pursue it. Whose fault is this? Not that of governments, but of academics who have pulled the carpet out from under their own feet.

There are three possible reactions to this insurgence of materialism. The first is that of total absorption within it. The second is that of escape into the arational, a path prepared many years before by Aquinas when he argued that the Fall of man was only partial and separated between the spiritual world, 'grace', and the natural world, 'nature', as the two sources for one's understanding of God. The former, upper storey could be understood only by revelation, but the latter, lower storey could be comprehended by the mind unaided. Once the division had been made in this way, nature, being autonomous, began to devour grace. By the time of Kant and Rousseau, nature had totally devoured grace, and freedom had taken the place of grace upstairs. The two spheres were then both autonomous. However, most people still wanted to hold them together. It was not until the arrival on the scene of Hegel and Kierkegaard that the pursuit of a unified robe of knowledge was abandoned and the dichotomy was reworded as faith versus rationality. In practice, this meant that in order to escape from this meaninglessness at the rational level, many sought refuge in an arational spiritual experience. The Romantic Movement can partly be explained in this way. In more recent years, release has been sought within the Christian tradition by taking refuge in a contentless faith, and without it by turning to one of the eastern religions that set less store by antithesis.

The third reaction to this insurgence of materialism is that of open resistance. All over the world there have developed various forms of fundamentalism, Islamic, Christian, Hindu and even Buddhist. Realizing that the foundations of the contemporary world are shaking, many have sought to go back to what they consider to be the roots of their respective civilizations. In many ways this is a good thing, and I personally have nothing but respect for those who are seeking to think out the implications of their faith and to live consistently with what they believe to be the truth. Such people are, to use Althusser's term, dis-identifying, rejecting the dominant ideology of their society, and seeking to establish an alternative society on the basis of a radically different set of values. What is wrong with fundamentalism, however, of whatever variety, is what Kenneth Cragg calls its 'cultural annexation of God'. In terms of our worship, this means that we try and put God in a box, and then start to worship the box. In practice, it means firstly that we try and do God's work for him - since of course he is stuck in the box, and secondly, that we only permit God to work in ways that we recognize; if we find anybody working for God in a way that is not authorized, we try and stop them. What this means in relation to this paper is that we develop a view of truth that identifies God's perspective on truth totally with our own. We fail to recognize that God is in heaven and we are on earth, that God, being omniscient, everlasting and omnipresent, is the master of all perspectives on truth, while we, since we share none of these divine attributes, are master of only a very limited number of these perspectives.

2. A Biblical Approach to Truth.

2.1. Truth is not autonomous.

Such then is the situation. The source book that I believe will be of most help to us in dealing with it is the Bible. The Bible has three main things to say about truth. They all derive from the fact that truth is not autonomous but finds its source in the being and character of God, and each aspect will be dealt with as it relates to his character. Firstly, God is there, rather than not there; therefore we are here, the world is here, and values are here. Secondly, God is personal and therefore truth is personal. This means that it is accessible to the mind, the will and the emotions, and that it contains an intellectual, a moral and an aesthetic content. Thirdly, the inescapably Trinitarian God of the Bible is a God whose being is rooted in relationship. Therefore, truth too is relational, with room for both the observer and the observed. Let us tackle each of these in turn.

2.2. Yahweh, the source of all being and value.

God's personal name 'Yahweh', which he revealed to Moses, means 'I am', the most uncompromising statement of being that could be made, and the one which underpins all Christian belief about existence. This statement contains within it the essence of two presuppositions. The first is that God is there rather than not there, the guarantee that there is someone out there, the source of all absolute truth in the realm of being, who can be known by the human mind. Secondly, this God who is there possesses a certain character, certain qualities. These qualities can be grasped by the human heart and are the source of all propositions expressing absolute truth in the realm of morality and value.

One of these qualities is that of 'creator'. God alone is able to create out of nothing, simply by speaking the word. The account of how God created the world and all that is in it, including man, is contained in Genesis Chapter 1. Again, it is on the basis of God's revelation that we receive the guarantee that this world exists and is not either a figment of our imagination or a dream in the mind

of God. Starting from ourselves we can get no further than the evidence of our own senses, which may or may not correspond with anything outside of us.

Before examining the implications of all this for our understanding of truth, we need to examine one further issue. This is the relationship of the universe to the creator. Did God create it merely as an extension of himself which will in due course be reabsorbed into God, or did he create the world and then as it were walk away leaving it to its own devices, or is there a third possibility? If the Byzantines strayed towards the first, Aquinas strayed towards the second. The first of these alternatives tends to lead to an over-emphasis on the spiritual as opposed to the physical world; the spiritual tends to be regarded as the ideal, the good, while matter tends to be regarded as evil in itself. This tends to lead to a disinterest in science, because the physical is regarded as no more than a symbol of the spiritual, and the creation is defiled by the mere fact of being made of matter. A good antidote to this is the refrain of Genesis 1: "God saw that it was good".

The second view leaves us with a world that is either totally predictable, mechanistic and closed, or one that is totally and terrifyingly unpredictable. We are left either with scientific laws that have become absolutes in their own right or with no scientific laws at all; However, a proper understanding of the second person of the Trinity gives us a third way of proceeding through this puzzle.
The Gospel of John describes Jesus Christ as the Logos (John 1:1) (the reason why) and teaches that the world was created through him (John 1:3) and in him (Col 1:16). He is "before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). In other words, Jesus Christ mediates the creation and acts as the sustaining and motivating force behind all things including so-called scientific laws, and in due time God the Father will "head up all things in Christ" (Eph 1:10). This formulation avoids the unpredictability of an occasionalist God and the closed universe and the practical materialism of the deist, balancing a doctrine of moral and causal coherence with an emphasis on God's intimate relationship with his creation. God is in fact in a covenant relation with his creation, and the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ are his troth.

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that there is a world out there independent of us. This leads on to the conclusion that to say that 'A' is 'A' means that 'A' is not 'non-A' at the same time and in the same respect. This runs counter to much eastern philosophy, and to the Hegelian approach to thesis, antithesis and synthesis, at least as it is popularly understood. Moreover, dichotomies between man and woman, and the rich varieties in culture, personality and viewpoint which characterize God's world are part of the form that God has given the universe and must not be broken down or blurred.

Since God is unchanging, it follows that at least in its metaphysical aspect, truth is unchanging. This is of course a denial of relativism, which in essence denies the existence of absolute truth. Some truths are of course localized in terms of space, time and respect, and all truths are localized with regard to perspective. However, they nevertheless remain unchangeably true with regard to that place, time, respect and perspective. Therefore, statements like "Truth is the state of affairs existing when the terms in the classificatory system, and the system itself appear to be secure... to the participants in the semiosic process" (Kress 1988 p.122) or "Truth is what is to the advantage of your own people" (a Nazi slogan quoted in Kegley 1970 p.21) need to be contested.

Given that the material about which we are to discover the truth includes God as well as the whole created universe, we will certainly not be able to uncover all the truth that is out there.

Nevertheless, we can uncover some true truth, and while we cannot claim that we have all the angles on truth, we can be confident that we will have the ability to master at least one true perspective.

2.3. Truth Is Personal, the Creation a Revelation of God's Character.

.As well as being absolute, truth is also personal, and that because the God of the Bible is a personal God; that is to say, he is a being who enters into loving relationships with other beings, and who allows other beings to enter into loving relationship with him. Against the claim of Platonism that absolute truth is to be found only in the ideal, in the essence of things rather than in their physical particulars, the Bible states that the self-revealing God has chosen to reveal himself through his creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God," as the Psalmist says (Psalm 19:1), and "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1 :20). The Hebrew word *emeth* is primarily an ethical rather than an epistemological term. We can trust what we discover about the world around us through our senses because we know that God is truthful and will not willingly deceive us. But belief that what is out there really does correspond to the impressions received by my senses is a position of faith rooted in God's character. In the west, failure to realize and hold to this has led in many areas of the humanities to an over-concern with the value of words at the expense of .their signification. Words can no longer be trusted to refer accurately to the world out there. In the east, this leads to a blurring of the dividing line between fact and fantasy. Am I awake or am I dreaming that I am awake.

2.4. Truth Is Relational and Makes Room for the Observer.

Thirdly, truth is relational, which is in fact a corollary of saying that truth is personal. That is to say, truth contains within itself the implication of a relationship between a knower and somebody or some state of affairs that is known. Herein lies the necessity of the Biblical concept of the Trinity, God regarded not as a simple unity but as a complex unity. If God is truth, if God is love, then before the world was created, there had to be both a knower and a known, a lover and a beloved; otherwise, God would have experienced a lack. Moreover, from the Biblical perspective, the eternal existence of the Trinity guarantees that there will always be room for the observer, as well as that which is observed. In the creation narrative, Adam was in fact given the task of naming and ordering the animals and plants of the garden. In other words, the subjective activity of observation is just as valid as that which is observed. The observer does not have to be scrubbed out, as in the Enlightenment model. He is an integral and eternal part of the equation.

This has important practical implications for our definition of objectivity in news reporting, and in historical or other types of research. We do not have to insist that there is only one way of seeing history or seeing the news. Nor do we have to give up completely the idea of finding out the way things were. We can pursue confidently the task of correctly identifying objects in terms of their labels, their compositions and the relations between them, while at the same time recognizing that there are other valid perspectives. Herein lies the divine beauty of the Gospels: four complementary pictures of the Christ, Jesus the Messiah in four dimensions. This does not mean that we have to accept all perspectives that are presented to us as being equally valid. What it does mean is that our judgment about their validity will be a function of our knowledge of other perspectives plus our knowledge about our informant's reliability and about the viewpoint from which he is approaching the subject.

2.5. Our Responsibility to the Truth.

By detaching truth from God, we have incurred a loss of focus on the truth. This in turn has led to a loss of the unity of truth, which is very quickly followed by a loss of the universality of truth. Conversely, when we realize that truth derives its nature from God, we are obligated to love it and to seek it humbly and with all our hearts. Moreover, when we have found it we cannot claim that it was due to our prowess. Rather, we must humbly acknowledge that God has chosen to reveal himself. This is of course very humbling, but it is exactly this cold shower of humility that we need if we are to continue to be effective researchers, able to let the rough surfaces of the data speak for themselves without our own prejudices, our own textual perspectives, drowning them out. However, many wonder why, if there is such a thing as absolute truth, then why is it so elusive and so dogged by error.

2.6. Why Are There so Many Errors?

Having established that truth is relational, and having established our obligations to the truth, we are now in a position to explore the various sources of error that make truth so elusive. The following is a possible list of micro-problems which might lead to error. They are largely due to our finitude and fallibility:

a. **Faulty observation.** This covers cases when we make mistakes about the number of people present, the colour of somebody's hair etc. Some recent studies in communication are useful here in encouraging the communicator to be sensitive to what he is sensing, thinking, feeling, wanting and doing.
b. **Faulty Interpretation.** This covers cases when we give the wrong interpretation to a fact that we have correctly observed. This can either be due to a simple misunderstanding, or more fundamentally to a belief system which so blinkers our senses that we become deaf and blind to certain categories of data.
c. **Faulty deduction.** This covers mistakes of logic and it is these sorts of errors, that philosophy seeks to eradicate.

In addition, the following is a possible list of macro-problems, which are far more serious because they are caused by our sinfulness, and much more far-reaching in their effects:
a. Suppression of the truth for sinful motives. Out of fear, self-interest or pride, we sometimes suppress or wilfully forget something that we know is true.
b. Suppression of the truth by sinful attitudes and deeds. The practice of sin can itself make us deaf and blind to the truth. Our hearts become calloused so that we can no longer recognize truth. Our light has been turned into darkness.
c. **A blinkered textual attitude to reality** which effectively filters out the brute nature, the firstness of reality. This is very much what Edward Said is attacking in, amongst others, his book *Orientalism.*

3. A Biblical Approach to Identity.

Having begun to consider the characteristics of the observer, let us now examine the question of identity. We tend to create our identity in terms of our position in society: our role in society, and the value of our contribution to society. All these measures are threatened by developments in the contemporary world. Our position in society is constructed in terms of either birth, education,

achievement or wealth. In the wider world we identify ourselves in terms of nationality/ethnic group, religion, language and history. The first of these is threatened by the breakdown of the extended family. The yardstick of education becomes more and more questionable at a time when graduates are finding themselves without work and many are consequently questioning the point of pursuing further studies. All that is left, therefore, is achievement or wealth, but both of these are very fragile and very hollow.

On a global level, our national identify is threatened on the one hand by the phenomenon of the global village and on the other by the blurring of national boundaries through new regional groupings and the semi-pernicious, semi-exhilarating spread of western, materialist culture. None of these criteria unify the personality at a sufficiently deep level or answer the questions 'Where do I come from?' and 'Where am I going to?' which are at the metaphysical base of all questions about identity. In addition, when many North Africans think about their cultural identity, they find their minds in Europe and their hearts in the Arab-Islamic world. Their need too is for a point of unity which is more transcendent.

The second of these is that of role. In days gone by, one inherited a role by birth, or took on roles according to the expectations of the society around. Today, this situation has altered drastically; we are in a state of constant change. Jobs are not inherited, and even when we choose a trade or profession at the beginning of our working lives, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to stay in that trade or profession all our lives. Even more fundamentally, what is expected of us as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters is all being thrown into question by the changing job situation, the blurring of distinctions between male and female roles, and the relativistic moral climate.

The value of our contribution to society is also subject to doubt as social and work units grow larger, as relationships grow more impersonal, and as the forces of materialism become stronger. I am what I produce. I am what I possess. But the void within grows daily larger, like the astronomers' black holes which devour all they come into contact with.

In the face of all these pressures, the Bible teaches three things about man's present state. First of all, it teaches that every man and woman is made in the image of God. This means that man is a free moral agent, able to respond to or reject God's love, and able to enter into relationship with others; he is neither a victim of his circumstances nor a captive to his genes. He also has a limited ability to create, not out of nothing, as God can, but out of the materials of the physical world around him, that God has created, and out of his imagination, which faculty again God has bestowed. He is also able to have a limited amount of continuity through the reproductive process.

Secondly, however, the Bible teaches that man has been deeply flawed by sin. That is to say, there was a time when man's first ancestor Adam chose to disobey God. The result of this sin was that he found himself alienated, from God (i.e. spiritually dead), from himself (for which reason the Bible describes the human heart as deceitfully wicked since our sub-conscious harbours more evil than we will ever know), from his fellow human beings (starting in the fracturing in the relationship between Adam and Eve and leading to all manner of evil deeds, the first of which was the murder of Abel by Cain) and from his environment (evidenced in the curse placed on the ground so that it yielded thorns instead of good fruit etc.). Instead, man found himself totally unable to put himself right, and in bondage to the world, the flesh and the devil.

Thirdly, however, the Bible teaches that God still loves man infinitely, and that because of this love, he set in motion a rescue plan as soon as sin entered the world. This rescue plan involved the call of Abraham and climaxed in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary to pay the penalty for the sins of the whole world, and his resurrection to bring us the means to become righteousness.

Within this context, the Bible teaches that each man and woman has significance as an individual:
a. Because he is a unique creation, made according to a unique design, and therefore he is significant not just for what he does but for who he is.
b. Because he has a unique destiny, and is created to perform an unique task and to display a unique aspect of God's many-faceted character.
c. Because he is an object of God's sovereign love and grace. Therefore, he is valuable, not because of any intrinsic worth that he may find in himself, but because of the value that God places upon him.
d. Because he is able to enter into meaningful relationships.
e. Because he is able to create, and therefore his work has significance.

The Bible also has something to say to men and women concerning their sexuality. With the advent of unisex in the west and with the return of the veil in an increasing number of Muslim countries, once again clear signposts need to be given as to what it means to be truly manly or womanly. In the garden of Eden we read that Adam rebelled against a known command of God, the truth, while Eve was deceived out of her relationship of grace with Adam and with God through the deceitful words of the serpent, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Following from this, and on the basis of the models presented in the Old and New Testaments, it can tentatively be argued that man is to major on practising truth in love, while the woman is to major on practising grace in love. Truth has to do with the maintenance of divinely-ordained structures while grace has to do with the process of fostering life within those structures. Truth without grace leads to sterility; grace without truth leads to life without either form or purpose. The antonymy between truth and grace can be paralleled by other similar antonymies which are often quoted in male-female debates: en-soi/pour-soi, structure/process, significance/security, etc. Exactly how this works out in each culture is open to discussion, but the principle is clear. From the nature of these antonymies, it will be seen how it is inevitably woman rather than man who suffers from the adoption of an aesthetic based upon static Greek values. Woman feels stifled, as does any group who have experienced oppression and are therefore in need of nurturing.

4. A Biblical Approach to Culture.

The Bible never once uses the word 'culture'. Instead, it uses the word 'nation'. Many parts of the Prophets are addressed to individual nations. The Bible treats these nations as quasi-persons. A nation can be seen as a group of people who have gone through a number of experiences together and commit themselves to one another and to a particular geographical/sociological space. On the basis of such a commitment, the Bible sees a new entity coming into being over and above the individuals who make up the group. This can be understood by parallel with the marriage relationship, which is described in both the beginning of Genesis and the New Testament as a mutual commitment between a man and a woman which results in the creation of a new entity, in addition to the two people forming the union. This sheds much light on the sociological concept of

the spirit of a nation, which is rejected by later sociologists of a more materialistic bent because they have no category within which to place it.

The Bible sees every man and woman against the background of his family, clan, tribe and nation. The Bible is at one level the history of a nation, and tells us to what extent this nation succeeded and to what extent it failed in fulfilling its destiny. At this level, its value lies in describing how a nation is born, the conditions which a nation has to fulfil in order to receive God's blessing, and the results bestowed upon the whole world when a nation enters into its heritage and fulfils its destiny. Finally, it relates how at the end of time, every nation will be represented round the throne of God.

From all this, we learn that every nation is valuable to God, portrays a unique aspect of his character, and contains within it redemptive potential which will be released to the extent that that nation enters into God's purposes for it. At the same time, however, we learn that nations, just like individual human beings, are sinful and subject to God's judgment. The repeated encouragements and warnings of the prophets are proof, if any is needed, of the chronic tendency of nations to depart from God's kind and just laws. Nations too, just like individuals, need to recognize that God's blessing is not based upon any inherent merit, and that any good to be found in a culture springs from God's blessing and not from some exclusive virtue peculiar to a particular nation.

This is of course very humbling, but it is exactly this antidote to pride that a nation needs at the zenith of its achievement. This is what lies at the root of Edward Said's justifiable criticisms of western Orientalism. The pride that sees Europe as the objective observer of an orient populated by interesting natives. The ethnocentrism that sees Europe as the centre of the world and all other cultures in terms of what they contribute to European identity. The blindness that results from seeing every other culture through the blinkers of one's own. All of this leads to an absolutizing of European standards which is totally at variance with the claim of the Bible that Jesus will come to judge all nations impartially by his standards.

On an even more contemporary note, how can human rights be defined in an objective way, or the United Nations have international credibility, unless the standards they apply have some measure of transcendence. It is a valid grouse about the 'New World Order' that most of its institutions are products of the Enlightenment, rather than being rooted in any world religious tradition.

5.1. A Biblical Approach to Education.

From the above, and in particular from what has been said about the nature of truth, the following implications can be drawn about the nature of true education (c.f. Macauley 1984). Firstly, since man is made in the image of God, education is above all an atmosphere, an atmosphere in which the student is accepted and respected for who he is rather than for what he can achieve, and where there is a true enjoyment of the pursuit of knowledge as being an aspect of one's pursuit of God.

Secondly, since truth is ethical as well as intellectual, education is a discipline, in which the student is taught the habit of attention/concentration, the habit of truthfulness, the habit of self-control and the habit of unselfishness. At the base of all these things is the need to learn to distinguish between 'wanting' and 'willing'. In. other words, a Biblical view of education will not divorce the intellectual from the moral and ethical.

Thirdly, since truth is personal, and man is made in the image of God, education is neither simply training a person for a job, nor filling a student's head full of facts, nor imposing on him one unified perspective on life. Rather, it is helping a person to discover and develop his talents, both physical and mental, and preparing him to fulfil his vocation.

Fourthly, since truth is relational, education can be regarded as a science of relationships. Thus, religious training is putting someone in contact with God. The arts and languages serve to put a person in contact with others and with himself, and the sciences serve to put him in contact with his environment. Part of this process will be to teach the student to distinguish between observations, feelings and beliefs. He also needs to learn to appreciate God's world in all its firstness, and allow God to speak to him through it, before he seeks to impose his models, his own feelings and beliefs, upon it.

Fifthly, since God is actually out there speaking through his creation, education can be regarded as a sowing of moral and intellectual ideas. This means that the student must be given direct unmediated access to the best of man's creations, and also access to God's creation. Part of this aspect is teaching the function and the limitations of reason.

5.2. Implications for Education Policy.

All of these points have implications for universities and educational systems world-wide. In concluding this paper, let me try and spell out some, but by no means all, of these implications. Firstly, if truth is personal, students need to be given personal attention in an atmosphere of personal interest and acceptance, even if this means reducing student numbers. Secondly, the intellectual route is not the only one to follow in order to pursue truth. This needs to be recognized in educational policy. Jesus was a carpenter by trade and Muhammad was a merchant.

Thirdly, students need not just to learn blocks of knowledge but also to see how they all fit together. Students also need to be put in touch with the people and the ideas that animate this knowledge. This coincides with one of the motivations for cultural studies and interdisciplinary approaches, namely the desire to make academic disciplines once more relevant to students. However, this is impossible without some common point of reference between cultures and between disciplines. This reference point must be rooted in absolute truth.

Fourthly, in a rapidly changing world, we need always to bear in mind that general education and character development are more readily transferable than specific skills, which swiftly become obsolescent. This being the case, resources must be focussed on the base of the academic ladder rather than the top, and policy makers must not be afraid to ditch the trend to go for ever increasing specialization.

6. Conclusion.

In conclusion, I recognize the very cursory and general nature of much that I have written in this paper, and that I have ventured into areas where there are many ,ore learned than I. However, given the times in which we live, I do not believe this to be a fault. Many beautiful storeys have been built on the foundations that were laid by our forebears in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, these foundations have been progressively and systematically weakened, and are now in dire need of

repair and strengthening if the whole edifice is not to collapse. If this paper has contributed in some small; way to this, and stimulates others to explore some of the above areas in more detail, then I will consider myself sufficiently rewarded.

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