Education for Homelessness or Homemaking?
The Christian College in a Postmodern Culture

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i wonder if I'll end up like bernie in his dream
a displaced person in some foreign border town
waiting for a train part hope part myth
while the station changes hands[1]

Agricultural reformer Wes Jackson once observed that undergraduate education in America today tends to be little more than "education for upward mobility." Indeed, he suggests that this is the only "major" that modern institutions of higher education seem to offer. As a result, he argues that precious little attention "is paid to educating the young to return home, or go to some other place, and dig in."[2] Kentucky poet-farmer and essayist, Wendell Berry echoes Jackson when he laments that education today often dislocates people from their native place to such a degree that it has created "a powerful class of itinerant professional vandals" who are "now pillaging the country and laying it waste."[3] And environmental studies pioneer David Orr makes a similar claim with respect to American higher education when he states that,

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[1] From "How I Spent My Fall Vacation" on the album, *Humans* ©1980 Golden Mountain Music Corp.

Brian Walsh has addressed the dynamics of home, homelessness and homecoming in Bruce Cockburn's lyrics in "One Day I Shall Be Home," *Christianity and the Arts* 7,1 (Winter 2000): 28-32.

[2] Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to this Place* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1996), p. 3.

[3] Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (New York: Northpoint, 1987), p. 50.

> the conventional wisdom holds that all education is good, and the more of it one has, the better …. The truth is that without significant precautions, education can equip people merely to be more effective vandals of the earth.[4]

In our judgment, these perceptive cultural critics are right. Colleges and universities–small or large, public or private, Christian or secular–tend to educate for upward mobility, to alienate people from their local habitation, and to encourage the vandalization of the earth. In short, education today is in many respects education for global homelessness. In this paper we intend (briefly) to explore these claims about contemporary education, to set forth an alternative vision of education, and to describe some of the practical implications of such a biblically informed vision. Our thesis is simple. We propose that Christian higher education ought explicitly to aim at homecoming and homemaking.

This is an experimental paper. Our question is: what happens if we allow "homecoming" to be the guiding metaphor for our educational praxis? Erazim Kohak has wisely noted that metaphors "shape the context of our experience as a meaningful whole, deciding in the process not only what is primary and what derivative, but also who we ought to be and how we ought to act." In this sense, "a metaphor is a mask that molds the wearer's face."[5] And Neil Postman demonstrates specifically how metaphors shape the educational task.[6] So, if the real metaphor of higher education in America is that of "upward mobility", and if it is this metaphor that shapes our view of the student as client, customer,

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[4] David Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994), p. 5.

[5] Erazim Kohak, "Of Dwelling and Wayfaring: A Quest for Metaphors," in Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *The Longing for Home*, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion, volume 17 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), p. 31,

[6] Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage, 1996), esp. chapter 9.

resource, professional-in-training, and citizen, then what happens if we shift the metaphor? What happens if we abandon upward mobility as the homeless-making metaphor that it is, secede from this education for homelessness and choose instead to foster an education for homemaking? What would that look like? If biblical faith shapes an imagination in which this world is our creational home, homelessness is the result of misplaced faith and failed stewardship, and the hope of redemption is for nothing less than the homecoming of God to a restored earth, then "homemaking" is a good candidate for a guiding metaphor in Christian educational endeavors.[7]

To try and unpack something of what this might look like we will first revisit Jackson, Berry and Orr to understand better their complaint. Then we will follow the lead of Berry and Orr to provisionally and imaginatively suggest what such a homemaking vision might look like if it became formative of our educational practice.

I. Education for Homelessness

i) Wes Jackson

Wes Jackson contends that much of college and university education is education for upward mobility. Rather than learning how to become native to one's place–to know the people and plants and animals and customs of a particular locale and thus to live sustainably in that place–we are socialized into a materialistic way of life that blinds us to both the cultural and the ecological

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[7] We have discussed the shape of a biblical worldview at greater length in other places. For an exposition of a biblical worldview in terms of creation, fall and redemption (here translated as home, homelessness and homecoming) see Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), part two. For an application of such an understanding of Scripture to environmental issues, and with more attention to themes of home, see Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision of Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), esp. chapters 4, 5 and 8.

realities of our community and our landscape. We assume we will (and should) move upward–up the socio-economic ladder–and become more mobile –moving from place to place. And we assume that these are unalloyed goods–good by their very nature. We do not question that upward mobility might not be such a good thing. But such a socialization process, Jackson contends, leaves us ecologically illiterate.

To test the plausibility of Jackson's claim, we need only ask ourselves a few questions. How many of our students know the trees that line the sidewalks on which they walk to and from class? How many of our students know the watershed from which their drinking water comes? How many of our students know where "away" is when they "throw things away"? If our students have no such specific knowledge of their peculiar place and how it works, how will they know how to take care of it, and why would they want to?

But "education for upward mobility" doesn't just result in ecological illiteracy. Students who have no intention of staying anywhere too long also demonstrate a profound geo-political, historical and aesthetic ignorance as well. Without any sense of commitment to place one pays no attention to neighbors, cares little about the dynamics of local community politics, never comes to understand the stories that have shaped this place to be the place it is, and never hangs around long enough to appreciate the art, literature, poetry and folk traditions that this place has fostered. One never becomes a homecomer or homemaker because one is lost in the homelessness of mobility. To borrow metaphors from Kohak, education for upward mobility is education for wayfaring nomads who know nothing of the virtues of dwelling, the importance of roots, and love for place.

What if, Jackson muses, colleges and universities were to "assume the awesome responsibility to both validate and educate those who want to be

homecomers–not necessarily to go home but to go somewhere and dig in and begin the long search and experiment to become native?"[8] What if, in order to achieve the sort of sustainable way of life that we must achieve in a shrinking world of limits, we worked toward "becoming native to our places in a coherent community that is in turn embedded in the ecological realities of its surrounding landscape?"[9] What if, given that upward mobility is often just a cipher for a kind of rootlessness and homelessness seemingly pervasive in our postmodern culture, institutions of higher education offered a "homecoming major"?[10]

ii) Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry takes Wes Jackson's insights a step further. The "powerful class of itinerant professional vandals" that are pillaging our world and "laying it to waste" are the products (the metaphor is intentional) of an educational system that is governed by the superstition that the proper place in society of an educated person is "up." "Up is the direction from small to big," Berry comments. "Education is the way up. The popular aim of education is to put everybody 'on top.'" Berry then wryly comments, "Well, I think that I hardly need to document the consequent pushing and tramping and kicking in the face" in order to get on top and stay there.[11] We need to ask ourselves, and Berry will force us to ask ourselves, what are Christians doing "on top" of such a pile? What are Christians doing playing the same game of competitive upward

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[8] Jackson, p. 97.

[9] Ibid., p. 3.

[10] Ibid. On the rootlessness of postmodern life see Paul Wachtel, *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989), and J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), esp. chapter 7.

[11] Wendell Berry, *What are People For?* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), p.25.

mobility as everyone else? And why on earth are Christian educational institutions in this game? Perhaps we need to muse, with Berry, that "up" is "the wrong direction."[12]

Berry supports his claim about rampaging professionals with two observations. First, such folk must be "'upwardly mobile' transients who will permit no stay or place to interrupt their personal advance." They "must have no local allegiances" for "in order to be able to desecrate, endanger, or destroy a place … one must be able to leave it and forget it."[13] Success requires a transient mobility which necessarily results in homelessness. The kind of careerism taken for granted in much of American culture implies that "one must never be able to think of any place as one's home; one must never think of any place as anyone else's home."[14] In such a context, successfully educated people "cannot take any place seriously because they must be ready at any moment, by the terms of power and wealth in the modern world, to destroy any place."[15] Placelessness and perpetual homelessness lie at the root of ecological vandalism.

Berry's second observation is that higher education is complicit in this vandalizing of the earth. As usual he minces no words:

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[12] Ibid., p. 26. Reflecting on the necessity of downward mobility later in the book, Berry writes, "We must achieve the character and acquire the skills to live much poorer than we do. We must waste less. We must work more for ourselves and each other." (p. 201) We can just see it now–a new campaign by a leading Christian college: "the school of downward mobility!"

[13] Berry, *Home Economics*, *p.* 51.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York and San Francisco: Pantheon, 1992), p. 22. On the connection between homelessness and ecological degradation see John F. Haught, "Religious and Cosmic Homelessness: Some Environmental Implications," in Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991): 159-181.

> Many of these professionals have been educated, at considerable public expense, in colleges or universities that had originally a clear mandate to serve localities or regions–to receive the daughters and sons of their region, educate them, and send them home again to serve and strengthen their communities. The outcome shows, I think, that they have generally betrayed this mandate, having worked instead to uproot the best brains and talents, to direct them away from home into exploitative careers in one or another of the professions, and so to make them predators of communities and homelands, their own as well as other people's.[16]

Loyalty to profession supersedes loyalty to place and in that supersession everything is superseded. Berry is worth citing again at length:

> According to the new norm, the child's destiny is not to succeed the parents, but to outmode them; succession has given way to supersession. And this norm is institutionalized not in great communal stories, but in the education system. The schools are no longer oriented to a cultural inheritance that it is their duty to pass on unimpaired, but to the career, which is to say the future, of the child.… The child is not educated to return home and be of use to the place and community; he or she is educated to *leave* home and earn money in a provisional future that has nothing to do with place or community.[17]

Mobility replaces mindfulness. Homelessness banishes homecoming. Not only is going to college the first step "away from home," the educational endeavor itself propels one even further from home, never to return.[18]

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[16] *Home Economics*, pp. 51-52. Berry makes a similar point in *The Gift of Good Land* (New York: North Point Press, 1981) in which he argues that schools are "powerful agents of the 'United States economy.' They do not prepare young people to stay at home and make the most of the best local opportunities. They serve the idea that it is good to produce little and consume much." (p. 73)

[17] *What are People For?*, pp. 162-163. Perhaps a small correction is necessary here. It would be naive to suggest that any education, at any time, passed on a cultural inheritance "unimpaired." Teaching (like all of life) is an interpretive endeavor and therefore always "impairs" in one way or another.

[18] It is not surprising, then, that when we think of a "homecoming" weekend, our minds do not go immediately to family and our community of origin, but to the college that became our (temporary) home away from home that then impelled us on into further and deeper homelessness.

An educational system established to train producers and consumers for a global market and rooted in an absolutization of efficiency and profitability is only successful when it produces docile and numb citizens who conform "to a rootless and placeless monoculture of commercial expectations and products."[19] It is not surprising, therefore, that the literature of "Generation X" is suffused with such images of placeless numbness. Writing in *Life After God*, Douglas Coupland confesses, "… I have never really felt like I was 'from' anywhere; home to me … is a shared electronic dream of cartoon memories, half-hour sitcoms and national tragedies." As such, Coupland says that he speaks with no distinct accent, or more accurately, he speaks with "the accent of nowhere–the accent of a person who has no fixed home in their mind."[20] Wendell Berry would say that the system has succeeded perfectly in producing such a generation of homeless young people. And it is no wonder, then that we have

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[19] *Sex, Economy*, p. 151.

[20] Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), p. 174. The Smashing Pumpkins echo these themes in their song, "jellybelly":

> welcome to nowhere fast
> nothing here ever lasts
> nothing but memories
> of what never was
> we're nowhere, we're nowhere, we're nowhere to be
> nowhere, we're nowhere, we're nowhere to see

And in another album on the same album, provocatively titled, "fuck you (an ode to no one)", lead singer, Billy Corgan sings:

> i'm never coming back
> i'm never giving in …
> i disconnect the act
> i disconnect the dots
> i disconnect the me in me

We live in a nowhere land of disconnection and there seems to be no way back home, no possibility of reconnection. Both songs are on the double c.d. *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* ©1995 Virgin Records.

seen nothing less than the "unsettling of America."[21] The double entendre is quite intentional: the unsettling of America–its suburbanization, mallification, McDonaldification–is unsettling and disturbing to those who perceive what is being lost and why.[22]

Let us now turn from Wendell Berry to another prophet who rails against the homelessness of the modern consumer, David Orr.

iii) David Orr

Here is Orr's telling question: if we are the most educated people in history then why is the world under such profound ecological threat? Why are such highly educated people so ecologically blind, stupid and malevolent? Why does a rise in linguistic literacy seem to parallel a concomitant increase in ecological illiteracy? Might it be that it is precisely *because* of our education that we are so ignorant of how the world works?[23]

Orr's thesis is devastatingly simple. "Education," he says, "is no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom. More of the same kind of education will only compound our problems."[24] Indeed, Orr insists that our current

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[21] Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986).

[22] See also William Leach, *Country of Exiles: Destruction of Place in American Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1999), and James Kunstler, *Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), and its sequel, *Home from Nowhere: Remaking our Everyday World for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1993).

[23] Sadly, this is not a new question or a new suspicion about "modern" education. Pioneering environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, perceptively raised the same problems fifty years ago: "One of the requisites of an ecological comprehension of land is an understanding of ecology, and this is by no means co-extensive with 'education'; in fact, much higher education seems deliberately to avoid ecological concepts. *Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine, 1970), p. 262.

[24] David Orr, *Earth in Mind*, p. 8. Orr's argument bears some resemblance to Jonathan Kozol's meditation on education in the 70's, *The Night is Dark and I am Far From Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975) in which he asked how it could be that American boys

patterns of education will only foster more ecological illiteracy precisely because such educational practices are rooted in a series of debilitating falsehoods that all conspire to render us displaced persons. For example, the belief that the earth can be satisfactorily managed with enough scientific and technological know-how and that where there is an increase in the accumulation of information there is a concomitant increase in wisdom and knowledge is foundational to the modern educational enterprise. Moreover, says Orr, higher education in the West is also directed by the technicistic belief that we can restore what we have dismantled. And all of this happens within the context of an arrogant metanarrative of cultural superiority that is the mythological foundation of the whole educational/cultural enterprise.[25] Such education, so the myth goes, will make us better people.[26]

Now Orr's problem with such an approach to education isn't simply its unabashed arrogance and hubris. Rather, like Jackson and Berry, he sees the devastating effect of this kind of education in socio-ecological life. An information-driven education which is directed to scientific and technological control of a world that is here for our dismantling and restoration, all driven by an economic imperative that is identified with the very direction of civilization

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in Vietnam could have committed the atrocities at Mai Lai. What went wrong in the American education system so that these all-American boys could have become such monsters? Kozol's conclusion? Nothing went wrong at all. The system works perfectly. (See especially, chapter six.)

[25] Compare this with Bob Goudzwaard's classic discussion of the progress motif in Western culture, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society*, translated by Josina Van Nuis Zylstra (Toronto and Grand Rapids: Wedge and Eerdmans, 1979).

[26] Echoing similar sentiments, Wendell Berry says that one of the foundational assumptions of "commercial education" (by which he means pretty much all formal education in America) is that, "educated people are better than other people because education improves people and makes them good." Sex, *Economy*, p. xiii.

and the moral progress of humanity, spells disaster for our relation to eco-systems broadly speaking and local places in particular.

In the end, Orr says, such an educational practice produces people who relate to their world as "residents" rather than "inhabitants." And a culture of residents is a culture of homelessness. In his book, *Ecological Literacy,* Orr explains this distinction at some length. "The resident," Orr explains, "is a temporary and rootless occupant who mostly needs to know where the banks and stores are in order to plug in." By contrast, the inhabitant cannot be separated from a particular habitat "without doing violence to both.…" "To reside is to live as a transient and as a stranger to one's place, and inevitably to some part of the self." The inhabitant and place, however, "mutually shape each other."[27]

Later he expands on this distinction:

> A resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify.... The inhabitant, by contrast, "dwells," as Illich puts it, in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place. Good inhabitance is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness.[28]

And so while residents require only "cash and a map," inhabitants "bear the marks of their places," and when uprooted get homesick. And this is so because for the inhabitant, there is a place of dwelling in which one finds identity and from which one derives meaning and apart from which one feels lost and lonely. In short, "the plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people,"

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[27] David Orr, *Ecological Literacy* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 102.

[28] Ibid., p. 130. The reference to Ivan Illich is to his essay, "Dwelling," in *Co-evolution Quarterly* 41 (Spring 1984).

more residents; rather, "it needs more people who live well in their places," more inhabitants.[29]

iv) Postmodern Homelessness

Jackson, Berry and Orr would all agree that contemporary education, at all stages, but most decidedly at the university level, is a process of forming people who will be residents, not inhabitants. This is an education of upward mobility that results in a pedagogy of disconnection and an ethos of displacement. In the context of a global economy, higher education produces career-oriented consumers who have no intimate knowledge of, or sense of commitment to, any place. This is an education for homelessness.

It is no surprise then, that the postmodern condition is so often described in terms of homelessness.[30] Postmodern a/theologian Mark Taylor describes the postmodern self as a "wanderer," a "drifter," "attached to no home," and "always suspicious of stopping, staying and dwelling."[31] Interestingly, such a postmodern homeless drifter bears more than a casual resemblance to the endlessly acquisitive ego of late modernity, consuming the products, and more

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[29] Orr, *Earth In Mind*, p. 12.

[30] We have addressed themes of postmodern homelessness at greater length in Brian J. Walsh, "Homemaking in Exile: Homelessness, Postmodernity and Theological Reflection," in Doug Blomberg and Ian Lambert, eds., *Renewing the Mind in Learning* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998), and Steven Bouma-Prediger, "Yearning for Home: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in a Postmodern Age," in Merold Westphal, ed., *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Bloomington, IN.: University of Indiana Press, 1999.)

[31] Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 150, 157, 156, 147.

Following Richard Bernstein, it is fair to say that Jacques Derrida's deconstructive project is "always encouraging us to question the status of what we take to be our center, our native home, our *arche*." *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 183.

importantly, the images, that global capitalism serves up.[32] The commodification of all of life, most fully realized in the imperial regime of global capitalism, renders us all restless and insatiable consumers, unable to settle, permanently exiled from home.[33] Elie Wiesel is right. Ours is the age of the expatriate, the refugee and the wanderer. "Never before have so many fled from so many homes."[34] But this is no longer exclusively the socio-cultural condition of the politically, ethnically and economically oppressed. We are now all in exile, all displaced, all disconnected from any sense of place that could carry the full

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[32] We echo here Roger Lundin who has suggested that, "The desiring and acquiring self of postmodern cultural theory bears more than a casual resemblance to the unit of consumption at the center of market economies and democratic societies." *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 73-74.

[33] On the connection between postmodernity and global capitalism see Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), and Stanley Hauerwas, "The Christian Difference: Or Surviving Postmodernism," in Susan and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000).

We heard Jürgen Moltmann draw the relation of cultural restlessness and economic insatiability to homelessness in an address entitled "Homecoming for Abraham and Sarah's Children and Augustine's Lonely Soul," at the American Academy of Religion meetings in New Orleans, November, 1996.

[34] Elie Wiesel, "Longing for Home," in Leroy S. Rouner, *Longing for Home,* p. 19.

Edward Said makes a similar observation, from the other side of the Jewish/Palestinian divide, when he says that "our age–with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers–is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced migration, mass immigration." "Reflections on Exile," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures,* R. Ferguson, M. Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds., (NY: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1990), p. 357.

In the light of twentieth century violence, Richard Bernstein concludes that "the entire metaphysics of being 'at home' in the world now seems hollow." *New Constellation,* p. 307.

weight of the notion of home.[35] And education has been a co-conspirator in producing this culture of homelessness.

II. Education for Homemaking

i) Wendell Berry, again

Commenting on Wallace Stegner's contrast between "boomers" and "stickers"–which roughly parallel's Orr's residents and inhabitants, or Kohak's wayfarers and dwellers–Wendell Berry writes, that "if enough of us were to choose caring over not caring, staying over going, then the culture would change, the theme of exploitation would become subordinate to the theme of settlement, and then the choice to be a sticker would become easier."[36] Herein is Berry's hope and program–to encourage stickers, dwellers and inhabitants who have a love of place. But, while "commercial education"[37] sees the school, especially the college and university, as an "economic resource"[38] in a competition for wealth and power, Berry calls for an education that is accountable to what he calls the "party of local community."[39]

The party of the local community believes that "the neighborhood, the local community, is the proper place and frame of reference for responsible work."[40] Therefore, an education that would recognize that locality is the proper

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[35] Please don't misunderstand us to be saying that the condition of the jet-setting corporate executive is the same as that of refugees and the socio-economic homeless. Our point is simply that they are both, in very important respects, homeless and displaced.

[36] Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), p. 70.

[37] *Sex, Economy,* pp xii-xiv.

[38] *What are People For?*, p. 133.

[39] *Another Turn*, p. 17.

[40] Ibid.

scale of human endeavor–of human stewardship–would be an education that helps students "acquire a competent knowledge of local geography, ecology, history, natural history and local songs and stories."[41] According to Berry, such an emphasis on locality is neither a matter of a romantic return to roots, nor merely an escape from the anonymity of urban life. Rather, the focus on locality is a matter of societal, ecological and cultural preservation and sustainability. It is a matter of ending the ecological and economic vandalism of the highly educated professional class in a global culture of homelessness and fostering an alternative vision of homecoming. But such homecoming is impossible without a love, care, knowledge and intimacy with place.

In his opening plenary address at the Calvin College "Christian Scholarship – for what?" conference, Richard Mouw cited Craig Dykstra's conviction that scholarship and education that is decidedly Christian must be a scholarship and education that "sees deeply into the reality of things and loves that reality."[42] Berry would profoundly concur. But he would add that such love and such seeing is never generic, it is never universal, it is always placed, timed and particular. Just as we cannot love our neighbor "in general," but must always love *this* neighbor, here in *this* neighborhood, so also can we never love things in general or the world in general, or even creation in general, apart from a love, intimacy, knowledge and care for a particular place. Indeed, Berry insists that the love of learning cannot exist apart from the love of place and community. "Without this love, education is only the importation into the local community of centrally prescribed 'career preparation' designed to facilitate the export of young careerists."[43] And then we are back to homelessness all over

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[41] Ibid., p. 40.

[42] We have not been able to track down this reference.

[43] *What are People for?,* p. 164.

again. If you love your community, Berry says, you must oppose such education with all of your might. In the context of this conference we need to ask not so much the abstract question, "Christian Scholarship – for what?", but the more concrete and personal question, "Christian Scholarship – for whom?" and "for where?"

Christian scholarship, we are arguing, must be for the shaping and formation of Christian community. This is, we acknowledge, a variation on themes that have been developed by people like Nicholas Wolterstorff, Thomas Groome, Craig Dykstra and Parker Palmer.[44] But the Berryian twist on these themes of character and community is to note that "if the word *community* is to mean or to amount to anything, it must refer to a place (in its natural integrity) and its people. It must refer to a placed people."[45] And concurrently, "persons of character are not public products" of mass education. Rather, "they are made by local cultures, local responsibilities."[46]

In the face of a culture of disconnected homelessness, however, such locality– such placedness–requires the fostering of a connected intimacy that runs counter to the abstract distance that characterizes modern education and technological society. Even terms like "ecology" and "ecosystems," says Berry "come from the juiceless abstract intellectuality of the universities which was

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[44] Nicholas Wolterstorrf, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Minstry – The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlbery* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983).

[45] *Sex, Economy,* p. 168.

[46] *What are People for?,* p. 26.

invented to disconnect, displace, and disembody the mind." An education for homemaking, however, would insist that "the real names of the environment are the names of rivers and river valleys; creeks, ridges, and mountains; towns and cities; lakes, woodlands, lanes, roads, creatures, and people."[47]

According to Berry, there are at least two things that are required if we are to shift the paradigm of education from homelessness to homemaking, from vandalism to care. The first is that our education must engender an ethos of intimacy and affection.[48] This would require, we think, an abandonment of both the aggressive realism of modernist epistemology and the equally anthropocentric (and usually equally aggressive) anti-realist constructivism of postmodernism. In its place we would propose a relational epistemology rooted in a relational ontology.[49] And since we confess that this relationship is rooted in God's extravagant creational love, knowing this world is always, at heart, a matter of love. N. T. Wright describes such an epistemology of love beautifully when he says, "The lover affirms the reality and the otherness of the beloved. Love does not seek to collapse the beloved in terms of itself." In such an epistemology, "'love' will mean 'attention': the readiness to let the other *be* the other, the willingness to grow and change in oneself in relation to the other."[50]

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[47] *Sex, Economy,* p. 35. One can see here that Berry has clear affinities with the bioregionalism movement. For comparison, see the essays in *Home! A Bioregional Reader,* edited by Van Andruss, Christopher Plant, Judith Plant and Eleanor Wright (Philadelphia, Gabriola Island, BC, Santa Cruz, CA: New Society Publishers, 1990).

[48] Ibid., p. 168.

[49] Our student, Stephen Robertson, has developed these themes at some length in an evocative M.T.S thesis, *The Paradigm of Relationship: Speaking the Scriptural Language of Covenantal Relationship to a Postmodern World* (unpub. mss: Toronto: Wycliffe College, 2001).

[50] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London and Minneapolis: SPCK and Fortress, 1992), p. 64.

Educational theorist, Parker Palmer, makes a similar point when he says that "the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own."[51] We suspect that Berry would agree.

But there is a second thing that Berry says is required if we are to reaffirm community and place in all of our praxis, not least in education. And that is that in the name of community, for the love of place, and, most profoundly, for the sake of Christian discipleship, we must secede from the empire that has rendered us homeless. We know that this is a rather sensitive time to be talking about empire, but if the forces of displacement, disconnectedness and homelessness are imperially imposed, then we must speak of empire. And Berry does not mince his words about Christianity and empire. We must quote him at some length:

> Despite its protests to the contrary, modern Christianity has become willy-nilly the religion of the state and the economic status quo.… It has, for the most part, stood silently by while a predatory economy has ravaged the world, destroyed its natural beauty and health, divided and plundered its communities and households. It has flown the flag and chanted the slogans of empire. It has assumed with the economists that "economic forces" automatically work for good and has assumed with the industrialists and militarists that technology determines history. It has assumed with almost everybody that "progress" is good, that it is good to be modern and up with the times. It has admired Caesar and comforted him in his degradations and faults. But in its de facto alliance with Caesar, Christianity connives directly in the murder of Creation.[52]

The degree to which this prophetic critique of the modern church is true is the degree to which it is also true of Christian higher education and scholarship. In response to this Berry advocates "a quiet secession by which people find the

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[51] Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: Education as Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1983), p. 8.

[52] *Sex, Economy,* pp. 114-115.

practical means and the strength of spirit to remove themselves from the economy that is exploiting them and destroying their homeland."[53] In his poem, "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union" Berry calls us to secede from the union of power and money, government and science, science and money, genius and war and "from outer space and inner vacuity."[54] An education for homemaking joins in such a secessionist movement.[55]

David Orr is a member of this movement. Let us now consider his contribution to an education for homemaking.

ii) David Orr, again

An education for homemaking is rooted in the belief that this earth is truly our home. This planet, created good by God and one day to be renovated by that same promise-keeping God, is our home. To be faithful homemakers, therefore, we must know something about our home planet. This implies that we must educate for increased ecological literacy. Just as we educate for numeracy, or the ability to calculate, and literacy, or the ability to read, so also we must educate for understanding how the world works. At the risk of running into Berry's critique of juiceless intellectualism, let's call this an education in "ecolacy.[56]

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[53] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[54] From *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1998), pp. 162-163.

[55] Such an ethic bears some resemblance to the neo-Anabaptist perspective of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon in *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

[56] Garrett Hardin seems to have coined the term in *Filters Against Folly* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 24. And see all of chapter 7.

But what exactly is ecolacy? What does it mean to be ecologically literate? David Orr describes the essence of ecological literacy as "that quality of mind that seeks out connections."[57] In contrast to the narrow specialization that characterizes so much education today, an ecological frame of mind seeks to integrate, to bring together, to see things whole. "The ecologically literate person has the knowledge necessary to comprehend interrelatedness, and an attitude of care or stewardship," and this must be accompanied by "the practical competence required to act on the basis of knowledge and feeling." Hence "knowing, caring, and practical competence constitute the basis of ecological literacy."[58] Not only must we know, we must care. And not only must we care, but we must have the wherewithal to act responsibly, informed by such knowledge and passion.

But concretely what does this mean? Orr offers a list of five necessary components of seeing things whole. First, we need "a broad understanding of how people and societies relate to each other and to natural systems, and how they might do so sustainably."[59] This presumes knowledge of how the world as a physical system works–knowledge of keystone species and succession, entropy and energy flow, niches and food chains. Ecological literacy, in short, implies a modicum of knowledge about the inextricable interconnectedness of all creatures great and small. In biblical terms, this is wisdom.

Second, we need to know "something of the speed of the crisis that is upon us."[60] Hence, we need to know the vital signs of our home planet–the

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[57] *Ecological Literacy*, p. 92.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 93.

trends concerning population growth and climate change, soil loss and species extinction, deforestation and desertification, energy use and air pollution.[61] A prescription is only as good as the diagnosis on which it is based. Our attempts to achieve wellness must, therefore, be based on a sober assessment of the health of the earth. Biblically, this is the ability to read the signs of the times, the ability to have prophetic discernment.

Third, ecological literacy, according to Orr, "requires a comprehension of the dynamics of the modern world."[62] In other words, we need some understanding of the historical, political, economic, and religious forces that have molded the contemporary world. What ideas and social pressures have brought us to where we are today? Ecological literacy, then, requires a well-rounded interdisciplinary education.

Fourth, ecological literacy requires "broad familiarity with the development of ecological consciousness."[63] Of special importance here is explicit attention to ethics and the nature of nature. Are we humans, for example, "conqueror of the land-community" or "plain member and citizen of it?"[64] Is the natural world "red in tooth and claw" or some Edenic paradise of harmony or something else? Such an issue is of great importance, for whether and how we "follow nature," depends in large part on our idea of what nature is and of who we are as humans.[65] If we are to be homecomers and to love and care

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[61] In addition to its well-known publication, *State of the World,* the Worldwatch Institute also publishes a very useful compendium on environmental trends called *Vital Signs.*

[62] *Ecological Literacy,* p. 93.

[63] Ibid., p. 94.

[64] Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, p. 240.

[65] Holmes Rolston, III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 32.

for a place, then we need to know, most foundationally, what our "place" is. Biblically, this is the doctrine of creation.

Fifth and finally, Orr maintains that we need "alternative measures of well-being" and "a different approach to technology." For example, Herman Daly and John Cobb's "Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare," in contrast to other indicators such as "Gross Domestic Product," includes the depletion of nonrenewable natural resources and the costs of water and air pollution in its calculation of overall welfare.[66] And the work of E. F. Schumacher, to mention only one well-known example, illustrates how technology can and must be appropriate to the scale and needs of a people and its culture.[67] Again, biblically this is a matter of wisdom.

Echoing one of the central tenets of the Christian tradition, Orr says that ecological literacy is "built on a view of ourselves as finite and fallible creatures living in a world limited by natural laws."[68] Ecological literacy, in other words, is founded upon the theological insight that we are creatures–limited and liable to error–living in a world not of our own making. Being ecologically literate is, simply, knowing the rules of the house, and ought to engender a humble and thoughtful keeping of this God's blue-green earth.

So what is an education for homemaking? It is at the very least, an education directed to ecolacy, directed to precisely that kind of intimacy and knowledge of place that Wendell Berry has been calling for. But, of course this is, in itself, not enough. An education for homemaking requires much more.

Homemaking, Homelessness and Hospitality

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[66] Herman Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 401ff.

[67] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[68] *Ecological Literacy,* p. 95.

Earlier in this paper we talked briefly about the significance of metaphors for shaping educational praxis. And we have asked what an education that is shaped by the guiding metaphor of homemaking might be. A closely related metaphor to home is that of hospitality. Home without hospitality is more akin to a fortress of exclusion and self-protection than anything that would cut through our disconnected placelessness with a place-shaped community. In a post September 11, 2001 world, the last thing we need is that kind of stance in defense of the "homeland." Down that path there is only more homelessness. Rather, home in the face of the other–especially the homeless or oppressed other–can never be a fortress. On this point, Emmanuel Levinas taps deeper springs of biblical insight with his insistence on the priority of the other who "paralyzes possession" of the home in order to keep home open to hospitality.[69]

David I Smith and Barbara Carvill have suggested that hospitality to the stranger can serve as "a metaphor for the way both teachers and students understand and interact with otherness."[70] And while their discussion of the implications of such a metaphor clearly bears fruit in the area of foreign language education, education as hospitality is also thoroughly congruent with the direction of our proposal for education as homemaking. Hospitality, within the ethos of the classroom, in response to legitimate plurality and as an epistemological stance vis a vis the world is, we think, deeply homemaking.

And, of course, there would be something profoundly perverse about a discussion of an education for homemaking without addressing the pressing

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[69] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* A. Lingis, trans., (Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1969), p. 171.

[70] *The Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality and Foreign Language Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). On the broader theme of hospitality in Christian faith and practice see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

problems of geo-political and economic homelessness. If it is tragically ironic that an increase in literacy seems to always accompany an increase in ecological illiteracy, then it is doubly tragic that a culture of affluent, upwardly mobile nomads should also produce millions of people who literally have no roof over their heads.[71] This is truly a culture of homelessness, and the people on our inner city streets, together with the international refugees lined up at our borders seeking economic, political and ethnic refuge bear witness to the moral bankruptcy of our culture and the complicity of education in that bankruptcy. Precisely because an education for homemaking is an education rooted in hospitality, Christian scholarship is called to shape character, communities, economic and political structures and churches that offer a place for the placeless, home for the homeless.

So our questions are, "Christian scholarship – for whom?" For the homeless in our midst. The homeless wanderers that we have all become. For the homemaking God who is coming. And "Christian scholarship--for where?" For our neighborhoods, our streams, our forests. For God's good earth. And "Christian scholarship – for what?" For homemaking in the Kingdom of God. For the restoration of the creational home. For repairing the breach and restoring streets to live in.[72]

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[71] While there is literally a booming industry of research addressing questions of homelessness in North America we will refer to only one book here, and it is set in a Canadain context. Jack Layton, *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis* (Toronto: Penguin, 2000).

[72] Isaiah 58.12.