

The following paper was written by Vern S. Poythress, and then received co-signers from the Harvard Christian Fellowship and other Christians at Harvard. It was then distributed at Harvard University in the spring, 1969. Its production and distribution took place shortly after a student take-over of administration building, which led to arrests and a student strike. The SDS is the Students for a Democratic Society, a leftist student group of the time.

THE STRUCTURE OF TRUTH: SDS AND THE HARVARD ESTABLISHMENT

The events of the past week have forced many members of the Harvard community to think deeply. Beneath the many issues involved, a more fundamental and disarming challenge has come to the basic premises of many people's outlook on life. Students are being forced to ask themselves, "Why is this or that position right or wrong?"

The thesis of this paper is that the positions of SDS are, by and large, the result of a consistent application of some basic philosophical ideas accepted at Harvard. The administration, on the other hand, applies these presuppositions differently, and a political divergence has resulted. These presuppositions themselves must be challenged before a different situation can be attained.

The Harvard faculty basically assumes that individual, rational men, or men in the company of scholars, can judge, evaluate, and interpret reality correctly. By suitable application of human knowledge and by cooperation among men it is felt that the ends of happiness, 'fulfillment', etc., are obtainable. To these ends men have created the various structures of society (schools, governments, industries, families). This position has been worked out by John Dewey and others, and has served as the basis of our schooling system.

As a result of the position articulated by Harvard, the Students for a Democratic Society also have begun to judge and evaluate, with themselves as the final point of reference. They have been taught that men have created the structures of society for their own ends. Hence, the structures can be destroyed, and ought to be destroyed, when they are no longer achieving those ends. Since the end of happiness is achievable, students, working people, and others who understand the bankruptcy of the "establishment" will be able to achieve that end. SDS has merely taken to a logical extreme the conviction of the goodness of man inherent in setting up man as competent judge of truth and values. Any means to an end, therefore, is acceptable because such temporary means bear no comparison to the suffering and injustice of people whose happiness and well-being are thwarted by the establishment.

Patriotism, capitalism, middle-class values, and the "American way" are also taught in our schools. Why does SDS reject these? It rejects them because it has seen 1) that the authoritarian, dogmatic method of teaching these values is inconsistent with the deeper premise that autonomous man should decide for and determine his own values; 2) that patriotism, capitalism, etc., according to the deeper premises, have no intrinsic value but only such derived value as they may obtain by their function in serving the end of well-being. When they no longer serve their end they should be replaced by other means. This analysis is necessarily an oversimplification, but one with considerable accuracy.

The situation described above is not the only possible one. An alternative exists, which the following analysis will attempt to present in outline. A lengthy defense, however, is left to the men cited (see below). In a word, the error that causes the present situation lies in a common basic assumption of almost the entire Harvard community: the autonomy of man. Man is the final judge of truth, the creator of societal structure, and the decision-maker about ends. Herman Dooyeweerd and Francis Schaeffer have traced the historical development and ultimate philosophical and moral frustration of this assumption. In contrast to the assumption of the autonomy of man, Christian revelation teaches that the universe, men and all their structural relationships are created and sustained by God, who alone is self-existent. The Christian position is that authority is found in Christ. Scholars who have believed this (T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, A. Kuyper, etc.) naturally demand that "every thought surrender in obedience to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). In this complete recognition of Christ and his authority men enter upon the true liberty for which they were designed (Romans 6:20-25).

This, of course, has extensive implications for the nature of the university. The university ought to be devoted to elucidating and explicating the structures of reality which God has created. How are we able to undertake such a task? Man is totally unequipped in himself, for he has rebelled against the truth. Therefore, God has himself provided the means by which we may be restored to wholeness of life and communication with Him, by sending His Son who is Savior of the world and Savior and Restorer in particular of knowledge of the truth. Personal recognition of this fact demands that all of life be converted to the service and worship of God, including our service to fellow men. It also demands that His hand be recognized in all of creation, and that one listen to the Biblical teaching about the nature of man and morality.

It would be ironic if students were to reject the Christian position on education because they have been taught that it is an exploded myth and "impossible". (If one accepts the assumptions of the establishment, it is indeed impossible.) The alternative to this position is clear: the continuation of the Harvard establishment or the formation of some other establishment (perhaps of students) to replace it, with equally fallible men at the top, and equally false fundamental principles at the bottom.

The following works develop and justify the ideas presented above. They are representative of a proliferation of scholarship in the past decade which has given intellectual support to our personal conviction that obedience to the living Christ is both necessary and eminently reasonable.

Vern Poythress 3G

Howard Cain '72	Chuck White '71	Skip Ryan '69
Charles Drew '72	Mark Buchanan '70	Lee Cooper 4G
Pete Everts '72	Gerald Brock '70	Jack Klenk 2D
Kenneth Fong '72	Wayne Grudem '70	Roger Magnuson 1L
Curt Gedney '72	Fred Potter '70	Doug Stuart '64, 3G
Ed Otuteye '71	Scott Turner '70	Grant Wacker 1D
Rod Petersen '71	David Nichols '69	Gordon Wenham 1G

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