

Eden's Children

An address given by Linny Dey, co-founder of The Imago School

'Eden's children'? What are you talking about? What kind of fuzzy-thinking, head-in-the-sky, deluded idealists would call their students 'Eden's children'? There is no place for Eden in a modern view of origins; it can be nothing more than the longing for a simpler, better time, but we moderns have left myths behind. Newer is better; if there's to be a utopia, it will be the product of science and reason."

This would, I am sure, be the reaction of many to the words of our school hymn, and yet, "Eden's children" is exactly what we believe our students to be. The name of our school, Imago, chosen 21 years ago, is meant to communicate that central to our understanding of the task of education is our belief that we have roots in Eden where God created man in His image.

Sing Eden's children of your birth;
Sing of earth, her stricken glory green and good, yet stands;
Sing Adam's daughters, sons of Eve,
Who believe your Maker's words and trust His wounded hands.
Seize the light; the darkness cannot comprehend
Till God arise and Eden bloom again.

This designation, "Eden's children", tells us something vital about who the children we are teaching are. They are daughters of Adam and sons of Eve, those two who were the pinnacle of God's creation for whom everything else was made. I'm sure many of you hear the echoes of C.S. Lewis in his book *Prince Caspian* when Aslan is revealing something of his origins to Caspian at the end of the book and says: "You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve, and that is both honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth." Who are the children before us each day? They are immortal beings, creatures of God made for a much different world, a much better place than the one they inhabit now. They were made for Eden, for an unfallen world. They were made *imago dei*, in the image of God. They do not need to wonder at the most basic level about who they are, about where they come from, and how they are to fit into this world. They were not made to fit into this world. They were intended for Eden. Knowing that there was a time before the Fall when all things were in perfect harmony with God and with each other helps us to understand what they and we were intended to be. Because there was an Eden we know that this world is a broken, abnormal place, not a normal one. "Eden's children" were made for a harmonious relationship with their Creator; they were made to find in Him the source of all Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. They were made to be caretakers of creation, to subdue, to name, to tend all that God had made. This knowledge tells us much about how we are to educate Eden's children.

The hymn also speaks of this world of which we are to be caretakers. It is fallen, but it is not worthless. "Her stricken glory, green and good, yet stands." It was after the Fall that David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God," and "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." We are not neo-Platonists. We reject the dualistic view that spirit is good and matter is evil. In Eden God declared physical reality good and, though it is stricken, it remains good and worthy of study and care. This too tells us something about how to educate Eden's children. What do we want for the children in our care? First, we want them to know who they are. We want them to know and believe their Maker's words. We want them to know that they, like their

first parents, are exiles from Eden and that their Maker has at great cost opened the way back to Eden. As a school we reinforce the teaching of the home and the church in this true view of reality. Our primary job, however, is described in the phrase "Seize the light." We seek to equip children to take hold of truth, goodness, and beauty as revealed by God Who is Light and as found in the world He has made.

Here is where our Christian understanding of reality intersects with the classical view. We, like those who lived in classical and in medieval times, have a pre-modern view of reality. What does this mean? Let me briefly explain four important distinctives of pre-modern thinking. First of all, pre-modern people did not believe that man was the measure of all things; rather they believed in what C.S. Lewis called "the doctrine of objective value." According to this view, all value statements are not merely subjective. Beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder; goodness is not just what I feel to be good. There are fixed standards for good and evil, for truth and falsehood, and for beauty and ugliness outside of myself. The modern world sees an absolute dichotomy between facts and values; the pre-modern world does not. Eden's children are premodern.

Secondly, pre-moderns believed that there was a unity to all knowledge, that there were universals, or basic principles, that gave meaning to all the bits and pieces, or particulars, of reality. For Christians this unity is provided by God Who made all things and Who is the God of all truth. We believe with John Henry Newman that "Religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge". Our belief in the unity of truth places us on the side of the pre-moderns.

Thirdly, people in pre-modern times had an understanding of the hierarchical nature of reality, and because of this they had the ability to respond with awe and proper solemnity to things that were higher than themselves. Christians understand that man is not autonomous; he was made to worship and serve his Creator. Hierarchy is built into the way God has made the universe. Modernism teaches egalitarianism and works hard at a leveling out of all things. We see some horrendous effects of this in modern education. Of course there have been great abuses throughout history in the name of hierarchy, but the answer to this is not to adopt a false view of reality but to bow before our Creator.

Finally, paganism and Christianity in the pre-modern world shared a belief in the reality of the supernatural. Both believed in permanent invisible realities. Modernism teaches that the physical universe is the only reality and that there is nothing beyond that which the senses perceive and reason apprehends. Science has replaced theology as the queen of the curriculum. For us theology is still queen. Eden's children live their lives on a much bigger stage than the natural world; our lives are played out before angels and demons and in the sight of the God of the universe.

We educate Eden's Children then on the basis of this pre-modern understanding of reality. We teach them to "seize the light" is so much as we teach them to know truth, to choose goodness, and to appreciate and create beauty, all of which are to be found outside of their own heads in a God Who really exists and in the world He has made.

In conclusion, the hymn reminds us that not only do Eden's children know from whence they have come, but they can know with certainty where they are going. God will arise like the sun and will dispel all the darkness in this stricken world and Eden will bloom again. In calling our students "Eden's children" we are not hopelessly deluded utopians looking backward to a time that can never be regained. We can train children to participate in the restoration of all things

because God has promised that there will be a new Heaven and a new Earth where all things will be as they were meant to be. Why would we want to train children to fit in to this world when the one they were made for and in which they will live forever is so very different and so very much better? May God give all of us, parents, pastors, and teachers, the vision and strength to persevere in nurturing these exiles from Eden.