

Scholarship Dinner, March 3, 2012

By Linny Dey

Peopling Paradise

The word “paradise” congers up a variety of images in people’s imaginations and creates warm feelings in their hearts. It should come as no surprise to us that we find in the human heart a universal longing for Paradise, that is, for beauty and perfection. Something about Pacific islands makes them an image for Paradise in the minds of many; people travel to Hawaii or Bali for an experience of Paradise. I’ve never been to a Pacific island, but I suppose it’s the warmth, the light, the lush beauty of nature, the feeling of eternal summer that attracts many who go.

Of course, the original meaning of Paradise, possibly lost on our increasingly secular world, is Eden or Heaven, and the third meaning in the dictionary is “any place of great beauty or perfection.” The longing for Paradise does exist, but Paradise is not to be found on this Earth; the longing speaks for something beyond this world in its current state, something we were made for but don’t have now.

Listen to the words of the 2nd verse of The Imago School Hymn:

Sing, Eden’s children, through the night;
See, the light still glows through all the worlds and all for you.
The power and print of Paradise
Meet your eyes in all things good and beautiful and true.
Raise the emblems of the Resurrected King,
And into dawn, O Eden’s children, sing!

Imago students are being taught that they are Eden’s children. The belief that the children before us were made for Paradise informs all that we do at Imago. They were made for a perfect world, for Eden. It is not foolish idealism to long for a perfect world. The world was perfect once and it shall be so again! This truth makes all the difference, or should make all the difference, in how and what we teach and in how we treat one another.

History began in Paradise. Eden was perfectly suited to creatures made in God’s image. There they could revel in unspoiled Beauty, and there they could work and create under God’s supervision without the drudgery of toil, living in perfect harmony with all created things and with the Creator Himself. Goodness was to be found in every relationship and honor was always given to whom honor was due. And Truth was clearly spoken by God to His vice-regents.

The Fall, brought on by Adam and Eve’s disobedience, ruined and marred God’s handiwork but did not destroy it completely. The redemption or restoration of all Creation was planned, was in God’s mind, before the world began. And, in the meantime, glimpses of the original glory, what C.S. Lewis called “patches of Godlight”, are visible here and now in this fallen world. “The power and print of Paradise” do meet “our eyes in all things good and beautiful and true.” The print of Paradise is there to be seen in a field of wildflowers, a rippling stream, a baby’s smile. Creation has the power to create a longing in us for that perfect world for

which we were made but which we lost. And the Creator is at work on a great work of restoration. The longing will be fulfilled; Paradise is in our future!

The students we teach at Imago shall people Paradise, and it is for this reason that the core of the Imago curriculum is Permanent Things. The Bible teaches us to divide what is into two categories: things which will pass away and things that last forever. Things that will last forever are most worthy of our study. We want children to become well-versed in universal truths against which they can judge all that they see and hear around them.

Toward this end we read and discuss good literature and great writers that talk about ideas which are true for all times and all places. We introduce students to the order and beauty of Creation in science and math. We teach them to understand the flow of history as the consequence of people's choices either to do what is just and good in the light of a true understanding of the human condition or to act on controlling ideas that are false to reality as God has made it. In the arts we seek to help them appreciate and create beautiful things based on a view of beauty that is not merely subjective but is the outworking of principles built into the Creation by the Great Artist.

Is this kind of education practical? Shouldn't we be equipping students to live and earn a living in the so-called "real world"? This is a good question to which I believe we have a good answer. A person can do more for this world if he understands where we came from and where we are going and if he is able to distinguish between temporary and permanent things. C.S. Lewis makes a similar point in *Mere Christianity*:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelists who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because Their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither.

We are right to question the designation of this present world as the "real" world. The real world was Eden and God intends to restore Eden and to restore us to Eden. We are headed for Paradise! Anyone who understands the original plan before the ruin, who knows Eden and something of what it was like, can do more to help restore it than those who see the ruin as normal.

And so every Wednesday morning our little band of restorers and potential restorers sing these words:

Sing, Eden's children, through the night;
See the light still glows through all the worlds and all for you.
The power and print of Paradise
Meet your eyes in all things good and beautiful and true.
Raise the emblems of the Resurrected King,
And into dawn, O Eden's children, sing!

Into dawn, the dawn of a new Eden, the dawn of eternal day in Paradise, O Eden's children, sing!