

to hell in a hand basket is “the prophetic imagination”. The feeling that “all’s well, and since I’m comfortable I don’t need to change anything” is solipsism, which is not only at odds with the prophetic commitment, but failing in the Christian sensitivity to which we all are called.

Challenging students with a divine discontent with things as they are and with a vision of what God intends for us--”on earth as it is in heaven”-- is a major calling for the church. If we don’t find the means and the courage to sound that prophetic bugle call, it won’t be heard, and all the world will be the poorer for it.

For The Crossing ministry staff,

Cecil Findley

*The Crossing seeks partnerships with local congregations, and feels that the church’s ministry in higher education will not be carried out without such joint efforts. It seems apparent to us that efforts such as called for here are an obvious area in which we can work together, drawing people together to discuss the aims, purposes and values of education and its impact upon the lives of students and upon our society. We would love to work with your congregation on such programs. Explore the possibility with us. Let us hear from you.*

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“I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of my people...” Amos 7:8

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## **The Plumb-Line**



A periodic communication for  
The Crossing: A Campus Christian Center  
by Campus Minister, Cecil Findley

## But Where Are the Prophets?

The “Organization Kid” appeared as an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 2001, but I have just caught up with it. It is an account by David Brooks of visiting several campuses, primarily Princeton, and studying the life style and commitments of top students. The superscription over the article summarizes: “The young men and women of America’s future elite work their laptops to the bone, rarely question authority, and happily accept their positions at the top of the heap as part of the natural order of life.”

As Brooks describes their single-minded pursuit of self-improvement, resumé-building and enrichment, he seems to describe the ideal student. I wondered if he were making nominations for sainthood, or at least writing recommendations for an eagle scout or for the young person you hope your son or daughter marries. When Brooks asked students to describe their daily schedules, he said “their replies sounded like a session of *Future Workaholics of America*: crew practice at dawn, classes in the morning, resident-advisor duty, lunch, study groups, classes in the afternoon, tutoring disadvantaged kids, a capella practice, dinner, study, science lab, prayer session, hit the StairMaster, study a few hours more.”

In the midst of the high praise for an admirable group of students, I felt some unease at their total acceptance of authority. While a CEO desiring sycophants for his corporation might be thrilled, I find it chilling to read what Aaron Friedberg, a teacher of international relations, says, “It’s very rare to get a student to challenge anything or to take a position that’s counter to what the professor says.” As Brooks says, “That’s the most common complaint the faculty has of Princeton students. “They’re eager to please, eager to jump through whatever hoops the faculty puts in front of them, eager to conform.”

Indeed, in other ways as well, Brooks’ article is not marked by unremitting praise of this generation of students. He compares them to earlier generations by noting a significant change in the commitment of their universities to intentionally and knowingly educate an elite. In earlier days, they thought it only just and proper that these well-born men (male reference intended) should be at the top of society. Their job was to mold them into gentlemen. That included a self-conscious code of chivalry and a sense of duties and responsibilities. As Brooks goes on, “Now administrators at top-tier schools know they are educating an elite but they seem to feel guilty about the whole notion of elitism and elite status.” Therefore there is no notion of the moral uses of privilege and education, of using one’s best efforts for the good of society. That’s omitted from the curricula and from the students’ ethos.

These students who are articulate in discussing a wide range of subjects and who thus would make interesting partners at a dinner party, are almost tongue-tied at discussion of anything that smacks of moral duty or civic responsibility. This is not surprising, since their educators say that these matters are outside their purview. Perhaps Brooks is right when he suggests that we teach nothing that touches on the larger moral questions, because we have nothing to teach.

In a book published in 1949, but pivotal in the moral thinking of many educators, Sir Walter Moberly wrote in *The Crisis in the University* that students are being graduated from our universities very well trained in their specialties, but “fundamentally uneducated because they have never been caused to exercise their minds on the fundamental questions of life.” They are never asked why they are living, or what or whom they would serve, or what would ultimately make life worth living. They are smart. They have the best education available. But they are “fundamentally uneducated”.

Moberly’s warning from over 50 years ago seems addressed precisely to our present situation. Brooks ends his article thus: “In short, at the top of meritocratic ladder we have in America a generation of students who are extraordinarily bright, morally earnest, and incredibly industrious. They like to study and socialize in groups. They create and join organizations with great enthusiasm. They are responsible, safety-conscious, and mature. They feel no compelling need to rebel—not even a hint of one.” There is no awareness of nor urge to challenge the injustices around us. He goes on say that what one finds, finally, is the “Organization Kid.”

What this means is that the elite students described by David Brooks see nothing seriously wrong with the world as it is, and are beautifully positioning themselves to get their share off the top, albeit often with charity for those who can’t make it as they do. In a world run amok with greed and cheating, violence and war, they find no calling to work to fundamentally change it.

Walter Brueggemann, in *The Prophetic Imagination*, notes both Jeremiah and Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because it is so far out of line with God’s will, and says that without those who grieve over the evils of their society, there is no repentance, no change of direction. That ability to perceive clearly enough to weep over a world going