My mother, Velma Grace Kienel, was a gifted singer of classical Christian music. One of her favorite songs included these words by Herbert Buffem: “It takes the stormclouds to form the rainbow, It takes the nighttime to show the stars.” In other words, without storm clouds and the blackness of night, we would never see the beauty of a rainbow or the majesty of stars.

It is difficult to see anything beautiful or majestic about the current worldwide economic crisis. Large financial institutions are calling on the government to bail them out. The stock market is the worst it has been in decades. The value of real estate is declining, and elderly people are watching their retirement savings disappear. Daunting as all these facts are, in God’s economy of things we may look back years from now and actually see God’s hand in it all. We may even say the economic downturn was a gift to us!

Permit me to share with you how the dark and dismal storm of our present economic crisis may ultimately reveal to us some rainbows and stars we would never otherwise see. The problem with prosperity is that it often produces spiritual complacency and an overall lack of dependency on the Lord. The good news is that in stressful times like those we have now, people race back to God and realign themselves with Him. They read such Bible passages as Isaiah 41:13: “For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’” (NKJV) and Psalm 50:15: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Quite frankly, God is far more interested in our personal devotion to Him than He is with how much money we make and give to His causes. He wants us much more than He wants or even needs our money. There is nothing like an economic crisis, painful as it is, to bring us back to that reality. In times like these we refocus our priorities. We grow in the faith and renew our commitment to the Lord.

I remember as a young man singing in church, sometimes with tears in my eyes, the following chorus by Helen Lemmel: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.” The gift of crisis is that a crisis calls us back to the profound theme of that amazing little song—the things of this earth grow strangely dim in the light of God’s glory and grace. One of the mottos of the Reformation leaders was Post Tenebras Lux: “After Darkness Light.”

**THE GIFT OF CRISIS TO TEACHERS**

I was eight years old when my father died. I was a second grader at the Deer Island School, a public school. I remember going back to school a week after Father died. The principal, Mr. Crab (what a name for a principal!), saw me in the main hallway. He said, “Paul, you have been absent. Where have you been?” He sounded a bit “scoldy.” I said, “My father died.” He walked up to me, putting his hands on my shoulders, and looked me straight in the face and said, “Son, I am so very sorry.” I remember very little about the Deer Island School. I don’t even remember what the names of my teachers were or what they taught me, but I remember every detail about the moment when Mr. Crab said those kind words to me. If the school were still standing (doubtful), I could take you to the very spot in the hall where that act of kindness occurred from a man I respected. I have shared this story many times at teacher conventions, reminding teachers that there are ministry moments when they need to be the voice of God and speak His compassion into the lives of children and young people.

As America’s financial crisis deepens, there will be a growing number of students in our Christian school classrooms who need to hear God’s heart of compassion through us as Christ’s educators. Even now, students are coming to school distressed over their family’s financial losses. They hear the news reports about our nation’s financial crisis—an enormous crisis that is spreading around the world. The gift of crisis for Christian educators is the golden opportunity we have to be a living beacon of hope to our anxious students when they see us; our very countenance should reflect Christ’s love and compassion. Our counsel to them, individually and collectively in the classroom, should be “let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1) and that wonderful psalm “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not
seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37:25).

**THE GIFT OF CRISIS TO ADMINISTRATORS**

You may well ask, If we equate declining enrollment with the blackness of night and the staff reductions that often follow with storm clouds, how can we expect the majesty of stars and rainbows to emerge out of that? or If because of the national economic downturn we go to our annual conventions and the attendance is down, where are the rainbows and stars in that? For those of us who have grown accustomed to the exhilaration of ever-growing numbers, today’s thundering economic crisis may be God’s opportunity to awaken us to a new awareness of just how much we need Him. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves the three following irritating questions:

• Is it possible we have drifted out of range to hear His still, small voice?
• Is it possible we are more interested in the latest business model than we are in our duty as the spiritual leaders of our schools?
• Have we lost sight of the Colossians 1:18 words “that in all things He may have the preeminence” (the theme verse of ACSI)?

I remember in the early years of our Christian school administrator conferences when we ended the first evening in a prayer meeting down on our knees. Second Chronicles 7:14 reminds us, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray …, then I will hear from heaven.” It could well be that God, in His sovereignty, is allowing this crisis to draw us more closely to Himself to prepare us, shape us, and mold us for an even larger vision. Most people are unaware that there were two very large Christian school movements in the past that were many times larger than our Christian school movement today—namely the Early Church Movement and the Reformation Movement. The momentum behind those movements was fueled by one crisis after another much more severe than our crisis today. Is it just possible that God is leading us through some deep waters to test our dependence on Him? Perhaps He is preparing us to be leaders who are empowered with a much larger vision of Christian school education than we now have. The preparation for what God has in mind may take some serious God-dependence training. Note these words from Psalm 119:67, 71: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word… It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees” (NIV).

It is also possible that the hardships ahead will cause the entire evangelical community to become more closely knit. We may see a new synergism, a much higher level of interdependence among Christian schools, Christian colleges, parachurch organizations, and the evangelical churches in general. Why? Because in addition to the mounting economic crisis, there is growing polarization between the evangelical community and the secular world. It doesn’t take a prophet to see that as animosity toward all of us who hold to Christian values intensifies we may well see a growing interdependence at all levels of evangelical ministry. Now more than ever, we absolutely need to avoid isolationism and stay in touch with one another in Christian school ministry. We also need to stay connected to our colleagues in Christian colleges and universities and urge our graduates to attend our own colleges rather than non-Christian institutions, which are steeped in their orthodoxy of secularism. The argument we use to urge students to attend our Christian elementary and secondary schools is the argument we should use to urge our high school graduates to attend evangelical institutions of higher learning.

As you may expect, I have a high regard for the service ministry that ACSI provides. I know these are difficult times financially and there are fees that are associated with membership and with attendance at ACSI events. I would like to make the case that now more than ever we need to stay connected to our colleagues in our schools and to the Christian school movement. I urge you as a supportive and collaborative partner to stay connected to ACSI and its events during these challenging times.

I pray that we will look back years from now and see that the hand of God was in this current crisis and that He used it to bring about His purpose for His kingdom. Remember, “It takes the stormclouds to form the rainbow, It takes the nighttime to show the stars!”

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