

THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

And the Christian University

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THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

What is it for?

Alternative Answers

- ▣ Prepare students for secular professions and careers
- ▣ A good education in an atmosphere of piety and biblical studies
- ▣ Prepare students for church-related vocations
- ▣ Defender of the Faith

Arthur Holmes

- College is for education, the liberal arts college if for a liberal arts education and the Christian college for a Christian education
- Education is a Christian calling
- What is a liberal arts education and how is it affected by a Christian's task or calling?
- [A liberal arts] education has to do with making of persons, A Christian [liberal arts] education the making of Christian persons

On the Goal of Christian Collegiate Education Nicholas Wolterstorff

- ▣ Contemporary Liberal Arts or Humanist Model: Education is for Freedom (Michael Oakshott)
- ▣ Christian Humanism: Christian collegiate education is to free students by initiating them into the Christian mind -- the Christian intellectual tradition

Education in the Humanist, Liberal Arts Tradition (Michael Oakshott)

- ▣ A liberal arts education frees the student from provincial biases and local particularities by initiating the student into the great cultural heritage of humanity
- ▣ To be human is to construe or envision the world in one way or another
- ▣ A human being is an inhabitant of a world of meaning(s) not primarily things

Oakshott on Schooling

- A serious, orderly initiation into an intellectual, imaginative, moral and emotional inheritance
- An engagement to learn by study, requiring effort and discipline
- And requiring a personal transaction between teacher and student
- The schooling takes place in an historic community of teachers and learners, with traditions of its own, evoking loyalties, pieties, and affections, devoted to initiating generations of newcomers into the grandeur and service of being human
- It frees one from the closed-in particularities, social situations, and current contingencies, releasing one to seek truth, beauty, goodness – a constituent of which are new vistas, and new satisfactions one and hitherto, perhaps, never imagined

How is this “freeing” accomplished?

- By virtue of a well-thought how, systematically organized and coherent curriculum
- Call this the core curriculum
- Theology (Old Testament)
- Church History (New Testament)
- Philosophy
- Political Theory and Economics
- Literature (Great Texts)
- Science
- Classical and Modern languages

Jellema's Christian Humanism

- Wolterstorff insists that the theme of liberation is **central** in the Christian humanist model of liberal arts education
- The goal of Christian education is to free students from their particularities by initiating into a more universal or general frameworks of understanding, but it is not **just** that
- **It is to enable the student to think, desire, imagine, will (to live) Christianly**
- What might this mean? My own case

An Augustinian Understanding of Education

- Human life in time is the interaction of the City of God and the City of the World
- Determinative of every civitas, or city/kingdom, is a mind or worldview
- For Jellema, the essence of all choices, is the answer, writ in large letters, to the question who God is.
- Education for Jellema, then, is both a manifestation of the life of some religious kingdom and an initiation into that life

Jellema on Christian Education Once Again

- The goal of Christian education is to initiate the student into the Christian mind - the Christian intellectual tradition
- Students must be freed from thinking with the mind of false gods (perhaps modernity) and led (cultivated or formed) to think with a Christian mind
- To accomplish this, the educator must lead students to converse with those across the ages who have thought with a Christian mind
- As well as to have conversations with historical representatives of those who think with other minds, from which they can learn and against which they must struggle

Alasdair MacIntyre

- Human beings are story-telling animals
- More essentially, we live within stories or narratives
- The Christian story or narrative should be that narrative that provides the ultimate framework of intelligibility for every Christian
- The Christian college or university is the bearer of a grand narrative and a tradition of practices -- Christian educational practices
- A living tradition is a historically extended, socially embodied argument about the goods that constitute the tradition

SO WHAT?

Implications for Union University

Implications for Union University

- ▣ Cultural Task – initiate/inculcate students into Christian intellectual tradition as high culture
- ▣ Counter-Cultural Task – help students recognize and prepare for the counter-cultural nature of their lives in the West (and East)

GOD ON THE QUAD:

How Religious Colleges and the
Missionary Generation Are Changing
America

Naomi Schaefer

- ▣ In an address at Harvard on Class Day, novelist and social satirist, Tom Wolfe, described our time as the era of the “fifth freedom” – freedom from religion
- ▣ At many colleges and universities, the faculties endeavor to “liberate” others from the strictures of orthodox religion and morality

God on the Quad

- Call them the “missionary generation.”
- Young men and women attending religious colleges and universities with a distinctive religious identity (2001-2002)
- Reject the spiritually empty education of secular schools
- Refuse to accept the sophisticated veneer of their contemporaries
- Snub “spiritual” but not “religious” answers to life’s most difficult questions
- Rebuff the moral relativism of peers and faculty

God on the Quad

- ▣ Administrators and faculty of many seriously religious colleges . . . believe they can produce young professionals who will transform the broader secular culture from within
- ▣ Is this aspiration realistic?
- ▣ What kind of education is necessary to achieve such a high aim?
- ▣ Suggested response: the Christian intellectual tradition

FOOLISHNESS TO THE GREEKS

The Gospel and Western Culture

Leslie Newbigin

The purpose of the book is to give an account of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and the culture (the whole way of seeing, thinking and living) that is shared by the peoples of Europe and North America, their colonial and cultural off-shoots, and the growing company of educated leaders in the cities of the world – the culture which those of us who share it usually describe as modern (and Western)

What is involved in the communication of the gospel across a cultural frontier?

- Communication must be expressed in the language of the receptor culture – thus one must master the language of the receptor culture. One must drawn masterfully on the culture to which one speaks, rendering one's message as best as one can (knowing that there is no perfect translation).
- Eventually, it will call into questions some aspects of the receptor culture's self-understanding.
- The final, radical conversion is the work of God, not our own.

THE RECEPTOR CULTURE --

Modern, Western Culture

What are its primary intellectual traditions?

- ▣ Emotivism/subjectivism/relativism with Respect to Morality and Religion
- ▣ Political Liberalism (from Hobbes to Rawls and beyond)
- ▣ Science, too include scientism (positivistic and reductionistic)

CENTRAL FEATURE OF WESTERN CULTURE

Sharp divide between public and
private, fact and value

Missionary's Challenge

- ▣ The dichotomy between the private and the public is an essential feature of Western Culture (the modern, nation-states in the West).
- ▣ Why this came to be and what alternatives are available is an essential part of the education of the missionary (the student of the Christian college).

Our Challenge

We are the product of the Western Culture, and its education, both formal and informal. How can there be a genuine encounter of the gospel with Western Culture, a culture which has been birthed and nurtured by Western Christendom? From whence comes the voice that speaks its own language and yet confronts it with the authentic gospel – the authentic figure of a crucified and risen and living Christ?

One possible answer – from the communities who are called Christian universities and colleges

MISSIONARY'S CULTURE:

Biblically-based and centered Christian culture (seeing, thinking, living) – an expression of the Christian intellectual tradition

Newbiggin

- One of the characteristic responses of the Western churches, especially Protestant churches, to the fact/value distinction is to withdraw into the private sphere of value or opinion.
- “The result is not merely a secular culture but a pagan culture, and its paganism, born out of a resistance to Christianity, is much more resistant to the gospel than pre-Christianity forms of paganism.”

Newbiggin

- A missionary encounter with our culture must bring us face-to-face with the central citadel(s) of our culture
- This is the belief that based on the immense achievements of the scientific method, and to a limited but increasing extent, embodied in our political, social, and economic practices, the belief that the real world is a world that is to be understood in terms of material and efficient causes and not final causes -- Naturalism
- Thus we inhabit a public world that is not understood in terms of intelligible purposes and ends, a world in which the answer to the question of what is good is left to each individual and cannot be included in the body of accepted facts that control public life – Liberalism, subjectivism, emotivism, individualism (Sheilaism)

SOUL-SEARCHING: THE RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIVES OF AMERICAN TEENAGERS

Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist
Denton

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

- A god exists who creates and orders the universe and watches over people.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and in most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- God is not particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to solve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.

More on American Teenagers

- After conducting over 3000 interviews with American teenagers, the researchers reported that when asked to respond to crucial questions about faith or culture, they responded “whatever.”
- For most teens, “nobody has to do anything in life, including anything to do with religion.”
- “‘Whatever’ is just fine, if that is what a person wants.” Lack of aspiration or sense of vocation
- ‘Whatever’ is a cover for emotivism or relativism -
-non-judgmentalism (no one is wrong; everyone is o.k.)

Two core elements of MTD

- ▣ Central to living a good happy life is being a good moral person -- this is a function of being nice, pleasant, respectful and responsible
- ▣ The principle benefits of a moral and religious life
 - Feeling good about oneself
 - Being Happy or self-satisfied
 - Being able to live amiably with others

What God is, according to MTD

- ▣ Creator
- ▣ Nice grandfather or uncle or elderly neighbor
- ▣ Divine Butler
- ▣ Cosmic Therapist

What God is not

- ▣ Trinitarian God of Christianity
- ▣ Incarnate Jesus the Christ
- ▣ The One who speaks through, Moses, the prophets and the Torah
- ▣ And through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

What MTD is not about

- ▣ Repentance from sin
- ▣ Sabbath keeping
- ▣ Living as a servant of a Triune God
- ▣ Living within a community of fellow believers shaped by the disciplined practices of worship, prayer, confession, suffering and self-sacrifice

Where did these teenagers acquire their allegiance to MTD

- ▣ Their parents and extended families
- ▣ Their churches
- ▣ The wider culture

Summary:

- ▣ Union attracts a lot of students (and faculty) who recognize the deformities/malformities of the dominant culture and have a missionary zeal (or come from families who do) for transforming (a form of engagement) the culture
- ▣ As missionaries, we must learn how to think about the malformed culture in its own terms and well as in Christian terms (Christianly)

How will Union prepare students to be missionaries – witnesses to this culture?

Immerse them in the Christian intellectual tradition, both its cognitive and non-cognitive elements

This involved both curricular and non-curricular activities and practices

THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

Engaging the Culture

“Mining” the Christian Intellectual Narrative in Christian Education

- ▣ Big, Honking Tradition
- ▣ How to organize the material -- persons, ideas, historical periods, kind of content, etc.?

Beaty's suggestion

- ▣ Christians must talk about a lot of smart, creative people who were not shaped by God's revelatory and reconciling work through Israel and the Church
 - Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Aristotle, Confucius, Buddha, etc
 - Must be fair to the smart creative person, such as Plato (can speak in Platonic language)
 - Must be capable of a Christian interpretation

Beaty's Suggestion

- ▣ Those who are consciously, intentionally Christian and engaging the Culture
 - Desert Fathers and Mothers, Clement of Alexander, Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, Aquinas, Chaucer, Dante, Michelangelo, Bach, Brahms, Donne, Austen, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre
 - How to let them speak for themselves
 - While appropriately “mining” their work for our Christian cultural and counter-cultural work

Beatty's Suggestion

- ▣ The Cultured Despisers of Religion – Especially Christianity
 - Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Dawkins, Hitchens, etc
 - Where are they right in their criticisms or critique? What can we learn from them?
 - Where do they get it wrong?

Virtuous Pagans

▣ Socrates

- ▣ The Unexamined Life is not worth living; the unexamined life is somehow defective
 - ▣ Naïve
 - ▣ Cowardly – all too willing to accept the conventional, and status quo
 - ▣ Lacking attention to one's life (Simone Weil): either lazy or distracted (acedia)
 - ▣ Failing to fully realize one's divinely ordained, human potential, and the imago dei in each of us

More on Socrates

- ▣ Meno, Republic, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo
- ▣ Three Main Themes
 - Love of Wisdom is love of the Good
 - Vocation or Calling (God at Delphi)
 - Conversion (Especially clear in the Cave scene in the Republic)
- ▣ Pedagogical Goals
 - Unsettle but inspire students with Socrates as moral exemplar – the morally good person
 - Socratic Method of inquiry and dialogue
 - Compare to life, death and resurrection of Jesus

Mining Platonic Thought: Four Observations

- ▣ Confirms scriptural teaching (Paul in Romans) about reason's power to discern God, but limitation in fully comprehending or speaking of God (Republic, Timaeus)
- ▣ Provides a rationally and provocative narrative on behalf of the humble wisdom-lovers aspiration "to see" God (Republic, Symposium)
- ▣ Prepares the mind to embrace the gospel (Augustine)
- ▣ Offers a philosophically rich vocabulary useful in the theological articulation of the Christian faith

Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics

- ▣ An great text of depth, insight, philosophical rigor and genuine wisdom
- ▣ Nonetheless, a text from an ethically alien culture
- ▣ Throughout, one finds points of contact with Christian ethical concerns
- ▣ To discuss the points of contact will illumine similarities and stark contrasts, conflicts
- ▣ Especially if read in dialogue with NT

Examples

- ▣ Aristotle -- Human Happiness is impossible/incomplete without contemplation of God, but God neither created nor cares about the world and its creatures; loving one's neighbor is not a virtue and not essential to contemplation of God
- ▣ New Testament – One cannot know God without loving one's neighbor; Jesus “Feed my sheep” “What you do to the least of these . . .”

More Examples

- ▣ The possession and exercise of virtues are central to Aristotle's ethics and prominent in the New Testament, but the list of virtues in each only partially overlap and some Aristotelian virtues are vices in NT and vice versa (humility is a virtue in NT and vice in NE)
- ▣ Aristotle stresses that we acquire virtues via habituation; NT calls virtues "fruits of the spirit" and expects some people to acquire a virtue via the work of the holy spirit, all at once

And More

- ▣ Aristotle expects some people to be perfected in virtue; because of sin the NT does not, yet the NT urges us to seek to be perfect as our Lord was perfect
- ▣ Aristotle's ethics assumes a well-ordered polis or city as a necessary condition of moral perfection; NT recognizes this ideal but does not expect any other city to be such, rather the Church is the Christian's most immediate polis – indeed, in terms of earthly city, we Christians are resident aliens.

Aristotle on the Best Life

- ▣ Self-sufficiency as opposed to dependency
- ▣ Agency as opposed to dependency
- ▣ Power over others
- ▣ Superiority over others
- ▣ Friendship with the best

Another Example: Friendship

- ▣ Aristotle gives a central place to a kind of love he calls *philia*; NT to a kind of love it identifies as *agape*
- ▣ On Aristotle's view, genuine friendship requires reciprocity among equals. Thus, no human being could be a friend of God; yet Christ calls his disciples friends, despite neither equality nor reciprocity.

The Desert Christians

- ▣ Knowledge is not sufficient: Wisdom and holiness (imitation of Christ) is the aim
- ▣ Wisdom is a deeper knowing that combines the cognitive, experiential, the spiritual and the practical
- ▣ It is cultivated with one's whole life, requiring the desert Christians to be harshly honest with themselves (cultivate self-knowledge) and to subject themselves to some one superior, as an athlete submits oneself to a coach or mentor.
- ▣ Self-knowledge and submission to others (the Abba/ Amma, the community, the desert) requires humility
- ▣ The Scriptures are to be lived, not merely memorized or read daily – yet, one never masters the Living Word.

Augustine's Confessions

- ▣ Exemplar of someone who articulates and lives within a biblically-based, but philosophically sensitive Christian construal of the world
- ▣ Exemplifies the convergence of Socrates and the Desert Christians attentive concern: critical and self-reflective attention to the quality, both interior and exterior, of one's life – a moral and religious/spiritual concern
- ▣ Exemplifies that such “work” is both easy and hard
- ▣ Superior philosophical and theological reflections and rhetorical / literary qualities (A really great text)

Aquinas's "On Evil"

- ▣ “Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you might discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Paul, Romans 12:2)
- ▣ Desert Christians took this admonition seriously and insisted that we must learn to notice the subtle distortions of our thoughts and passions, and to trace these distortions back into the disordered culture around us.

Eight evil thoughts or The Seven Deadly Sins

- ▣ Evagrius discusses “eight evil thoughts” as sources of spiritual immaturity and moral failure – defects with respect to our telos of loving God and our neighbor
- ▣ John Cassian reported that Abba Serapion discussed “eight principle vices that attack mankind”
- ▣ St. Thomas Aquinas reduced them to seven capital vices

Intro to Ethics: The Seven Deadly Sins

- ▣ Course taught by Dr. Robert Kruschwitz at Baylor
- ▣ Introduces students to the rich Christian moral and spiritual reflection (philosophical, psychological, spiritual) behind Aquinas' (The Christian intellectual tradition's) use of seven capital vices (deadly sins) – words/concepts we need to identify the distortions of love of God and neighbor – both within ourselves our neighbor

Kruschwitz on Teaching the Seven Capital Vices

- ▣ “Begun by Desert Christians pioneering a new form of community and nurtured by radical saints from Benedict to John Bunyan, the tradition still tugs us toward honest circumspection when the Church has become too cozy with culture and an Empire is collapsing around us.”
- ▣ “Reflecting on the capital vices isn’t for navel-gazers seeking inner purity, but for all who desire to love as God loves.”

Why retrieve the Christian Intellectual Tradition?

- ▣ Because a Christian liberal arts education is to cultivate Christian persons
- ▣ Christians who can construe the world – think and live – Christianly
- ▣ It is for the formation and transformation of persons – Christian persons
- ▣ It is to assist us into becoming the kinds of persons who “love as God loves.”