RELIGIO ET ERUDITIO

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Unite the pair so long disjoin'd,
Knowledge and vital Piety:
Learning and Holiness combined,
And Truth and Love, let all men see,
In those who up to Thee we give, Thine,
wholly thine, to die and live.
—Charles Wesley[1]

For most of Union University's history, its motto—*Religio et Eruditio*—appears to have exerted little influence on the institution's self-understanding. In fact, Union archivists have no record whatsoever of the motto's adoption. It first appears on diplomas and other official University documents in 1927, just two years after a process of consolidation of Tennessee Baptist colleges culminated in the formal chartering of Union.[2] From this year forward, the motto appears on seals and stationery but never exerts more than a quiet presence until 1999, when, in his fall Convocation address, President David S. Dockery invoked the motto to support his commitment of Union University to the project of integrating faith and learning.[3] The long silence between the motto's unheralded appearance and its sudden reassertion invites several questions: Why was this motto originally adopted? Does the phrase mean the

same today as it would have meant in the early twentieth century? How might this motto guide the University as it continues to grow into the future so compellingly imagined in Dockery's book *Renewing Minds*? Let us, then, ponder the meaning of *religio et eruditio* for the past and present, as well as the future of Union University.

A BRIEF LATIN LESSON

Before we consider the meaning of this phrase in the life of Union University, we will attend to the possibilities for meaning that inhere in the phrase itself. It is comprised of a simple conjunction, in Latin, of two abstract nouns that derive from verbs. *Religio* is, of course, the Latin word behind our English cognate, "religion." In ancient usage, the word seems to have referred primarily to the practice of religion and secondarily to religious beliefs. Recent scholars, along with ancient witnesses such as Lucretius, Augustine, and Lactantius, trace this noun form to the verb *religare*, to bind or bind back. This lineage would help explain *religio*'s strong connection to sacred duties and obligations, whether moral or ceremonial. Interestingly, an alternate philological tradition, attested by Cicero and Aulus Gellius, derives *religio* from *relegere*, to reread. On this account, religions are necessarily communities devoted to the teachings of master and thus to the frequent reading of those teachings.[4]

The etymology of *eruditio* is both less controversial and more colorful. Both in English and in Latin, this word means education, but the word contains within itself an interesting perspective on the nature of education. *Eruditio* derives from the verb *erudire* (to educate) which in turn is formed by the addition of the prefix *e-* ("out of" or "away from") to the adjective *rudis*: raw, rough, crude, or unformed. Thus *erudire* means to polish, to refine, to remove the rough edges from something, and is often used of coins or of sculpture. Education, on this view, centers upon the transformation of character, and the transmission of knowledge or skills is instrumental and, therefore, secondary.[5] To put it into modern parlance, it involves taking the country out of the boy, whether or not the boy is taken out of the country.

The third and most easily overlooked element of this phrase is the *et*, a simple coordinating conjunction. While the *et* may seem the least ambiguous element in the phrase, it is far from so. Because *et*, like its English cousin "and," has a wide range of meanings, it tells us very little about how *religio* and *eruditio* might be related. For all we know, they might be related by temporal or causal procession, by shared concerns or rival enmities. The only options ruled out by the *et* are the complete destruction of one by the other or the complete identity of one with the other. Put differently, the history of the meaning of this motto will be the history of how we should construe the *et*, as well as the various understandings of erudition and religion in play.

KNOWLEDGE SERVING PIETY

What might *religio et eruditio* have meant to those who first claimed it as Union's motto? Since the Union University archives tell us very little about the adoption of the motto or its subsequent use prior to 1999, we will have to look elsewhere to think about what this couplet might have meant for prior generations. Duke University adopted a similar motto—*Erudtio et Religio*—in 1859, and its archivists suggest that the motto has its roots in the antebellum Methodist hymnal. Charles Wesley's hymn, "Sanctified Knowledge," expresses in its third stanza a longing to "Unite the pair so long disjoin'd,/Knowledge and vital Piety." Given Duke's founding as a church-sponsored college, it seems plausible that its Methodist patrons may have looked to the rich tradition of Wesleyan hymnody, Methodism's most widely admired gift to the church universal, for its motto. Even the ordering of each pair, knowledge/erudition followed by piety/religion, seems to confirm this hunch. Let us, then, look closely at the hymn text to see what light it might shed on the understanding of this couplet in the past.

The next lines of "Sanctified Knowledge" gloss the original pairing through psalm-like parallelism: "Learning and Holiness" and "Truth and Love" restate and clarify what is meant in the conjunction of "Knowledge and vital Piety." The pattern that unfolds in the third stanza implies that knowledge and piety belong to two

distinct categories of human activity: "learning" is the means to "knowledge" which has "truth" as its proper end, while "piety" cultivates "holiness," the substance of which is "love." Behind this distinction may lay an awareness of the different institutional contexts in which these activities typically take place (school and church) or the different psychological "faculties" which correspond to these activities (the head and the heart). In any case, Wesley seems not to have thought of these two activities as essentially opposed to one another; if he had, no hope for reuniting these disjoined partners would remain.

Whence, then, the disjunction? On the basis of this hymn alone, it is difficult to tell what, if anything, Wesley might have wanted to say in answer to this question. From the perspective of theological anthropology, the corruption of the will through original and actual sin must play a role,[6] but the hymn text gives us little in this regard. Only the implicit lament of "so long" suggests anything along these lines. We may be tempted to read into the hymn a disjunction originating from the wound inflicted by the historical crisis of faith in early modern Europe and consummated in the Enlightenment, but Wesley likely would not have thought of it in these terms. As the former Dean of Duke's chapel, Sam Wells, points out, Wesley penned this hymn well before the distinctively modern rift between reason and religion had reached its current width: "Wesley knew no Scopes trial, he knew no Darwin, he knew no Big Bang theory, he knew no First Amendment."[7]

Instead, Wesley seems to have taken the disjunction not as an historical enmity but a created fact. Head and heart simply are fitted for different tasks. What is known does not, in and of itself, shape one's feelings.[8] The goal of Christian sanctification is, in part, to conform one's affective life to the truth as revealed in Christ. Rightly-ordered affections are crucial to the Christian life because without them we would be hearers only of the Word and not doers also. No hospitals are founded without a love for mercy, no orphanages without a love of kindness, no soup kitchens without a love of justice. This union of knowledge and affection in service seems to be precisely what Wesley had in mind by titling

the hymn "Sanctified Knowledge." Knowledge, for Wesley, is made holy when it is put to holy purposes, when God's people love justice and mercy and use their knowledge in service of this love. Perhaps Wesley is hereby invoking and transforming the ancient metaphor of despoiling the Egyptians.[9] Whereas Origen and Augustine had thought of making intellectual and rhetorical use of the riches of pagan learning, Wesley imagines the gold of knowledge deployed in the concrete service of the neighbor. The popularity of service-learning in church-related college and universities today testifies to the enduring power of his vision.

At the same time, this vision has proven vulnerable to any number of forces. For example, as the twentieth century witnessed the increase of stridently anti-religious ideas and commitments within universities, the morally or theologically neutral character of knowledge became suspect. While pietism offered excellent direction for the use of knowledge, it offered precious few resources to Christians who wanted to resist the corrosive effect of modern and late modern thought. *Eruditio*, it seems, needs more than pious intentions or sentiments to remain faithful.

INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING

Precisely for this reason, talk of *religio et eruditio* in recent decades has taken a form different from that of the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century discourse on the subject. Reflecting a general evolution within American evangelicalism away from Methodist-style pietism and toward a more typically Reformed intellectualism, discussions of faith and learning in the second half of the twentieth century came to center upon the metaphor of integration. This agenda for relating *religio* and *eruditio* arose from a growing awareness of the situated character of all of rationality. That is, all thinking begins from a perspective, a point of view, which is shaped by history, language, education, and religion. This stereotypically "postmodern" note was sounded in the early part of the twentieth-century by Dutch Reformed intellectuals, both here and on the Continent, who made use of the neo-Romantic idea of *worldview* to describe the perspectival character of all knowledge.[10]

This breakthrough made possible a greater confidence on the part of Christian intellectuals, and for obvious reasons: If all knowing is historically situated, if there is no such thing as timeless Reason, then we need not defer to secular academics as the infallible standard of rationality. When the truths of faith, as propositional statements, conflict with the dictates of secular reason, we are not compelled to discard the former as untrue. Instead, we can interrogate and critique the differing epistemological frameworks and intellectual methodologies which underlie the conflict of interpretations.

In *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, George Marsden went a step further. In addition to encouraging Christians to enter fearlessly the lists of academe, he also made a plea to the secular academy for greater openness to ideas held on Christian grounds. Appealing to widely shared notions of epistemological perspectivism, Marsden argued that, in the absence of a final, mutually agreeable criterion against which to judge competing worldviews, all worldviews should be welcomed around the academic seminar table.[11] The perceived results of this book were immediate and astonishing: within a year, the University of Illinois at Chicago's College of Arts and Sciences, under the leadership of Stanley Fish, had established a chair of Catholic Studies with the intent of building an entire program of theologically informed study within this public state university.[12] Though Fish is no confessing Christian, he saw the need to take religion seriously, not only as an academic subject but as a worldview which rivals the truth claims of secular reason.[13]

The integration strategy of relating *religio* and *eruditio* has won us a hearing with religion's cultured despisers, and it has provided at least two generations of Christian academics with weapons, tactics, and courage for battling their intellectual foes. However, this strategy has also been implicated in the balkanization of the late twentieth-century Culture Wars[14] and in the gnostic consumerism of late modern American evangelicalism.[15] It has left many wondering whether we have improved our lot as Christians, or as academics, by being simply one more clamoring voice in the

pandemonium of the multicultural university, whether we may have sold our birthright for a mess of pottage.

BELONGING AND BECOMING

Such suspicions lead us back to the motto for further guidance. The phrase *religio et eruditio* contains the possibility of at least one more way of relating faith and learning, this time through a focus on the etymology of those two words.

According to one way of tracing the word's history, *religio* means "to bind back." More precisely, it means a set of practices that aim at nurturing a sense of belonging and obligation to a place, a people, a way of life. On this account, any number of events are "religious," even though they do not take place in a sanctuary: harvest festivals, state fairs, homecomings, and Independence Day parades, for example, all serve this kind of function. According to Wendell Berry, American higher education needs more of this kind of religion. As a poet and novelist who gave up a career teaching creative writing to return to the farmlands of his Kentucky childhood, Berry has much to say about contemporary educational practice. "The Mad Farmer from Kentucky" has argued for some years now that higher education is complicit in the destruction of the fabric of American social life: higher education takes students away from rural communities and teaches them skills only of use in urban settings, thus guaranteeing a continual drain of people, and therefore life, away from these increasingly fragile communities:

> Our children are educated, then, to leave home, not to stay home, and the costs of this education have been far too little acknowledged. . . . As the children depart, generation after generation, the place loses the memory of itself, which is its history and its culture.[16]

The resulting vulnerability of depopulated communities, coupled with the challenging economics of small-scale agriculture, makes them less able to resist the buy-outs offered by agribusiness interests, which further contribute to the ruination of an entire way of

life. Whether Berry's charges against academia are driven more by nostalgia than by analysis is debatable, but he is nonetheless correct that our higher education system has a centrifugal trajectory: children begin at the center of the communities into which they are born, only to be flung far afield through the accelerating forces of college and, ultimately, corporate demands for a mobile, rootless workforce.

Berry invites us, instead, to imagine education more religiously, that is, with a purpose and goal of educating students to return to their native communities. Such an education would impart "a love of learning and of the cultural tradition and of excellence—and this love cannot exist, because it makes no sense, apart from the love of a place and a community."[17] What would it look like if Union University were to offer an education *for* West Tennessee or *for* the Mid-South more generally? This will be a difficult question to answer for at least one reason: Every faculty member at Union is the product of the universalizing, urbanizing, and de-particularizing education lamented by Berry. Nonetheless, the experiment is worth the effort. Likely a local education would require increasingly sustained engagement between campus and community: Sociology faculty and students addressing the plight of the urban poor here and in Memphis, Political Science faculty and students in local political campaigns or in grassroots organizing, or MBA students providing *pro bono* consultation for local small business. Hopefully it would also involve a core curriculum and pedagogy aimed at developing a self-reflexive and therefore critical appreciation of Southern culture, including its music (especially bluegrass here in Jackson), cuisine, and customs. What else might an education *for* West Tennessee or *for* the Mid-South entail? I hope Union faculty and administration will give some sustained attention to this question.

But Union must also answer another question: What about the other "place" and people to which we belong? As a Christian university, Union also belongs to the communion of saints, believers of all times and places who have been drawn together by the grace of their Savior to worship the Triune God. As President Dockery

noted in his 2011 convocation address: "To be part of this Christian community does not just take us back to 1823, to the founding of Union University, but it connects us with the earliest followers of Jesus Christ and with other believers over the past 2,000 years . . . and provides a powerful sense of history and perspective regarding our identity."[18] What might it look like to provide a college education *for* the communion of saints? Of course it will involve training our students to see their work in light of God's unfolding Kingdom. Surely it will involve sharing with our students the riches of the Christian intellectual and practical traditions: Athanasius on the Incarnation, Augustine on the Trinity, Aquinas on virtue, Luther on grace, Bonhoeffer on discipleship. Hopefully it will mean making use of these riches in our own work as scholars and as teachers. Perhaps Union faculty will develop pedagogies that make use of the best traditions of spiritual formation. Moreover, we may learn, under the tutelage of those that have gone before us, to think in ways that respond to both the canons of our disciplines and the Canon of Scripture. What else might an education *for* the communion of saints entail? I invite the Union community to devote significant time and attention to this question, as well.

One might worry that a curriculum designed for a particular place and people might suffer from parochialism, that a local education would necessarily be narrow at best or xenophobic at worst. Such a danger certainly exists, and therein lays the wisdom of pairing *religio* with *eruditio*. Recall that *eruditio*, at root, means taking something that is raw or rough and transforming it into something beautiful or useful through craft. A stone turned into sculpture, metal ore turned into a coin, sounds turned into music all are examples of *eruditio*. Education as *eruditio* starts with the premise that students come to us needing (and presumably wanting) to become something more than they currently are. Higher education certainly has the effect of transforming students, as Berry laments and as any parent can attest who has welcomed a stranger upon a son or daughter's return from college for Christmas break. The pairing of *eruditio* with *religio*, however, forces us to acknowledge that not all kinds of transformation are salutary. At the same

time, students leave their native communities precisely to come to college, to enter another community of formation than the one in which they were raised. Since transformation will happen, we certainly need to be thoughtful about the kinds of transformative experiences we prepare and encourage for our students.

One kind of transformation that can be alternately salutary or crippling is what academic professionals now refer to as the acquisition of a global perspective. Study abroad programs become more popular with each passing year, and I confess that my chief regret about my undergraduate years is that I did not take advantage of such programs at my *alma mater*. The key educational benefit to such programs is their capacity to awaken students to the contingencies of their local communities and the perspectives formed therein. Local customs that seem transparently necessary for the healthy functioning of society suddenly become merely conventional or even questionable when confronted with the contrasting mores of another country. When I have taken Union students to Italy, they often remark about how much time Italians spend at table. Food, and the sociality occasioned by it, is indeed central to Italian culture, and this feature stands in marked contrast to our drive-thru, heat-n-eat, on-the-go fast food culture. What at first strikes them as odd and extravagant about Italians eventually raises questions about the largely unhealthy and antisocial aspects of American food culture, a reversal which creates in at least some students an ongoing commitment to be more thoughtful about their relationship to their food. These benefits are the unquantifiable but nonetheless tangible outcome of cross-cultural or international experiences, and while these can be salutary, they can also have a deleterious effect. Students who have returned from an experience of Italian food culture might well return with a slash-and-burn skepticism about everything related to American food culture. In discovering the contingency of their own native pieties, they might, in a moment of Cartesian excess, throw all local customs out the window. Put differently, study abroad can produce the sort of cosmopolitanism that has less to do with being a citizen of the world than with being a citizen of no place in particular.

Thus *religio* needs *eruditio* to prevent it from lolling into a sleepy parochialism, but *eruditio* needs *religio* to keep it grounded, accountable, and responsible. As we move deeper into the twenty-first century, institutions that learn how to practice both *eruditio* and *religio* will provide students with a truly meaningful education and society with a truly meaningful service.

A CHRIST-LIKE UNION

Finally, we come to the *et*. In the fifth century when the church was struggling to work out the consequences of confessing that Jesus is not only a human being but also the second person of the Trinity, a council of bishops met at Chalcedon to think through how divinity and humanity could both subsist in one person. To their credit, they crafted a definition that did not prescribe dogmatically a specific understanding of the relation; instead they chose to set some boundaries within which a valid answer would have to be found. An orthodox Christology, the bishops decided, must affirm Christ's divine and human natures "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." As we contemplate the union of *religio et eruditio* in the project of higher education, and especially at Union University, we would be wise to follow in their footsteps. We should be on guard lest *eruditio* be reduced to *religio*, as fundamentalists tend to do; nor should we allow *religio* to be reduced to *eruditio*, as it is among liberal Protestants. We must allow each to do its own proper work in cooperation and tension with the other. Within the space bounded by these admonitions, there is a great deal of room, enough to accommodate all three of the models noted above. In the house of the "divine 'and'," [19] there are many rooms.

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(Endnotes)

1 Charles Wesley, "Hymn 461, For Children" in T*he Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, eds. Franz Hiderbrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983; reprint Nashville: Abingdon Press), 7:643-44.

2 My thanks to Andrew Norman for his research on the motto in the Union University archives.

3 The text of the original address can be found online:http://www.uu.edu/dockery/convocationfall99.htm. Dockery subsequently revised and expanded the address to become chapter 5 of his *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

4 Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "religio." See also Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 1.

5 *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "erudition." The older East Coast tradition of "finishing schools" may reflect something of this idea. Behind that, one can trace the lineage of education as erudition to Newman's ideals on liberal arts education as the formation of the gentleman: see John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

6 Wesley was closer to Aquinas than to Calvin on this point.

7 Rev. Dr. Sam Wells, "*Eruditio et Religio*," a sermon preached in Duke Chapel, 4 Oct 2009. The text of the sermon is available online: http://www.chapel.duke.edu/documents/sermons/Oct4EruditioetReligio.pdf.

8 One might think here of Kant's famous dictum: "reason is poorly suited to promote the happiness of a rational being."

9 The despoliation motif was introduced by Origen in his third-century "Letter to Gregory" and alludes to Exodus 12.35-36. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2.151.

10 For a more complete account of these developments, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

11 George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford, 1998).

12 I do not know whether Fish read Marsden, but the historical correlation alone is noteworthy.

13 In a later op-ed piece entitled, "One University Under God?" Fish argues that, on secular liberal grounds, religion must be taken seriously as a contender for truth (*New York Times*, 7 January 2005).

14 See, e.g., Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, eds., *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford Unviersity Press, 2004), esp. ch. 1.

15 See, e.g., James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), esp. Introduction and ch. 1.

16 Wendell Berry, "The Work of Local Culture," in *What are People For?* (New York: North Point/Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1990), pp. 153-69, esp. 164-65.

17 Ibid., p. 164.

18 David S. Dockery, Fall Convocation address, 26 August 2011.

19 Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, p. 74.