The Passionate Intellect

Jens Zimmermann

Christian university administrators like to talk about the integration of faith and learning, of developing a distinctly Christian mind. In actual practice, however, developing a Christian mind often turns out to be some kind of schizophrenic experience for students, with professors supplying specialized knowledge in their fields and some other pastoral staff, such as student life, taking on the responsibility of the students' spiritual formation. It is hard to see how yet another well-meant professional development session for faculty or students on integrating faith and learning will lead anywhere when most have already been trained to regard spirituality and academic research as mutually exclusive. At the same time that Christian universities typically pursue this self-destructive strategy, many continue to advertise themselves as islands of safety from the world, on which students are taught to think counter-culturally in order to become Christian missionaries to their culture.

The roots of the university in the West are Christian, and the current educational crisis requires a Christian solution. Such a solution, however, requires a different Christianity from the one currently peddled in many of our so-called Christian colleges.

Yet are Christian universities really different? I believe that they are not but that, in effect, they have accommodated culture much more than they know or care to admit. I have often dared students to challenge their university administrators at meetings to present them with their vision of a Christian liberal arts university and its mission for the world. Some have

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reported back that so challenged, most administrators could not respond adequately to their question. That’s not surprising, though, because their secular counterparts are in the same boat. The fact is that we find in secular universities exactly the same general loss of purpose for education as we do in many Christian institutions. Whether this statement sounds alarmist depends on how seriously one takes the role of education in society, for it simply remains true that most institutions have long forgotten the purpose of their existence. This is why any serious discussion of faith and learning among Christians has to begin with a hard look at the general culture of learning in which Christian institutions inevitably participate. Why is it, for example, that all too often neither Christian nor secular institutions can explain how the academic disciplines work together? Why is it that in Christian and secular universities the arts and humanities are equally looked down upon as an impractical luxury? Why has education in both cases been mostly reduced to information gathering for the narrow goal of getting jobs in pursuit of social advancement and technological progress?

This reduction of knowledge to skill and the common inability to envision universities as shapers of cultural values (rather than their mirrors) stems from a basic dualism between faith and reason at the heart of Western culture which refuses to die and which continues to foster a cultural attitude that separates passion from intellect, religion from rationality, indeed, experience from reflection. I will argue that the best way to address this situation is through the recovery of the passion which originally fuelled the ideals of Christian education, namely the passion of a Christian humanism flowing from the incarnation of God for the redemption of creation. The roots of the university in the West are Christian, and the current educational crisis requires a Christian solution. Such a solution, however, requires a different Christianity from the one currently peddled in many of our so-called Christian colleges.

This recovery of educational ideals depends on retrieving the Christian root of reason as the personal Logos, the creating wisdom of God. Returning to this Christian root of education, we will find that a passionate intellect embodies both the primary meaning of the word passion as suffering in the sense of undergoing or enduring something, and its secondary meaning of therefore being emotionally attached to a subject and willing to endure adversity for its sake. Rekindling this passionate intellect requires above all the recovery of the incarnation as the foundation for Christian education. I am suggesting, in other words, that nothing less than a revolution of Christian culture is required. Only a complete change in our intellectual climate through the retrieval of Christian humanism, as advocated by such early church fathers as Irenaeus and Augustine, can startle Christians out of their apathetic complicity in the dualism of faith and reason which continues
to undermine any higher purpose for Christian and secular postsecondary institutions. To substantiate this claim, I will first offer a brief overview of our current intellectual culture. This will require some patience on the reader’s part, but only with a clear understanding of the current cultural context of education can we then proceed to recover a Christian view of the intellect. Thus in the second part of the essay, I will then suggest one strategy to recover a Christian, incarnational view of reason as the basis for the passionate intellect that originally motivated Christian education.

THE CRISIS OF REASON IN WESTERN CULTURE

The combination of intellectual, political, and popular culture commonly referred to as “The West,” is currently undergoing a massive identity crisis.¹ What amounts to a crisis of reason in Western culture manifests itself in two ways. The first is a loss of cultural identity accompanied by the West’s consequent failure to mount a convincing defense of its values in light of current global developments. The second symptom of this crisis is the loss of a clear goal for the education of its citizens. For a change, the whistle blowers on this crisis are not Christians but for the most part secular thinkers.

The voice of Terry Eagleton, a prominent Marxist cultural critic, is representative of other cultural critics, intellectuals, and politicians in his assessment that political pressures force the West “more and more to reflect on the foundations of its own civilization” at a time when we have lost the ability to think deeply.² According to Eagleton, postmodernity has rightly criticized naïve and oppressive notions of universal reason, but it has also left us without any common ground for a universal sense of human dignity. Yet world events require that we discuss human nature in terms of universal purpose and ask once again, in all seriousness, “What is the function of human beings? What are human beings for?”³ Science cannot help us to answer this question. In fact, biotechnology’s progress rather contributes to our uncertainty concerning an essential humanity. In his recent book entitled On The Human Condition, French philosopher Dominique Janicaud confirms that Western culture is currently marked by an “unprecedented uncertainty about human identity.”⁴

This loss of common ground has also impacted Western educational ideals and their institutions. Jean Baudrillard, an important postmodern cultural critic, writes in his book Simulacra and Simulation about the loss of purpose in university education and the consequent fragmentation of disciplines. Designating the contemporary culture of knowledge as a “spiraling cadaver,” he concludes that “the university is in ruins; nonfunctional in the social arenas of the market and employment, lacking cultural substance or an end purpose of knowledge.”⁵ He argues that
since we have lost an ultimate unifying reason for knowledge, especially for knowledge of seemingly impractical values such as truth, justice, goodness, and beauty, we no longer know why we should invest real work in the pursuit of such knowledge. The value of a university education and graduate certificates is no longer connected to any real ultimate content, and so you have a kind of inflation: university degrees are still valuable to get you someplace in society, a kind of job requirement, but they are actually increasingly worthless in themselves. While one may not want to go as far as Baudrillard in denying any value to the critical thinking which continues to transpire in our universities, I have personally encountered enough examples of a rising client mentality in students, to see at least partial truth in his remarks. When students negotiate grades as if they were entitled to them on the basis of their high tuition fees, the commercialization of education has begun, at least in students' minds.

In his splendid book The Decline of the Secular University, John Sommerville explains the general loss of the university's intellectual and spiritual purpose as the university's failure to connect with people's most urgent questions about life. Since technical schools are increasingly filling the requirement of skill acquisition for the job market, universities that seek to compete on these grounds, especially smaller institutions lacking massive research programs, are marginalized. They are marginalized because

the liberal arts core of the universities have been hollowed out in two ways: ... The great majority of students are now in professional programs, learning how to make money and be useful. Second, the liberal arts themselves have changed. They've turned into technical specialties. They're often addressing questions nobody is asking, and giving answers nobody can understand.

This marginalization of the universities, and by implication any other educational institution without immediate practical import, is not simply a fated necessity; rather, it stems from forgetting the reason liberal arts education arose in the first place.

Sommerville points us to the heart of the problem: why do administrators only talk about information and practical outcome? Why don't they any longer talk about "wisdom," an old fashioned word meaning seeing things in their widest context, including our ultimate concerns? The question of wisdom, however, arises only when one recognizes oneself as part of a larger story that establishes one's identity. For the West, this story is heavily influenced by the Christian religion, and, to conclude Sommerville's argument, the secular university is in decline because of its ideological, not to say pathological,
dismissal of religion. Secularism, on account of its naturalistic roots, cannot answer the question of purpose, because this is a religious question:

When [secular] academics think of religion they may assume that it makes only assertions, not arguments. They may not realize how much religion remains embedded in our current thinking. We can't even discuss the concepts of wealth, justice, sanity, truth, the human, and the humane without finding their irreducibly religious dimensions. For all of these involve the question of what human life is all about, of what would be optimal for humanity. Naturalism is silent on these questions.  

This silence means that secular reason has ceased to be a viable option for explaining human reality. Sommerville concludes that “the secularism that looked vital and self-sufficient in 1900 has exhausted itself before reaching its goals of offering wisdom and leadership to American life. By limiting the university’s attention to what we supposedly could all agree on—the objective or rational—secularism has not fulfilled our hopes. It has not become the cathedral of learning that was promised.”

This exhaustion of secular reason leaves Western culture not only without the means to reason out its identity and cultural values, it also explains the much talked about return of religion. Even in the academy, religion seems to make inroads once again as a legitimate shaper of human ideals. Living in a post-secular world means that atheism can no longer equate itself with common sense and that a secular worldview holds no potential for cultural renewal. This intellectual vacuum has a number of philosophers and politicians calling for a return of religion to the heart of the academy and public policy. Indeed, many current thinkers are recognizing the dependence of Western culture on Christian roots. The Italian statesman Marcello Pera even recognizes the centrality of the incarnation for Western liberal humanism when he writes that

it is true that almost all of the achievements that we consider most laudable are derived from Christianity or were influenced by Christianity, by the message of God become Man. In truth without this message, which has transformed all human beings into persons in the image of God, individuals would have no dignity. In truth our values, rights, and duties of equality, tolerance, respect, solidarity, and compassion are born from God’s sacrifice. In truth, our attitude toward others, toward all others, whatever their condition, class,
appearance or culture is shaped by the Christian revolution. In truth, even our institutions are inspired by Christianity, including the secular institutions of government that render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.12

Prominent voices in the academy are following suit. Literary critic Stanley Fish has recently announced that religion will form the next research focus in North American literature departments, even in the university as a whole. The reason, Fish argues, is that one of the things 9/11 has taught us is that most people in the world are in fact religious. The time has now come for the small, secular elite governing the overall outlook of university curricula to reinstitute religion as a “real candidate for truth.”13 In another publication, Fish has attacked the still prevalent argument that religious education indoctrinates while secular institutions present facts. As Fish argues in his book The Trouble With Principles, “Just as you cannot have education without authoritative selection, so you can’t have consciousness without authoritative selection, and one you didn’t make … The choice is never between indoctrination and free inquiry but between different forms of indoctrination issuing from different authorities.”14 Fish’s point is that everyone thinks on the basis of some authority. This is not something we can or even should avoid; it is simply the nature of growing in knowledge and insight.

Another sign of the breakdown of secular reason is evidenced within the legal system. The attempt to maintain a non-religious, secular legal language breaks down every time judgments refer to “the sanctity of life,” or “human dignity,” because these concepts have no cash value without their religious roots.15 This linguistic difficulty illustrates the impossibility of retaining the idea of human values without religion. This “philosophical incoherence”16 can only stop when the legal profession recognizes its own dependence on implicit faith assumptions.

To conclude our analysis, we find ourselves in a cultural situation where the weakening of secularism, in part effected by the postmodern critique of arid and atheistic rationalism, opens up space for less narrow conceptions of rationality that include religion. No one has issued this call more clearly than Pope Benedict XVI. Not only in his Regensburg address but also in his earlier conversation with Jürgen Habermas, Ratzinger has called for a “co-rationality of reason and faith, reason and religion, which are destined to reciprocal cleansing and healing, and which need one another and have to recognize this need.”17 If secular theorists like Terry Eagleton are correct, after the postmodern obsession with particularity has run its course, the search is now on, once again, for universal aspects of our common humanity which allow us to link fact to value, to connect every
aspect of everyday life “with matters of ultimate spiritual importance.”

Yet his encouraging news comes with two important cautions. First, as Habermas has warned Ratzinger, we should not forget the benefits of the Enlightenment and its postmodern continuation of critically engaging religion and metaphysics. The danger that we will fall back into theological triumphalism as we rush toward absolute and universal values is all too real. It would not be the first time in history that Christians squander a valuable opportunity. Secondly, the return of religion made possible by the exhaustion of secular reason has met with a rather mixed reaction from intellectuals and politicians. For while the exhaustion of dogmatic, atheistic secularism has encouraged the return of religion as a legitimate shaper of human ideals, this renewed openness to religion remains haunted by the simultaneous fear that religious convictions inevitably lead to intolerance, conflict, and violence.

RECOVERING A PASSIONATE INTELLECT

What does this cultural scenario mean for the relation of faith and learning? It means that culture is partially open to religiously based education, even if some fundamentalist rationalists such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins continue their reductionist model of truth and knowledge. Against their minority voices, Christians can avail themselves of Eagleton, Fish, and a host of other thinkers, most academics, in fact, who no longer believe in test-tube epistemology. Yet culture also remains suspicious of religion that appears sectarian and fundamentalist. This should not mean that Christians must give up distinct doctrinal claims, even though secularists would like to see them do so. Instead, Christian educators should pursue the opposite route which will, to the surprise of many, actually lead to discovering that Christianity is in essence a humanism that speaks for the good of culture as a whole.

The starting point of any response must be rekindling the Christian imagination through the recovery of its basic humanistic instinct. It may be tempting to retreat even more into a Christian island from which one observes with self-righteousness the rudderless drifting of secular culture. But the renewal of Western culture and its educational institutions requires that Christians adopt exactly the contrary stance by recovering the sense of a common humanity and rationality. Although the increasing interest in religion by atheist and agnostic intellectuals may be a hopeful development, it cannot replace the living Christian imagination that gave rise to the incarnational, Christian humanism which formed the primary motivation of the Christian university and so powerfully shaped Western culture in the first place. I believe that Jacques Maritain was right when he wrote fifty years ago that “modern civilization is a worn-out vesture: it is not a
question of sewing on patches here and there, but of a total and substantial reformation, a trans-valuation of its cultural principles.  

This transformation cannot be accomplished—contrary to recent suggestions by Marcello Pera, French President Sarkozy, or political philosopher Simon Critchley—by creating an external, lifeless civic religion, nor will it happen by Christians seizing and controlling political power to impose their version of the holy empire on all others. Rather, as Maritain suggests, we will need a living imagination, “a rousing of forces of faith, of intelligence and of love in the inner depths of the soul, an advance in the discovery of the world of spiritual realities.” At the same time, Maritain warns that re-booting culture by means of a living imagination must avoid a-historicism at all cost. We cannot simply start over, as if history had not happened. The renewal of culture, and in our case of university culture, can only work through the recovery, interpretation, and application of past traditions. In this remaining section, I will argue that for Christian education, we need to recover the early church’s incarnational humanism in order to recapture the development of a passionate intellect as the true vocation of all learning.

Given these challenges, one wonders whether North American evangelical subculture, which still informs many Protestant institutions of learning, is in any way prepared to tackle this task. Frankly, I doubt it. Why? Because the recovery of a passionate intellect and a purpose for education requires a grasp of one’s history and identity which comes through knowing one’s tradition. The sap of a tree comes from its roots. Identity and purpose of Christian education, in other words, require knowledge of the theological tradition which gave it birth. Yet the evangelical subculture reveals its greatest weakness precisely at this crucial point.

What is perhaps most striking concerning evangelical worship and theology—which form, after all, the heart and passion of any religion—is the general absence of history, a near total neglect of the Christian tradition. Worship and preached theology are mostly cut off from any real interaction with the saints from the past. When this lack is addressed, it usually occurs in an eclectic postmodern manner of “gutting” past thinkers for usable parts without giving much contextual considerations to their stance as a whole. It is as though a reductionist idea of sola scriptura had condemned evangelicals constantly to reinvent the wheel of worship, biblical theology, and liturgy only to become ever less conscious of how much their efforts end up mimicking culture.

This is not to say that Christianity could actually be a purely counter-cultural enterprise directed from some point outside culture. Such an attempt goes directly against the idea of the incarnation. Incarnational thinking means that Christians have to recover their passion by retracing
the cultural development of Christianity, to understand how the church from its beginnings has incarnated the gospel in culture. If Christians don’t seem to grasp the essential nature of incarnational thinking, they could at least follow an ancient Christian tradition and plunder the Egyptians or, in this case, hermeneutic philosophy.

**SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITION**

The hermeneutic philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer, in his rehabilitation of tradition against Enlightenment thinking, has outlined what incarnational existence entails: if reflection on our identity and purpose does not occur through the interpretive appropriation of tradition, we drift without any mooring in the sea of culture and are prey to subjectivism no matter how much we claim to stand on facts or revelation. What either facts or the facts of revelation *mean* requires interpretative appropriation within a tradition. On this account, knowledge has as much to do with memory as it does with new insights. *Meaningful* new insights occur only on the basis of an interpretive tradition.

Much of the current a-historical attitude in evangelicalism stems from the misconception that knowledge somehow stands in the way of an encounter with God. Yet it is tradition, the rich past of other Christians’ reflection on God, church, and the world which unfolds for us who God actually is. Tradition is therefore not merely an object of knowledge but participation in an ongoing historical event. Without such an understanding of self-knowledge, a person or community has no real identity, nor does a disincarnate consciousness have any means by which to judge cultural developments. As Gadamer asserts: “The danger of Docetism seems banished when historical tradition is conceived not as an object of historical knowledge or of philosophical conception but as an effective moment of one’s own being.”

In Gadamer’s terms, evangelicalism has largely lost the very source of its identity and imagination, namely its historical consciousness, both of its own origins and of the larger Christian tradition in general. Yet, as the Catholic theologian Yves Congar reminds us, tradition connotes not mere conservatism or historical knowledge but “the continual presence of a spirit and of a moral attitude, the continuity of an *ethos.*” Tradition is “like the consciousness of a group or the principle of identity that links one generation with another; it enables them to remain the same human race and the same peoples as they go forward throughout history, which transforms all things.” Evangelical subculture has lost this continuity with the past, which is why it either spends all of its time trying to establish its identity or sometimes even glorying in this lack of historical identity, simply becomes a mirror of current cultural trends.
How can a Christian culture thus cut off from its roots and without any real identity address the current cultural crisis of reason, identity and purpose? It cannot. The tragedy of our times is that at the very moment when culture may be most open to Christian intellectuals and institutions to address issues of reason and faith, of religion and politics, of social virtues and a common humanity, many Protestant Christian institutions have deprived themselves of their intellectual will and structural muscle to do so. Many evangelical postsecondary institutions currently follow the popular trend of turning universities into job-factories of applicable knowledge whose lack of intellectual Eros is compensated by promising students an “exciting” Christian experience. Christian universities, in part induced by government funding guidelines, also dutifully try to implement “interdisciplinary” programs for teaching and research without bothering to articulate an intelligent Christological foundation for such endeavors. Yet the Christian Logos in whom all things co-inhere arguably provides the only authentic reason for interdisciplinary work and an effective means to heal disciplinary fragmentation. Instead, Christian liberal arts institutions merrily follow the secular trend of splitting disciplines into independent schools of research, leaving the student to sort out how all of this supposedly constitutes a Christian education or enables them to be “leaders in the marketplace.”

INCARNATION AND THE PASSIONATE INTELLECT

All of this is tragic because Christians actually have access to an idea which places in their hands, not as possession but as sacred trust, the very thing our current culture looks for. Christians know of a non-foundationalist foundation, the grounds for a religiously determined notion of universal human rationality and human knowledge which, if rightly understood, is able to address our current cultural need. This gift is the tradition of Christian humanism, the very fount of a passionate intellect. And this gift starts with Christology. The foundation of a passionate intellect is the incarnation of God in Christ for the affirmation, judgment, and ultimate redemption of his creation and of humanity. In Christ we recover the true meaning of passion as reflected in the word’s Latin roots: patior, patiens, and passio all indicate undergoing, or sustaining a certain activity. By taking on humanity and defining it in the ultimate sense of redemptive suffering toward a new humanity, Christ gives passion its true meaning. Passion is also com-passion, a suffering with the common cultural woes in order to serve as witness for the new humanity inaugurated by Christ (not a suffering at the hands of others in order to redeem—Christ already did that), a being-there-for a broken humanity.

While this Christological teaching provides the theological root of
Christian humanism, the Eucharist served as the liturgical embodiment of these convictions at the heart of the church. In this central liturgical participation in God’s incarnation, we encounter the end of dualism and the beginning of a concept of universal reason and values which do not in fact lead to fundamentalism but to a common humanity. This doctrine also reminds Christians of their essential participation in and responsibility for culture and the interpretive nature of their faith in exploring both God’s creation and their role in shaping culture. Christians must existentially appropriate this source of cultural renewal and experientially live it responsibly in every aspect of their common humanity and citizenship. In other words, Christians have to recover the incarnation and its Eucharistic re-enactment as the foundation for humanism and learning, and they also have to understand that the Christian life and practice is patterned as suffering, as passion. Passion means to undergo, to enact, and to be drawn by something greater than formulaic and predictable patterns. Let’s briefly look at these two aspects.

THE INCARNATIONAL-EUCHARISTIC FOUNDATION OF HUMANISM

In the incarnation a very distinct notion of our common humanity enters Western thought for the first time. As Catholic scholar Henri de Lubac puts it, “Christ is not only the bearer of an eternal message which he repeats to the astonished ears of successive individuals, but also he in whom humanity finds an unexpected answer to the problems of its organic unity.” In the incarnation, with its unique union of human and divine, of the particular and the transcendent, of the historical and the eternal, of the cultural ethnic and the collective human race, “the very idea of humanity is born. That image of God, the image of the Word, which the incarnate Word restores and gives back its glory, is ‘I myself’; it is also the other, every other. It is that aspect of me in which I coincide with every other man, it is the hallmark of our common origin and the summons to our common destiny. It is our very unity in God.” And so the deepest mystery of our unity with the Trinity defines our humanity: “we are fully persons only within the Person of the Son, by whom and with whom we share in the circumcession [mutual co-inhabiting] of the Trinity.”

Against the charge that such an image of being truly human in Christ argues for exclusivity rather than a common humanity, incarnational Christology, from the church father Irenaeus onward, has proclaimed Christ as the central common ground of all human beings and of creation. The Christian’s participation in Christ does not separate the church from the rest of humanity but rather establishes an intrinsic connection with it. At the very heart of the church, in the encounter with the incarnate Word
of God, through preaching and the Eucharist, we participate in Christ’s humanity which is ontologically structured as *being-for others*. Without lapsing into a neo-Platonic or Romantic panentheism, we can nonetheless affirm that Eucharistic participation in the incarnation links us, in Christ (!), to all of humanity. In his summary of the Eastern and Western traditions on Eucharistic theology, T.M.R. Tillard explains that in the church as the new humanity, God’s “salvation through agape and communion is realized in this: in his historical work, the Son assumed everything in the human condition (by taking it on himself); at the same time, since the resurrection, he continues to live in his members the human tragedy in all its truth and all its reality. What this means is not a ‘continued incarnation’ but the fulfillment (*teleiosis*) of the work of the incarnation in the power of the Spirit.”

This work does, of course, distinguish between the church and the world, but it also establishes their connection in the divine ministry of reconciliation. Tillard concludes that “the church is grafted onto the great pain-ridden body of humankind. And the graft is but a fragment taken from the reconciling power of the cross.”

The fear that a renewal of faith in institutions of learning will lead to conflict and violence has renewed the typically modern comparative religious approach which waters down all religious particularities to their most inoffensive kernel: an ineffable, non-descript transcendence, a blank space which somehow is supposed to encourage humility, tolerance, and love. Besides its own hidden assumptions of neutrality, such an approach clearly enacts its own blanket imperialism against any particular religion. Against this ploy, the Christian will assert the opposite: a proper understanding of Christology, not the rejection but the full articulation of doctrine, leads to common ground and empathic engagement with every other human being. If Christ affirmed God’s solidarity for his creation, how dare we refuse?

**THE INTERPRETIVE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LIVING**

Understanding the incarnational nature of Christianity means understanding the interpretive nature of Christian living. “What would Jesus do” is, in other words, much more difficult than commonly assumed. No one has grasped this idea better than German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who insisted that Christian self-knowledge and understanding must follow the pattern laid down by the incarnation. The Christian life is unified because it lives out of the ultimate word of God’s reconciliation of creation to himself in Christ. Yet this unity of the Logos must be lived out in the penultimate reality of everyday life. While this abolishes the division between secular and sacred, living incarnationally also means that “just as in Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of the world, so, too, is
that which is Christian to be found only in the natural, the holy only in the profane, and the revelational only in the rational. The unity of the reality of God and of the world, which has been accomplished in Christ, is repeated, or, more exactly, is realized, ever afresh in the life of men." Little attention is paid to the striking similarities of Bonhoeffer’s Christology and that of the church fathers. Like them, Bonhoeffer understands that the ultimate reality of all things in the Logos Christ requires sacramental manifestation, the enjoyment of God’s presence in preaching and in the Eucharist. This participation in Christ shares in the incarnate Word’s mode of being as “being-there-for-others,” “suffering for the world,” and love of one’s neighbor.

Following the example of the incarnation in finding the “the holy in the profane” denies the Christian any monopoly on truth, or, as Bonhoeffer knew all too well, on correct political action. Bonhoeffer’s insistence on the interpretive nature of Christianity inevitably raises the question concerning the relation of the Church to the institutions of learning. Leaving many questions about the incarnation as the foundation for a Christian cultural philosophy unanswered, I want to restrict my final remarks to the university. As John Henry Newman pointed out, while the Christian university needs the Church for its “integrity” to remind it that the ultimate purpose of all learning is in the service of God and humanity, he also rightly insisted that the university is independent of the Church. The Christian university’s mission is primarily intellectual, not moral.

Newman knew, of course, that no human endeavor, including research, teaching, and publishing, is morally neutral. His statement makes the simple point that the university is not the Church and consequently enjoys a different mandate. All universities, secular or religious, should advance human knowledge and frame these advancements ethically by carrying forward the best of past thinking on human nature and a flourishing society. Christian universities merely claim to have a better ultimate reason for doing so, inspired by a God who died for the life of the world.

Yet the goal of research and knowledge advancement in the service of peace should be common to all institutions of learning. This, at least, is my interpretation of Nicholas Wolterstorff’s brilliant motto for Christian education as “Educating for Shalom,” i.e. for human flourishing, for self-formation in accordance with God’s will in the new humanity as inaugurated by Christ. More often than not, Wolterstorff’s motto is misunderstood and misused by Christian university administrators to indicate that Christians really know better and do research better than anyone else. Such a view still conveys the false message to parents and students that Christian learning is intrinsically superior in quality because it is Christian. In other words, this is the old ruse of Christian integration—you are allowed to conduct
research in some narrow Christian sense, within the Christian ghetto of Christian interest groups, merely confirming one another’s methodology and basic view of things.

Wolterstorff, however, addresses the ultimate end of knowledge in the service of Shalom. He too advocates a hermeneutical (i.e., interpretive) model of scholarship in which the guiding principle “is not to be different or distinctive but to be faithful” to the object of investigation.\textsuperscript{36} Christian belief and piety guarantee neither good scholarship nor wise living. Christians can be very pious but still ignorant, and a Christian is not automatically better qualified to do science or business than the pagan.

THE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

What then should the Christian university look like? We have addressed this question in detail elsewhere,\textsuperscript{37} and I can only briefly summarize: a recognition of a common rational ground on the basis of an incarnational Christology means that the Christian university has the responsibility to be at the center of public discourse and culture rather than continuing as a moralizing, preachy, better-than-thou bastion which dissipates its energies in self-referential conferences and publications catering to a Christian market. The strength for this task, however, can only come from a firm grasp of its own incarnational and intellectual roots. Only when Christians continue in a strong sense of their identity as individuals called by Christ but equally as members of the human race for whom the God-man died, an ethos found at the heart of the Church in the Eucharistic re-enactment of the incarnation and its affirmation, judgment and reconciliation of humanity—only in recovering this genuinely theological humanism can we accomplish what our vocation currently calls for.

Within the university such recovery also entails a clear understanding and ordering of the disciplines toward this common purpose. Each discipline should recognize their common goal of shalom, but also retain their methodological integrity. The natural sciences should not be held by administrators to adhere, for example, to creationism or intelligent design, if scientific discovery makes such constructs doubtful. Nor, of course, should dogmatic scientism dominate their agenda. At the same time, among the humanities the discipline of theology is crucial for the maintenance of the university’s identity as a Christian institution.

In his important contribution to this topic, Gavin D’Costa has argued that the marginalization of theology and its secularization as “religious studies” in Christian institutions (!) has resulted in a subsequent identity crisis. His conclusion sums up our own argument that the Christian university is to be sectarian only insofar as it nourishes its distinct identity, but, following the gospel, this “sectarianism” understands itself as serving
God’s universal covenant with creation and thus has an intrinsic, essential commitment to the public square.\footnote{We cannot possibly delineate here the important reciprocal relationship between theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences which Pope Benedict has called for. Nor do we have time to address the crucial dialogue with other religions and their institution in our multicultural Canadian setting. But the Christian university must encourage real academic theology (not just so-called “practical” training for the ministry) which ranges across the entire theological tradition and remains tethered to the ecclesia in order to act not as the queen but as the regal conscience and source of identity for the Christian university.\footnote{The current cultural situation as we have outlined it desperately needs religious institutions to recover its cultural and educational roots. Christians must heed this call, but they have first to recover their own Christian humanistic life blood in the incarnation. A passionate intellect suffers with culture in solidarity, endures the real ambiguities of research and human knowing because of the passion of Christ, because of his suffering for the redemption of humanity. As one Christian humanist recognized over forty years ago, this focus on Christ can never be sectarian or world neglecting. Rather in its very particularity it always serves to “rekindle the Spirit of a common humanity in the Christian religion.”\footnote{NOTES
1. I am employing the term “West” to indicate geographically what Charles Taylor has referred to as “the West, or perhaps the North-west, or otherwise put, the North Atlantic world” (Charles Taylor, A Secular Age [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007], 1). Culturally this term comprises the common intellectual, political, and historical development that Vaclav Havel has described in his discussion of the rise of “impersonal power.” For Havel it was “Europe and the European West” which has developed and exported into other countries “natural science, rationalism, scientism, the industrial revolution, and also revolution as such” (Václav Havel, Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990 [New York: Knopf, 1991], 258). Charles Taylor, again, adds to these the values which mark a specifically Western modernity: “the market economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people, among others” (Charles Taylor, Modern Social Imaginaries [Durham: Duke University Press, 2004], 2).
2. Terry Eagleton, After Theory (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 73.}}
3. Ibid., 120.
6. "The values of the university (diplomas etc.) will proliferate and continue to circulate, a bit like floating capital or Eurodollars, they will spiral without referential criteria, completely devalorized in the end, but that is unimportant: their circulation alone is enough to create a social horizon of value, and the ghostly presence of the phantom value will even be greater, even when its reference point (its use value, its exchange value, the academic 'work force' that the university recoups) is lost. Terror of value without equivalence" (ibid., 155).
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 21.
11. Postmodern criticism of scientific rationalism has exposed the rationalist model of truth as detached observation as both impossible to uphold and inadequate to express human values that cannot be verified by science. It would take too long to rehearse here this discussion which extends from the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Polanyi all the way to philosophers such as Gianni Vattimo and Charles Taylor in our time.
15. Iain Benson notes the contradictions in the Rodriguez v. British Columbia case, when Chief Justice Lamer, in his dissenting judgment, "opined that the court should answer the question of the constitutionality of assisted suicide '... without reference to the philosophical and theological considerations fuelling the debate on the morality of suicide or euthanasia.'" Instead a "non-
religious” sanctity of life was evoked, calling on the sense of the non-religious as defined by Ronald Dworkin. So Benson asks correctly, “why would a justice of the court choose an important term such as ‘sanctity’ for key notions—that human life is ‘sacred or inviolable’ and that there is ‘an intrinsic value of human life, and ... the inherent dignity of every human being ...’ and then promptly attempt to empty it of its settled content?” (Iain T. Benson, “Notes Towards a (Re)Definition of the ‘Secular’,” *U.B.C. Law Review* 33, no. 3 (2000): 524. Available on the website of *The Center for Cultural Renewal* at http://culturalrenewal.ca/downloads/sb_culturalrenewal/benson050405.pdf.)

19. “Ein Bewusstsein von dem was fehlt: Über Glauben und Wissen und den Defätismus von der modernen Vernunft,” printed most recently in *Die Religion und die Vernunft. Die Debatte um die Regensburger Vorlesung des Papstes*, ed. Kurt Wenzel (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2007), 47-56, 56. Habermas writes that Ratzinger’s Regensburg Address is “a negative answer to the question whether Christian theology has to wrestle with the challenges issued by modern, post-metaphysical reason. The Pope calls on the synthesis of faith and Greek metaphysics and biblical faith founded on a tradition from Augustine to Aquinas, and he denies implicitly that there are good reasons for the fact that the polarization of faith and reason occurred for good reasons in European modernity” (56).
22. Maritain, 82.
27. Ibid., 340.
28. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 138.
33. Ibid.: “Encounter with Jesus Christ. Experience that here a complete reversal of human existence occurs, namely in the fact that Jesus is only ‘there for others.’ This ‘being-there-for-others’ of Jesus is experience of transcendence as such. In freedom on his own accord, in the ‘being-for-others’ to the death does omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence derive in the first place. Faith is participation in this being of Christ (Becoming Human, Cross, Resurrection [Menschwerdung, Kreuz, Auferstehung]).” That is why faith is not a religious relation to God, to a “highest, most powerful, most good being—that is not real transcendence—but our relation to God is a new life in ‘being-there-for others,’ in participation in Jesus’ being. Not the infinite, unreachable tasks, but the respective given reachable neighbour is the transcendent. God in human form!” This is what sets Christianity apart from other religions.
36. Ibid., 106.
37. The Passionate Intellect (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), co-written with Norman Klassen to whose clear understanding of these issues I continue to remain indebted.
38. Gavin D’Costa, Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy
and Nation, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 82, 217.

39. Since theology, too, follows an incarnational pattern, theological and institutional identities will obviously bear the marks of particular ecclesial traditions. Yet the theologians at a university should not be reduced to mouthpieces and enforcers of a particular tradition but rather interpret it in light of a broader orthodoxy that always has at heart the interest of the Church as a whole.

40. Maritain, 156.
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