

Thinkers or Lovers

A Brief Introduction

Those of us involved with higher education, and perhaps especially those in Christian higher education, sometimes appear fixated on the subject of what we do exactly, and why. Every year finds more books and articles on the goals and purposes of the university, and a good many begin with an apologetic asking “why another book on the Christian university?”¹ It might not seem an exaggeration to claim that the purpose of a university appears to be conversation about the purpose of a university—exactly the sort of self-reflexive circle causing joy for philosophers and exasperation for vice presidents of finance.

Within the orbit of Christian higher education, especially but not only within evangelical circles, a conception of higher education known as *the integration model* has served as something like the default position, or at least “has largely defined the terms and delineated the boundaries of the current conversation.”² In fact, because the past work of thinkers such as George Marsden, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Arthur Homes was so “visible and so compelling, it is easy to imagine that the . . . [integration] model for Christian higher education is the only available model.”³ It would be somewhat of a simplification, but accurate in the main, to say that many starting points for reflection about education have depended heavily on an earlier generation of thinkers, often Reformed in theology and thought, who provided a thoughtful model for integrating faith and learning.

Despite its prevalence, the integration model does not translate well into every denominational or theological context, and the various

1. See, as examples, Benne, *Quality with Soul*; Budde and Wright, *Conflicting Allegiances*; Burtchaell, *Dying of the Light*; Cunningham, *To Teach*; Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*; MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*.

2. Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, 16.

3. Hughes, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 5.

church and school traditions, even while gratefully acknowledging their dependence and benefit, are now moving beyond it, or at least attempting to augment the discussion in new and diverse directions.⁴ For some, the expansion is a matter of theological heritage, with the integration model viewed as Reformed, committed to the sovereignty of God over all dimensions of human act and knowledge, whereas a Mennonite commitment to radical discipleship, a Lutheran hesitation to blur distinctions between the kingdoms, or a Roman Catholic commitment to the integrity and autonomy of the world does not necessarily fit the model.⁵

It is not our intention here to re-trace the history of integration or its expansion, as other works adequately do so. We are, however, interested in exploring one particularly compelling question emerging in the pushback against integration, namely, whether we define ourselves primarily as *thinkers* or as *lovers*.

An extensive tradition views humans as primarily or especially thinking beings or rational animals, and education so influenced is largely concerned with the making of minds, dissemination of ideas, analysis of worldviews, research and dissemination of information, critical thinking, or even the integration of faith and reason. If education exists primarily for the in-forming of minds, the highest good sought will be a contemplative one.⁶ The chancellor of Boston College, J. Donald Monan, explains the implications:

This presupposite, quite simply, is that liberal education is directed almost exclusively at the intellects of students; that it is the communication of truths and skills and habits and qualities of intellect—as though keenness and method in knowing and voluminousness in one’s learning constitutes one liberally educated . . . But to set the purpose of education outside of knowl-

4. These next several paragraphs draw heavily from the work of Peterson and Snell, “Faith Forms the Intellectual Task,” 215–17. They include the following sources as representing the broadening of discourse on Christian higher education: Curry and Wells, *Faith Imagination in the Academy*; Dunaway, *Gladly Teach, Gladly Learn*; Henry and Beaty, *The Schooled Heart: Moral Formation in American Higher Education*; Hauerwas, *State of the University*; Houston et al., *Spirituality in Educational Leadership*; Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen, *American University in a Postsecular Age*; Jeffrey and Evans, *Bible and the University*; Noll and Turner, *Future of Christian Learning*; Ortiz and Melleby, *Outrageous Idea of Academic Faithfulness*; Sommerville, *Decline of the Secular University*; Spears and Loomis, *Education for Human Flourishing*.

5. Hughes, *Models for Christian Higher Education*, 5–7.

6. Snell, “Making Men without Chests.”

edge, would we not be abandoning an insight shared by all of Western culture since Aristotle—that knowledge is a good in itself, worth pursuing for its own sake? Would we not be abandoning the intellectualist view of man that came from Aristotle through Aquinas, to shape centuries of intellectualist humanism: that the highest good for man is truthful knowledge because, as Aristotle put it, “Man is *nous*—man is mind.”⁷

Behind every pedagogy is an anthropology. What we think education does, what it is for, depends on our image of what we think humans do, what they are for, especially if we think that education should fit neatly with human capacity and structure, as most do. Our understanding of education, then, depends considerably on our definition of humanity. Monan articulates this as well, claiming that given the prevailing image of the human, “it would be difficult to overestimate the educational consequences of this simple expression of the philosophic nature of the human person and the identification of his highest good.”⁸ If, as he puts it, the “good life of a man or a woman is a life of mind,” then that good defines the purpose and structures of university education almost entirely, emphasizing “those fields and those methodologies that will best fulfill the potentialities of mind.”⁹

If the anthropology of mind is correct, then the resulting model of education is adequate, and certainly alive and well in practice. However, if this understanding is inadequate, then so too the education—and it is inadequate, the picture of the human as intellect is “a radical oversimplification of . . . the complexity of human nature and of its true good.”¹⁰ In a powerful description, Fr. Monan explains:

I do not feel I need belabor the point that in Jewish and Christian biblical tradition, the measure of a man or a woman was never to be found in the magnitude of one’s intellectual attainments. That measure was to be found rather in how sensitively, how responsively, one exercised his or her freedom. The great Commandment is: Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and mind and soul, and thy neighbor as thyself.

7. Monan, “Value Proposition.”

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

A new “reference point” other than *knowledge* is required to “serve as magnetic ‘north’ in defining liberal education’s purpose”¹¹—and that magnetic north is *love*.

PERSONS AS LOVERS

Given the prevalence of the “thinking things” mindset, it is unsurprising that much of Christian higher education has concerned itself with worldview analysis—anthropology and pedagogy tend to follow and support each other. While not strictly coterminous with the integration model, the default position often linked worldview and integration closely, claiming that Christians, like all thinkers, bring unique foundational assumptions to their disciplines; consequently, Christian scholarship differs from its secular counterparts in its foundations.¹² In fact, so prevalent is worldview thinking that unease with it is partly responsible for the expanded conversation indicated previously.¹³ As one of the leading voices pushing back against the thinking things model in favor of the lovers, James K. A. Smith opens his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* by asking of the purpose of education, and what difference a Christian education makes, claiming that most often “education is about ideas and information . . . so distinctively *Christian* education is understood to be about Christian ideas . . . the development of a Christian perspective . . . worldview.”¹⁴ Smith goes beyond a typical answer, suggesting that the primary purpose of education, Christian or otherwise, is less about information and more about “*formation* of hearts and desires.”¹⁵ Using a variety of images to articulate this, he wonders if informing the intellect might be better recast as grabbing us by the gut, or shaping the heart, or transforming our imagination. Corraling the variety of images into a concise project, he suggests

11. Ibid.

12. Peterson and Snell indicate several representative texts in this vein; see for example Hamilton and Mathisen, “Faith and Learning at Wheaton College,” 271; Sire, *Universe Next Door* and *Naming the Elephant*; and Dockery and Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview*. For a history of worldview thinking and its educational implications, see Naugle, *Worldview*.

13. Peterson and Snell identify Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden*; Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America*; Jacobsen and Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith*; Hughes, *Vocation of a Christian Scholar*, esp. 42–68.

14. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 17.

15. Ibid., 18.

that education is not “first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love,” and we entirely agree.¹⁶

When Smith argues for an education of the *gut*, he expresses concern about the usual way of conceiving higher education, including the status of embodiment for education, a desire to break the neat seals of the classroom to have education engage all of life, and a sophisticated account of cultural formation and the role of liturgy. But as interesting as he is on those matters, it is his philosophical anthropology which is of most interest here, for as he suggests, “behind every pedagogy is a philosophical anthropology” and “Christian education has absorbed a philosophical anthropology that sees human persons as primarily thinking things.”¹⁷ Consequently, Christian education has devoted considerable effort and attention to “the dissemination and communication of Christian ideas” or worldview, primarily understood as a system of beliefs, as an “epistemic framework,” beginning always with the primacy of mind.¹⁸

Smith suggests an alternative model rooted in the primacy of love because humans are “first and foremost: loving, desiring, affective, liturgical animals who, for the most part, don’t inhabit the world as thinkers or cognitive machines.”¹⁹ In fact, a good deal of our involvement or engagement in the world is pre-cognitive, pre-theoretical, and pre-reflective—although this is *not* to suggest unintelligent or irrational. Humans may in fact be rational animals, but this is not to suggest that we start our engagement with the world from a position of ideas, abstractions, or beliefs. Instead, we start with a stance, a way of being in the world revealing our projects and intentions, our cares and concerns. This is not to imply that ideas have no consequences, but ideas emerge from a stance and way of approaching the world, the way we *love* or care.

In some ways, this is a deceptively simple claim: if we did not approach the world with certain concerns and intentions nothing would emerge in consciousness worth attention. Ideas, hypotheses, insights, doctrines, systems of belief, all arise in consciousness because we care enough to advert to the world, and the way we advert to the world shapes the various ways the world appears, the way it is *for us*.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 31.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 34.

In formulating his anthropology, Smith hopes to pivot education towards worship, claiming that we are *homo liturgicus*, worshipping beings, with cultural and social practices forming our identities. With just a tint of antithesis about his project, he critiques the cultural liturgies of our society and suggests alternative practices and liturgies more adequate to the formation of people for the kingdom. In one very helpful section of the text, he suggests that grasping his alternative model of the person as lover requires understanding a nexus of related concepts and terms: (1) intentionality, or love's aim; (2) teleology, or love's end; (3) habits, or love's fulcrum; and (4) practices, or love's formation.²⁰ Our project is not opposed to his, but it is somewhat narrower, we "hunker down" on the first of his concepts, intentionality, trying to unveil the richness and fecundity of the notion.

INTENTIONALITY AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF LOVE

It may seem counter-intuitive to claim that a narrowed focus on intentionality is supportive rather than inimical to the project of critiquing the "thinking things" model. After all, intentionality, as we consider it, is largely a philosophy of consciousness, a phenomenology of subjectivity, and we ground a good deal of our argument in the structures and transcendental precepts of a turn to the human subject. We will not devote much attention to worship, cultural practices, conditions of social life, or embodiment. This is not, however, hostility or oversight of those realities, but rather a close read of what it means to be conscious lovers. To be sure, our project can, and should, be supplemented by the sort of reflections Smith and others provide, just as we claim that our project can be thought of as a supplement or sustained deliberation about one aspect of his. Naturally, we think we offer something of value.

The turn to subjectivity is somewhat out of favor these days, even viewed with obvious suspicion by the very proponents of an anthropology of love.²¹ Historicity, language, and embodiment are supposedly indicative of what happens when the turn to the subject is left behind, or at least minimized, with too much concern for subjectivity supposedly indicating entrenchment in the Cartesian trap of the inner space

20. *Ibid.*, 47–63.

21. For an especially interesting text, see Kanaris and Doorley, *In Deference to the Other*, especially the Foreword by Jack Caputo.

of the mind. Those concerns are justified if the turn to the subject is not performed properly, if intentionality analysis is thought something like an inner-looking or privileged gaze at oneself. If, however, the turn to the subject is performed well, those concerns can be avoided and a normative grasp of authentic subjectivity—what we term *authentic cosmopolitanism*—attained and defended in a mode entirely conversant with historicity, temporality, language, sociality, and embodiment, what we later term the *hermeneutics of facticity*.²² All that remains to be articulated, but we are not ignorant of those concerns and possible objections. For the moment, we can do no more than to insist that ours is an anthropology rooted in love, in the engaged agency of concrete (i.e., historical and actual) human beings, and explain more in the following pages. For the moment, consider intentionality.

Smith suggests that his model starts from “an *intentional* account of human persons.”²³ Rather than assuming the Cartesian divide between ideas and the extra-mental world, with a corresponding notion of the mind as a kind of inner space for ideas, intentionality analysis considers the human as always already involved with the world, always intending or aiming at the world as an object of consciousness. Consciousness is always intentional, always aimed and involved, such that the Cartesian idea of the “thinking thing” is obviously truncated—thought is always “about” or “of” something, never just “thought” or “thinking” in inner space.²⁴

If intentionality meant only object-ification, it might be construed as remaining within the thinking thing model, but intentionality has more flesh than simply thinking about something, for we always intend the world in some particular mode. Intentionality is inhabited, involved, engaged. Humans approach the world and its myriad objects in some way of involvement, under some guise—as bored, or indifferent, or delighted, or afraid, or nostalgic, or curious—and the same extra-mental object exists for us in a variety of different ways. We approach reality with a certain comportment, what Heidegger calls “care” or “concern,” or Augustine calls “love,” or what Charles Taylor or Lonergan will discuss as “value,” and the world changes as a result.

22. Lawrence, “Expanding Challenge to Authenticity in *Insight*,” 427–56.

23. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.

24. *Ibid.*, 48.

Intentional existence is always concrete, always the way of being of a particular person at a particular time; consequently, consciousness is not itself an abstract or reified thing, and while we can arrive at universal structures and claims about consciousness which are true, normative, and invariant for all persons, these structures are known only through the self-knowledge and appropriation of concrete persons. Eric Voegelin explains:

Human consciousness is not a free-floating something but always the concrete consciousness of concrete persons . . . for consciousness is always concretely founded on man's bodily existence, through which he belongs to all levels of being, from the anorganic to the animalic. . . . Concrete man orders his existence from the level of his consciousness, but that which is to be ordered is not only his consciousness but his entire existence in the world.²⁵

A study of consciousness, thus, properly understood, is a study of the whole human, in all their pursuits and engagements and involvements of their existence, as well as the entire world of meaning and action with which they are involved. Intentionality is a study of all the ways we love, and all the things loved, and a thorough understanding of love is to already understand, in a limited way, all that there is to love.

Still, consciousness is known only by knowing oneself; there is no such thing as "Consciousness" to be studied, no "Intentionality" to be analyzed. There is just the concrete, existing human person in their embodied individuality, sociality, historicity, and temporality. Consciousness is always placed. And a study of consciousness is a study of the existing person, with all their authenticity and inauthenticity, intelligence and stupidity, transcendence and wickedness. As a result, to understand love as it should be we turn to the converted subject, the authentic person.

THE CONVERTED SUBJECT

Coming to terms with the whole existence of a concrete subject is to come across the joker in the deck of education, for persons are not always authentic, rational, or virtuous; in fact, the doctrine of original sin would suggest that the greatest impediment to education is not igno-

25. Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 200.

rance but the existential disorder of sinfulness. Oddly, despite the doctrine of original sin and the so-called noetic effects of the Fall, concrete and detailed discussion of its implications for education are quite rare.²⁶ Many texts never mention sin in their account of education, even when it is assumed and polemically used against theological positions deemed overly optimistic—an odd failure to link theology to educational philosophy.²⁷ Even when discussed, the tendency is towards a vague abstraction, for example, “reason is partly debilitated . . . and we grope our way through various errors . . . there remains some desire to learn, some clarity of mind, some love of truth.”²⁸ More sophisticated accounts will usually include reference to a narrative of Creation-Fall-Redemption, but the nod is fairly limited and often a generality without much implication for the actual pedagogy.²⁹

Even when sin is discussed, the account is often truncated, with serious oversights, as argued by Stephen Moroney.³⁰ First, the tradition tends to suppose that sin impairs our ability to know God much more than knowledge in the sciences and liberal arts; religious knowledge is hurt, but secular knowledge escapes relatively unimpaired. Second, very often the antithesis between the redeemed and the unbeliever is made so strongly that the limits of noetic sin seem all but overcome for the believer, especially if they have a proper worldview with a place for everything and everything in its place. Third, the consequences are often considered in oddly asocial ways, as if sin affected only individuals and not social structures and institutions, or as if social sin is mainly about moral and religious truth—think of certain culture war depictions of the disingenuous scientist or cultural elite. Fourth, the reality of grace and redemption tends to be discussed in the most abstract manner, as if grace did not operate within the structures of concrete human sub-

26. See Moroney, *Noetic Effects of Sin*, as well as Moroney, “How Sin Affects Scholarship,” 432–51. For a helpful summary and engagement with Moroney see Hoitenga, “Noetic Effects of Sin,” 68–102.

27. For examples of influential texts without *any* apparent place for sin in education, see Holmes’s *Idea of a Christian College*, Hughes, *Vocation of a Christian Scholar*, and Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College*. For examples of polemical use against Thomas Aquinas, and a response, see Snell, “Thomism and Noetic Sin, Transposed,” 7–28.

28. Holmes, *Building the Christian Academy*, 67.

29. For example, see the influential and substantial book by Wolters, *Creation Regained*.

30. See Moroney, *Noetic Effects of Sin*.

jectivity. To be sure, there are some thinkers doing sophisticated work on these issues, but their insights have not as yet permeated the default position.³¹

We suggest these oversights occur because of the relationship between anthropology and pedagogy. It is perfectly coherent for the default position to think of sin as a conceptual category within the puzzle-piece nexus of concepts making up the system. Coherent, but truncated, lacking the methodological resources for an anthropology of the concrete existential subject.³² Our own method begins with the existing subject: “it is the study of oneself inasmuch as one is conscious . . . attends to operations and to their center and source which is the self.”³³ By attending to the concrete operations of the self, we avoid the thinking thing truncation, just as we avoid a conceptualist abstraction about sin and grace, for sin and grace are apparent in the operations and acts of consciousness. The disorders of sin and the restorations of grace are real and actual and knowable in our own selves, and since we are primarily lovers the concreteness of sin and grace is in the order and disorder of love. The *ordo amoris* is the heart of education.

We have no particular objection to information, systems of belief, or worldview analysis as having a proper place in education, for of course ideas and systems matter and must be done properly; we do hesitate to make those functions the foundation and purpose of education, especially an education of concrete persons and their loves, especially an education of persons with disordered and sinful loves, finding ourselves in agreement with Greg Clark’s depiction of the default model’s truncated understanding of love’s conversion:

Conversion in worldview philosophy culminates in gaining admission to a theater of worldviews. When one converts to Jesus, one has a sense that nothing is more real than this One who wrecked the gates of hell, whereas in worldview philosophy one is keenly aware of the distance between one’s worldview and reality. Coming into contact with Jesus inspires worship . . . while

31. For examples of more sophisticated thinkers on these issues, see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 199–240; Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite*; Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology*; Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom*.

32. See Lonergan, “Subject,” 420–35.

33. *Ibid.*, 424.

worldview philosophy brings us out of dogmatism but has tendencies towards skepticism.³⁴

It is telling that Clark utilizes a pagan, Plato, to criticize the lack of conversion in Christian models of education, arguing that the cave analogy of the *Republic* “offers us a picture of the movement in the spiritual life of the philosopher . . . a process of continual education, transformation and conversion.”³⁵ As opposed to the default position “the language of conversion makes it clearer . . . that one’s life is at stake, not just one’s beliefs or presuppositions. To use the Platonic imagery, one does not emerge from the cave as an eyeball; the entire body must ascend. Conversion requires that our desires—our loves and our hates—change.”³⁶

Since we wish to provide a foundation for education in a phenomenology of the concrete existing subject, and since we think this reveals the subject to exist as a lover, and since the reality of sin disorders loves concretely, our understanding of education centers on the conversions of love. We differentiate between intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, arguing for the role of each in a full-orbed pedagogical vision, and arguing that a proper study of the human subject—their loves and conversions—allows for a robust and normative understanding of *authenticity*, a notion we link to Lonergan’s description of *cosmopolis*.

A FINAL WORD

In the following pages thinkers of diverse backgrounds and vocabularies are placed in conversation with each other—Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Heidegger, Taylor, Scheler, for example—but the unifying theme in all is the notion that humans are not disengaged minds but engaged lovers, with thought operating as one mode of love. The major influence for the text is the Jesuit theologian-philosopher Bernard Lonergan, our account of intentionality largely his, and our readings of other thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas influenced by that account. It is our assumption that Lonergan is not necessarily well known, or at least little evidence exists that his thought is utilized in the conversations on Christian education, and we view this as a brief introduction to his work as well as an account of intentionality and engaged subjectivity. Our focus is

34. Clark, “Nature of Conversion,” 217.

35. *Ibid.*, 211–12.

36. *Ibid.*, 218.

on intentionality and its teleology, love and the implications for human flourishing, rather than any direct application for university study, although certainly such applications could be made—but first things first, and so we turn to love.

SAMPLE