

The Necessary Struggle to Regain the True, the Good and the Beautiful
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For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and with godliness - brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 Peter 1:5-8

I'd like to begin by suggesting that the overarching barrier to regaining a Biblical understanding of the true, the good and the beautiful is the absolute dominance and carefully protected invisibility of secularism. In 2018, the radical Stanley Fish, the scholar perhaps most responsible for bringing post-modernist thought and scholars such as Foucault and Derrida to the U.S., reviewed a book of essays by Christian scholars who were critical of secularism's dominance in the university. After reviewing the book, he best described our situation:

"For most Americans secularism is the air we breathe: it is invisible and sustaining and terribly limiting, all at the same. This most powerful of modern ideologies derives its power from the claim to be above or below or to the side of ideology."¹

The clearest example I can provide here is when California senator, Diane Feinstein suggested to judicial nominee, Amy Barrett that "her dogma (Christian beliefs) lives loudly in her". Feinstein suggested that Barrett is biased and thus unqualified for judgeship. However, because Feinstein is secular (not identified you will notice), she can judge Barrett because Feinstein is neutral. But Barrett, on the other hand, cannot be neutral or fair because she has a dogma - her Christian beliefs.

Secularism began as a direct substitute for the Christian thought. It was promoted first by John Dewey who called for stepping away from specific faiths such as the religion of Christianity and instead adopting "a common faith" – a method for keeping particular values but disassociating them from true Christian faith commitment. At the time, Dewey claimed there were values in Christianity (such as democracy) that were common to all mankind and could/were expressed without commitment to a specific religion. Dewey had a profound influence on education (and still does in project and portfolio-based education).

Stanley Fish, mentioned above, was very active in promoting *reader-response*, a literary method where the author's meaning is insignificant in a reader's determination of the meaning of any text. The reader is free to make of the text what she or he wants or

¹ Fish, S. (2017). Comment on Kanpol, B. and Poplin, M. (2017). *Christianity and the Secular Border Patrol: The Loss of Judeo-Christian Knowledge*. NY: Peter Lang.

desires. While accused of being a postmodernist, he claims he is simply an anti-foundationalist, which he claims, “relieves me of the obligation to be right and demands only that I be interesting”. That is the freedom we give all readers these days – the freedom to interpret text as we wish. While he is still a force to be reckoned with in higher education, he has interestingly at times defended, even advised Christians:

If you persuade liberalism that its dismissive marginalizing of religious discourse is a violation of its own chief principle, all you will gain is the right to sit down at liberalism’s table where before you were denied an invitation; but it will still be *liberalism’s* table that you are sitting at, and the etiquette of the conversation will still be hers. That is, someone will now turn and ask, ‘Well, what does religion have to say about this question?’ And when, as often will be the case, religion’s answer is doctrinaire (what else could it be?), the moderator (a title deeply revealing) will nod politely and turn to someone who is presumed to be more reasonable. To put the matter baldly, a person of religious conviction should not want to enter the marketplace of ideas but to shut it down, at least insofar as it presumes to determine matters that he believes have been determined by God and faith. The religious person should not seek an accommodation with liberalism; he should seek to rout it from the field, to extirpate it, root and branch. (Fish, 1996).²

I believe this strikes at the heart of the problems we are discussing these next two days and it reveals what we must all do. The challenge to secularism must be made clearly, overtly, publicly and frequently. And I believe Fish is right, it is no use to try to be acceptable in the academy. Yes, we should be collegial and trustworthy in all the tasks of professor or teacher, but it is no use to try to be fully accepted on secular terms by omitting truths we know, or not suggesting (where appropriate) other ways (Christian ones).

Our first challenge is to make secularism apparent as a required but limited choice. We must show it has simply been a historic trend that began shortly after the loss of Christianity in the university, which then set the course for what we call PreK-12 education. Second, we need to make its weaknesses public. Were it not for the total dominance of secularism, we would not be struggling these next two days with the issues Dallas Willard Ministries and our symposium hosts have laid out for us. Thanks be to God for Dallas and them.

One of the first books Dallas recommended I read after my radical conversion from secular and “new age spiritual” professor was Julie Reuben’s book subtitled “The Marginalization of Morality.”³ Here she documents the transitions of the moral domain in the university. She outlines how the subject of morality moved from theology to religion departments, then to philosophy, from there it was moved to science, then the social sciences, from there it was the responsibility of the humanities, then the general faculty, and finally to the dean of students office where it is now lodged in “student services”. The astronomical rise in student services she predicted in 1996 has taken over the so-called

² Fish, Stanley. (1996). Why we can’t all just get along? *First Things*, p. 21. Retrieved May 31, 2010, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/09/001-why-we-cant-all-just-get-along-40>

³ The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 269.

moral conversation on campuses. These student services are largely operated by young graduates; some bearing graduate degrees in “student services”. Here the hyper-sexualized and politicized culture of the university is often protected or at least not contested. After all, raising issues of morality hurts people’s feelings and assumes there is some gold standard (the good person) rather than multiple ways to be good. Today, we believe we teach moral knowledge by addressing “woke” “social justice” issues. All of these issues affect the education of teachers and administrators, most of whom still get their necessary degrees and credentials in the university. This has now become a part even of Christian K-12 schools now offering what the secular world calls “social justice”.⁴

In summary, there are three major problems with secularism being the uncontested framework for education in the U.S. First, secularism is never overtly identified as a limiting choice. Instead it functions as normal and as diverse. This is perhaps its most dangerous quality, its uncontested range from far left to far right. This raises its second most dangerous aspect of secular humanism. It has no permanent moral boundaries, no moral plumb line, thus it can range wildly from left to right.

The third and perhaps most serious issue is the loss of possibilities in general. The Judeo-Christian worldview is both distinct from far left and far right culture and it offers what Lesslie Newbigin identified as a *higher or wider rationality* with a moral plumb line that limits its range, so that knowledge; the truth does not lean far left or far right.⁵ I take this term “wider rationality” from Lesslie Newbigin who likens this experience to what physicists experienced after Einstein’s theory was developed when they had to hold “*both Newton’s and Einstein’s laws together in unity because Newton’s laws are still true in mechanics and for large objects in slow motion.*” Newbigin writes in *Foolishness to the Greeks*:

Seen from one side there is only a chasm; seen from the other there is a bridge. By analogy, one could suggest that the radical conversion . . . Implies a discontinuity that cannot be acknowledged [by the secular world]. . . . Yet it does not imply a surrender to irrationality, since the new understanding of the converted person might make it possible . . . To find a (Christian) place for the truth that was embodied in the former vision and yet at the same time offers a wider and more inclusive rationality than the older one could.

Saul the Pharisee can only see Jesus of Nazareth as a saboteur of the law. Paul the Christian can see the law as the paidagogos [tutor] that brought him to Christ; and he can see Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

C S Lewis had another way of describing this, “*Man is a tower in which the different floors can hardly be reached from one another but all can be reached from the top floor.*”

⁴ See Carol Swain’s op ed. Does Progress Require Shaming and Embarrassing Children? <https://tennesseestar.com/2020/01/08/carol-m-swain-commentary-does-progress-require-shaming-and-embarrassing-children/>

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin. 1986. *Foolishness to the Greeks*. Eerdmans, p. 52-53

Lesslie Newbigin describes the radical conversion or the *top of the tower* this way:

“It is not only a conversion of the will and of the feelings but a conversion of the mind—a “paradigm shift” that leads to a new vision of how things are and, not at once but gradually, to the development of a new plausibility structure in which the most real of all realities is the living God whose character is “rendered” for us in the pages of Scripture (p. 54).”

Our problem is our intellects are too small for our spirits and when we try to keep them separate we lose Christ. Lesslie Newbigin describes the reality that I have learned over the past twenty years: *“The Christian claim is that though the Christian worldview can in no way be reached by any logical step from the axioms of [the other worldviews], nevertheless the Christian worldview does offer a wider rationality that embraces and does not contradict the rationality of [these other worldviews] p. 54.”*

In many of Paul’s letters he instructed Christians to renew their minds so that they would not be deluded by plausible arguments (see Romans 12:2; Colossians 2:4). The false principles of each of these worldviews are expressed variously in the dialogues of this Jewish intellectual. In Galatians 4:9, he calls these “weak and worthless elementary principles of the world,” possibly a reference to the principles of naturalism that reject all but elementary material phenomena. In another letter, Paul refers to “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1), most likely a reference to the spirits of some pantheist and pagan religions such as those that had seduced the Israelites from time to time. To the Colossians, Paul says, “see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition” (Colossians 2:8), most likely the errors of secular humanism. He refers to a number of other principles that humans have concocted that err against Christ’s teachings: “myths and endless genealogies” and “speculations” (1 Timothy 1:4); “irreverent, silly myths” (1 Timothy 4:7); “craving for controversy” (1 Timothy 6:4); and “irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Timothy 6:20). Of knowledge alone Paul cautions that “‘knowledge’ puffs up” (1 Corinthians 8:1) and that some are “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

I fear the major problems with education today stem from the limits we place on plausibility – our plausibility structures in education are too small. Lesslie Newbigin describes the radical challenge of Christ’s resurrection to the secular plausibility structure of the West:

The difference between the two plausibility structures (higher and lower) is seen most sharply at the point where we have to come to terms with the Christian tradition about the resurrection of Jesus. The community of faith makes the confession that God raised Jesus from the dead and that the tomb was empty thereafter. Within the plausibility structure of the modern world, this will become something like the following: The disciples had a series of experiences that led them to the belief that, in some sense, Jesus was still alive and therefore to interpret the Cross as victory and not defeat. This experience can be accepted as a “fact.” People do have such psychological experiences. If this is what is meant by the “Easter event” it qualifies for admission into the

world of fact. The former statement (i.e., that the tomb was empty) can be accepted as a fact only if the whole plausibility structure of contemporary Western culture is called into question.

So what does this mean for education? It means that basic principles of Judeo-Christian thought are not allowed in the classroom. It also means that those of us who use it will be excoriated as either too simple, irrelevant, or accused of proselytizing. Our culture has ordained the proselytizers of secularism by anointing them as neutral and unbiased, and thus acceptable. The problem of secularism having no permanent moral boundaries goes unnoticed.

The True

Today the physical sciences are the only field, which still unapologetically uses the word TRUE or TRUTH as its goal, the reason for its existence. The physical sciences are the only ones who believe they are finding truth, that this is their job. It is one of the few places in the university where faculty and students don't assume that the hydrogen atom, for example, cares or changes based on what anyone thinks or feels about it. The word "truth" now belongs exclusively to them. They do not make this exclusive claim overtly, but for all intents and purposes the other fields simply gave up the search for truth in pursuit of meanings.

Sociologist Elaine Ecklund found in her research that 36 percent of scientists in American universities report that they believe in God, a belief incompatible with strict naturalism. Thirty-four percent report being atheist, which, like the percentage of all professors who report being atheist, is much higher than the 4 percent of the general American public who make that claim. Interestingly, she found that 12 percent of self-identified atheist scientists also call themselves "spiritual." Ecklund also noted that many of the nonreligious scientists reported concern over the increase in the number of their students who are religious and suggested that some scientists and students of science who believe may remain "closeted" so as to avoid discrimination in the field. Gross and Simmons have found that professors' religious belief is higher at non-elite secular universities. Atheism is highest among biology and psychology professors and lowest among professors in nursing, elementary education, accounting, finance, marketing, art and criminal justice.⁶

Roland Barthe, Stanley Fish and Jacques Derrida influenced a whole generation of secondary high school English and Social Studies teachers claiming that the text has no meaning other than that given it by the reader (reader-response). There were those who resisted such claims and spoke of the urgency to renew education and attend to teaching students serious content. E D Hirsch in K-12 (2006, 2009) and Allan Bloom (1987)⁷ in higher education urged educators to return to the classics, attend to core values, and use some explicit instruction. Nevertheless, the fields of teacher education and higher

⁶ Elaine H. Ecklund, "Religion and Spirituality Among University Scientists," Social Science Research Council, February 5, 2007, <http://religion.ssrc.org/reforum/Ecklund.pdf>. Elaine H. Ecklund, "Science vs. Religion Discovers What Scientists Really Think About Religion," Washington Post, May 30, 2010; idem, Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, "How Religious Are America's College and University Professors?" working paper, October 5, 2006, www.epi.soe.vt.edu/perspectives/policy_news/pdf/religions.pdf.

⁷ Hirsch, E D (2006). *The Knowledge Deficit*. NY: Houghton Mifflin. Bloom, A. (1987). *The Closing of the American Mind*. NY: Simon and Schuster.

education largely continue toward the deconstructivists emphasizing and exacerbating differences rather than seeking to create an American identity complete with attention to values.

Like Willard, psychologist Sigmund Koch warned psychologists of the loss of meaning that comes with an exclusive attachment to physical sciences when psychology left the domain of the humanities for science. In his 1978 Presidential address to the American Psychological Association, Koch described the inability of empiricism to deal with big issues of life because the method requires reduction of the variables to numbers.⁸ The conundrum here is that this leaves us with a lack of measurement allowing educators to adopt the practices of popular theories regardless of there being very little evidence. I agree with Willard and Koch's criticism of the limits of science, but I must say science can be preferable in terms of instructional practices to the lack of any evidence or accountability. Today the sciences are one place where many conservative and Christian students are attracted, which I believe is a result of the clarity provided by those hydrogen atoms that won't change to accommodate our opinions. Truth takes no sides and does not bend to human beliefs or desires. Reality simply is what it is; it functions with or without our agreement.

Stanley Fish predicted 15 years ago that the academy would ultimately turn back to religion (Fish, 2005). What was more unexpected is that he suggested that intellectuals should once again consider religion, not just as an object to study but rather "as a candidate for truth."⁹ This has yet to happen.

Scientific research on various aspects of human flourishing supports the moral principles that lie behind the "good person". Almost universally, scientific findings that relate to human flourishing reveal the advantages to living Christianly, e.g., life longevity, physical health, mental health, education, science, and family. Unfortunately, these studies largely lay hidden from the world in academic journals. There are a few brave and industrious forerunners. One of the most prolific is sociologist Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas whose research on the family has demonstrated the advantages of Christian views, though not discussed as such. While he has paid highly for this, he also courageously publishes in public media outlets such as *The Atlantic Magazine*. Tyler VanderWeele of Harvard (also a prolific forerunner) has worked with a former USA Today religion editor, John Siniff, to publish popular articles in the mainstream media from his epidemiology research lab articles. For example, he found that the number one factor in life longevity in the U.S. is regular church attendance. Carol Swain also publishes and is featured widely in secular media and on Twitter. These are examples of the kind of moral courage that is needed.

Perhaps as someone who has never had a Facebook or Twitter account I should not talk, but I think if we are going to be both scholarly and advance topics like "the good person" we need to be aware of our options to understand what people are writing and reading. In a recent post, Christian millennial blogger and reporter, Nick Pitts who also publishes in places such as the Huffington Post informs us that "Pew found that there are only 10% of Twitter users who are super active and they are responsible for 80% of the Tweets. Meanwhile 90%

⁸Sigmund Koch, *Psychology in Human Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁹ Stanley Fish, Letter to the Editor, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 25, 2005 <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Religion-as-the-Next-Big-Idea/35628>

of users have a median of 19 followers and follow 74 accounts. That means the majority of what you see on Twitter is around 2% of the hyper engaged population arguing with each other. According to Pew: 42 percent of sampled users had a college degree, versus 31 percent for U.S. adults broadly. Forty-one percent reported an income of more than \$75,000, too, another large difference from the country as a whole."¹⁰

Secularists are as dependent on their particular faiths, which vary widely, but are much less aware of their own assumptions. Christians cannot afford to mix what is true into what is partially false in secular assumptions. To add pure water to poison water does not produce pure water, it produces diluted poison. That is why we must first come together, serious orthodox Christians (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox), both university professors and high level culture makers for intensive periods of time to discern, develop and build strategies to redeem our fields and offer visions of the good person and the virtuous life. We must determine in every field what theory and empirical work will best reveal the false principles and assumptions. This requires we enter the mainstream publishing arena in every area of media. There are many Biblical references that acknowledge that truth must be nested in other virtues.

The 'orthodox' Christian has a view that supersedes secular knowledge, a view where knowledge never stands alone or as primary. For example, in 2 Peter 1:5-7, Peter describes the sequence into which true knowledge is positioned, "*For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.*" True knowledge is accessible when preceded by faith and virtue and followed by self-control, etc. It is from this point of departure we can begin to define – what is true and what is a good person?

Regarding knowledge or truths, Biblical texts also bear pertinent warnings. Paul warns the Colossians of several dangers – the empty deceit of human philosophy and elemental principles, which I suggest are foundational to the issues Dallas raises. "*I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments.... See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.*" (Colossians 2: 2-4, 8-10). In 1 Timothy 4, Paul warns also of *deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*. He predicted the days when we would call good evil and evil good; surely these are those days.

As Dallas told a group of philosophy students when he was chided for using the word "truth" in a talk; "what is truth?" they asked him. He replied calmly, "Truth is reality and reality is what you run into when you are wrong."

The Good

¹⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/04/24/sizing-up-twitter-users/> Nick Pitt's Daily Briefing, April 26, 2019. <https://www.thebriefing.net/bio>

The foundation of good has also been eroded and yet students today (most of them) long to be good, and perhaps think of themselves as good. One of the most deceptive books in psychology was a small book published in the 1960s (and still selling) that claims, “I’m okay, you’re okay”. The more accurate phrase would be “I’m not okay and you are not okay but there is redemption”. Not only is the redemption of Christ who underwent every temptation known to man not known by secularists, but the idea of identification and confession of one’s sins (a word that cannot be spoken in schools, regardless of the fact that it simply means missing the mark of human flourishing, akin to missing a target on the dart board) is vehemently rejected. As Dallas was fond of saying, “If you can’t talk about sin, you’re like a farmer who can’t talk about weeds and bugs: The bugs get fatter and the weeds get taller. So, we have to talk about sin, because sin is a matter of the will’s distortion of the whole person”.¹¹

Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning changed the way educators taught morality or goodness. Kohlberg’s six stages move from pre-conventional reasoning where authority plays an important role in a child’s concept of what is good, to conventional stages where norms, authority, law and order are prominent. Lastly are his post-conventional stages whereby social contracts play a large role. Ultimately the final stage of “universal ethical principles” is accessible. Few individuals reached this final stage where one acts on their own set of ‘moral’ rules, which is presumed to be the highest level of moral development. This final stage is believed to characterize people such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King.

Moral development programs emerged from Kohlberg’s followers and entered the public schools. These largely emphasized teaching children and adolescents *values clarification*. There was a wide range of responses to these values-clarification programs, which used scenarios such as – “If seven people are in a lifeboat and one must be thrown over in order that the others do not drown, who goes?” Parents often saw these exercises as teaching moral relativism and most schools abandoned them. Lockwood (1978) extensively studied the results of programs for moral development and values clarification and concluded they had very little effect.¹²

Carol Gilligan, a student of Kohlberg, challenged Kohlberg’s stages of moral development as being solely based on justice and suggested that a separate dimension of “caring” was also critical to moral development.¹³ Her work suggested these two (care and justice) were both independent of one another and yet connected something like the face/vase experiments. Thus, one could look at a moral dilemma one way and then look at it the other way but not see both at the same time. She also noted there were gender differences whereupon men looked more through the justice lens. Her interjecting “care” into moral knowledge conversation stimulated others to suggest this was also critical to schooling. For example, Nell Noddings of Stanford wrote an influential book on educating

¹¹ From Dallas Willard’s first talk at the 2012 Heart and Soul conference. He also uses this metaphor in *Renovation of the Heart*, page 46.

¹² Lockwood, A. (1978). The Effects of Values Clarification and Moral Development Curricula on School-Age Subjects. *Review of Education Research*.

¹³ Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

teachers simply titled, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (now titled *A Relational Approach*).

At last the critical theorists have taken the day and goodness means “social justice” for all. Currently, critical theory dominates education and exerts quite an influence on the entire university in the social sciences and humanities, and even inside public schools, particularly at high school levels in schools in low-income areas. Teachers are currently educated/inculcated with heavy doses of critical theory whose largely Marxist principles are best described in Peter McLaren’s book, *Life in Schools* (1998, 2015).¹⁴ The major daily publications in education - *Education Week* (K12) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are filled with political perspectives using critical theory and post structuralism. Studies have shown that university faculty are overwhelmingly on the left rather than conservative at a ratio of 12:1.¹⁵ Few major education sources touch on the real issues – the indoctrination of students in leftist ideologies, however you can see its effects in the younger members of Congress. Many parents and grandparents are alarmed at the education their sons and daughters are receiving.

But there is hope:

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) works to “uphold the standards of a liberal arts education fostering intellectual freedom, the search for truth and promotion of virtuous citizenship”.¹⁶ The organization’s ideals include: reasoned scholarship and civil debates in the university, individual merit, the pursuit of truth, and fair examination of contending views. They are focused on offering coherent curricula, financial accountability, academic freedom, and the inclusion of subjects such as Western Civilization and American history, diversity in pursuit of truth, the traditional liberal arts, and the promotion of virtuous citizenship. The NAS maintains a quarterly journal, regular special reports, commentaries, advocacy and meetings.

A good number of conservative Christian colleges are now thriving even economically while remaining focused on the moral development of students and the orthodoxy of Christianity (Catholic and Protestant). Colleges such as Hillsdale, Thomas Aquinas, Ave Maria, Biola, and College of the Ozarks, and have some of the highest ranking.¹⁷

Christian student groups on campuses from K-12 to college such as Youth for Christ, Young Life, InterVarsity, FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Campus Crusade, Navigators and many others continue to flourish despite their often being contested and sometimes ejected from campuses. These provide students places to think about Christian faith, and to meet like-minded colleagues.

Lastly another promising sign, oddly enough, is the fascination of many young people (particularly young men) with Jordan Peterson’s work. His book titled “Twelve Rules for Life,” is a worldwide best seller. His audiences are filled with young people and his YouTube

¹⁴ McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in Schools*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

¹⁵ Bradford Richardson - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, October 6, 2016

¹⁶ <https://www.nas.org>

¹⁷ <https://thebestschools.org/rankings/20-best-conservative-colleges-america/>

channel is among the most viewed. One of his most popular comments to young people is “you cannot change the world if can’t keep your room clean”.

The Good News

My perception of the most promising in-roads, aside from those just mentioned above is not coming out of the field of education, but from secular continental European philosophers who are challenging the viability and sustainability of secularism. Fundamentally, the problem of the loss of moral knowledge largely stems from the complete takeover of the academy by secularists who exclude insights from the Judeo-Christian perspective. These major secular philosophers have begun to question the wisdom of this takeover.

Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), a German philosopher and theologian, held a series of high-level meetings with European philosophers that influenced Jürgen Habermas of Germany, Marcelo Pera of Italy, and likely many others. Habermas and Pera have written of the need to recover Europe’s Christian roots. For example, though a self-proclaimed “methodological atheist”, Habermas has written:

For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. . . . Everything else is idle postmodern talk.¹⁸

Italian political philosopher and for nine years a senator, Marcello Pera suggests the results of rejecting the Christian framework has been devastating. He proposes that because of radical multiculturalism, postmodernism and relativism, Europe can no longer defend herself against radical Islam and other aggressors because she can no longer bring herself to say that one thing is better than another. In his book he elaborates:

Two divergent theories may be compared on the common ground, . . . and one may be judged better than the other. By better we mean that it has greater empirical content, more heuristic capacity, and so on. . . . Two religious systems may be compared by their cultural consequences, and here too one may be judged better than the other. By “better” we mean that it recognizes and respects more fundamental rights, satisfies more expectation, allows for more efficient, transparent, democratic institution and so on.¹⁹

Philosopher Pierre Manent (2016) (a Catholic, though he rarely identifies himself in this manner) has suggested that the reason France cannot successfully accommodate its

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Pera, M. (2011). *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christian: The Religious Roots of Free Societies*, trans. L. B. Lappin (New York: Encounter Books, 2011).

Islamic immigrants is because she (France) no longer knows or remembers who she is. Thus she cannot define her own boundaries.²⁰ He goes on to say whether France is still largely Christian or not, the laws of France directly emerged from that framework and thus immigrants should be told – you are welcome to come however you must obey our laws, which emerge from Judeo-Christian principles and thus you cannot, for example, completely cover your bodies and faces, nor operate in your neighborhoods on different laws.

There are two major tasks that we need to do in order to restore moral knowledge. First, is to work together as “orthodox” Christian scholars with similarly inclined culture leaders to define what is a good person from Christ’s perspective. Secondly, is to reach the culture outside of the university, with critical discussions, such as the ones Dallas has put before us over the years – what is a good person, what results in human flourishing, and is reality secular? For example, Dallas challenged us in 2009 with these questions:

Is reality secular? Is adequate knowledge secular? And is that something that has been established as a fact by thorough and unbiased inquiry? Is this something that today’s secular universities thoroughly and freely discuss in a disciplined way? Certainly not! Nowhere does that happen. It is now simply assumed that every field of knowledge or practice is perfectly complete without any reference to God. It may be logically possible that this assumption is true but is it true?²¹

The first place to start is amongst people like ourselves, members of the “orthodox-believing” Christian community (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant). We have been urged since the 1700s by Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant scholars to contest the secularization of the university and the culture – John Henry Newman and Abraham Kuyper, Charles Malik, Pope Benedict, Dallas Willard and others have all written about these issues. Pope Benedict XVI, addressed scholars in Spain, reminding us that the university must always be “the house where one seeks the truth.” In 1987, Orthodox scholar Malik advised,

The university is the clear-cut fulcrum with which to move the world. The problem here is for the church to realize that no greater service can it render ... than to try to recapture the universities for Christ on whom they were all originally founded.... The university more than any institution dominates the world, and we can allow no fear, no trembling, no difficulty to weaken our resolve....If there is Jesus Christ and if there is his Holy Spirit and if we are open to him, he will, at his pleasure, correct our error and guide us into the truth. ²²

We simply do not have time to appease and be part of an open dialogue with committed antagonists. The contest between the radical secularists (or even non-orthodox Christians) in the academy and orthodox Christians will never reach any consensus on moral knowledge regarding the good person or any other such thing. Our secular colleagues simply have no access to the knowledge you and I take for granted. We must go from Judeo-Christian knowledge directly to define what constitutes a good person. There we have resources and insights for defining good, to which our secular colleagues have no real access. While we can

²⁰ Manent, P. (2016). *Beyond Radical Secularism*. St. Augustine Press.

²¹ Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*. (NY: HarperOne) p. 138.

²² Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks*, 1987, 100-103

have dialogues with secularists as well as those from other religious perspectives neither will produce the moral knowledge that is available to us from our primary source of Biblical truth, which we involve too lightly in our work.

We have started a small project set on these tasks. We call our little band the Upper Room Gathering. We are a group of “orthodox believing” Christians across traditions coming together regularly to study, plan and execute activities to infiltrate the culture with Christian knowledge, whether it would be overtly identified as such or not. The strategy’s first step is to gather “orthodox believing” faculty and similar high-level culture actors across disciplines and traditions to hear from and model forerunners strategies. This is precisely how the major shift in our culture we have experienced came about.

The Upper Room Gatherings currently use questions such as: Who are the faithful forerunners historically and currently? What were/are their basic principles and assumptions? What are the basic principles and assumptions upon which your field currently functions? Which of these principles or assumptions may be true based on the best available empirical data and Biblical understanding and which are likely to be false? What is the higher rationality that is missing but is suggested by a Christian framework? What empirical research and theoretical work must be conducted to reveal true (or false) principles? In what publications (academic and mainstream, print and media) will it be important to publish findings and insights? And which culture makers and scholars and journalists will take responsibility for each task?

For certain, it is a long-range project and we are a new organization. The Board includes forerunners such as Mark Bauerlein of *First Things* and Emory; Mark Regnerus, sociologist at the University of Texas; Daniel Chua, music scholar from University of Hong Kong; Douglas Matthews, scientist at Wisconsin; and Carol Swain, political scientist formerly of Vanderbilt. Our goal is to reach and influence the culture for good.

The necessity for groups like the Upper Room Gathering is that Christian scholars are scattered far and wide, even on explicitly Christian campuses. For many of us there may be only one Christian in our field at our university. So, the intellectual fodder and repartee with colleagues of like minds rarely happens except tangentially across schools or in small gatherings at annual discipline meetings. The second difficulty is that as Christian scholars we have become accustomed and comfortable with being silent.

Whether this particular arrangement works or not remains to be seen. But we must somehow: First, think together Christianly about major ideas engaged in the university and culture. Defining the “good person” will be one of the most significant challenges. Second, we must learn how to disseminate our results to the public in clear and accessible language and in publications that offer productive alternatives to ideas so dominant in the university and media today.

The one thing we cannot afford to do is stay safe in our private schools and offices while the “whole of creation is groaning” (Romans 8:22).