

The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge in Education

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Children come to school and young adults enter college having been shaped by an education designed with intent by the media. The differences between having grown up with *Father Knows Best* vs. *Archie Bunker* vs. *Will and Grace*, etc. have tremendous effects on the moral mind far beyond simple entertainment. The media campaign to denigrate the place of strong men in the family and culture has been strategically and intentionally educating us for a very long time. The effect of violence in children's movies is difficult to assess – hundreds of cars are destroyed in horrific accidents all portrayed as comical in a movie about pets. We don't know the impact of museums displaying dead bodies purportedly to teach about the human body; surely it encourages, at the very least, a mechanistic view of human nature. All this education has effects on moral knowledge and desires. Students bring these images, concepts, along with their fears into the classroom. Compared to these things, the classroom is less significant than it once was in shaping moral character.

1) The Disappearance Of Moral Knowledge In Education

As we know from histories of higher education of Julie Reuben, Dallas Willard, Alasdair MacIntyre, George Marsden, Abraham Kuyper, and John Henry Newman universities were largely the product of Christianity – Catholic and Protestant. It was not until the establishment of Johns Hopkins and Cornell in the very late 1800s that any U.S. universities were established with no overt Christian influence. The secularization of these institutions is now complete. Today we have separate Christian colleges and universities. The secular ones who once simply ignored Christianity are now much more aggressively anti-Christian. I contend that it is secularism that primarily plagues our attempts to recover moral knowledge in the university and the culture. Stanley Fish offers the best description of secularism's power over the culture, "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 Secularism now is positioned as simply the way things are.

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.

Mirroring the university, the secular take-over of the public schools has been described by Paul Vitz (1986), Charles Glenn (1998), and William Jeynes (2007).² The Puritans and other Christian groups played enormous roles in establishing early schools for children in the U.S. As the Common Schools developed and subsequent government regulations flourish, Christianity loses its influence even in the K12 establishment. So much so that in Diane Ravitch's over 500-page history of public schools, Christianity is never mentioned (Ravitch, 2000).³

Until the early 60's, the Bible and Christian ethics played a role in public schools. There were morning prayers and devotionals broadcast into classrooms. This ended abruptly with Madeline Murray O'Hare's campaign against school prayer and the Supreme Court's acquiescence. Government rules and regulations so furthered the secularization of K12 schools and universities that today some private K12 schools, as well as colleges such as Thomas Aquinas and Hillsdale refuse to take any federal or state funds. Some are doing quite well going it alone.

In every area of education, Christian religion is discredited as a source of knowledge, although religious principles from Eastern religions are acceptable. Mindfulness – a mix of new age and Eastern religion abounds even in the K12 classroom and especially in the university counseling centers, where students are counseled to practice *mindfulness*. The human self is not studied from a moral perspective today but rather largely from particular political perspectives. Power and politics figure strongly in defining who is a good person and who is bad.

Reuben whose 1996 book is subtitled “the marginalization of morality” pointed out a related and disturbing trend that moral knowledge over its many transitions in the university went from theology to religion to moral philosophy to science, to the social sciences, to the humanities, to the 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 has taken over the moral life on campuses. These 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 sustained 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 teach moral knowledge by addressing “social justice” issues.

The Christian influence in education was perhaps first challenged by Rousseau's *Emile* where the individual was to discover himself and his world with the help of his tutor guiding him through wide ranging experiences. Such an education never became institutionalized except in small experiments, via private tutors, and private schools, such as *Summerhill*, *Waldorf*, and similar independent experiential/experimental schools. These schools largely share the assumption that moral knowledge emerges from within the individual and the more freedom one has, the better a person will become.

Following the exclusion of Christianity and any organized moral knowledge, the focus in university teacher education became stages of development, e.g., cognitive, social and moral. From the 1950s to 1960s the structuralism of Vygotsky and Piaget posited that there were universal underlying structures of the mind and cognition such that all people

² Vitz, P. (1986). *Censorship*. Servant Books. Glenn, C. (1998). *The Myth of the Common School*. University of Massachusetts Press. William Jeynes (2007). *American Educational History*. SAGE Publications.

³ Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform*. NY: Simon and Schuster.

essentially go through similar stages of development. Levi-Strauss, a prominent structuralist, suggested that there is a unity across cultures that can be observed in the structures of languages and cultural norms at their deepest levels. The fundamental differences are akin to viewing independent icebergs, while the structures underneath the surface are single blocks of ice. At first, the early structuralists and constructivists assumptions grew alongside Husserl's phenomenology. For example, *Husserlian essences* are referenced briefly in Piaget's book, *Structuralism* (1970). Eventually even these developmentalists pulled away from Husserl due to their confidence in the scientific enterprise (Gardner, 1981).⁴

Piaget sought to explain how children develop morally by observing them in interactions with one another and asking them questions. Kohlberg worked to extend Piaget's insights and developed a stage theory of moral development. Kohlberg's six stages move from pre-conventional reasoning where authority plays an important role, 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 wide range of responses to these values-clarification programs, which used scenarios such as – "If seven people are in life boat 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.⁵

Carol Gilligan 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.⁶ 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 teachers simply titled, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (now titled *A Relational Approach*).⁷

B F Skinner's scientism was also quite influential in the classrooms and in curriculum development, concentrating only on observable behaviors. His teaching machine outlined in *Technology of Teaching* (1968)⁸ prefigured computer instruction. Skinner turned

⁴ Piaget, J. (1970). *Structuralism*. NY: Harper and Row. Gardner (1972). University of Chicago Press.

⁵ Lockwood, A. (1978). The Effects of Values Clarification and Moral Development Curricula on School-Age Subjects. *Review of Education Research*.

⁶ Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁸ See also Skinner and Epstein, *Skinner for the Classroom*, 1982.

the moral conversation into “ethical behaviors and self control”. He was fond of performing experiments with pigeons where he would train them to do some ‘moral action’ and claim that moral categories were simply learned behaviors that people engaged in for the rewards inherent in them. Skinner’s work on language also described verbal language as simply a learned behavior. This was roundly challenged by Noam Chomsky (a post-structuralist). Skinner never replied to his critique. Jeanne Chall’s 1967 book on reading instruction supported the explicit teaching of elements of language as phonics and vocabulary development. The explicit instruction movement today, a much toned down behaviorist approach, continues to demonstrate it’s superiority in terms of student achievement to the more post-structuralist approach (Hattie, 2008; Tobias and Duffy, 2009).⁹

Nevertheless, by the 1980s post structuralism and post-modernism had won the day in pedagogy (Fosnot, 2005)¹⁰ and still figures strongly, though the debate has revived a bit (Tobias and Duffy, 2009). The early constructivism of Piaget morphed into the forms of deconstructivism and post-modernism encouraging teachers to allow students to develop their own meanings, students to teach one another, and to focus instruction more on constructing meaning and less on textual accuracy, i.e., constructing their own meanings. To this day primarily post-constructivist instructional practices are taught to teachers in university teacher education programs. Lisa Delpit (1995) challenged such instruction as elitist and ineffective with “other people’s children” the title of her seminal book. Hers was the first major entry into the cultural diversity movement in terms of pedagogy and the first significant challenge to the popular post-structuralist methods.¹¹ In the last several decades the issues of morality or character hardly figure in the education literature or in the teaching of teachers in the university. Today the emphasis is largely on culture, gender, and class seen through the lens of critical theory.

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 K12 (2006, 2009) and Allan Bloom (1987)¹² in higher education urged educators to return to the classics, attend to core values, and use some explicit instruction. Nevertheless the field of teacher education and higher education largely continue toward the deconstructivists emphasizing and exacerbating differences rather than seeking to create an American identity complete with attention to values. The last vestige of an attempt to level the achievement gap between rich and poor, Asian/Euro-American and Black/Latino students was *No Child Left Behind*. Educators largely resisted it, insisting on the values of student engagement, interest, cultural diversity, and academic freedom for teachers.

At last, the critical theorists are taking control – disregarding similarities, emphasizing differences, and bringing to the fore radical political agendas. Currently,

⁹ Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning*. NY: Routledge. Tobias, S. and Duffy, T. (2009). *Constructivist Instruction: Success of Failure*. NY: Routledge.

¹⁰ Fosnot, C. (2005). *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*. NY: Teachers College.

¹¹ Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People’s Children*. NY: The Free Press. In a recent multi-year study of 42 highly effective teachers of the most vulnerable K12 students, our team also did not find these constructivist activities being most frequently used. (Poplin and Bermudez, NY: Peter Lang, 2019).

¹² Hirsch, E D (2006). *The Knowledge Deficit*. NY: Houghton Mifflin. Bloom, A. (1987). *The Closing of the American Mind*. NY: Simon and Schuster.

critical theory dominates education schools 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 with heavy doses of critical theory whose largely Marxist principles are best described in Peter McLaren's book, *Life in Schools* (1998, 2015)¹³. Over the past 5-10 years, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) has been dominated by critical theory and led by critical theorists. 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 12:1.¹⁴ Few major education sources touch on the real issues – the indoctrination of college students in leftist ideologies, however you can see its effects in the younger members of Congress and parents and grandparents are alarmed at the education their sons and daughters are receiving.

Like Willard, psychologist Sigmund Koch warned psychologists of the loss of meaning that comes with an attachment to physical sciences. 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. 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. It is one of the few places where faculty and students don't assume that, for example, the hydrogen atom cares or changes based on what anyone thinks or feels about it.

2) How Is Education Coping With The Disappearance Of Moral Knowledge?

There are several productive ways in which people are dealing with the absence in the schools of moral knowledge. In the K12 arena, there are increasing numbers of homeschoolers (approximately 1.7 million).¹⁵ Private schools account for 10% of PK-12 students (approximately 5.7 million)¹⁶ and 78% of private schools are religiously affiliated. Six percent of children attended charter schools in 2017, today 3 million students attend, up from 1.8 million only five years earlier.¹⁷ A few of new charters are focused on serving economically disadvantaged students such as the KIPP schools. Many, but not all, of these home schools, charters, and private schools focus on engaging virtues alongside reading classic texts, emphasizing values, and striving for excellence in all things.

In the K12 public school arena, there is no national movement toward the inclusion of moral knowledge. Some schools have adopted programs focused on teaching particular character qualities. An example is the popular *Character Counts*, which comes with ready-made materials for handouts and short assignments, e.g., posters and student activities for

¹³ McLaren, P. (1998). *Life in Schools*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

¹⁴ Bradford Richardson - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, October 6, 2016

¹⁵ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_206.10.asp

¹⁶ <https://www.capenet.org/facts.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-education-charterschools/number-of-charter-schools-students-in-u-s-rises-report-idUSKCN1B22JX>

the week or month. Its foci are the six qualities of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, honesty, kindness, helpfulness, and never giving up.

Another encouraging shift is that there are now teachers who openly challenging the one-sided political nature of their unions, which almost exclusively fund leftist candidates. This backlash and the recent Supreme Court ruling that unions cannot collect dues from non-members nor require membership will weaken the teacher unions which are the primary antagonists to charter public schools, for example in California,

In the higher education arena, there are perhaps even more promising movements that directly address attention on moral knowledge and goodness. The first and most encouraging of these is an opening to reinvigorating “moral knowledge” in the classroom. Miroslav Volf and his colleagues at Yale in the Yale Center for Faith and Culture developed and continue to teach courses around such topics such as: *A Life Worth Living*, *What’s The Difference Between Joy and Happiness*, *The Theology of Joy*, *The Good Life*, and *Christ and The Good Life*. These classes have long waiting lists and may even be restricted to students who write essays to get accepted. The popularity of these courses has spread across elite campuses. *Psychology and the Good Life* at Stanford has to be taught in the chapel as it accommodates 800 students. Nearly one-fourth of the undergrads enroll within the first three days of registration.¹⁸ The hope lies in the hunger of students these days for serious classes that focus them on their examining their lives and looking to their future. The window to reinstating conversations about what is the “good person” is opening.

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”.¹⁹ 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, College of the Ozarks, and University of Dallas are some of the highest ranking.²⁰

Christian student groups on campuses such as 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) have with Jordan Peterson’s work. His book titled “Twelve Rules for Life,” is a worldwide best seller. His audiences are filled with young people (particularly young men) and his YouTube’s among the most viewed. One of his most

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/nyregion/at-yale-class-on-happiness-draws-huge-crowd-laurie-santos.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.nas.org>

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

popular comments to young people is “you cannot change the world if can’t keep your room clean”.

3) What Are Current In-Roads to Establishing Moral Knowledge in Education?

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.²¹

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.²²

Philosopher Pierre Manent (2016) (a Catholic, though he rarely identifies himself in this manner) has suggested that the reason France cannot successfully accommodate its Islamic immigrants is because she (France) no longer knows or remembers who she is. Thus

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006).

²² Pera, M. (2011). *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christian: The Religious Roots of Free Societies*, trans. L. B. Lappin (New York: Encounter Books, 2011).

she cannot define her own boundaries.²³ 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.

4) Two Ways To Move Towards The Restoration Of Moral Knowledge And Its Relevancy.

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?²⁴

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, and 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.²⁵

Even Stanley Fish who himself has greatly influenced varieties of critical and post-modernist thought predicted that the academy would ultimately turn back to religion if only for intellectual reinvigoration. What was more unexpected is that he suggested that intellectuals would once again have to consider religion, not just as an object to study, but as a candidate for truth.

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

²³ Manent, P. (2016). *Beyond Radical Secularism*. St. Augustine Press.

²⁴ Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today*. (NY: HarperOne) p. 138.

²⁵ (Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks*, 1987, 100-103)

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).²⁶

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

C. S. Lewis once described our advantages, "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." Lesslie Newbigin²⁷ called this a "higher rationality." The 'orthodox' Christian has a view that supersedes secular knowledge. 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 a good person?

Regarding knowledge, 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*

²⁶ 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>

²⁷ Lesslie Newbigin. 1986. *Foolishness to the Greeks*. Eerdmans.

and teachings of demons. He predicted these days when we would call good evil and evil good.

Secularists are as dependent on their particular faiths, which vary widely, but are much less aware of their own assumptions. Christians cannot be mixing 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 reveals the false principles and publish the findings of true principles broadly. This requires we enter the mainstream publishing arena in every area of media.

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 has worked with a former USA Today religion editor, John Siniff publishing popular articles in the mainstream media. For example, he found that the number one factor in life longevity in the U.S. is regular church attendance. Carol Swain publishes and is featured widely in secular media and Twitter. These are examples of the kind of moral courage is what 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 and of the data regarding who and what people are writing and reading. In a recent post, Christian millennial blogger and reporter who has also published 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% 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.”²⁸

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.

²⁸ Nick Pitt’s Daily Briefing, April 26, 2019. <https://www.thebriefing.net/bio>

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/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.

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 one or 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 their language and publications so there will be productive alternatives to ideas so dominant in the university and media today.

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