Higher Education in Light of the Cross

By Scott A. Ashmon

Abstract: What is the *summum bonum* of a university education? The much lauded "liberal" approach of Aristotle, Newman, and Roche proposes that education is for contemplating the truth—an intrinsic, joyous end in itself. This approach offers the benefits of pursuing truth, virtues, and intellectual habits, but it also carries with it the temptations of idealatry and *homo incurvatus in se*. Christian universities can reform this approach to education, though, with Luther's theology of the cross, reorienting it through the crucified Christ toward the highest ends of life revealed in God's word: faith in God and love for the neighbor.

Key Terms: Christian higher education, Aristotle, John Henry Cardinal Newman, Martin Luther, theology of the cross

What is the *Summum Bonum* of Higher Education?

What is the greatest good of a university education? This question, often expressed in terms of "value," is a contentious query in contemporary American society. For many students, parents, business leaders, and government officials, higher education is an expressway to personal employment and economic success. In a 2012 survey of freshmen in the United States, 88 percent said that the most important reason to go to college was "to be able to get a better job." Seventy-five percent likewise agreed that a chief goal of a college education is "to be able to make more money."[1] This contrasts sharply with a 1970 survey where only 36 percent of college students identified occupational and financial ends as important reasons to attend college.[2] Even the U.S. Department of Education pushes the economic and employment thesis of education. Its recently rolled out College Scorecard quantifies the sum total of each American college's value with five utilitarian metrics: cost of the degree, graduation rate, loan default rate, median borrowing amount, and employment rate upon graduation.[3]

Reacting against this utilitarian, careerist view, many liberal arts pedagogues counter that intellectual cultivation and contemplation of truth is education's highest end. They argue that the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty is an intrinsic, self-sufficient good that need not be useful to or serve any other end, like a job. Its purpose and value rests in itself.

This thesis is central to Mark William Roche's book *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?*, which won the Association of American Colleges and Universities' 2012 Frederic W. Ness Book Award. It also is quintessentially evident in John Henry Cardinal Newman's discourses on higher education in *The Idea of a University* (1852), which many humanists like Jaroslav Pelikan hail as "the most important treatise on the idea of the university ever written in any language."[4] Undergirding both Roche and Newman, though, is the educational vision of Aristotle, whom Newman extols as "the oracle of nature and of truth."[5]

Scott A. Ashmon is an Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew and the Director of Core Curriculum at Concordia University in Irvine, CA.

© 2015 Wiley Periodicals and Dialog, Inc.

As will be shown below, this much lauded "liberal" approach to education of Aristotle, Newman, and Roche draws on a theology of God and teleology of human life centered in the leisurely, intrinsic, personal pleasure of intellectual contemplation. This approach offers three significant benefits for individuals and society: the cultivation of truth, habits, and virtues. For Christian universities, it will be argued, this approach also contains two grave problems that should not, but often do, go unnoticed—the temptations to idealatry (the worship of ideas) and *homo incurvatus in se* ("the human turned inward on herself"). By applying a theology of the cross to liberal education, though, Christian universities can reform this approach by preserving the pursuit of truth, habits, and virtues while reorienting higher education to focus on the two highest ends of life revealed in Scripture: faith in God and love for the neighbor.[6]

"Happiness [is] the End of Human Nature"

In order to understand Aristotle's vision of education, one must first look through four windows, each of which offers a view onto Aristotle's conception of education. The first window is his theology about god. Aristotle asserts that for the cosmos to be in motion there must be "something which moves [the cosmos] while itself [is] unmoved, exist[s] actually, . . . [and] can in no way be otherwise than it is." This something is the first mover, the first principle or god, of which, Aristotle postulates, there are several. The gods, being the unmoved movers, are what ultimately start and keep all things in motion. Moreover, the gods eternally enjoy what humans can only briefly enjoy: pleasure.[7]

What is the gods' greatest pleasure? Aristotle submits that the gods are blessed and happy and that the actions they take up directly connect to their happiness. So "what sort of actions must we assign to them?" In answering this question, Aristotle dismisses divine acts of justice, bravery, mercy, and temperance since these and nearly all other actions are "trivial and unworthy of gods." The only worthy activity is contemplation. Thus the gods' activity is "thought think[ing] itself." Moreover, rational thought is the divine element that is best, most pleasant, and the good state of happiness in which gods always live.[8]

The second window is Aristotle's teleology of humanity, which flows directly from his theology about god. For Aristotle, "[h]appiness [is] the end of human nature" because happiness is what everyone seeks for itself and not for the sake of anything else. A cardinal principle for Aristotle is that an intrinsic activity is always superior—the highest end—compared to an instrumental activity, because an intrinsic act is free to pursue its own self-sufficient end whereas an instrumental act is servile and merely a means to another end. A second cardinal principle is leisure. Indeed, "[t]he first principle of all action is leisure," since "leisure is better than occupation and is its end." Based on these principles, Aristotle concludes that human happiness depends on leisure from work that serves external ends because people are only busy so that they might enjoy leisure.[9]

Intellection is Happiness

What, then, is the intrinsic, self-sufficient, leisurely activity that gives the greatest pleasure—happiness itself—to humans? Aristotle offers three possibilities: the life of enjoyment, politics, and intellectual contemplation. The life of enjoyment is pleasurable, but is merely the relaxing amusements of song, drink, sleep, etc. that divert people from the pain of their labors and enable them to work. Political or military life is unleisurely and seeks to achieve other ends—peace, power, honor, and happiness for oneself and fellow citizens. This instrumental activity does not give happiness itself either. Intellectual activity, though, is "superior in worth and . . . aim[s] at no other end beyond itself, and . . . ha[s] its pleasure proper to itself . . ., and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness . . ., and all the other attributes ascribed to the blessed man." Thus it follows that intellectual contemplation is

"the complete happiness of man" because it is an intrinsic activity free from serving other ends.[10]

The third window is Aristotle's view of humanity's creation. "Understanding is by nature our end and the exercise of it the final activity for the sake of which we have come into being," avers Aristotle, for "every man has been made by god in order to acquire knowledge and contemplate." Indeed, the gods have put this likeness of divine contemplation in people so that they can cultivate this characteristic and achieve that "best state" of life that is "most dear to the gods."[11]

The last window is Aristotle's vision of heaven or paradise. "The Isles of the Blest," in contrast to the instrumental world of justice in Hades, is the leisurely place where "there [is] need of nothing and no profit from anything . . . only thought and contemplation." In this utopia the rational soul is free from bodily concerns and serving other ends and can continually contemplate the truth of the universe. To enter and live in this paradise—should that chance be given, people "must, so far as [they] can, make themselves immortal" like the gods are by using the divine element of rational contemplation in them.[12]

"Everything Exists for the Sake of the Mind"

In Aristotle's view "[E]verything exists for the sake of the mind." In this light, given that the highest end, or *telos*, of human life is the happiness of the rational soul contemplating truth, the question of what constitutes the *summum bonum* of education easily follows. Like the three paths to happiness in life, Aristotle offers three possible primary purposes for education: utility, excellence, and higher knowledge. Aristotle allows that children should learn useful things that are really necessary, but not too many useful things since some useful knowledge is for the illiberal occupations of professionals and slaves, the learning of which would make children mechanics, not free people. Reading and writing can be useful for making money, managing a household, and political life, but focusing too much on useful ends is to be avoided since instrumentality and service "does not become free and exalted souls."[13]

If a useful education is to be gained for business and politics, but not sought as the highest end because it is servile, excellence is a higher end. Children should learn of excellence, which "consists in rejoicing and loving and hating rightly," cultivating "the power of forming right judgments, and . . . delight[ing] in good dispositions and noble actions." An education in excellence, like learning music with its noble melodies and rhythms, is valuable because it properly forms character and judgment. This is useful to civic life and prepares people for intellectually enjoying what is noble, right, and true. But while an education in excellence forms people's minds, habituates them to true pleasures, and contributes to mental cultivation, it cannot be the *summum bonum* of education because it too serves other ends.[14]

The *summum bonum* of education is intellectual activity. Intellection is the highest end—indeed the only true end—because it is the leisurely activity of free citizens that gives them pleasure, happiness, and enjoyment, does not serve other ends, and is self-sufficient and valued for its own sake.[15]

Education for Aristotle, then, is partly liberal and partly illiberal. If a person "learns anything for his own sake or for the sake of his friends, or with a view to excellence, that action will not appear illiberal" because it is done freely for its own sake, or rather, for the happiness of the free rational soul engaged in intellectual activity. "[B]ut if done for the sake of others," as in the case of professionals and slaves, "the very same action will be thought menial and servile."[16] Clearly the primary purpose of education for Aristotle is pursuing personal happiness in the activity of contemplating the truth free from service. The *summum bonum* of a liberal education is tantamount to the *telos* of human life.

"Knowledge . . . is Its Own End"

Aristotle's division between liberal and servile education, contemplating truth for its intrinsic value rather than learning for instrumental ends, is also

foundational for Newman's vision of education. In the nineteenth century, utilitarians under the influence of John Locke argued that education should avoid useless disciplines, like classical languages, and have students only learn what is useful to their temporal callings. Newman responded to this occupational vision of education by contrasting liberal and commercial/professional education. He distinguished them by asserting:

> that alone is liberal knowledge, which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be *informed* . . . by [i.e., minister to] any end, or absorbed into any art, in order duly to present itself to our contemplation. The most ordinary pursuits have this specific character, if they are self-sufficient and complete; the highest lose it, when they minister to something beyond them.[17]

The Aristotelian notion that self-sufficiency and freedom from service define the highest end of education, which is intellection, drives Newman's thinking.

While Aristotle's theology of God overtly informs his teleology of humanity and education, Newman's does not. Instead, in *The Idea of a University*, Newman appeals to the temporal authority of Cicero's *De officiis* and many other thinkers like him. These authorities show that "Knowledge . . . is its own end" based on the arguments that people pursue knowledge for its own sake, without concern for how it benefits society, when they have the leisure to do so.[18] Adopting this view, Newman argues that cultivating the mind with knowledge is valuable for its own sake because in it people receive the ample remuneration of intellectual joy.[19]

"The business of a university," for Newman, is "the cultivation of the intellect." Newman expounds on this in two ways. On one hand, intellectual cultivation is "Knowledge" or "Philosophy" that "takes a view of things; which sees more than the senses convey; which reasons upon what it sees . . .; which invests it with an idea. . . . [that] map[s] out the Universe" to the end of "Universal Knowledge." The cultivated intellect sees truth holistically and systematizes the various branches of knowledge around a center. Perfecting the intellect this way is the *beau ideal* of education, "the highest state to which nature can aspire, in the way of intellect." That this grand view of knowledge can be achieved, within human bounds, is based on the theological conviction that because God is the creator of all truth, "[God's] works cannot contradict each other."[20]

On the other hand, intellectual cultivation is also a philosophical habit of mind that includes virtues like "freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom." This philosophical habit of mind also includes, as Newman explains, valuable intellectual capabilities:

> [A University education] gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant. It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility.[21]

The Uses of a Cultivated Intellect

While Newman clearly defines a university education as achieving its highest end in the contemplation of comprehensive knowledge and the cultivation of intellectual abilities and virtues for their own sake, he too, like Aristotle, acknowledges the great utility of this education to the church and society. In the preface to his discourses Newman explains that the reason why the Catholic Church wanted him to head up a new Catholic university in Ireland was not because the church intrinsically cherished talent, genius, and knowledge, but because the Church sought to enhance people's spiritual welfare, religious influence, and training in order to make them more intelligent, able, active, and useful members of society. Similarly, in his seventh discourse, Newman claims that a cultivated intellect is supremely useful to professional and public life because its power and refinement enables a person

to "discharge his duties to society" in ways that are "more useful to a greater number."[22]

In arguing for the great benefit of intellectual cultivation, though, it is clear that Newman still places the perfection of the intellectual self as the highest end of education. This is most evident when Newman begrudgingly allows that "if then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society." It is also evident when Newman equates theology with contemplation and deems it a "charitable condescension" that theology offers its service to the business of preaching and catechesis. In making this equation, Newman distinguishes between Christian humility/condescension—wherein one graciously descends to the level of one's "inferiors" to help them, and worldly condescension—wherein one helps others but protests one's superiority while doing it.[23] It is the latter definition, however, that not only suits Aristotle's view that it is a trifling indignity for deity to serve humanity, but also aptly describes Newman's view of the condescending utility of education and theology to society and the church.

Faith, Reason, and Wisdom

Moreover Newman, like Aristotle, holds divine-like intellection to be the highest end of human life. This is most evident in Newman's university sermons. Here Newman argues that faith is superior to reason because "Faith . . . apprehends Eternal Truth" while reason ministers to faith. But faith is merely the first gift of the Holy Spirit and akin to genius that "guess[es] and reach[es] forward to the truth, amid darkness and confusion," while wisdom is the last and perfect gift, "the mature fruit of Reason" that "nearly answer[s] to what is meant by Philosophy." As Newman states:

> Wisdom is the clear, calm, accurate vision, and comprehension of the whole course, the whole work of God; and though there is none who has it in its fullness but He who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of the Creator," yet "by that Spirit" they are, in a measure, "revealed unto us." . . . Others understand [God] not, master not his ideas, fail to combine, harmonize, or make consistent, those distinct views and principles which come to him from Infinite Light. . . . [But the wise person] compasses others, and locates them, and anticipates their acts, and fathoms their thoughts, for, in the Apostle's language, he "hath the mind of Christ". . . . and know[s] all things.[24]

In other words, Newman holds that Christian wisdom and philosophy are essentially equated, that Christ is the one perfect human whose "human mind" at "the moment of [His] conception . . . received from His Godhead as perfect a knowledge of all things as it has now," and that humans become "divine sons, immortal kings, gods" when they imitate Christ's image, that is, the mind of Christ.[25] The *telos* of humanity, then, is to know, systematize, and contemplate all truth.

Like Aristotle, Newman's theology influences his vision of humanity's highest end: contemplating truth. For Newman, though, the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom is needed to attain this goal. A liberal education alone cannot accomplish this even if it is a sanctified means to "attain to heaven. . . . [and] perfect out nature."[26]

"The Joy of Contemplation [is] Our Highest End"

Like Newman, Roche addresses his book *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* to the question of higher education's purpose and value in reaction to a utilitarian, careerist conception. Roche argues that there are three purposes to a university education: contemplation, production, and action. Contemplation of truth is an intrinsic end. Production is the practical application of the intellect in a career. Action is the idealistic development and deployment of intellectual virtues and vocation in service to others.[27]

The highest end of education is intellection, which is an enjoyable, divine activity. "Through the leisure of contemplation we abandon the contingent and engage the eternal," waxes Roche, and attain "joy [that] does not, and need not, serve a purpose

beyond itself." For, as Aristotle asserts, "the business of work serves the external purpose of giving us the conditions for leisure and repose, on which the joy of contemplation, our highest end, depends." In Roche's view, people are to "live for ideas, for the life of the mind, in which ideas have no less value than things." In fact, ideas have ultimate value and contemplating them constitutes humanity's *telos*. By engaging in contemplation—not practical service—people participate in "the activity that most mirrors the divine" and brings them nearer to God.[28]

The intrinsic value of a university education that is focused on contemplating ideas is, for Roche, the self-sufficient and paramount good of liberal, or leisurely, education. But Roche also acknowledges and elaborates on the instrumental value of a liberal education for work and democratic life. Liberally educated students develop the "abilities to communicate clearly, think critically, and solve complicated problems." They can "draw on a breadth of knowledge while patiently focusing on appropriate details . . . appreciate difference, complexity, and ambiguity . . . [and] continue to learn." They also cultivate virtues like temperance in studying well instead of pursuing easy pleasures, generosity in listening to the ideas of others, modesty in recognizing those with greater insights, justice in listening fairly, hospitality in encouraging dialogue, humility in withdrawing a bad idea, and courage in holding a valid but unpopular view. These intellectual habits and virtues, as much data show, prepare students to excel in a wide range of careers and to outperform peers with professional degrees.[29]

The last and least end of a liberal education is, for Roche, helping students discern their vocation, or "calling to serve others in addition to themselves." Liberal education helps students ask and answer questions like, "What do I care most about in the world today? What can I bring to an issue that no one else can? What role can I contribute within a much larger context?" It directs them to look for purposeful employment and, when "gainful employment is without higher meaning," to seek out ways to transform society in the family, the world of ideas, and public life through activism. Like Aristotle and Newman, though, Roche holds that the vocational value of a university education is a lesser good than contemplating ideas because "instrumental values are not the highest values, [but] are necessary if the highest values [i.e., intellectual contemplation] are to be realized in society."[30]

Truth, Habit, and Virtue

This Aristotelian school of thought about education has three excellent traits that benefit students, society, and the church. The premium placed on pursuing the truth (and its sisters—goodness and beauty) is paramount in a time when truth is jettisoned for satisfying the ideological appetites of powerful, partisan interest groups or sidestepped for instrumental ends that pursue wealth instead of, as Roche rightly advises, addressing the most basic question first: "[W]hich ends should I seek to achieve?"[31] The pursuit of truth that liberal education emphasizes slows students down to wrestle with fundamental and essential questions of life like: What is wisdom? What is virtue? Who is God? What does it mean to be human? What is the meaning of life? How should we live? Moreover, in a Christian context, the pursuit of truth encourages students to find pleasure in the intellectual gifts God has given them for exploring and discovering the truth of God's wonderful, beautiful creation.

The Aristotelian approach also instills academic habits that are treasured transferable skills for a person's career and community. These habits include reading texts, people, and situations carefully; engaging in civil dialogue; asking appropriate and insightful questions; thinking systematically and creatively about issues, evidence, and ideas; making relevant connections between bodies of knowledge; identifying what is false and grasping what is true; and communicating clearly and persuasively. These intellectual habits, and others like them, are vital for excelling in a job and every other vocation a person has in life.

Likewise, intellectual virtues, which are connected to pursuing truth and cultivating habits of mind, are equally valuable to a person's career and citizenship. Such virtues include charity in listening to the ideas of others, humility in one's thinking,

responsibility in doing one's work excellently, integrity in standing by one's work, justice in considering how ideas and actions affect others, and courage in standing up for the truth. These and other virtues are not only cherished in the academy, they are invaluable for the proper operation of society and the church.

Idealatry and *Incurvatus in Se* in the Ivory Tower

There are, however, two problems with the Aristotelian approach to education and life that, even if unintended, conflict with the Christian faith. The first problem is idealatry, the worship of ideas. In making this critique it is helpful to use Martin Luther's insightful definition of god: "A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good. . . . Anything on which your heart relies and depends . . . is really your God."[32] From Aristotle to Newman to Roche it is evident that intellection is elevated as humanity's highest end in education and life. But making the contemplation of ideas humanity's *telos*—the self-sufficient end that is happiness itself—turns the pursuit of truth into an idol that is served for its own sake. It erects an ivory tower temple with its own god, priests, and laity. Here people trust in the contemplation of ideas to bring them closer to divinity and give them immortal joy just like the prime-mover god who is "thought thinking itself," or the Christ who knows and contemplates all things.

The Aristotelian approach, in essence, turns ideas and truth into god. It tempts people with idealatry, which conflicts with the First Commandment (Exod 20:3). Even if, as with Newman, the Holy Spirit gives one the ability to engage in wisdom (or philosophy) and so image the "mind of Christ" that contemplates all, the idolatrous temptation to rely on ideas as the source of all good remains strong in the Aristotelian approach.

The second problem is selfishness. The notion that knowledge is its own end or that contemplation of ideas is intrinsic is nice rhetoric, but not entirely accurate. If it were, then a person would pursue the truth simply for the truth regardless of how it affects her. But this is not how the intrinsic contemplation of truth often is described. Rather, intellection is frequently described as the means to the end of personal happiness. The cultivated intellect can, of course, benefit others, as Newman and Roche note, but it need not serve them and thereby forfeit its self-sufficiency and freedom. If a person serves others, it should be done, in Aristotle's view, to advance his own nobility, since each person "is his own best friend and therefore ought to love himself best."[33]

Newman's approach to intellectual activity seems less self-centered than Aristotle's since Newman holds that "the Faith of the religious mind . . . is instinct with Love towards God and towards man," and he wishes that "all the powers of [Christians'] minds [be used] to the service of their Lord and Saviour."[34] Still, Newman rarely discusses this loving service; rather, he categorizes it as condescension and devotes much more thought to the joyous end of personal intellectual cultivation. Roche also would seem to avoid the problem of selfishness with his talk of vocation, but his notion of vocation revolves around what the individual deems to be personally interesting and meaningful rather than what a person's neighbors consider necessary and call him to do in loving service for them.

Thus, despite talk of service, love, and vocation, this intrinsic approach to pursuing truth and pondering ideas tempts people to self-centeredness. It takes the goodness of truth and turns it to the happy service of the self and incidental aid for one's neighbors. This reflects the sin of *homo incurvatus in se* that Luther so poignantly laments:

> [O]ur nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them (as is evident in the case of legalists and hypocrites), indeed, it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.[35]

Luther could have substituted Aristotelian intellection for legalism and hypocrisy here since it turns the good gift of pursuing truth toward self-centered joy and seeks a noetic god to support that aim. Instead of the God who created and saved humanity and nature in righteousness and grace, the intellectual idol contemplates its own thoughts in eternal happiness without condescending to trifling acts of justice and mercy for humanity. Even the incarnate Christ under Aristotelian influence becomes the consummate contemplator, the God who became human to elevate humanity to the divine perfection of contemplating all truth.

"True Theology [is] in the Crucified Christ"

Considering the virtues and vices of the Aristotelian approach to education, is it possible for a Christian university to preserve the good aspects of the Aristotelian approach, eradicate its problems, and even suffuse it with Scripture's two highest ends for humanity: loving God and one's neighbor (Deut 6:4; Lev 19:18; Matt 22:36–40)? Yes. All of this is possible by shifting theological moorings from an Aristotelian theology of glory to a Lutheran theology of the cross.

If the Aristotelian aim transgresses with idealatry and selfishness, the root of the problem is its theology of God. Scripture reveals that God is not averse to serving others with justice and mercy; God is not centered on seeking his own eternal happiness in contemplation. Rather, God reveals his justice and gracious love for humanity in the righteous life, suffering, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Christ.

As Luther declaims in his 1518 "Heidelberg Disputation," "true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ." Based on 1 Cor 1:18–25, Luther categorizes all theologies as falling into two contrary camps: "a theology of glory [that] calls evil good and good evil," and "a theology of the cross [that] calls the thing what it actually is." A theology of glory willfully and blindly desires to gain knowledge, wisdom, virtue, and the like to achieve its own divine glory, even though this glory never can be attained due to human sin. A theology of the cross reveals Christ, who "is just and has fulfilled all the commands of God" for humanity, which people graciously receive in faith. Moreover, Christ lives in people through faith and "arouses [them] to do good works [of mercy] through that living faith in his work. . . . [by] which he has saved [them]."[36]

Aristotle's philosophy, Luther levels, "is contrary to [a] theology [of the cross] since in all things it seeks those things which are its own [namely, its own good works] and receives rather than gives something good." It is a theology of glory that seeks its own good and immortality by arrogantly trusting in its own works, like knowledge and wisdom, but can never achieve them due to sin. This is the opposite of a theology of the cross where the love of God, "[r]ather than seeking its own good . . . flows forth and bestows good. . . . [It] turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person."[37] The cross of Christ does not serve itself. The love of God in the crucified Christ serves humanity by delivering people from the law, death, and the sinful folly of false idols and self-centeredness. It reforms life's highest ends by liberating people through Christ's loving acts for them and arousing in them a faith-filled response to love, serve, and bestow good on their neighbors.

Liberal Education for Vocations of Service

The cross of Christ changes "liberal" education from Aristotle's freedom, which is liberty from others for self-service, to a truly liberated education where individual freedom is used to serve the neighbor through one's vocations.[38] This reformation of liberal education is wonderfully expounded by Luther in his 1520 treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian." In explaining how salvation in Christ removes the need for a person to strive after good works to earn her salvation and so frees her for a

life of faith active in love for her neighbors through her vocations, Luther declares:

> God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable gifts? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ. . . . The works of all colleges, monasteries, and priests should be of this nature. Each one should do the works of his profession and station . . . in the freedom of love.

In response to God's superabundant gift of salvation in the crucified Christ, the Christian no longer lives in or for himself, "[o]therwise he is not a Christian." Rather, "[h]e lives in Christ through faith [and] in his neighbor through love." Moreover, love for the neighbor mirrors Christ's love in that the Christian willingly and freely "cover[s] and intercede[s] for the sins of [her] neighbor, which [she] take[s] upon [herself] and so labor[s] and serve[s] in them as if they were [her] own."[39]

Christ's love is imitated not only in Christians with the "spiritual" vocations of a pope, priest, nun, and the like, but also, as Luther says in another 1520 treatise, in Christians with many other sacred vocations that God gives them as being part of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet 2:9) and members of the one body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12–13). Whether a bishop, monk, cobbler, or blacksmith, each vocation is appointed by God and alike as "consecrated priests and bishops." Each vocation is bestowed by God to "benefit and serve" others "so that . . . many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community."[40]

"Wise, Honorable, and Well-educated Citizens"

Luther develops this Christ-like love in relation to liberal education and vocations in his 1524 treatise, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools." Luther begins by chastising universities and monasteries for performing their vocations simply to sate their bellies. In place of self-centered satisfaction, Luther sees the goal of liberal education as developing "many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens" who "can then readily gather, protect, and properly use treasure and all manner of property" for the "welfare, safety, and strength" of a city.

In order for young men and women to fulfill their sacred vocations of Christ-like service to their neighbors in the family, state, and church by preserving the peace, justice, life, and salvation that the temporal and spiritual estates offer respectively in the law and gospel, young people must be well educated. An illiberal education, or an education solely focused on technical training, only produces "blockheads, unable to converse intelligently on any subject, or to assist or counsel anyone." What young people need, Luther contends, is a liberal education that enables them to understand and proclaim the gospel of the crucified Christ contained in Scripture and to conduct temporal affairs capably according to their vocations:[41]

> But if children were instructed and trained in schools, or wherever learned and well-trained schoolmasters and schoolmistresses were available to teach the [classical and biblical] languages, the other [liberal] arts, and history, they would then hear of the doings and sayings of the entire world, and how things went with various cities, kingdoms, princes, men, and women. Thus, they could in a short time set before themselves as in a mirror the character, life, counsels, and purposes—successful and unsuccessful—of the whole world from the beginning; on the basis of which they could then draw the proper inferences and in the fear of God take their own place in the stream of human

> events. In addition, they could gain from history the knowledge and understanding of what to seek and what to avoid in this outward life, and be able to advise and direct others accordingly.

Indeed, for Luther, the impact of liberal education goes well beyond the city as well-educated young men and women will even be able to "benefit and serve the world."[42]

Luther summarizes this vision of education in 1529 in his explanation of the Fourth Commandment (Exod 20:12) in the Large Catechism.

> If we want capable and qualified people for both the civil and the spiritual realms, we really must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and the world. . . . [We must] let all people know that it is their chief duty . . . first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and . . . to have them engage in formal study [i.e., liberal education] . . . so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.[43]

For Luther, the *summum bonum* of education—like life—centers on God and the neighbor. Young people are to learn about God's gospel—the crucified Christ—in Scripture for a life of faith toward God. In response to God's liberating love in the cross of Christ, young people will be moved to use their freedom to love their neighbors in kind through their vocations in the family, society, and church, callings that their liberal education prepares them to fulfill ably, wisely, and honorably.

A Cruciform Vision of Higher Education

Applying a theology of the cross along Luther's lines to higher education today not only supports the good gifts of liberal education, it also corrects the Aristotelian temptations to idealatry and *incurvatus in se* by reorienting education's highest ends toward a vision of faith in the God of the cross and vocations of love for the neighbor. A theology of the cross affirms that each person—mind, body, and soul—is distinctly a good end in God's eyes and that every individual should seek her own good.[44] However, this is accomplished passively at the cross where in faith a person freely receives God's goodness in the justice and mercy of Christ. Stirred by the love of God in Christ, the individual (saint, not sinner) no longer seeks leisure/freedom, knowledge, wisdom, truth, and virtue for its own sake first. Instead, the individual receives, enjoys, and cultivates them as God's good gifts, but does so ultimately for the benefit of others (Phil 4:8; 1 Cor 10:24, 33).

In this cruciform vision the *summum bonum* of higher education is twofold: to know and trust in God as he has revealed himself in the cross of Christ; and, being aroused by God's love, to use the pursuit of truth, the development of intellectual habits, the cultivation of virtues, academic liberty, and every good gift of higher education to bestow good on one's neighbors through one's vocations for the neighbors' temporal and eternal welfare. At the foot of the cross the idol of intellection and the self are crushed by Christ and raised to new life in faith toward God and loving service toward the neighbor. This is the theology that should shape humanity's *telos* and the *summum bonum* of higher education, especially at a Christian university.

Endnotes

1. *Chronicle of Higher Education: The Almanac of Higher Education 2013*, accessed on January 21, 2014, http://chronicle.com/article/A-Profile-of-Freshmen-at/140387/.

2. Mark William Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 2.

3. U.S. Department of Education, accessed on May 30, 2013, http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card.

4. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of a University: A Reexamination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 9.

5. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 82–83.

6. A theology of the cross can also be used to critique and reform a careerist, utilitarian view of education, which, with its typical *telos* of personal wealth, has its own selfish and idolatrous temptations.

7. Aristotle, "Metaphysics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1072b7–31. All subsequent references to Aristotle's works come from this volume.

8. Aristotle, "Metaphysics," 1072b23–25 and "Nicomachean Ethics," 1078b8–24.

9. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1171b1–5, 1176a30–1076b8; "Protrepticus," B25; and "Politics," 1337b32–34.

10. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1095a16–18, 1176b30–1177a1, 1177b6–25 and "Politics," 1339b31–41.

11. Aristotle, "Protrepticus," B17, B20 and "Nicomachean Ethics" 1177b28, 1178a26–27, 1179a23–24.

12. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1177b33 and "Protrepticus," B28, B43–44.

13. Aristotle, "Politics," 1337a40–1337b14, 1338a15–17, 1338b2–3 and "Protrepticus," B23.

14. Aristotle, "Politics," 1339a23–26, 1340a14–1340b14.

15. Ibid., 1338a1–13.

16. Ibid., 1337b17–22.

17. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 81, 120, 126.

18. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 77–80. Cicero is himself drawing on Aristotle (Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect: A Study of Newman's Educational Ideal* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955], 213).

19. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 82, 86.

20. Ibid., 85, 101, 103–105, 167.

21. Ibid., XXXVII, 76, 134–35.

22. Ibid., XXXIX, 126, 134.

23. Ibid., 82, 134, 156.

24. John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826–43* (London: SPCK, 1970), 58, 67, 73, 220, 281, 292–94.

25. As quoted in Avery Cardinal Dulles, *John Henry Newman* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 17–18.

26. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 93.

27. Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?*, 10–11, 148–49.

28. Ibid., 26, 40, 45.

29. Ibid., 52–53, 82, 110–11.

30. Ibid., 51, 154–55, 158.

31. Ibid., 25.

32. Martin Luther, "Large Catechism (1529)," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 386.

33. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," 1168b9-1169b3.

34. Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 1826–43*, 240, 277.

35. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 291.

36. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 52–53, 56–57.

37. Ibid., 57.

38. On this point, also see Gene Edward Veith, "Classical Education as Vocational Education: Luther on the Liberal Arts," *Logia* 21, no. 2 (2012): 23–26.

39. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 367, 369, 371. Footnote 17 on page 369 explains that "college" here means "a corporation of clergy supported by a foundation and performing certain religious functions." Nevertheless, Luther's point equally applies to colleges and universities in general.

40. Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 127, 130.

41. The liberal education that Luther has in mind is a humanistic and evangelical revision of the medieval liberal arts curriculum, which was composed of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), the three branches of philosophy (natural, moral, and metaphysical), and culminated in specialized education at the graduate level in law, medicine, or theology. It was principally Philip Melanchthon, Luther's colleague and rector at the University of Wittenberg, who refocused the liberal arts curriculum away from scholastic logic and speculative philosophy to reading and interpreting pagan classics and Scripture in their original languages (*ad fontes* and *bonae literae*) and using rhetoric for teaching, proclaiming, and defending God's word—especially the gospel. See Bruce Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*, exp. ed. (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1995), 63, 66–67, 90–93; Philip Melanchthon, "On Correcting the Studies of Youth (1518)," in *A Melanchthon Reader*, trans. Ralph Keen (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 47–57; Philip Melanchthon, "On the Rôle of the Schools (1543)," in *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, ed. Sachiko Kusukawa, trans. Christine F. Salazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9–22; and Timothy J. Wengert, "Higher Education and Vocation: The University of Wittenberg (1517–1533) between Renaissance and Reform," in *The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation*, ed. John A. Maxfield (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2008), 5–9.

42. Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 348, 356, 358, 368–71.

43. Luther, "Large Catechism," 410. For "liberal education," see the Latin translation in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 630–31.

44. While Luther strongly argues that the greatest good of education is vocational (i.e., loving the neighbor through one's callings), he also acknowledges that an education can be a personal good or pleasure, even if for just a few: "I shall say nothing here about the pure pleasure a man gets from having studied, even though he never holds an office of any kind, how at home by himself he can read all kinds of things, talk and associate with educated people, and travel and do business in foreign lands; for there are perhaps very few people who are moved by this pleasure" (Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, ed. Robert C. Schultz [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967], 243.)

Copyright of Dialog: A Journal of Theology is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.