LIVING CHRISTIANLY AMONG STRANGERS:
THE EDUCATIONAL, CIVIC, AND THEOLOGICAL PRACTICE
OF “BEING THE CHURCH” IN THE POST-SECULAR AMERICAN ACADEMY

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As religion regains prominence in American public life, it becomes increasingly important for institutions of higher learning to recognize the challenges and possibilities in making room for people of faith within the academy. As universities continue to diversify their educational spaces, the recruitment, retention, and success of students who hold an exclusivist view of Christianity points to practical and critical implications that will be addressed in this dissertation; implications that take into account religious perspectives that inform the lives and the learning experiences of many students of faith.

This humanities oriented dissertation aims at exploring possible answers to questions that guide the overall inquiry into what a life formed and informed by exclusive Christian convictions has to offer to a shared, pluralistic space where people of the most various secular and religious commitments intersect to live and learn together. The overarching question that guides this project is: How ought Christian students – especially those that hold a particularist worldview informed by their faith – live, express their religious commitments, and practice their social agency “as the church” in public institutions of higher education in America?

While this dissertation will address the challenges and possibilities in making room for exclusivist believers in the American academy, it will also press public universities to reevaluate the meaning they attribute to diversity and inclusion with a
view to creating spaces that are more hospitable to religious viewpoints. That said, believers will also be encouraged to reflect on the virtues of civility, respect, and hospitality, so that they may become co-workers of a peaceful learning environment where mutual understanding of others might contribute to the formation, transformation, and flourishing of all members of the academy.

The dissertation outlines certain ways of living Christianly that while maintaining the legitimacy of exclusiveness of one’s religious convictions still lends itself to deeper learning about, with, and from others. With that, it presses exclusivist Christians to answer other important questions, one of which is: How are they to practice, in the post-secular academy, a presence that is neither disinterested nor domineering? Possible answers to this and other questions will lead to an important assertion: that civic and educational pluralism, when intelligibly informed and augmented by a religious worldview, edifies our public life, particularly as people of varying moral and ethical commitments decide to enlarge the conversational space where education takes place. To that end, the idea of respectful dialogue will be discussed as a way by which all members of the academy may become teachers and learners of values that ultimately inform life in a democratic society.
To Jennifer, whose very “being” reminds me daily

of the kind of Christian I am called to be.
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Finally, yet most importantly, I rejoice in my Lord Jesus for seeing me through this project – for planting in my heart the desire to see His church best represented in the academy. He strengthened and equipped me with what I needed so that I would be able to work on this project with all my heart, as working for Him (Col. 3:23). He is the one matchless example from whom I can only hope to understand more and more what it really means to be His church most authentically, with civility, respect, and hospitality toward “strangers.” To Him be all the honor and glory.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Religion seems to be reemerging in American public life.¹ The modern academy is also experiencing a revival of religion that has, in recent years, challenged universities to reconsider their strong secularizing tendencies and renegotiate the terms of the established truce between faith and knowledge.² Institutions of higher education³ in the United States have committed to providing a certain learning environment – informed, to a great extent, by the value of human differences and commonalities – where people of various ethical commitments and religious inclinations converge to learn together as members of one academic community, or one “public” institution. This reality points to practical and critical implications that I wish to grapple with in this dissertation; implications that take into account the pluralistic, democratic, educational, and also theological perspectives that inform the lives of students in post-secular institutions of higher learning.


³ The reader will also notice throughout the manuscript that, while distinct in essence, my use of the terms “college” and “university” loosely refer to, and thus I will use them interchangeably with (unless pointed out otherwise) “institutions of higher education” – that is, the space where higher learning takes place; the campus and/or classroom at large.
Since the breadth of a project that aims at unpacking the challenges and possibilities of higher education as it intersects with religion (and religious values in particular) is too intricate and thus impossible to cover within the constraints of a single manuscript such as this, my dissertation will deliberately focus on a particular religious tradition: Christianity. I will aim at exploring possible answers to a normative question that will, to a great extent, guide my overall inquiry into what a life formed and informed by Christian principles has to offer to a shared, public space where people of the most various secular and religious commitments intersect to live and learn together. Therefore, I ask: How ought Christians – particularly students of faith – to live, express their religious commitments, and practice their social agency “as the church” in public institutions of higher education in America? Other questions will follow in an attempt to tease out some of the complexities that will stem from the exploration of possible answers to this overarching question.

As public universities continue to attract students of faith, many who bring with them the aspiration that they would be fully included and involved in an academy that has

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4 Throughout my dissertation, when I speak of “the church,” I am broadly referring to all Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, denominational and non-denominational; communities of faith that proclaim and affirm the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am mindful, nonetheless, of the diversity of doctrines found within Christianity. However, since it would be impossible to do justice to all the nuances found among Christians, I can only acknowledge the possible shortcomings of my usage of the term in light of the different expressions of the Christian faith. My hope is that by presenting my arguments in a mostly ecumenical way they would still be found appealing to a broad Christian audience. Likewise, I hope that the arguments I am putting forth may also be useful for educators in thinking about ways in which to expand its democratic space so that more fruitful dialogues that account for one’s religious commitments and convictions may take place among all members of the secular academy, regardless of their religious preferences.
traditionally been more comfortable with secular conceptions of the good and of the good life, it becomes an increasingly important task for educators to engage with the questions and conundrums that are bound to spring up within a learning environment committed to some form of civic pluralism and an education that communicates and upholds the values of a liberal state. Therefore it becomes necessary within the context of my project to recognize – or perhaps to assume – that the public, post-secular university shares a basic understanding of and commitment to pluralism that is large enough to include (or at least not to preclude) religion as a source of knowledge and a viable educational partner in the experience of college students. Whether that is the case or not can only be asserted from the context of specific institutions, some of which are more and others less commitment for various reasons to welcoming religion into the college experience. While needed, an empirical study of this sort would lead us to wander too far off from my main objectives for this dissertation. With that, I hope that my assumption can be adequately supported by what many other scholars have already said about the important connection – and needed partnership – between religion and education. Here, there is an important lesson for institutions of higher learning.

Likewise, due to the fact that many believers will chose to freely attach themselves to a supposedly “secular” institution where their faith will not (and as public

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5 Since many Christians, as we are told by prominent theologians, do not see a sharp dichotomy between the secular and the sacred – a belief informed mainly by the biblical understanding of a world that has been created and ordered in its entirety by God – my use of the term “secular” throughout the manuscript will at times merely serve to emphasize a distinction between public universities (i.e., institutions where religious views are to be taken – whether they are or not – neutrally in relation to particular religious viewpoints) and religiously affiliated universities (i.e., where presumably
universities would affirm, it should not) take precedence over other traditions in their educational experience both in and out of the classroom, they, too, will need to more deeply reflect on the implications of their Christian convictions in view of the learning experience they seek to acquire. But since such convictions are informed by a deep commitment to valuing others above oneself,\textsuperscript{6} I argue that believers need to make room for what others wish to gain as a result of their own educational aims. In doing so, they uphold the very freedoms that the Gospel they believe in affirms.

That said, making sense of learning in a secular environment through the lens that these particular students’ faith affords will require a keen perception of the challenges and possibilities of a project that seeks to better integrate religious commitment with the liberal aims of public higher education; a project that respects both individual and community values without demanding the relinquishment of either, for they provide the very source from which both are shaped and reshaped as part of the learning process. Hence, as the dissertation unfolds, I will argue that Christian students are not without resources that can not only help them to make meaning of their college experience through the lens that their faith provides, but also contribute to many of the aims of a liberal higher education. I will make a case for the view that such an education is – or should be – generous enough toward religious convictions as a viable ethical position within a liberal democracy. Admittedly, this proposition will not be easily embraced by

\textsuperscript{6} Phil. 2:3 (NIV).
all liberal educators. Nevertheless, that many Christians are convinced that their beliefs are not to be worn as accessories, but an outward expression of their relationship with Christ, warrants, in my view, the expansion of the definition of a liberal education or, at the minimum, the recognition on the part of an academy that claims to be neutral toward, not anti-religion.

While this is a contentious issue that I cannot presume to have the most adequate answers for, my hope is to contribute to keeping the conversation alive on this important matter. American higher education finds itself at a critical historical juncture. In present days we can clearly observe the emphasis educators of all political and religious inclinations have placed on diverse identities and multicultural communities in response to a phenomenon that is not only emblematic of the academy, but of the twenty-first century American society at large. In light of that, my goal is still quite modest: to simply add to the voices of those that believe that a viable partnership can be properly established between religious persons (that can also, by their own account, be reasonable, intelligible, and hospitable toward other ways of knowing) and secular universities.

With that, I should pause to clarify that my project does not aim, from a deeply Christian perspective, to “take back” the secular university. I have no ambition to institute a politically coercive approach to “convert” the public university by decree, even though as a Christian I cannot help but to desire that others would freely and willingly know Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In sum, what I hope to accomplish is that both institutions committed to liberal principles and

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Col. 2:3 (NIV).
students committed to their Christian witness can be encouraged to find educative ways to converge and converse; ways in which to embrace – even while disagreeing – the convictions of the students I have in mind so that their religion goes beyond mere factual or statistical diversity. That the university would see all students, including evangelical Christian students, as partners in the education of all and as legitimate citizens of this educational community where we attempt to operationalize a civic and educational pluralism that allows each and every member to flourish. Thus, I ask: How ought the believer practice, in the academy, a presence that is neither disinterested nor domineering?

The pressing reality for institutions of higher education is that many Christian students will aspire to live congruent lives in order to best align who they are and, consequently, what they do, with He in whom they believe. If we assume that these students desire to live life with a high level of integrity, thinking of ways in which to optimize their educational experience while taking into account the diversity of thoughts and expression that they bring to the university will likewise become a pressing need for institutions that seek to educate students for an increasingly pluralistic American society. The implications of such a prospect are admittedly complex and perhaps quite overwhelming. Yet the exciting possibilities should inspire both Christians and

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8 By “evangelical” I do not mean to simply communicate the popular political weight that such term seems to carry in America in present days. What I mean by evangelical is a certain way of presenting oneself and the message of the Gospel, which often translates into one’s exclusivist stance on issues of faith.

9 Here I am thinking of integrity as to accord one’s faith the proper weight in what constitutes these students’ identity in public. As such, faith cannot be easily dissociated from their vocation and experience in college.
institutions of higher learning to aim for potential learning outcomes that can, in my view, contribute to even more meaningful educational exchange among people of varying ethical and religious commitments.

Admittedly, extending an invitation to religious people as an equal conversation partners in the secular academy carries certain risks: the perception that the public space may become a place for religious indoctrination, unwelcomed proselytism, the possible dominance of majority religious voices, to name a few. These, as I will argue later, are unavoidable, albeit, not lamentable, as some might reluctantly imply. Education happens as a result of encounters: with people who share and some that do not share our viewpoints about the good life. It also happens when we are able to encounter ideas that sometimes affirm our own views and at other times challenge us to revisit, strengthen, and/or modify our viewpoints on any given issue. These encounters are possibilities, if for anything else, for greater mutual understanding among people of varying commitments and convictions. Although not an aim reserved solely for the public university (for religious colleges and universities are often more diverse than we care to admit), the very notion that an institution is “public” implies a place where “the public” – with all its complexities and, admittedly, its dysfunctions – converges to live and learn together. Therefore, as religion becomes an increasingly pivotal identity marker in the twenty-first century, we are not left wondering whether one might engage with the religiously diverse other (be they Christians, non-Christians, or even non-religious persons) but how these engagements will inevitably play out, particularly, for my

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purposes, in public universities. In my estimation, this is an important consideration for these institutions of higher learning as well as for the Christian believer, the context and the subject, respectively, of my dissertation.

**Why Religion? And Why Christianity?**

The question of how Christians ought to live, express their religious commitments, and practice their social agency in the pluralistic space of the secular academy will be centrally normative to my overall inquiry. That said, readers may also wonder from the onset of my project: Why religion and not spirituality? And, most importantly, why Christianity and not other religions, especially at a time when the knowledge of other minority religious groups and traditions seem so needed?

The answer to the first question can be more simply stated. “Spirituality,” we are told by Robert Nash, “is private; religion is corporate and public. Spirituality is immediate and experiential; religion is doctrinal and traditional.”\(^{11}\) As a set of beliefs that is formed and informed by a specific tradition, one’s faith is practiced in community, by a community. “In current usage,” writes C. John Summerville, “spirituality is more like an aesthetic category. Without an ethical dimension, it appears to be an apprehension, like our feeling for beauty. There may be no commitment involved.”\(^{12}\) Thus we might rightly state that while religious people are certainly spiritual, their commitments as a community of believers (although diversity – and disagreements – from with abound) is

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what, in my estimation, makes religious people in general (and religious students in particular) an important population to learn about and understand. When faith is corporately expressed it tends to often exert greater cultural pull, which in turn are often experienced as tensions from within the context of public institutions, such as the university. The presence of religious persons within these public spaces seems to problematize life among people of varying religious (or non-religious) commitments. Furthermore, religious believers add complexity to public life because of their emphasis on the tenets of a tradition that is expressed – not necessarily created – by individuals, unlike a more private notion of spirituality that I can make sense on my own and in my own terms.¹³ Thus we may wonder more broadly: What are the implications of religion for life within public institutions such as the university? Most importantly, what are the resources that religious traditions offer to individual believers that seek to participate in public spaces accounting for the particularities of their belief system? I think that these are both intriguing and timely questions that both believers and the academy are primed to contend with.

However, my interest is, once again, narrower than religions “in general,” for indeed we cannot speak of them in generalities. In fact, my reason for favoring religious over “spiritual” views is because, as Christian, I do not know how to properly speak of spirituality voided of religious commitments and apart from a tradition. Yes, I may speak

¹³ Hauerwas and Willimon further explain that “tradition is a function and a product of a community. So all ethics, even non-Christian ethics, make sense only when embodied in sets of social practices that constitutes a community.” Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9. That is in fact the way in which I am thinking of the Christian church as a “social” – while also an ethical – practice for the purpose of my project.
of it in merely scholarly (and perhaps even in theological) terms with a view to explaining what it looks like for people who hold these more private definitions of spirituality. I would admit that the opportunity to look into these private beliefs from an objective standpoint would be a worthy study. Yet, what I seek is not distance from the subject of my investigation, but a closer relationship with it, both as a believer and a scholar, that would allow me to learn how to create the very partnership to which I alluded earlier; that we,\textsuperscript{14} as believers, would learn to converse better with those that do not share our views of the world. In that vein, I would side with Parker Palmer who cautions us to a kind of academic orthodoxy that exalts objectivism out of fear that our subjective selves are simply too dangerous (and full of bias, prejudice, blinders, etc.) that if we make room for it in what we seek to know. “Objectivism,” he explains, “insists that we can know the world only by distancing ourselves from it, by separating our inner lives from the external objects we want to know.”\textsuperscript{15} What are the hopes for meaningful encounters that allow people of varying ethical (including religious) commitments to learn with and from each other if the self becomes an unwelcomed element in the conversations that heighten our curiosity and that most animate us as both students and human beings?

\textsuperscript{14} The reader will notice that, in light of my own stance as a Christian and a main audience I have in mind (i.e., the churched), I will sometimes be using throughout the manuscript the pronoun “we” whenever my stance implies a shared religious value. Conversely, I will refer to my main audience as “they” when speaking of “Christians,” unless otherwise noted.

While spirituality apart from tradition is so private it may be more prone to being an acceptable “way of being and knowing” that tends not to disrupt or challenge the secular nature of public universities. While I do not wish to diminish the value of such expressions of belief for public life, my observation is that such forms of spiritual expressions do not seem to pose the same kind of presumed threat that religion, especially in its particularist expressions, does. At the same time, as Nicholas Wolterstorff posits, “it would be dangerously myopic to focus one’s attention on the danger that religion poses to the polity while ignoring the equal or greater danger posed by secular causes.”[^16] Both a religious and a secular view can be exacerbated to the point to disruption of the peace in a community that is comprised of people with various commitments. It suffices for now to merely recognize this point, which I will seek to elaborate later in the dissertation.

I also have other reasons that incline and intrigue me toward a project that takes into account religion in the form of an organized tradition. These are more nuanced than my reasons for choosing religion over spirituality. Let me try to enumerate and explain them.

From a literacy standpoint, which impacts how we view and interact with others in democratic, pluralistic spaces, I am inclined to heed to Stephen Prothero’s assessment that understanding the basics of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism is far more important than it was a half a century ago. Nonetheless, understanding Christianity and the

Bible must remain the core task of religious literacy education, if only because Christian and biblical terms are most prevalent on our radios and televisions, and on the lips of our legislators, judges, and presidents.17

While Christianity has been the “religious language” most spoken from the establishment of the United States of America and the institutionalization of higher education in this country, many (including Christians, I am afraid to admit) remain uncertain about what comprises the basic commitments of these believers and how these commitments ought to play out in the shared space of higher education in modern days. This has been the cause of great misunderstandings, which have often compromised the witness of believers and their ability to participate in a meaningful and peaceable way while co-contributors to the democratic life and shared learning outcomes in the American academy.

Likewise, it is plausible to conceive that Christianity still is, even in its plurality of denominational expressions, the most prevalent religious language spoken on American college campuses. To make matters even more complex, the very diversity represented from within the Christian tradition poses a great deal of challenges as believers attempt to articulate their own convictions – and particular nuances of the faith – under the “banner” of Christianity. In a way, one might argue that what is observed in public life is not a single expression of Christianity but many “Christianities” that hinge on denominationalism while supposedly informed by the same theological, authoritative source (the Bible). However, such differences in expressions of the same faith have posed, in my view, a significant challenge for the Christian community, as the Body of Christ, to establish a coherent identity in response to or in dialogue with those outside of

17 Prothero, Religious Literacy, 14.
the faith. This, in turn, has added confusion and regretfully compromised in many instances the integrity of the Gospel itself. Such heterogeneity of Christian expressions, while positively adding diversity to public life (and public universities where believers also converge), have also made it more difficult for believers to negotiate and assert a unique, let alone coherent, Christian voice in the secular academy.

Whereas many confessional institutions (i.e., Christian colleges and universities) have strived, not without difficulties, to sustain a partnership between the faith and some of the overarching liberal aims of education, public universities are only now starting to reignite their curiosity about issues of spirituality and religiosity. These were abandoned in the wake of the great strides made mainly by the Enlightenment to foreground reason in public spaces, which divorced faith from reason and inspired a movement toward restricting faith to more private spaces. It is doubtful that the proponents of such arrangement have fully succeeded, even though, for a time, it had appeared so. Therefore, what remains important to recognize is that in many cases both secular and religious institutions of higher learning have yet to fully align their rhetoric with their practice as far as their distinct institutional values are concerned. That said, in recent years we are seeing a number of public colleges and universities that are becoming increasingly interested in religious diversity and the religious identity development of their students. Arguably, there are a number of secular institutions that show greater interest in such kind of diversity than some markedly religiously affiliated institutions. Adequately incorporating faith, particularly as expressed in the form a tradition, in the realm of learning remains a challenge for both kinds of institutions. It seems that both feel the
great cultural, political, and economic pull toward inclusion and equity that seeks to bring together incommensurable particularities of individual and community identities “under one roof.” Thus, it remains an important task for modern institutions of higher education in America that claim a strong commitment to diversity to figure out ways in which to recognize and operationalize for educational and democratic purposes both the differences and commonalities that it attracts. The question of how to set such diversity in motion – one that leads to meaningful educational encounters among people of various commitments – must also be dealt with.

In that vein, while engaging with the implications of other (and all) religions is much needed given each tradition’s unique claims, I have decided to focus on the particular challenges Christian students face as they navigate the pluralistic setting of the secular or, in view of the aforementioned arguments, the “post-secular university.”18 To be even more forthright, I have additional reasons for pursuing such a project.

Since I am a Christian, this is the religious tradition that I understand the most. While there is room in the literature and certainly the need from an educational and democratic standpoint, in my estimation, for scholars to engage with the particularities of other faith traditions, I cannot offer any practical advice, let alone a model for how believers of other faith communities ought to publically live and express their unique convictions based on the sources and resources of their particular faiths, assuming that, as

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Wolterstorf reminds us, “we cannot leap out of our perspectives. And even if we could, there is nothing firm that we could leap on to: no adequate independent source” for our ethic as citizens in constitutional democracies of a liberal character.\(^\text{19}\) Thus it is up to each community of faith to articulate in their own terms these resources they can offer to the workings of life in a democracy or any give public space, such as the university. With that in mind, as a Christian, I can only hope to best represent a view from within the tradition according to which I view and live life. That said, it is still my hope that from a civic and educational standpoint, the arguments I will present throughout this dissertation may be found appealing to believers of other faith traditions as they also seek to participate in the shared educational space of American institutions of higher learning.

Furthermore, as a Christian scholar myself, I am intrigued by the many questions and challenges of modernity that I think the church is primed to contend with in order for it to be “salt and light”\(^\text{20}\) (as it argues it should) in the modern shared spaces in which Christians live, work, and learn. I believe that my vantage point as a follower of Christ allows me to be better positioned to engage, challenge, and encourage fellow believers as they attempt to live out an authentic expression of their own faith commitments while practicing a certain kind of social agency that is mindful, civilly respectful of, and hospitable toward those who do not share their convictions and worldview – the “stranger” in this sense of the term. My contention is that the stranger ought to be viewed with dignity and respect, as a contributor to one’s own formation and transformation.

\(^{19}\) Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*, 113.

\(^{20}\) Matt. 5:13-16.
However, it is important to acknowledge that this notion that informs the idea of the stranger is complicated by the fact that Christians themselves not only are, but perhaps should be, as some argue, the ones known as “strangers.” No doubt that in secular spaces theirs is often the most “strange” of ideas and ideals. Yet what I hope to make clear is that my definition of “strangers” will place both believers and non-believers under the same light depending on the context in which we encounter them. What I seek to contend with is the idea posed by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon of Christians as “resident aliens” in a world that does not think Christianly.21

Undoubtedly, the term “stranger” is full of difficulties. It can imply dissociation, separation, and even distance as a result of our deliberate choice of how to view, treat, and interact with others who are “different then us.” After all, certain convictions have a way to compel us to hold on and to be cautious in how we make room for differences that challenge our own thinking. Conversely, when we are willing to introspect about our own strangeness as believers, we may start to shine the proper light on others and begin to view them as worthy human beings, co-collaborators of our own flourishing. That said, I believe that the term “stranger” is still useful in a particular sense, as many authors and scholars have used it, particularly when it denotes the very differences that make pluralism as a civic and educational aim not only possible but also viable.

**What This Project Seeks to Accomplish**

My project will not challenge the notion that diversity adds value to higher education. Much to the contrary. I wish to support such an ideal that also seems widely

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21 For further discussion of this distinction between church and world, see Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, esp. chap. 1 and 2.
accepted in and fervently sought after by the contemporary university. However, I hope to affirm what many other scholars have posited: the need for both believers and the secular academy to move beyond diversity as a mere statement of fact in what pertains to the educational value of life among strangers. Pluralism – by which I mean the hard working of diversity among people of different ethical and religious commitments without the demand for consensus on theological matters – seems to be a higher and more worthy standard for life in shared, public spaces where people are most prone to disagreements that often lead to public isolation and sometimes other more regretful outcomes that are counterproductive to the educational enterprise (e.g., violence, name calling, character assassination, etc.). One would be right in noticing that such definition approximates the definition of a civic, not necessarily religious pluralism. For as a Christian myself, I am aware that what constitutes the particularities of my faith will also represent a dissent from or renunciation of, other traditions based on what is central to my own. With respect to that, my goal is to awaken and orient both the public university and the Christian student toward their own sources and resources as with a view to making room for these particularities to be expressed and enacted from a sense of civic pluralism. Further still, I hope that these resources can be used in the formation and transformation of individuals and communities in the context of institutions of teaching and learning. In that vein, our theological differences become integral in the liberal aims of a secular academy that is supposedly dedicated to liberal, democratic principles.

At the same time, since the exclusive claims of Christianity seem to problematize life in a diverse community among people of various convictions and religious
inclinations, my project will remind us of commitments that need not be perceived as totally incompatible, let alone as a threat to liberal education. I argue that a proper view of exclusive religious commitments within the academy can be mutually edifying. On one hand the believer who holds a particularist worldview can add to the diversity wanted and needed in universities committed to civic pluralism. On the other hand, by welcoming such a student, the public university validates its inclusive (liberal) educational ideal based on the very diversity it claims to value and aim at. While I am optimistic that there is a way in which the exclusive believer needs not to be resented by the secular academy, and that believers and non-believers should strive to encounter one another with respect to their own particular viewpoints, my project will more intentionally focus on Christian students. It will encourage this particular student

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22 I should add upfront that my appreciation for many of the aims of what we call a “liberal education” (e.g., autonomy, critical thinking/analysis, academic freedom, etc.) can and, if construed in a certain way as to welcome religious justifications on academic projects, should be embraced by exclusive believers. Conversely, I think it is unreasonable, and arguably illiberal, on the part of many liberal educators who think it necessary to undo the connection that people of faith seek to form (or strengthen) between their religious convictions and the object or subject of their academic study. The notion that religious commitments pose a threat to liberal education since it seeks to indoctrinate students into a certain set of beliefs, thus serving to prevent the possibility of the “proper” expansion of one’s mind, is one that I reject. In the chapters that follow I will offer my explanation of some of the resources that Christians can (and should) use through the faith elements of the Christian tradition that I believe enhance the values of a liberal education. In this sense, I share with Elmer Thiessen dissatisfaction with what he calls “the Enlightenment ideal of liberal education.” See Teaching for Commitment: Liberal Education, Indoctrination & Christian Nurture (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), xii. His comprehensive treatment of the issue of indoctrination is an interesting attempt to affirm – while redefining and expanding what counts, normatively, as a liberal education – our need to nurture Christian/religious values as an educational project. While his focus is on the education of young citizens (children), I think that his main thesis offers some interesting insights to university educators.
population to think of their role in as well as the manner in which they engage with others in the academy. The kind of engagement I have in mind should allow them to be personally enriched by the education they seek to receive (i.e., their private good as receivers of wisdom) while contributing in a meaningful way to the human flourishing of others (i.e., the public good they may promote as instruments of shalom and givers of wisdom).

**The “Christian” Student**

Lastly, as important as the thoughts and ideas I wish to share throughout my dissertation might be for universities and their educators therein, I wish to highlight that my efforts will be mainly geared toward engaging with a particular audience: the “exclusive” (or “exclusivist”) Christian student in the context of the post-secular academy. However, I wish to note that my definition of the exclusive stance I will attribute to the Christian student I have in mind departs to a great extent from the assessment, for instance, provided by sociologist Robert Wuthnow. Wuthnow posits, among many other intriguing definitions within his study of the challenges of religious diversity in America, that “exclusive Christians appear less likely in many instances to

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23 Miroslav Volf encourages believers to be both givers and receivers of wisdom. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), Kindle edition, 105-13. I will expand on these concepts later in the manuscript.

24 See Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), esp. 159-87. In this volume, the author suggests many ways in which a believer might be understood to be an “exclusive Christian,” in addition to two other kinds of believers he discusses: “spiritual shoppers,” which “presupposes exposure to religions other than the faith of one’s upbringing” (p. 110), and “inclusive Christians,” those who “have somehow managed to retain their
have the cultural capital (education, language skills, experience, wisdom) they feel is needed to make their own choices about what to think and believe” or that “[they] seldom go out of their way to learn about other religions, either by talking with people or by reading and taking classes.” I think that Wuthnow misses the mark to some extent of what counts as an “exclusive Christian.” The author does not seem to acknowledge those whose belief is based not on what one lacks but on the very cultural, intellectual, and (religiously) moral capital one has indeed acquired. I would argue, that this can lead the exclusive Christian to the deepening of his convictions because of his religious commitments. While it may not be the case of many such believers, I surmise that the modern academy is replete with students that are quite mindful of why they believe in what they believe. Their belief is questioned, tested, and increasingly informed the sources and resources that they find valuable in explaining what they learn. Thus I am not persuaded that an exclusive worldview equates to something one lacks, at least not a priori nor necessarily.

The very term “evangelical” – which is often associated with this kind of Christian and, in fairness to Wuthnow, a term that he avoids using in his study – connotes the believer’s free acceptance of the “evangel” (or the Christian gospel), which compels him to witness, thus undoubtedly complicating life in pluralistic spaces such as the secular university. While I am inclined to appreciate many of Wuthnow’s narrow

commitment to Christianity but apparently do not believe in the more exclusionary interpretations that have characterized Christianity in the past” (p. 132-33).

25 Ibid., 170.

26 Ibid., 172.
descriptions of this sort of believer, I am not compelled to acquiesce to his evaluation of what counts as an “exclusive Christian.” However, for my purposes, I am satisfied with his assessment that “exclusive Christians are more likely to believe in the existence of a single set of right answers.” That particular definition should be sufficient for the most part to support the ideas I am putting forth in my dissertation in connection with what I will often refer to the “evangelical,” the “conservative,” or even at times, the “exclusive/exclusivist Christian” student; all terms that in essence expresses the particularities of the Christian faith. In that vein, we may as well include the term “particularist,” as dealt by other authors, to form the definition of the believer toward whom I am addressing my concerns and expectations in this project.

One last point in relation to Wuthnow’s impression of the “exclusive Christian” (his own term) is also worth noting. My disagreement with the author’s portrait of these believers does not preclude me from accepting his assessment as an important reminder that the way in which many believers express (or have expressed, historically) their convictions in public spaces often contributes to them being caricatured by others as not only being closed-minded but often uncultured and even arrogant. These reminders should prompt the Body of Christ to remember its commitments to being a confessional church. That said, this is a perception that, however true, need not be the reality for the believer who wishes to maintain a religious conviction based on an exclusive Christian worldview while still productively engaging with the culture (or world) around him.

In sum, to be clear from the onset of my project, the qualifiers (i.e., the adjectives)

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27 Ibid., 170.
I will interchangeably use when referring to the kind of Christian and the kind of church I have in mind bears the strictest resemblance to those believers that take Jesus at his word when he emphatically states “I am the way and the truth and the life [my italics].”28 This is the way in which I would define “exclusive,” a term that places an emphasis on discipleship as a way of living and on the believer’s commitment to promoting peace among strangers. This is especially important in a place where the need for mutual understanding, along with one’s willingness to be civil, respectful, and hospitable toward those who do not see life as one does, is needed in order for human flourishing to occur.

Such deeply held conviction on a single yet triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as Christians believe) should prompt the believer to find all the sources and resources that this very God offers in order for him to be best represented in the world. By that I mean, to believe in the way and the truth that is embodied in a Christ who says: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”29 Moreover, what I have in mind is a belief system that does not compromise in the exclusive aim, but that affirms: “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”30

I must, however, admit that in being such a believer one can easily express the kind of “Christian love” in a way that does not express service, but imposition; a way that

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28 John 14:6 (NIV).
29 Matt. 20:28 (NIV).
30 Phil. 2:3-4 (NIV).
does not communicate selflessness but selfishness. Such seems to be the perception that non-believers might (often rightly, I must admit) have of those that tend to see one’s exclusive belief as an imposition on others. Let me be clear: I will not advocate for coercion, but will do my best to communicate the invitational stance that I think the Gospel requires of those who self-profess their belief in this *One* person (i.e., Jesus) as the exclusive way to God the Father. Yet, even then, the more one will seek to align themselves with Christ, one must also understand the cost of such allegiance, or the price of discipleship.

It is important for readers to know that while the kind of Christian living that I will try to articulate should promote the peace of the community as a whole, his allegiance to this Christ signals an acceptance of risks that are part of one’s exclusivist convictions. While the university, for other educationally liberal reasons (e.g., to promote democracy, authenticity, etc.) should also be willing to take certain educational risks that would allow for a more civil and respectful community, the need for peace (or a kind of *shalom*, as I will try to articulate in greater details in chapter VI) is not just a *right* of all, but a real *risk* for believers.

On one hand, Christians should recognize what M. Scott Peck suggests in his critique of the church, as a latecomer to the Christian faith himself:

what we [i.e., Christians] desperately need to reunderstand is that it is dangerous to be a true Christian. Anyone who takes her or his Christianity seriously will realize that crucifixion is not something that happened to that one man [two thousand] years ago … Christians should – need – in certain ways to live dangerously if they are to live out their faith … Today the times demand of us that
we take major risks for peace.\footnote{M. Scott Peck, \textit{The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace} (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 295.}

On the other hand, the public university, with its secular commitments, would also do well to heed to Robert Nash’s suggestion that any genuine encounter among people of varying religious commitments (both believers and non-believers) obliges us to take values and religions seriously, which sometimes can lead to conflict. Nash, a self-professed existential agnostic and a secular humanist who is, at the same time, a strong proponent of the need for the inclusion of religious narratives in educational dialogues, suggests that we must be willing to move beyond a simple regard for religious differences in the religiously plural university: “This means taking risks, stirring things up a bit, knowing how to deal with controversy – all the while summoning up the courage to dig deeply and to speak honestly from the heart of the narrative where each of us lives.”\footnote{Nash, \textit{Religious Pluralism}, 142.}

Thus, in order for such pluralism to become a reality, the risk lies on both the Christian student and the secular university as they exercise a kind of give-and-take of knowledge and wisdom, in humble acknowledgement that we all play a part in the forming of our unique identities and in the transforming of our beings into “educated persons.” What is worth noting is that the “exclusive” way in which I will define the Christian (and the church) I have in mind for my project is preceded by an awareness that one’s attempt to “be a church” that promotes peace in a community of strangers – that is, the human flourishing of all – should not inspire an attitude of victor but of a servant who, in the likeness of \textit{the One} whom we serve, will most likely be faced with expected
opposition, which should be embraced as leaning and teaching opportunities. Yet the onus is on the believer to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [him] to give the reason for the hope that [he has]. But do this with gentleness and respect …”\textsuperscript{33} This is a call for humility, not arrogance. That is the way in which I will frame my meaning of one who believes exclusively and particularly in Jesus who is, among many of his attributes, gentle and respectful of our humanity and dignity as his created beings.

\textbf{The Relevance of This Project}

My project aims at outlining a certain way of living Christianly that while maintaining the legitimacy of exclusiveness of one’s religious convictions still lends itself to deeper learning about, with, and from others. It is a lamentable fact that many believers (particularly young Christians) seem to be heading to college underequipped to grapple with the many exciting ideas that they will (and should) be challenged to explore throughout their academic career with limited means to make sense of them from the perspective of their faith commitments. While blame would not accomplish much, the thought that many believers find themselves in an environment that often does not know much about what we believe \textit{from within} the tradition itself, without the means to justify their viewpoints on what they learn from the perspective of their faith commitments, seems to suggest a breakdown on both the formal and informal education that should have prepared them to be the church in a place that does know the church. Unfortunately, I cannot go into much detail as to the possible causes of this educational breakdown. However, what seems apparent is that many young people will not only reconsider their

\textsuperscript{33} 1 Pet. 3:15 (NIV).
faith commitments as to strengthen or learn to better articulate them, but many will unquestionably lose them altogether during their college years. When faith commitments are revised without much thought – or, worse yet, as a result of environmental pressures to conform to other traditions or values – these losses are not only losses for the church, but also losses for public institutions committed to diversity and to the values of a liberal education that places a particular emphasis on the virtue of autonomy.

The goal of a higher education, as I see it, is indeed to challenge and stretch one’s mind. Yet the outcome, in line with what a conception of liberal education that, as I would like to conceive of, is large enough to welcome religious perspectives, should be left to the autonomous person. Just as I would like to call people of faith to maintain an invitational stance on what they profess – that is, to afford others the same freedom that we believers claim to value – it is also necessary for the liberal academy to commit to a similar educational approach, especially since the kind of neutrality implied in the mission of many secular universities seems to err on the side of an anti-religious stance, consequently leaving little room for students to truly learn more and better about what their faith commitments mean for both themselves and the community of diverse learners that a public university ought to be. In the context of such an educational environment, the choice and outcome, I would argue, should be left to the student: to revise their convictions as they see fit, to loosen their grip on certain religious perspectives given

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34 For an interesting discussion of why young people are leaving the church, see results of a five-year project headed by Barna Group president David Kinnaman at https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church.
what they learn, or perhaps to even tighten it where they see fit based on newly found and sound knowledge that they acquire *with the assistance* of the secular academy and its diverse fellow members.

For these and other reasons that may become clearer as the dissertation unfolds, central to my dissertation will be the articulation of suggestions that should help believers to better understand what it means to live Christianly among strangers in the post-secular, pluralistic space of public institutions of higher learning in America. Both the relevance and the uniqueness of my project lie in the fact that I will be addressing Christian students of a more conservative bend – a student population that, in my view, is often neglected by the secular university for a variety of reasons. On one hand it is possible that Christians, as a community, have made themselves irrelevant to the workings of a secular university by presenting themselves – and their views – in ways that does not compel others to listen to them. For example, they might display arrogance, lack intelligible justifications for what they believe, among other reasons. At other times, their own unwillingness to listen and learn from, with, and about others is the problem. For example, not giving the space for others to articulate their own views, attempting to monopolize conversations in hopes to “twist someone else’s arm” in favor of one’s own views, etc. On the other hand, it seems that the secular university, with exceptions, has not sustained its supposed commitment to neutrality toward all religious views. Whereas it seems that greater attention has been duly given in recent years to many minority religious groups, as a consequence of an increased awareness of diverse issues, including current events around the world, globalization, and the increasing visibility of religious
students on campus, one could argue that these secular institutions have been given permission to take for granted the Christian faith amidst its diverse modern community. Perhaps we could also argue that we as a community of believers have made ourselves irrelevant to or unwelcomed in the secular academy given our own attitude toward others.

If my assessment is remotely correct, the church would have many reasons to relearn how to live Christianly – i.e., confessionally, missionally, and, most importantly, relationally or dialogically – among strangers in our present times, bearing witness, without coercion, of its convictions “as those who not only speak about Christ with [our] words but also imitate him in [our] behavior and entrust [ourselves] to his care in [our] living and dying … pointing to a way of life in which [we ourselves] participate.”

My research has revealed an intriguing gap. The literature does not seem to address Christian students directly on the conversations related to religion and/or spirituality in higher education. It seems to me that the energy of most authors (even Christian authors) are spent on addressing the role of institutions and teachers/faculty, with a view that a certain way of doing Christianity “from the top down” would naturally impact the lives and experiences of college students. That is an argument that I do not plan on challenging. In fact, I am in support of it to a great extent, as I believe this is a needed conversation. That said, what is intriguing to me is that where students are addressed, they are addressed only incidentally, as members of the church at large, not necessarily (although there are exceptions) as college students, representatives of the church in a space that is not the church. Typically the conversation entails what “we”

(i.e., educators and institutions) should be doing “for” them – and here I include both Christian and some non-Christian educators that are still quite committed to the possibilities of religion in the secular academy. Yet seldom do authors speak directly from the perspective of Christian students, that is, what students should and could be doing through their social agency and, most importantly, how they should live their lives and convictions “in” and “for” (i.e., in service of) the academy. Where students are addressed, they are often spoken of as “persons” or “believers” not very often directly as “student-believers.” This is where I hope my project will be able to offer a unique contribution to American higher education in a time when the university seems increasingly attuned to diversity issues. Although my project will be addressed to students, I am still hopeful that educators (e.g., faculty, administrators, and student affairs educators) would benefit from learning about the challenges and potentialities related to the presence and education of exclusive Christian students.

Although my model should help to fill some gaps in the literature, it is also inescapably bound to be fraught with limitations. I would expect both fellow believers as well as non-believers to be able to find many difficulties left unattended or not adequately contended with. Nonetheless, my hope is that my initiative might at least contribute to opening the dialogue (or to keep it flowing) on the complicatedness of an important and timely discussion for an increasingly diverse post-secular academy. Moreover, by “model” I simply wish to articulate a short hand for a certain non-exhaustive way in which Christian students might go about living their convictions in the shared, pluralistic space of public higher education. My own limitations and subjectivity as an “interested
“scholar” will certainly get in the way of presenting an argument that I know would deserve great critique for its many imperfections. Nevertheless, by confessing to these shortcoming upfront I hope to be freed to offer a modest proposal (or model) that should encourage students to optimize their deep convictions whereby their faith might bring about both the private and public good that would result from their educational experience in a place where they themselves are “strangers.”

Since my arguments will be supported by philosophers, theologians, and educators of a certain bent, I foresee the possibility that my claims will most likely be received with a degree of caution, if not skepticism, by many readers, including many Christians that may not share with me a certain vision of “doing Christianity” in the secular space of higher education. I hope, nonetheless, that my membership in this community of believers might allow me to speak with a degree of credibility to my primary audience (i.e., students who are fellow believers) while expressing my concerns and addressing the dispositions of the Christian church, which I will argue ought to be a community of worshipers and of peacemaking, not a community of conquest and domination on a public university campus. This understanding of the Christian ethos is a central component of my overall theses.

In particular, I suspect that exclusive Christians – or evangelicals – may question my line of argument. However, that is, for the most part, the segment of the Christian community I wish to most deeply engage with, for their “exclusive” stance poses a particular challenge to the liberal academy. My goal, however, is not to indoctrinate evangelical (i.e., particularist) Christians into a more “liberal” form of Christianity. In
fact, I could not, as a conservative Christian myself. By sharing a unique reading of what it might mean to live one’s “conservative,” “evangelical,” or “exclusive” Christian values I will propose ways in which students would not be required to either relinquish their deep commitments or to appropriate the secular space by demands that others should see the world as they do. In essence, I wish to challenge Christian students to consider during their formative college years, as James Davison Hunter puts it, their “theology of faithful presence” in these shared, democratic spaces, such as the secular academy, whereby they may recognize “that the vocation of the church is to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God;”\(^{36}\) a different people, who embody an alternative culture, integrated within the present culture as a genuine alternative in all areas of life\(^{37}\) (and for my purpose, the university). Thus, if, as Hunter claims, “a theology of faithful presence is a theology of engagement in and with the world around us,”\(^{38}\) we must reiterate the question raised earlier: How ought the Christian student practice, in the post-secular academy, a presence that is neither disinterested nor domineering?

To answer this and other critical questions that will emerge throughout the manuscript, the arguments that I will articulate to help to support my model will be substantiated with an academic literature drawn mostly from philosophy, theology, and


\(^{37}\) Ibid., 96.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 243.
religious studies alongside a literature on selective best practices of higher education. I hope that my approach will deepen the dialogue about diversity and pluralism in American higher education as well as expand our awareness of students’ formation in a way that accounts for their religious convictions. These are matters of concern not only for educators but for our shared life in a pluralistic democracy.

I have no ambition to hypothesize tightly construed outcomes. Educationally, the modest proposal behind the suggestions that will be put forth toward a certain kind of Christian living will be quite experiential at best – hopefully exciting for both educators and students. Many of the outcomes of such “presence” would still be somewhat unpredictable, just as our dialogical identities are in constant process of formation and transformation in light of new encounters with others and on the part of believers, by an increasing awareness of God’s nature and his purposes for our lives. Such unpredictability of outcomes in my view still obliges us to think of ways in which our presence as Christian witnesses might be instrumental to the flourishing of self and others. That we cannot predict precise outcomes but only entertain possibilities should not deter us from seeking to become people of integrity, whose words and deeds are aligned whether or not they are understood (or appreciated) by others. Thus, I can only remind believers of important virtues and commitments that may allow them to live an authentic faith that sees others, regardless of their personal convictions or religious inclinations, as God sees them: as worthy beings and divine creation.

Moreover, since I will emphatically posit that students’ social practice as “the church” on a post-secular university campus does not seek to dominate the learning
environment, my model makes no demand on institutions, yet, at the same time, it does not shy away from an interested critique that seeks to heighten the awareness of both students and institutions of certain values that often hinder the educational process and compromise the possibility of greater understanding resulting of human encounters in the pluralistic space of the secular academy. Thus, I will point to ways in which the university might enhance the educational experience for people of faith whereby Christians might become better “givers and receivers of wisdom.” However, most importantly, the focus of my project will be on calling believers to reassess their sense of responsibility as social agents of peacemaking among strangers. Naturally, that will require of students to rethink their responsibility for self-formation as Christian witnesses in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic world.

Since my research method is humanities-oriented, I will also argue that a more subjective (i.e., a more intimate) look into the issue of Christian living in the secular academy is indeed in order. A “look from within” can help expose some of the challenges and potentialities of turning the secular academy into a more hospitable – and thus post-secular – place where one’s Christian convictions can be informative and transformative to all students. Likewise, when Christians become more hospitable toward others, they not only legitimize the claims of their faith, but also open themselves for opportunities to teach and to learn from and with others, thus collaborating to the kind of human flourishing that a higher education should aim at. I can only hope that the challenges I will offer from within both communities (i.e., the church and the academy) would serve,

if for nothing else, as a reminder of the importance of a life well lived – a life of greater integrity; an aim that, as I hope to demonstrate, is shared, albeit in different yet not necessarily in completely incompatible terms, by Christians and the public university committed to the educational transformation of students. That while Christian values remain incompatible with many of the values of the secular academy, these incompatibilities can be turned into opportunities for complementary and mutually constructive commitments that can indeed contribute to learning.

Finally, for this project to be meaningful, I will argue that certain normative ways in which Christians might live their convictions in the secular academy stem from the centrality of Christian thought and belief. Thus, although what will follow will be mainly an exercise in philosophy of education, I also view my project as a kind of “theological pedagogy.” My writing will be addressed to the Christian student, not the student whom, only by chance, happens to be a Christian. In other words, my project will assume that the Christian student whom I am addressing (i.e., my main audience) is not simply a nominal or a cultural Christian, but a believer committed to applying the tenets of the faith to his daily life as a student and an active participant within the context of a pluralistic academic community. In fact, this important distinction is often what sets the evangelical Christian student apart from other “types” of Christians (e.g., liberal Christians or those who claim an affinity to the Christian faith only by cultural upbringing). Thus, my project aims at helping believers not only to conceptualize and actualize a way of being a certain “kind” of student in the secular academy, but a particular kind of Christian whose life freely willed among strangers may be somehow
instrumental in contributing to the human flourishing of one’s neighbors, whether believers or non-believers. Most importantly, I hope to remind the Christian student of how, through the social and theological practices of the church – particularly, as Hunter puts it, his “faithful presence”⁴⁰ – he might seek the peace and prosperity of this “city”⁴¹ in which he finds himself as a “resident alien”⁴² among “strangers.”

A Roadmap for This Project: The Structure of the Dissertation

After a brief historical account of the Reformed integration model of faith and learning, the focus of chapter II will be on ways in which the college journey of exclusivist Christian students might be augmented by this intentional integration. A discussion on academic freedom will illustrate some of the tensions and possibilities of incorporating religious views into students’ academic projects in the post-secular academy – that is, a place in which students can put to practice their democratic values.

In chapter III, I will turn to important concepts that I think particularists in the academy should consider as they engage with others. Here I will argue that a civic, educational, and theological translation of the virtues of civility, respect, and hospitality, should constitute the foundation of how Christians ought to engage with strangers in the

⁴⁰ Hunter, To Change the World, 95 and 243.

⁴¹ Later, the parallel between the institution of higher education and the “city” to which I am referring here will become clearer. “City” (just as Aristotle’s “polis”) is a broad and yet a literal biblical context found, among other places, in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, as when the prophet speaks to the captive Jews during their exile in Babylon. I will incorporate this biblical text in my closing chapter when this connection to the university will become clearer.

⁴² For further discussion of this idea of Christians as “resident aliens,” see Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens.
academy. In this chapter, I will discuss the intricate features of what makes one’s living and one’s calling particularly Christian, which will help us to qualify the civil, respectful, and hospitable stance I will be calling believers in the academy to take before God and others. These concepts will be woven through the educational issues of formation and transformation that will continue to unfold throughout the dissertation.

Among other questions, in chapter IV, I ask: What does it possibly mean for a Christian to most genuinely “be the church” without the need to transform the world – particularly the world of public higher education? Since I do not take for granted that all Christian students know how to be the church, here I delve into Hauerwas and Willimon’s provocative statement that “the political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world.”43 I want to reconcile what the authors mean by “being the church” in an non-Constantinean way (i.e., a non-coerce or non-domineering way) without disregarding Christ’s Greatest Commission for believers to “go and make disciples of all nations.”44 This apparent tension introduces the complicated and often contentious issue of Christian witness. I will attempt to legitimize such practice by reminding the reader of the connection that exclusivist believers make between their witness and their sense of authenticity as people of faith. In that vein, I wrestle with the apprehensions and possibilities of risking hospitality to exclusive believers in the context of the public university. I also argue that while there are risks, the proper inclusion of religious students not only validate their identity as legitimate members of this “public,”

43 Ibid., 38.

44 Matt. 28:19 (NIV).
but also the university’s own claim of inclusion and diversity as it allows these students to live out an authentic faith and thus contribute to the kind of pluralism desired in the context of the American academy.

Since living Christianly is at the core of this project – i.e., not only how evangelical students actually live, but most importantly how they should live their exclusive commitments in American public higher education – in chapter V, I will challenge believers to think more deeply about the manner in which they engage with others in the academy. My aim here is to awaken students to the fact that, in light of their religious commitments, they ought to seek to become, as Volf puts it, better givers and receivers of wisdom. Thus my goal is to orient believers toward ways in which they might become “more Christian” in the public university. This will be done against a backdrop that should help us to understand some of the modern aims of American public higher education that, as I will argue, often prevents it from focusing on wisdom as a good, particularly when it insists on translating students into consumers of education. In light of that important caveat, I begin this chapter with a critical analysis of the commodifying trends observed in the academy in present days.

Throughout this project, I will explore the sources and resources that inform both the academy and the church as they seek to make room and contribute to the formation and transformation of college students. There are implications that institutions and believers will need to deal with. Most importantly, together they will need to learn how to converse and negotiate their differences in order to optimize the civic and educational

experience of all students. That said, there are potential risks involved in such an exchange. However, in my view, there is a great opportunity in these encounters among strangers for mutual understanding as a first educational and civic priority of a pluralistic higher education that, as I argue, should encourage the human flourishing of humankind. This is central to what I will develop in Chapter VI and will continue to unpack in my subsequent chapter.

By way of introduction of this common goal, in chapter VI I take the opportunity to delve into the concept of shalom (i.e., comprehensive peace that leads to human flourishing). Such virtue will enhance the discussion in chapter III on the virtues of civility, respect, and hospitality. Here I claim that this pivotal Christian virtue informs to a great extent how the church ought to live in the world, including in the world of higher education. I contend that from an educational – and consequently, formational and transformational – standpoint, shalom must start from within: from believers making peace with their Creator; from self-transformation in spite of what goes on around us in the secular spaces of which we are part. Hence, I will put forth the idea that while universities can be instrumental, believers need not wait to begin this transformational journey that is informed, to a great extent, by their religious convictions. One of the central theses of this chapter is that a life well lived changes the direction of dialogues. One’s learned invitational stance – mainly by way of hospitality that communicates one’s desire for peace – changes the nature of dialogical relations shared with others. Consequently, as we respond to others (and others to us) relationally, we find ways to enhance the honor and worth of strangers before our eyes, even in light of the
incommensurability of beliefs that are often not easily reconcilable in American public higher education. Thus, peace becomes a critical notion in the church’s engagement with strangers and vice versa.

Finally, in chapter VII, I attempt to offer some possibilities as to how evangelical students and the post-secular academy may operationalize their unique commitments toward the promotion of a greater public good for all students. While I do not offer a set of prescriptions or strategies, I try to remind the academy of what makes it truly post-secular, encouraging it to view the exclusivist Christian not as a threat to its liberal aims, but as an asset to it.

In this chapter, I continue to challenge evangelical Christian students to rely on the academy and all of its resources in order for them to learn how to become a better conversation partner, especially on issues that carry ethical and moral implications. Here I press the notion that exclusive believers should offer intelligible religious justifications for the academic projects they engage in so that others might learn more about, with, and from them. Concomitantly, I also challenge the academy to make greater strides toward recognizing religious particularists as legitimate members of these communities of teaching and learning. To that end, I insist that respectful dialogues should be the means by which all students may flourish together (i.e., with and among strangers) as they learn to learn from one another.

In chapter VII, I will also reinforce the notion of “integrity” in an attempt to explain how aiming at developing integrity in students (i.e., as a possible common aim of both exclusivist Christians and the post-secular academy) has a way to contribute to
college student formation and transformation for the good of all. Albeit for different motives, by committing to the integrity of their message and methods, I submit that both the Christian student and the academy may explore ways in which to operationalize their unique commitments toward human flourishing with an emphasizes on the public good that both can uniquely promote. Christians in particular will be reminded that their shalom is strictly connected to the shalom of others; the very idea that one’s private good is intertwined with the greater public good.

Finally, in chapter VIII, I offer some concluding thoughts and practical suggestions for possible partnerships between the church and the post-secular academy, emphasizing, however, their asymmetrical ethical and educational obligations in the formation of Christian students.
CHAPTER II
LEARNING FROM FAITH: CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-SECULAR AMERICAN ACADEMY

Religion informs the lives and choices of people of faith. It offers a lens through which many people see and interact with the world around them, including the world of higher education. Religious students and scholars are ever so present within American colleges and universities, not only private but also public. Thus, to remain uncurious about the role of faith in the learning and scholarship of many members of the academy would indicate a denial of an important reality: that religion is not only resurging in the private spiritual practices of individual citizens, but that it accompanies many believers as they come to college to learn, grow, and attempt to carry out their chosen scholarly activities, all while attempting to live out their religious identity in the public realm of American universities.

Jacobsen and Jacobsen posit that rather than diminishing in relevance and disappearing, religion seems to be reemerging in American public life in the twenty first century. Their assessment is that we now live in a postsecular world, a term that denotes “the simple fact that secularization as a theory about the future of human society seems

46 Andrew Delbanco better explains the intricate differences between and the historical progression from “college” to “university.” These terms are, to be sure, somewhat different, for they express different qualities of different kinds of institutions of higher education in America. Their meaning in present days are noteworthy. See College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. chap. 3. However, for my purposes, I will be using both terms interchangeably throughout the manuscript, simply referring to the larger context – or environment – in which higher education is formally imparted. We are also well aware that education cannot be confined to these (or any other) institutions. It happens anywhere and everywhere one is willing to engage in learning.
increasingly out of touch with realities on the ground.” One of these realities is the observable change in the religious landscape of America. In recent decades, the United States has become the most religiously diverse nation in the world. In fact, according to sociologist Stephen Prothero “religion is emerging alongside race, gender, and ethnicity as one of the key identity markers of the 21st century.”

This reality also points to practical and critical questions that the academy, as a microcosm of American democratic society, is primed to contend with and that believers must also reflect more deeply about. To the modern public university, I ask: In an educational era devoted to diversity, inclusion, and pluralism, how does it factor in and make room for religious believers who see their faith as an integral element of their scholarship? To Christian students, I ask: How can they make meaning of their scholarship when relying on their faith as an informational basis for the questions they ask and the academic projects they engage in? To both, it is imperative to inquire: What are the implications of such relationship between one’s faith and one’s scholarly pursuits, particularly when carried out in the context of (post-) secular universities?

While this chapter will seek to clarify these relevant questions, I wish to first deal with an assumption imbedded in the aforementioned questions that some might have


49 Prothero, Religious Literacy, 5.
noticed: that students (perhaps like many seasoned believing scholars) are indeed fully aware of how their faith informs their academic pursuits and activities and thus attempt to make the best out of this connection. As plausible as this assumption may be, in the case of college students (particularly young, traditionally aged students), the implications of one’s faith on one’s scholarly pursuits and even the meaning of their whole college career may not have been adequately thought through prior to their ingress in higher education. Naturally, it would be important to consider this assumption on a more personal basis. However, in more general terms, some might argue that perhaps it would be unreasonable for these young people to have come to college with a full awareness of such critical implications. Others would remind us that a certain reading of the American college experience (particularly from the perspective of what a liberal education aims at) should be the ideal time devoted to such explorations and discoveries; a time when faith would manifest itself in unique ways as it intersects with what one learns within a diverse academy. Some might even go as far as arguing that a tightly construed aim that foregrounds religious commitments as one enters the academy might impede the transformational journey that students should seek – or should at least be open to – during these critical, formational college years.

In his seminal book, The Idea of a University, John Henry Newman posits that “Liberal Education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect, as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence.” He adds that the intellect has its beauty, and it has those who aim at it. To open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to know, and to digest, master, rule, and use its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, resources, address, eloquent expression, is an object as
intelligible (for here we are inquiring, not what the object of a Liberal Education is worth, nor what use the Church makes of it, but what it is in itself), I say, an object as intelligible as the cultivation of virtue, while, at the same time, it is absolutely distinct from it.\textsuperscript{50}

Newman’s assessment of what a liberal education should aim at as it serves to form and inform one’s intellect has a way, in my view, in which to dreadfully remind certain critics of modern trends in the academy of how far off the university has veered from educational goals qualified in such peculiar terms. Those who are keen observers of the tendencies that transpire within the contemporary university might suggest that the goals outlined by Newman have only faint connections with the aims of the contemporary university and the aspirations it seems to have for its students and scholars. I have no need to contest the fact that college should be a time for such expansion of one’s mind and intellect. In fact, as an educator I would affirm such educational aim wholeheartedly and would hope that it would. However, I share in some of the doubts of critics of the contemporary university that such expansion of the intellect is still an intentional practice fostered by (when and if it even aims at) modern institutions of teaching and learning, the lack of which seems to come at a high cost for both students and society as beneficiaries of the private and public goods that ought to stem from one’s excursions in higher education. In fact, certain practices deemed “educational” appear to be inconsistent with the way in which institutions, through the practices of many educators, have taught themselves (albeit often forced by greater powers, be they political, economic, etc.) to view students as “consumers” (others might call them

customers or clients) and not as “social agents,” or “informed citizens,” or less yet, the “educated person” in the making.

There is a sense in which the contemporary university has forgotten – or convinced itself – that human beings are full of potentialities and capabilities that, as a community, we have the responsibility to help them realize and channel toward virtuous actions that would benefit some greater good beyond individuals themselves. Yes, it might be undeniable that many institutions of higher education have painstakingly written in their mission statements some form of affirmation of their aim to develop the intellect – and, consequently, the cultivation of virtue, reminiscent of what Newman had in mind – along with the ethical and social commitments that students ought to aspire or be awakened to during the college years. However, one might be at liberty to question if practice follows the rhetoric of these statements (often only found buried in the depths of institutions’ websites) for mere contemplation and intellectual entertainment. Yet if, for instance, we were willing to affirm a whole body of literature on student learning which supports the notion that the college years are critical to one’s growth, maturation, and development, still one could argue that each student will grow, mature, and develop in different ways and at different paces, especially when accounting for how differently equipped (e.g., academically, socially, spiritually, and so on) each one of them might be at the onset and throughout their college journey.

Although the college experience has the potential to shape individuals in particularly desirable ways, any formal or informal learning experience, regardless of place or time in one’s life, can serve to form and transform individuals. The church, as
yet another educational agency, strives to help people to mature in one’s faith in Christ. In fact, maturation, growth, and/or personal development in the faith, can be thought of in connection to the process of “sanctification:” a process of continual transformation after one has accepted Christ as savior which should lead one toward seeking greater intimacy with him; a process of habituation (to use Aristotle’s term) into “being the kind of Christian” one is called by and in Christ. In this process of “becoming,” the church also teaches believers how to better articulate why they believe in whom (i.e., Christ) they believe. Naturally, it is also not hard to imagine that not all churches (just like not all universities) focus on this kind of intentional or personal “education toward habituation” of believers. Arguably, some do that more intentionally than others. What is important to contend with as a result of the church’s greater or lesser effort to educate believers in the basic tenets of our faith is that, in the case of students, each will come to college with a different private and communal religious “history.” Many have had the chance to think deeply about their faith and the ways in which their religious commitments might intersect with other aspects of their lives. Others may not have had the same opportunity or may not have been taught how to make such connections.

While seasoned scholars may be able to better articulate how their faith intersects and impacts their scholarship (again, with exceptions), students entering the university for the first time may not fully realize some of the difficulties that they may encounter while attempting to operationalize their faith in a space where “strange” new ideas abound. Pairing one’s faith with one’s learning for the purpose of not only the development of one’s intellect, but also for the good and responsible use of it, takes
intentionality. Being intentional in that vein requires the kind of habituation that Aristotle spoke intently of and that the Christian Church, particularly through Catholic thinkers who place a great value on the connection between faith and reason, has dealt with quite extensively through the work of many thinkers throughout history (Aquinas is but one great example, followed by many ancient and contemporary Christian thinker and theologians). Indeed, if one of the goals of higher education is to allow students to experience a kind of self-exploration that leads to self-transformation, it would be imperative that one’s values would have to be revisited in order for them to be either revised (where needed) and/or deepened as a result of greater knowledge acquired throughout their college experience. With that, I envision that the end goal of this exploration and transformation would lead to formation of individuals that can properly align who they are with what they do – that is, to form students, through the cultivation of certain virtues, into people of integrity. That, however, will require a great deal of intentionality as one sets himself into many uncharted intellectual territories. In that sense the Christian vocation toward becoming “an educated person” would be more successful with a degree of planning. That would happen as students seek to make meaningful connections between what they learn and what they believe in while in the company of other believers and non-believers who can teach them how to “be the church.”

If I am correct in thinking that certain virtues that contribute to a cogent Christian worldview – i.e., that which helps us to interpret the world through the lens of our faith – is analogous to developing a disposition (or an inclination) toward seeing the material world in the light of Christ’s teachings, I think that it is important for educators not to
assume that all students would know how to partake in this exercise of seeing their college journey through the lens of their faith (i.e., their Christian worldview). I believe that this is something that needs to be learned by students; a practice that students need to be socialized and habituated into, as a practice of the Church itself, which stems from a kind of theological pedagogy that seeks to promote, among other things, the *shalom* of God – or comprehensive peace – in a world where self-interests often leads to disharmony. This is a practice that begins with deep introspection about the distinguishing identity of mature Christians.

Therefore, the Church has an important role to play here. In fact, from a practical standpoint, many churches around university campuses seem to make concerted efforts to keep Christian college students engaged with their faith community, albeit through a “new” local church. However, in the absence of a church *in* the secular university campus or in light of the inability (or, regrettfully, the unwillingness) of many churches to provide such support and insights, the committed believer should still find ways in which to reflect on the implications of her religious convictions to the learning she will be experiencing throughout her college years. This is why, later on, I will highlight the importance of mentorship (or discipleship), encouraging the Christian student to find other believers to whom she might be able to be accountable and with whom she might find opportunities to reflect deeply about issues in which her faith would be instrumental to her learning during these critical college years.

While the church has an important role to play, the university that values their educational mission is certainly not exempted from playing its part. The growing
literature that affirms the need for institutions to take more seriously the religious
dispositions of many students of faith seems to corroborate with my perception that the
secular nature of public institutions of higher learning does not completely preclude them
from engaging more deeply with student learning that stems from their religious identity
and commitments. For instance, while Caitlin Mahaffey and Scott Smith, both student
affairs educators, provide an interesting discussion on ways in which universities may
create a welcoming campus environment for students from other minority religious
groups, their suggestions, while unduly excluding Christians, would seem applicable for
the engagement of evangelical students. Some of the authors’ strategies for inclusiveness
account for the following: the initiation of dialogues on the part of educators from the
onset of students’ college career about issues related to their religious identity; greater
collaboration among departments on campus (e.g., office of religious life, residence life,
etc.) as well as the establishment of partnerships with outside religious organizations
(e.g., places of worship); the provision of resources whereby new students might be
helped to find religious groups with which they may want to be affiliated on campus;
training of mentors (e.g., faculty, staff, and even alumni) who might be willing to assist
religious students in meaningful ways, ensuring that these students feel at home while in
college.\footnote{Caitlin J. Mahaffey and Scott A. Smith, “Creating Welcoming Campus
Environments for Students from Minority Religious Groups.” In \textit{Student Engagement in
Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Diverse
90-96.} Mahaffey and Smith’s contention is that “[these] proposed strategies have the
potential to improve the campus climate for students from diverse religious backgrounds,
and most of these interventions may be employed without placing great demands on the limited resources of institutions." If that is so, why are secular institutions so hesitant to reach these students “where they are at” in terms of the religious sources and resources that seem so central in their attempt to exact the kind of learning that will ultimately contribute to them becoming “an educated person”?

Naturally, we can surmise that some institutions still find it challenging to justify the energy that is required to make these meaningful connections for the benefit of students of faith. Paired with what might often be a mistaken reading of the “wall of separation” between church and state in the United States, many justify their inertia in matters of religion and spirituality when it flairs up in secular spaces by affirming that student development or learning in such direction is “out of our (public) jurisdiction.” But is it really? And do these apprehensions have a solid foundation? It seems as though some misunderstandings about the boundaries of secular institutions in matters that could promote a more coherent (and educationally sound) connection between one’s faith with one’s learning still appears, in a very basic level (let alone when issues of rights are introduced) to distract or discourage institutions from moving more intentionally toward the kind of inclusion and/or pluralism, by which I mean the hard work that sets diversity in motion toward a communal life among strangers, that accounts for the religious worldviews which more often than not – and whether we are willing to admit it or not – inform the lives of believers in the academy.

While secular universities can (and should) come up with creative and

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52 Ibid., 96.
educationally meaningful ideas about ways in which to better integrate students of faith into campus life (i.e., their academic and social life), their commitment to living Christianly does not wait or depend on universities for their formation and transformation. Regardless of the resources that institutions may (or may not) provide toward such aim, my project insist that believers in the secular academy should find for themselves meaningful avenues to develop their academic vocation in light of their religious convictions. The greater onus is, in my view, still on the Church and the “churched.” After all, the university is not the church,\textsuperscript{53} nor should it attempt to be.

Before getting too far into the viability and possibilities of integrating one’s faith in one’s scholarship in the context of secular universities, I think it would be important to emphasize what the interaction of faith and learning means for educational and spiritual practices that center on the formation and transformation of college students of faith. More specifically, I want to delve into what these possible practices suggest for how the post-secular university as well as the Church should understand their respective roles in the cultivating the intellectual virtues of Christian students.

**Faith and Learning as Formative Practice**

As higher education continues to foster a commitment to bringing together “under one roof” people of the most diverse walks of life and grapple with the workings of pluralism in its democratic educational space, the American college campus becomes increasingly populated with students who consider themselves “religious” and report to see their faith as an important facet of who they are. Thus, I would argue that it becomes

important for the university to maintain a curious posture about the role faith plays in the scholarship that students engage in, for it is hard to deny the important reality in American higher education that religion is not only a private but also a public matter. Indeed, a matter that matters to pluralism, the kind of which compels us to express our diverse views in dialogical and mutually constructive relations with those whom we share the educational public.

Since the integration of faith and learning is not a new phenomenon in the academy, I believe it would be productive to briefly recap some of the important historical developments that should help us to conceptualize what the literature means by the integration (or interaction) of faith and learning. I will then proceed to explore some of the implications of such integration in light of the particular customs and traditions of the American academy. In chapter VII, I will come back to this matter in hopes to offer some modest suggestions whereby Christian students and scholars, committed to what their faith means to their scholarship, may attempt to live out their convictions while contributing to the civic and pluralistic nature of “secular” institutions of higher education. Moreover, since my project is situated within the context of public institutions, I want to try to extend the conversation on and potential ways in which to integrate faith and learning – often accepted by many, albeit not in equal terms, “faith-based” universities – to public universities where such matters are potentially problematized by the secular nature of these institutions.

My hope is also that through a better understanding of how Christians view their educational calling or mission, a conversation might be furthered whereby the academy
may see the value in the unique contributions of believers in the public space of institutions of higher learning. I will argue that the contributions of Christian students have the potential to meaningfully add to the diversity of knowledge produced and shared within these pluralistic and democratic communities of teaching and learning.

The conceptual foundation where this chapter will rest is on the Protestant, Reformed understanding of how faith and learning can be cogently integrated into the life and scholarship of believers. One must also acknowledge that American higher education is also indebted to the work of Catholic thinkers and educators. In that respect, any conversation that highlights the intersection of faith and learning should flourish, as I will attempt to articulate it, as an ecumenical exercise that would lead us toward a better understanding of the role of faith in the scholarly experiences of believers – Catholics and/or Protestants – in the context of the American secular academy.

**Christian Scholarship and Other Influential Forces: A Brief Historical Account**

Theologian Andrew Walls recounts that the origins of Christian Scholarship is tied to “evangelistic theology – scholarship in mission, made necessary by mission.” According to the author, Christian scholarship came to being with the expansion of the Christian mission to the Greek world, which broadened the role of theology as the early Christians attempted to articulate their faith to people who had been shaped by a Greek

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inheritance centuries before Christ. Walls adds that in a market of religions Christianity was but one option among many. So, the task of early Christians (including, in particular, the Apostle Paul’s relentless work of apologetics) was, to a great extent, to make sure that the story about a Jewish carpenter was not distorted, exaggerated, or misunderstood.

Thus, one might argue that this was, in essence, the early expression of Christian scholarship: a scholarship tied, as it still is, to the missionary nature of Christianity with the intention to best represent the personhood and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, American public higher education is indebted to a rich tradition of the Christian Church, which established, hundreds of years ago, institutions of education for the training of young minds. The Catholic Church in particular can be credited for the establishment of many European medieval universities from which our modern universities stem. However, from a historical perspective, it is also important to note that even the earlier Catholic universities of Europe in the Middle Ages had to contend with radical ideas, heresy, and looming sedition, which caused the church to keep a close eye on the secularizing tendencies pervading the Christian academy since its inception.

Although other important historical developments have helped to shape the character and purposes of the American academy, which is a topic larger than I can

\[55\] Ibid., 166-167.

\[56\] Ibid., 167.

\[57\] Jacobsen and Jacobsen, “Postsecular America,” 8.

\[58\] Anthony T. Kronman offers an interesting historical account of how the American academy has undergone three critical phases in what pertains to the usefulness of the study of the purpose and value of life. The first begins with the founding of
contend with in the scope of this dissertation, what we are aware of is that a major shift happened in higher education from the Classical to the Enlightenment periods: a shift from God-centeredness (faith in God) to man-centeredness (faith in reason). This shift dramatically redefined the scholarly task of those in the academy.\textsuperscript{59} In fact, one might argue that such man-centeredness in scholarly pursuits resulted in an overreliance on reason alone, often forcing religion to the margins of academic conversations. Under the premise that religion could thwart a truly liberal education, compromise the attainment of individual autonomy, frustrate the objective aims of academic freedom, and possibly encroach on the legal boundaries that separates (at least in the United States) religious from secular matters, the academy sustained for some time, albeit often in subtle ways, its commitment to relegating religion to a lower status of rational justification. But what were the consequences of that?

I am inclined to agree with former president of Calvin College, Anthony Diekema, that while religion had for some time been perceived as a threat to liberal academic pursuits, its marginalization, in effect, has threatened academic freedom itself.\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, Diekema explains that from within and outside of the academy as well as from

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\item Harvard College in the seventeenth century (the “age of piety”); the second follows the establishment of the first universities after the Civil War (the “age of secular humanism”); the third begins in the late 1960s when questions pertaining to the meaning of life seem to have been abandoned even by disciplines in the humanities. \textit{Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 45-47.


\item Ibid., 38.
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\end{footnotesize}
within public, private, and religious institutions, the phenomena of political correctness, prior restraint, censorship, and ideological imperialism, have demanded (sometimes forcefully, but more often subtly) of faculty and students the surrender of their worldviews and the ceasing of their pursuit of truth.\textsuperscript{61} In turn, these threats to academic freedom have contributed to the binding of the intellect, often compromising the very foundation of academic freedom as a moral practice deeply embedded in the ethos of the academy.\textsuperscript{62}

In modern days, the impact of secularization and secularism\textsuperscript{63} has caused higher education to be reshaped in dramatic ways. Although half a century in the making, Jacobsen and Jacobsen recall that by the mid-twentieth century we started to observe in America a critical shift in the relationship of the academy with religion.\textsuperscript{64} The authors remind us of the publication of \textit{God and Man at Yale} in 1951, in which the young and conservative William F. Buckley offered a sharp critique of how his alma matter (Yale University) had been marginalizing religion while still claiming its Christian and religious character as an institution. By the 1960s, arguably motivated by the theory that

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 11.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 28.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Note that, different than the term “secular”, which should imply the disposition of public spaces, such as the secular university, to remain neutral toward religious convictions and justifications (although in practice religion still seems to be inequitably treated in present academic dialogues), a certain reading of the terms “secularization” and “secularism” suggests a more concerted opposition to or hesitation toward religious worldviews in an attempt to restrict and/or relegate religious expressions of individuals strictly to private spaces.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Jacobsen and Jacobsen, “Postsecular America,” 9.
\end{enumerate}
the world was being increasingly secularized, institutions of higher learning began to signal a more secularist (i.e., anti-religion) stance on education. As religion seemed to have less and less of an influence on American society and with the world becoming increasingly secularized, in the academy, religion, once seen as “a source of inspiration or insight concerning human life and thought,” had been rejected and pushed to the side. Only a decade later, major American universities, defining public knowledge in purely secular terms, had bleached religion from their goals and purposes. Toward the end of the 1970s, institutions of higher learning had relegated religious beliefs solely to the private lives of individuals; public knowledge disseminated in the classroom would have only scant connections to the personal beliefs and practices of students.

Some would argue that this is precisely the era in which we currently live. However, there is also a glimmering hope for religion – and for Christian scholarship – in

65 See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), where the renowned sociologist outlines his definition of the term “secularization,” contributing to what is now known in academic circles as “secularization theory.” According to such theory, we would see, particularly in the West, less and less of religious influences until the world had finally and completely turned its back on religion, moving full force toward modernity with the individual at the center of all humanly experienced activities. Interestingly, this was a position that Berger himself retracted and revised a few decades later. In his essay “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview” the author affirms that “the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions […], is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.” *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 2.


67 Ibid., 10.
light of new developments in the academy, especially in what pertains to an arguably new commitment to diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism in present days. In light of that, one might find reasons for some optimism that the American academy, motivated by factors that, again, cannot be adequately addressed in the context of this discussion, may be regaining an interest (albeit still timidly) for religion. Christian scholarship, in particular, continues to be reshaped by recent cultural shifts in the academy. “It is no secret to those involved in scholarship,” states Diekema, “that Enlightenment answers have become post-Enlightenment questions. The fundamental presupposition of autonomous reason’s self-sufficiency has been found to be seriously flawed.”

Thus, Diekema suggests that the parameters of a culture other then Enlightenment is in the making. Reason, he adds, is being relocated and placed within a wider range of human gifts and talents: “a very pervasive rediscovery of values, spirituality, ethics, emotions, intuition, and human communal concerns seems to be shaping the new worldviews emerging in our [American] society and all over the world.”

This, I assume, would be the opportunity in which serious Christian scholarship may regain its proper place in the academy: not one of dominance, for such stance would compromise the very freedom Christianity aspires to promote. In my view, Christian scholarship should seek to contribute to a space characterized by comradery and solidarity, where the believer might, in a distinctive way, learn in and add value to the educational aims of the secular academy.

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69 Ibid.
The Integration (or Interaction) of Faith and Learning

Although there are many ways in which Christian scholars can approach their work, a very influential American model of Christian scholarship in recent years is the one known as “the integration of faith and learning”. This model has delineated to a great extent the boundaries of present conversations about how Christians approach their scholarship.\textsuperscript{70} Tracing its historical origins, Jacobsen and Jacobsen recount that the model was developed by Evangelical Protestants after World War II in an attempt to combat the pejorative image of fundamentalist antiintellectualism. The authors clarify that Evangelical Christian scholars felt compelled to demonstrate that they were on par with their secular colleagues in what pertained to mastery of their academic disciplines.\textsuperscript{71} They further explain that

The task of the Christian scholar was understood to be twofold: (1) to critique the premises of modern learning when and where they directly conflicted with Christian truth, and (2) to discover the ways modern learning at its best might either reinforce or refine the truth of faith. This was and is the foundation of the integration model of Christian scholarship.\textsuperscript{72}

George Marsden, a leading voice of the integration model in recent decades, posits that the model is not meant to victimize Christians or highlight the discrimination against them in the secular academy. He is concerned, nonetheless, that the attitude of the dominant academic culture still tends to teach people that reflection on the intellectual implications of one’s faith – an esteemed practice of countless students and scholars –


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 18.
must be suppressed in the educational space. According to Marsden, this is a culture that simply takes for granted the separation of faith and learning; a culture that trains scholars (and I would add students) that remaining quiet about their faith is the price for full acceptance in the academic community.

While Marsden’s views on the integration model also represent a critique of how modern, secular universities regard the role of faith in the academy, it is important to highlight that the author’s perspectives on faith and learning also seek to expand the reach of scholarship, even to include persons of other faiths or of no formal faith at all. This, I would hope, should appease to some extent the apprehensions of certain members of the academy who are concerned about a possible Christian agenda that might seek to dominate the secular educational space and dictate the rules of higher education in what pertains to public institutions. Additionally, Marsden’s moderate proposal of how Christian scholarship ought to be understood (if not embraced) by the academy, serves as an affirmation of the value of pluralism, which, in turn, helps to sustain the democratic nature of public university classrooms and of the culture of secular campuses at large.

From a particularly Christian view, it is also important to consider that Christian living and Christian learning are deeply interconnected ideals for believers. Christian philosopher Arthur Holmes underscores the fact that “the human vocation is far larger


74 Ibid., 7.

75 Ibid., 10.

76 Ibid., 8.
than the scope of any job a person may hold because we are human persons created in God’s image, to honor and serve God and other people in all we do, not just in the way we earn a living.”

Christian scholarship, by way of integration of one’s faith and learning, becomes part of a larger goal aimed at by students and scholars who find meaning in their academic pursuits through the connections they endeavor to make between who they are and what they do – namely, individuals made in the image of God for his purposes and his glory. Thus, many Christian scholars aspire to align themselves with the Apostle Paul’s admonition: “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.” In fact, such exhortation becomes an important distinguishing motto and motive for many Christians in the academy. In that vein, Christian students and scholars often strive to find connections between the material realm (i.e., the world created by God) and the spiritual realm (i.e., the relationship of men and women with their Creator). Evangelical historian Mark Noll explains that such way of studying the world is connected to studying all that Christians believe to have been created through the person of Jesus Christ. He suggests that “to believe that we are attached to Christ inspires the confidence that God can be attached to anything we might study.”

Equally important to note is that Christian scholarship emphasizes that believers ought to make good use of their minds. Because a certain way of doing scholarship is Christian, should not, under any circumstance, excuse us from using our intellect to its

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78 Col 3:23 (NIV).

fullest potential. Our academic calling is – or should be – synonym to a divine appointment to use our gifts responsibly, gratefully, and worshipfully. As David Dockery explains, to love God with one’s mind means to think differently about the way a believer learns and teaches. This is a rigorous task, affirms the author: “a call to serious Christian thinking simultaneously affirms our love for God and our love for study, the place of devotion and the place of research, the priority of affirming and passing on the great Christian traditions and the significance of honest exploration, reflection, and intellectual inquiry.”

Dockery adds that since they see life and learning from a Christian standpoint, Christians should look for ways in which to restore coherence to learning by unifying knowledge as a seamless whole, in concert with the “unifying principle that God is Creator and Redeemer.”

However, what seems disconcerting for many believers today is the apparent departure from conversations between disciplines that historically complemented each other but that, in present days, find themselves in competitive terms with one another. Marsden reminds us that “knowledge today is oriented increasingly toward the practical; at the same time, in most fields the vast increases in information render our expertise

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81 Ibid., 7.

more fragmentary and detached from the larger issues of life.”

Holmes also points out that interdepartmental interaction is often frustrated by these gaps formed between disciples that, in turn, often prevent scholarly collaboration and partnerships.

While disciplines enjoy their own autonomy and independence in the secular, modern academy, Christian scholarship seems to issue an invitation anew for greater cooperation among disciplines. Such invitation is often based on the premise that the world may be understood holistically, in unison with God’s creation and intentions. In essence, what Christians attempt to add to scholarly conversations is a unique reading of the world, whereby, through their worldview, they may be able to offer a different set of interpretations for the phenomena they explore in the intersection of their faith and their scholarly endeavors.

**Faith and Learning in the Framework of the Academy’s Commitment to Freedom**

The mission of countless American universities reflects, in one way or another, the idea that knowledge can only be acquired through a relentless search for truth. This is in fact the central idea that informs our notion of academic freedom. This is also what Christian scholarship – the study, research, and learning qualified by the Gospel – aims at.

As Cornelius Plantinga suggests, it is important to note that all learning is in fact faith-based, not just purely objective. “The question”, states the author, “is never whether

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a person has faith in something or someone, but in what or whom.\textsuperscript{85} In fact, most scholarly activities are based on informed and concerted choices often grounded on the very values one upholds; values which are often reflective of one’s secular or religious worldview. Since every scholar has commitments, what seems to matter the most is honesty not neutrality.\textsuperscript{86} Honesty liberates the scholar, for it allows her to articulate the impact of her worldview on her scholarship rather than pretending it does not inform and/or support her scholarly pursuits.\textsuperscript{87} In like manner, as Nash reminds us, “all of us who work as administrators and faculty on college campuses are values educators.” So, he asks:

How is it ever possible for even the most objective and dispassionate scholars and administrators to be consistently neutral on the things that they value with all their hearts and minds? … A true values-neutral person, if there were ever to be such a creature, would be nothing more than a moral android, an inhuman construction of science-fiction writers.\textsuperscript{88}

Yet, what is worth noting is that there are boundaries generally accepted by the academy that every scholar, whether religious or non-religious, should still respect. Likewise, from a historical perspective, we are reminded that the idea of academic freedom was originally formulated in German universities in the nineteenth century (although the origins of academic freedom predate this period in history) as a means for scholars to challenge religious authorities in their attempt to impose restrictions on


\textsuperscript{86} Holmes, The Idea, 71.

\textsuperscript{87} Diekema, Academic Freedom, 47.

\textsuperscript{88} Nash, Religious Pluralism, 142-43.
Scholastic inquiries. So, this points to a delicate balance that those who dare to embark on any scholarly project needs to strive for, especially as one contemplates the possible intersection and applicability of one’s faith in one’s scholarly pursuits, particularly as one seeks to find such balance in the context of secular institutions. This is a challenge that cannot be underestimated.

That said, I would argue that education, in its attempt to harness the creativity of the human mind, in line with the spirit of freedom that guides the academy, is obliged to keep open the lines of communication that foster dialogues on the most controversial topics, including competing educational arguments grounded on the study of religion and on theology as sources of knowledge and organized disciplines. After all, “controversy is at the heart of academic freedom.” For it is through such freedom that scholars can set themselves on whatever journey needed in order to tackle the many possibilities that can point to answers to the number of questions that the pluralistic academic community finds worthy of asking. Moreover, I would argue that the secular academy would be well served by different angles from which to tackle the questions persons of different religious persuasions choose to ask.

As Ronald Thiemann reminds us, “we must take up the task of seeking to define an appropriate place for religion within a pluralistic democracy. Our failure to do so will

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leave us caught in the grip a paralyzing and destructive predicament.”  

However, as the author emphasizes, we need to redefine our interpretation of the wall of separation between church and state. A strict interpretation of how such “wall” functions in the context of American secular society may disrupt the intended balance created by the law itself between the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, while neglecting the fact that the so-called “wall of separation” is meant to protect the church from the state, not the other way around.

While a thorough legal analysis of constitutional implications would be impossible in light of the overall aims of my project, it is important to highlight the fact that while the United States Constitution informs certain freedoms (e.g., freedom of speech, expression, and association) that pertain to our democratic life in public forums, the academy, in distinct terms, is also steeped in customs and traditions that are paired with these freedoms, which even the U.S. Supreme Court recognizes to be vital in the life of institutions of higher learning. In that vein, an important legal criteria often used by the Court to satisfy First Amendment tests is known as “viewpoint neutrality:” the duty of the courts to assure its citizens are not being discriminated on the basis of their viewpoints. For instance, while universities may utilize a narrowly tailored legal definition of time, place, and manner, to impose certain restrictions on freedom of speech on campus, the

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92 Ibid.

courts have been clear that viewpoint discrimination is not permissible. Thus, C. John Summerville emphasizes that

Seen in this light it should be illegal for tax-funded universities to eliminate religious perspectives simply because they are religious, if they otherwise seem plausible or convincing. That would be viewpoint discrimination, singling out religion alone and thereby committing an ‘impermissible classification’ under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.  

The author adds that given the nature of higher education, where students are assumed to be more mature than students in primary and secondary education, where religion can address intricate issues and help to expand academic dialogues there is less of a potential for legal problems. While tax supported institutions of higher education cannot impose religious values or views on its member-citizens, they are not allowed to discriminate on the basis of one’s religious views either.

In light of that, we must ask: How are institutions to work around such seemingly paradoxical ideas? Here, I suspect that both proponents of more or less religious freedoms in public higher education may not be able to fully satisfy each other on a strictly legal basis. Gladly, I think that the notion of academic freedom can help to address, although not without difficulties, some of the apprehensions about how to properly afford religious views a place in secular academia. Furthermore, while it may not necessarily resolve irreconcilable legal provisions, in a spirit of cooperation from within its own establishment – as even the courts have often made allowances for – we may find hope that different viewpoints on questions asked by members of the academy

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95 Ibid.
can be properly represented in the pluralistic space of public universities. After all, the very idea of academic freedom seems to support the notion that different viewpoints are needed and can contribute to both the public and the private good when individuals are allowed and encouraged to embark on an independent search for truth. In fact, we see this exemplified in the preamble of the Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students published in 1967, which boldly states that

Academic institutions exist for the transmission of knowledge, the pursuit of truth, the development of students, and the general well-being of society. Free inquiry and free expression are indispensable to the attainment of these goals. As members of the academic community, students should be encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth.  

Likewise, the preamble also stresses the fact that “freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The freedom to learn depends upon appropriate opportunities and conditions in the classroom, on the campus, and in the larger community.”  

Thus, students and educators share the journey toward greater knowledge that is lead by the desire to discover and uncover the truth in their academic projects and pursuits that, in turn, offers possible answers to the questions they ask. However, the learning environment (i.e., the public space in which strangers encounter each other) must be carefully set up and intentionally open as to allow for these meaningful and intellectually stimulating pursuits to happen and for students to gain a deeper understanding of what makes us peculiarly human, endowed with and socialized

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97 “Join Statement.”
into unique views of the world that surrounds us.

Freedom and the emancipation of the learner as an autonomous agent is an important aim of liberal education, which insists that individuals would come to see things truly, on their own.\(^{98}\) Following that premise, I would argue that a genuine liberal education should be open to the possibility that religious truth (assisted by theology as a viable and cogent form of knowledge\(^ {99}\)) also serves as an informational source – and indeed a resource – from which Christian scholars in particular derive many of their questions and answers to the academic projects they undertake. Truth is, after all, not only at the core of Christian commitments, but the overall commitments of secular institutions of higher education that understands and affirms the value of academic freedom. Therefore, what is noteworthy is that the freedoms spoken of by Christians do not seem as incompatible, albeit based on different motives, with the freedoms the academy claims to afford its members and protect as a matter of principle. Such academic freedom is what seems to safeguard the activities that both religious and non-religious students and scholars undertake, guided by the unique worldviews that inform their scholarship.

Moreover, even above convention, academic freedom implies, as Diekema suggests, a fundamental right that safeguards one’s disposition toward the pursuit of truth. As a functional concept reserved solely for the academy, academic freedom is


\(^{99}\) Hauerwas, *State of the University*, 12.
communal in character, carrying no legal or constitutional sanction. \(^{100}\) “It arises”, as Diekema explains, “from the essence, the very ‘soul’, of the academy. […] It concerns the collective and personal integrity within the academy which resists any threat or intimidation to the pursuit of truth from any source.” \(^{101}\) As such, the author adds, academic freedom should be protected from single interests (or self-interests) that push people to conformity. In fact, religion is especially apt to being asked to conform given its often-controversial nature. Truth, Diekema insists, adds diversity to human thought and discovery. With political correctness (often perceived as an expression of intolerance toward religion) truth becomes relativized beyond what academic freedom can reach for, posits the author. In fact, when academics become captive to the desires of special interests, the pursuit of knowledge is compromised and, by extension, the academy becomes a place where ideological imperialism reigns. \(^{102}\)

Viewed in such light, academic freedom, while related to the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, is also fundamentally distinct from these rights: “While rights related to freedom of speech and freedom of the press are constitutionally granted and protected by law, academic freedom is a right granted specifically to teachers and scholars in the academy, by the academy.” \(^{103}\)

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\(^{100}\) Diekema, *Academic Freedom*, 7-8.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 8. Important to note, however, is that by “scholars” Diekema suggests the exclusion of students from this particular definition. They are, in his view, “transient in the academy, not yet full citizens.” *Academic Freedom*, 8. I would disagree with this
more susceptible to politicization and special (or self-) interests, some of which might demand the articulation of one’s scholarship solely based on reason.

Reason, as narrowly constructed by an Enlightenment framework, cannot be the only source of answers for our human experiences, particularly when seen in light of the cultural consensus that have brought about a postsecular age in the American academy, as articulated by Jacobsen and Jacobsen.\textsuperscript{104} However, as Holmes reminds us, neither should the Christian replicate the kind of antiintellectualism often even found in churches.\textsuperscript{105} In essence, regardless of constitutional guarantees, the freedom afforded by academic customs and traditions (or allowances made by individual disciplines) should not permit that one’s religious convictions would serve as an excuse for lack of intellectual rigor or even the kind of rational approach that keeps individuals in check while working out their scholarship with the assistance of their unique religious viewpoint. I would argue that seeing one’s scholarship as an opportunity to learn more and better about God’s creation and even God’s truth would require of the believer a level of stewardship of her academic vocation that should motivate her toward the highest level of integrity.

\textsuperscript{104} Jacobsen and Jacobsen, “Postsecular America,” 10.

\textsuperscript{105} Holmes, The Idea, 47.
CHAPTER III

VIRTUES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE POST-SECULAR ACADEMY

Prior to further advancing some important suggestions for Christian living in the post-secular academy, some conceptual work would help to lay the groundwork and understand the meaning I wish to attribute to a few central virtues that will be introduced in and woven through the subsequent chapters. They are: civility, respect, and hospitality, in addition (or leading up) to peace, *shalom*. An account of what seems central and normative to the kind of Christian living – that is, informed by these virtues that are qualified by the Gospel – students of faith ought to consider once part of a pluralistic academic community is needed and in order.

One must be mindful, however, that a “personal” reading of these concepts carries with the exercise the unavoidable risk of a certain bias toward these virtues, resulting in a presentation of them that reveals my own preferences for what they mean. That said, I still believe that in a project such as this I cannot help but intentionally position myself as an interested scholar and a believer in order to add to the kind of conversation on pluralism I contend is needed in the secular academy. Moreover, speaking from within both the academic and the Christian community calls for a kind of engagement with these concepts that should afford us some freedom to shrink the boundaries of objectivism in order for relations to flourish and understanding of the strange other to transform us, if for anything, into more civil and respectful educational conversation partners.

Since virtues are matters of values, and since values are what often get in the way – or, in the best possible case scenario, pave the way – for meaningful encounters
between strangers, I think each of us ought to put forth most legitimately our viewpoints on what matters most to us and our communities of faith as we navigate the universe of higher education. In that vein, I argue that we ought to move beyond a disinterested outlook of what Christian virtues mean for the life we live as part of “the public.” In fact, that is what I will attempt to realize here, mindful that “when it comes to Christian ethics, is not whether we shall be conservative or liberal, left of right, but whether we shall be faithful to the church’s peculiar vision of what it means to live and act as a disciple,”\textsuperscript{106} especially, for my purposes, in the shared, secular space, of public higher education. Thus I ask: How does civility, respect, and hospitality, contribute to such vision as students attempt to live as a church that is faithful, aligning their beliefs with actions that give evidence of their commitment to being disciples of Christ in these secular educational spaces?

Before proceeding any further, let me also expand on an important caveat about the discussion that will follow that I find worth addressing (and confessing to) upfront. There is a risk in elevating certain concepts above others, particularly when these are framed, as I will attempt to, in “Christian” terms. Some would rightly exclaim: “But why not stress the virtues of faith, hope and love\textsuperscript{107} or even justice, mercy, and humility\textsuperscript{108} instead of civility, respect, and hospitality?” This is a fair challenge, I admit – for the task of selecting certain virtues in lieu of others risks misrepresenting the totality of the

\textsuperscript{106} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 69.

\textsuperscript{107} 1 Cor. 13:13.

\textsuperscript{108} Mic. 6:8.
Christian faith, which is much larger and deeper than civility, respect, and hospitality. Nevertheless, it is not hard to conceive that it would take volumes (many, by the way, that have already been much more eloquently written by others) to treat each one of these central tenets of the faith with the intricate care that each of these virtues deserve. There is no doubt that these are important considerations.

Yet in response to this possible apprehension, I can only admit that my choices are deliberate. I think that Christianity as a tradition nevertheless informs and qualifies each of these virtues. Moreover, these virtues – although arguably articulated in different terms represented in the context of the biblical narrative – seem to fall in line with a kind of Christian living that best represents the vocation of the church that witnesses as a different people and a genuine alternative to the present culture;\(^{109}\) a church that is engaged with and in the world through its “theology of faithful presence,” which, as we learn from Hunter, is a recognition of God’s faithful presence to us, which urges us to be faithfully present to him\(^{110}\) in all spheres of life.\(^{111}\)

Furthermore, my choices for the specific virtues that I wish to engage with in this chapter is also informed by the literature that deals particularly with civic pluralism, which I think, in turn, contributes to meaningful educational encounters adding to the hope of greater mutual understanding that tends to facilitates human flourishing (i.e., by way of peace) in the academy. This body of literature has nudged me to focus on these

\(^{109}\) Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 243.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 257.
admittedly non-exhaustive virtues that I find crucial to substantiate my claims for how believers might be able to learn from, with, and about strangers, all the while contributing to the pluralistic nature of the secular academy. These concepts will inform the discussion about peacemaking (or shalom) I will continue to articulate later in the manuscript. Ultimately, my goal is to be able to advance a modest proposal on how both Christian students and secular institutions of higher learning might be able to “operationalize” these virtues toward meaningful educational – that is, mutually transformative – outcomes for all members of the university community.

While some of the concepts I will deal with in this chapter will sound familiar (albeit in different terms) to many non-believers and people who are adept of other faith traditions, my overall project, and the treatment of specific virtues, aims at qualifying the ethics I am embracing – that is, a “Christian ethics.” As William Schweiker explains, this is an ethics not only in its broadest sense as “the examination of life which seeks to determine how we should live,” but more specifically one that is concerned with the first principle of theological ethics, through which many believers accept that “the distinctiveness of Christian ethics consists in its perspective on life, that we should seek the integrity of life before God [italics in the original].”[^112] What is important to highlight is that this is not an ethics we believers get to define on our own, for our Christian ethics is inescapably collective. In fact, “all our ethics presuppose a social, communal, and

political starting point – the church."\textsuperscript{113} In short, for my purposes, as I deal with these important concepts I will concomitantly be dealing with ethics – that is, both the examination of life and the very act of living as a result of a life examined in accordance to vital Christian standards – qualified by the Gospel of Christ. At the same time, we will delve into a literature that helps us to frame these concepts from a civic and educational perspective, which I contend adds value to a college experience. Thus I argue that the believer’s commitment to expressing the values she has examined (or, at least, should be in process of examining while in college) is her way of seeking to live such a life of integrity first and foremost before God, which leads her to engage and respond to others in a civil, respectful, and hospitable manner; a way in which the student’s Christian stance and witness in the secular academy may be more invitational rather than coercive toward others.

Another observation is also in order. Unpacking these concepts might, in some ways, either challenge or affirm some of the notions that exclusive Christians may have gathered from their particular communities of faith (e.g., their church, their family, their mentors) prior to their arrival at the secular university campus. However, offering a certain “Christian reading” of these concepts may prove beneficial not only to believers but also to those unfamiliar with the ways in which we view – or ought to view – certain virtues, ideas, and ideals. That said, we cannot take for granted that such understanding of these virtues would lead to some form of consensus, even within the Christian community. In fact, doctrinal differences among denominations and other differences

\textsuperscript{113} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 81.
expressed by virtue of one’s personal adherence to a Protestant or a Catholic reading of the Christian faith also complicates the prospect of mutual understanding, even among believers themselves.

When seen in that light, one might argue that civility, respect, and hospitality, are virtues not only found in deficit among strangers (i.e., non-believers) but oftentimes among believers themselves. Thus I cannot presume – neither do I have the space – to be able to deal with every intricate issue that Christianity as a tradition seeks to respond to and be an alternative within the larger and, in the context of my project, the secular academic culture around us. All I can hope to accomplish is to adequately highlight some important nuances of what I imagine can contribute in a meaningful way to evangelical students’ ability to operationalize in this pluralistic space of the American university a “theology of faithful presence”\textsuperscript{114} that can add meaning to a shared educational experience among strangers.

As I unpack the concepts of civility, respect, and hospitality, I want to start dealing, quite modestly given how intricate these concepts are, with some important features of what makes one’s living and one’s calling particularly Christian in an area of public life (i.e., the public university) where the church is but one of many ethical and/or moral voices. Consequently, it becomes imperative for us to understand both the meaning of certain concepts for the workings of pluralism – again, the hard work of “doing” diversity together, going beyond a mere acknowledgement of our differences on a university campus – in civic, educational, and theological terms. By dealing with what

\textsuperscript{114} Hunter, \textit{To Change the World}, 243.
informs and contributes to a certain reading of pluralism in the secular academy, I hope to articulate possible ways in which we might be able to conceptualize what contributes to the formation and transformation of exclusive Christian students. Naturally, this prospect cannot demand of believers the relinquishment of their religious identity, for I contend that the very particularity of who they are contributes in a unique way to the pluralistic and democratic nature of a public higher education. Moreover, I argue that a student’s identity (be they religious or otherwise) has the potential to challenge others to better articulate their own epistemological foundation for what they take to be normative about their own belief system as it is expressed in the context of the secular academy. The civic and educational value of such exchange cannot be underestimated. In fact, it should be honored as a promising democratic exercise.

Let me once again be clear about some important considerations that inform this discussion on civility, respect, and hospitality. First, it is important to underscore that by favoring these virtues I am not claiming that these are the only virtues needed in order for students – particularly the exclusivist Christian – to actualize a kind of “Christian living” that, through their witness, they can collaborate with others toward the flourishing of all members of the academic community. Other virtues (e.g., open-mindedness, humility, etc.) will have to be considered and exercised by believers that will complement and help them to better articulate their words and actions in the secular academy while vested in these three virtues. In fact, these virtues need to be worked out by each student, individually, albeit not necessarily by themselves, on their own. Believers need the Body (i.e., other believers) to remind them of their commitment to better represent their Christ
in all spheres of life. As a community, we can encourage one another to live Christianly while upholding both the integrity of the religious commitments we – as the church – claim to live by as well as the integrity of those with whom we interact. In all instances, the stranger must remain free to accept or reject the invitation we offer as we share openly and intelligibly the source of what motivates us to interact with and understand the world around us.

Moreover, I would surmise that different Christian students will need to focus more intently on certain virtues (i.e., whether civility, respect, hospitality, or others) based on their own personal history and understanding of what these mean at the time they enter the academy, for we must acknowledge that each of them will journey through college while at different points of their spiritual and personal journey. Therefore, while attempting to live out these virtues, it is also expected that their understanding of them would be reevaluated and possibly transformed as they mature spiritually and academically. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that these virtues cannot guarantee certain civic and educational outcomes. All we can hope to accomplish is the laying of a critical foundation on which they might be able to build their own understanding of these virtues in the company of others (believers and non-believers) who may also be committed to these virtues, even while for different motives. What civility, respect, and hospitality, can offer is a safe ground on which strangers can encounter each other with hopes for mutual understanding and the willingness to collaborate toward a peaceful learning space that is committed to mutual human flourishing.
Lastly, my focus on these virtues should not be interpreted as a formulaic account of what these virtues are or should be. A mere prescription does not seem to be a bond strong enough to hold people of different ethical commitments together as co-workers of a peaceful learning environment. Moreover, a prescription cannot guarantee the actual practice of these virtues. It takes commitment on the part of individuals to enact them when faced with the “otherness” of strangers. Incorporating civility, respect, and hospitality into our Christian living (or into an educational endeavor) is a quite challenging prospect, even for those who are deeply committed to it. One might equate such exercise to a discipline and habit of mind that must be learned and relearned by a church that seeks to be faithful to God and his creation as part of a “strange” culture.

**Civility**

Let me begin this discussion on civility with a hint of realism that is blended with theological conviction. Marty says it better:

> the notion that interactions of faith communities would lead to their complete overcoming of differences and toward their merger into one is a utopian notion. We can presume that four or five of the world’s six billion people are dug in, entrenched, at ease, with their faith traditions or their secular commitments, unmovable, not shopping for change. They are unready to be swallowed up or dissolved at the expense of everything they consider to be redemptive or fair. As for the theological conviction: the notion that interactions of faith communities should lead to their complete overcoming of differences and toward their merger into one violates the commitments of faith communities and the stories that animate them. They cannot and will not give them up.¹¹⁵

I can appreciate Marty’s realistic assessment. Yet if my understanding of his overall project is accurate, he speaks not from a sense of pessimism about a timid

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prospect of people of conviction being able to share our public spaces. Much to the contrary. He seems adamant that, because one’s faith is bound to “collide” with the faith of others, we must find resources, in respect to each one’s traditions, from which to draw a sense of peace among strangers. Thus one might suggest that there is a sense in which different communities of faith cannot seek to overcome their differences on theological grounds alone. We still need to tread carefully on what meaning to attribute to the notion of “overcoming our differences.” What would that mean for a community replete with diversity? At what cost for individuals and their particular communities? And for what end? For it seems as though pluralism could only survive as a civic or educational project in the secular academy if differences are respected, not eradicated every time strangers meet as “a public.”

Differences seem to be the “breath” of a pluralistic community. Without them we have little to say about and hardly any need to understand the importance of pluralism, which I argue can serve as a civic (or civil) mediator of peace in a community that often does not see eye-to-eye on matters of values. Hence, this “overcoming of our differences” should approximate, in my estimation, an educational process of self-critique with the intent of offering others the opportunity to communicate honestly about their views of the good and the good life. Indeed this would be an educational project – as educational projects ought to be – that seeks to expand students’ views of a world that is drenched with diverse perspectives so that, in light of new knowledge acquired, they can also assess what their religious commitments mean to strangers.

Considering an alternative to the kind of an “overcoming of our differences” that
often seems to demand of people of different ethical/religious commitments that they “turn in” their worldviews in favor of a common ground seems to be of great importance if pluralism is to be an educational and civic aim of the post-secular academy. When our religious differences are most prevalent and accentuates our inability or our theologically grounded unwillingness to give up that which is most central to our understanding of a good life, what should we reach for instead in the context of the public university? My short answer, which I am sure will be unsatisfactory to many readers, is: we must seek for a better understanding of the strange other. “But how do we do that?,” one might press further. By using resources that stimulate opportunities for encounters among strangers with the aim of cultivating dialogical relationships that lead to a common formulation not of theological ideas that would suit all, but of peace, which finds its meaning in particularist views (be they religious or secular) of the term. To that end, each person, as a representative of their exclusive community of faith (here I would include even secular views that contribute to some form of peace) should strive to preserve the integrity of others without having to forego what makes them equally “whole” before others as a result of their commitments. In fact, exclusive Christians have reasons to pursue such avenue. They can start by heeding to the very teaching of Jesus, who says: “and as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”\textsuperscript{116} Let me elaborate on that by way of engaging with the first virtue I have in mind as a facilitator of such peace – that is, 

civility.

Christians seem to have several options from which to express their convictions in

\textsuperscript{116} Luke 6:31 (ESV).
public spaces. They can do so through the exercise of their political rights: by demanding, for instance, under the law, that they be “included” and heard in public dialogues. Something to that effect seems to fit an argument for our equal value as citizens of a democratic society. While a plausible option (and sometimes a needed one), I think that a better option is for Christians – especially the exclusivist Christian – to practice, as Marty puts it, their “public theology.”¹¹⁷ In fact, the church is indeed called to experience itself as a “public” and engage in the dynamic process that is, as Palmer suggests, the “public life” where “strangers come in daily contact, grow accustomed to each other, learn to solve the problems which the common life poses, enrich and expand each other’s lives.”¹¹⁸ This way of engaging with others prioritizes the possibilities that stem from these public encounters between the church and strangers. It does not cancel our rights to engage with others in public spaces. It simply seeks for alternatives that are less demanding and more collaborative.

In that sense, Christians have an important role to play given their commitments to being a disciple of Christ in any public space. As Hauerwas and Willimon explain, “the challenge of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange community, which is shaped by a story of how God is with us.”¹¹⁹ From a particularist perspective, Christianity as a tradition challenges modes of living that overemphasizes,


among other practices, individualism that leads to the fragmentation of life into each one’s preferences or mere opinions about the good. It favors unity instead.\textsuperscript{120} In that vein, Christianity (as well as other religious traditions) can serve as a source and an alternative resource through which we can renew our nearly lost sense of belonging to one another;\textsuperscript{121} a sense that a university community committed to pluralism seems to encourage even by the simplest fact that it makes a concerted effort to bring people with different commitments together under a single roof. But in order to reach beyond such simplicity of thought, we are also obliged to ask: How can a public higher education be truly transformative in the lives of students without its members’ willingness to give of themselves and their willingness to receive from others the gift of wisdom that each of them bring? While I will further elaborate on that notion in chapter V, this is an important backdrop to the virtues we are exploring here.

I want to make clear that the kind of living of which I am challenging the exclusive Christian student as a member of the secular academy to practice, while it can be lived in light of the civil rights that are accorded to them as part of the American society, it should be increasingly oriented by an allegiance that precedes such right: an allegiance to a Christ who’s idea of a social order says: “Blessed are the poor in spirit …. Blessed are the meek …. Blessed are the merciful …. Blessed are the pure in heart …. Blessed are the peacemaker ….”\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, living Christianly as part of a “public”

\textsuperscript{120} Palmer, The Company of Strangers, 20.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{122} Matt. 5:3-9 (NIV).
that does not see life eye-to-eye with our religious commitments reminds us, as even Jürgen Habermas\(^{123}\) puts it, that “the status of citizens is, as it were, embedded in a civil society that is nourished by springs that well forth spontaneously – springs that one may term ‘pre-political’.”\(^{124}\) In that vein, religion, language, and a national conscience contribute, as history suggests, to the creation of a highly abstract solidarity among citizens,\(^{125}\) a solidarity that I think well fitting for all who call themselves Christians within a strange culture.

Habermas has also more recently argued that religion must become more reflexive so that it may recognize the importance of neutrality that the state ought to promote, the equal freedom that other religions communities should enjoy, and the independence that institutionalized sciences should have. At the same time, he posits that the secular state, which functions as a source of intellectual formation and not just as an empirical power, must also contend with the question of whether religious citizens are forced to accept asymmetrical obligations. Habermas adds: “[the secular state] may not demand anything of its religious citizens which cannot be reconciled with a life that is led

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\(^{123}\) Interesting, in the Foreword to Habermas and Ratzsinger’s *The Dialectics of Secularization*, Florian Schuller reminds us that “the philosopher [i.e., Habermas], who describes himself as a follower of Max Weber in the sense that he sees himself as ‘tone deaf in the religious sphere’, surprised many people by demanding that the secular society acquire a new understanding of religious convictions, which are something more and something other than mere relics of a past with which we are finished. On the contrary, these convictions pose a ‘cognitive challenge’ to philosophy” (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006, 11-12).


\(^{125}\) Ibid., 32.
authentically ‘from faith’.“¹²⁶ To be sure, “if religiously justified stances are accorded a legitimate place in the public sphere, however, the political community officially recognizes that religious utterances can make a meaningful contribution to clarifying controversial question of principle.”¹²⁷ Hence, just as the liberal state is right in expecting secular citizens not to consider simply irrational forms of religious expressions, theology is also obliged to engage with postmetaphysical thinking in a serious manner.¹²⁸ Here, if we were to side with Habermas and take the liberty to extend his argument to the world of the American post-secular academy, we would be attuned to the fact that both, religious persons and the academy itself, would need to reassess the methods employed by each when interacting (or attempting to thwart such interaction) with one another.

As we have discussed in chapter II, the university does (and should) enjoy a degree of autonomy that is conferred to it by means of academic freedom, which even the courts hesitate to legislate over given the particular customs and traditions of institutions of higher learning in America. By following certain educational precepts, a liberal, democratic, and especially public education can only enjoy such status if participants are indeed free to argue, question, and even often disbelieve in order to seek clarity and truth as the institution plays its distinct societal function in forming “educated persons” in service of a public good. In that vein, the public university also serves as an important laboratory in which citizens learn to negotiate the terms of a liberal democracy.


¹²⁷ Ibid., 21-22.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 22.
Within the walls of the academy (although certainly not strictly within it) citizens learn a sense of civic cooperation; a sense that our lives are intricately connected by webs of relations. The college experience is – or should be – one that mirrors life in an inevitably pluralistic “community,” where peaceful negotiations of differences help to sustain and affirm certain particular values (e.g., religious values) that citizens are allowed to live by even when they sharply contrast with the values of others. Therefore, I think it is critical for universities to most cautiously consider not only the overriding constitutional terms of, say, the First Amendment, but also the educational benefits that a shared life in a pluralistic learning environment affords in preparing individuals to most healthily dialogue about what constitutes the “good life” for themselves and for others. The public university cannot ignore the larger issues of democracy and avoid the messiness of public discourse that is bound to happen among strangers, especially those that seek to promote the public good, even though the terms of such good might arguably not be easily agreed upon by all.129 Later I will deal with the fact that the fear of the “strange other” often prevents us from engaging learning experiences. For now it suffices to point out that those on secular campuses need to overcome fear so that they may encourage students, faculty, and staff, to talk openly about their own religious (and non-

129 Then again, as I have argued earlier, the goal of a pluralistic community such as the university is not necessarily consensus among strangers. That said, we should not automatically eliminate the possibility of consensus being achieved among people of varying ethical and religious commitments, especially if it does not compromise what is central and essential to one’s particular worldview. This kind of approach may even be affirming of educational aims that seek to expand, not limit one’s perspectives. In this vein, the post-secular academy also accords religious reasons a degree of credibility in public life.
religious) explorations as well as their meaning narratives.\textsuperscript{130} And if such explorations are to become a norm in the life of an academic community committed to pluralism, how ought we, as believers in Christ, to engage with the strange other in the public space of the university? What attitude(s) should we display once fear of dialogues (which seem to often stem from – and sometimes be exacerbated by – our fear of the strange other) have been overcome to a sufficient degree that affords us enough courage to engage with “strange” ideas and strangers themselves?

To begin to offer possible answers (not necessarily neatly prescribed solutions) to these questions that can help us learn to deal with strangers in the secular academy with civility, we must first recognize, as Richard Mouw posits, that “some of us have some unlearning to do if we are going to enter the public square with confidence, as persons of good manners.”\textsuperscript{131} We have neglected to think about the way in which we view other people with whom we strongly disagree about important matters.\textsuperscript{132} As a church, we must first admit that we have often assumed an arrogant posture while upholding our particularist convictions that have in many instances translated into an unmannered interaction with the stranger, the one whom we are called to love as a neighbor. We habitually fall short in our communication with others, especially the stranger, about what animates our convictions and commitments. We fail to disagree vulnerably with those who do not see life as we do. We turn down opportunities for honest conversations,

\textsuperscript{130} Nash, \textit{Religious Pluralism}, 17.


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
passing on the hope of a more truthful understanding of those we claim to oppose (or of those that oppose us). Moreover, we often bring to the public an attitude that closely resembles a crusading mentality, thus turning ourselves into a “people who think that the cause [we] are fighting for is so important that [we] must use all means at [our] disposal to win.”\textsuperscript{133} Most regretfully, as a community of believers, we tend to lose sight of what is at the center of the very cause we claim to “fight for,” which, as a community of worshippers, must call our attention to causes that ultimately glorify God; that by honoring God’s perspective on reality, we become increasingly aware that \textit{we are seen by God} – an awareness that should prompt us, in turn, to see others in a more truthful and civil manner.\textsuperscript{134}

Let me be clear once more. This way of seeing others does not (and should not) preclude us from seeing things through the lens of our religious convictions. However, this very lens, known as our Christian worldview, should bring an even sharper focus onto the humanity and integrity of others, be they fellow believers or not. “Faith begins, not in discovery, but in remembrance.”\textsuperscript{135} How often have we forgotten the times we ourselves have been treated in a hostile way by those that disagree with and fiercely oppose us? What shall we do then? Shall we forget the convicting words of Jesus?

>You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 51-52, 55.

\textsuperscript{135} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 52.
miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.\textsuperscript{136}

Civility, as I see it through the eyes of my own faith, is in and of itself a conviction that others ought to be treated as a neighbor; that they are due the proper recognition as worthy human beings; that, like us, they are also a precious divine creation. But this sort of civility is something that the church often forgets and that we, as a consequence of our frail memory of our existence before God, fail to exercise in the presence of strangers.

We often, even if completely unaware of it, buy into a sort of Nietzschean proposition that there is nothing more sinister than man’s “technique for remembering things.”\textsuperscript{137} In such manner, forgetfulness becomes an active and needed ingredient for the attainment of freedom: an “active forgetfulness whose function resembles that of a concierge preserving mental order, calm, and decorum.”\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, no present can exist without forgetfulness, says Nietzsche; thus his objection to the priests who keep reminding men of their flaws and transgressions. Forgetting, then, in Nietzschean terms, is (and takes) strength; memory must become a function of the will – to remember only what brings pleasure and points to freedom, especially freedom of conscience (i.e., a proud, powerful, and free conscience). Not so with the church, I argue. What are we to make of civility when our memory of the times when we have been uncivil toward others

\textsuperscript{136} Matt. 5:38-44 (NIV).


\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 39.
is allowed, or willfully forced, to fade into the abyss of our memory? Are we to forget
that the strange other – even though we may disagree on their stances in life – deserves to
be honored as God himself honors us as part and participants of his creative plan? Are we
to consider that the civility that we owe others is beyond (or perhaps a nuisance to) our
freedom to treat others as we wish? Not so.

It seems to me that when we as believers subscribe, in opposition to Christ’s
teachings (again, even if arguably unconscious of it), to the German philosopher’s
suggestion that sin is synonym of a sick soul – “the most dangerous and fateful trick of
religious interpretation,” as Nietzsche puts it – we run the risk of acting upon our own
selfish desires by neglecting to approach others with the kind of civility that testifies to
our integrity as believers and that contributes to the flourishing of all humankind. In turn,
we also deny ourselves of the opportunity, as Mouw posits, “to approach others [with
civility] in a spirit of teachability [italics in the original],” whereby we express both
our empathy and curiosity in our relations with others in order to learn not only about, but
from them.

Our ability to remain open to being taught follows the recognition of our inability
or inadequacy in surveying the whole of what we strive to learn. Put simply, learning is a
complex activity and so are the many “objects” or “subjects” that we strive to learn about
or from. Moreover, from an educational standpoint, even if we have sufficient evidence

\[139\] Ibid., 118.


\[141\] Ibid.
to stay the course of our investigations about the created world, by remaining open to learning more and better about whatever we seek to know, we can deepen our understanding of what it is that we seek to know. Thus, educationally speaking, we observe that, as Jason Baehr puts it, our willingness to keep our minds open follows our ability to take seriously alternative or distinct standpoints while flowing from our love of truth, knowledge, and understanding, which are intellectual goods accompanied by certain intellectual motivations that we have.\footnote{Jason Baehr, “Open-mindedness,” in \textit{Being Good: Christian Virtues for Everyday Life}, ed. Michael W. Austin and R. Douglas Geivett (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 37-39.} However, in assessing “open-mindedness” as a Christian virtue, the author clarifies what might be certain objections that certain Christians themselves might have toward this potentially controversial virtue. He explains:

\begin{quote}
 to be open-minded is \textit{not} essentially or inherently to be wishy-washy, relativistic, or flaccid. . . . For, insofar as open-mindedness is constrained by something like a love of truth, it will involve an appropriate kind of selectivity or discrimination. A person who cares deeply about ‘getting things right,’ about developing an \textit{accurate} view of the world, is unlikely to give an open-minded consideration to a belief or argument which she has little or no reason to think might actually be true [italics in the original].\footnote{Ibid., 41.}
\end{quote}

I am in agreement with Baehr that, from a Christian perspective that values others (including those that oppose us), the practice of the virtue of open-mindedness requires us to give serious considerations to others’ beliefs, particularly the beliefs that matter most to them. That does not mean, however, that in taking these particular beliefs seriously we should necessarily accept them, even while fulfilling an arguably Christian propensity to
be open-minded toward others’ beliefs. On the contrary, our love of truth should motivate us in either direction: to revise our thinking as a consequence of our ability to learn more and better about our own beliefs or to maintain and refine them based on new information gathered as we allow ourselves to remain teachable. In either case, one must engage in the admittedly risky learning process by giving and taking – i.e., exchanging – wisdom with others (a concept I will come back to later in chapter V). I would argue that it is in this kind of exchange that not only civility, but also a sense of humility – a central “good” that informs our Christian living – is most critical and needed if we are to be transformed while seeking the flourishing of all toward the good life.

That said, as the church we must recognize how often our incivility toward strangers is rooted in our lack of humility (and also of open-mindedness) that prevents us from learning from others. As Andrew Pinsent notes, pride is more than a serious moral failing for Christians; it is not only a sin, but the root of all sins. Pride can be thought of as a form of intellectual laziness or blindness, whereas humility involves a mind that is actively engaged in recognizing, in connection with knowledge, the true causes of what makes things most excellent. However, what is important to highlight is that humility orients the Christian to interpret life through his faith in the divine. This virtue serves as a reminder that our own human causes (e.g., our intelligent actions) are only excellent

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144 Ibid., 42.


146 Ibid., 252.
insofar as they are recognized as a gift from God himself. In fact, any excellent outcome in life is a confession of our own greatness through Christ who, while Lord of all, is also “gentle and humble in heart.”

In view of that, I argue that the exclusive Christian stands a better chance of being able to recognize what is most truthful about what she comes to know as a result of the great gift of her own intelligence, which emanates from her capacity – i.e., a gift – to be teachable and thus to learn. Yet, this comes with a degree of unlearning on our part, as Mouw already reminded us, which should prompt us to deal with others with a civil humility, thus avoiding the sin of pride, which not only can corrupt our thought but in effect lead us to believe that we owe nothing to other fellow human beings.

In this vein, we strive to avoid a false sense of happiness as well as empty joys, which pride seems to breed in us. Augustine illustrates that by reflecting on the effects of his own pride, which continues to accuse our own conscience many centuries later: “I would tell many a lie, and for my lies I would be applauded by men who knew that I was lying. My heart pounded over such causes of care and it burned with the wasting fever of my thoughts.” Thus, it becomes important for us to recognize that our spirituality of civility is only adequate to the extent that it is also an exercise in self-critique, as we seek to honestly identify and assess our inner motives and purposes as we relate to others.

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147 Matt. 11:29 (NIV).


149 Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 76.
Respect

As we have discussed above, civility is one of the virtues that allows a diverse community to strive toward human flourishing, without which our disagreements in the context of a pluralistic society can lead to unfortunate consequences. By our willful disposition to uphold others’ integrity we are able to seek the peace of all even when particularist views of the world collide. Christianity, as we have also seen, is a tradition of remembrance. By remembering our propensity to be uncivil toward others (i.e., a product of our sinful nature) we try to keep alive in our memory the grace and mercy of God, which helps us to sustain, in light of our understanding of ourselves and others, our commitment to such virtue. In fact, I argue that the civility we display toward others bears witness of the mercy and kindness of God toward us. Without the memory of what has taken place in history two thousand and some years ago our unique characteristics as a people of the cross would not allow us to be the kind of alternative I have been calling the Christian student in the secular space of the pluralistic academy to be. Yet the practice of – or our habituation into – such virtue (or lack thereof) does not begin in higher education.

Prothero finds distressing the fact that public schools have deprived individuals from early on in their lives of what he calls “chains of memory.”150 In the author’s view, schools downplay, by remaining silent, the role of religion (from past to present experiences) in the civic life of this country. This symptom is not characteristic of a certain religious group. Christians, Jews, and even atheists and agnostics alike, to name a

150 Prothero, Religious Literacy, 32.
few, suffer from a lack of knowledge (and in some cases, interest) about the convictions that different religious and non-religious groups claim to hold. Most importantly, Prothero suggests that individuals also lack some foundational knowledge of their own faith, which in turn complicates any attempt to engage with the religious other when discussing issues that confront and challenge divergent worldviews and truth claims. Religious literacy is in great peril. And among Christians this reality is not much different: “Many a proponent of interreligious dialogue assume that Christians know their own religious traditions. In fact, interreligious dialogue assumes basic knowledge on both sides of the religious divide that the distinction is designed to bridge. But this assumption is hollow, at least in the United States,” insists the author.¹⁵¹

Without a foundational understanding of each one’s own convictions, an interreligious conversation that could possibly contribute to a peaceful community within a pluralistic institution such as the university can only run so deep, yet possibly not deep enough to bridge what pluralism may require of individuals (e.g., to promote, among other aims, the flourishing of its members taking into account that religiously diverse groups will inevitably interact with each other on a secular campus). To that end, students are confronted with a particular challenge that seems inherent in a pluralistic society represented in the microcosm of the university: on a daily basis one must contend with human differences (and conflicting worldviews) that inform the way in which people and communities believe and live out their religious convictions and commitments both privately and publicly.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 33.
Prothero also accents the fact that families, religious congregations, schools (colleges and university included), and even the media, do a poor job teaching young people about religion and religious traditions. The author is concerned that as a result of avoiding the teaching of religion (which is permissible under the law in secular, public spaces), individuals are learning that religion counts for nothing; an obvious misrepresentation of reality in the private life of many as well as in public life. And although the author admits that one can learn about their (and others’) religion on their own, he bemoans the fact that public schools lack a concerted effort that would contribute to higher levels of religious literacy, starting with the classroom.\textsuperscript{152} I surmise that his assessment of this reality has grave implications for higher education as well. Without a commitment from education to develop habits of mind that translate into actions that uphold the integrity of others in a pluralistic society, the hope for a peaceful society begins to dwindle. An earlier education (or lack thereof) will inevitably carry on to higher education later in one’s life, requiring educators to overcompensate for educational initiatives that spared citizens – for one reason or another – from engaging with strangers.

Diana Eck reminds us that “pluralism is not just the enumeration of differences, and pluralism is certainly not just the celebration of diversity in a spirit of good will. Pluralism is the engagement of differences in the often-difficult yet creative ways that we as scholars can observe, investigate, and interpret.”\textsuperscript{153} Yet in order for such engagement

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\footnotesize\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 126-27.
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to be richly educative, some basic knowledge of the tradition of individuals and communities must be first articulated and learned – a give and take sort of activity. Reaching for mutual understanding among strangers seems to be an important starting point if we are to create public spaces where people of varying ethical commitments can learn to negotiate their differences all the while ensuring human flourishing in the context of a peaceful community.

Although many are proponents of keeping private matters private, the advancement of a civically and educationally pluralistic academic community depends in large part on the freedom of diverse voices to be articulated openly on matters that matter to them. For this reason, having a voice in the context of pluralistic communities (particularly educational communities where we teach and learn how to negotiate our differences) can lead to conversations that help us to cultivate mutual and respectful understanding of others. By articulating our convictions we lay in the open the sources from which we draw the possibilities for greater human flourishing. In conversations with others we also address (or, at the minimum, express) our differences upfront. Moreover, these exchanges expose our points of contention, it pinpoints where and why we disagree. Such interactions are especially needed when consensus cannot be reached in light of unique religious views.

Ironically, whereas differences are often the cause of much discord and conflict (i.e., the antithesis of a peaceful community where people would flourish), these very differences among strangers, which are rooted on the particularities of religious traditions, can be the a source of peace. In fact, many religious traditions center their
efforts on habituating believers toward greater respect for others – an important reconciliatory feature based on faith that even secular societies and communities that are committed to pluralism should not ignore. Many religious communities encourage believers to seek to resolve human conflicts by engaging, collaborating, and cooperating with people of varying religious commitments, even though they do not see eye to eye on all religious matters.\textsuperscript{154}

Another irony about public life in America is the fact that while the population claims to either accept or reject a multiplicity of or the possibility of multiple truth claims, people seem only casually familiar with the basic tenets of major world religions; an obstacle not be ignored for the livelihood of a pluralistic community and of society at large.\textsuperscript{155} If engagement with the religious other is by and large an important aim (or one of the aims) of a healthy pluralistic community, such basic lack of knowledge of the content of other religious beliefs as well as the truth claims each one espouses could very well place a roadblock on the kind of dialogue that would lead to mutual understanding and reciprocal respect – both worthy aims, in my view, of a meaningful educational experience even while communities are allowed to disagree on the foundation of each others’ truth claims. To either end, in the context of pluralistic communities such as the public university, deeper understanding and some basic knowledge of what other groups...
believe in seems to be an important educational element worthy of being learned through respectful dialogues, lest we compromise opportunities for collaboration between religiously diverse groups that, in their own terms, can assist in the human flourishing of all – i.e., toward a peaceable learning environment.

Perhaps we should pause for a moment to reflect on a possible and important conclusion. What seems implicit here is that “understanding” precedes “pluralism” and that “to know the other” can help us “to act on behalf of the other’s flourishing.” While a compelling prospect, in actuality the order is often reversed in our shared public life with consequences that are often less than educationally or civically desirable. It seems that our public life is full of false starts that often bypass the understanding of others and rush us toward the workings of pluralism as if our knowledge of the strange other (along with his or her concerns, aspirations, etc.) was sufficient enough to bring about – sometimes forcefully – a peaceful life within a diverse community. Consequently, our public life becomes replete with examples that frustrate instead of promoting human flourishing. We often assume that respect calls for immediate action that affirms individuals and their values. Perhaps there is a time for that. Yet for the most part, it seems counterintuitive to begin the works of peace without asking the stranger: “What does peace look like for you and your community of faith? What are the resources you could bring to our diverse community that would contribute to the peace and flourishing of you and I?” Most strangely, secular institutions seem to ignore the sources that inform the practices of individuals that do not – and will not – learn to pursue a peaceful world in secular terms. In the case of Christians, “peace” is not just an idea, but a person. As believers we do not
learn how to act peacefully based on an empty, let alone secular, concept. Our idea of peace is always informed by the source of our peace. Likewise, the respect we confer to others flows from us as an expression of our gratitude for the respect we receive from our Creator as he calls us his children.

At the same time, an attempt to answer the aforementioned questions may not satisfy all. If I claim, as an exclusive Christian, that there is no real peace (and no comparable human flourishing, for that matter) apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ, how ought others to respond with respect for my conviction? Conversely, how ought I, while a believer, to respond to the definition of peace that others profess in a way that would honor them as human beings without compromising my own understanding of what peace is and what each of us can do, given our own resources, to contribute to the flourishing of all? The biggest irony of such honest exchange is that instead of liberating us to enact on that which promotes human flourishing, a mutual understanding of “our own religious truth” seems to often be the greatest challenge toward a peaceful, pluralistic community. Yet, “if we claim to be concerned about defending the truth, why can’t we at least go out of our way to be sure that we are characterizing the views of other people – no matter how strong our disagreements – in ways that are truthful?”¹⁵⁶

However, it is in the context of such rich exchange that we come to realize how matters of difference matter to us. We also come to realize that a pluralistic exchange that seeks common ground can only go so far before it encounters some irreconcilable differences embedded in unique truth claims that guide each and every religious group distinctively.

¹⁵⁶ Mouw, Uncommon Decency, 60.
as they seek membership in what we deem to be (or hope it is) a truly “secular”
university – i.e., a supposedly neutral public space that accords no preference for a single
view of what counts as (religious) truth. In light of that, we come to realize how much we
need to ponder what it means to respect others.

Respect does not mean to acquiesce. Rather, it means to value someone deeply
enough that our differences become less significant in light of the worth I attribute to you
as a fellow human being. Respect prioritizes one’s value as a person. Hence, if we can
 premise our disagreements on that notion, we can better negotiate (or simply understand)
our differences with greater generosity toward the personhood – not just the ideas, as
important as they are – of the strange other. Nevertheless, for Christians such attribution
of value is precisely because we see others – that is, we have habitually learned to see
them – through the eyes of Christ. That, in sum, is my own spiritual take on what respect
means.

Yet respect also serves an important educational role. In fact, we must not ignore
what respect, as a virtue, means for the entire educational enterprise.

In that vein, we are reminded by Suzanne Rosenblith that from the standpoint of a
liberal education, we cannot avoid matters of truth, especially when matters of truth are
often so central to the subjects we explore in education. In fact, matters of truth speak
directly to the aims of a pluralist community that places a high priority on respect for
each individual member. For the author, engaging in dialogues involving the very notion
of religious truths is needed since it is part and parcel of what a liberal education aims at.
Thus, tolerance, in Rosenblith’s view, is insufficient to accomplish the goals of a liberal
education. Only an epistemological examination of the different claims made by the various religious groups would satisfy the degree of respect and recognition that is due all religions, which concomitantly satisfies, from the perspective of a liberal education, the educational obligation we have toward students to “contribute to the development of critical rationality, individual autonomy, and epistemological consistency,” she argues.\(^{157}\)

On the surface this sounds like a promising educational prospect. However, upon closer inspection, we find that Rosenblith calls for “two possible solutions to the pluralist predicament, which should satisfy both liberal educational values and the basic tenets of religious pluralism.”\(^{158}\) One solution suggested by Rosenblith is the notion of “degrees of belief.”\(^{159}\)

In this instance, Rosenblith suggests that the argument for this approach would require us to “measure the evidence and justification for each belief and attribute a certain epistemic confidence level to each belief. This would require placing each proposition within the context of a wider belief system or systems [both religious and secular], rather than treating the claims in an isolated manner.”\(^{160}\) Yet, noticeably, in arguing in favor of a “wider belief system or systems” the author ultimately elevates this approach to something “quite similar to the process of scientific inquiry,” whereby one would maintain an openness to the possibility that a view of his or her belief system might be

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\(^{158}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{160}\) Ibid.
changed as a result of treating individual claims not as absolutes but rather as only tentative until further public evidence is measured and assessed. Ultimately, for Rosenblith there is a need for an “outside” mediator (and she seems to think that something like scientific inquiry might be it) of truth claims which can help us to avoid mere tolerance but accord due respect to individual religious claims. This mediator allows us to more objectively assess religious claims and correct our views accordingly if we conclude, by way of such method, that certain religious propositions are not coherent.  

161 I must confess my ambivalence toward such proposition. On the surface, it seems to serve an important role. However, I find it hard to conceive of the possibility that someone (or some method) outside of religious traditions might be more of an expert on particular religious claims than members of these traditions themselves. It seems to me that the possibility of shifting expertise from within to outside of religious traditions cannot but fail to accord the very respect that Rosenblith seems to call for.

As I have argued earlier, education that aims at transformation of students should challenge them to rethink and reassess their religious claims – particularly claims that are exclusivist. However, when a liberal education begins with a particularist conviction (not too different from exclusivist religious convictions, I presume) that “we cannot say with absolute certainty which claim is correct,” 162 it brings into question the validity of the assessor’s authority to judge religious claims of which one has little access to except by

161 Ibid., 237.

162 Ibid.
way of objectivism (i.e., as Palmer puts it, by an academic orthodoxy that “[holds] the knower at arm’s length from the known”).

Hauerwas reminds us that respect cannot be simply earned, in the context of pluralistic societies, through the mediation of a third language that moderates between two or more traditions. He is concerned that such arbitration is too great of a risk, for the neutrality that liberalism on the one hand seeks to ensure, it fails to guarantee on the other. I agree with him. Yet Hauerwas does not stop here. His claim is much bolder and arguably controversial at a first glance. His stance is that religious pluralism is not even a viable goal, for he contends that the kind of depth and understanding that pluralism implies is often found wanting when dialogues concerning truth claims across religious traditions emerge. In his view, pluralism tempts us to take the safe and convenient path that toleration has to offer – that is, the kind of which asks nothing more than our willingness to “put up with” the religious other without affording a basic level of respect to his or her religious claims (something that even Rosenblith seems to object to).

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165 For a full treatment of this notion of what pluralism cannot be, see Hauerwas’ “The End of Religious Pluralism.”

166 Another concern is also worth paying attention to. In Religious Pluralism, Prothero shares his concern that the coming together of different or similar faith traditions often requires a kind of compromise that tends to “wash down” the essence of religious groups. For him, morality, as an observable popular substitute for theology, has
The intricacies of each religion and their different views on what constitutes the good and the good life pose a real challenge for a diverse community (and for a democratic society) that strives to operate in harmony while attempting to bring together strangers to work toward a common cause without extricating them from the essence of what each community holds to be true. Philip Quinn reminds us that while different world religions might be able to share an understanding of one another’s perspective, especially in modern days, living together in peace is something that has not yet been totally secured. At a first glance, we might be taken back by Quinn’s assessment and call it somewhat mistaken – or perhaps an incomplete picture of reality, particularly in the context of democratic states. If we were to translate his assessment to the context of my project, we might argue that in the context of the post-secular academy we have seen many positive signs that indicate a strong commitment to values inherent of a liberal state that affirm one’s rights to live life as one sees fit. In fact, not all liberal educators are opposed to ethical conversations that take into account religious convictions. Moreover, come to require a common ground that does not seem to allow for particularities to emerge and survive among faith communities, especially in what pertains to what makes each of them unique (e.g., their view of individual salvation, the after life, doctrine, etc.). Therefore, it is claimed that for pluralism to subsist in diverse communities, each community must seek a common denominator from which all can operate together. Naturally, as Prothero reminds us, this would require that certain aspects of each tradition be left out of the dialogue when coming together to affirm what is “common” among them. While possible for religiously diverse communities to work together in spite of their theological differences, even under the pluralistic banner, one must be cautious in avoiding turning collaboration (i.e., as a sign of civic pluralism that can bring strangers together toward a common cause) into a mechanism of dissolution – ironically, in the name of pluralism – of what is most dearly held by each faith community (i.e., the particularities that inform their motives for working together in a pluralistic society).

for the most part, religious students are allowed to remain religious throughout their college career without fear of grave consequences. Yet we must also contend with the fact that despite such encouraging evidence of the freedoms students and scholars are able to enjoy within the public university – freedoms that stem from larger societal freedom, particularly in America – what we also observe is a degree of a “hands off” approach in the name of diversity (and arguably of a certain reading of the virtues of civility and respect) that continues to contribute to the level of illiteracy that concerns scholars like Stephen Prothero.

One could argue that tolerance itself might be more of a culprit than of a hero. “Let religious students live life as they see fit,” some would exclaim. Such stance might indeed indicate some healthy signs of a truly liberal state and, in turn, of a public institution that sees itself as an extension of the state in educational matters. However, it would behoove us to dig a bit deeper into this notion. Is it possible that such freedom has amounted to a diminishing value and a thinning curiosity about what our pluralistic communities, society, and indeed our world, is comprised of? And if so, what are the consequences of such stance? Does that provide a sustainable model for peaceable living among strangers? I would surmise that it is through the thickening of our mutual understanding of the differences represented in the post-secular academy that we, as diverse people within pluralistic communities, strengthen (and even redefine) our lives among strangers. Perhaps it would also proactively prepare us to better manage future conflicts that could arise as a consequence of our real – and often unknown, until evoked – differences.
My hope would be that a deeper understanding of the stranger would add value to what we have learned to recognize as basic (yet still important) outward signs of peace. Through respect, we may make more concerted investments in our understanding of others in order to contribute to a state of affirmative human flourishing that is actually more in line with the aims of a liberal education. Hence, I would argue that when students commit to respecting one another, they can learn to deal and cope with healthy conflicts. Moreover, they might be inspired to learn from and teach others about the values that inform our lives in a pluralistic society.

That said, both believers and the secular academy should not take for granted these important encounters that provide the opportunity for people of different ethical commitments to not only learn about but in effect practice respect – as a civic, educational, and theological virtue – for one another. It is not enough to hope for positive outcomes. I think it is the university’s responsibility as an educational agency to facilitate such encounters and provide the training ground for students to learn how to respect fellow students of other religious and ethical inclinations. Likewise, the Christian student should also seek opportunities to encounter the strange other; opportunities that would lend themselves to greater mutual understanding by the respect that they confer to the strange other.

Education would be enriched when each member of the academic community learns and agrees to live a life of integrity (i.e., where their values are aligned with their actions), all the while fulfilling a commitment to upholding the integrity of strangers in light of (not despite of) the resources of their faith. Christians do not have to look too
hard into our own tradition to find reasons to embrace such aim on the basis of our commitments and convictions as a community of faith, even though at times it might require a degree of courage in the face of possible push backs from the academy which neither has to nor will always gladly affirm our religious convictions. As Hauerwas and Willimon propose, “the confessing church has no interest in withdrawing from the world, but it is not surprised when its witness evokes hostility from the world.”¹⁶⁸ And yet, if our aim as individual believers (i.e., the church) and as a learning community (i.e., the university) is to understand the ways in which we can mutually affirm what brings about human flourishing, we must search beyond that which is simply common among strangers – that is, we must go beyond our commonalities. The particularities of each faith tradition can substantiate and even affirm many of the aims of our shared public life. In particular, the Christian learns to respect others not simply out of a civic commitment, but out of a deeply religious commitment. The same might be true of those that uphold civic values that trump, in their estimation, religious values. Here the outcomes of a respectful liberal community might look quite similar: each member would be indeed allowed to live life as one sees fit. However, I argue that the process would be educationally enriched as a result of the recognition of that which informs each member’s respect for strangers. Perhaps the particularist stance of each member of the pluralistic community might be a more promising resource that could help us to uphold the integrity of others and the integrity of the educational enterprise that allows students to practice and be granted the due respect that seems to sustain our public life in a pluralistic society.

¹⁶⁸ Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 46-47.
Thiemann says it best: “if liberal democracies are to honor the diversity of their own societies, they must be open to the variety of arguments (including religious arguments) that seek to define the common goods these societies should seek.”

There are certainly many ways in which communities of faith can collaborate with each other for the benefit of the common good without requiring a compromise of each one’s particularities in matters of faith. Likewise, Christians themselves can – and should – collaborate, alongside believers and non-believers, to a peaceable learning environment in a post-secular academy that is committed to the flourishing of all. Pluralism along these lines can be a welcome feature of diverse communities that brings people together, promotes meaningful encounters, and reaches for the best that each tradition can bring to a shared learning experience, all toward a shared vision and educational outcome even though each one’s motives for the flourishing of the strange other might still vary.

What these important ideas about respect attune us to is that a liberal education also runs the risk of lacking the “liberal” qualities that, by definition, seeks to enlarge a person’s mind as students and participants of pluralistic communities. A certain reading of what one means by education often points us to the fact that the academic community, like religious communities, also has its doctrines and creeds. The imbalance of such orthodoxy can turn an institution of higher learning that is called to be secular (i.e., neutral toward religious commitments) into a secularist (i.e., anti-religion) institution. “With religions absent from the public square, secularism of this sort becomes the

169 Thiemann, Religion in Public Life, 131.

overarching perspective. … secularism ends up as the favored overarching perspective [italics in the original].”\textsuperscript{171} In turn, the very foundation on which a liberal education is built upon becomes compromised. Instead of enlarging students’ minds, by restricting their view to only that which is devoid of a religious perspective, students, like citizens of a liberal state, are told to restrict their convictions to their private spaces. But “how can they be free to live the way they see fit when they aren’t allowed to bring religious reasons into public debates and decisions? For these people, liberalism conceived in this way is illiberal. It hinders them from living out their lives as the faith that they embrace urges them to.”\textsuperscript{172}

At the same time, a similar charge can be issued toward certain Christians who seek to dominate educational spaces and impose, by coercive measures, their faith on others. The risk of coercion should not be reserved exclusively to the academy through the practices and orthodoxies it seeks to uphold. When each one’s values go unchecked against the very source that each claim to espouse to (i.e., Christian students to biblical values and the public university to the true aims of a liberal education) opportunities for respectful dialogues give way to religious or secular praxes that rupture the foundation that support the particularisms of religious convictions and of a liberal education. Holding in reasonable tension the religious values of members of the secular academy and at the same time the values inherent of a liberal education found within the structures

\textsuperscript{171} Volf, \textit{A Public Faith}, 124-25.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 124.
of a public university can be a meaningful way to promote exchanges that are truly transformative in the lives of individual students and the larger academic community.

I have no doubt that a believer’s viewpoint will at some point be challenged by those that do not share our commitment to the Gospel. Christians had better learn to expect that, for that is not only a democratic possibility but in effect a biblical promise that convictions will inevitably invite challenges. That said, those that learn to welcome critiques, questions, and even resistance to their witness are afforded an important educational opportunity to dig deeper and better articulate their religious justifications for the views they uphold among people of differing values. When the post-secular academy confers to believers the same respect it expects from them, it can serve as an affirming educational partner as it (i.e., the academy) invites and challenges exclusive believers toward a path of self-transformation by way of education. On the other hand, where the academy, through a certain reading of what constitutes a liberal education, seeks to replace what exclusive believers bring to this learning environment, the Christian, in respect for others (not just out of an instinct of self-preservation) ought to put forth the resources of their faith that reminds the academy of a mutual commitment to the freedom of all of its members. In that vein, Christian students should seek – most respectfully, in keeping with the integrity of their witness – to challenge the academy in order to remind others of its democratic and pluralistic values, the kind of which serves all students. Likewise, the academy can help exclusive believers to consider the ways in which, by respectful words and actions, they can become co-workers toward a peaceful community. In both cases, one could argue that “the glue” that helps to hold together this mutual
commitment to freedom and self-transformation is the notion of \textit{mutual respect} – that is, the acknowledgement that we need each other to form our own selves into our “best selves,” consequently helping to transform our institutions of higher learning into the best version of what a liberal and post-secular academy ought to be.

That is why it is not enough for us to simply “tolerate” one another in academy. Engagement is a more promising approach to personal and communal transformation. The idea of respect for the strange other allows us to confidently lean in to hear what animates the other’s convictions and concerns. We learn to pay respect for particularist definitions of the good and the good life. We offer alternatives to strangers (i.e., strangers like us \textit{and} them) without demands. We remind each other of where we fall short as teachers and learners of wisdom. We respectfully warn one another of where instead of liberating we try to coerce each other to conform to our own preferences. In sum, we – students and scholars in the public university – respect that which leads all life (not just “our” life) toward a flourishing life. Most importantly, we Christians seek to affirm these freedoms because of, not in spite of, the Gospel.

Where pluralism as an educational aim of the liberal academy does not negate or asks too high of a price from religious students, one can certainly hope that, through mutual respect different groups could find ways to negotiate their differences in order to bring about meaningful educational and civic outcomes that would serve society well in the long run. Yet even in the face of a glaring lack of commitment to such virtue on the part of universities, the Christian still has a choice to make. While rights are fundamental and can be called upon as a civic resource that insures their participation in the public life
of a university, believers have an overriding commitment to respect for the integrity of others that is not stipulated only by man-made laws and policies. When respect is not freely afforded to them in light of their deeply held religious convictions, we are still called to “show [ourselves] in all respects to be a model of good works, and in [our] teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned ….”\(^{173}\)

In that vein, mutual respect allows for particularists to, at best, present their views on the grounds of persuasion, but never with coercion: “the challenge to pluralistic democracies, then, is to encourage those habits of mind and behaviors that will allow citizens to resolve their disagreements through noncoercive deliberative means and to live peacefully together when those disagreements cannot be resolved.”\(^{174}\) Thus, as Thiemann affirms, the notion of mutual respect becomes a viable avenue (similar to the Golden Rule) that “goes beyond mere toleration in that it requires of citizens that they grant to those with whom they disagree the same consideration that they themselves would hope to receive.”\(^{175}\) He adds: “unless we find ways to disagree civilly, even in matters of conscience, we run the risk of undermining the moral character of contemporary democracy,”\(^{176}\) which depends on civil discourse that affords a voice to all societal groups on issues that define and affect our ways of life in both pluralist communities and in society at large.

\(^{173}\) Titus 2:7-8 (ESV).

\(^{174}\) Thiemann, Religion in Public Life, 136.

\(^{175}\) Ibid.

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 139.
Hospitality

When faith is introduced into conversations that happen in the secular university, conflict becomes a real possibility. Those who believe, as mentioned earlier, that every educational journey and every academic activity is, one way or another, faith-based, should be prepared to accept the challenges that may arise when traditions run into each other in public spaces. Sometimes we see clashes based on differences that exemplify – and do not always reconcile – the distinctive particularities of religious and secular traditions; traditions that, for instance, often pitch faith against reason or vice versa. These tensions, while arguably educationally intriguing, also beg the question: Is there a way for them to live in harmony with each other? Do Christians have reason to suspect “reason”? Or should they embrace it as a gift of God himself?

The sharp dichotomy (i.e., the idea that one’s life and scholarship must be informed by either faith or reason in justifying their religious or secular commitments in the academy) is hardly as simple as it may appear on the surface. After all, there are a number of non-believing scholars who are welcoming of religious justifications in the secular academy. Likewise, there are countless Christian scholars who are equally eager to share the educational space with non-believing persons because their religiosity inclines them to respect, even while not subscribing to, competing worldviews. I would surmise that the respect due to ideas stems from respect due, first and foremost, to our fellow human beings. In fact, one could argue that prioritizing respect for individuals makes our Christian commitment to respecting others more possible. If instead of

177 Plantinga, Engaging God’s World, 67.
engaging *worldviews* we decided to engage *people*, we as the church would be more inclined to police our thoughts, words, and actions, and measure our efforts to engage strangers against their integrity as neighbors. Thinking of the other as a fellow human being who, like us, is full of aspirations, apprehensions, and commitments, should humanize our interactions and cause us to see these engagements as opportunities for invitation, not coercion, into the world as we see it. Again, such invitation hinges largely on the freedom others have—and that are equally due to us—to accept or reject the invitation.

Since differences hardly come prepackaged and easily intelligible to those that do not share a certain view of the world, what is important from an educational standpoint is to conceive of a public space in which ideas are free to be expressed, grappled with, and even challenged. “Practical reason provides justifications for the universalistic egalitarian concepts of morality and law which shape the freedom of the individual and interpersonal relations in a normatively plausible way,” states Habermas. “At the same time,” he adds, “practical reason fails to fulfill its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, *an awareness of what is missing*, of what cries out to heaven.”

In order for civil and respectful dialogues to become a norm that contributes to important educational and civic outcomes that allows pluralism to thrive in the post-secular academy, we must turn our attention to a virtue that facilitates the possibility of

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178 Habermas, “An Awareness of What is Missing,” 19 (italics mine).
students learning from and teaching each other about differences that inform our public lives in a diverse society, namely, *hospitality*. I think that this virtue, while no less important than the previous two discussed above, contributes greatly to the possibility of public spaces such as the ones within the university (e.g., classrooms and all other learning environments within the university) to become more open to the kind of civil and respectful dialogues that I want to make Christian students and the secular university increasingly aware of and open to trying as a way of living their unique commitments among strangers.

While civility and respect are essential components (albeit, again, not the only ones) that inform both the kind of Christian living and the kind of liberal education that the secular academy should seek to promote, without special attention to the virtue of hospitality, we limit the possibility of dialogical relations that give hope to what could be a peaceable learning community. In my view, hospitality, as an educational and arguably transformative practice, presumes that the public has an *a priori* commitment to civility and respect toward strangers or, at the minimum, an intentional desire toward becoming more civil toward and respectful of others in these public, democratic spaces where strangers inevitably learn from and teach one another. While it may be the case in many universities that have learned to value such practices, one must remember, as I have argued earlier, that the works of civility and respect still take intentionality on the part of students and educators. Likewise, hospitality – the kind that can help us to be personally transformed as a result of our encounters with the stranger – cannot be left to chance. We (i.e., all members of the academy, but particularly the exclusive Christian) must seek out
the stranger with whom we can learn how to practice the virtues of civility and respect. By proactively doing so, I think we can more aptly enhance our understanding of what animates one another thus enhancing the possibility of a peaceful life within the pluralistic university of which we are members.

Hospitality, therefore, can be said to be a foundational virtue, without which it becomes increasingly difficult to put into practice the virtues of civility and respect. For how can we learn to be civil or respectful of others without first inviting them into our spaces, indeed the spaces that we often protect by often shutting out those that we believe are threats to the convictions we hold so dearly to? There is no doubt that hospitality practiced in such terms thus constitutes one of the riskiest of all virtues. It seems to me that we can both display civility and respect for others while keeping them at arm’s length. Not so with hospitality. When we open our lives to strangers – i.e., when we invite them into our world – we, like they, commit to or at least accept the fact that our vulnerabilities might become plain in the sight of others. Inviting the stranger *in respect* for who they are (e.g., the ideas they treasure, their own conception of the good and the good life, etc.) also invites the possibility of challenges to our own convictions that has a way to shake the foundations of our beliefs and commitments.

The virtue of hospitality represents the ability of all members of the academy to operationalize (i.e., to put into practice) one’s own civility and respect toward others. Through a collective effort inspired by a common desire to live peacefully among strangers, we work together – *in a spirit of hospitality* – to ensure that ideas that represent the most diverse conceptions of the good and the good life are carefully listened to, even
while they may not compel us to find a common conception (let alone a consensus) of the good or of the good life. Conceiving of hospitality in such terms can contribute to important learning outcomes for all students.

From an educational standpoint, my concern in introducing this virtue is quite basic. In order for public higher education to be considered pluralistic and democratic, it must remain open for ideas to flow to and from strangers as they grapple together with the issues that animate them as human beings – i.e., members of both the academic community and of a democratic society. The lack of religious literacy to which Prothero alludes implies that much work still needs to be done in order for strangers (including the exclusive Christian) to acquire some basic understanding and knowledge of the diverse perspectives, many of which are based on the religious (or non-religious) convictions that individuals hold and bring into the public. Moreover, in order for the public space of education to be considered democratic and pluralistic it has to communicate in words and deeds that individuals are safe to explore answers to the questions they ask without fear of reprisal or of being ridiculed by others.

Hospitality seems to be the kind of virtue that allows each of us to safely explore ideas that might seem odd at first in the eyes of the strange other. Assuming that a central aim of higher education is to transform individuals into not only productive but also both informed and fulfilled citizens, we ask: How can we create both spaces and opportunities that would contribute to mutual understanding of democratic and personal values through which we discover what makes oneself and others more human, more in line with the best representation of who they are? “By definition,” as Christine Pohl states, “hospitality
involves some space into which people are welcomed, a place where unless the invitation is given, the stranger would not feel free to enter.”\textsuperscript{179} Thus, one might question: What are the conditions needed in order for civil and respectful dialogues to be increasingly at the center of the college experience students might expect in American higher education?

To conceive of such hospitable spaces and to make one’s own being more open to receiving strangers (and, consequently, to entertain their strange ideas) will no doubt test our comfort with the ambiguities and risks of this endeavor as we seek to be exposed to many potentially threatening unknowns. Inviting diverse perspectives have a way of challenging our pre-conceptions of the world (and our protected worldviews). It makes us wonder about new or additional possibilities for the questions we have and the views we hold of the good and the good life. At the same time, if education (not just a mere delivery of a product to those so called “consumers,” as I will argue in chapter V) takes into account the dissonance that must occur in order for one’s thinking to be deepened or stretched on that which one seeks to learn, we must foster a disposition toward opening our “physical and intellectual spaces” for ideas that may help us to be transformed by and with others. Yet critics (I would surmise that the exclusive Christian would be one of the first to offer such critique) might promptly object: “If one of the central contentions of this project is that the Christian student, as far as his religious identity is concerned, should be allowed to retain and preserve his worldview while navigating the world of secular higher education, why would we (i.e., the church and the university) want to advocate for the opening of this space where the believer would come increasingly in

contract with strangers, thus potentially risking the weakening (or, worst yet, the losing all together) of his worldview? Moreover, why should believers be willing to take such risk?”

I must confess that I am not sure that I can provide a convincing answer to such a challenge – particularly from a Christian perspective. I myself am ambivalent toward such prospect. Yet my hunch, as both a scholar and a believer, is that the risks associated with a lack of encounters between strangers seems to be riskier than the alternative. As the university becomes increasingly post-secular – that is, more welcoming of diversity of religious views and ideas – these encounters seem quite inevitable, although arguably there are many ways in which students can still refrain from interacting with those with whom they disagree. That is why we cannot uncritically concede to the university the status of a pluralistic community, unless the hard work of democracy becomes an intentional educational practice of each generation. It seems rather implausible that those committed to being educated in the context of a public university would be able to live such sheltered lives as to remain completely oblivious that others will inevitably impact their educational journey. The question then is: How will students be impacted by others? And, conversely, how will they impact others’ experience in college?

I must confess that the more I grapple with the idea of hospitality toward stranger,

\[180\] In challenging a static concept of democracy, John Dewey reminded us many decades ago “that every generation has to accomplish democracy over again for itself; that its very nature, its essence, is something that cannot be handed on from one person or one generation to another, but has to be worked out in terms of needs, problems and conditions of the social life of which, as the years go by, we are a part, a social life that is changing with extreme rapidity from year to year.” Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1975), 39-40.
deep within me I hear a (biased yet perhaps healthy) warning that is informed by my own religious convictions: “don’t get too close to what might corrupt you as a believer.” At the same time, when I decide to heed the words found in scriptures, I find it hard to ignore Jesus’s own stance on whom I might consider “the stranger.” Jesus himself was highly relational and did not favor interacting with believers over non-believers. The good news of Jesus’s birth was to be a reason for great joy to all people.\(^{181}\) What are we to do with his example? What do we do with a Jesus that appears to be the strangest in a society that was merciless toward those less favored? Or a Jesus that is radical in his commitment to love others – even, and most importantly, our enemies (those most hard to love)? A Jesus that is unapologetically committed to mend humanity and restore relations? Even a Jesus who is willing to make himself vulnerable and become a guest – indeed the stranger himself – in many people’s homes and in their lives?

Perhaps a life of discipleship – i.e., a life in response and disciplined obedience to Christ’s teachings – can help us to put into theological perspective the importance of hospitality as a virtue to be practiced by his followers. At the same time, hospitality also seems like an educational practice that all can benefit from. In that vein, I would think that the idea of hospitality should not be neglected by an academy that prizes the opportunity to learn more and better about the world; that, in the spirit of academic freedom, seeks to know the truth in the matters studied by its diverse members. That is something that the academy must grapple with; a risk that it should dedicate itself to being willing to undertake. Likewise, Christians in the academy are not exempt from

\(^{181}\) Luke 2:10 (NIV).
such endeavors. In fact, they themselves will have to work hard at recalling and reorienting themselves toward the meaning and worthwhile risks that accompany this virtue, as they seek to be a church that welcomes strangers; one that is not afraid of encountering, in intimate conversations and relations, those that see life differently than them.

Marty gives special consideration to the virtue of hospitality and the risks associated with it. His assessment is that when faiths collide (as they often do, for instance, in secular spaces), the first counsel typically heard from conciliators is a call for toleration, a concept that the author shows very little enthusiasm for. In such instances when people cannot see life, given their own faith perspective, through the same lens, his stance is one that advocates “not [for] the settling for tolerance but [for] the aggressive risk of hospitality and the consequences that can follow upon the taking of the risk.”

He explains: “one of the problems with tolerance within pluralism is that those who tolerate often have the power or the will to remake ‘the other’ into some manageable image. Hospitality permits – indeed, it insists on – regarding the other as being really different.”

Moreover, hospitality implies an invitational stance that I think believers need to reawaken themselves to. Unfortunately, as Pohl articulates, hospitality seems to have lost its moral dimension, causing most Christians in present times to lose touch with the rich and complex tradition that gives meaning to the term. She adds that instead of thinking of

182 Marty, When Faiths Collide, 124.

183 Ibid.
hospitality that prioritizes our desire to welcome strangers, in present days we tend to regard it as a mere activity in sharing a pleasant meal with family and friends or in even more basic terms as something connected strictly to the industry of hospitality; something apart from our own commitments as believers. Pohl posits that today we strive to understand hospitality by adding only a minimal moral component to it. Thus, it becomes merely a nice extra activity reserved for when we have the time or the resources needed for it to become a practice. “We rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity,” states the author. However, she also recounts the different historical perspective that the church used to espouse: “hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationship. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also a recognition of their worth and common humanity.” This was an intentional – yet certainly not perfect – practice of the church for nearly seventeen centuries meant to not only spread but also add credibility to the gospel while transcending national and ethnic distinctions in the church as it cared for the sick, strangers, and pilgrims. However, as the author explains, by the eighteenth century such practice was viewed by many as antiquated and disconnected from the commercial society of that time. As that period ushered in major economic and social changes, the practice of hospitality itself was no longer the means by which to address the needs of the

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185 Ibid., 6.

186 Ibid., 6-7.
poor and strangers, for it had been emptied of its moral meaning.\textsuperscript{187} While the practice of hospitality did not totally disappear in that century, one could notice that it had become the practice of multiple specialized institutions that began to focus on social relations that are typically flattened to one dimension – that of caregivers and recipients, or professional and client – with human bonds narrowly defined.\textsuperscript{188}

As a consequence of such eclipse of hospitality, Pohl laments the fact that “later generations of Christians were left with little sense of the theological and practical richness of the hospitality tradition.”\textsuperscript{189} And if her assessment is correct, it is not hard to imagine that Christian students in present times may be ill equipped to practice such critical spiritual virtue that not only attests to the character of their faith but that in effect could help them learn more with, from, and about the strange other. In light of that, I would argue that the absence of such virtue not only compromises their witness but the very educational journey that they have set themselves on.

Palmer also draws our attention to different settings where the public life can be realized (e.g., city parks, squares) and where the interaction of diverse people can occur, which, in turn, allows strangers to pause, spend time in the presence of one another, share their common interest and pleasures, become increasingly aware of each other, and even exchange some words.\textsuperscript{190} While he does not make explicit mention of universities, I

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 38.

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 39 and 114.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{190} Palmer, \textit{The Company of Strangers}, 39.
presume that he would include the university as one of such settings. In any event, I think that his assessment is fitting of universities as well. As Palmer explains, “the public as a whole is simply too large, too abstract, for the individual to identify with and respond to. A small world like the neighborhood gives the public a human face, a human scale.”

From the narrowing of such contexts, I think I am not overextending Palmer’s ideas by affirming that the university represents in a sense such a neighborhood. This is, after all, yet another space – central to my context – where the public merges with diverse needs and interests; a space where people attempt to negotiate their self- and communal interests as well as their aspiration for the good and the good life. Moreover, the university – among other public and democratic settings – is a place where it is vital to attempt to formulate a vision of what a peaceable life among strangers might entail while accounting for one’s own freedom to exercise certain virtues and thus to flourish together as human beings.

Hospitality seems like a difficult virtue to master for it is not simply reactive (e.g., you might treat me poorly and I must decide in what manner – hopefully civilly and respectfully – I will treat you as a result of how I am being treated by you). Hospitality requires our being proactive; our seeking to become a civil and respectful host; our willingness to make room for others (often the stranger) in the closeness of our intimate spaces, be they the physical environments considered “ours” or the thoughts and ideas that are intimately “our own.” It provides, nevertheless, the opportunity for those “outside” to come in, to be welcomed, to feel that they matter to us and that we might

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191 Ibid.
matter to them. However, this virtue also has a way in which to make us vulnerable, for it often allows others to not only have access to our intimate spaces but also our more intimate thoughts. Hospitality presumes good will on the part of hosts and guests; that neither will abuse the trust given or received as our intimate “spaces” are open to others.

Thus, we may conclude that hospitality is a foundational virtue that allows civility and respect to be operationalized in the interactions among strangers in the post-secular academy. Yet given how indisposed both the church and the academy seem to often be toward incommensurable values and ideas presented by “the other,” hospitality needs to be relearned as an indispensible virtue in the promotion of the public good that emanates from a higher education; a good that has the potential to benefit both the church and the academy.

Arguably, hospitality leaves both the church and the university somewhat vulnerable. But that is not a bad thing, particularly when each commit to being generous toward the other and to respecting the integrity of one another. Yet given how tenuous this relation between particularists (i.e., the church and the secular academy) have been throughout the years, both parties have work to do. In light of that, I will return to and will expand on this discussion in chapter IV. Also, later in chapter VII, I will offer a modest proposal as to how believers and non-believers might see each other not as a threat but as an asset to the liberal aims of a shared, public higher education. I will argue that through the means of dialogue suspicions may turn into civic and educational opportunities so that all students may become co-workers of peace in the pluralistic American academy.
CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE CHURCH COMES TO CAMPUS: CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS AND THE CHALLENGE TOWARD AUTHENTIC MEMBERSHIP IN THE POST-SECULAR ACADEMY

Before getting too much ahead of ourselves in the arguments I intend to articulate in this chapter, I think it would be productive to clarify what challenges “the church” (i.e., the evangelical expression of the Christian faith in particular) poses to the secular academy. I think it may be prudent to recognize that not all Christians problematize in the same manner an educational enterprise that is supposed to be neutral (i.e., secular) in approaching questions of meaning from religious perspectives as not to favor one religious (or ethical) worldview over another. One of the aims of a liberal education is to transform students into autonomous and critically engaged citizens, capable of making up their own minds on matters of values. To that end, those that hold most tightly – as many evangelicals do – to matters of ultimate meaning tend to stand in greatest contrast with the some of the goals of public higher education in America.

At the same time, if we are willing to admit that religions are, in a way, human expressions of spiritual particularities that reflect not simply one’s ethical and moral preferences but also one’s informed commitments to particularist communities of faith that help them to address questions of ultimate meaning in life, we may also acknowledge that religion offers a lens through which many people see and interact with the world around them, including the world of higher education. Such lens – also referred to as a worldview – is, in the words of Christian educator Mark Cosgrove, “a set of assumptions
or beliefs about reality that affect how [people] think and how [they] live.”  Certain suppositions based on one’s belief, according to the author, also affect one’s learning in three distinctive ways: (1) it can narrow down the subjects one might be interested in studying; (2) it pushes individuals toward specific methods of gathering knowledge; and (3) it affects the way in which one interprets data gathered through any given academic investigation.  Historian Mark Noll adds that confessing Christ is tightly connected to the value of studying the things believed by Christians to have been created by him.

Of particular interest to this discussion, psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann explains that the term “evangelical,” although hard to define with precision, implies three central commitments on the part of believers: “a belief in the literal or near-literal truth of the Bible; belief that one can be saved only by choosing a personal relationship with Christ, or being ‘born again’; and belief that one should, to some extent, evangelize and share the good news of salvation with others.”

Admittedly, such tightly conceived notions of the good (and of the good life) may pose potential challenges to educators and other students that must share with exclusivist believers the pluralist space of the American college campus where not only evangelicals but also many other religious and non-religious persons have “made their home.”

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193 Ibid., 21.


particular, concerns about the presence and expressions of evangelical Christians in public universities may be exacerbated by the fact that these students often represent, as a reflection of American society itself, the status of a majority faith on college campuses, even though one’s Christianity is expressed in a variety of ways. All to say that while the church is “the Body” of Christ, believers themselves have learned through their unique Protestant or Catholic tradition to express their convictions in many different ways, some of which complicate our democratic life in the academy more than others.

That said, I believe it would be sensible to consider that at the university level – i.e., at this micro level of society – students of an “evangelical” persuasion may very well represent the status of a religious minority. In such cases, I would argue that there might be an educational risk unduly shouldered by these students that, depending on how

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197 Here I am referring to particularists or exclusivists, for it is my contention that all Christians are – or should consider themselves to be – evangelical in one way or another, especially as they profess their allegiance to the Gospel of Christ.

198 Here I am not referring to evangelical Christians as minorities in the same sense as other minority groups have been perceived in this country. Historically, it is clear to us that Christians have enjoyed a great deal of privilege in American society and even in higher education, as the history of colleges and universities in American would suggest. However, in modern days, I would contend that especially evangelical Christians do find themselves as part of a minority, often even a marginalized group in certain secular circles. This is the context in which I think they might be seen as a minority. As John Howard Yoder puts it, “to recognize that the church is a minority is not a statistical but a theological observation.” “Let the Church be the Church,” in The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 175.
dialogues are facilitated and how conversations that carry a moral overtone are allowed to flow in the academy, may find their voices quenched by a non-religious academic majority.

Marty reminds us that “majorities who have had a monopoly or privilege often see the presence of the stranger, the new neighbor, or the other, as a threat.”199 His point was made in reference to how those from a majority religion (e.g., Christianity itself) in America need to become more mindful of potential implications of their majority status in light of the growing presence of believers of other faiths. His assessment of how people of different faiths interact with each other is followed by a challenge to religious people to become more hospitable toward their neighbors of other religious inclinations. I think that his point can be applicable to when Christians – particularly evangelicals – become the minority, as it might be the case in most secular university campuses. For if the educational environment becomes monopolized by “privileged” secular views, those who hold a minority view (indeed a “strange” view as exemplified by religious particularists) may, at one point or another, be perceived as a threat to the values held by the majority, that is, those with a greater purchase on liberal values.

In particular, there is a sense in which the academy may feel that evangelical students’ overt efforts to “witness” to others (i.e., to share their faith and their faith perspectives publically) could compromise the inherent freedoms of other members of the university, especially when witnessing is perceived by others to be coercive in nature. Apprehensions may also be noticed in the encounter of secular higher education with the

values evangelicals hold based on their commitments to an exclusivist view of how religion ought to shape their lives and scholarship.

In light of that, some educators, mindful of such “religious landmines,” may default to a risk management mode that simply ignores this aspect of students’ moral and ethical development. Others may welcome the risk of affording full hearing to evangelical students in the classroom and other settings, but when topics that carry a moral or ethical overtone are discussed they may still struggle to find adequate ways to facilitate the conversation without alienating religious voices from public dialogues. Yet other educators view such risks with empathy toward evangelical students and may become genuinely concerned about these students’ learning experiences: they may argue that if evangelical students hold too fast to their religious commitments during their college years, these students could somehow risk compromising their own education since, supposedly, there would be an inclination to leave their values unquestioned during such a critical time of their development and maturation.200

At this point, it would be wise to pause and consider Robert Kunzman’s reminder that the overarching strategic term “worldview” does not exclusively provide a notion of the good (or the good life) solely to religious people. He recognizes that secular conceptions of the good also serve as life-shaping functions, and help individuals to address deep, existential questions about meaning. Therefore, Kunzman argues, we

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should avoid the mistaken assumption that religious frameworks are more partisan than nonreligious ethical ones, especially since secular frameworks are hardly neutral themselves; “both secular and religious frameworks,” states the author, “express fundamental convictions about meaning and value in life.”

Furthermore, Kunzman posits that it is in the context of broad ethical questions that religion often finds its place in dialogues, especially in the classroom. That, he maintains, causes educators to hesitate giving religion (or religious voices) a hearing, perhaps out of fear that students would not be able to properly resolve their ethical disputes. Extending Kunzman’s argument to the university classroom (and other learning environments), we are reminded by the author that if one of our educational goals is to foster thoughtful citizenship, institutions of education are obliged to provide a way in which students would learn how to talk about ethical differences while communicating and deliberating respectfully among differing and unfamiliar ethical perspectives, many of which happen to be informed by both religious and secular views. C. John Summerville complements this notion by stating that “we fear that trying to


[^202]: Ibid., 47.

[^203]: Kunzman’s research centers on public schools (K-12). His scholarship deals mainly with younger students. However, his stance on ethical dialogues is highly applicable to the world of higher education. In fact, whereas he focuses on classrooms, I contend that students and educators can extend the implications of his scholarship to other learning environment where ethical conversations become just as problematized by religious stances articulated. For instance, student affairs educators – i.e., those mostly concerned with the education of college students outside of the classroom – can learn a great deal from paying close attention to Kunzman’s arguments and conclusions.
understand humans, rather than merely describe them, will inevitably get us into normative judgments. We will begin talking of norms or values, and there will be disagreement. But should such disagreements be discouraged in the academy? I would argue that they should not.

From an educational and civic standpoint, there is a healthy element to respectful disagreements. In fact, I contend that disagreement can flow from the very civility and respect due to others with whom we disagree, as we have already articulated in chapter III. Such kind of disagreements – i.e., when the integrity of our interlocutors are upheld in ethical conversations – can help each other to press harder toward deeper understanding of what we set ourselves to study. It can expose the strengths and weaknesses of arguments with hopes that all would come to a fuller (yet plausibly not a common) understanding of matters at hand. Nevertheless, civil and respectful disagreements presupposes that ethical conversations are not settled with ease, but that we might still have something to learn from one another, even if conversations do not lead to consensus or compromise. What is more, disagreements can serve the function of keeping conversations alive. Yet disagreements should not be encouraged for their own sake – or for mere academic entertainment – but particularly as a means by which citizens can learn to give thoughtful considerations as to how they exercise their educational privilege of holding contrary views in public spaces. Assuming that people will often disagree on “what” they believe, a focus on “how” they carry themselves in public discourse might hold a promising prospect of a rich educational exchange among

\[204\] Summerville, *Religious Ideas*, 45.
those that hold conflicting religious and ethical views. In that sense, the pluralistic university, as a microcosm of our shared, democratic life, can be a good place from which to introduce the practice of both respectful dialogues and, when fitting, of respectful disagreements.

We recall Thiemann’s argument for noncoercive means for resolving disagreements and that assists in our peaceful life together in the context of a democracy, especially when we cannot reconcile these disagreements.\(^\text{205}\) He explains that mutual respect is a viable avenue though which we transcend toleration, requiring of citizens to be considerate of others, especially those with whom they disagree, in the same manner in which they would hope others would be considerate of them.\(^\text{206}\) Moreover, Thiemann suggests that allowing citizens to expose their views not only based on personal preferences or interests but also out of genuine moral convictions, inevitably serves the purpose of informing (and often of persuading) others of one’s personal stance on issues pertaining to their understanding and interpretation of the world around them.\(^\text{207}\) And while persuasion might not occur in every instance when religiously diverse individuals interact from their seemingly incompatible standpoints, they must still seek to disagree with civility, lest we undermine the moral character that it at the foundation of democracy.\(^\text{208}\) A democracy depends on civil discourse that allows for all societal groups.


\(^{206}\) Ibid.

\(^{207}\) Ibid., 136-37.

\(^{208}\) Ibid., 139.
and communities to have a voice on issues that define ways of life in society.

On this note, I suspect that some may still object to the methods used by evangelical Christian’s to interact with others. Their desire and drive to “witness” to others might be perceived by some to cross the line of mere presentation of arguments toward the kind of mutual understanding I have been articulating in this discussion. And where one’s Christian witness is supposedly meant to be perceived by others as an act of love toward them, some would be right in pointing out that such expression of love has often been translated into acts of incivility and disrespect toward the integrity of others – ironically, and to the detriment of Christianity, in the name of Jesus. As Volf puts it, “beginning at least with Emperor Constantine’s conversion, self-styled followers of Christ have perpetuated gruesome acts of violence under the sign of the cross.”209 That is an unfortunate reality that Christians must contend with as they approach others with the message (or from the perspective of) their faith convictions. Conversely, unfounded suspicions or prior restraint on religious expressions are not productive either. The attitude – or lack of consideration – on the part of many who are obstinately unwelcoming of evangelicals (merely because they are evangelicals) have, likewise, translated into unfruitful endeavors toward a more civil and respectful public discourse, breeding mutual resentment among fellow citizens.

I for one, am concerned that an attempt to suppress such expression of one’s faith – as the very mark of its liveliness and authenticity in the life of a believer210 – would


210 Ibid., 29.
render the evangelical student unrecognizable to others\textsuperscript{211} (I would even argue that it could contribute to rendering pluralism itself irrelevant). In fact, I would side with Walter Feinberg’s assessment that “opportunities for interaction between members of different groups are a desirable norm for pluralism, and pluralism has an interest in education that enables students to engage with those whose background and beliefs are considerably different than their own.”\textsuperscript{212} Without authenticity, how do we know with whom we are conversing? If one has to hide her true identity lest she offends someone else, how can she truly learn to respect the “strange other”? The religious and ethical syncretism proposed by many supporters of increased campus diversity seems to often make the individual unrecognizable. How can we learn about diversity – and, conversely, how can we learn to set it in motion through the works of pluralism – if those with whom we speak are not the true representations of their private selves as far as their convictions are concerned?

Extending these questions and problems to the secular academy, I would insist that mere tolerance toward the “strange other,” while a possibly effective mediator for peace in a diverse community, may not be as adequate of a mediator for meaningful learning about the values, intricacies, and implications of various religious views.

\textsuperscript{211} My point about evangelicals’ freedom of expression is an extension of Warnick’s point on freedom of expression in general and the detriments that stem from the suppression of said freedom: “the person is less able to tell other people about who she really thinks she is.” Bryan R. Warnick, \textit{Understanding Student Rights in Schools: Speech, Religion, and Privacy in Educational Settings} (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 70.

represented on a given university campus. Here I am in agreement once again with Prothero, who aptly states that “the moral of the story is not just that we need more tolerance. It is that we need better education – and not because it is nice to be multicultural but because the world’s religions, no longer quarantined in the nations of their birth, now live and move among us.”

To compound the issue, claims of possible mutual agreement or compromise between divergent views must be evaluated with great caution, especially if it demands of fellow religious citizens (or religious students) the “watering down” of their convictions in favor of a common moral ground. Thus in this matter Wuthnow’s position that tolerance is often too casual and too easy is worth pondering. In fact, I concur with the author that while pluralists of liberal persuasion are often apprehensive about Christian exclusivists, “such firmly held convictions [of these so called exclusivists] nevertheless are what gives pluralists hope that society can be genuinely diverse and still hold together.”

Likewise, I believe that this same hope could be extended to the public university and many educational environments within which strangers are encouraged to encounter and converse with each other. In fact, I optimistically think it, too, can hold together, especially when people of different religious persuasions find ways to civilly and respectfully disagree with each other while making room for others to democratically

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213 Prothero, Religious Literacy, 3.
214 Ibid., 85.
215 Wuthnow, America and the Challenges, 287.
216 Ibid., 288.
participate in this same shared, pluralistic space. However, this can only happen if and when there is a commitment to hospitality and respect toward all members of such community of learners, including the exclusivist Christian. Understanding, after all, requires hard work. Yet the educational outcomes cannot be underestimated for the health and prosperity of a pluralistic society in which students are encouraged to participate as “educated persons.”

**Diversity as an Educational “Strategy”**

There is something about American higher education that we may have learned to simply take for granted: the modern academy does not seem to (and indeed can no longer) neglect diversity issues. “Diversity” has most recently become part of the motto and mission of American universities. Nowadays, institutions take a clear stance on what pertains to attracting and retaining diverse individuals. Their strategies are intentional and affirmative, as they should be. One might attribute such firm commitment to issues of diversity to laws and the many decisions reached by every instance of this country’s judicial system, which have rightly compelled the academy to pay closer attention to (and keep tabs on) the composition of its student body and its faculty. Others would also rightly point out that aside from the law, there is a general good will toward including a wide range of cultural differences, experiences, and perspectives in higher education.

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217 Mark A. Noll reminds us that “forces hostile to Christianity in the academy and in elite culture are large, vigorous, and growing rapidly. At some American universities and colleges, Christian scholars must operate as if from foxholes. … [I]n American society very strong trends are working against all intellectual efforts, and not just Christian efforts, to use the mind responsibly.” *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 153. If Noll’s assessment is correct, that would pose a significant challenge to the overall pluralistic project of post-secular university classrooms.
Moreover, as institutions compete fiercely for “clientele,” marketing campaigns seem quite concerted in illustrating (e.g., through words and images) institutional commitment to diversity, which has now become a contemporary issue to be fostered and even bragged about. The more diverse the American college campus is, the better off we all are, so the rhetoric and practice goes.

When viewed in such light, some might still think about diversity with a hint of cynicism. For instance, dwelling too much on these diversity “strategies” employed by the university might lead some to wonder about the real motives of the academy for embracing so fervently such a commitment. Are we sincere in attracting diversity into our institutions? Or is the issue being used – and perhaps abused – for purposes that only advance some sort of private good (e.g., the academy’s)? Or perhaps both? That said, others might object: does the motive even matter when in fact something is being done (whether by conviction or obligation) to not simply diversify our institutions and provide a means for people to talk about issues once taken for granted in a different sense then we do today, but in effect to promote a sense of justice and human cohesion in the educational enterprise? I think that universities that prize integrity as an educational virtue would do well in asking these tough questions, lest the issue becomes one that can be manipulated in favor of self-interests that, in the long run, cannot sustain a concerted and sincere effort toward justice, equality, access, success, and so on, of diverse societal groups that can indeed enhance significantly both the quality of the educational experience and the quality of our interactions with fellow citizens in the context of a democratic society. Diversity in these latter terms (i.e., not as a mere strategy for ulterior
motives, whatever they may be, but as a matter of civic and educational value) cannot be stressed and promoted enough.

While these questions are worth paying closer attention to and that university faculty and administrators should not ignore, for my purposes I want to accord the contemporary university (even while some critics might think it naïve to do so) a vote of confidence in what pertains to its reasons for pursuing and affirming so fervently the issue of diversity as a civic and educational priority. I want to continue to believe, based on evidence seen and experienced, that there are many educators working diligently to ensure the kind of justice and peace that brings about both a private and a public good when our shared commitment to diversity translates to honoring what each individual brings to educational experiences. In fact, it is hard to ignore that in present days colleges and universities across the country seem to widely accept the premise that a diverse learning environment offers an ideal opportunity for students to explore a variety of perspectives and learn from people whose lives have been shaped by unique cultural factors and distinct traditions. However, it is equally intriguing to notice that whereas institutions of higher learning have placed great value on issues pertaining to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, conversations about religion and spirituality are still less prominent in the academy – although it is gaining some momentum as of late – particularly in the secular university (although arguably many religiously affiliated institutions of higher learning do not pay too much attention to these issues either).

Despite the fact that religion is timidly addressed, its relevance for many people of faith obliges educators to pay closer attention to how this identity marker intersects
with the scholarly activities of religious members of the American academy. Since we cannot speak of religion in generic terms – religions are different given the particularities of their claims and practices – what I want to turn my attention to in this chapter are the potentialities and challenges of making room for exclusivist Christian commitments in the shared environment of public institutions of higher learning. Once again, while speaking from the perspective of other communities of faith is an equally pressing task, my hope is to remind Christian students of their own sources and resources that would allow them to meaningfully participate in the diverse space of the contemporary university. Thus I ask: What are the challenges and possibilities of affording an authentic membership in the secular academy to Christian students? How does the academy, by doing so, affirm its commitment to a more inclusive secular space whereby the self-professed faith of students – whoever they may be – can be fully incorporated into the academic and cocurricular life of the university? And what are the responsibilities of believers if the academy were to become more empathetic (and indeed more curious) about their exclusivist religious commitments? Moreover, what outcomes – for themselves and for others – could we expect to see as a result of exclusive Christians articulating their faith in light of the virtues discussed previously: civility, respect, and hospitality?

Later in this chapter, I want to begin to articulate what might be a viable, albeit quite modest, way in which the church may earn, without demanding, an authentic membership to the secular academy; but not without first understanding its first priority: to be a community of worshipers, not a community of conquest, through which it can still
share, “with gentleness and respect,”218 our witness for the hope that we have as we live our academic vocation as followers of Christ in the secular academy. When seen in such light, I argue that the faith through which Christians see the world has the potential to be a meaningful addition to the secular, pluralistic space of American higher education that places a genuine value on the diversity of perspectives brought to this shared “marketplace of ideas.”

**Merited Apprehensions of an Academy Still Secular**

Based on what a liberal education aims at, some fear – perhaps rightly so – that the mismanagement of religion as a conversation partner in the university runs the risk of turning it into a mechanism of indoctrination. Others, also based on the same values, assert that one’s religious convictions should remain within the constraints of one’s private life, separate from one’s public endeavors so that one’s convictions would not intrude on the freedoms of others to believe in what they please. That is an argument in favor of autonomy, a value that university indeed must prize and protect. As we have also seen, an additional apprehension, once supported by the notion that the world was becoming increasingly secular and that religion had lost (or would eventually lose) its place in modern society, was grounded on what was known as “secularization theory,” now fallen into disuse. Having disputed the fact that “secularization theory” would prevail,219 we are once again reminded by Berger that since modernity has added a great deal of uncertainty in the lives of citizens, religion, to the extent that it provides some

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218 1 Pet. 3:15 (NIV).

certainty to individuals, has regained its appeal to a great number of people who, not only from a theological but also from an anthropological perspective, long for meaning in life. This is one of the greatest features of humanity, he asserts.\(^{220}\) In other words, reason, as narrowly constructed by many Enlightenment thinkers, cannot be the only source of answers for our human experience. Many other scholars corroborate with that idea.

MacIntyre for instance affirms that “question of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent.”\(^{221}\) Wuthnow adds that religion, as moral order, provides a way through which people define themselves individually and collectively.\(^{222}\) Moreover, Prothero, bringing this conversation closer to education, affirms his conviction and concern that “our current inattention to religion in secondary and higher education today is a failure of the highest degree,” which amounts to a serious civic problem.\(^{223}\) He adds that in today’s world (and in the United States, in particular) such inattention serves as a tremendous hindrance on one’s ability to participate fully in public life: such degree of religious illiteracy can lead one to be easily persuaded by the agendas of both the left or right, which, in turn, puts this country’s democratic system in great peril.\(^{224}\)

More recently, Jacobsen and Jacobsen compiled an optimistic body of research that points to the fact that many institutions of higher education across the country have

\(^{220}\) Ibid., 13.


\(^{222}\) Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges*, xiii.


\(^{224}\) Ibid., 10.
been turning their attention back to religion in acknowledgement of its importance and presence on university campuses through the lives of religious students and educators.

The authors offer three noteworthy considerations: (1\textsuperscript{st}) that religion, in its pluriformity, has both returned and has become much more visible in higher education in the last two decades; (2\textsuperscript{nd}) that religion is no longer thought as an add-on to the purposes of learning, especially as colleges and universities live out their commitment to understand the world as it really is, with religion, like it or not, consisting of a significant part of the world (both the “outer” and “inner” world of individuals); and (3\textsuperscript{rd}) that paying more careful attention to religion while properly handling it can actually help to revitalize higher education as a whole. While the authors acknowledge that a return to the past is neither likely nor desirable, they contend that

The religio-secular realities of life in America today are much more about questing and questioning then they are about defending or imposing the ideas and ideals of any particular religion on anyone else. It is this new mode of religion that may allow the academy to recapture a nearly lost conversation about ‘things that really matter’ and how these deeper concerns of life relate to the more practical skills and knowledge that colleges and universities also convey to students.\textsuperscript{225}

In fact, this is not a kind of assertion made exclusively by religiously minded scholars like Jacobsen and Jacobsen. Anthony Kronman, a self-confessed secularist, while critical of the way in which religious traditions provide answers to the meaning of life,\textsuperscript{226} shares a deep concern about how institutions of higher learning, and how the humanities in particular, have been giving less and less prominence to the bigger questions of life.


In light of this contemporary reality, it becomes important to ask: What happens when the Christian church comes to the secular campus “embodied” by its members? How should a self-professed Christian – particularly the evangelical Christian – attempt to live his or her faith authentically and publically in the context of a secular, pluralistic educational environment?

To offer some plausible answers to these questions, we must first deal with the reality that institutional claims for the importance of a diverse and inclusive learning environment often collides with Prothero’s assessment that we live in a nation of religious illiterates.227 Thus, one could assume that many of the misunderstandings and apprehensions about fully including religion in the secular academy spring up, at least to some extent, from such religious illiteracy.

Equally important, is an understanding of the implications of a faith authentically lived. Many self-professed Christians often make a concerted effort to live out their faith in this shared, pluralistic space of higher education, by asking questions, seeking answers, and framing their arguments, informed by their religious convictions and commitments. For many, the intersection of their faith with their learning is a key component of a meaningful education, as I have pointed out in chapter I. While I am contending that living one’s faith authentically should incline believers to evaluate the weight of their convictions on the scholarly projects that they engage in, I am mindful that this proposition may not satisfy all Christians, let alone all members of the secular academy. That said, I think it is still important to note that, for many, an authentic faith is often

noticed through the opportunities the believer finds to “witness” to the world around them by sharing the Good News of the Gospel, as the church that places a priority on Christ’s Greatest Commission instructs them by way of Scriptures. Witnessing – that is, the way in which the believer expresses, by words and deed, his faith commitments “[doing] it all in the name of the Lord Jesus”\textsuperscript{228} – is, after all, an important feature of a lively Christian faith and an authentic way of communicating one’s hopes for the present and the future. I am mindful, however, that such lively expressions often account for great apprehensions in the secular academy.

\textbf{Witnessing While Simply – Yet Not Simplistically – “Being the Church”}

In their seminal book \textit{Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony}, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon offer a provocative statement that I think is worth paying close attention to. Although expressed in theological terms, I believe that their assertion is applicable and transferable to the world of higher education. The authors state that the “political task of Christians is to be the church rather than to transform the world.”\textsuperscript{229} On the surface, they seem to disregard, or so it appears, Christ’s Greatest Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations;”\textsuperscript{230} our very call to witness. We are reminded that “witnessing” and “discipleship” are unavoidably linked to Christian practices. This apparent tension is intriguing and worth dealing with. However, we must notice that their assertion should not be taken as permission for passivity on the part of

\textsuperscript{228} Col. 3:17 (NIV).

\textsuperscript{229} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 38.

\textsuperscript{230} Matt. 28:19 (NIV).
Christians. A more careful reading allows us to understand that what Hauerwas and Willimon seem to have in mind is a particular interpretation of the role of Christians and a normative way in which the church ought to exist in the world. In essence, while Christians ought to live and fulfill their religious and political role as active participants in society without compromising their religious convictions, their efforts should not center on modifying society through conquest (i.e., by imposition, coercion, or political pressure that others should become Christians), “but rather in the [confessing church’s] determination to worship Christ in all things.”

Hauerwas and Willimon’s proposition is far from simply satisfying the aims of our shared lives in a democracy. The authors call on Christians to reconsider the very way in which they live, as a community of worshipers, in a world that does not know Christ as the church does – i.e., in a self-giving, willing relationship with him. They simply, yet not simplistically, remind believers of an important priority, which is neither less engaging nor less political, but rather a redefinition of what counts as Christian living and as the mission of the church in the world. Here, priorities are reassessed as the church relearns to accept that “God, not nations, rules the world.” Therefore, instead of the church becoming mere underwriters of American democracy and thus committing to

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232 Ibid., 45.

233 Ibid., 43.

234 Ibid., 32.
practicing, in step with other societal agencies, a sort of “Christian social activism,”

“the church’s only concern [becomes] how to be in the world, in what form, for what purpose.” As they explain,

for the confessing church to be determined to worship God alone “though the heavens fall” implies that, if these heavens fall, this church has a principle based on the belief that God is not stumped by such dire situations. For the church to set the principle of being the church above other principles is not to thumb our noses at results. It is trusting God to give us the rules, which are based on what God is doing in the world to bring about God’s good results.

So, what does it possibly mean for a Christian (particularly a student) who may learn to subscribe to this view of one’s purpose and existence in the world to most genuinely “be the church” without the need to transform it – particularly, for the purpose of this project, the world of higher education? How can we reconcile the Christian witness (often misperceived as an unwelcomed imposition upon the liberal academy) to the proposition of simply “being” the church in the secular, pluralistic space of education?

John Howard Yoder is helpful here. He writes from an Anabaptist perspective, suggesting that Jesus’s life not only testifies to his spiritual reach but also speaks to his social and political influence. According to Yoder, Jesus, while obviously invested in the spiritual transformation of his disciples, also announces a new “visible socio-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God, achieved by divine

\[235\text{ Ibid., 37.}\]

\[236\text{ Ibid., 43.}\]

\[237\text{ Ibid., 46.}\]
intervention” through Jesus himself. The transparent evidence of a new social order given to those outside of this community of faith would be evident: “the rich would give to the poor, the captives would be freed, and the hearers would have a new mentality (metanoia), if they believed [the good news Christ was preaching].” Noticeably, a sharp contrast by way of motives with the larger culture, since for believers – particularly for evangelicals that fall in line with a Protestant reading of Christianity – the unique praxis of love flows from our response to grace (and love) that is freely given to us by God, not earned by us through our own good works. While similar acts that lead to arguably similar outcomes can be accomplished by a praxis of love construed by all sorts of moral, theological, and philosophical foundations (arguably, even a secular notion of love for humankind), Christians’ motives are attuned to the fact that “God does not see what man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord sees the heart.” In this vein, the church’s theological and social practices flows from a deeper well that does not emanate from our own beings or simply from the needs of others or of our communities. Love and service to others becomes a responsive, worshipful way of communicating our commitment to God and to being co-workers with God in mending a world he has created. In this light, love and service dispensed on behalf of others affirms, by the church’s willingness to be a community of worship of a God who seeks to redeem the world.

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239 Ibid.

240 1 Sam. 16:7 (ISV).
That Christ is Lord would require such individual transformation and hopefully translate to the modification of the social order, especially to the benefit of those less favored in society. However, the church’s determination to worship Christ in all things as a first order should place the church on a non-coercive track to influencing the world (including the world of higher education, I would add), by simply being something that the world neither can or never will be able to be.241 Put simply, other social institutions are not the church. By living out its overriding political task, the church would be in a better position to be a “community of the cross”242 – a self-giving, self-sacrificing community, contributing in faithful testimony (or in spite of its infidelity) to the creation of structures more worthy of human society.243

Hauerwas adds that “[Christians] cannot avoid being in mission to witness what they believe God has done in Christ.”244 One’s witness accounts for a genuine representation of one’s faith. However, what the church must grapple with is that adherence to Jesus’s propositions must always happen through voluntary commitment.245 Volf also reminds us that “a major purpose of the Christian faith is to shape the lives of persons and communities.”246 So, for Christians, remaining idle would imply one of the

241 Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 46-47.

242 Ibid., 47.


244 Hauerwas, The State of the University, 67.

245 Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 37.

246 Volf, A Public Faith, 13.
“malfunctions of the Christian faith” – a misrepresentation of what it actually is (for “an idle faith is no Christian faith at all”).

Extending these views further into the world of higher education, I would contend that if such state of idleness were to be superficially imposed or demanded by public institutions in the name of greater inclusion or tolerance – as some proponents of a strict view of the desired separation of church and state, particularly in public institutions, such as the university, tend to assert – such attempts would seriously compromise the university’s commitment to these very principles. In fact, to require individuals to leave their religious convictions completely out of their academic pursuits could stunt an educational process that purportedly aims at investigating the world from a multiplicity of viewpoints. It would also imply that the very differences claimed to be valuable have, in effect, no place in the pluralistic space that institutions so carefully attempt to construct. Moreover, if education is about human flourishing and transformation, educators must take into account all that individuals claim to be important for their own development and growth. Religion, for many, is an integral component of that very process of personal maturation. At the same time, Christians ought not to neglect the method through which they engage the secular academy which, as I have been arguing – that is, if the goal of the church is to add unique value to the pluralistic nature of public higher education – should qualify the verb “go” found in the Great Commission by the virtues of respect for the integrity of others and civility toward those that do not share their worldview. After all,

247 Ibid., 13-22.

248 Ibid., 16.
what believers should seek is a legitimate membership to the academy, not special
privileges in this shared, democratic space.

**The Challenging Prospect of Including Religious Voices in the Post-Secular Academy**

Kunzman posits that it is in the context of broad ethical questions that religion
often finds its place in classroom dialogues. That, he argues, causes teachers to hesitate
giving religion (or religious voices) a hearing, perhaps out of fear that students would not
be able to properly resolve their ethical disputes.\(^{249}\) By extending Kunzman’s argument
once again to the university environment, we could learn from the author that if one of
our educational goals is to foster thoughtful citizenship, institutions of education are
obliged to provide a way in which students would learn how to talk about ethical
differences while communicating and deliberating respectfully among differing and
unfamiliar ethical perspectives, many of which happen to be informed by both religious
and secular views.

It seems to me that a more sophisticated way in which universities may call for
and practice “toleration” (while keeping ethical conversations flowing) would stem from
the deeply intellectual capacity of the academy itself to affirm its secular, not secularist
nature; again, its position of neutrality toward religious convictions and justifications, not
its readiness to oppose such values and viewpoints. “We need,” as Wolterstorff asserts, “a
politics that not only honors us in our similarities as free and equal, but in our
particularities. For our particularities – some of them – are constitutive of who we are,

\(^{249}\) Kunzman, *Grappling With the Good*, 47.
constitutive of our narrative identities.” However, such neutrality with respect to one’s particularities should not be practiced in idleness on the part of the institution. There must be a concerted educational effort to include as many voices as possible in educational dialogues, particularly those that aim at engaging with questions of meaning. In that vein, the university cannot expect students to be transformed by an educational experience by accident. If one of the goals of an American college experience is to form citizens capable of strengthening our pluralistic democracy, the institution cannot simply hope that these students would draw from their religious sources the resources that can indeed contribute to a more just and peaceful society.

While I am ambivalently willing to concede, in agreement with the terms of the First Amendment, that secular universities cannot advance nor favor a particular religious view, I would contend that, at the minimum, it should not impede these views from flowing in the halls of the academy, especially when students claim that these views are what informs the meaning they make of a college experience that ought to prepare them to live and dialogue with strangers in society. In order for inclusion and diversity to transcend rhetoric, universities must make a concerted effort to keep its lines of communication open for religious ideas to flow in what is supposed to be a neutral, public space. Such a stance would encourage a meaningful way for students to develop their educational projects while taking into account their religious views where they see fit. I optimistically trust that the academy is indeed capable of handling such level of

\[250\] Audi and Wolterstorff, Religion in the Public Square, 111.
inclusivity that presses it toward a more convincing notion of pluralism. The question is: Is it also willing?

Volf, like Jacobsen and Jacobsen, explains that it is important for those that do not share a religious vision of the world to recognize that Christians see their religion as an integrated way of life and an overarching means of interpreting reality through conviction, attitudes, and practices that allow believers to live well, in the light of how God created them to live. 251 In other words, Christianity is not just a private accessory of one’s life. It is one’s very identity, which should be lived out in all areas of life.

So, what can Christians themselves add to the secular space of public universities? Through the educational role of the church, Hauerwas and Willimon posit that we learn “the interpretive skills whereby we know honestly how to name what is happening [around us] and what to do about it.” 252 And by learning to see and name the world through such a unique lens, Christians offer an important gift to secular higher education, especially when institutions return the favor by encouraging believers to elevate the quality of their academic arguments and provide both intelligent and intelligible answers for the questions they ask. In doing so, I believe secular institutions strengthen the educational potential of Christian students, particularly the exclusive Christian who some argue – whether factually or not – are less prone to questioning their beliefs or to providing rational justifications for the convictions they claim to hold. I think this exchange could prove quite productive and educational: the secular academy

251 Volf, A Public Faith, 101.
252 Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 146.
could learn even more from evangelical Christians while also emphasizing to them the important scholarly and intellectual skills that are at the core of an educational mission.

As mentioned before, one of the main aims of my project is to allow strangers to encounter each other in these public educational spaces, whereby they might learn about, with, and from others. On this point, I am in agreement with Mouw who asserts that while Christians may not find truth by exploring every perspective at their disposal (some viewpoints are simply confused, distorted, and even crazy\(^{253}\)) “even when we strongly disagree with [others’] basic perspectives, we must be open to the possibility that they will help us discern the truth more clearly. Being a civil Christian means being open to God’s surprises.”\(^{254}\) The hope is that these encounters would prove to be fertile soils whence the transformation of all students would spring up; where human flourishing through education would be a viable outcome for all, believers and non-believers, as they intersect to do the hard work of pluralism in the academy.

When engaged in such civic and educational manner, I argue that Christians can offer something unique while adding value to public higher education. For instance, Christians may ask different questions and explore answers to these questions from different angles; their commitment to truth, so central to Christian thought and aimed at by the very principles of academic freedom, can propel believers to find answers for questions in places where the non-believer may be either unwilling or underequipped to search for. Likewise, by maintaining a hospitable attitude toward strangers, Christians


\(^{254}\) Ibid., 64.
might learn something from those who are also committed, for various or other reasons, to searching for truth where the believer himself is not naturally inclined nor adequately prepared to search for.

Living their faith truthfully and taking their convictions seriously should inspire Christians to conduct themselves in all that they do with the highest level of integrity, prioritizing others’ interests and well being above one’s own gains. Additionally, they will do everything possible to live at peace with others, to be a servant of humanity, and do their best to put into practice Christ’s second greatest commandment, to love their neighbors (in this context, their fellow students, those who educate them, and others) as they love themselves. These are gifts that I think would be highly attractive to and desirable by secular institutions that place a high value on civic pluralism and on preparing students to serve and lead for a better (diverse) world.

Of course, those that do not share the Christian worldview may challenge what we might call these “Christian potentialities” by arguing that in many ways this is a task that may not seem so exclusively reserved for Christians. The non-believer should be just as capable of conducting truthful inquiries and maintaining integrity in their academic work; they should also be fully capable and indeed free to search for answers to their questions anywhere, including in the church, if they wish; and, most importantly, they should be just as capable of extending love to those around them. The difference in these seemingly equal dispositions of believers and non-believers, as the theological ethicist James...

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Gustafson reminds us, is that the Christian has a special obligation to act morally. By “special” one could read “as an expression of worship,” not by political demand, a man-made ethical code, or fear of reproach (although these should not be disregarded by Christians either). But because all they do “they do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men,” the bar seems to be even higher for Christians. To live what they profess is not only what the culture expects of them, but an expectation of God himself.

We are also reminded by Volf that “faith does its most proper work when it [does three things]: (1) [it] sets us on a journey, (2) [it] guides us along the way, and (3) [it] gives meaning to each step we take.” This, I believe is not just a statement of faith apart from the activity of the believer. If faith is integrated in the overall life of the believer and not just an “add-on,” it should not be hard to conceive that for the believer who is socially and politically engaged, this same faith is that which, often – if I might extrapolate this argument into the world of education – (1) sets them on a particular academic journey, (2) guides them along the way (e.g., many Christians are committed to praying about their education, praying for their fellow students, praying before a test, and also in order that they would be most able to bring honor to God as a result of their acquired degree and scholarly activities), and (3) it gives meaning to each step that they

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257 Col. 3:23 (HCSB).


259 Ibid., 101.
take in their academic pursuits. What is important to note is that the life of the believer is not partitioned, but interconnected, lived in the intersection of the personal and communal journey that the Christian sets herself on.

That said, in order for the pluralistic space of higher education to be truly inclusive, both the secular academy and Christians have some work to do. There is a good place from which both can start. Put simply, as Prothero suggests, we must make a better attempt at becoming more religiously literate. Both believers and non-believers must acquire some basic knowledge of religion so that we can better understand how religion shapes private and public lives.\textsuperscript{260} However, for the believer this is an even taller order: more literacy about their own faith allows them to be an even better representative of the God that they serve while living their religious convictions, in Yoder’s terms, as a “herald,” not a Crusader,\textsuperscript{261} in the shared space of higher education. In fact, Christians share the burden with non-believers of becoming more literate about their convictions, for they are often just as unreflective as anyone else in the academy about how their faith informs their scholarship\textsuperscript{262} and their dealings with others.


Risking hospitality toward the strange other should not be left untried, particularly by and in a public academy. Such risk would, nonetheless, require universities to take the Christian faith seriously enough to the point of positively and sincerely engaging with it – even challenging it when and if needed, especially when one’s interest is set aside so that any public discourse, in line with the idea of a liberal democracy, is governed by respect for the particularities of one’s fellow citizens. However, I would argue that for such level of hospitality to become a reality, the academy must recognize that in secular institutions there ought not to be different levels of membership: students, in particular, are equal when vested in their educational identities; they share the common goal of and desire to learn, albeit the college journey might be traveled on different grounds by believers and non-believers.

Although he was grappling with the idea of student rights mainly in the context of public schools, I think that higher education would do well to heed to Warnick’s warning that, although controversial and even offensive at times, when students’ freedom to publicly express themselves (and here I would include the expression of their religious views and ideas) is suppressed, he cautions:

Two troubling consequences follow: (1) On an internal level, the individual’s sense of integrity is compromised; conforming to external pressure, the individual cannot live her life “from the inside”; (2) On the external level, other people are more likely to misrecognize the person who lacks expressive freedoms. The person is less able to tell other people about who she really thinks she is, and she

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is forced to live what she considers to be a false life in the eyes of others.\textsuperscript{266}

In view of that, I would argue that allowing religion to be a viable “voice” in education would affirm a critical dimension of the very fabric of American society represented in American secular institutions of higher learning.

Where peacefully expressed, our views, our voices, our convictions matter. Likewise, where the diverse other is not in effect threatened but respected and honored, our differences and particularities can add value to a pluralistic environment that is rich in its diversity of ideas. I also insist that one’s freedom to think “religiously” is indeed a testimony to the academic freedom of students (and of educators) and a testimony of this country’s democratic values. The suppression of such freedom would be – if I may borrow Volf’s terminology – an “educational malfunction” of sorts.

As the church comes to the secular university campus, Christians ought to be reminded that the complexity of the argument that calls for them to simply be the church instead of aiming for domination – let alone through coercive means – lies on its very simplicity. While the church cannot be excused from its mission to mend the world and see to it that humans would flourish,\textsuperscript{267} the church ought to better grapple with its first priority, which is to learn to worship God by the way it lives, in full alignment with what it believes. Unfortunately, history has reminded us many times that the church has fallen short of this aim. Consequently, more often than I would like to admit, Christians have misrepresented not just their religion, but their Christ. Congruent lives – that is, lives

\textsuperscript{266} Warnick, \textit{Understanding Student Rights}, 70.

\textsuperscript{267} Volf, \textit{A Public Faith}, 96.
lived with integrity – would allow exclusive Christians to more effectively engage with the academy and most meaningfully add their particularist voice to the pluralistic space of public higher education.

At this historical juncture, and given the inherent commitments of public higher education in America, I believe that the church’s real challenge, given what Christians profess to believe, lies not in asking “how can the academy offer a more adequate way for us to live out an authentic faith in this secular, pluralistic educational environment in which we seek an authentic membership?” The more pertinent question I believe Christians – particularly evangelical Christians – ought to ask is: “how can we make ourselves more attractive by living consistent lives so that the academy would be more inclined to live its commitment to inclusion, diversity, and pluralism – which would encompass diversity in the form of religion – and find it important enough to grant us an authentic membership?”
CHAPTER V

WISDOM AS A GOOD: TOWARD MUTUALLY EDUCATIVE PRACTICES

Before getting too deep into the central ideas I wish to explore in this chapter, I think it is important to deal with yet another assumption: that the impartation of wisdom upon students is a normative aim of American institutions of higher learning. While that may certainly be true, particularly in the case of institutions still strongly committed to the aims of a liberal education, the more I interact with and observe the ever changing world of higher education in America the more ambivalent I find myself being toward the notion that pursuing wisdom (as elusive and subjective as the idea might be) is indeed a priority in modern universities. In fact, some of the educational practices of the academy seem to suggest that “wisdom” – as a coveted educational outcome for students and scholars, the kind of which aims at enlarging one’s mind in consideration of the complex world in which we live – has now found a wide variety of challenging factors that pull the university in different directions as it scrambles to prepare students for an increasingly competitive world and job market.

But what is wisdom in light of the aims of higher education? Wisdom is said to be directly linked to one’s character – “the attenuated modern word,” as Andrew Delbanco articulates, “for what the founders of our first colleges would have called soul or heart”; a term that transcends brain-training for any given task.268 He adds:

At its core, a college should be a place where young people find help for navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood. It should provide guidance, but not coercion, for students trying to cross that treacherous terrain on their way toward self-knowledge. It should help them develop certain qualities of

268 Delbanco, College, 43.
mind and heart requisite for reflective citizenship.\textsuperscript{260} I think that his stance on what a college experience should aim at is a good place in which to situate a broader view of wisdom as a kind of “good” (both private and public) to be pursued through such experience.

While Delbanco offers us an intriguing critique of modern higher education, contextualizing his viewpoints on the elite (i.e., mostly Ivy League) American institutions, his view of what college is – or, conversely, his normative take on what it should be for – reminds us of a seemingly bygone aim of education that, in present days, tends to favor a market-driven demand for productivity and the “bottom line.” One might argue that in many ways modern institutions of higher education now resemble training grounds for business, for they operate increasingly in a business-like manner. In fact, it seems as though twenty-first century institutions of higher learning – with all the political, economic, and social pressures and demands upon its structures – are not shy about offering plenty of evidence and constant reminders to the public (some subtle, others quite unapologetic) that they have not only embraced, but to a great extent have in effect become contributors to the commodifying trends that presently permeate higher education in America.

In many ways, universities, as institutions, do not seem to bother any longer hiding from public sight some of the self-interests that seem to drive many of their initiatives. Consequently, one might be inclined to conclude that the relationship between the private and public good that should stem from the efforts of the academy has been

\footnote{\textsuperscript{260} Ibid., 3.}
somewhat redefined. In effect, it seems as though a higher education has become an aim in of itself; an increasingly private good, with an enticing promise for individuals. In the case of students and their families, a higher education is often sold as a “ticket for a better future,” even though we see evidence that a college degree can no longer guarantee a better “return for one’s investment” in light of forces (e.g., globalization, economics, politics) that are beyond the control of universities. Additionally, the pace of progress and ongoing technological advancements tend to call into question the prospect that one might be indeed prepared, as a result of one’s education, for the actual challenges of tomorrow, especially when one cannot easily forecast what these challenges might be. Therefore, ironically, we now observe that such promising future – once a motivator for the reason why one would choose to head to college – is also becoming increasingly elusive, particularly given how institutions and society (including families) have learned to value or valuate a college degree. These days each degree seems to have its own market value as students learn, in large part from universities themselves, to take an economic gamble on their future by the investment they make in the present in order to become more educated in preparation for an unknown tomorrow.

While I am sympathetic with Delbanco’s normative view that, in market terms, “our colleges have an obligation to coax and prod students toward [the fulfilled life]”\(^{270}\) (even as a democratic aim of higher education; a way in which all citizens would have access to higher learning and knowledge), I am obliged to only cautiously embrace the notion he articulates that education should aim in large part at one’s “enjoyment.” Much

\(^{270}\) Ibid., 32.
of the conversation about the aims of education in what pertains, specifically, to joy and happiness seems to offer a view of the world in which the individual increasingly occupies the center stage of the educational experience. I for one think that such outlook resembles a sort of post-modern way in which American higher education refers to its “student-centric” mission – in a way, a reading (i.e., one among many readings) of what counts as a “college educated person,” with the individual student (i.e., the “I”) at the center of the educational enterprise. In fact, it seems that institutions have widely embraced this mantra, which is emphasized from a perspective seemingly tied to the economic gains it can yield from “satisfied and loyal customers” (a questionable view of who students are and/or should be in the eyes of educators).

What we notice nowadays is that many educators still seem genuinely committed to the (private) gains of a college education that is supposed to be thoroughly “enjoyed” by students. In turn, students buy into an erroneous idea of joy in learning, claiming, for instance, that an education should always be “fun” – that is, it should fulfill one’s own desire for greater entertainment during the college years. Certainly this is not the notion put forth by Delbanco and others when referring to the enjoyment students should derive from a college experience. However, this is a notion that is often mischaracterized by many college students. In fact, some even claim to see the college years as their last chance to “have fun in life”, obligating institutions to go above and beyond to provide experiences and a whole set of stimulations that grips student-customers in hopes that they will persist through the college years.

Nell Noddings, for instance, provides some interesting insights about the
connection between happiness and education. In the opening pages of *Happiness and Education* the author makes quite clear how disappointed she is with her Christian upbringing. She confesses her distaste for how, in her view, Christian doctrine glorifies suffering, admonishes people to be good by way of fear, and encourages the habit of deferred happiness.\(^{271}\) She implies with a selective – and, vague – outlook on Christianity that religion thwarts the possibility of human happiness. Thus, she cannot escape a certain kind of post-modern reading of education that places one’s individuality at the center of the educational journey, indeed as an intentional educational strategy. While her goals in supporting happiness as a primary aim education are noteworthy – especially as she focuses on disrupting the accepted modern notion that education is merely a means to the economic ends that schooling seems to promote – Noddings cannot help but to elevate one’s private happiness above a more collective (i.e., public) reading of such virtue. Her resolve that schooling should center on education for “a full personal life”\(^ {272}\) seems to imply that private goods are above the public goods that, in my view, especially from a Christian perspective, are of greater importance for our shared lives as a humankind. Whereas she weaves the theme of democracy into her work as to shift the focus from individuals to society and shine some light on happiness as a possible public good, I remain largely dissuaded that her call for an arguably private version of happiness can amount to much more than just that.

Even though Noddings’ ideas and ideals are questionable (and being mindful that


\(^{272}\) Ibid., 204.
her work addressed in large part the education of children, not of college students), the implications of a normative view such as the one she articulates seems to have gotten some traction in the modern American academy. Yet one might argue that favoring happiness as a private good is not all bad news, especially when it serves as a springboard to a greater – i.e., public – good that results from it. An illustration might be helpful.

Take for example a college student who learns certain habits of mind that allows him to become more mindful of how he communicates with others. Say he has become, as a result of what he learns, increasingly aware of how his words affect others – a kind of self-awareness that causes him to consider how he talks to other people, especially those with whom he might be most prone to disagree with based on the particular worldview he holds. In the process, this student finds that he gains more friends as a result of the methods he employs as he interacts with other. We might say that these “gains” (both the virtues and these newly formed friendships) are his – i.e., his own private goods. However, it is not hard to imagine that as a result of the way in which he interacts with others (let us say, for the sake of the argument, more wisely), those around them also benefit from this student’s way of approaching others. We might even say that both the student and his new friends might become increasingly happy as human beings, for they appreciate the way in which this student treats them. At the same time, we are obliged to recognize the tenuous connection between the student’s own happiness (or well-being as learner) and his ability to make a wider public impact as a result of the enjoyment he derives from a “merely happy” educational journey – i.e., an education increasingly centered and measured by one’s own joy in the enterprise.
My concern here is not with the outcome of an educational experience that leads directly to a sense of happiness or enjoyment on the part of students. Rather, I contend that the focus on such individual (or private) outcome – if exacerbated only to the advantage of the individual student – can come at a price to the greater good that a higher education should also prioritize in the mind and journey of those who partake in it.

To be clear: I certainly have no intentions of articulating or supporting an arcane vision, for an alternative vision’s sake, of an education that should be painfully imparted on students. The love of learning should nourish one’s sense of joy in the college journey, and it should also enhance one’s desire and commitment to use what one learns to the benefit of others. One could even go as far as to argue that joy and happiness can indeed serve a motivating function as one navigates the challenging journey toward becoming an educated person. In fact, there is nothing wrong with an education that produces a sense of joy and happiness in students – indeed, it should. Moreover, students’ enjoyment of the educational journey seems to me, in strictly market terms, like “good business.” Yet, for my purposes and with the student population I have in mind (i.e., Christian students), I want to press these aims a bit further by pointing out how an education that is solely anchored on self-fulfillment – i.e., the kind that overemphasizes a private good that one might derive from education – is often at odds with a certain sense of Christian responsibility and ethics. As Schweiker reminds us, “truthfulness to self places no constraints on the self and the quest for power since the concept of authenticity introduces no new commitments of value beyond that of fulfillment.”

\[273\] Schweiker, Responsibility & Christian Ethics, 28.
Furthermore, it concerns me that American higher education finds itself enmeshed with a culture that affirms how deserving we, as a people, are of the goods we seek individually. In fact, we seem to live in a time when many educators have become convinced that students cannot fail; where even wisdom – often perceived as a commodified good – has become an inherent “student right,” not a privilege of those who seek it earnestly.\footnote{274}{Here we must tread carefully. On one hand, a statement such as “I [the student] have the right to learn” is a bold premise supported by the largely accepted definition of academic freedom in the American academy. Although I am drawing a sharp criticism of education, I am mindful that we should not be totally blind sighted by cynicism when such statement refers to the actual right of students to learn and grow as a result of their efforts in the academy. This is an argument I offered and supported earlier, in chapter 1. It would be counterproductive to start tinkering with or denying such right so deeply and properly embedded in the tradition of American universities. The problem I am addressing here is when students attempt to turn an academic right into an economic or consumer as they evoke their status as a customer in education. It is disconcerting to me to hear a student complement their assertion of “rights to an education” with “after all, I am paying for it.” Such stance reveals how deeply they have bought into the market-driven ideals of modern American higher education where we see evidence of how much the attainment of one’s private goods seems to supersede the public good that an education should aim at.} Indeed, it seems to me that students, as “consumers of education,” have in effect learned that they not only cannot but should not fail.\footnote{275}{This apprehension over what “failure” means is an idea that often puts education at odd terms with Christianity’s notion of our fallen nature (and the redemption offered by Christ, which believers embrace as a free gift from God). Christians accepts that we are indeed sinful, fallen creatures, and live in an imperfect world. Therefore, Christian students will have to be aware of the fine balance between their roles as students and as believers in the academy. While I do not advocate that students should give up on being assertive when their rights are infringed upon, I want them to be increasingly aware that the manner in which they seek justice – for oneself and for others – is intricately connected to the witness they give of a lively (or, conversely, a feeble) faith.} “Interestingly,” states Michele Welkener, “the word failure rarely appears in the higher education
literature, except when referring to student attrition [italics in the original].”  

Yet, if we allow students to remain safe from risk and the possibility of failure, we limit their possibilities for learning and development, especially since it is often through risk and failure that essential competencies are developed during the college years.

Additionally, what we also observe is that not only students have something to lose, but the very success of the contemporary university, as a vital economic and political institution within American society, seems so intricately tied to the success of students that they must succeed no matter the cost. In fact, we have made it the institution’s business to ensure student success. One must read this call with a degree of ambivalence, which should cause us to pause and consider the root of such declarations on the part of institutions. In of itself, ensuring the success of students is not a bad aim. To the contrary. We have reasons to tame our initial cynicism, for every educator should be invested in seeing to it that students would succeed in their academic endeavors. Naturally, however, much of their success hinges on students’ own level of motivation and effort to succeed.

What concerns me is when such drive toward student success is exacerbated to the advantage of the institution alone – i.e., when the institution decides to embrace all losses (that is, even the students’) as if they were solely their own. The rhetoric seems sincere: “students’ failures are our failures.” Yet we know that institutions, like students,

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277 Ibid.
can also be blind sighted by the benefits of private goods at the expense of public goods. Put simply, institutions of higher education have too much to lose nowadays. Many can no longer afford to see their students fail. Their operation depends, in more ways than we can deal with here, on student success. This perception has caused many to articulate questionable educational strategies under the premise of greater “student success.”

It is in that spirit that we see the success of many universities no longer measured by, for instance, the quality of the education they impart. Many of the assessment approaches employed in higher education center on student satisfaction, graduation forecasts, rates of employability post-graduation, etc. Furthermore, we want happy customers and happy graduates, for they are the ones most likely to keep universities’ doors open both during and after their college years. There is nothing inherently wrong with that idea. However, as Tracy Davis reminds us “higher education’s primary purpose is to produce learning, while industry is essentially called on to produce profit. Commercial and social objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but confusing the two can clearly damage the central focus of educational institutions – namely learning.”

In that vein, when the individual “customer” takes center stage in the educational enterprise and when institutions become more preoccupied, say, with the level of student satisfaction than with student learning, the speed by which it can deliver its “product” rather than on the methods that let students do the slow work of self-formation, the number of degrees it awards instead of the quality of the educational

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process, and so on, our rhetoric about the college experience as a time for exploration and formation of students – more in line with the aims of a liberal education – is bound to be met with a degree of skepticism. I imagine that those who support a vision for higher education that is more intricately tied to a public good beyond the profit an institution might be able to turn out for itself, would be the ones most prone to take issues with this view of students as customers.

Strategies centered on satisfaction, speed, and quantitative measures of student success, are worthy in themselves. Serious research and assessment that results in rich data for educators can be quite informative in understanding students’ needs that, in turn, may translate into student learning. Yet when we prioritize data that places a high value on students as customers, the tendency is to relegate to a lower status the public good that an education should aim at. What concerns me the most is that, for all the critiques we hear about such emphasis on “students as customers” we cannot help but notice that universities themselves have in effect taught the public how to think (as consumers) about the education it receives. We hear many bemoaning about how students are “so privileged” when all they seem to care about are themselves. Yet how often do we feed into such “privilege” by way of practices that affirm their sense of self at the expense of a shared experience that strengthens their sense of community? Moreover, how often are educational practices affirming of one’s right to flourish without fostering in students their ability to perceive that their flourishing is intricately tied to the flourishing of others?

Naturally, failure for failure’s sake is not the answer either. Student learning and
development is not something to be played with. However, when education centers solely on a kind of a pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding experience, the individual is discouraged, from an educational standpoint, from trying new things, from experimentation that inspires creativity, from exploration of possibilities. The fear of failure oftentimes prevents the mind from reaching for unique educational experiences. Additionally, as public accountability becomes an increasing preoccupation of the modern public university, there seems to be little room left for the subjective outcomes (that is, if the university even bothers to measure them) that a college experience should afford students.\textsuperscript{279} The priority seems to be on measuring and quantifying the objective, observable outcomes that can provide evidence of how “effective” institutions of higher learning are in creating productive citizens. “Job ready” seems to be a more tangible and enticing mantra.

A sense of learned entitlement has also convinced the public of the good it ought to reap from any (paid) educational endeavor. Without getting into the topic of whether higher education is a right or a privilege, which I not only cannot fully attend to but that it would also distract me from my main theses, what concerns me is that the church (or church members seeking a higher education) have also in many ways lost – or have been taught to disregard – a sense of mission or vocation as they journey through their college

\textsuperscript{279} Here I am thinking of things like the value of being part of community, of friendships that begin in the college years and that are treasured for a lifetime, of the outcomes of conversations with those different then oneself which tend to promote the kind of dissonance needed for student learning and maturation, etc. These are difficult outcomes to measure. Nevertheless, they would account for meaningful data that perhaps would help to support these more subjective outcomes that complement what the university tends to measure.
career. In fact, the admonition to “work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord”\textsuperscript{280} seems to lack the attractive appeal that the modern notion of doing everything that leads to personal satisfaction has; a message that the Christian student will have to contend with in the same academy that, for good or ill, “puts students first.”

This sense of entitlement has not only compromised, but in effect made it more difficult to distinguish the believer from the non-believer in the secular university. The very particularities of which many Christians attribute their sense of “being different” gets blurred with a sense of entitlement that hardly differentiates believers from strangers. It concerns me that many Christians have learned a sense of arrogance – or resistance – exemplified by many other students; the kind of which is both often dreaded and bemoaned by many educators. While some might dismiss my claim in favor of a more generous psychological or educational assessment of students, say, in line with what William Perry describes as “basic duality,”\textsuperscript{281} I argue that many believers knowingly or unknowingly neglect humility as a key virtue of those who call themselves disciples of Jesus, thus closing the doors for opportunities to learn and mature. If part of the “sanctification” of the believer is to learn to be more like Christ, the Christian student

\textsuperscript{280} Col. 3:23 (NLT).

\textsuperscript{281} William G. Perry, Jr. explains that students in this “Position 1” (which he terms “basic duality”) interpret pressures for change from the college community as anomalies of experience. These, in turn, must be violently repressed lest they are forced to assimilate to such undesirable experiences, thus causing these students to rethink many of the assumptions they hold so dearly to for one reason or another. \textit{Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme} (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 73.
will have to be mindful of how he receives from the academy and internalizes these contradicting messages about the “self” – that is, how he makes sense of the dialogical nature of his identity and character or, in essence, “who he is” in relation to God, to others, and also to the institution itself.

**Giving and Receiving Wisdom as a Mutually Transformative Practice**

If Christians are to be “salt and light”\(^{282}\) – a way of witnessing of an authentic faith in the post-secular academy – they will need to assess their convictions and commitments in light of what they mean for the work that they do as members of the contemporary university and a community within a culture that often stands at odds with the tenets of the Christian faith. It is important to remember, as Mark Schwen posits, that

> the research university is perhaps the most characteristic institution of modernity, and as such it both manifests and to some degree perpetuates the dilemmas that collectively define the moral predicament of our times. Thus, to address thoughtfully and critically the *ethos* of the academy is to address, in a focused way, the deepest difficulties within contemporary culture.\(^{283}\)

For the Christian, this cultural reality is exacerbated by the fact that even the church has often bought into the premise that formation often takes place not in recognition of a divine gift freely extended to the believer (e.g., that one is a good scholar by the grace of God who is the giver of our scholarly gifts), but as an exchange between agents (e.g., the student and the institution, the student and other scholars, etc.). The logic follows that “I” (the customer) enter into an agreement to receive from “you” (the

\(^{282}\) Matt. 5:13-16.

university) a “good” that can be transacted in clear and precise terms between us. Such agreement carries certain rights and responsibilities that each commit to abide by. Naturally, such agreements hardly tell the whole story that illustrates the aims and outcomes of a higher education.

In order to be transformed by the educational experience one receives in college, students must inevitably engage in dialogical relations with others (e.g., other students, faculty, student affairs educators, mentors, etc.). These encounters present opportunities for outcomes that are often beyond what any educator might be able to objectively predict in advance. At the same time, they add meaning to the college experience when students decide to partake in a journey that makes the college experience even more worthwhile when the sharing of experiences, perspectives, and worldviews, begin to permeate one’s thinking alongside what one learns as part of a more prescriptive curriculum.

From an educational and democratic standpoint, a meaningful and intentional engagement with others carries a great promise of deep transformation when people give of themselves generously for the flourishing of one another all the while remaining open to being taught by others. These encounters invite learners to see the world from a new vantage point – that is, as others see it – even though one is never obliged to adopt the other’s viewpoints. Mutual understanding, as an aim in of itself, is a good place from which to infer the value of dialogical relationships. These, in turn, contribute to a worthwhile college experience, particularly in the context of a public university where strangers must negotiate their differences all the while attempting to maintain a level of peace that would allow everyone to flourish as human beings. I submit that these
relations offer unique opportunities for Christian students to learn more about strangers and the world we, in many ways, share with them.

However, the Christian in particular should not stop at the threshold of “educational opportunities” for, in the most private of goods, these encounters, if not kept in check, can become simply opportunistic. Conversely, when exchanges with others are generous and dialogues with strangers are charitable, education can become mutually transformative, even among those who do not see life eye to eye. In turn, by listening for understanding of what animates others, each member contributes to the hope of promoting the kind of peace that, at its foundation, aims at the flourishing of all. What is important to note is that these mutual encounters are not necessarily aimed – at least not as a first order – at changing the other, but more fundamentally at challenging one another to embrace the opportunity of being transformed in relation to the “otherness” of the stranger, especially as each of them seek to affirm the integrity of the other.

As for the Christian student, I argue that she will be transformed in such way when she allows herself to cultivate certain Christian virtues that afford her the opportunity to see others as a neighbor, as a sister or a brother – in essence, as she seeks

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284 Robert J. Nash, DeMethra LaSha Bradley, and Arthur W. Chickering, explain that charity in the context of dialogues has to do, along with other qualities, with the display of generosity and affection toward others we converse with on campus. In this sense, they insist, we display our willingness to give and to take as we dialogue with others about ideas that are controversial. Listening respectfully to others – yet another component of charity in dialogues – especially those with whom our views might conflict, becomes and important component toward building open and safe spaces on campus where mutual perspectives might be shared and listened to. The goal is to afford opportunities for greater understanding among people. This way of interacting generously with others also allows individuals to communicate their honest interest for how others make meaning of the world. How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus: From Polarization to Moral Conversation (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 22.
to enhance the stranger’s integrity before God. These encounters allow the believer to better understand strangers even while it may not compel her to see life as they do. What is important to highlight here is that mutual transformation does not depend on mutual agreement. What I think is most important, particularly from a civic and educational standpoint, is that, as a result of students’ encounters with others (particularly these so called “strangers”) they might learn new habits of mind that lead to affirming not necessarily the other’s stance in life, but the other as a beautiful creation of God.

In order for the Christian student to mature in that direction, the believer will have to engage in intentional dialogues with others that would provide opportunities for self-reflection (and self-criticism286) to the point of deep understanding of who the Christian is in relation to (or, concomitantly, dialogically with) others and God – and vice versa. To that end, I think that this exercise in self-awareness could prove to be the evangelical Christian’s greatest challenge. Those believers who have learned to protect their religious convictions so zealously might have to relearn how to preserve their commitments without shutting down the means of communication with the very strangers they often want to “win over.” This process of self-evaluation cannot be understated.

Dealing with their own stubbornness might be the first step toward a better understanding of those around them. I surmise that many evangelical students come to college to merely study and try to understand what is “out there,” all the while keeping a


286 Marty reminds us that “self-criticism of a tradition is a key to the practice of hospitality. Housecleaning occurs before the guest is invited and arrives.” When Faiths Collide, 129.
safe distance from that which may shake the foundations of their religious convictions. Yet in the process many pass by the opportunity to “study” their fellow human beings – that is to know them better: what animates them, what concerns them, what constitutes the good life for them. Likewise, many believers will spend the college years without studying their own selves, thus leaving, after these short years, unchanged by what is supposed to be a transformative experience: if for nothing else, as a means of refinement of one’s own convictions and commitments. As Augustine puts it, “men go forth to marvel at the mountain heights, at huge waves in the see, at the broad expanse of flowing rivers, at the wide reaches of the ocean, and at the circuits of the stars; but themselves they pass by.”

I argue that, in light of an authentic faith that seeks not to malfunction in public (in line with Volf’s terms) it will not be enough for the Christian to go to class, or to engage in social and educational activities on campus, while neglecting the opportunity to reflect deeply on the implications of being the church among strangers. This is a practice that needs to be learned; a practice that evangelical students – like any other believer – will have to be habituated into. Yet I claim this is not a practice that, as a church, students will have to develop on their own, although they will need to learn to want to learn such practices to begin with. Moreover, it is through the counsel of and among other believers (i.e., the learned practice of discipleship) that they might learn about a practice that is not just their own, but a collective *modus operandi* of the church to which they belong.

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288 For further discussion of this notion of discipleship, see Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, chap. 5.
and whose value they affirm in the public space of the academy as an alternative voice in public dialogues.

As the believer gives and receives wisdom, he learns to become a true servant of Christ (and of humanity) by way of the vocation to which he was called, first and foremost, “honoring other people – even people whose beliefs and actions we dislike – in a manner that is gentle and reverent.” Furthermore, in learning such practices, he is able to recognize that “all men ask counsel about what they wish, but they do not all hear what they wish. [That the] best servant is he who looks not so much to hear from [God] what he wants to hear, but rather to want what he hears from [him].” Admittedly, this is a practice that one learns from and with other believers through discipleship. In fact, the practice of discipleship, where mature Christians mentor other believers into the practices of the church, affords a unique opportunity for self-reflection and self-criticism. Hauerwas explains:

Christian convictions constitute a narrative, a language, that requires a transformation of the self if we are to see, as well as be, truthful. The gospel commands us to submit to a vigorous and continuing discipleship if we are to recognize our status as subjects and properly understand the requirements for participation in the kingdom. Furthermore, to be a Christian is not principally to obey certain commandments or rules, but to learn to grow in the story of Jesus as the form of God’s kingdom. We express that by saying we must learn to be disciples; only as such can we understand why at the center of creation is a cross

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291 That is not to say that non-believers cannot be instrumental here. To the contrary. Many non-believers can also serve as a model of civility and respect, from whom believers can learn to be more charitable toward strangers.
and resurrection.\textsuperscript{292}

That said, exclusivist Christians must reorient themselves toward a critical priority: to be the church, a member of this community of worship; indeed “a community of the cross,”\textsuperscript{293} where we are enabled to do extraordinary acts not grounded on our own gifts or abilities but in the context of a community that nourishes within us the kind of virtues and practices that allows us to be better people\textsuperscript{294} to other people.

The challenge for evangelical Christians will thus be to not allow themselves to merely objectify the world and those around them\textsuperscript{295} in an attempt to “escape intact” from a college experience in the context of the secular academy. Worst yet, perhaps it is the case that even evangelicals have been habituated into thinking as “consumers,” thus thinking that the public university must learn to conform to their own demands. Both scenarios would thwart the purpose of a higher education that is shared and pluralistic – that is, that through such education students would be transformed in meaningful ways as a result of their college journey.


\textsuperscript{293} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 47.

\textsuperscript{294} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{295} Parker J. Palmer offers a critical assessment of our modern way of knowing through “theory.” He explains: “we regard what we know as ‘out there,’ on stage, and we relate to it from a distance. Our knowledge does not draw us into relationship with the known, into participation in the drama. Instead, it holds us at arm’s length as detached analysts, commentators, evaluators of each other and the world. Like theater-goers we are free to watch, applaud, hiss and boo, but we do not understand ourselves as an integral part of the action.” \textit{To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey} (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 23.
So, if the assessment of the Christian student put forward in this chapter is close at all to the reality we might find in public higher education these days, what is there for the believer to give and to take from such encounters with strangers in the academy? How might the Christian student become ever more mindful of the private and, most importantly, the public good that a higher education should aim at? Moreover what can Christians learn in the pluralistic environment of public higher education? Conversely, what can they teach others, without imposing on either the public university or strangers therein the values they hold so dearly to?

Wisdom as an Educational and Spiritual Practice

As I have already argued, the Christian witness is a way in which one can authentically express his religious commitments. Earlier we learned from Volf that to do otherwise would represent a malfunction of one’s faith.\(^{296}\) Evangelical students in particular take very seriously their commitment to living lives that exude the exclusive values of the Gospel, one of the reasons why they seem to problematize the workings of pluralism within the public academy. In light of that, I think it would be productive to press a bit further this idea that “for Christians, giving witness is a key way of sharing wisdom [italics in the original].”\(^{297}\) That said, Volf explains that this act of sharing implies certain limits that must be observed by believers. Firstly, gifts cannot be imposed by the giver, for they serve a God that is not self-imposing, but self-giving. Secondly, the gift of wisdom cannot be commodified into something that is sold and bought, for they


\(^{297}\) Ibid., 106.
serve a God that gives freely. Thirdly, Christians are witnesses, not merely teachers of something that they have externally learned; they are participants in a way of life that points others to God. Fourthly, as a witness, they are not mere midwives who attempt to instrumentalize the birth of wisdom contained within others; the wisdom to which they witness points others to a source other then themselves, namely, Christ, who is the source of all wisdom for the believer.\footnote{Ibid., 106-8.}

It is in these terms and under these specific conditions that Volf reminds us that the self is both a giver and a receiver of wisdom. That in giving wisdom the integrity of the receivers will be respected since there are generally limits to what the receiver might be willing to receive.\footnote{Ibid., 108-9.} Likewise, the self recognizes that those to whom wisdom is offered are also givers of wisdom, not only passive receivers.\footnote{Ibid., 110.} In that vein, “all light, wherever encountered, is the light of the Word and therefore Christ’s light; all wisdom, whoever speaks it, is Christ’s wisdom. It cannot be otherwise if all things come into being and exist through the Word who became incarnate in Christ.”\footnote{Ibid., 112.}

With that in mind, I think it would be a stimulating and a fitting exercise to extend Volf’s argument to the world of higher education where “wisdom,” as both an educational and, as I would argue, a spiritual practice, contributes to the flourishing of both givers and receivers. Through wisdom, believers might be able to discern what can
be learned from the encounters they have with strangers so that the common (or public) good, expressed in the Christian tradition in the comprehensive notion of shalom, can be sought after for the benefit of all people. In that respect, I contend that the Christian student will have to deliberately work toward developing the habits of mind (and of heart) toward others in the opportunities they might find to both give and receive wisdom. Undoubtedly, wisdom will also require the ability to sift through the menu of gifts available to oneself, for “not all things are profitable”\textsuperscript{302} for the believer. In other words, not all gifts are worth receiving if one’s intention is to preserve one’s integrity before God in light of one’s religious values.

I also maintain that it is wisdom itself – not fear, or resentment, or biases, which can inconspicuously and falsely pass as wisdom – that allows us to reflect ever so deeply about the convictions and commitments we hold as believers. It is this same wisdom that teaches us to hold on to what is true and to let go of what is not. Moreover, wisdom – particularly in the person of Jesus,\textsuperscript{303} to whom we commit our vocation as Christian students and scholars – allows us to approach others reverently and humbly, open to learning from them what might add to our own knowledge of the created world. As Mouw purports, “there are various kinds of ‘truths’ we can learn from people with whom

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{302} 1 Cor. 10:23 (NASB).
  \item \textsuperscript{303} While believers can share with others some confidence in our human potentials as people who are capable of learning and growth, Christians are also attuned to the fact that wisdom is personified, not merely a concept to be grasped. Believers orient themselves toward the person of Jesus, confident not on their own understanding but a view “to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Col. 2:2-3 (ESV).
\end{itemize}
we disagree on very basic matters. Sometimes we can learn important lessons simply by attending carefully to the stark contrast between our views and those of unbelievers.”

Oftentimes, the exclusivist believer’s hesitation in being open to receiving “all” gifts is precisely what prevents them from being transformed by what an education often claims to offer. Yet my contention has been that the particularities (or boundaries) of each religious tradition, while not leaving all student open to all sorts of “wisdom,” is precisely what makes the academy truly pluralistic. Such stance on the part of religious students is also what makes the educational process interesting and dynamic, particularly as each commit to sharing their views openly to the benefit of a pluralistic educational enterprise.

The terms in which I am calling the evangelical Christian to express his convictions – i.e., with civility, respect, and hospitality toward strangers – may contribute to the hope that others would also be free to explore wisdom in the wide array of options offered in the context of an educational system (i.e., a public higher education) that is open to being scrutinized by the wider public. For particularists, the wisdom they are offered by and in the secular academy will (and should) encompass a spiritual practice in order for them to recognize the actual “good gifts” they receive from the secular academy, which are always weighed in the light of God’s own good gifts toward them. In that vein, the gifts they receive as a result of a liberal education (e.g., the ability to think critically and autonomously about what they learn) may in effect press them toward a better and more robust articulation of their faith commitments, which may even require

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some adjustments along the way. This is the way in which evangelical Christians can be transformed both by God and by others in the secular academy into more generous givers and receivers of wisdom. Similarly, strangers could be transformed in like manner, by simply being challenged, as a result of the gifts they are willing to receive from believers, to at least pause and consider the essence of their convictions. Again, Volf, by way of a practical illustration, helps us to better understand how we can better give and receive wisdom. He notes an important feature of this exercise in sharing wisdom:

   it is more like playing a musical piece for a friend than treating her to a meal. When I serve a meal to a friend, what she eats I no longer have; in contrast, when I play music for her, she receives something that, in a sense, I continue to possess. When I share wisdom, I don’t part with what I give; to the contrary, I may come to possess it in a deeper way.  

   

This way of viewing and of sharing wisdom – as an educational and a spiritual exchange among strangers – may arguably complicate how the secular university views the very notion of wisdom. Even while the essence of such concept may differ between the church and the secular academy, educators and students are reminded once again that convictions matter, particularly when they are grounded on one’s religious commitments, even on democratic and educational terms. As has been contended earlier, self-transformation does not necessarily mean total replacement of commitments as a result of exchanges of wisdom along the college journey, even though that may be a risk that exclusive Christians will need to undertake on their way to becoming “an educated person.” Their engagement with new and supposedly strange ideas during their time in the academy should be welcomed as an opportunity to reexamine, refine, and hopefully

\[ ^{305} \text{Volf, } A \text{ Public Faith, } 105-6. \]
deepen the “right” commitments that, in these students’ view, allows them to live the life that they see fit within the context of a community that is committed to the workings of pluralism.\textsuperscript{306}

In that sense, transformation through an education that stems from new encounters and dialogical relations with others might mean, for particularists, the opportunity to better qualify and to more congruently articulate their beliefs so that others might come to better understand and thus be willing to pay greater attention to the diversity they add in the academy. By adding their “Christian voice” to pluralistic dialogues – i.e., a voice that is essential in democratic conversations – we foment not only one’s own flourishing, but most importantly the kind of mutual transformation that can lead to human flourishing. The intellectual exercise required by all cannot be understated. Yoder says it best: “New Testament moral thought begins by facing the fact that we live in a world that most of the time does not listen to all that Christians have to say and some of the time will listen to nothing. Recognition of this minority posture calls not for social cynicism or for withdrawal but for a profound intellectual reorientation.”\textsuperscript{307}

This idea of transformation through the sharing of wisdom, while taking into consideration what might be “added” to one’s formation, would account for what needs

\textsuperscript{306} It is important to emphasize that for the Christian “living the life that one sees fit” comes with the acknowledgement that one must also learn to see life through the eyes of God; that is, one must acquire a certain lens through which one is habituated into seeing the world Christianly. In that vein, once the believer is “conformed,” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer posits, to the likeness of Christ (see Bonhoeffer, \textit{Ethics}, 81-82), one cannot help to see fit to live a transformed life by which the “strange other” is seen as a neighbor, not as a threat. This is a stark contrast to a more secular ideal of living a life according to one’s own chosen standards apart from a transcendent moral source.

\textsuperscript{307} Yoder, “Let the Church Be the Church,” 176.
to be refined and deepened within students’ religious commitments. This, of course, is a
different sort of refinement than some in the secular academy might suggest or hope for.
Again, by such refinement I mean not a radical revising of self that many secular
educators take to be the main point of educational transformation. The kind of
transformation of which I would hope the Christian student would be inclined to orient
herself toward should allow her to become “more Christian,” not morphed into a new
“common identity” (if one even exists – or should exist – within a pluralistic academic
community). This is the hope in which Christianity might add to the kind of diversity that
pluralistic institutions should learn to also value. For what diversity would we have to
speak of if the educational aim of the public university was to transform all students into
a homogeneous version of what some deem to be “an educated college student”? What
should we say about a liberal education that is imparted in such terms?

At the same time, an attempt to operationalize such kind of education – i.e., a
more enlarged version of liberal education itself – will inevitably bring to light the
incommensurable differences between the goals of the church and some of the aims of
the secular academy. Arguably, while they need not be mutually exclusive in all fronts, in
matters of motives there will be differences that must be acknowledged by both camps;
differences that, as I would argue, should be fostered in support of a pluralistic
educational endeavor. With that, strangers (i.e., both Christians and non-Christians) can
still strengthen each one’s commitment to a public good inspired by their unique views of
“the good.” In other words, even while the outward workings of one’s identity might still
promote the kind of flourishing that enhances our lives in a prosperous community, these
are still often achieved through and for different motives that should not be extricated from a curriculum that seeks to sustain a democratic life among people of varying religious and ethical commitments.

Viewed in such a light, the church has many reasons to support some of the aims of pluralism in the academy. Pluralism in such terms supports the aims of a democratic society. And Christians have reasons to affirm this proposition. As Mouw suggests,

… our unique awareness of a plurality of alternatives is not a totally bad thing. We may not like the fact that everything seems to be up for grabs these days, but we certainly want to preserve our range of choices about what we most treasure. Whenever we Christians celebrate our freedom to worship God as we please and to live our lives in the light of our deepest convictions, we are actually rejoicing over our uniquely pluralistic consciousness.\(^308\)

For one, pluralism will not go away because we Christians say so. Moreover, what would our demand for anything other than pluralism do to the witness we claim in conjunction with the freedoms we enjoy – and want others to experience – in and through the person of Christ? Civility, respect, and hospitality, is a stance we take in a pluralistic community such as the public university *because* we as a community of faith understand that our views are one among many in shared, democratic spaces. While we do not accept them all, we must contend with the fact that they are not likely to go away any time soon in the American academy, particularly as it becomes increasingly post-secular (i.e., more accepting of the plurality of the various religious voices represented in the world).

We cannot expect – let alone demand and coerce others – to make the secular academy the place of our real citizenship as believers. The eschatological notion of shalom – that is, a comprehensive peace by way of the coming kingdom of heaven – is a

\(^{308}\) Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 84.
work of God himself. In this side of heaven the peace to which we orient ourselves as believers is one as co-workers with God as sowers, not enforcers, of the Word. And it is in such an invitational way that we ought to remain hopeful, not forceful, that the wisdom we share – that is, the person in whom all wisdom is contained, Jesus\textsuperscript{309} – would find fertile ground in the hearts of others.\textsuperscript{310} Such hope is the inescapably Christian way in which we participate and add meaning to the life we live together in a community of strangers that is the academy.

That said, Christians should not simply contemplate the concepts of civility, respect, and hospitality, but seek ways to live them out as they engage in “doing life together” alongside strangers in the secular university. Yet, as we participate in this diverse community, we would do well to contemplate, \textit{a priori}, as Marty suggests, whether as the church we simply make little raids in this public realm, or if there is a theology and a pattern of care\textsuperscript{311} for this community (or the public) in which we find ourselves often as strangers among strangers. This “theology and pattern of care,” of which Marty speaks, should help the exclusive Christian to assess his most basic commitments of faith to a world (and a secular campus) that is, as we believe, also under God’s jurisdiction.

Thus, the believer is left with at least two important choices, which are neither exclusionary nor represent a sharp dichotomy. We can chose to engage in merely

\textsuperscript{309} Col. 2:3.

\textsuperscript{310} Matt. 13:1-23.

\textsuperscript{311} Marty, forward to Palmer, \textit{The Company of Strangers}, 13.
legalistic terms with the world, claiming rights that are properly due to all citizens, believers or not, but that run the risk of making us appear belligerent to strangers. In that vein, my fear is that, clinging to our “rights” – as if that was the only way in which to engage those that disagree with us – our witness (i.e., our message and our method of sharing wisdom – in the person of Jesus – with a secular academy that does not know him beyond intellectual encounters) can be compromised.

In light of that, another possible alternative in which to engage in public life is by bringing our theological perspectives and practices as the church to a world that often does not think in such terms. Such stance would seek to offer, when we act civilly, respectfully, and hospitably toward others, a viable alternative in dialogues that aim at promoting the public good. Naturally, as I have been proposing, in view of our theological differences this way of engaging strangers cannot mean that Christians need to shed their convictions in order to enter public life and the conversations that animate our private conception of the “good.” In fact, if one of the goals of the university is to confer to all a peaceable learning environment where mutual formation and transformation may occur, the table around which ethical dialogues take place has to be large enough to accommodate competing notions of the good life in such a pluralistic community.

With that in mind, exclusive believers, because of their convictions and commitments to peace cannot be excused (or excuse themselves) from participating in these conversations that animate our public lives. They have a political and educational
role to play, which the university, as a microcosm of society, would do well to allow them to play. As Marty aptly states without minimizing the risks in these conversations:

If the hardliners will not come to the table of conversation, the slightly more moderate traditionalists may do so. In fact, interactions have often yielded most when they begin in least obviously promising settings. Those described as liberals, modernists, or people with a reputation for tolerance have their place at the table: without them there would never have been these efforts. But the more conservative representatives also introduce notes of realism with which the various parties have to reckon. And when such apparently intransigent sorts from both or all camps meet, they may make some contribution to an understanding out of which a safer and more peaceful world can emerge.312

This might be a good model for the ideas I have been advancing in this chapter, whereby all members of the academy, by their willingness to come together to this table where conversations among strangers are apt to happen, may become greater teachers and learners, givers and receivers of wisdom.

312 Ibid., 170.
CHAPTER VI
ON LEARNING TO LIVE PEACEFULLY AMONG STRANGERS

Given the incommensurability of the various worldviews represented in American public universities, some basic knowledge of the unique religious resources that members of the academy possess toward peacemaking can serve a critical function in mitigating tensions among strangers. Such exercise in understanding religious views can also serve to usher a basic sense of order and harmony, whereby, in an environment free of secular and/or religious coercion, lives may flourish as a result of a higher education.

Although apparently a basic – and some might say, superficial – aim, we cannot take for granted the importance of maintaining peace in the academy. For if dialogues among strangers are not premised by an ethic of peace, persons might go on quarreling with each other over their differences and worldviews and, consequently, miss the opportunity to learn more about what animates both oneself and the strange other. What peace as a civic and educational project can promote is the opportunity for encounters through which strangers become increasingly “less strange” to one another; as relations are formed through the practice of mutual understanding, strangers learn that they may approach each other without fear of being ridiculed for their stances and viewpoints in life. Indeed, “if estrangement is then to be overcome, an open one-on-one encounter must occur.”

A peaceful educational environment allows students to feel safe to articulate their unique perspectives in and while legitimately a part of the educational public. Yet such

sense of safety does not solely depend on the academy itself. It is a virtue that must be understood and articulated in the lives of individuals who are committed to welcoming one another into mutually edifying conversations with a view to forming relationships; individuals commit to the practice of hospitality as a means by which they can learn together. Certainly, the academy can play a part on teaching students how to communicate with one another with civility and respect – a good place whence relations might be formed. Yet, for all the learning that happens in the academy, the onus still falls on the individual student, for it is he or she who ultimately must choose to carry out these kinds of conversations. What a mutual commitment to peace allows for are conversations to flow and stories to be told whereby “the stranger becomes a person.” For the antonyms of peace (e.g., a state of insecurity, a sense of unhealthy vulnerability, etc.) tend to shut down conversations and, consequently, limit these encounters that have the potential to be truly transformative in the lives of students.

That said, conflict and chaos do not need to necessarily be seen in direct contrast to peace. Sometimes tensions are needed to bring about the realization that peaceful dialogues are needed and that through such practice one’s true self is placed in the open so that others can understand his or her points of view, as controversial as they may be. Opportunities to do the hard work of peace *communally*, especially amidst tensions among people of varying ethical commitments, can be more transformative than a peace that is enforced, thus not earned in the company of those with whom one converses and thus may disagree. To that end, Nash supports the notion that the only way one can claim

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314 Ibid.
to take values and religion seriously in the academy is by allowing for genuine encounters, which sometimes instead of preventing actually lead to conflict. Yet by taking such risk in presenting one’s narratives (religious or otherwise) most honestly, individuals find that conversations become increasingly complex, deep, and vibrant, with hopes that they would somehow change all of those who partake in such practice.  

There is no doubt that in the context of a post-secular academy individuals may oftentimes feel as thought they are under-resourced to bring peace about on their own. One does not know how to facilitate peace unless he or she is called to respond to what tends to compromise one’s own sense of peace and that of others. At the same time, conflict and chaos, when channeled toward a commitment to peacemaking, have a way (i.e., if persons are mindful of their edifying attributes in the life of communities) to expose not only other people’s shortcomings as they negotiate the terms of what they consider peace to be, but most importantly one’s own. “Often in such encounters one discovers not only resources among strangers but also overlooked resources in one’s own experience and that of one’s community.”  

Facilitating peace is not a task that can be avoided by individuals committed to a healthy educational public where religious strangers are bound to interact and often disagree with one another. Avoidance of the strange other is a strategy that only widens the gulf that separates individuals in the pluralistic academic community, particularly when they have not taken the time to familiarize themselves with the important

315 Nash, Religious Pluralism, 142.
316 Marty, When Faiths Collide, 146.
differences among various religions,\(^{317}\) which are often (yet do not need to be) the culprit of deep ethical disagreements and relational disengagements. As a result of one’s avoidance of the strange other, individuals reinforce their illiteracy on matters that matter to many people. One cannot learn without some engagement with the sources that inform their lived experiences. This cannot but be a failed civic and educational strategy, let alone a viable approach to legitimate the hard work of pluralism at the micro (e.g., the university level) or the macro (e.g., in society at large) sphere where private convictions meet the public yearnings for a democracy that claims to value differences. If, as Palmer reminds us, “at bottom, religion, like the public life, has to do with unity, with the overcoming of brokenness and fragmentation, with the reconciliation of that which has been estranged,”\(^{318}\) people of faith cannot “do life” – or “live Christianly” – in a community without some interest in renewing their awareness of and the commitment to acting on their theological convictions toward peacemaking.

If the ideal public life is supposed to teach citizens – and to inspire Christians – to orient their civic and theological efforts toward visions of unity, the intentional engagement with the strange other is not only unavoidable in public, but a desirable task for believers. As individuals become less self-centered – an important trait of those who claim to follow the example of Christ’s self-sacrificing love – they are reminded, as Palmer suggests, that by seeking the self directly, one withers, yet by losing it in service

\(^{317}\) Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges*, 229.

of others, the self flowers. Christians have a particular interest in such kind of service. Yet, in other for us, as the church, to realize this ideal of self-giving and self-sacrificing for the benefit of our neighbors, we must not only reconsider our disposition to participate in public life, but intentionally seek ways in which to do so in an invitational manner toward others.

To that end, believers in the post-secular academy ought to reassess what Marty, at a much larger scale, calls “the development of a ‘public theology’,” by which he means a certain way of putting one’s faith in action for the public good; a call for believers to reorient their efforts toward “caring for the public as public, for the people who belong to God’s creation and order whether they know the name of God or not, whether they are saved or not, whether they are likely prospects for saving or not [italics in the original].”

Such stance in the context of a pluralistic community such as the public university compels us to rethink the way in which diverse individuals are often simply called to a shallow commitment that requires nothing more of them than to learn (however they might do that) how to live peacefully together in spite or because of their differences. Marty goes a bit further. What he seems to have in mind is the need to reorient believers toward the practice of a “public theology” which requires them to reconsider the way in which they are called to share public spaces with strangers. His considerations are of a

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319 Ibid., 43.

320 Marty, forward to Palmer, The Company of Strangers, 14.

321 Ibid., 13.
tall order, especially since during times of tension within a pluralistic community
differences amongst people are exposed for good or ill.

As Christians we have reasons to believe that “deep down” humanity shares a
great deal of similarities. After all, we Christians content that every person is created in
God’s image. However, when exclusivist values are introduced to our public life, we
begin to realize how the nuances of our views inform and impact the ways in which we
interpret life and our own definition of what counts as “the good” both for ourselves (i.e.,
our private good) and for others (i.e., our definition of a public good). As these
differences become more prominent, we somehow convince ourselves that human beings
are more different than similar in what pertains to who they are.

Once aware of these differences, believers and non-believers tend to seek ways in
which to bring some stability to their shared lives. Hence, a great number of strategies are
used to maintain order and find some sense of personal and communal peace. Yet when
individuals undermine or minimize deep convictions that account for particularities from
which each one interprets life, a “can’t-we-just-all-get-along?” type of approach in their
encounters with strangers can only go so far in promoting a satisfying and pluralistic
public life. As Wuthnow tells us, this kind of approach is often a taxing exercise that asks
of citizens to engage in mental bargains – not the most productive way of “doing”
pluralism. Moreover, conversations that remain in this superficial realm seem to feed into
the reigning normative outlook that most Americans seem to subscribe to322; an outlook
that feeds an unchallenged and unquestionable understanding of the true consequences of

322 Wuthnow, America and the Challenges, 257.
ideas that in fact permeate American society (and that at one point or another are bound to collide, as Marty puts it, when faiths meet in public spaces\textsuperscript{323}).

That is why I have been insisting that an attitude of mere tolerance toward strangers, while often needed for the implementation of a basic level of peace among people of varying ethical and religious commitments, seems to leave much to be desired in the post-secular academy, especially in light of what students might gain as a result of a deeper, respectful engagement with others. Fear that things might get out of hand if students are allowed to express their deep convictions in conversations with others often lead educators to avoid creating spaces where these differences can be exposed and explored. Yet how can students be transformed by an education that prevents – under the guise of peacemaking – one from expressing and the other from contemplating what animates each one’s ideas and their actions as student-citizens? How can an education be deemed “transformative” if questions of meaning are often precluded – under a “secular” premise – from being explored from the standpoint (i.e., the sources and resources) of what one calls most meaningful about one’s identity, as many Christian students do?

A shallow reading of tolerance as a mechanism for a peaceful life among strangers tends to short-circuit some of the aims of a “public” higher education. While an important mediator of life among strangers in this educational public, tolerance (i.e., here interpreted as a mere willingness to “put up” with the strange other) seems too urgent of a concept and too quick of a social device that often prevents diverse individuals from seeking a more robust version of peace that, as I argue, can only be attained through

\textsuperscript{323} For further discussion of this problem, see Marty, \textit{When Faiths Collide}. 
greater understanding of those with whom one is most prone to disagree based on incommensurable worldviews. Moreover, mere tolerance seems to impede the development of a more vigorous respect (even in light of disagreements) in public spaces. For what is toleration without any knowledge of the strange other? From an educational standpoint, what can really be accomplished by asking the public for such blind respect? There is no need for belaboring this point on the greater value of respect over mere tolerance. This idea was already more thoroughly dealt with in chapter III.

Here it suffices to say that college students can do better than merely swallowing a thin concept of toleration. The stretching of one’s mind – a fitting aim of a public higher education – would require the reevaluation of the virtues that individual students claim to possess in light of the religious traditions to which they claim membership to. Thus, respect, as a virtue, seems more promising in the context of the post-secular academy. It accords greater value to who others are. Respect seeks to know, to understand, to recognize that there might be something worth learning from others; another appropriate aim of a higher education that encourages respectful encounters whereby all students might be transformed. If the educational value that stems from mutual respect can be conceived of by this educational public – a value through which students are enabled to live more peacefully in this community of strangers – it behoove us to ask: What can be done to promote meaningful encounters among these strangers with a view to contributing to each one’s unique (while not necessarily homogeneous) transformation as a result of such higher education? If Christian students in particular have, within their tradition, resources that inform their call to civility, respect, and
hospitality toward strangers, how can the post-secular academy channel them for the flourishing of all its members?

I am not persuaded that resisting religious justifications in public encounters (as it is the tendency of the contemporary American academy to do so) can lead to greater peace among strangers. To the contrary, my sense is that such suppression tends to breed the kind of resentment that ultimately compromises the work of peace in public institutions of teaching and learning. Conversely, when particularities are expressed and explored in the context of this educational public, they affirm American higher education’s commitment to cultivating the “whole” student. Moreover, they advance the aims of a democratic society where citizens are offered the chance to express their private convictions in the public sphere where alternatives can – and should – be contemplated, especially where they have the potential to advance certain views of the public good that stem from our collective (albeit particularist) efforts toward peacemaking.

**Shalom in the Academy**

In chapter III, it was asserted that hospitality flows necessarily from the sense of civility and respect individuals learn to uphold toward others. This is a notion that Christians in particular must be attuned to. At the same time, it is also applicable (albeit in different terms and for different reasons) the post-secular academy. The reason why I have reserved an entire chapter to discuss peace (or *shalom*) is because I think it is one of the foundational virtues that encompasses the other three (civility, respect, and hospitality), among others that complement, sustain, and give evidence of one’s Christian commitment to peacemaking. With that, our attention as believers, especially while
navigating the post-secular academy, should be increasingly attuned to our calling to promote the good of others. Such commitment falls in step with the Great Commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. In fact, one might observe a striking similarity between Jesus’ “love commandment” to his disciples and the notion of “public good” – i.e., if the latter concept was enlarged as to encompass a religiously informed notion of it. In other words, there is a way in which the church could think of the public good not in spite but because of its religious commitment to being and to doing the good of and for others. The church’s commitment to serving a public good goes hand in hand with one’s commitment to lovingly serve one’s neighbors, which ultimately brings about one’s own private good as well.

Since my project aims not at the reformulation of Christian commitments, but their strengthening in tandem with some of the goals of a post-secular academy that claims to value human intrinsic (and aspirational) differences, it becomes imperative to explore more in depth the meaning of peace conceived in the religious expression of “shalom” – that is, a comprehensive and deeply Christian virtue that complements in a unique way, yet not without limits, the pluralistic aims of public American higher education.

Exploring the deep theological roots and nuanced implications of shalom is not possible within the constraints and context of this project. However, it is still important to deal with this virtue, even if in a somewhat elementary manner, highlighting its applicability for this educational public that claims to be committed, beyond rhetoric, not

\[324\] Matt. 22:36-40.
only to a diverse but a pluralistically lively learning environment. Thus, in what pertains to this particular educational context, the kind of comprehensive peace toward which exclusivist Christians must orient themselves is not necessarily the eschatological view that believers of Old and New Testament long for – that is, the final coming of the kingdom of God that ought to reconcile creation with its Creator. While as a believer myself I cannot help but to affirm such longing, my purpose for exploring the virtue of *shalom* is much more contained, yet not outside of biblical teachings about how believers ought to view themselves as peacemakers in the world.

Both institutions that are committed to a civic version of peace and believers who, while committed to the same version are willing to embrace a larger (i.e., theological) version of peace (or *shalom*), should press toward finding answers to important questions: What are the possible religious resources, derived particularly from within the Christian tradition, that inform the church’s unique way of contributing to peacemaking within a pluralistic educational environment? A la Volf, we can also ask: In what ways can Christians give witness of a lively (not an idle) faith – their most “precious good [and their] most valuable personal and social resource”325 – that communicates their commitment to *shalom* in the academy? While peacemaking can be viewed as a civic mission of any university, it is imperative to deal particularly with what makes the work of peace so particularly characteristic of Christian believers who are members of these post-secular universities.

Firstly, from a civic standpoint, teaching students (and educators) to live

peacefully amongst themselves serves many important functions. Ensuring that the learning environment is safe for all to become givers and receivers of wisdom\textsuperscript{326} seems to be a priority if learning is to occur. When students feel unsafe, their tendency is to retreat to intimate spaces in which they can be comforted by a sense of belonging. When opposed, some retreat to the church, to their families, and to intimate friendship circles, where they can find a sense of affirmation of their religious values. However, these safe spaces, while important and understandably necessary for one’s sense of well being, may not adequately challenge students to take advantage of an educational process that holds a promise of deep transformation, by which I mean, a process of growth whereby one’s assumption is tested and pressed toward revisions or greater depth in one’s original thought process, cognitive abilities, and intellectual skills. In other words, students cannot grow when all they receive is support. Without a balancing degree of challenge during the college years, students are unlikely to learn and mature.\textsuperscript{327} Thus, to be sure, certain liberal values of American higher education, when expanded in order to capture a sense of curiosity toward what Christian students know religiously, can challenge them to raise the level of their particular justifications for what and how they learn. This, in turn, strengthens the value of public life, which should be lived civilly and respectfully among strangers.

This is a lofty goal, I admit. And yet, at the most basic level, the work of peace is needed and, as argued earlier, stem in large part from students’ learned desire and ability

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 105-113.

\textsuperscript{327} For further discussion of this notion of challenge and support toward college students, see Nevitt Sanford, \textit{The American College} (New York: Wiley, 1962).
to articulate most respectfully their ethical and religious views in public. That is a reason why the post-secular academy cannot afford a thin conception of peace if it is to be instrumental in teaching students of all religious inclinations how to navigate the great challenges of life in a democratic and pluralistic society.

Moreover, Christianity as a tradition, even in its more “conservative” version, can be an instrumental partner in helping to secure the kind of peaceful environment that allows the sustainability of the many of the aims of public higher education in America. Certainly, one would have to assume that the kind of Christians who are at the center of this project (namely, the evangelical, exclusivist Christian) would likewise be able and willing to accept a certain way of living their religious values most authentically in this educational public. In essence, a basic state of truce would be essential in order to jump-start this mutual and complementary civic work that Christians and non-Christians could undertake for the benefit of a public good. Yet, it cannot stop there if one of the main goals of an institution’s educational mission is to see to it that all students would be deeply transformed by an education attained as a result of an engagement with and among others, including the strange other.

Since this project does not wait for institutions to make room for the kind of believers I have in mind, Christians therefore should strive to model an invitational (i.e., civil, respectful, and hospitable) way of life that is consistent with Christian principles. When done in such manner, the academy might see these believers as viable co-workers of peace, even though such peace would be sought after with and through the resources of their particular faith. For how can the post-secular university ask otherwise without
compromising these students’ sense of integrity in light of the religious identity they
uphold?

Through their particularist religious resources, Christians draw their commitment
to peace and thus learn how they should promote shalom as members of the American
academy. What is more, if all members of the post-secular academy have the potential to
be teachers and learners, exclusivist believers should seek and be given the opportunity to
respectfully inform others as to what animates their view of peace for humankind.

However, believers must face the fact that by virtue of its nature and purposes the public
university does not necessarily aim at promoting the biblical notion of peace, especially
since, understandably anchored on democratic values, it cannot not side with one over
another religious view (or with a non-religious over a religious one). In fact, many defend
the notion that the best Constitutional version of a public university in this country is one
where “neutrality” toward religious views – as tenuous as this concept still is – informs
its secularity. Therefore, it is up to the church to demonstrate what peace in Christian
terms means for its members and for others. And that is precisely why this project
reminds readers that the university’s very commitment to pluralism should inspire the
recognition from within the institution that it needs diverse people as co-creators of
knowledge and co-workers of peaceful pluralism in order for the American academy to
be truly recognized as a post-secular, not a secularist, institution.

Qualifiers of Shalom

Considering a theological notion of peace (which, again, does not – and cannot –
leave out its civic implications), what makes shalom so central to Christianity as a
tradition? There are at least two possibilities or two central elements that inform the notion of shalom. A very short summary should suffice to illustrate the concept.

The first focuses on shalom as justice. Wolterstorff informs us that “an indispensable component in shalom is justice: the honoring of every person’s rights” in the context of an ethical community. The shalom community (the name believers might give to such ethical community) is not simply a just community, but one that promotes its members’ acute sense of harmony with God and nature while allowing them to delight in all their relationships, including with one’s fellows, their work, and with oneself. That, according to the Christian philosopher, is a prominent characteristic of shalom. At the same time, he warns us that “the modern Western liberal notion that a society is just when each person is free to exercise his or her own will, provided only that no one harms the will of another, is most emphatically not the biblical notion of justice.” Such view of a just society (which is arguably applicable to just communities as well) insists passionately on the entitlement of every member of this ethical community to a full and secure place within it; where those on the margins are no longer de facto marginal. 

The other way of viewing shalom is through the notion of human flourishing, which seems quite fitting in the context of an educational and civic project such as this. Although shalom as justice is vital for a full appreciation and understanding of peace, a better understanding of shalom as human flourishing is also of vital importance in

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329 Ibid., 143.
realizing the notion of post-secular pluralism in the American academy. While this notion has already been introduced earlier in this dissertation, the concept begs some additional clarifications.

Perhaps a good way to summarize its meaning within the Christian tradition is to deal with what human flourishing is not. Once again, Volf is helpful here. He reminds us that the prevalent contemporary Western understanding of this idea of *shalom* is connected to many that believe, based on a feeling, that to live an experientially satisfying human life is indeed the prime definition of a flourishing human life.\(^{330}\) Indeed, that seems to be what many people’s lives (particularly non-religious individuals) in the West is all about. Thus, without satisfaction, many claim that there can be no flourishing life. In that vein, some seek such personal satisfaction – i.e., not the cause but the fact of it – from a number of sources: from classic music to drugs; from good food to sex; from sports to religion. For them, feeling satisfied signifies flourishing.\(^{331}\) Volf recounts that the desire for such experience of satisfaction does not imply that individuals only seek pleasure on their own, i.e., apart from society, but that “[others] matter mainly in that they serve an individual’s experience of satisfaction.”\(^{332}\) What is noteworthy, however, is that religious people can also cling to such individual view of satisfaction by merely replacing human beings with God, yet retaining desire – what Volf calls “the outer shell of love” – rather than love, which inescapably turns human flourishing into yet another


\(^{331}\) Ibid., 57.

\(^{332}\) Ibid., 59.
form of experiential satisfaction.\textsuperscript{333} As a result of that “when the scope of love diminishes, love itself disappears; benevolence and beneficence mutate into the pursuit of self-interest. … when love shrinks to self-interest, and self-interest devolves into the experience of satisfaction, hope disappears as well.”\textsuperscript{334}

Here we see that while \textit{shalom} can be enacted in relation to others (people and God), the reason for involving others in the fulfillment of one’s life contributes to a certain definition of peace that favors the private good. In that vein, believers and non-believers simply use others to bring about one’s own fulfillment. Others become a mere instrument of self-satisfaction. Naturally, such version of “fulfillment” misses the mark of what \textit{shalom}, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, aims at – namely, a public good, whereby others, instead of being used as instruments of our own peace, become recipients of the peace we have, i.e., personified in the God of peace.

\textbf{Shalom as a Relational Process}

Whether by way of promoting justice or human flourishing, \textit{shalom} is also a relational process. It cannot be otherwise. Many human beings generally seek to live in peace because they also recognize the potential for disharmony as a result of personal and community interests that often pitch individual values against one another. Peace becomes of great importance when two or more individuals (or two or more communities of faith) are prone to disagreements that may preclude both justice and human flourishing from contributing to personal and interpersonal formation and transformation. In

\textsuperscript{333} Ibid., 59-60.

\textsuperscript{334} Ibid., 61.
particular, as students seek to be formed and transformed by the education they receive during their college years, peace becomes a virtue that cannot be underestimated. Relations with both believers and non-believers will – or at least should – facilitate one’s growth and maturation, as well as the awareness of the “other” as a possible contributor to one’s own education.

By now, it should be clear that this project has been supporting the dialogical nature of formation and transformation through a certain kind of public higher education. In fact, the reason why I am adamant about educators in the contemporary university making room for exclusivist Christian students is because I believe that they complement the workings of pluralism within the post-secular academy, which in turn helps to sustain a mutual commitment to peace in the larger context of public life in a democratic society. What is more, the American university is one of the public places where Christians have the opportunity, as citizens and members of this community of teaching and learning, to develop a disposition for becoming both givers and receivers of wisdom\(^\text{335}\) (this was already articulated in chapter V). Through their theological practices and presence in the academy, Christian students can contribute to human flourishing while adding a unique perspective that augments the liberal aims of American higher education.

Naturally, the student’s identity will also be shaped in political (i.e., relational) terms, for these are civically and educationally constructive terms from which the post-secular academy ought to operate. From the standpoint of contemporary politics, the evangelical Christian, as a peculiar kind of minority in the secular academy, can even be

\(^{335}\) Ibid., 105-13.
seen as part of the known politics of “multiculturalism,” whose theses, according to Charles Taylor, is that “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves [italics in the original].”³³⁶ And since for the contemporary American academy individual identity seems to matter a great deal, we cannot neglect to consider the possible tensions between a politics and a theology of “being the church,” which both educational institutions and believers therein are – or should be – interested in articulating on their own, distinctive terms. In fact, the idea of identity is important since it also matters to believers whose identity-conferring commitments is synonym with the very faith they live by.³³⁷

A politics of recognition speaks to certain civil rights that ought to be afforded by the university to all of its members. The principle of originality, ushered in by the late eighteenth century, articulated in part by John Stuart Mill in his On Liberty, has categorically posited that “each of our voices has something unique to say.”³³⁸ The public university owes to all students a space where viewpoints can be expressed without fear of reprimand. At the same time, in light of the kind of Christian living that this project orients believers toward, it is important to move this conversation on student formation


³³⁷ Schweiker, Responsibility & Christian Ethics, 35.

and transformation beyond the idea of individual rights, which, as Schweiker recounts, the democratic polity and liberal thought has helped, in modern days, to usher. In the process, he adds, it caused “a shift from the community as the center for moral attention to that of the individual. … This has meant that much modern ethics understood persons as bearing rights rather than being defined by social roles and relations.”

This is a crucial observation in the context of this overall project, which aims, as previously articulated, at contemplating a sort of “theological pedagogy” of living Christianly in the post-secular American academy. What this essentially implies is that Christian students will have to be reminded of their communal commitments and loosen up their grip on privileges they might enjoy by way of rights. For, again, they cannot afford to taint their witness as a sign of an authentic faith that seeks to be an alternative culture within a larger, often secular, academy culture. The beliefs of Christians are only asserted as part of a larger story that they do not get to make up on their own, but rather can only choose to be faithful to, as part of a church that seeks to be a community of worship and of peacemaking in all spheres of life, including in the academy.

Thus the importance of relationships, for we know that education is replete with examples of dialogical features: education happens by engagement with writers, instructors, mentors, peers, and even with one’s self.

That said, however obvious and important the dialogical nature of our identities in the academy may be, many of the psychological mechanisms that prompt individuals to

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340 For further discussion of this view of Christian ethics and Christianity as a tradition, see Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, chap. 4.
be hyper-sensitive to the evaluation of others – as a politics of multiculturalism seems to suggest – should not compromise the believer’s ability to be a true moral agent, responsive to and responsible for the religious convictions he or she holds. What that means in Christian terms is that moral agents “can and must constitute their identity and thus self-understanding through a set of commitments about how to respect and enhance the integrity of life,” including one’s own. My contention is that the dialogical nature of students’ identities (in formation) starts with their relationship with God, as when the Creator expresses, in the words we read in the Old Testament, that he knew us before we were even formed by him in our mother’s womb. Thus, a central aspect of Christian students’ identity formation should happen, first and foremost, through a dialogue with their Creator; a sense in which, like Augustine expressed, we turn upwards in order to turn inwards; to find in us – that is, God in us – the source of our fulfillment and purpose in life.

**Shalom as a Means of Formation and Transformation**

While formation from within in Augustinean terms (i.e., this very movement from upward-to-inward-to-outward) does not deny the Christian’s responsibility for a wounded world and therefore for the flourishing of all human beings (that is after all what shalom

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342 Jer. 1:5 (NLT).

343 See Augustine, *The Confessions*. 
is all about), it redefines the notion of Christian responsibility which starts with self. It challenges us to reassess the political notion of identity formation through a politics of recognition as articulated by Charles Taylor. Our Christian identity becomes less dependent on the assessment of others, but rather on how God views us. While the Christian student navigates the political environment of an institution that is also part of life in a democracy, as a “resident alien” he or she ought to be reminded of an allegiance that precedes, while not excusing, his or her allegiance to worldly institutions, such as the university. By sorting out one’s identity in light of God’s intents and purposes for one’s life, the Christian student is not “held hostage” of the evaluations of others in order for his or her identity to be established in public. I argue that the believer’s moral actions, which stem from his or her identity formation, are first and foremost a result of his or her dialogical relationship with God, who then calls the believer to interact with others by mirroring how God deals with us: with compassion, kindness, forgiveness, etc.

Therefore, Christian students must carefully consider how they conceive of their scholarly mission (or calling) in the context of the post-secular academy, so that they may approach their academic vocation as an opportunity by which they can also learn to be better Christians as they seek to learn alongside others. The believers’ awareness of God’s working (and the workings of others) in their lives can help them to practice a state of shalom that should contribute to the formation and transformation of those around them. Hauerwas emphasizes that

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344 For further discussion of the healing and flourishing functions of shalom, see Volf, A Public Faith, chap. 1.

345 Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, chap. 2.
as Christians, we must maintain day in and day out that peace is not something to be achieved by our power. Rather peace is a gift of God that comes only by our being a community formed around a crucified savior – a savior who teaches us how to be peaceful in a world in rebellion against its true Lord. God’s peaceful kingdom, we learn, comes not by positing a common human morality, but by our faithfulness as a peaceful community that fears not our differences [italics in the original].

Christians take courage that one of the reasons they participate in public life is so that they might be instrumental, through the unique source and religious resources they add to the communities they are part of, to the welfare (i.e., peace) of all. Philip Ryken reminds us that among the many reasons believers should seek peace is that God himself intends that the Christian would do everything in his power to advance the public good; by being a good neighbor the believer contributes to the shalom of all. Therefore, in light of a Christian worldview, we must ask: Why is formation and transformation so vital to believers in the academy? The short answer, I would argue, is because by seeking to being formed and transformed by God through the gifts that he bestows upon us we might be able to be better co-workers with him in facilitating shalom, or comprehensive peace, which, in turn, translates into “order, health, safety, harmony, well-being, happiness, wholeness, and completeness” wherever we, as the church, find ourselves. Ultimately, Christian students, by habituating themselves to practices that promote peace in the academy (e.g., civility, respect, hospitality, and, above all, love for one’s neighbor), they can corroborate to the idea of shalom in this shared educational space to which he is

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346 Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 12.


348 Ibid., 132.
This, I admit, is no small feat on the part of students. A life committed to instrumentalizing God’s *shalom* requires hard work, which, in turn, begs the question: Is this too lofty of a goal, particularly for young Christian college students? I would answer with a categorical “no,” especially considering that Christians are not called to dominate the educational public of which they are part of. Yet I am mindful that my “no” may trouble those that take a more development – thus incremental – approach to student development during the college year. Student affairs educators, in particular, are most prone to take such route to student formation. They may wonder about the timing of ethical engagements which, while they can be instrumental for the formation of students, if poorly or untimely facilitated may actually become counter-productive to sustained peace in a pluralistic learning environment. Some might prefer to scaffold such kind of learning, taking slower steps toward the ethical development of college students.

Naturally, educators should not take lightly conversations that have moral and ethical implications. Yet, as already articulated earlier, a paralyzing fear of engagement paired with a strategy of avoidance of conflicts within the university cannot help the cause of student formation and transformation toward becoming educated and civically minded persons. That said, those educators that might object to or hesitate to provide opportunities for encounters among strangers (religious and non-religious), under the guidance and arguably the excuse that student development theories provide, should consider Nash’s admonition: “educators need to be very cautious and selective when attempting to apply the insights of developmental theories to moral conversation about
religion on college campuses. Developmental theory is hardly the last word on which students may or may not be ready for moral conversation.”

Moreover, being the church on a public university campus defies any attempt to put boundaries around one’s Christian mission. In that sense, however big or small one’s engagement with the strange other might be, there lies a hope for shalom. In fact, one must be careful in presuming or defining on behalf of the evangelical student what the scope of his or her vocation before God might be. I argue that through one’s own responsibility for and commitment to self-formation as well as the dialogical relations one strengthens with God and establishes with others, a sense of Christian vocation in the academy may develop toward which one might be able, in his or her own way, to contribute to the shalom of all.

While the church may conceive of ways of being in the world – that is, the method through which Christians engage with their non-Christian neighbors – it cannot neglect the notion that it is not up to each believer to revise Jesus’ calling to spread the Gospel, which defines the practice of his followers in public. “Evangelism,” as Hunter explains, “is not only a means of saving souls but of transforming individuals and, in a roundabout way, the culture.” Yet knowing what to change in the world should precede our understanding of how we might go about changing it, for we cannot underestimate the need for us to understand the essential elements of the culture we wish

349 Nash, Religious Pluralism, 189.

350 Hunter, To Change the World, 9.
Moreover, through education (both in the church and in the academy) students may be able to better understand what needs to be changed in the world. This presumes a willingness to learn on the part of Christian students. In that vein, some of the concerns of educators in the contemporary academy, e.g., that evangelical students may not be transformed in intended ways during their college years given their inflexibility in how they view and interpret the world, may be valid.

As Christians we cannot deceive ourselves in assuming that problems only lie with others; that we ourselves are not contributors to the very cultural chaos we often try to fix. The church needs to be as quick to confess its faults, as it is often quick to rightly judge the world’s iniquities and indifferences. This is why I argue that from an educational (and consequently, formational) standpoint, shalom must start from within: from making peace with our Creator; from self-transformation in spite of what goes on around us in the “secular” spaces of which we are part. As Christians we need not wait for peace in order to seek our “inner” shalom.\(^{352}\)

The culture around us may or may not change as we (i.e., the church) may wish it would. Yet there is still a bigger story that provides hope for the faithful. This is why I am inclined to agree with Hunter that evangelicals may be somewhat naïve in their understanding that changed lives can, by instant default, change the world – that is, as the logic of evangelicals goes: “if people’s hearts and minds are converted, they will have the

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\(^{351}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{352}\) The quotation marks around “inner” should serve as a reminder that shalom that aims at justice and human flourishing, as explained earlier, does not ignore the emphasis on one’s “outer” works as believers in an attempt to bring about the public good.
right values, they will make the right choices, and the culture will change in turn.”353 As the author explains, the pull that culture exerts on individuals and groups is hard to contend with: cultures resist intentional change.354 Therefore, whether or not one’s stance on the Gospel of Christ (which can also be expressed through one’s academic vocation) may change the world, my contention is that a life well lived changes the direction of dialogues among strangers, for it changes the nature of the dialogical relationships we establish with others. This is a decisive and distinguishing feature of our Christian living as the church among strangers in the post-secular academy. A life of integrity before God and others invites strangers to respond to us as believers in ways that can enhance and honor their worth before our eyes. Consequently, in honoring others as divine creatures, we also enhance their own integrity before God. This is the practice of Christian responsibility of which Schweiker speaks.355

Shalom as a Rule of Engagement With Strangers in the Academy

Christians must first recognize that a vision of shalom is not simply tied to a literal and most popular translation of the term, that is, “peace” – although it certainly encompasses it to a great extent. Although the term is not particularly exact to begin with, Walter Brueggemann explains that the concept and controlling vision of shalom can be thought of as the amalgamation of several dimensions and nuances: “love, loyalty, truth,

353 Hunter, To Change the World, 9.

354 Ibid., 45.

355 For further discussion of this notion of Christian responsibility, see Schweiker, Responsibility & Christian Ethics, 33.
grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness.\textsuperscript{356} He adds that it only comes to the inclusive community that does not exclude anyone since the covenant of \textit{shalom}, through the will of the biblical God, binds people not only to God but also to one another “in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid.”\textsuperscript{357} What is noteworthy is that the idea of \textit{shalom} should serve as an invitation to others, particularly non-believers, in line with the evangelistic mission of believers, into a relationship with Christ. There can be no denial of what exclusive believers aspire (or should aspire) for their fellow human beings: that they, too, would come to the saving knowledge of Christ.

A biblical understanding of our purposes in life – as a response to what we believe God has done for us through the cross of Christ – calls the church to invite others into a relationship with the triune God. That should be a distinguishing particularity of us who count it a privilege to be called followers of Christ. As Christians we have a message to share. The Good News of the Gospel compels us to tell the story we believe in.

Admittedly, this is an exceptionally challenging feature of the Christian faith, which evangelicals in particular tend to emphasize (or over-emphasize) as an expression of belief. Naturally, given the incommensurability of their mission, it comes as no surprise the reason why public universities seem most reluctant to acknowledge or uncertain how to properly respond to these believers’ stance on this kind of invitational \textit{shalom}.

With that in mind, it becomes imperative for Christians to reflect on both “what” they believe and “how” they express and share their message with others. In other words,


\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 17.
they must understand both the content of their message and the methods by which they deliver it to others. While the biblical notion of shalom is always intricately connected to the peace that is only brought about by the biblical God, believers should still approach others with respect for their integrity. As Volf reminds us, “Christians should share wisdom in the way that the first letter of Peter instructs them to give an account of their hope – ‘with gentleness and reverence’ (1 Pet. 3:15-16).” Therefore, believers should carry their message in an invitational manner, not by imposition or coercion. As Yoder puts it, Christians ought to see themselves as heralds, not as Crusaders.

This is no simple feat on the part of believers. In fact, this is a very delicate and complicated stance given how laden with history (i.e., a history that has often compromised the credibility and authenticity of the truly invitational and hospitable message of Christ) the presence of Christians has been in public life not only in America but throughout the world. For a long period in the history of this country Christians were able to feel quite at home in the larger culture. That was equally the case in the academy. In fact, Christians were instrumental in founding the early colleges in America. For instance, in the case of Harvard, “the kind of learning [the founders] had in mind was, among others, theological [i.e., mostly Christian] learning.” Throughout the years, as society became increasingly secular, the church began to lose sight of the kind of biblical

358 Volf, A Public Faith, 109.


360 Delbanco, College, 39.
shalom that seeks the flourishing of all humankind; a shalom that, at its core, reflects – and that through our witness we are able to represent – the God who is himself the essence of love, through whom believers find ultimate peace.

To this point, some might protest that sometimes this love does not seem so loving, especially since many perceive that this “Christian love” has lead to a great deal of hurt, disharmony, and even a sense of exclusion, the kind of which cannot contribute to a shalom community. Some of the ways in which strangers have been treated “in the name of the biblical God” has had a lasting impact on many people’s perception of the nature of the God we, as the church, often (mis)represent in public. There is no doubt that an exclusivist belief system still has he potential to inevitably cause a great deal of resentment on the part of non-Christians. The very nature of a community of faith that is anchored on a single source of truth – i.e., Jesus – could cause many to feel excluded and judged. I must confess that I do not know how to properly address such sentiment without the resources of my own Christian faith. Moreover, as a believer myself, I find something wanting as I reflect on the historical, psychological, and anthropological explanations many have come up with to justify the need to keep religion at the margin of our civic lives in a democratic society.

Yet it also seems to me that the church’s own resources should help to shine some light on the pain that many feel when certain ways of expressing one’s religious convictions openly fall short of a full remedy to ease their discomfort with the message of the Gospel. It appears to me that such perceived pain is precisely what leads many liberal Christians (and non-Christians) to charge the kind of love offered or expressed by
exclusivist Christians as non-loving (to be sure, this is but one of the softest synonyms used in public debates to express one’s feelings toward certain believers; other synonyms are bound to be much more explosive).\textsuperscript{361} That said, misunderstandings are what often fuel resentment toward evangelical Christians in public spaces. Naturally, it is equally important to recognize that many believers’ own misunderstanding of the tenets of the Christian faith contributes to them being resented. That is one of the reasons why this project calls both Christians and others in the post-secular academy to lay some groundwork on this issue of mutual understanding. In the case of the academy, oftentimes the same spirit that informs its liberal inclinations to “live and let live as long as no harm to the other is done,” also informs its desire to tame (if not extricate) conservative Christian voices that attempt to participate in public discourse. Such stance strikes me as

\textsuperscript{361} Some, yet arguably not all, of the charges that non-believers mount against exclusive believers are plausibly understandable (i.e., when interpreted from their own viewpoint). In matters of meaning, which helps each human being to assess for themselves (albeit, admittedly, influenced to a great degree by societal and cultural forces) and formulate their own definition of the good and the good life, which, in turn, affects each person’s understanding of what constitutes the public good, one would have reasons to argue that a certain reading of “Christian love” should be left out of public spaces. Some argue that certain religious expressions tend to impinge upon – indeed thwart – the expansion of individual freedoms in a democratic society.

Again, Volf helps us understand this historical progression: “One way to view the three phases in the conception of human flourishing – love of God and neighbor, universal beneficence, experiential satisfaction – is to see them as a history of the diminution of the object of love: from the vast expanse of the infinite God, love first tapered to the boundaries of the universal human community, and then radically contracted to the narrowness of an single self – one’s own self.” \textit{A Public Faith}, 59-60.

Many are (often rightly) skeptical about our display of Christian love. In fact, our own witness – or lack there of – seems to justify the stranger’s skepticism toward the church. Oftentimes, the only evidence we display of the love we claim to value speaks to our own “anthropocentric shift,” that is, as Volf puts it, “[our] gradual redirection of interest from the transcendent God to human being and their mundane affairs” that often mirrors the Western interpretation of human flourishing that emerged around the eighteenth century.” \textit{A Public Faith}, 58-59.
quite illiberal. Moreover, it assumes that by shunning certain perspectives of “the good” one would finally be free to pursue one’s own good and achieve some sort of “higher” public good as a result of that. It is unlikely that such stance would indeed result in these voices, for the satisfaction of some, to be gone. Convictions of any kind tend to sit deep within one’s being. They do not disappear as a result of mandates. Legislating morality cannot guarantee the silencing of certain voices or ideas that seek to be heard in society by whatever means available. In addition to their freedom of expression, people are endowed with free will. Many prefer to deal with the consequences of having their ideas heard rather than being forced to retreat from public engagement.

That said, if my contention is right that there is a greater public good that would result from a student in effect becoming “an educated person,” people of the most varying ethical commitments must find ways, without divorcing themselves from their convictions, to live peacefully together and strive to understand where each of their neighbors come from as they engage in public discourse in the academy. And what a better place than the university, where individuals are encouraged to explore the world of ideas, to learn how to bring about the public good as they place “out in the open” their resources and traditions to which each of them espouse so that the flourish of humankind might be realized.

As I have mentioned before, seeking our rights to be heard, while a plausible avenue, seems to be only one way to get others to want to hear what we, as the church, have to say about the world in which we live. Without discrediting shalom that is instrumentalyzed through the means of justice, a focus on human flourishing, as both a
means toward and an end of *shalom* in itself, seems more basic and educationally viable in facilitating peace in the academy with a view to student formation and transformation. The connection between *shalom* and human flourishing seems refreshingly communal and particularly instructive to both Christians and non-Christians in the post-secular academy.

**Possibilities for the University as a Shalom Community**

It is important to underscore once again that the church cannot forget that while it must enact a political presence in the world, its overriding political task “is to be the community of the cross”\(^{362}\) whose “determination [is] to worship Christ in all things.”\(^{363}\) This is the first priority of a community that seeks to engage with the larger culture as an alternative to it. As we also learn from Hunter, its way of being faithfully present in the world should be enacted through a theology that, while in the opposite direction of social theory, cannot merely disregard its insights. At the same time, the church cannot lose sight of its vocation, that is, “to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the coming kingdom of God.”\(^{364}\) That is the only way, says Hunter, that the church can be a genuine alternative culture, regardless of what its larger influence may translate into.\(^{365}\) He explains: “A Theology of faithful presence is a theology of engagement in and with the world around us. It is a theology of commitment, a theology of promise. It is disarmingly

\(^{362}\) Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 47.

\(^{363}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{364}\) Hunter, *To Change the World*, 95.

\(^{365}\) Ibid., 95-96.
simple in concept yet in its implications it provides a challenge, at points, to all of the dominant paradigms of cultural engagement in the church.”366

In light of that, I think it is important to ask: What should “shalom” translate into for Christians, their non-Christian neighbors, believers of other faiths, and the academic culture of the post-secular American academy in general?

In reality, it is hard to predict what a commitment to shalom will accomplish for the “strange other” or the academic culture at large, especially when enacted from the standpoint of Christianity. A biblical vision of shalom is bound to be met with profound difficulties in an academy that is supposed to be pluralistic and inclusive in nature. Again, as Christians we can hope and work toward, but we still cannot impose an outcome on those strangers to the faith in light of the invitational nature of the Gospel we profess. As a church, we can only hope to be an attractive and trustworthy alternative to a culture in which our very presence can serve as a living critique of certain systems that we wish, yet often find ourselves powerless on our own human terms, to change. In fact, as believers we should not expect that our invitational stance, even when practiced with the utmost respect and civility toward non-believers would be freely received by others, especially given how laden with history the Christian “witness” has been. Therefore, once again, the greatest onus falls back on the Christian church. And so, when the question is addressed to believers, it is undeniable that peace with God changes (or should change) one’s values and, consequently, one’s actions.

Yet, if we were to press this assumption further, would we find that such

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366 Ibid., 243.
transformed life would have the means by which to actually change and/or influence others and the culture around us? To change, I would say, “maybe.” But to influence, my response would be with a categorical “yes.” That said, when the need for certain changes become pressing in the life of pluralistic communities, persuasion, not coercion, should be the method of choice for Christians.  

In the case of the church, what does persuasion look like if we, as a community of worship, were to buy into Hunter’s arguments that cultures are tough to change? I think that our witness as believers in Jesus is often much more persuasive by way of who we are (and thus by what we do) than merely by way of what we say. My contention is that the church has lost some social credibility as an alternative culture because it has often refused or neglected to align its message with a way of being in the world that testifies to

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367 Some might be suspicious of my use of the term “persuasion” in contrast with “coercion.” Liberal education’s commitment to free inquiry and autonomy (among other important attributes) might lead some to argue that my use of “persuasion” is merely a camouflage for what I might really have in mind as a conservative Christian, namely “proselytism.” While a full treatment of some important distinctions and similarities between the concepts of persuasion and proselytizing cannot be provided here as it pertains to coercion, to defend my point I can only briefly say that I concur with Christian philosopher Elmer John Thiessen in that “persuasion can become manipulative and coercive.” In such instances, it should be condemned as immoral. However, I also appreciate his assessment that “persuasion is not in of itself a bad thing. Indeed, persuasion is an expression of our social nature. We depend on persuasion to gain knowledge.” However, as the author affirms as a counterpoint to such form of immoral persuasion, “a better approach is to interpret [persuasion] as an expression of care and respect for the other person. It is indifference that violates the dignity of the other person. If I attempt to persuade you, I show that I care about you. Healthy persuasion in fact contributes to a climate that fosters human dignity,” he adds. “The Problems and Possibilities of Defining Precise Criteria to Distinguish Between Ethical and Unethical Proselytizing/Evangelism,” Cultic Studies Review 5, no. 3 (2006): 383. It is this notion of persuasion that I have in mind, which best describes and introduces the possibility of the kind of dialogue that is vital to a “public” higher education; a notion that does not push back against arguments and justifications grounded on religious convictions.
the integrity of its faith claims. More often than one would care to admit, the substance of the lives of many believers as members of the church serves as evidence that supports the charges often made against the church by the culture at large. Conversely, when we as Christians commit to living lives with integrity before God and others in the places in which we have some influence, strangers might be more prone to pause and give us the opportunity to at least state our views more openly. While others may remain unmoved by our stances, the hope is that conversations might begin to flow in both directions with hopes of better mutual understanding, particularly of our incommensurable differences.

To that end, and with the particular aims that are fitting in the context of this civic and educational project, I submit that persuasion should be a preferred method for all people of faith (non-religious persons included) in the context of conversations within colleges and universities that affirm a certain level of “faith” in the liberal aims of the American academy. Furthermore, my contention is that if we are shaped, as Charles Taylor suggests, by dialogical relations, others are obliged (or can choose) to respond to what we as the church bring to any dialogue within the post-secular academy: our message and, most importantly, our method of delivery. If the moral meaning of the Christian faith dictates an imperative of responsibility that “in all our actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God,” then what

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369 Schweiker, Responsibility & Christian Ethics, 33.
follows is that whether or not others are changed by who we are, by living responsibly before God (i.e., living the Christian life with utmost integrity) others are obliged to respond to the kind of person we become as a result of the convictions we place in the Christ we serve. Granted that a life of integrity may not change others, we can still remain confident that such Christian living inevitably changes the tone of our dialogues with others in the shared spaces among people of varying ethical/moral commitments. Herein lies the hope in which we might be able to live more peacefully in the context of a pluralistic community such as the public, post-secular university where strangers converge to learn together.

Moreover, this sense of integrity to which Christians in the academy should orient themselves toward and indeed habituate themselves into – whereby their values and actions are most aligned – is, in my view the church’s greatest asset (and greatest potential of being an alternative culture in the university). With that, the church contributes to not only the pluralistic nature of public higher education in America, but to a respectful, civil, and captivatingly diverse educational space where the particularity of religious voices matter, whether we agree with them or not. When agreement is no longer the ruling norm but gives way to dialogue, not the argument, but the individual becomes the priority in our relations with others. In this way, we begin to communicate with our mouth and our ears that the very integrity of our neighbors – be they Christians or not; whether they accept our message or not – is what matters the most. In that sense, on the one hand, the more the post-secular academy can inspire the exclusive Christian student

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{370}} \text{It is important to keep in mind that a changed disposition toward accepting God’s truth must be willed freely by individuals.} \]
to be “more Christian” (not more secular), the greater the hope it might find the church as a partnering agent through which other people’s flourishing might be promoted. On the other hand, the more the Christian student can find ways in which to enhance his or her own integrity before God, the more the student will learn to value others, and consequently to see others, as God Himself sees him or her.

**Hindrances to the Peaceable Post-Secular University Community**

The current discussion reminds us of a possible hindrance to peaceable relations between Christians and non-Christians in the public (i.e., still secular in many respects) space of American higher education. One could argue that it is often a fear of the stranger that gets in the way of building a peaceable community, especially in a space where ideas and competing views of “the good” and “the good life” collide. Having dealt with some of the apprehensions of the secular academy in chapter IV, I still think it is important to contend with some of the fears that many evangelical Christians may have while encountering the strange other in the public university. I posit that many Christians take great care to emphasize a doctrinal stance of “being in the world” without being “of the world,”⁷⁷ which, in practical terms, loses its original meaning in favor of a misplaced

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⁷⁷ Here I am extrapolating the idea found in John 15:18-19 (NIV), where Jesus states to his disciples: “if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” The apostle Paul also adds this thought in Rom. 12:2 (NIV): “do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” At the same time, we are reminded of Hauerwas and Willimon’s assertion that “the church is not out of the world. There is no other place for the church to be than here. … The church’s only concern is how to be in the world, in what form, for what purpose [italics in the original]” *Resident Aliens*, 43.
fear of being “corrupted by the world” – granted that this is a legitimate apprehension, on theological grounds, for the believer that intends to maintain a healthy respect and proper understanding of our propensities as human, sinful beings. However, such fear, when exacerbated, seems to require distance from the unknown or the “strange other.” Yet, paradoxically, Christians are taught quite prominently by the church, which often evokes the well known parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), that the stranger is also our neighbor, thus worthy of respect, dignity, compassion, and our loving service; the Christian narrative is clear that all of God’s creation participates in his plan and corroborates with his redemptive aims for humanity.

Hence, the fear of the other should not – although, admittedly, it often does – get in the way of Christians contributing to a mutually flourishing life in a community shared with the stranger, or, in effect, a multicultural community. Through a genuine pursuit of shalom, Christians can serve not only a mediating function (although others can as well) to keep life among people of varying commitments afloat, but be actively instrumental in offering a vision of the world that seeks the peace and prosperity of all – as it cannot be otherwise when Christian convictions function as a resource, indeed, as Wolterstorff posits, our control beliefs, which inclines us “like everyone else … to seek consistency, wholeness, and integrity in the body of [our] beliefs and commitments.”372 Hence, at the center of our actions ought to be the cross of Christ: the model that compels us to give of ourselves to others, including the strange other.

In my view, peace does not simply aim – at least not as first priority – at avoiding

conflict, which can be too thin of a proposition. In fact, avoiding conflict at all costs may not even be desirable (or humanly possible) in the context of healthy communities that care deeply for others as neighbors. However, this understanding should not necessarily dissuade us from earnestly seeking to live in harmony with others, even though we may not always agree with them or them with us. In fact, the Apostle Paul emphasizes this notion of harmony: “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

His admonition clearly urges believers to consider “everyone” in their pursuit of peace, not just the peace of their fellow Christians. In fact, the virtues of respect and hospitality would help believers to be instrumental in offering such a vision of *shalom*, particularly, as it was the tradition of the church, toward “strangers.”

Again, what is important to emphasize is the invitational nature of Christianity – as modeled by Christ himself – particularly as the church strives to relate to strangers in the context of the larger academic culture. The Christian vision toward comprehensive peace is certainly not without challenges in view of the aims of American public universities, especially since the church’s invitation to others toward *shalom* is given on religious grounds. That said, I am not persuaded that the particularities of such invitation should serve as a basis for rejecting it altogether, particularly when there is no coercion on the part of the church. Moreover, I am doubtful that the grounds from which such

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373 Rom. 12:18 (NIV).

374 Pohl explains that “for most of the history of the church, hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also a recognition of their worth and common humanity.” *Making Room*, 6.
invitation springs can harm others (or threaten the liberal aims of public higher education) or deny non-believers their right to actually reject the invitation altogether. In fact, invitations to “believe” in something are issued everyday on university campuses. All are welcome to accept or reject any given claim, whether religious or secular. In fact, this is the very freedom from which genuine Christian belief should operate. Any other approach would frustrate the love freely given by Christ and freely willed on the part of those who accept his message. Moreover, where there is no freedom, there is hardly any academic freedom.

Gladly, in the context of a democratic society Christians do enjoy the same right to participate on supposedly equal grounds in the various shared spaces where life is lived in communities among strangers. Their religious justifications, even while not appreciated by all, have a standing in a liberal democracy. However, my contention is that, as “resident aliens,” Christians, in order to earn their space in public dialogues, have to be more aware of the “otherness” of strangers. After all, as Volf affirms, it is the

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375 In discussing his consocial position, Wolterstorff affirms that such position “agrees with the liberal position and opposes the competition-of-interests position concerning the goal of political discussions, decisions, and actions: the goal is political justice. But it departs from the liberal position on two defining issues. First, it repudiates the quest for an independent source and imposes no moral restraint on the use of religious reasons. And second, it interprets the neutrality requirement, that the state be neutral with respect to the religious and other comprehensive perspectives present in society, as requiring impartiality rather than separation. What unites these two themes is that, at both points, the person embracing the consocial position wishes to grant citizens, no matter what their religion or irreligion, as much liberty as possible to live out their lives as they see fit.” Audi and Wolterstorff, Religion in the Public Square, 114-15.

376 For further discussion of the status of Christians, see Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens.
Christian who is arguably the “alien” in a given culture; a status that Christianity cannot complain too much about, for “at the very core of Christian identity,” he adds, “lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures.”

For its part, the contemporary university is often concerned with, while arguably not solely focused on, several “gods” that the Christian, who has “departed” such culture, is instructed not to pursue: pride, privilege, self-importance, self-recognition, and so on, lest they “lose [their] saltiness … and [become] no longer good for anything.” The Christian ought to be different and be an alternative culture within the culture. That is the church’s political task enacted through its presence and theological practices. And this is a stance that should not compromise, but in fact complement the liberal aims of the post-secular academy. When ethical values collide, it becomes important for Christians to “[cultivate] the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to it,” a challenge, but also a needed exercise so that the integrity of their witness, the genuineness of their convictions, and the uniqueness of their contributions to this educational public, may not be compromised before God and others.

A vision of shalom inspired in such fine balance between distance and belonging, when effectuated in a non-coercive (i.e., invitational) manner has the potential to add not

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378 Ibid., 40.

379 Matt. 5:13 (NIV).

only a diverse “flair” to the pluralistic space of public universities in America, but a meaningful public good that aims at the human flourishing of all. The very witness often feared by some liberal educators in the academy in light of the Christian’s “otherness” can be the greatest asset of believers when put into practice in respect for the divine worth of others.

That said, Christians have a great deal of work to do in order to best represent not only their religious convictions but their Christ in the academy. The Christian’s contribution toward the shalom of others should remind them that “those who seek to overcome evil must fight it first of all in their own selves. Distance created by the Spirit opens the eyes to self-deception, injustice, and the destructiveness of self.”

Any initiative toward public good in the form of shalom requires the intentional fine-tuning of one’s own Christian commitments, pressing the need for self-formation and transformation. It is naïve to think that Christians come to campus with such heightened awareness of their own shortcomings, let alone of others’. As argued earlier, the church seems deficient in preparing young people to live “in the world.” Hence, I would surmise that this would prove to be a most challenging task for believers (particularly, exclusive believers) in public academia, for many of them are prone to uncritically consider the possible harms they are capable of inflicting on others through their own (often selfish) interests that pitch their conquering desires against the freedom of the Gospel.

While I cannot presume that my arguments will effectively convince non-Christians to trust in such believers – even if we were to imagine their willing desire and

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381 Ibid., 52.
efforts toward redefining their presence and theological practices in the public university – as the church we ought to be reminded of our own religious commitment to “[trying] to bring God’s standards to bear on public life.” Yet, such disposition must come with at least one caveat. In the words of Mouw: “no more would-be messiahs need apply. Our calling is not to bring the kingdom of God in its fullness; it is to witness to the power and presence of that kingdom in ways that are made available to us.” Therefore, what a commitment to shalom with this impetus entails is not a vision of peace that compels the church to establish God’s kingdom in its fullness, here and now – that is, an eschatological view of the kingdom to come. While such vision must be kept in sight by believers (for that is part of the hope they have), my concern is with attuning the church to a sense of kingdom that is present (and thus in line with Christ’s teachings): a kingdom that is within us, that is indeed around us, because that is where Christ “resides.” Hence, this is a reality that believers experience in the present while they await the future kingdom – a shalom in its fullness that can only be brought about by Christ himself in his second coming.

This brings us back to an important question: Is it too lofty of a goal or an undue burden to put particularly on young Christians the responsibility of being agents of peace – or agents of Christ’s kingdom, as the church should be – in the post-secular academy during these critical years of their own formation? The short answer to this question, in my view, would again be a categorical “no.” However, in the context from which my

382 Mouw, Uncommon Decency, 34.

383 Ibid., 38.
project is enacted, we must not pause there, but press further: How, then, can Christian students conceive of themselves as peacemakers among strangers in this particular context (i.e., the post-secular academy) in which they exercise their vocation to become educated persons? This question will be addressed in the next chapter where suggestions will be offered for possible ways in which the church may operationalize its presence and theological practices. These suggestions should underscore how some of the aims of Christian students are tied to the civic and educational aims of the post-secular American academy itself.
CHAPTER VII

“I’M NOT A THREAT!”: TOWARD THE INCLUSION OF THE EXCLUSIVIST BELIEVER IN THE POST-SECULAR UNIVERSITY

Thus far, my stance on the American academy – with all the possibilities and apprehensions in regards to the role of religion and, in particular, exclusivist believers in public universities – has been that while its rhetoric seems to indicate a strong commitment to diversity of all kinds, efforts toward the integration of religious perspectives into the college experience still seem rather timid. Even though the contemporary university seems to understand, albeit often hesitantly, that religion constitutes an important facet of human existence, its ambivalence in addressing questions of meaning that are often informed by religious ideas and convictions tends to slow down the workings of pluralism and downplay differences that are often claimed to be so critical to students’ comprehension of the world in which they currently live. Such hesitation on the part of public academia leads to a counter-intuitive educational and democratic stance toward the propagation of the value of human diversity. The public university’s vigorous affirmation of the value of diversity does not often match its practices. A strategy of avoidance of religious ideas that seem, on the surface, incommensurable with the aims of public higher education (and of a liberal democracy) does little in helping students to understand both themselves as diverse beings as well as the religious revival presently in motion both in the United States and around the globe.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁴ Feinberg, For Goodness Sake, xxiii.
My contention has also been that, by skirting around religious views and sheltering its arguments under the constitutional premise that educators and administrators in public universities should not promote the values of one religion over another, these institutions weaken their claims to the liberal values that they so zealously seek to promote. In turn, they not only compromise their stance on academic freedom, but the larger freedoms that go hand in hand with the liberal values of American society which, as many claim, affords (or should afford) the freedom for people to live lives as they see fit. Volf has a good point, questioning: “how can [religious people] be free to live the way they see fit when they aren’t allowed to bring religious reasons into public debates and decisions? For these people, liberalism conceived in this way is illiberal. It hinders them from living out their lives as the faith they embrace urges them to.” And if, in a sense, public universities serve, as they should, as a microcosm of the pluralistic and democratic values found in the context of American society, I ask: How can they optimally operationalize in both educational and civic terms the liberal commitments they promote so that religious students might not only be present in, but become in effect full-fledged members of such educational public? Possible answers to this question are not without challenges. Yet an attempt must be made if those involved in the education of young people are to hold in tension – in a state of educational, civic, and even religious peace – the incomensurabilities and possibilities of the relationship between pluralism and particularism in the twenty-first century American academy.

The contemporary university is de facto post-secular to the extent that it

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385 Volf, A Public Faith, 124.
proactively attracts and seeks to retain all of its students, including religious ones. As argued earlier, these students’ success is more than ever intricately connected to the success of public institutions themselves. In fact, I maintain that the participation of religious students in these public universities contributes to the growth of all students as they inform others of values that can no longer be ignored in the context of any democratic state. Religious students, not unlike any other student, help to advance in one way or another many of the aims of public higher education in America and, in turn, the democratic values of this country. Yet their physical presence on a university campus is just a first step in articulating a college experience that seeks to prepare students to contribute to a healthy and peaceful society. Thus the claim of post-secularity can only be a legitimate one once public universities commit to going beyond the physical integration of diverse students and move toward the integration of the meaning they make of their experiences in light of their worldviews, religious or otherwise.

Undoubtedly, the different values that play out in the context of a public university are often politically profitable for Christians. As Mouw aptly notes, “if diverse viewpoints have a right to be expressed, then [the Christian’s viewpoint] has a right to be expressed. It is to our advantage, then, to promote a political system that encourages religious pluralism.” The tenets of democracy should afford believers of any faith the opportunity to freely express their views. Christians, however, are faced with a balancing act between their rights and their religious convictions. Moreover, their decision to follow Christ as a community of worship can pose certain challenges to the established social

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order of public institutions of higher learning in light of the fact that many evangelical students may not simply cling to their civil rights to freely express their religious ideas in public. In the case of exclusivist believers, their sense of Christian mission seems to exercise a greater pull in their decision to interact with and witness to others. That, as also previously noted, tends to problematize public higher education. Because of that, the church has an even greater responsibility for considering its call to upholding the integrity of others, making every effort to relate to strangers with a sense of civility, respect, and hospitality.

The discussion that will take place in this chapter should continue to illustrate some of the difficulties in incorporating exclusivist religious claims into the pluralistic, liberal space of American public higher education. Yet however difficult this challenge may be, it should not go untried by both believers and non-believers in the academy. Even while accounting for distinct goals, both the church and the post-secular contemporary university should embrace the opportunities that these seemingly incommensurable “missions” might bring. Thus, what will follow are ideas that should point to possible ways in which Christian students as well as college educators and administrators may consider in attempting to operationalize their deeply held convictions toward the promotion – in unique and often distinctive ways – of the public good that stems from an education among strangers.

**Toward a Genuinely Inclusive University Campus Environment**

As it has been already established, extending an invitation to the religious other as an equal conversation partner in the pluralistic space of the American academy carries
certain risks. Some of the apprehensions take into account possible threats to the liberal values of the academy: the risk of students being indoctrinated by particular religious values, unwelcomed proselytism, the possible dominance of majority religious voices, to name a few. However, avoiding such risks, especially in the name of a shallow conception of toleration (i.e., rather than mutual respect) or of ensuring an impermeable wall of separation between church and state, minimizes an important feature of what makes the American academy truly pluralistic and more post-secular from the inside out.

Given that more and more students are practicing their religious beliefs openly on college and university campuses, the university becomes a place where students attempt to integrate their learning with their belief system (or vice versa) – be they religious or secular – or, in the case of some, to challenge others to consider the learning that takes place both in and out of the classroom from a particular (e.g., religious) perspective. When that happens, many liberal educators in the academy may feel justified in their apprehension toward some forms of religious expressions, particularly those tied to a view of the world that is “narrowly” conceived and accepted and that, on the surface, seem to pose a potential threat to a liberal education that aspires to expand, not restrict, students’ perspectives. So, what should the posture of educators and administrators in public universities be toward students that are resistant, on religious grounds, to the more “liberal” approach to education? How should the learning environment of these universities be structured in order to accommodate students that remain cautious, and perhaps even suspicious themselves, toward the liberal values of the academy?

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I argue that whenever the university becomes a safe space for students to share perspectives informed by their religious convictions, others can learn more about these “strangers” (in this case, evangelical Christians) among them. In what pertains to their presence and participation in public dialogues, exclusivist believers need not to be perceived as a threat to the aims of public universities, but as an asset to them. In fact, as also mentioned earlier, these students’ willingness to live their religious commitments authentically may even present an ideal opportunity for the learning experience of others. An attempt at articulating pluralism in the academy must stem from the understanding of how deeply held Christian convictions impact one’s life and scholarship.\(^\text{388}\) In fact, the presence of evangelical students in pluralistic learning spaces has the potential to add a unique perspective to the educational experience of all, regardless of their religious inclinations.

Yet, while attempting to deepen the academy’s commitment to both a liberal and a pluralistic education, it would be important for us to remain mindful, as Hauerwas alerts us, that “we simply cannot begin any serious dialogue if we think we must begin by compromising our convictions in order to reach a common understanding.”\(^\text{389}\) Assuming that a diverse learning environment would amount to the kind of meaningfully diverse learning experience desired (and often intentionally designed) by educators, I argue – as I have insisted throughout this project – that trivializing students’ Christian convictions through mere toleration can do little to honor the meaning they attribute to their

\(^{388}\) Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea*, 63-64.

\(^{389}\) Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, 54.
educational experiences as they intersect with their deeply held religious convictions. Moreover, through an engagement that surpasses mere toleration, the academy may even help to promote greater respect for the contributions of these “strangers” (i.e., believers) in and out of the classroom. And by doing so, it takes a normative step toward becoming more post-secular. In fact, such promising hospitality contributes to the health of public life beyond the confines of the university.

Nevertheless, in order for that to become a reality, educators and students of all religious persuasions would need to consider particular ways in which a misperceived “threat” to liberal values of the academy may be turned into learning opportunities. This critical consideration would exemplify the very practice of good stewardship of this shared educational space in which all students are – or should be – afforded an opportunity to fully express their values with the expectation that their views might add to the understanding of others as they explore together answers to the questions they ask. It is in that sense that the university may even become a sort of laboratory of democracy itself; a space in which citizens can express their views and expose others to competing notions of “the good” and of “the good life.” Such a healthy exchange among strangers, when adequately facilitated by educators and embraced by students as a way of learning (and of knowing), can prove quite profitable. However, it seems that such outcomes can only be achieved through intentional investments on enhancing students’ cultural and religious literacy as well as on their ability to articulate, in intelligible and non-coercive terms, the convictions that inform their perspectives on what they learn and know.

Prothero shares his concern that when the major agencies of society (e.g.,
families, religious congregations, the media, and schools) avoid the teaching of religion, individuals learn that religion counts for nothing – an obvious misrepresentation of reality. Extending to universities his exhortation originally directed at public schools can be quite illuminating. For instance, he maintains that educators must make more concerted efforts toward teaching students about religion and some of the basic tenets of religious traditions that are embraced by a diverse citizenry. Although a monumental task with potential risks for an education that is supposed to be “public” – thus also arguably “secular” – we are also reminded by Summerville that tax-supported universities have no reasons not to explore the whole range of possible answers to many questions raised in the academy regardless of their source. The author argues that “if religions offer the most intuitively convincing views, they would deserve to be explored rather than dismissed by some secular prohibition.” What we need, he adds, “is a new sense of when ideas have won the right to be heard.”

Once again, it behooves evangelicals to tread cautiously on matters of rights, for their witness hinges not on winning an argument by the virtue of the fact that they can summon their rights to have their voices heard in public spaces, but on being a disciple of Christ, which should orient them to the very possibility that their voices will not always be heard. Therefore, how they proceed in light of that balancing act between rights and

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390 Prothero, Religious Literacy, 126.
391 Summerville, Religious Ideas, 46.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid.
witness is what makes all the difference in Christian students’ ability to earn – not demand – a seat at the table where moral and ethical conversations take place within the academy.

Thus I think that believers can possibly earn their “right to be heard” in even more basic human terms: by these students’ willingness to respectfully uphold the integrity of their fellow students, the integrity of educators, and of others, regardless of their religious inclinations, in the way they communicate their commitment to hospitality toward these strangers in the shared educational space of universities. In fact, this is a tall order for all students (not just believers) if one of the goals of a public higher education is to set pluralism in motion, as a public good, in view of a meaningful civic and educational experience for all.

Given the space that religion now occupies in the individual and communal life of this country’s citizenry, it is important for universities to admit that religion comprises the very identity of a great number of people, many of whom also happen to be members of the academy. In the context of a truly inclusive university, I would envision consensus among competing worldviews to be only secondary to a more primary aim – namely a fuller understanding of the “strange other.” In this vein, all members would be encouraged to interact with one another with a view to acquiring greater literacy about what animates those with whom they share this educational public. That, I think, would

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394 Volf, A Public Faith, 95.
be an enriching educational practice. Through such exchange, all members, just like in the context of our democratic life in society, can learn to listen and even learn to learn from one another. After all, as Thiemann reminds us “we cannot by philosophical or political fiat decide in advance which arguments we will accept in the public sphere. Rather, we must learn to understand and evaluate the arguments that seek a public hearing.”

The advantage of dialogues guided by civility, respect, and hospitality is that arguments need not to be won. The classroom and any other environment where learning takes place – that is, places where we might conceive of the college campus as a laboratory for democracy itself – do not need to be transformed into battlegrounds for the glory of intellectual winners. A respectful exchange of ideas allows everyone to explore plausible options for any given subject or questions that involve ethical or moral considerations.

Robert Nash and DeMenthra Bradley reminds us that this kind of deep engagement is a necessary task that, while a challenge for American higher education, cannot be avoided. The authors point to the importance of respecting students’ spiritual narratives as well as the integrity of their lives. They suggest a strategy for inclusion of

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395 I think that the educational spaces where students congregate can serve a more modest, and truly educational function. Since we cannot assume that citizens possess a high level of understanding of the religious other (see Prothero, Religious Literacy), reaching consensus can prematurely short-circuit democracy. Therefore, to look for a common denominator without proper knowledge of the strange other is, in my view, to prematurely, conceitedly, and even mistakenly, ignore the many exclusive features of competing beliefs possibly present in a secular university; a goal antithetical to a pluralistic university campus and pluralism itself.

396 Thiemann, Religion in Public Life, 156.
religious voices (applicable, in my view, to evangelicals) by way of extending an invitation to all students to fully participate in ethical conversations. In the context of classrooms, they stress that instructors should structure the learning environment around conversations. In such an environment, meaning-stories are shared and debates (with the strict purpose of converting and convincing other classmates) are generally avoided.\textsuperscript{397} Such structure affords the opportunity for religious students to talk more openly about their spirituality, signaling that everyone’s particular voices, just like in healthy democracies, matter. Thus, according to Nash and Bradley, successful teaching among people of different faiths and traditions accounts for the act of listening with respect, charity, and generosity toward one another’s narratives and religious-spiritual differences.\textsuperscript{398}

In such educational environments, educators also play a key role in legitimizing the pluralistic aspect of post-secular universities and help to redefine what the academy means by “being neutral” toward religion. Boundaries, in this sense, are expanded to include religious convictions in public discourse. In fact, educators who are committed to such a level of inclusion on campus also realize that their own biases can potentially contribute to a lack of access to these public dialogues of voices that appear to contradict or threaten the liberal values of American higher education, as it might be perceived in the case of evangelical Christians. Therefore, one of the most challenging tasks for


\textsuperscript{398} Ibid, 147.
educators committed to a secular (i.e., neutral), not secularist (i.e., anti-religion), learning environment, lies on discerning the difference between coercion and conviction. Such distinction may impact most significantly the level of hospitality and access afforded to religious students (and arguably others) in conversations that are centered on ethical and moral issues and/or arguments. If educators become overly sensitized to “potential threats” to education, they may mediate dialogues in and out of the classroom with a view to restricting some forms of religious expressions. A mere perception of a potential threat to the freedoms of others (e.g., equal to operating on the premise of prior restraint) would not, in my view, be a reliable justification for abridging certain freedoms of students in and out of the classroom. Rather, one’s freedom to think “religiously” – and to live as such – should be seen as a powerful testimony of the very academic freedom both students and educators enjoy as members of the post-secular American academy. Conversely, the suppression of such freedom weakens the commitment of many educators and administrators in public higher education to cultivating a genuinely diverse and pluralistic learning environment, the consequences of which cannot be underestimated for the life and health of a liberal state at large.

**Toward the Inclusion of the Exclusivist Christian in the Post-Secular Academy**

If education is supposed to be a transformative experience in the lives of all students, educators of a more liberal inclination would have reasons to question the kind of college experience evangelical students would attain, especially if, by holding on to their convictions uncompromisingly, they may choose to abstain from exposing themselves to competing ethical values during educational exchanges with others. Such
apprehensions are understandable. One could argue that these students would be forfeiting a prized (liberal) educational outcome during these transformative years of college – e.g., the chance to develop, among other skills, personal autonomy, critical analysis, etc. In light of that, it is important for evangelicals to refute the conventional idea that their belief in the Christian story stands in opposition to a serious dedication to the exploration of the world from an intellectual standpoint; while saving sinners, Christ also summons his disciples to use their minds in their study of the world, human structures and experiences, and the lives of those who experience the world.399

We would also do well not to assume that all Christian students are in the best position to represent Christianity in the academy. It is, after all, an unfortunate fact that many misrepresent the church, thus adding legitimacy to the apprehensions of many liberal educators. Hence, some of the “accusations” mounted toward evangelicals in the academy (e.g., that they are often arrogant in their dealings with non-believers) may be well founded at times. Oftentimes, an uncritical view of self leads the exclusivist Christian to the misperception and skewed assessment that they possess greater access to knowledge than others do. On one hand, the knowledge of our own limitations as believers as to what has been made plain to humankind in this “side of heaven” needs not to thrust us into skepticism. On the other hand, an accurate view of ourselves as believers could lead us to realize how important it is for us to remain teachable, humbly acknowledging how much we can still learn from others. Once again Mouw has some wise words for Christians: “sometimes unbelievers tell us things that are true in a rather

399 Noll, Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind, 41.
straightforward sense. Jesus himself urges us to be open to the possibility that ‘the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of the light’ (Luke 16:8).\(^{400}\)

At the same time, according ourselves a realistic evaluation of our limitations as Christians should not lead us to necessarily assume that other members of the academy (including educators) are in the best position to refute our religious convictions either. Thus, a genuine effort toward self- and mutual understanding of what it means to follow Christ is needed on everyone’s part. According to Prothero, we still live in a nation of religious illiterates.\(^{401}\) His admonition applies to believers and non-believers alike. So, in order for a pluralistic project that lends meaning to our civic and educational encounters with strangers in the academy to work at its best, both sides have to lay some groundwork.

In that vein, Habermas adds some interesting thoughts on the kind of homework needed by believers and non-believers, which helps us to understand the tall order that both sides face. While his focus is not directed toward institutions of higher education, his thoughts are applicable to universities that claim to collaborate with many of the aims valued by a liberal state. A more comprehensive quote is best to illustrate his thinking on the needed reflexivity on the part of those that enjoy the freedoms afforded by a secular state:

Instead of grudging accommodations to externally imposed constraints, the content of religion must open itself up to the normatively grounded expectation

\(^{400}\) Mouw, \textit{Uncommon Decency}, 64.

\(^{401}\) Prothero, \textit{Religious Literacy}, 1.
that it should recognize for reasons of its own the neutrality of the state towards
worldviews, the equal freedom of all religious communities, and the
independence of the institutionalized sciences. This is a momentous step. For it is
not just a matter of renouncing political force and religious indoctrination as
means of imposing religious truths; it is also a matter of religious consciousness
becoming reflexive when confronted with the necessity of relating its articles of
faith to competing systems of belief and to the scientific monopoly on the
production of factual knowledge.
Conversely, however, the secular state, which, with its contractual legal
legitimation, functions as an intellectual formation and not merely as an empirical
power, must also face the question of whether it is imposing asymmetrical
obligations on its religious citizens. For the liberal state guarantees the equal
freedom to exercise religion not only as a means of upholding law and order but
also for the normative reason of protecting the freedom of belief and conscience
of everyone. Thus it may not demand anything of its religious citizens which
cannot be reconciled with a life that is led authentically “from faith.”

In the context of my project, some might question: Isn’t the very notion of
academic freedom (particularly as articulated in chapter II), the very foundation on which
a liberal education rests its reason for treating religion so cautiously within the public
university? After all, others might add, in light of its own customs and traditions, the
university should have the autonomy to sift through what is reasonable and what is not
for students to contemplate throughout their college journey; a role that distinguishes the
university from the state in ways that even the state has recognized to be important.

This, I admit, is a charge hard to escape. However, I also think that Habermas’
admonition to both religious communities and the secular state is quite informative to my
purposes in addressing both the public university and the church therein. For if part of the
mission of the public university is to reinforce the value of civic engagement – unless, as
mentioned in chapter V, it has taken the leap toward a more “commercial” view of
education – it would necessarily have to promote similar freedoms that would allow

students (as “citizens” of these communities of learning) to practice certain civic virtues that will be required of them in the context of life in a democratic society.

Likewise, Christian members of the academy – since “they cannot avoid being in mission to witness what they believe God has done in Christ”\textsuperscript{403} – need to better understand, articulate, and live out their own convictions so that others would even want to learn more about, with, and from them. In fact, Wuthnow has a good point: “[Christian exclusivists] need to be clearer about why they are exclusivists, what they should be doing to bring their understanding of divine truth to the awareness of others, and how they can do that without engaging in religious warfare.”\textsuperscript{404} That, of course, is a task that must go hand in hand with the academy’s commitment to becoming more hospitable toward evangelical students and any other religious student. Therefore, on one hand, we are reminded by Noll that “because for a Christian the tasks of scholarship are tied so closely to the unearned gift of salvation, there can be no genuine Christian learning that is arrogant, self-justifying, imperious, or callous to the human needs of colleagues, students, and the broader public.”\textsuperscript{405} On the other hand, the secular academy could likewise oblige evangelical Christians with a degree of genuine regard toward their spiritual narratives and the meaning they derive from them while navigating the college years.

Summerville affirms that Christianity, as a unique religion, finds its best chance to

\textsuperscript{403} Hauerwas, \textit{The State of the University}, 67.

\textsuperscript{404} Wuthnow, \textit{America and the Challenges}, 288.

\textsuperscript{405} Noll, \textit{Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind}, 30.
blossom within a secular world. But he also affirms that Christians have no need to dominate secular spaces before they can feel a sense of safety within that space. In that vein, I am willing to go a step further: that the secular nature of public higher education can be helpful to religious students. It can push them to reflect more deeply about their own convictions and press them to better articulate their faith so that the seeds of civility, mutual respect, and understanding of what they believe, could be cultivated by them as legitimate members of a public university. In fact, the articulation of such a generous stance on the part of all members of the academy is indeed what makes it truly post-secular. When that is the case, we learn to accept not only the fact that such “secular” space is shared by people of varying religious commitments, but we also seek to cultivate a sense of genuine curiosity as to what animates one another’s thoughts, ideas, and their very lives. Again, from a civic and educational standpoint, mutual agreement becomes secondary to mutual understanding. With that, one may begin to foresee the possibility that evangelical Christians might be able to play a meaningful educational role in the experience of others in the academy (and vice versa). For instance, they can teach nonbelievers as well as remind their fellow believers about a way of life and a kind of conviction that is present and thriving in society.

The combination of such intentional and generous interactions among strangers leads me to believe that the university need not fear the exclusivist Christian who commits to an invitational (i.e., non-coercive) stance toward others on what they maintain

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406 Summerville, Religious Ideas, 48.

407 Ibid., 61.
unwaveringly to be the good and the good life. These believers do not have to be a threat to the secular university. Perhaps with a little more “faith” in the educational and democratic process, the academy might itself be able to offer a more effective “witness” of its commitment to inclusion and pluralism in all of its educational spaces.

What Outcomes Can Be Expected From a Project Such as This?

We have finally come to an important juncture in this project. What outcomes can be expected if indeed a normative project like this would find some traction within an academy that seeks to be increasingly post-secular? Firstly, it is important to reiterate that finding common outcomes – that is, outcomes that would satisfy all members of the academy and of the church – is not necessarily the end goal of this project. In fact, I am ambivalent about some of the possibilities of such a prospect. Given their incommensurability of aims on issues of religious (or secular) commitments, looking for tightly construed commonalities could also severely compromise the kind of civic and educational pluralism toward which I have been trying to orient both educators within the university and their evangelical students.

For that reason, I think that a better prospect – just as likely to bring about the human flourishing of all students in the academy – is to look for the particularities that allow the university and its students to bring to shared educational spaces the unique resources that contribute to expanding everyone’s outlook on that which may enhance our collective understanding of the good and the good life in a democratic society. The increasing diversity in America obliges all citizens to visit these seemingly incommensurable versions of the good life and make a concerted (and respectful) effort
to try to understand the possibilities in front of them. While, as Habermas suggests, “the cleavage between secular knowledge and revealed knowledge cannot be bridged,”\textsuperscript{408} when the differences that tend to separate humanity in the microcosm of the university are exposed and placed before students’ eyes, they can begin to creatively imagine the educational opportunities that would help them to become more civil and respectful citizens; more willing to hospitably engage strangers as they become more mindfully informed about a world that is populated by different conceptions of the good. This way of viewing higher education holds the promise of a quite enriching experience for all students.

Hence, compromises and common ground become a second order in relation to developing students’ ability to remain teachable about what animates others (i.e., “strangers”) in the academy. A commitment to mutual understanding should not, in my view, serve as a strategy to “convert” others. Rather, in what pertains to the democratic aims of the public university, mutual understanding should be seen as a civic and educational goal in and of itself. In that vein, believers – while undoubtedly committed to their Christian mission to evangelize – must first seek to know strangers, to find ways in which to relate to them better \textit{as people}. In fact, Mouw stresses that “it’s important that all dialogue with persons of other religious groups not be \textit{merely} a strategy for evangelism. We mustn’t set these relationships up in such a way that our efforts will be a failure if the relationships don’t develop into evangelistic opportunities [italics in the

\textsuperscript{408} Habermas, “An Awareness of What is Missing,” 17.
As some possibilities are outlined for how to better integrate a particularist view of faith in the post-secular academy, one must also resist the enticing – and perhaps rather simplistic – prospect of “strategies” that would allow both evangelical students and those within secular institutions of higher learning (e.g., educators, administrators, and other students) to think of ways for them to become effective partners. Effectiveness is not always the best goal, lest we turn a value-laden discussion into a mere transaction between people of faith and others within their respective institutions. We must also avoid a paternalistic approach in which students might be superficially satisfied by the false impression that their views have value for their own education and the education of others. The hard work of pluralism in the post-secular academy awakens us to the prospect of meaningful engagements with others on issues of values that does not trivialize that which is not inconsequential, but central to many students’ identity and formation during their college years and beyond. My earlier critique of how the contemporary university has commodified education also cautions me against offering any additional “scheme” whereby institutions might merely capitalize on students’ identity in order to earn bragging rights of how inclusive they have become.

Likewise, Christian students ought to resist the temptation to simply politicize their deepest religious convictions in order to gain ground and visibility on campus. That is an important consideration for believers who understand their commitment to promoting the public good. In all settings, the actions of Christians ought to be prefaced

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by an attitude of worship that causes them to respond to others as God’s creation and thus to recognize the integrity and freedoms of their neighbors, be they believers or non-believers.

That said, it becomes critical to encourage both Christian students and those committed to a more inclusive post-secular academy to think of certain ways for people to live together so that the educational experience of all involved would be mutually edifying and truly transformative. Therefore, little can be gained by an attempt to outline a strict set of “how-to’s.” The work of peace that aims at bringing about human flourishing by way of education will always be, in my view, excitingly experiential. If there were any prescriptions worth mentioning, it would be the prescription of good will and intentionality in promoting public dialogue among strangers in the academy. Nevertheless, even such prescription must account for unexpected yet hopefully constructive and transformational outcomes.

This kind of interaction with strangers speaks directly to what I mean by a “theological pedagogy,” which Christians must seek to cultivate as they establish their presence as the church on a public university campus. This is also a way in which believers and non-believers might come to think of “doing life together” in the academy – that is, a certain way of being with one another that communicates respect for differences that are often anchored on each one’s particular worldviews and religious inclinations. “Strong religious beliefs, while often a big part of the problem of incivility, can also contribute to the solution,” states Mouw. And if many of our societal problems – as

\[410\] Ibid., 67.
often mirrored in our personal relationships with others – stem from misunderstandings about our perspectives on what counts as the good life, it becomes imperative that all should learn how to converse with one another without tearing each other up in public.

So what viable outcomes might be derived as a result of an intentional engagement between religious and “secular” exclusivists (assuming each one’s own orthodoxy and orthopraxis) in the academy given their unique and often incompatible views of what counts as the good and the good life? I would contend that vigorous dialogues and hospitable conversations could lead not necessarily to a consensus, let alone compromises. The important outcome of these encounters cannot seek to strip the strange other (i.e., the religious or non-religious conversation partner) of one’s exclusivist convictions in favor of a kind of civic morality that is tolerable to both. Assuming that the central aim of these encounters is the creation of meaningful educational opportunities for students of varying ethical and religious commitments, educators in the post-secular academy cannot risk counterproductive interactive measures that tend to frustrate those that are not willing to give up their prized convictions. Thus, the cultivation of respect for intrinsic differences seems to be a better alternative to artificial conformist agendas that seek to convince the other of the inherent errors in their worldviews. As also mentioned earlier, commitments may (and sometimes, if one is honest about the value of his or her education, must) be revised. However, the means by which one reflects on what may be an erroneous conviction (or a particular flaw in one’s overall worldview) – i.e., the form in which we interact with others who do not see life as we do – may encourage or
discourage these strangers from reassessing their commitments when we think our own represents the better alternative.

For Christians in particular, the commitment to upholding the dignity of others cannot be understated, for we understand that those with whom we dialogue are God’s own children. Therefore, the civility, respect, and hospitality, given to others do not depend on their capacity or willingness to reciprocate these virtues unto us. The church offers strangers these “gifts” as a reflection of our understanding and acceptance of God’s own gracious gifts unto us, even though we are often undeserving of them ourselves.

All in all, I contend that to look for a common denominator among people of varying ethical or religious commitments is to conceitedly or mistakenly ignore the many exclusive features of competing beliefs; a goal that seems irreconcilable with that which pluralism professes to support. Perhaps, then, the only hope is that, people, genuinely equipped with knowledge of their own faith and a willing desire to live lives in which their values and actions are aligned, in their encounter with the religious other as both of them are (i.e., legitimate stewards of their particularist worldviews) would choose to engage in dialogues while honoring each other as fellow human beings. I surmise that in the context of such exchange, the best (yet often hidden) outcomes would be observed when strangers commit to demonstrating to other strangers the fundamental values of their distinct convictions as exemplified and mirrored in their own lives. In particular, engaging the strange other would require of the entire academic community just as much humility to present oneself open to learn as the conviction that seeks to teach the other
what the stranger might not yet know. This is an exciting opportunity. Indeed, an educational gift to be respectfully given and received by all.

And yet, while there are no guarantees that such kind of generous interaction between strangers will lead to mutually edifying outcomes for all members of the academy, through each one’s commitment to upholding each other’s integrity – and the integrity of their message, even while disagreements may abound – we keep conversations flowing in these educational spaces. The impetus here is that intelligent interactions (informed by each one’s theological perspectives and practices) may stir the desire for all to seek greater understanding of their own convictions and the convictions of others. While no one should be coerced to accept each other’s worldviews, from an educational and civic standpoint all would do well in committing to listening to competing views with generosity and to challenging them, where honestly appropriate, out of a genuine desire to learn from, with, and about others. Christians in particular cannot take both this commitment and this challenge lightly.

To that end, Christians must move beyond a mere critique of the liberal approaches of the contemporary, post-secular university. For while such critique is needed and arguably useful, it lacks to some extent an affirming proposition that could help the believing student to operationalize his or her faith commitments to the benefit not only of self but also of others. Therefore, counter to part of the literature that focuses solely on bemoaning the secularizing tendencies of the academy, I think that a certain reading of how university campuses have become increasingly secularized should serve as a greater reminder for believers of the importance of our distinct religious
commitment, i.e., as a alternative to a world that often thinks in strictly scientific and objective terms. Thus, for Christians, the question that follows any critique of “secular universities” ought to be: What should our message and, most importantly, our stance (i.e., our attitude and behavior) be in and for an academy that does not see life as we, as a community of believers, do?

Anticipating pushback – as every disciple of Christ should – and preparing ourselves with genuine regard for those that challenge our worldview, might be one of the ways in which we might not simply be granted a right, but earn the trust of others that ours may often be a viable alternative to seeing truth in many of the academic projects pursued in the academy. While certainly not an easy prospect, Christian students (and scholars, for that matter) ought not to feel threatened by the opportunity to seek to be an alternative voice in the context of the public university, especially institutions that seek to be increasingly “post-secular.” In fact, we would be remiss if we, as believers, did not recognize that, more recently, many public institutions and liberal educators have in fact become much more mindful and intentional about including religion (and spirituality) as an important dimension of the whole college experience. Not all who call themselves “secularists” or “political liberals” are interested in extricating deep religious convictions from the public space of academia. In fact, some, because of how strongly committed they are to their liberal values, have learned to become quite generous (sometimes more generous than ourselves as believers, I admit) in respecting and appropriately challenging religious views.
Dialogue as a Means to Human Flourishing

For a project that aims at assisting evangelical students to live Christianly within public higher education to work, it must exemplify the dialogical nature of the relations we seek to nurture with those around us, be they believers or not. Moreover, for the Christian narrative to have any educational value in the context of a post-secular university, it must be presented with authenticity. The connection between one’s faith and one’s learning is of particular importance if one of the central aims of a higher education is indeed to broaden one’s understanding of the world through the academic journey one undertakes while at the same time considering what others might offer by way of their unique exploration (and explanation) of what such a journey means for them.

Therefore, in order for us to contend with the complicatedness of what it means for the church to come to a post-secular university campus, we ought to first consider an important feature of any educational endeavor: the sharing of ourselves (i.e., our gifts, our wisdom, our aspirations) and that which animates and informs our hopes in and views of life (e.g., for Christian students, the sources and resources of their faith). By giving of themselves most authentically, what matters to Christians becomes increasingly plain to others so that, in turn, believers might be able to more aptly assess their formulation of the good life in contrast (and sometimes in collaboration) with the views of others, particularly where they seek to promote a public good. I also contend that an authentic Christian life requires willingness on the part of the church to be shaped and reshaped, formed and transformed, as we learn more about ourselves (and the depth of our religious convictions) while learning to learn alongside strangers. While we are not obliged to
receive every gift from strangers – for arguably not all “gifts” are profitable for believers\(^{411}\) – the greatest gift Christian students can receive as members of the post-secular academy is the ability for them to better understand others as they strive to also be understood by others.

Without this “sharing of ourselves,” students compromise the possibility of them being able to shape and be shaped by others. This, I argue, ought to be one of the central aims of public higher education. Moreover, without dialogue – the context in which we get to present our points of view and to assess the viewpoints of others – we cannot test our convictions and commitments, nor can we articulate our very epistemology as a community of faith. In the absence of such exchange, we miss the opportunity to be challenged by others to better articulate our own views of the life we call “good.” Yet the loss is also for strangers, for they, too, depend on the church’s articulation of the good life: not so that they would necessarily embrace it, but so that they would better understand the terms in which pluralism is negotiated among people of varying ethical and religious commitments who share this educational public.

While minds may not be changed as a result of such a generous exchange among strangers, our understanding of the other – the strange other – should be enlarged by such experience. By knowing a little more about the source (or sources) of what motivates and animates both the strange other and ourselves, we stand a better chance of collectively facilitating a process of peace that does not depend solely on seeking common ground but most importantly on the civility and respect owed to each other as equally legitimate

\(^{411}\) 1 Cor. 6:12.
members of an academy that calls itself, for educational and civic purposes, “public.” Accordingly, the importance of this exchange cannot be underestimated.

As they navigate together and negotiate this shared educational space of the public university, strangers (i.e., both Christian and non-Christians) come to a stronger realization of who each one is. In fact, such rich exchange should assist in the shaping and reshaping of each one’s identity every time they grant to one another the generosity of having their unique – even arguably incommensurable – voices heard in public dialogues. And while as Christians “we are invited to see ourselves and our lives as part of God’s story [italics in the original]”, our convictions, which are not static but in a constant state of formation and transformation for depth and consistency, can become more epistemologically sound every time we resolve to better understand what motivates and animates others as fellow human beings, God’s own creation. Sometimes, however, we may be persuaded to change our minds and to reassess our convictions in order to fill in the gaps that often contribute to our religious views being less than convincing to strangers. Other times, we simply listen empathetically as to merely affirm others’ integrity as neighbors. In one interaction we might strive to convince others of our viewpoints, while in another we may choose to just take in what might be critical for the reformulation of our own convictions.

While as Christians we are to be keenly attentive to the apostolic admonition that we ought not to be “[taken] captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human

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412 Hauerwas and Willimon, Resident Aliens, 67.
tradition ..., and not based on Christ,\footnote{Col. 2:8 (HCSB)} what we learn from others can be integral to our own Christian maturation. In propounding an alternative worldview in the pluralistic universe of the post-secular academy, we must strive to present most intelligibly a point of view that is not only sincere and solidly based on our religious convictions, but also a view that has been rigorously assessed in light of other competing views of what we explore in the academy. Hence, from an educational and civic standpoint, it is not enough for the church to simply state a shallow disagreement with non-Christians. Of greater importance is the opportunity we afford others to scrutinize our own understanding of the world that we commit to studying and knowing Christianly.

As diversity issues become more and more prevalent in the academy, it becomes imperative for American public universities to exercise a degree of curiosity as to what communities of faith bring to their civic and educational spaces. In particular, universities committed to post-secular pluralism ought to give exclusivist faiths the opportunity to articulate their views. They, too, populate, participate, and to a great extent complicate, for good or ill (hopefully for good), the life and mission of universities. Here, the church also has a critical role to play, starting with reflection and confession: how many times have our ideas and arguments presented in public been disappointing to others, particularly when they observe the incongruence between what we claim to believe and the way in which we live out our convictions in public? Moreover, how often has our message been tainted in light of the methods we employ to engage with strangers in the academy? Most importantly, what do we make of the times when we have neglected to
connect the rejection of the message we proclaim to the kind of Christian living we actually display, especially in a culture that, by nature, is not inclined to view our religious convictions as credible to begin with?

As Hunter suggests, the simplistic idea of many churched people that cultures are changed as we change ourselves, while possible also seems implausible as a matter of mere technique and strategy.\textsuperscript{414} Then again, my project falls in line with a more basic – yet no less challenging – premise, extrapolated from Hauerwas and Willimon’s idea, that our most important priority is to be the church and not necessarily to transform the world of academia.\textsuperscript{415} While transformation of the kind I have been articulating should occur in the lives of all people with whom we share the educational space of the public university, the tenor of such transformation will follow the ways in which one is open to being transformed – that is, one’s openness to being changed or to reformulating one’s convictions based on new information gathered or to deepen and more aptly articulate one’s original religious commitments.

In that vein, an education in the context of the post-secular academy which does not account for the possibility of a sort of “maintenance” (i.e., the remodeling, not necessarily the full replacement) of one’s religious convictions cannot but fail to affirm the larger freedoms afforded by a liberal state. And to that end, our unwillingness as believers to present ourselves most authentically by the way we live Christianly in the academy (or, conversely, the university’s unwillingness to make room for such a way of

\textsuperscript{414} For further discussion of the problem of culture in light of the intentions of the church for change, see Hunter, \textit{To Change the World}, esp. 43-47.

\textsuperscript{415} Hauerwas and Willimon, \textit{Resident Aliens}, 38.
living) cannot but thwart the value of an education that challenges all students to recognize that our differences matter and yet, precisely because of them, we are able to add value to public life as people of faith in a diverse and pluralistic society.

This kind of exchange, done in most part through conversations – i.e., the very context in which we can practice our civility, respect, and hospitality toward strangers – can add great meaning to the education of all college students. It also helps them to become better givers and receivers of wisdom,\(^{416}\) so that they may, through charitable dialogues,\(^{417}\) be both formed and transformed by and with others. In fact, our “theology of faithful presence”\(^{418}\) in the academy provides an ideal training ground where the believer’s convictions can be tested while helping others to test their own as alternatives to the good life each espouse to in a true community of learners. Yet I insist that this exchange can only succeed if our presence as the church exudes, among other virtues, the virtues of civility, respect, and hospitality (always qualified by the Gospel) that invite others to converse with us. It is by way of these (and other) virtues that a shared commitment to human flourishing is awakened within a shared, public educational space, lest we talk amongst ourselves and miss altogether the chance to be formed and transformed into educated persons committed to peace.

Through dialogues – i.e., where these values are most prone to be tested – evangelical students might be able to open themselves, without fear of being


\(^{417}\) Nash, Bradley, and Chickering, *How to Talk*, 22.

\(^{418}\) Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243.
“disconverted” by the academy, a fear that I think often prevents religious particularists from engaging with strangers. While the church cannot be naïve to the fact that this is precisely what many (certainly not all) educators would prefer to see as a result of a certain reading of what counts as a “public” higher education, we must also acknowledge that the modern issues that have reoriented the academy toward issues of diversity in present days have, in many instances, contributed to a renewed hope (however timid that still might be) that conversations on matters of meaning, which are often informed by religion and spirituality, can and indeed should regain a respectable space in the public university.

To that end, I empathize with Marty’s reminder that “if any positives are going to appear, more and more of the concerned parties have to be open to conversation, and to listen to what strangers, other strangers, are saying, and why they say it.”419 His reminder as a “public” theologian is one that evangelical Christians ought to be particularly attentive to. The confessional church understands that a great deal of harm has been done in the name of Christianity by its refusal to share in the dialogue with other traditions. Indeed, one might argue that such an attitude on the part of the church has in effect contributed in many instances to the (often rightful) public perception of our own arrogance and self-righteousness as believers. That we ought to change our minds in matters that matter to us is beside the point and a demand too great for many believers. A dialogue needs not to be taken as a synonym to or opportunity for uncritical compromise. I suspect that such a demand is also what often precludes exclusive believers from joining

419 Marty, When Faiths Collide, 121.
the conversation to being with, for theirs is often the understanding (or misunderstanding) that they will be asked to surrender what is central to their conception of the good and of the good life every time they sit around the pluralistic table. That is not likely to happen (although I am not persuaded that it should always happen). At the same time, evangelical students cannot approach conversations with the same resolve that strangers should surrender their worldviews without any critical examination of the alternatives we present to the questions we all engage with in the academy.

**Integrity as a Common Aim of a Pluralistic Educational Project**

Christians must be attentive to the fact that the *shalom* of others is strictly connected to one’s own *shalom*: that their private good is intricately connected to a broader public good. In the Old Testament we read the prophet Jeremiah’s articulation of this idea. He encourages the Jews during their exile to Babylon to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I [i.e., God] have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” In essence, the exiles were being asked to come to grips with the fact that they would be in exile for a long period of time – at least seventy years. Hunter explains:

> Jeremiah’s guidance was even more counterintuitive than it might first seem. If God’s purposes really were being realized through these circumstances, then the welfare of the Babylonian conquerors was linked to their own welfare. To this end, Jeremiah instructs the Jews in exile to “seek the welfare” of their captors, to pray for the very people who destroyed their homeland, for the welfare of the exiles and the captors were bound together. As they pursued the shalom of Babylon, God would provide shalom for his people. …

God was calling them to something different – not to be defensive against,

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420 Jer. 29:7 (NIV).

isolated from, or absorbed into the dominant culture, but to be faithfully present within it.\textsuperscript{422}

And if believers of present days can learn from such dire circumstances of believers of old, how much more should they consider the welfare of those in a strange community who are undoubtedly quite unlike the Jews’ captors of Babylon? Christians in the modern academy are in no way hostages of strangers in a strange city like Babylon. It would be a stretch of the imagination to compare the two situations as if they were one and the same. Naturally, we cannot neglect the fact that many Christians still suffer severe persecution around the globe in present days. However, in the context of this civic and educational project, I think it is safe to assume that while many Christian students in the American academy may still feel persecuted for their beliefs, the context and freedoms associated with their circumstances in the university do not begin to compare with the Jews’ in Babylon nearly 600 years BC. That said, it is still important to validate the sense of estrangement that many believers experience upon joining a public institution of higher learning. Yet, for the most part – lest we take too much liberty in comparing believers’ situations, thus neglecting time, context, and history – it is important to highlight the fact that Christian students choose freely to associate with a university (even while we may argue that such is a “strange” community to them).

Even though parallels must be drawn carefully, the lessons we learn from the Old Testament prophet seem fitting and applicable in many ways for the believer who is concomitantly a member of the church and of the post-secular, twenty-first century academy. As we learn from the above passage, in spite of their circumstances, the Jews

\footnote{\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.}
who were under captivity were not only to proactively seek the peace and prosperity of others, but to also pray for a city that they considered evil. In fact, the idea of prayer as a theological practice of the church reminds believers that this act of faith holds a real promise that, by prayer, believers may enhance before their eyes the humanity and dignity of others. The act of praying requires us to pause and consider the others’ worth as we bring them, in supplication, before God. In turn, Philip Yancey tells us, this helps us to see others as persons, just like God himself sees them. “Something happens when [we] pray for others in this way. Bringing them into God’s presence changes [our] attitude toward them and ultimately affects our relationship,” he adds.423

While praying for those considered “enemies” is often a great struggle for believers, the church must not forget that such intercessions are not optional, for they are part and parcel with Christ’s Great Commandment.424 Among other aims which we cannot go into details here, prayer has a way of bringing about some transformative outcomes, particularly as we commit to habituating ourselves to seeing others in the proper light. In fact, countless are the examples spelled out in the New Testament as to how the church ought to see others and seek the good of others, even those prone to doing them harm.

These are but a few examples of theological resources that, from a Christian worldview, inform the ways in which the church ought to interact with strangers. When we commit to seeing the eternal worth of other human beings, and thus interact with them


424 Matt. 5:44.
accordingly, we do so not necessarily (i.e., not as a first order) so that they would change their views about us. Rather, our interactions with others should be a natural response to God’s love for us: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another,” says Jesus to his disciples.\footnote{John 13:34 (NIV).} This is the kind of person every Christian ought to want to become.

Therefore, loving others – including those who do not love us – is about our own spiritual integrity, which demands nothing from those whom we decide to love. Love is our very witness as an expression of worship, not coercion; love that we share with others in light of our acceptance of the fact that “[God] first loved us.”\footnote{1 John 4:19 (NIV).} Likewise, our civil, respectful, and hospitable stance toward strangers must be an informed (and even habituated) attitude that results in our recognition of the worth and dignity of others as equally created beings in spite of their choices, preferences, and dispositions in life.

If we as believers are to understand \textit{shalom} to be something desirable not only for ourselves but also for all who share life in this “city” (i.e., the university) with us, unity becomes an important feature of life among strangers. And in this respect, the contemporary university does not do the believer (or any one else for that matter) any favor by its attempt at fragmenting life into compartments that can only be sorted independently from one another. Disciplines and departments within the academy often exemplify this lack of unity. Consequently, more often than not, students receive piecemeal knowledge (for good and often not so good reasons) about what they learn, as if there was no connecting “whole.”
For the believer, the theme of unity in diversity – the very notion that should inform what universities ought to be about – is of vital importance. Yet it is lamentable this is a lesson that even the church that retrieves in itself by taking to extremes the biblical teaching that we are not to be of (or belong to) the world\textsuperscript{427} contributes to fostering. Oftentimes, believers learn from the church how to be disconnected from the world in which we are to be an alternative culture. Indeed, one of our roles as Christians immersed in larger cultural contexts is to try to add a voice, among other voices, that calls for unity in the communities of which we are part. This task is consonant with the nature of the God we serve, who is himself indivisible – that is, whole.

Here I suspect that some would object: “but wouldn’t we then be no different than, say, the humanist or secularist whose notion of unity calls for the kind of compromise and common ground that requires us all to surrender that which, while particular to our understanding of the good life, allows the church to be an alternative culture within the larger academic culture?” I hope I have been clear all along in sustaining the idea of a kind of Christian conviction that does not buckle under pressure (or fear) of being an alternative voice in public spaces where our religious commitments and hopes are not shared by all. (I think that pluralism itself depends on such voices.) If it was so, that would not only compromise our particular witness (or our “public theology,” to use Marty’s terminology\textsuperscript{428}) but also the democratic and pluralistic nature that I think American public higher education should be oriented toward.

\textsuperscript{427} John 15:19.

\textsuperscript{428} Marty, forward to Palmer, The Company of Strangers, 14.
That said, the kind of unity sought after by the church awakens us to the fact, as Palmer puts it, that “our identity is not to be found in our differences from others – in our superiorities and inferiorities – but in our common humanity”\textsuperscript{429} since “God names us all as brothers and sisters.”\textsuperscript{430} However, as the lay theologian also adds, the kind of unity that informs our practice is unlike the civic unity that many call for, which often suggests compromise and accommodations produced by a sort of “enlightened self-interest,” but by the inward and spiritual life of prayer faithfully pursued, where we meet with God and connect with one another, thus bringing us back to the public realm.\textsuperscript{431} He explains:

From a Christian point of view, this is not so much unity as it is a fragile truce, a marriage of convenience, to be dissolved whenever the self-interest of one partner requires it. The Christian is convinced of a unity which lies deeper, in our very creation and condition, a oneness which roots in the fact that – despite our strangeness to one another – we are all children of the same creator God. For the Christian, our unity is known not in politics but prayer, and is given by the grace which answers prayer. The unity sought by the church is not achieved through calculation and manipulation, but received through contemplation and vulnerability and self-giving.\textsuperscript{432}

All of these qualifiers should have direct implications for the spiritual and educational formation of people of faith, their life in a pluralistic democracy, and the opportunities they may find for deeper learning, growth, and development in the context of the educational public. Thus, I think that a common thread that may allow the church and the secular academy to enact their own “particularist missions,” would be the

\textsuperscript{429} Palmer, \textit{The Company of Strangers}, 26.

\textsuperscript{430} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{431} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid.
development of integrity, or a sense of “wholeness” in both the sacred experience and vocation of religious students as well as the “secular” aims devised by educators in public institutions of higher learning. This, I would imagine, could lead to the promotion of the public good of all who partake in such shared civic and educational experience.

That said, it becomes important to ask: What does the development of integrity mean for those who contribute to the education of young people in the post-secular academy and for Christian students themselves? How does such aim contribute to human flourishing that is mindful of differences and that at the same time sees strangers as co-contributors of mutual transformation and understanding through a higher education that is pluralistic and democratic in nature? Moreover, what does “diversity” that accounts for a strong sense of personal integrity look like and what end does it serve for both students and institutions? While these questions are important and invite further introspection, given the constraints of this project, I can only touch on some possible answers.

Aside from the standpoint of the particularities of religious convictions, which often make it difficult to fully conjoin the commitments of a “secular” democracy – i.e., one that is (or should be) neutral toward the religious worldviews of its citizens – with the exclusivist claims of Christianity, my hope is that, by aiming at lives lived with integrity, we may find ways in which Christians and non-Christians can contribute to their mutual public good, which, by default, contributes to each one’s private good. I contend that seeking integrity (or the development of such ethical stance in life as to avoid the fragmentation of life – and, consequently, of one’s activities in light of one’s values) should shine some light on a possible common aim that contributes to college student
formation and their transformation as a good in itself.\textsuperscript{433}

Furthermore, a focus on personal integrity – i.e., the intentional alignment between who the student is with what the student does – should also keep in view a certain way of living Christianly that affords both self and others the opportunity to flourish as human beings (a concept I have already dealt with in Chapter VI). A life that seeks to nurture personal integrity reminds both Christian students and those who educate them of the undue burden on students who are often asked to fragment their identities in order to fulfill their academic vocation most objectively in pluralistic educational spaces – e.g., to dissociate their religious commitment from their academic (or professional) calling since, as some proponents of political liberalism posit, they cannot be understood by other citizens that do not embrace or cannot comprehend a particular religious view not commonly shared by all.

My contention is that lives well lived (i.e., lives that do not give in to the imagination of others as to whom we ought to be in public spaces, but that at the same time seek to extend the same respect for the rights of others to live life under similar premises) has the potential to add to the kind of diversity of perspectives that the post-secular academy needs in order to become a community that promotes the flourishing of students as “whole” persons. This cannot be understated if educators are to be honest.

\textsuperscript{433} I am intentionally using the term “formation” and avoiding the use of the term “development,” which is more often associated with psychological and psychosocial theories that, to be sure, also inform the works of educators. That said, I think of “formation” as a more fluid term that does not depend on certain stages or schemes that supposedly evolve according to age, gender, culture, etc. The term formation falls somewhat more in line with the idea of a “holistic” (e.g., the moral, ethical, spiritual, intellectual, cognitive, etc.) education of students without isolating certain aspects – or variables – that account for their “development” during the college years.
about their desired aims to create a learning environment that not only respects
differences at arms’ length, but that encourages meaningful encounters among strangers
who bring with them new possibilities, ideas, and worldviews, that help all members to
enlarge their knowledge and understanding of the world and of their fellow neighbors.
Moreover, when diversity is just a mere fact about what one might encounter in a
university that seeks to serve a public good by, first and foremost, opening its doors to the
public, it does very little to help students negotiate their views in a space that ought to
serve as a laboratory of democracy – indeed, a place in which one learns to live the
democratic values of a pluralistic society, with religion as a viable option for optimizing
such a life. That is why a transition to post-secular pluralism is a high priority for public
universities.

Furthermore, these encounters among strangers are what orient the post-secular
academy toward the possibility of pluralism that enlivens students’ curiosity about what
helps them to understand how the world works. By going beyond diversity as a mere
informational and (worst yet) a mere statistical fact about people’s differences, public
universities can become a space where students can experience – in relation, action, and
interaction with others – the true value of a higher education that seeks to afford all
students the opportunity to experience life with integrity (i.e., indivisibly, as a whole).
Accordingly, this kind of “living” adds a unique dimension to education that, in turn, also
enlarges everyone’s view of the world and of humanity, with all its differences and
commonalities. In that vein, the “university,” as the very meaning of the word derived
from the Latin universitas implies, should seek to promote a space from which we can
experience “the whole” – our “whole” – as unique individuals are brought together under one roof as part of a single educational public.

**Modest Suggestions for the Church as a Participant in the Post-Secular Academy**

As believers we ought to bring and share our own definition of what we mean when we speak of and attempt (even as imperfectly as we often do) to live out these central virtues on our Christian journey within public spaces, such as the university. It is important for us to seek to become viable and more attractive partners and co-workers with others toward mutual understanding that leads to personal and institutional transformation. A genuine educational effort that inspires students to not only keep their minds but also their ears open to what the stranger has to say might inspire institutions committed to post-secular pluralism toward a kind of “‘thickening’ of the discourse”\(^{434}\) which, as Marty explains,

will not produce anything so neat as a straight-arrow secular rational approach. It will eventuate in a thicket, a bramble, of entangled and sometimes not completely unentangleable strands, mixed with branches of other growths. But it is likely to reflect not only the messiness of a pluralist society but also repositories of options that would not have been contemplated in the world of the Rawlsians. The larger society will have benefited because legitimate voices of particularity and often dissent have been heard … \(^{435}\)

Marty’s proposition is quite helpful in conceptualizing a pluralistic space, such as the one I think the post-secular university ought to work harder at becoming; a space where meaningful interactions among strangers not only have the potential but the need to direct our actions toward a peaceable and safe learning environment (i.e., a non-

\(^{434}\) Ibid. Here I am extending Marty’s suggestive concept to the context of the American public university.

\(^{435}\) Ibid.
threatening space whereby all can flourish as human beings). Such need and action becomes even more accentuated when seen in light of particularist voices that comprise a “secular,” public institution of higher learning. However, the kind of civic pluralism toward which we are oriented by the author – one that stems from his evident conviction that this kind of pluralism is needed for a healthy life among strangers – is unlikely to come to fruition in a university that keeps the “wall of separation” too high and virtually impenetrable to issues where religion has (or seeks to have) a say on. This I argued in chapter II. Nevertheless, what is important to note is that another consequence of such “wall of separation” (which is often so immovable in public universities) is that instead of directing the learning experience of students toward the thickening of democratic dialogues, urges people to settle for thinner versions of ethical and moral dialogues that do not always address students’ deepest questions of meaning nor give evidence of what a pluralistic society and democracy is – or should be – about.

That said, believers cannot be exempted either. The church has often played a part on “thinning” public dialogues. We have resisted (and sometimes forfeited) opportunities to learn more and better about what we believe in. Moreover, when we have not resisted we have often showed contempt (not genuine, informed and respectful disagreement) toward strangers. We have in many ways contributed to the current suspicion that tends to alienate the very stranger toward whom we are called to be hospitable as an expression of our religious values. We have also often avoided meaningful ethical conversations: sometimes in light of our own fears and apprehensions, other times because we find ourselves incapable of contributing to dialogues given our own lack of knowledge of
what we claim to believe in, and why we do so. In addition, when strangers disagree with us, how often have we shut down and taken an offense, the kind of which can only silence conversations (and that prevents future ones from happening)?

Perhaps if evangelical students were to be more generous toward those that do not share their worldview in the academy, they might begin to ask themselves: “What if the stranger’s disagreement could be seen as an actual invitation to learn more about us?” Which should also prompt them to ask: “What is it that I, as the exclusive believer that I claim to be, do not know – or need to know better – about what I claim to believe, without the knowledge of which I cannot fulfill my role as a co-worker toward the human flourishing of my fellow neighbors (Christians and non-Christians) in this academy of which we are all equal members?”

It seems to me that honest answers to these questions – as well as the actions that would stem from them – would make it clear how imperative it is for us as Christians to develop not only an intelligible vocabulary to express our convictions (and our clear definitions of what we mean by a civil, respectful, and hospitable life) in a space that is “strange” to our faith, but that we ourselves would be inclined to live out these values

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436 It should be noted that by “intelligent vocabulary” I do not mean a way of defending our religious views in a manner that is always comprehensible to non-believers. Rather, what I have in mind is the believer’s ability to present their views in coherent (and intelligent) ways, even while these views will often not be fully comprehended nor accepted – at least not by faith – by those outside of the church. While we need to seek to reach our audience by whatever means possible, we cannot compromise the integrity of our message that is always dependent on the theological foundations of our faith. In sum, by “intelligent” I mean arguments that are theologically sound even while popularly unconvincing to those outside of the faith.

That said, I am inclined to agree with what seems central to Marty’s own argument, which he evidently shares with other thinkers, that “Christians in conversation
as to earn, without demanding, a seat at the table where these meaningful ethical dialogues take place within the academy. At the same time, we must exercise some self-discipline in the implementation of such a way of living out our convictions and interacting with others. We should not get ahead of ourselves here without the understanding of some fundamental steps.

In dealing with civility, respect, and hospitality through the particular lens of Christianity as a tradition, I think it would be productive to start a step behind what Marty has in mind. Thus, my contention is that both Christian students and those who participate in their education in the academy (e.g., educators, administrators, and other students, Christian and non-Christians) have something even more elementary, nevertheless of great importance, to accomplish in order for ethical conversations among strangers to be most meaningful and transformative.

Oftentimes, individuals want to rush to teach what they want others to know. In the process they seem to forget that learning precedes teaching, for how can one teach with any sense of integrity about what one does not know in at least some elementary way? I believe that civic pluralism, as a sort of mediator of peace in a university community where people of different commitments not always clash but often come together for one reason or another, can get messier than Marty seems to optimistically

with others need not set aside basic commitments and do their partners in such discourse no favor by doing so. They only create confusion and postpone the time when differences have to be and get to be articulated.” When Faiths Collide, 164. My hope is that Christians in the academy would be able to begin to think more intentionally about the sources and resources that their faith affords them as they become more invested in developing (or strengthening) certain religious and scholarly virtues that contribute to the possibility of them becoming more conversant with strangers in the post-secular academy.
suggest (although, to be sure, he does deal quite convincingly with the consequences of possible collisions of faiths in democratic spaces). That is especially so when we find among strangers a preemptive unwillingness on the part of learners (here I am thinking of both students and educators) to listen to each other with civility and respect, to learn from one another, and to be hospitable (even when they disagree) toward the other. Such defensive stance prevents us from giving the stranger a full hearing of what constitutes their understanding of the good life, which indeed makes the post-secular academy not only diverse but most importantly truly pluralistic in its mission as an educational and societal agency.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, I would argue that the American academy would benefit from paying closer attention to how a Christian worldview that seeks to integrate faith with learning might add value to the educational project of all. Valuing a kind of pedagogy that is increasingly aware of and invitational to questions of meaning that are often grounded on religious convictions can serve all students that participate as members of this educational public. While affirming the importance and relevance of religious claims from the standpoint of those who profess to see the world through a particularist Christian lens, the academy takes an important step toward aligning its diversity rhetoric with an actual pluralistic educational agenda, thus renewing its commitment to the very freedoms prized by public institutions of higher learning in America.

That said, the onus also lies heavily on believers themselves. I think it would be important for Christian students to consider ways in which they might effectively learn
from their faith while responsibly exercising their membership to the academy. This, in turn, brings back an important question, central and normative to this project: What does the integration of faith and learning mean for evangelical students that seek to live more Christianly in the post-secular American academy? Let us consider some possibilities.

Firstly, Christian students need not fear their academic journey as it pertains to the relentless pursuit of truth involved in their scholarly activities. In fact, they should search for truth in their disciplines, as all members of the academy should, wherever it may be found. From a faith perspective, Christians can rest confidently that “truth is truth. The Christian accepts truth where he or she finds it without feeling the need to claim possession of that truth.”\(^{437}\) And if that is so, Christians can confidently collaborate with others – whether religious or non-religious – in projects that would advance not only the public knowledge of the world and of those who inhabit it, but in effect the public good that should result from their becoming “college educated persons.”

Secondly, when approaching their scholarship from a faith perspective, it would be important for Christian students to be forthcoming about how their convictions impact their scholarship (no differently than any other good scholar should), acknowledging how their biases and preferences (and even their pre-conceptions about what they study) inform their studies and projects.\(^{438}\) However, one’s faith should never be an excuse for


\(^{438}\) Naturally, the assumption here is that the secular academy would be just as invitational to these students’ religious justifications on the projects they engage in. I sustain the notion that it cannot be otherwise in the context of any higher educational project that seeks to prepare college graduates for an increasingly diverse and
less rigorous or intellectual work. In fact, one’s Christian convictions should inspire even greater zeal when exploring the world through one’s discipline or field of study; especially since one’s scholarship, in the context of one’s overall Christian mission, is viewed as any other activity “as working for the Lord.”⁴³⁹ Their work – wherever it may be practiced – is never disconnected from their witness. By representing their scholarship well, and being forthcoming about their faith perspectives on what they study, Christians also contribute to better representing their Christ in the academy. In fact, the integrity of their scholarship is one of the vehicles through which believers present themselves most authentically to others in the university, effectively witnessing of a genuine and lively faith in Christ – one that needs not to be seen as a threat to the liberal projects of the post-secular academy. Indeed, such faith has the potential to complement the projects aspired by universities that are committed to post-secular pluralism, democracy, and the value of human thinking and diversity.

Thirdly, while religion is experiencing an increased visibility at public universities that mirrors its resurgence in the culture at large,⁴⁴⁰ Americans are still quite illiterate about religion.⁴⁴¹ Many do not know (or even seek to know) the meaning that those who call themselves “believers” attribute to their religious convictions. Therefore, Christian students ought not to assume that the way in which they see the connection complicated world that is replete with conflicting and incommensurable ethical values that inform democracy in liberal states.

⁴³⁹ Col. 3:23 (NIV).


⁴⁴¹ Prothero, Religious Literacy, 1.
between their faith and their scholarship will be received with no resistance by the larger academic culture. Hence, Christians should value the opportunity to articulate in a sensible and intelligent manner how faith and learning intersect in their scholarly pursuits. While a reasonable articulation of how their faith interacts with their learning may not serve to necessarily convince certain members of the academy or even the public in general of the value of their worldview, by doing so, Christians may help to keep open the lines of communication between faith and reason in the post-secular academy.

Lastly, I envision that, as challenging as it may be for students who are still in the process of formation themselves, a solid academic articulation of how one’s faith informs one’s scholarship may, in turn, encourage other religious students to bring their own religious justifications to the fore. I believe that these academically sound justifications for how one’s religious worldviews impact one’s scholarship can serve as an effective “witness” to not only the academy at large, but also to other religious students and scholars themselves; particularly those who would be otherwise convinced that to earn their space in the secular academy they would need to set their religious convictions and viewpoints aside. Such clear and explicit articulation – where plausible and logical – may serve to encourage other believers to raise the level of their own reasonable justifications for the projects they understand the participation of their faith to be central and essential.

I think, however, that it is important to highlight that while faith most likely will intersect one way or another with the scholarly projects of many believers in the post-secular academy, it does not mean that faith should be the only lens through which Christian students view and explore the world. Even though such lens is rarely (nor
should it be) disregarded by exclusivist Christian students, they should be conscientious of the fact that the university – while part of God’s creation and a fertile ground for their mission and vocation – is not the church. Every effort must be made on the part of believers to preserve the integrity of those who receive their faith-informed perspectives and the fruits of their scholarship. Likewise, although faith is never (nor should it be) set aside (for faith is not a mere act, but a fact about the very identity of believers), as legitimate members of the academy Christians can and should make good use of all the resources that their discipline affords them, whether religious or not, if these do not violate ethical, legal, and especially Christian, principles.

Finally, I would argue that to think Christianly is, in essence, to both philosophize (i.e., to love learning while recognizing that the very ability to learn is a gift from God) and theologize (i.e., to make faith an active component of one’s academic pursuit in recognition that God himself, along with his creation, is worthy of being studied and understood). Both practices should motivate believers toward obtaining greater and better knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, Christians should be inclined, through the interaction of their faith with their learning, to faithfully understand both the world (believed by them to have been created by God) and those who inhabit it (those created by and, in the case of human beings, in the very image of God). In my view, this is a particular practice that the contemporary post-secular university cannot prevent either in practical terms or by political decree. In fact, academic freedom (i.e., the right to teach and the right to learn) is not prescribed nor defined by the law but by the very customs and conventions

Holmes, The Idea, 73.
agreed upon and shared by members of the academy. Such freedom accounts, at least in part, for the fact that “academic institutions exist for the transmission of knowledge [and] the pursuit of truth.”\textsuperscript{443} With such freedom at one’s disposal one can aptly learn and teach from and with faith.

\textsuperscript{443} “Join Statement.”
CHAPTER VIII

On “Being the Church” in the Post-Secular Academy: Concluding Thoughts

The university is a microcosm of society where individuals get the chance to not only rehearse but in effect negotiate their differences with a view to teach and to learn about what animates the thoughts and actions of their fellow citizens. In light of that, I have argued that agreement and consensus become secondary goals in light of a more primary normative aim of public universities in America: the understanding of the many conceptions of the “good life” that permeate public life. The thought that particularist religious convictions might regain a respectable space in public higher education alerts educators, justifiably so, to certain risks. However, the many possible benefits that stem from greater engagement among people of various religious and non-religious traditions within the academy cannot be underestimated: the intersection of religion and public higher education has the potential to enlarge our collective conception of public life.

The academy is also an ideal space for students and educators to give of themselves and to receive from each other the gift of an education that seeks to expand the mind. To that end, public universities must properly recognize the value of religion as an important identity marker that complements the inclusive aims of a democratic education within a pluralistic state. Likewise, in order to become co-contributors of such aims, people of faith (exclusivist believers in particular) must also be challenged to consider the ways in which they can best represent their religious convictions in public so that others might recognize their unique identity as an authentic alternative within a larger academic culture and tradition.
Contemporary universities are post-secular in proportion to their willingness to move beyond the mere physical presence of religious students on their campuses. Rather, these institutions legitimize their claim to post-secularity once they commit to moving toward the integration of the meaning students make of their experiences in light of their worldviews, religious or otherwise. By grappling with competing notions of the “good,” the academy moves from diversity to pluralism.

A central focus of my dissertation has been on orienting Christians toward a life well lived – that is, a life of integrity: the idea that one might first live so that others might recognize (even though they may not accept) Christianity as a real alternative culture within the post-secular academy. In my estimation, this is the sense in which exclusivist Christians might in effect add meaning to pluralism as a civic and educational aim of public universities. However, in order for such pluralism to become a reality, risks and possibilities must be assessed by both the church (personified by Christian students and scholars in the academy) and the university itself (educators, administrators, and students of all religious or non-religious inclinations). All must exercise a kind of give-and-take of wisdom, humbly acknowledging that every member of this educational public potentially play an intricate part in the forming of each one’s unique identities and in the transforming of their beings into educated persons. To that end, the concepts of civility, respect, and hospitality, as discussed throughout this dissertation, remind Christians – and non-Christians – of virtues that harmonize their convictions with their actions in the post-secular academy.

A proper view of exclusive religious commitments within the academy can be mutually edifying, especially where there is a resolve on everyone’s part to creating safe conversational spaces that afford dialogue on questions of meaning that are often informed by religious convictions. What this means for my main audience (the exclusivist Christian student and those who educate them), is that in order for Christians to contribute to public life in the post-secular academy, they must consider and commit to learning more about not only what they profess, but most importantly how they profess it publically, i.e., the method by which they present their message by both what they say and who they are. In order for the church to be recognized as a community of worshipers, not a community of conquest, its witness hinges largely on how it presents its message to an academic culture that often only knows Jesus intellectually, not relationally. Thus, to avoid a misrepresentation of its commitments, the church cannot abdicate its responsibility to see to it that both the integrity of its witness and the integrity of others are upheld. In doing so, the church may earn without resentment the opportunity to contribute to public life by means of a shared educational experience in the American academy. Moreover, a commitment to hospitable engagements among strangers can personally enrich all members of the academy by way of the education they seek to receive from others (i.e., their private good) while contributing in a meaningful way to the human flourishing of all people (i.e., the public good they may promote).

To that end, both the church and the academy have some homework to do. Those responsible for educating young people, particularly, leaders and educators within the church and the academy, must reevaluate their priorities as to what counts as “a
churched” and “an educated” person respectively. It is important to emphasize here that these two are complementary adjectives for the churched. Undoubtedly, such assessment of priorities will bring to light values that are often incommensurable with the values of a larger culture that tends to emphasize individualism and the promotion of private goods, often at the expense of more collective, public goods. Thus, an emphasis on the public good that stems from a higher education – which I claim to be most in line with Christian values – presupposes a certain responsibility on the part of those who educate college students, including students themselves. On one hand, the churched (represented by its members) must learn how to use the sources and resources of their faith while operationalizing the public good that stems from a higher education (e.g., mutual understanding, peace, etc.). On the other hand, the academy must grapple more deeply with the breadth of the meaning of the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” with a view to moving these concepts toward post-secular pluralism – a work that calls upon educators to accord religious convictions their proper place in the formation of religious citizens in democratic educational spaces. In either case, students will most likely need role models who are willing to teach them what it means for them “to be” – i.e., to be the church and, at the same time, to be an educated person – within these two communities of which they are members. Hence, educators in the church and in the academy cannot underestimate the implications of the example they communicate to students as they seek to educate them into becoming people of integrity. Their example can set the tone for the kind of engagement (or, conversely, of disengagement) that students will learn to value and will try to replicate among strangers.
In view of the challenges and possibilities that help us to reconceptualize the post-secular American academy in order to make room for religious convictions, a neat conclusion is difficult, if even desirable, to reach. Civic and educational pluralism within the post-secular academy requires intentionality and a high degree of civility and respect. Individuals must also learn how to negotiate their differences. It might be that rather than attending to conclusions, those involved in the education of young people must think of ways to re-introduce questions of meaning that arise from opportunities to create safe, dialogical spaces for students. Naturally, students must seek these spaces for themselves as well, since opportunities to learn more with, from, and about strangers occur in every corner of a university; they are not confined to formal spaces where learning is expected to happen. That said, the time seems right not for conclusions but for reacquainting: of the churched to the value of their tradition and of the student to the value of a higher education.

This dissertation has stressed a number of key concepts and ideas in the hope of heightening the awareness of students and educators in the contemporary, public university. These concepts carry implications for my target audience (mainly the exclusivist Christian student) and for those involved in the formation of Christians in the academy (educators of all religious inclinations, fellow students, the church, and others). We discussed the intersection of faith and learning paying particular attention to the tradition of American universities, even in relation to the law and other academic customs (chapter II). We analyzed how civility, respect, and hospitality can be instrumental in fostering the civic and educational aims of higher education and our shared life in a
pluralistic learning environment (chapter III). We also reflected on what authenticity in Christian living adds to the experience of professing believers and strange others in the academy (chapter IV). Additionally, promising outcomes of a life committed to both giving and receiving wisdom as a means to self-formation and self-transformation were explored (chapter V). The notion of shalom (i.e., peace) as a practice of engagement with others that contributes to human flourishing was later added to the conversation (chapter VI). And, finally, we looked at possible outcomes that stem from lives that seek to understand others through dialogues that preserve the integrity of strangers (chapter VII).

While I am hopeful for a more inclusive, pluralistic, and indeed post-secular academy, I remain unsure about the prospect of arriving any time soon at the kind of civic and educational pluralism I have been calling for in my dissertation. Certainly, the American academy has made great strides toward diversifying its student body and the composition of its faculty and administrators. Yet in many ways diversity remains a matter of fact for contemplation that is still reserved for planned programs and activities, not necessarily a shared experience that makes pluralism a pedagogy of ongoing engagement among strangers. Yet in spite of my ambivalence, I am encouraged by the prospect that as religion reemerges in American public life so it may resurface with tempered vigor in the academy. As religious students commit to intelligently articulating the meaning their faith has on the academic projects in which they engage (even though their reasons may not be intelligibly comprehended by all), others in the academy may eventually heed to the possibilities of what religion offers for the greater good of all in the academy.
The work toward safer dialogical spaces within the academy reinforces the kind of civility, respect, and hospitality, that not only suggests but in effect contributes to the human flourishing of all members of these communities, including religious particularists. Yet in order for that to become a reality, we cannot pretend, let alone demand, that values be left out of the moral and ethical conversations that are prone to occur in universities. In fact, not only should one’s values not be left out, but to a great extent they cannot be left out of important dialogues that inform our public life. Nash’s assessment of how deeply our values run is revealing, challenging the widely accepted notion of neutrality in matters of value: “I have never met one values-neutral, narrative free person in my life. … A true values-neutral person, if there were ever to be such a creature, would be nothing more than a moral android, an inhuman construction of science-fiction writers.”

In light of that, much work has yet to be done by both the church and the academy as facilitators (and possible co-contributors) of meaningful encounters among strangers. Let us consider some practical suggestions that may accomplish just that.

Firstly, since my project hinges largely on the authenticity of the Christian witness as a praxis of “being” and of engagement with others (i.e., a theological pedagogy), the church cannot expect the academy to do the work that only this community of faith can do in preparing people to live Christianly among strangers. To that end, ministers and youth leaders must tackle these questions of how to “be” the

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church in the academy through the work of formation that happens in the church. If we have hope that students might become exemplars of Christian living in the academy, the work of religious literacy (beginning with the tenets of their own faith) must start well in advance of students’ college journey. Hence, those who work directly in Christian education should find – or create – engaging curricula that challenges young believers to consider the foundations of their faith, the implications of their beliefs and witness, and their disposition toward people of other faiths (or of no formal faith) as they seek to live out their religious commitments as part of a larger public.

This kind of work assumes that educators themselves have grappled (and continue to grapple) with their own formation as Christians. For the purpose of forming young people for life in an educational public, it is critical for the church to find educators who are able to grip the minds of young people and capture their imagination as to what their religious commitments mean in these encounters with strangers. In that sense, those who minister to young people serve as role models of the kind of dialogue that can later translate into important lessons about who the stranger (i.e., their neighbor) is and what responsibility the church has toward them as human beings created in God’s own image.

This kind of education can be implemented in Sunday School, through small groups, in

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446 My focus on the work of ministers does not exempt the family from playing the critical role that only it can play in the formation of the youth. The family, however, has its own set of challenges and responsibilities in modeling the Christian life to young people. As an agency of Christian formation, it must also apply and exemplify these communal theological practices that allows the youth to learn what it means to “live Christianly” in the world. However, since engaging with the responsibility of the family is beyond the scope of this dissertation, in this concluding discussion I deliberately focus on practical suggestions aimed at the church as a larger community. By harnessing its collective resources it can contribute, in more formal ways, to forming and informing its members of practices that are most characteristic of the Body of believers.
youth groups, and, most importantly, through discipleship (i.e., the exchange between a young and more “seasoned” believer). Thus, it becomes important for young people to find consistent witnesses of lives well lived that exemplify the kind of civil, respectful, and hospitable community that the church is called to be. As Hauerwas and Willimon explain,

> From this point of view, Christian ethics is, in the Aristotelian sense, an aristocratic ethic. It is not something that comes naturally. It can only be learned. … a primary way of learning to be disciples is by being in contact with others who are disciples. So an essential ethical role of the church is to put us in contact with those ethical aristocrats who are good at living the Christian faith. … There is no substitute for living around other Christians. 447

Education that happens both formally and informally in and through the church must continue as students enter college and meet other role models of Christian virtues. Along the way, the needs of students will change and new questions will emerge as a result of their lived experiences. And yet, the challenges that students will experience as they attempt to live out and articulate to others their faith commitments in a religiously pluralistic educational environment can help church leaders to better understand how they might be able to best challenge and support these students (and best model Christian virtues), particularly as they encounter strangers – and “strange” ideas – in the academy.

Secondly, local churches ought to seek ways in which to collaborate and help sustain the work of those who are most close to or even on university campuses. Campus ministries should seek to continue the work of formation started by students’ home

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churches. And since this work happens much closer to the “strangers” about which this project speaks, churches that are located near university campuses can center their efforts on reaching out to students, inviting them to discuss what it means to live Christianly in the academy. What is vital about this prospect is that those involved in campus or college student ministry might be willing to focus their efforts not only on attracting (or merely enticing) young people to “come” to church but in effect on teaching them what it means to “be” the church as they live out their academic vocation as part of their Christian calling in the academy. To that end, in what pertains to the education of those that already see themselves as members of this body (for some students will have their encounter with Christ and/or the Christian tradition in college), these ministries must transcend an education that merely seek to teach “about” Christianity. Again, as Hauerwas and Willimon emphasize, “we already have too many people who know something about Jesus, about the church. What we need is people who will follow Jesus, who will be the church [italics in the original].”

Thirdly, while a challenging prospect, the willingness of educators in the academy

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448 The physical location of these churches near or around a university does not always translate into the kind of engagement with college students that I think is needed. Not all churches near a university campus center their work on educating these young people – nor, in fairness to them, do they have the resources (e.g., human, material, etc.) to carry out such project – with the kind of intentionality discussed in my dissertation. What is also noteworthy, often to the detriment of this kind of work of Christian formation, is that, in light of denominational diversity, churches tend to work in silos. They do not always seek to work collaboratively with or in support of one another’s ministry to college students. While understandably so, a lack of ecumenical collaboration is a missed opportunity for the Church to foster the virtues discussed in my project so that young people might realize their academic vocation in light of who they are as part of this larger Body of believers.

to rethink a wall of separation between church and state that may be a bit more permeable might afford some interesting possibilities whereby a partnership between church groups and universities can be fostered. Rethinking the connection between faith and learning seems like a timely exercise for higher education in America. Moreover, a shared commitment between church and academy, paired with intelligible civic and educational justifications for such partnership, could provide students with living examples of civility, respect, and hospitality that can be fostered in the context of a democratic, pluralistic society (here exemplified in the context of public higher education). Likewise, the “doing” of such educational engagement as a partnership between these two societal agencies holds great promise of modeling to citizens what it means to enjoy and to contribute to the freedoms that all are afforded in a liberal state.

Most importantly, these two institutions should not underestimate the intellectual stimulation that such partnership can bring about. Together, the church and the university might help to address the risks and to formulate the possibilities of reintroducing religious virtues in academic projects, thus speaking directly to the yearning of many Christian exclusivists in the academy who see this connection to be vital to their formation. By aiming at mutual understanding in light of the particularities of each community, the church and the university can collaborate toward a critical outcome for American public higher education: the formation of students and their transformation into citizens who are capable of understanding how religious worldviews inform and impact the life and livelihood of a pluralistic, democratic society.

To that end, universities must first commit to preparing educators (faculty and
student affairs professionals) to engage with questions of meaning that are often informed by religious values. Educators should create safe spaces for them to grapple with the challenges and possibilities of including such a worldview in the educational experiences of students both in and out of the classroom. This can be done through professional development (e.g., workshops, conferences, training modules, etc.) with a view to intentionally preparing these educators to (a) understand religion as yet another important diversity marker and (b) to move toward incorporating such identities into scholarly activities, thus contributing to remaking the secular into a post-secular academy.

Such commitment undoubtedly requires the university to practice a sort of intellectual humility, for it must rely on those that not only know but who also live the virtues of their faith. The academy has options: it can welcome the church into its space and it can also rely on Christian educators who are already living these virtues within the academy. In that vein, universities may not need to look too far in order to find exemplars of Christian living that can help them to better understand the value of exclusivist religious convictions in these pluralistic learning environments. While I envision that such workshops would still be done by way of teaching “about” the church – a valuable academic/intellectual activity – a partnership with the church implies hospitality toward those that not only know about the church, but who in fact “are” the church. By modeling hospitality, both church and academy can share resources that might also amount to meaningful learning outcomes for all students, not just religious (Christian) students. While these practical suggestions present a number of risks, the possibilities behind them are worth trying.
All in all, this project is just the beginning of a larger project that must be undertaken by all members of the academy – students, faculty, administrators, both Christian and non-Christians – who are willing to honor the value that religion adds to our lives in the public academy and in the life of a democratic society. Most importantly, ascertaining what it means to live Christianly among strangers will require members of the church (ministers, educators, families) to attune themselves to what their exclusivist religious commitments mean for a culture that sees life through different lenses. In fact, the responsibility cannot be abdicated by anyone who sees the importance of making the American post-secular academy more inclusive of values that inform the thoughts and actions of many private citizens and that inevitably serve to either promote or hinder peace (among other public goods) in this and other civic and educational spaces.

While the obligations of universities and churches to form educated citizens will always remain asymmetrical in light of their incommensurable values and motives, through a spirit of hospitality these institutions may still come together in the promotion of a public good, starting by instilling in students a spirit of civility and respect toward others. Yet the greatest onus still remains on the church, as a community of faith and worship, for it cannot expect from the university only what it can do in preparing Christians to be the best representatives of the Christ whom they serve and proclaim by what they do and who they are.

Whether or not more room might be made for exclusivist Christians in this educational public is yet to be seen. But in spite of that, Christians must remain faithful witnesses by words and actions of a Gospel that is invitational, never coercive. Even in
the face of resistance, living Christianly among strangers calls the believer back to a life of civility, respect, and hospitality – indeed, a life of love for one’s neighbor – whereby he or she might become peacemakers in the public university. As Christians embrace a distinct theological pedagogy of how to “be the church in the post-secular American academy,” the church might better understand what the prophet Jeremiah meant by “seek the peace and prosperity of the city … because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

This is a timely challenge for the church and an exciting prospect for higher education as they seek, in distinctive ways, to promote the flourishing of humankind.

\[450\] Jer. 29:7 (NIV).
REFERENCES
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