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With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy of Education

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Michael L. Peterson; *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001. xii = 260 pp. \$18.95 (pbk), ISBN 0-268-01968-1).

Reviewed by Todd Ream, Ph.D and Amy Peeler

Despite the recent rise of interdisciplinary work in academe, the majority of research conducted within this enterprise continues to focus upon strands of knowledge within a particular discipline or sub-discipline. Studies in theology quickly turn into studies in soteriology, which quickly turn into studies done in soteriology within a particular theological tradition. While such efforts contributed to the proliferation of knowledge during the modern era, these efforts also allowed the issues that define the educational enterprise as a whole to slip into the realm of the pre-conscious. In his book entitled *With All Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy of Education*, Michael L. Peterson attempted to theologically frame these defining issues in such a way as to allow them to move back from the pre-conscious field of operation.

In order to conduct such an effort, Peterson drew upon resources found within philosophical theology. These resources were then operationalized into what he called digested scholarship or a form of scholarship that includes normative arguments built upon the evidence of personal reflection. As a result, Peterson argued, “every policy and every method, whether we realize it or not, is laden with some form of conception of what education is all about, and this concept arises from some fundamental philosophical viewpoint” (5). Peterson hoped that such a conversation would eventually reveal a philosophical worldview that drives perceptions of educational philosophy, policy, and practice. In the end, his goal was to equip the reader with a reliable and helpful way of thinking as a Christian about countless educational issues.

An overview of Peterson’s book reveals a discussion that begins with basic theological and philosophical terms and then quickly moves into conversations concerning a host of traditional and contemporary philosophies of education. In regard to traditional philosophies of education, Peterson reviewed movements such as idealism, naturalism, and Thomism. In addition, when Peterson reviewed contemporary philosophies of education he examined movements such as experimentalism, existentialism, philosophical analysis, and postmodernism. Each one of these traditional and contemporary philosophies of education received a review of its major theoretical commitments, an assessment of its impact on education, and a critical evaluation of the presence of those commitments in education.

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The result of this sense of critical evaluation led Peterson to contend that a need existed for the articulation of a Christian philosophy of education. His position concerning the need for such a perspective leads one to see his theological commitments to historical orthodoxy and theism. The employment of these commitments leads to a conversation that begins with the creation narrative and sees a heavy sense of import in the idea that human beings are bearers of the image of God. As a result, humanity possesses a drive to understand the created order and how education represents a formal effort to facilitate this understanding. When a Christian understanding of the educational enterprise is defined by a clear and present sense of philosophical understanding, it also provides for the best forms of educational practice.

This sense of understanding works to mediate the divide that has emerged between a host of dualisms. Christianity has access to the meaning that is found in God. As a result, a Christian philosophy of education focuses its efforts on the highest aims of a liberal education. For example, since all truth is now God's truth, the realms of faith and learning can no longer stand divided but can now become an integrated entity. This sense of understanding could also provide insights into issues such as professional education, ethics, and pedagogy. In the end, the fissures that modernity forged between many issues within education could find mediation and a new sense of focus as a result of the presence of a Christian philosophy of education. This new sense of focus would find its defining mark in a pursuit of intellectual excellence.

Peterson's development of a philosophy of education is in many ways valuable because of the fact that it successfully raises the question of the need for a Christian philosophy of education. Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with his evaluation of traditional and contemporary philosophies of education or with this theistic philosophy of education Peterson's work directs one's critical gaze beyond his or her own conscious practices in education to the pre-conscious theories that drive such practices. In addition, while Peterson does an admirable job of appropriating the rich detail of such theories, his work is also designed to be accessible to anyone interested in educational theory and especially a Christian philosophy of education. As a result, his charge concerning excellence is discernable to scholars in biology, chemistry, history, English, and music alike.

However, one should find him or herself wary of the critical approach that Peterson employs in certain portions of his work. The concerns that he raises with regard to the traditional and contemporary philosophies of education that he reviews emerge as a result of the internal limitations present in these systems. As a result, a Christian philosophy of education does not gain its standing by virtue of the critical power by which it engages these forms of understanding. By contrast, these forms of understanding are negated by internal limitation and a Christian philosophy of education emerges by default. In addition, Peterson's critical approach occasionally leads him to take on an apologetic air in terms of his sympathies for the canon of Western Civilization. Frequent affirmative references to the efforts of scholars such as Mortimer Adler lead to a blurring of the lines between Western Civilization and the Christian faith. While these two entities have made contributions to one another, critical concern must be reserved to demonstrate the space that separates them.

Michael L. Peterson's work concerning a Christian philosophy of education is an admirable foray into an important area that receives little to no attention. While





scholars in academe will find his work a challenge to their pre-conscious assumptions concerning education, his work is accessible to anyone interested in engaging the theoretical and practical implication of a Christian philosophy of education. While Peterson's work may not serve as a defining text in the field of philosophy of education, this text may have raised awareness for the need for a Christian conversation concerning philosophy of education. In the end, that type of contribution may prove to be invaluable.

