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The Moral Idea of a University: A Case Study

By Todd C. Ream and Perry L. Glanzer

Abstract

A common moral idea is necessary for not only providing shape to a particular college or university community but also for the cultivation of the virtues amongst students. However, what are the characteristics of an institution that models this type of approach? In order to answer this question, this article describes what we believe is the best exemplar from our study of 156 different Christian colleges and universities. Such a determination was made based upon an analysis of documents (academic catalogs, admissions view books, and student handbooks) gathered from all 156 institutions and then site visits made to nine institutions that demonstrated a significant level of investment in moral education. Ultimately, we argue that the moral idea of a university, particularly in the Christian sense, is viable if individual institutions are willing to establish practices that support the narratives afforded to them by their respective traditions.

Introduction

Standing as a prophet at the crossroads of modernity and postmodernity, Friedrich Nietzsche saw a world where the very notions of good and evil would become obsolete (1886/1966). Without belief in God and the story of Christianity which humanity in the West had derived from it, Nietzsche believed that the moral ideas guiding our existence would prove to be unworkable in both theory and practice. He worried that the West was heading into a crisis and that new ways of knowing were necessary. In the place of good and evil, Nietzsche envisioned his notion of the will to power (1901/1968). Instead of a dependence on what he viewed as Christianity's needlessly servile notion of the good, Nietzsche found moral significance in the beauty offered by individuals who faced life's challenges with only their force of will. Like Odysseus who strapped himself to the mast of his ship, moral significance for Nietzsche did not come through success or failure but through the exercise of one's will regardless of cost.

Although his notion of the will to power was never adopted on a large scale in the West, his initial prophecy about the crisis of moral knowledge appears to have come to fruition. More troubling than debates concerning matters such as abortion, capital punishment, and euthanasia is the reality that many communities lack a common moral idea by which they frame such debates. Education has not proven to be immune from such a dilemma. Julie Reuben (1996) ended her historical study of moral education in modern research universities by observing that "universities no longer have a basis from which to judge moral claims" (p. 269). The result is that moral education is often marginalized from the curriculum. For example, in *The Moral Collapse of the University* Bruce Wilshire (1990) claimed that despite his efforts in the university "to find a place to ask questions about goodness that seem so essential" he could not find it (p. xviii-xix). Certainly these authors would concur with Nietzsche's initial prophecy that knowledge

about good and evil is, in fact, in jeopardy. In particular, the education undertaken in most colleges and universities now lacks a common moral idea or framework.

We believe that we should not be surprised at this development. Since most liberal democratic nation-states have shed state churches, they have also shed the metaphysical narratives that provided a source of moral commonality and unity. We should not expect to find many state-sponsored universities with a common moral ideal in pluralistic liberal democracies (except perhaps at military academies). Instead, we would offer that such common moral ideas are best cultivated within educational communities keenly aware of and well defined by particular traditions. These common moral ideas are necessary for not only providing shape to a particular community but also for the cultivation of the virtues amongst students. A growing scholarly body of literature affirms this point (Lindholm et al., 2005; Kuh 2002; Hunter 2000).

What would be the characteristics of an institution that modeled this type of approach? In four parts, this article describes what we believe is the best exemplar from our study of 156 different Christian colleges and universities. The first part describes our study's theoretical framework—paying particular attention to what we mean by tradition and narrative. Second, we offer an overview of the literature concerning institutional efforts to embody particular moral ideas in their educational practices. Third, we describe the research methods employed in terms of both the document analysis and the interviews. Finally, we draw on both the documents and the interviews in the presentation of our case study to offer an overview of an institution that exemplifies what we would argue is the most comprehensive approach to Christian moral education. We conclude that in the face of Nietzsche's prophecy, we ultimately argue that the moral idea of a university, particularly in the Christian sense, is still viable if individual institutions are willing to establish practices that support the narratives afforded to them by their respective traditions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding our study is drawn primarily from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. Known most widely for revitalizing an interest in virtue as a moral idea, MacIntyre's work also touches on the larger social structures necessary for the cultivation of virtue. Like Nietzsche, MacIntyre saw how the intellectual trends of modernity relegated morality to the realm of the subjective by comparison to other forms of knowledge—such as modern science—which were deemed objective. Because the objective proved to be empirically verifiable, it proved to be of greater value. MacIntyre's way of eradicating a distinction such as the one separating the subjective from the objective was to return to a revised pre-modern understanding of moral knowledge and human functioning based upon Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), MacIntyre argues that moral enquiry in the West has passed through what he calls the encyclopaedic and the genealogical phases. The encyclopaedic phase may most closely be associated with modernity and the compulsion to reduce and classify knowledge by empirical methods. The underlying assumption in place at this point is that one can know the whole by objectively organizing all of its parts. In contrast, the genealogical phase may most closely be associated with postmodernity and the compulsion to unveil our motives in relation

to our efforts to discover and set forth knowledge. The underlying assumption is that efforts to know the whole in any fashion are not neutral in nature but are driven by a deeper and more subjective desire for power. Ironically, MacIntyre argues that the common thread shared by both phases is that they assume that knowing is an individual capacity and, at best, only vaguely contingent upon one's membership in a larger community.

In contrast, MacIntyre asserts that moral reasoning and knowledge is necessarily connected to various social identities. Within the Thomistic understanding, one understands what a good person is by understanding a human being's function or end. Since each human being is connected to a variety of social roles and identities, one can only understand one's end in light of these social identities. For example, we may be children, parents, cousins, professors, Americans, Christians and so forth. We inherit from the past understanding about what it means to be a good parent, son or daughter, or American. Moreover, our understanding of what a good person is involves ordering the importance of these identities. In this respect an individual's narrative understanding of his or her identity cannot be separated from these social communities.

The same holds true for universities. Universities are defined by particular social practices and identities that have narrative histories (e.g., American, state, liberal arts, research, Christian). Thus, any university community is defined by its relationship to any number of narratives and thus any number of traditions. As MacIntyre states, a living tradition "is an historically extended socially embodied argument precisely about the goods which constitute that tradition" (1984, p. 222). Living traditions develop narratives. A narrative, which is aptly described by Postman (1996), is "not any kind of story, but one that tells of origins and envisions a future, a story that constructs ideals, prescribes rules of conduct, provides a source of authority, and, above all, gives a sense of continuity and purpose" (pp. 5-6). Traditions are formed by communities attempting to both live out and pass along a particular narrative.

These forms of tradition do not follow the common understanding, such as that found in the song in *Fiddler on the Roof* in which a tradition imposes order on a community based upon a complacent willingness to do things the way things were always done. In contrast, MacIntyre views a living tradition as a continual argument. Thus, a university aware of its narrative and associated tradition and more importantly, seeking to practice it, would be "a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which the central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict" (1990, pp. 230-231). In other words, curricular and co-curricular educators alike would not only advance thought from a particular point of view but would also demonstrate a willingness to critically engage rival points of view. Fear over competing perspectives proves irrelevant as a result of the confidence and depth of knowledge a community possesses in the narrative qualities defined by its respective tradition. A tradition not only provides an arena of debate but also a means by which one can enter into debate. Virtue, both intellectual and moral, is best cultivated when students are invited to participate in tradition-formed practices.

Background Research Literature

Much of the research concerning moral education during the 1970s and 1980s sought to speak about moral education and moral development in universal terms (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg 1984). More recently, greater recognition was shown to the importance of particular identities and traditions for moral education. Discussions concerning moral education are currently dominated by individuals concerned with an individual's or institution's political identity. Various authors offer that our identity as members of the liberal democratic tradition can serve as a common basis for moral education in higher education (Keohane, 2006; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Shapiro, 2005; Colby et al., 2003). Whether conscious or not, they approach the tradition of liberal democracy as one that "inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain good and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of events or persons with admiration, pity, or horror" (Stout, 2004, p. 3).

Perhaps the most pronounced example of this approach is the book by Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, Elizabeth Beaumont and Jason Stephens, *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (2003). Colby et al. (2003) offer detailed examples of the perspectives and practices various schools use "when educating citizens is a priority" (pp. 49-95). In particular, they draw upon twelve case study campuses (Alverno College; California State University, Monterey Bay; the College of St. Catherine, Duke University, Kapi'olani Community College; Messiah College; Portland State University, Spelman College; Turtle Mountain Community College; Tusculum College; the United States Air Force Academy; and The University of Notre Dame). Although Colby et al. acknowledge the diverse identities of these institutions, they do not focus on the importance of their identities and associated moral traditions for moral and civic education. Colby et al. (2003) discuss the importance of moral and civic identity in one section (pp. 116-122), but their primary focus is on individual identity construction and formation.

However, if Alasdair MacIntyre is correct, we need to understand the fundamental importance of recognizing different institutional identities and traditions and the implications such recognition has for how colleges and universities approach moral education. When higher education institutions support more comprehensive forms of moral education, they do so by fostering commitment to a set of particular identities and traditions and then asking students to acquire virtues relevant to that commitment. For Christian colleges and universities, their respective religious traditions prove to be essential in this process. In essence, the moral idea of a university is best embodied by institutions where their respective pasts inform their current practices.

Study Design

We began our study of different visions of the moral idea of a university by undertaking an analysis of academic catalogs, admissions view books, and student handbooks among a group of 156 American Christian colleges and universities associated with two large partnerships—the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and the Lilly Fellows Network (LFN). When we began our study in 2003, the largest group included the CCCU institutions (103) followed by the LFN

institutions (70). We excluded the three Canadian CCCU institutions. In addition, fourteen schools were part of both coalitions. We chose these partnerships for a couple of reasons. First, these partnerships represent the same schools at which Lindholm et al. (2005) and Sax et al. (1998) indicated significant faculty support for moral education and at which Kuh (2002) found significant success with moral education. Thirty of the 156 schools were also listed in the *Templeton Guide's Honor Role of Colleges that Encourage Character Development* (1999). An additional thirty-three were cited in *The Templeton Guide's Honor Role* as having particularly outstanding character education programs, including a senior year seminar or an academic honesty program. In all, sixty-four (41%) were recognized as having a noteworthy program related to character education.

Second, these partnerships provide a diverse sample of religious colleges and universities. The LFN contains schools from a wide range of Catholic and Protestant traditions. The Catholic schools were started by various orders, lay groups, or parishes while the Protestant schools are often affiliated with different mainline and evangelical traditions. The CCCU schools are largely evangelical Protestant schools but they also include schools from a variety of religious traditions (e.g., Wesleyan, Reformed, Nazarene, Baptist, Quaker, Mennonite, Presbyterian, etc.).

We started by collecting academic catalogs, view books and student handbooks from each one of the 156 institutions. We then examined the documents to identify the attention given to ethics in the curricular and co-curricular dimensions of the institutions. Based on our findings, we chose nine schools that demonstrate a comprehensive interest in moral education in both the curricular and co-curricular: Bethel University (MN); Calvin College; Eastern Mennonite University; George Fox University; St. Olaf College; Seattle Pacific University; the University of Dallas; the University of St. Thomas (MN); and Xavier University (OH). We then made site visits to each one of these institutions to interview leaders who could describe and articulate the specifics of their moral idea in more detail. Such leaders included the chief academic officer, the officer in charge of general education, the chief student development officer, the officer in charge of residence life, the officer in charge of student discipline and the officer in charge of religious life. Afterwards, we analyzed the interviews, field notes and other additional documents using the process of open coding associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thus, we analyzed the responses to find general patterns, themes and categories.

Out of all of the institutions we surveyed in terms of our document analysis and our interviews, Calvin College proved to possess the most comprehensive moral idea. The following case study demonstrates the nature of the idea in place at Calvin College and why it proves to be significant in comparison to the other institutions we considered.

The Case Study

Background

Calvin College is an institution of both liberal and applied disciplines in Grand Rapids, Michigan. With a current enrollment of approximately 4,000 students, Calvin College is one of the larger members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Calvin is also a member of the Lilly Fellows Network. Perhaps more important than these relationships which place Calvin as an institution within

the larger Christian tradition is the relationship it shares with the Reformed tradition. Finding its origins in the work of John Calvin and the Protestant Reformation as it took place in and around Geneva, Switzerland in the 1500s, the Reformed tradition, in brief, emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the depravity of humanity and the unconditional nature of the grace which God grants to particular individuals. In the United States, the Reformed tradition is reflected in a number of denominations: the Christian Reformed Church (CRC); the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC); the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA); the Reformed Christian Church in America (RCA) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPC). In particular, Calvin College was established by members of what is referred to today as the CRC. Both the CRC and the RCA were initially established by Dutch immigrants to the United States. By comparison to the RCA, the CRC today continues to identify with more distinctiveness from its heritage while also participating in the larger community of evangelical Christianity.

Perhaps more important to the Calvin College community than the work of John Calvin is the work of Abraham Kuyper. A politician and an academic with an astute grasp of theology, Kuyper came to the United States in 1898 to offer the Stone Lectures at Princeton University in which he argued for the development of a Christian worldview that could compete with modernity. Following his delivery of these lectures, Kuyper visited a number of Reformed institutions in the United States, including Calvin College. Over time, his injunction translated into the calling to integrate faith and learning. In many ways, the following case study looks at how the integration of faith and ethical learning is lived out at Calvin College. However, the widespread influence of this injunction is evident via its presence in the documents generated by a number of institutions within the CCCU and the LFN. Any number of institutions, including institutions from the Baptist, Quaker, and Wesleyan traditions, now incorporate this phrase into materials such as mission statements, academic catalogs, admissions view books and student handbooks.

While Calvin College benefited greatly from the work of Abraham Kuyper, the institution has also benefited greatly from the willingness of its own faculty and administrators to explore what it means to integrate faith and learning. Although one could find such examples in a number of academic departments, Calvin's philosophy department has likely proven to be the most influential. What makes this department significant is the way a number of its members draw on the key tenets of the Reformed tradition as they practice their craft. Perhaps the most influential member of this department to date is Nicholas Wolterstorff. A professor at Calvin College and then at Yale University, one of Wolterstorff's initial contributions to the integration of faith and learning was the way he argued that beliefs make a difference in terms of how one encounters the world. For example, in *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (1999), Wolterstorff argued that Christian commitment "involves believing certain things—among others, those things taught in the creeds. Thus, though authentic Christian commitment is not to be identified with believing certain things, it does in fact have a belief content" (p. 74). If Wolterstorff's work represents the influence that the Reformed tradition is having on analytical philosophy, the work of James K. A. Smith has come to represent the influence that the Reformed tradition is having on Continental philosophy. For example, in *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, Smith contends

that through the Church “we find that the role of Scripture is central, not just as the Text that mediates our understanding of the world but also as the Story that narrates our role in it” (p. 76).

The distinct nature of the way that the Reformed tradition has influenced the work of scholars at Calvin and the Calvin College community as a whole has drawn the interest of a number of other higher education scholars. For example, in *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (2001), Robert Benne argues that “It is hard to imagine a more religiously intense and theologically literate—or perhaps religiously literate and theologically intense—church tradition than that of the Christian Reformed Church” (p. 69). Benne goes on to note that part of what makes Calvin distinct is that “Calvin stresses that Christian claims cannot simply remain in the heart; they must also be active in the intellectual processes of the mind” (pp. 71-72). Echoing MacIntyre’s notion of constrained disagreement, Benne notes that “even the immigrant Dutch farmers of the CRC were versed enough to discuss and debate with other laity and challenge their local clergy” (p. 69). Given the theoretical framework we employed in this study, one question which emerges is what tradition gives rise to a narrative so important to scholars and administrators at a place such as Calvin? The answer resides in the Biblical narrative of creation, fall and redemption.

In *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (2002), Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., the former Dean of the Chapel at Calvin and now president of Calvin Theological Seminary, argues that “learning is a spiritual calling: properly done, it attaches us to God” (p. xi). In his book designed for students enrolled in first-year seminar courses, Plantinga offers that “The point of all this learning is to prepare to add one’s own contribution to the supreme reformation project, which is God’s restoration of all things that have been corrupted by evil” (p. xii). As a result of human sin, creation fell from grace. However, redemption is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The purpose of a Calvin education is to help students find their place in this story and then cultivate the virtues that will make it possible for them to faithfully participate in these redemptive efforts. Plantinga commits a chapter to each one of the components which come together to form this narrative. He also claims that within this narrative, “An education is something you have to achieve; it’s almost something you have to win. I mean that a seasoned Christian to the world and human life requires real struggle with real alternative approaches” (pp. 124-125). Creation’s place at the beginning of this narrative and redemption’s place at the end of this narrative emphasize God’s sovereignty. However, Plantinga wants to underscore that redemption makes demands that one engage all of God’s world. A college education is designed to prepare one for participation in such a sense of engagement.

Documents

The best place to begin with a review of key documents generated by members of the Calvin College community in relation to this narrative and the Reformed tradition is with the institution’s mission: “Calvin College is a comprehensive liberal arts college in the Reformed tradition of historic Christianity. Through our learning we seek to be agents of renewal in the academy, Church, and society. We pledge fidelity to Jesus Christ, offering our hearts and lives to do God’s work in God’s world (Calvin College,

2002b, p. 7). The mission statement adopted by Calvin College not only places this particular community within the context of the larger Christian tradition but also within the Reformed strand of the Christian tradition. In its *Expanded Statement of Mission*, the college acknowledges that “Calvin’s confessional identity arises from a specific community of faith, a particular people of God who continue to seek obedient discipleship in a confessional way” (2004a, p. 11). This reference to a specific community of faith not only points to the Reformed strand of the Christian tradition but also to the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the denomination which “gave birth to the college out of its desire to practice Christian faith more effectively” (Calvin College, 2004a, p. 11). To the credit of the CRC, education was perceived to be an inextricable part of a faithful Christian life.

If the mission statement proves to be the most central document in an institution’s life, perhaps the most widely circulated document communicating such a message to future members of the community, particularly students, is the admissions view book. Each year, colleges and universities mail untold numbers of admissions view books to prospective students. Calvin College is no different in this case. Part of the packet sent to students indicating an interest in attending Calvin College includes a view book with the usual array of full-color pictures, lists of impressive offerings and a heartfelt invitation to visit the campus. What makes Calvin’s admissions view book unique is embedded in the text—a text which not only points to the Reformed tradition but also to the narrative of creation, fall and redemption. On the third page, students are introduced to this narrative via a set of propositions which read “The Reformed Tradition: God created *all things*, and they were good. *All things* have fallen from that original goodness. Christ, who has redeemed *all things*, eventually will restore them.” This section ends by offering that Calvin is a community which aids in “the [Holy] Spirit’s work of restoration by seeking to make all things better” (Calvin College, 2002a, p. 3). Prospective students are thus invited to think about themselves as participating in such efforts of renewal.

One can rightfully wonder whether such language informs the actual practices which take place on campus. The landscape of American higher education is littered with institutions which possess names indicating a religious identity. Some of these institutions even possess mission statements and admissions view books which also make reference to a religious heritage. However, such assertions concerning a tradition become present in an enlivened narrative when they appear in the requirements offered in an academic catalog and in a student handbook. Perhaps even more important is when this narrative reaches across both of these documents and thus even integrates both the curricular and the co-curricular efforts. At Calvin, the Reformed tradition as interpreted through the narrative of creation, fall and redemption proves to not only be a slogan but provides such an integrative force.

Echoing the title of Cornelius Plantinga’s book, the section on the core curriculum in the Calvin College Academic Catalog offers that “the core equips students for a life of informed service in contemporary society at large, for an engagement with God’s world” (Calvin College, 2002b, p. 33). To engage the world in such a manner is understood to participate as an agent of renewal. In order to do so, one will need “to cultivate such dispositions such as patience, diligence, honesty, charity, and hope that make for a life well-lived – of benefit to others and pleasing to God” (Calvin College, 2002b, p. 33).

As a result, one finds in the Calvin College catalog courses such as “CAS 352: Communication Ethics.” In this course, “Christian positions are reviewed and applied” while examining “the moral dimensions of human communication” (Calvin College, 2002b, p. 88). However, in order to take such a course as a communications major, one must first take Biblical Foundations I, Developing a Christian Mind, and Philosophical Foundations—all courses in the core curriculum.

In the Academic Catalog, the Student Development section makes reference to a similar aspiration where it acknowledges that “Calvin encourages students to apply a Christian worldview to all areas of life, including popular culture” (Calvin College, 2002b, p. 13). Such an understanding is communicated in greater detail in the student handbook. Echoing the emphasis on redemption, the welcome statement acknowledges that members of the Calvin community seek “to be agents of reclamation, reconciliation, and renewal.” (Calvin College, 2007, p. i).

Such an emphasis is present in a number of places throughout the student handbook but is perhaps most present in the section on “Building Community.” For Calvin, community is defined by an impulse “to weld its participants together around beliefs that all are made in God’s image and that members of Christ’s church need one another, such that their educational endeavors, interpersonal relationships, and personal actions might reflect the Lord’s provisions more closely” (Calvin College, 2007, p. 21). This understanding brings forward the reality that redemption is not an individual effort but one initiated by a group. Reflective of the conviction that Christians are called to live together as the body of Christ, Calvin recognizes that “Building community doesn’t occur automatically; it requires commitment and perseverance” (Calvin College, 2007, p. 33). Although curricular efforts such as the core curriculum and co-curricular efforts such as residence life ask students to participate in different sets of practices, at Calvin these practices are both shaped by the same narrative framework and tradition. At such a point, not only the integration of the curricular and the co-curricular become possible but such a relationship also has the possibility of providing a viable understanding of moral formation.

Finally, a number of the larger concerns educational communities are called to address demand such a sense of integration. To sequester such concerns into one realm or the other creates a truncated response that students are too often able to discern. One such concern facing both the Church and the larger society in our time is racial reconciliation. A student can take a philosophy class where justice proves to be a common theme. In the same sense, a student can live in a residence hall where justice also proves to be a common theme. However, such lessons may never meet and thus prove to have a real and formative level of impact unless they are defined by a larger tradition and a larger narrative framework. Again, for the Calvin community the Reformed tradition offers the narrative of creation, fall and redemption.

When it comes to racial reconciliation, the presence of this narrative gave the Calvin community the ability to develop a document entitled *From Every Nation*. This document offers both curricular and co-curricular educators a means of thinking through matters such as racial justice, reconciliation and cross-cultural engagement. In those contexts, the commitment to redemption is brought to life in terms of a commitment to “Restoration—the establishment of a genuinely multicultural community” (Calvin College, 2004b, p. 30). As a result, “The immediate challenge is to

create an environment in which this can become a living reality within the framework of a shared Reformed tradition” (Calvin College, 2004b, p. 11). A truncated narrative can only speak so much truth into situations where restoration is needed. However, a comprehensive understanding of a narrative such as creation, fall and redemption thus allows lessons from philosophy classes and residence halls to forge an integrated front in an effort to create a community called to live as the body of Christ.

Interviews

Many institutions can provide a comprehensive understanding of the moral idea of a university in their printed literature. However, the real challenge comes on two other fronts. First, does that idea found in print translate in terms of an idea held by members of the community, particularly key curricular and co-curricular leaders? Second, if that idea translates, do both curricular and co-curricular leaders hold that idea in common? The only way to explore whether such an idea holds true in these capacities is to conduct structured interviews with these leaders. Once again, we found that the Reformed tradition as embodied in the narrative of creation, fall and redemption provided a substantial foundation for the moral idea of a university as found in the Calvin College community.

One place to begin with an overview of the results of these interviews is to turn to the remarks of one co-curricular educator who referred to the Reformed tradition as embodied in the life of the CRC as a “Thinky People.” In essence, they are people who take the time to think deeply about how matters of doctrine shape and form their existence. This same administrator then offered that this “thinky” disposition translates in terms of how “creation, fall, redemption, restoration belief” is shared with students. Students at Calvin are invited to participate in a context of what is referred to as one of responsible freedom. Without a larger narrative framework, a concept such as responsible freedom can translate into any number of moral ideas. At Calvin, however, the narrative framework of creation, fall and redemption helps students to share in a common understanding. Referencing students, this same co-curricular administrator offered that “there are a lot of decision[s] in life that you may not agree with but because you have developed a sense of integrity and moral formation, you’re going to decide to abide by that and conform your behavior in a certain way.” When a student fails to exercise his or her freedom within the Calvin community in a responsible manner, this same co-curricular administrator offered that the student is asked to participate in any number of practices designed to facilitate restoration.

Mirroring these remarks, a curricular administrator offered that one expression of the moral idea of a university found at Calvin College stems from the narrative of creation, fall and redemption as found in Plantinga’s *Engaging God’s World*. As a result, this administrator offered that the standard ethics class where students read and write about various ethical propositions is proving to be insufficient. In contrast, this administrator offered that at Calvin they are attempting “to have students more actively engaged in learning. So, I mean just that . . . [the] idea is not enough . . . that people have to struggle with how they put [such ideas] into practice has been a really strong part of our work here.” In essence, he argued that Calvin is “working on seeing [how] theory and practice form [students] – both are related.” As a result, such an effort not only applies to curricular efforts but co-curricular efforts as well. In the end, this same curricular

administrator contended that particularly when it comes to efforts in relation to moral formation, this idea is not only at work in the core curriculum but “is being picked up by student life too.”

Finding a way of facilitating such efforts in a community which enrolls approximately 4,000 students does not prove to be an easy venture. Another curricular administrator offered that “it’s hard! We have to have campus wide conversations.” Fostering an appreciation for the tradition and thus a particular narrative framework comes through deliberate efforts in a number of areas. For example, this same administrator offered that “Right now . . . we have a whole lot of people working on care theory.” Various faculty members are seeking to integrate how care theory makes a difference in how they teach and write in their related fields. Such efforts are not limited to isolated academic disciplines “but in how we teach love and caring across the curriculum.”

This same curricular administrator offered that such efforts cannot end with just the curriculum but must also be woven into co-curricular efforts. One example of such an effort is found in the investment Calvin has made in service-learning. Service-learning at Calvin is viewed as a great aid in cultivating an engaged campus. In the end, this same curricular administrator wants to know “how are we an engaged campus? Not just by sending students out and using the community but again by partnering. So we work hard on that and we read a lot of articles about that too.” Such an effort leaves one with the impression that the boundaries between classroom experiences and out-of-class experiences are difficult to distinguish. In addition, the surrounding community of Grand Rapids is not simply a diminutive object in need of service but a valued partner in the larger effort of redemption.

Another area at Calvin reinforcing the notion that theory is not simply the domain of the classroom is orientation. One co-curricular administrator offered that “I spend time during orientation talking about Reformed kinds of ideas and it makes a difference in terms of the way we do our business here, our educating.” For this co-curricular administrator, these ideas then translate into how student activities are initiated on the campus. Although Calvin brings a host of films and musical artists to campus that express a wide variety of views, if Calvin students are going to learn how to serve as agents of redemption in the world, they need to learn to think through ideas and practices different from their own. Some of these ideas and practices may even offer evidence of the fallen nature of the world. This same co-curricular administrator offered the showing of the movie *Fahrenheit 9/11* as an example. Although many people had reservations about the film, Calvin chose to show it. This co-curricular administrator asked, “How do you think the average student here takes *Fahrenheit 9/11*? The Reformed worldview may or may not endorse some of the arguments they [the film’s director, Michael Moore, and his colleagues] make. It’s just a process of engagement and critique.”

Conclusion

To the credit of both the curricular and co-curricular administrators that serve the Calvin community, if one removed their references to particular programmatic efforts, it might prove difficult to make any distinctions between these two segments of Calvin administration. Facilitating such a common voice is a well-cultivated appreciation for

the Reformed tradition and its narrative of creation, fall and redemption. Regardless of whether one reads their printed materials, is in the classroom or in the residence hall, this framework provides a theological foundation for the moral idea embodied by the Calvin College community.

Further research efforts will need to subsequently assess whether a correlation exists between the strength of such an understanding and the moral formation exhibited by students. Our speculation is that such a correlation exists. Regardless, communities such as Calvin College offer evidence to the fact that good and evil are not obsolete. The moral idea of a university still exists even if such an idea is most appropriately plural and not singular—reflecting the traditions and narrative frameworks defining any number of campuses. The question for campuses that exist beyond the Reformed tradition and its narrative of creation, fall and redemption is whether they will also deliberately seek to draw on their traditions in the same way as the Calvin College community.

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