

Seeking Christian Values in the Humanities at Christian Higher Education

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1. What are the humanities?

The humanities can be described as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language to understand and record our world. These modes of expression have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall under the humanities umbrella. Knowledge of these records of human experience gives us the opportunity to feel a sense of connection to those who have come before us, as well as to our contemporaries.

Humanities are academic disciplines that study human culture. In the Middle Ages, the term contrasted with divinity and referred to what is now called classics, the main area of secular study in universities at the time. Today, the humanities are more frequently contrasted with natural, physical and sometimes social sciences as well as professional training.

The “human condition” is not a uniform, undifferentiated phenomenon but an ever-changing compound of specific situations and experiences. When we study these, our immediate purpose is to understand their peculiar textures, to illuminate specific sequences of events, to explain individual patterns of culture and unique works of art. So attempting to make generalizations about the humanities poses special challenges, since the subject matter of the humanities tends by its very nature to resist generalization.

Disciplines of the humanities such as philosophy, history, and literary studies offer models and methods for addressing dilemmas and acknowledging ambiguity and paradox. They can help us face the tension between the concerns of individuals and those of groups and promote civil and informed discussion of conflicts, placing current issues in historical perspective. They also give voice to feeling

and artistic shape to experience, balancing passion and rationality and exploring issues of morality and value. The study of the humanities provides a venue in which the expression of different interpretations and experiences can be recognized and areas of common interest explored.

The humanities provide general knowledge about the best accomplishments of human beings throughout history. Learning the works of Shakespeare, Plato, and Beethoven is part of the humanities. The humanities make a person educated, but not necessarily for a specific profession. Most people require a more specific area of study beyond the humanities.

The word humanity comes to English from the Latin *humanitas*, which first shows up with the writer Cicero. He used it to describe good people, that is to say “civilized” human beings. It entered English usage in the 14th century.

As traditionally understood, the humanities embrace those branches of learning that are concerned with aspects of human culture or, more broadly, the human condition. The issues that concern students and scholars in the humanities ultimately come down to the question of what it means to be human. But of course that embraces an extremely wide range of possibilities, covering all sorts of potential disciplines, types of subject matter, and methodologies, so that it is sometimes difficult in practice to determine precisely what should qualify and what should not.

The main definition of the singular form — humanity — refers to being “humane” and is synonymous with civilized and well-educated. Humane people recognize and practice concepts like “hospitality” and “justice” even if precise definitions might vary in different times and places. The word also refers to a collective — the human race.

Used in the plural — humanities — it usually becomes “the humanities” or a field of study within university settings, a group of “subjects” scholars study, discuss and debate including history, music, art, languages, philosophy, religion, and literature. The humanities have been part of the curriculum since the very beginning of universities.

When we study the humanities we study people, only not psychologically or biologically (although those fields do come into it from time to time). Mainly we're learning about how people in earlier ages or faraway places created the world they lived in, and how the world they lived in made them the people they were. And while studying the many different subjects contained within the humanities, we inevitably end up learning about more than simply past or distant cultures. We end up learning how we create the world we live in now, and how the world we live in makes us the kind of people we are.

According to the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act: "The term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."

The specific disciplines of the humanities explore the heart of the human experience by encouraging reflection on its nature and value and by encompassing time-tested methods of inquiry - dialogue, historical and logical analysis, critical interpretation and scholarly investigation. The humanities are ways of thinking about what is human about our diverse histories, values, ideas, words and dreams. They help to shape individuality and community, and thus pose fundamental questions about the past, present and future. The humanities inspire us to ask who we are and what our lives should mean. They ask us to place ourselves in the worldwide context of humankind and to understand commonalities and differences.

Through exploration of the humanities, we learn how to think creatively and critically, to reason, and to ask questions. Because these skills allow us to gain new insights into everything from poetry and paintings to business models and politics, humanistic subjects have been at the heart of a liberal arts

education since the ancient Greeks first used to them to educate their citizens.

Research into the human experience adds to our knowledge about our world. Through the work of humanities scholars, we learn about the values of different cultures, about what goes into making a work of art, about how history is made. Their efforts preserve the great accomplishments of the past, help us understand the world we live in, and give us tools to imagine the future.

Today, humanistic knowledge continues to provide the ideal foundation for exploring and understanding the human experience. Investigating a branch of philosophy might get you thinking about ethical questions. Learning another language might help you gain an appreciation for the similarities in different cultures. Contemplating a sculpture might make you think about how artist's life affected her creative decisions. Reading a book from another region of the world might help you think about the meaning of democracy. Listening to history course might help you to have a better understanding of the past, while at the same time giving you a clearer picture of what the future holds.

2. Humanities Crisis?

Parents and students have legitimate practical concerns. Will graduates get jobs with decent incomes? Will they be happy and successful? Will they ever move out of their parents' basement and into a place of their own?

Multiple articles over the last few years have proclaimed that "humanities fall from favor," "interest fades in the humanities," or that the humanities are "under strain around the globe." Commentators tend to attribute the decline to two major developments: significant funding cuts to history, literature, and arts programs at public universities and political criticism of the humanities. Republican governors have proposed cuts to humanities departments at state universities to rebalance funding towards more obviously "practical" subjects.

We live in a crisis-strewn culture; no use pointing out that we are healthier and less likely to die

prematurely of disease or from acts of violence than ever before; better housed and better fed; better provided with the means of entertaining ourselves; and so on. The human mind is less attuned to contentment than anxiety; it's one reason why politicians are always complaining that the electorate is ungrateful, taking past benefits for granted, punishing governments for not making life still better, always ready to blame the government for some hitherto unperceived threat. No doubt there is some explanation for this, buried deep in the living conditions of our most distant ancestors, but it does make us prone to panic in the face of uncertainty.

In education, crises in the humanities sometimes alternate with crises in the sciences, crises in higher education with crises in schools, sometimes they cumulate, not least in the minds of critics lamenting the wholesale collapse of intellectual and cultural standards from kindergarten to graduate school. The most obvious feature of educational crises, however, is that they are never resolved in the terms in which they are presented; we just get tired of being anxious about whatever issue has exercised us and move on to the next.

Humanities in Korea

A University students protest the school's reform plans that will merge certain humanities departments. The university recently announced an organizational overhaul that will merge several humanities departments, touching off a debate on the "crisis of humanities." At the center of discussion was the school's decision to merge the Korean Language and Literature Department with the Department of Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language. The university students majoring in Korean literature cried foul, saying that the school's decision was unilateral and that it made no sense to integrate departments with such different curriculums. The university's choice, however, is not an isolated one. Across the nation, Korean universities are scrambling to shut down unpopular humanities departments. Some Universities are reportedly planning to eliminate departments which receive the

poorest scores in internal evaluation.

The trend against humanities departments at colleges is partly due to the dismal employment rate of graduates of literature, philosophy, history and other academic disciplines that have no explicit link to a career. According to a survey by Job Korea, 70.3 percent of respondents who graduated with humanities-related degrees said their major did not help them get a job.

Most students favor business administration and other popular majors that boost their chances of landing a job.

The near-collapse of humanities as legitimate academic courses in higher education, however, might be overstated. The humanities have faced trouble in recent years but there are signs of hope, as the public is increasingly drawn to the study of humanities as part of lifelong education and self-improvement efforts.

On some campuses in Korea, new courses and programs focused on humanities that target the general public are popping up. For instance, state-run Seoul National University and other prestigious colleges are introducing special humanities courses. Similarly, online education is discovering the value of humanities subjects.

As for the conflicting interpretations about the status of humanities in Korea, the two different views are closely interconnected. The fundamental problem behind it (the crisis of humanities) is a social system that makes its members compete all the time, whether it is for college admission or job seeking. And the current education system deprived students of opportunities to study humanities and the unfulfilled desire to study the subjects resurfaced as they got older, a process unnatural.

This crisis in the humanities will be unremitting not because there are no solutions but because the luster of the humanities will not be restored by means of the "Politics of Virtue." Our students must understand the foundations of their cultural heritage; they must be serious readers; they must engage

in substantive research that necessitates the difficult process of critical thinking even if it challenges their worldview. This necessarily means returning to the foundational building blocks of the civilization based upon rigorous standards of academic excellence. The humanistic disciplines must jettison the pseudo-Marxist catechism of social justice and postmodern nihilism in order that our students resume the pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness, the firmament of the authentic canon.

But, of course, this is precisely what the commission on the Humanities would never acknowledge. For that would require a fundamental change in worldview. Without a seismic change in values that venerates historical cultures of excellence in conjunction with a celebration of scientific, professional, and technical achievement, there can be no restoration of the humanities. The migration of students into business, professional, engineering, and technological areas of expertise will continue.

Teaching should be an obvious solution for many humanities majors. But secure and well-paying tenure-track jobs are disappearing, with at least half of college teachers now part-time adjuncts, many of whom, even when they combine several academic jobs, fail to make a living wage.

Preserving the Humanities

As I continue working at the university, someday I hope to convince my colleagues to take on the responsibility to preserve liberal education. The faculty in the humanities needs to know the culture, values and expectations of their students, and change its teaching techniques accordingly. To help sustain interest in the humanities education, the academics should learn as much as possible about who their students are, how they learn and what teaching methods would be the most effective with them; and should provide the teaching of “critical inquiry,” challenge their minds with controversy and encourage debates on ethical, social, philosophical and topical issues.

I know that professors and advisors cannot control the current policies prevalent in education today – those driven by economical concerns – but we can predict that the change in curriculum will not be beneficial for the humanities. Corporatization and research continue to drive higher education in the

country, but I strongly believe in the importance of teaching the humanities to students regardless of their major concentration, and that despite the utilitarian goals of most modern education, the humanities education still plays an enormous role in shaping the intellect, the university, and the community. I am optimistic about the number of students enrolled in the humanities; it makes me believe that liberal education is not completely lost. As I work with students more closely, and hopefully teaching them in the future, I look forward to igniting interest in the liberal arts by offering a creative and intellectually challenging experience.

3. Response to God's Call to serve others in the Humanities Scholarship

There can be a difference between becoming a scholar in humanities and becoming a teacher of humanities. Although clearly related, they are two different projects. They involve different skills, and perhaps different passions. One could be an excellent scholar and a very poor teacher of humanities; one could be a very good teacher of humanities, but only a mediocre scholar. Ideally, of course, one would be a good teacher and a good scholar in the humanities. But surely one does not guarantee the other.

I teach at a Christian university. That university values what it calls the "integration of faith and learning." The idea is that the religious identity of the university hangs on more than creating a certain atmosphere on campus; more than holding chapel services for students and faculty. The religious identity should permeate the instruction and research conducted at the college as well. In class professors should strive to make connections between the articles of Christian faith and the content of their discipline.

There is some justification for the "integration of faith and learning." First of all, though there is a unity of truth there is nevertheless a diversity in our ways of knowing that makes the unity of truth a

difficult and demanding achievement for us humans. Corresponding to the diverse ways of knowing there is a diversity in the ways of speaking, of asking and answering questions. This diversity in ways of knowing and speaking provides a perennial challenge for the Christian scholar, and sets many traps for the student who would ignore it; those who would know God by the methods of the natural sciences and those who would understand scientific matters through scriptural revelation share a common record of ill-success. So as a matter of fact the humanities scholars are confronted by diverse and apparently unconnected bodies of knowledge achieved through different means; it is precisely and only by "integration" such diverse bodies of knowledge that the vision of a unity of truth is gained.

Another reason why a process of integration is necessary is found in the actual situation in the various academic disciplines. It hardly needs pointing out that the leadership of the academic disciplines is not in the hands of those who share the vision that "all truth is God's truth." While many Christian colleges provide a good undergraduate education and some offer limited graduate study, leadership in the various academic fields is vested in "prestige" graduate programs at leading secular universities. Christian faculty members, having been trained in such institutions, have typically received little or no guidance in relating their graduate training to their Christian faith. As they begin their professional careers, then, they are in fact confronted with two "separate and disjoint bodies of knowledge and belief," simply because the graduate program has not assisted, and may have actively discouraged, the establishment of connections between them. Under these circumstances, to object to talk of "integration" is simply to deny the realities of the situation.

For the Christian university, faith-learning integration is not only a theological but an educational necessity. It is necessary for the reason that education cannot be carried out in the most effective way without some broad framework of common assumptions which structure and motivate the curriculum. This does not imply that the most effective education is one which is controlled by rigid dogma, with alternative views excluded from consideration. Christian universities generally recognize, both in theory

and in practice, that good education takes place as students are challenged by a wide variety of conflicting views. It is arguable that a Christian university with a commitment to faith-learning integration is in an especially strong position to encourage vigorous inquiry among its students.

Christianity is a faith that affirms the value, indeed necessity, of human cultural activity. It tells us that we are made in the image of a creating God and as such are called to exercise our own creativity. This is certainly a key implication of the famous "cultural mandate" of Genesis 1:28 to "subdue and replenish the earth." We, Christians can hardly afford to ignore the signals we receive from this larger environment. However, I believe it important that Christian faculty do not simply take the pluralism and incoherence around us as a given. We should neither embrace the status quo uncritically nor attempt to ignore and avoid it. Our task, ultimately, is to model a better way. What we seek is an educational practice that does not beg the question of its ultimate purpose but instead serves the goal of enabling Christians to live effectively in contemporary society. We are called to this pattern of living in a variety of roles. As teachers or scholars we are responsible for providing students with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind and heart necessary to pursue their vocations in the world. As Christian academics we are called to address the concerns of our particular disciplines, the concerns of the academy, and the problems and perplexities of society at large.

The humanities offer one important set of vehicles for pursuing these goals. In particular, they invite students into a fuller knowledge of the world and of the self. Focusing as they do on the various dimensions of what it means to be a human, the humanities raise many of the critical issues that an expansive pursuit of self-knowledge inevitably poses. The habits of thought typical of the disciplines in the humanities are not only useful tools for achieving Christian purposes but also are themselves authentic reflections of a Christian worldview.

The humanities matter because they are central to many of the goals of Christian education. The questions they address help to enhance knowledge of both self and the world, illuminated by knowledge

of God. And the humanities matter because their focus on the shape of human experience and the richly varied textures of human culture resonates so deeply with core elements of the Christian faith and worldview.

The humanities have implications for the way all of us, regardless of discipline, approach the teaching task. In teaching, the human focus is ultimately crucial. Whatever our field of expertise, we are essentially in the business of educating persons. Subject matter, however important, is a means to an end, not the end itself; the key relationship is teacher-student, not teacher-subject. In our fast-paced, professionalized world, this is easy to overlook, and it is as true for those in the humanities as in so-called professional disciplines. Whatever its high-flown intellectual claims, the study of philosophy, literature or history can only too easily degenerate into a glorified form of vocational training, an exercise in which recognized professionals (faculty) simply pass along the lore and tools of the trade to would-be professionals (students), at the expense of deeper educational purposes.

All serious Christian scholar-teachers once might address themselves to the problem of how their faith should find specific expression in their professional activity. Generally speaking, the crucial test of a Christian perspective is not that it necessarily be distinctive, in the sense of standing apart from other approaches, but that it be authentic, in the sense of being fully faithful to reality as faith reveals it to us.

Like everyone in higher education, scholar-teachers in the humanities contend with an ever-changing array of pedagogical challenges and opportunities. Some of these are all but universal, while some are more or less peculiar to the humanities. As contemporary culture grows increasingly visual, the humanities face a dual pedagogical challenge. They must work to promote visual literacy, training students to become critical “readers” of image-based communication, while at the same time seeking to maintain traditional habits of literacy among students who may be more inclined to spend their time watching television or playing video games than reading books. What does seem clear is that we face both challenges and opportunities as we attempt to integrate new and old forms of communication in

ways that honor the complexities of the human condition and foster the sort of reflection and insight that the humanities have traditionally sought to cultivate.

Christian scholars believe that the Spirit of God is at work in history and natural world, and that we are in the midst of a great spiritual struggle. They believe that the Creator God has a universal law to order our common existence, and that god-fearing people have a duty to seek the good of the earth and all who dwell therein. They have not become cynical about ideas or values. In an era that scoffs at big questions and treats intellectual debate like a power game rather than a search for truth, Christians can become good scholars or fine teachers. Christian scholars live the question of what it means to do their studies *Coram Deo*, and they see the questions they struggle with as having a larger significance. They also know that there is a purpose to the human existence, and that there is a direction to history as well.

Strategies for Christian teachers or scholars in the humanities

What should we be doing as Christian scholars? You can give me some advices of what Christian scholarship can accomplish, so we can try to make a difference. I would say some familiar policy for what we are doing as Christian scholars.

1) Focus on Christian matters

One of the most important contributions that Christian scholars in the humanities have made is in taking religion seriously as a factor in their fields of inquiry. there is a blind spot in contemporary academic researches when they are come to religion, largely because many scholars do not try to study Christianity as being important or being concerned. Christian scholars, however, can come up with

some strikingly studies, for they realize religion matters, especially the Christian subjects and take it seriously as a mission or calling.

A great deal of studies are being produced by Christian scholars in the humanities, and I think it is encouraging that the studies are showing signs of recovery.

2) Find peace of mind

Many studies in the humanities are open to moral judgement and prescriptive ways. Christian scholars are called to care deeply about the common good of the societies in what they live, and of human welfare more generally. At a time when the dechristianized learning environments tend to corrode moral devotion, Christian scholars can find shape in their searching for what is good, wise and positive, examining the roles and responsibilities of the humanities in the society.

The inquiries in the humanities, which aim at making a thoughtful and valuable contribution to the developing conversation about how to live together with justice, social equity and good will, are worthy of the effort of Christian scholars.

3) Transform our humanity

The Bible teaches that God created human beings in His image. This means that God enables us to have some understanding of Him and of His vast and complex design. Our human nature reflects some of God's attributes, although in a limited way. We love because we are made in the image of the God who is love (1 John 4:16). Because we are created in His image, we can be compassionate, faithful, truthful, kind, patient, and just. In us, these attributes are distorted by sin, which also resides in our nature. We now live in a fallen world, and all creation "groans" under the consequences of our sin

(Romans 8:22). To live in a fallen world means we struggle with sin on a daily basis. We experience heartache and pain. We witness natural disasters and staggering loss. Injustice, inhumanity, and falsehood seem to hold sway. Discord and trouble are commonplace. None of this was God's original plan for humanity. The good news is that God does not intend His world to forever groan. Through Jesus Christ, God is repairing His creation, restoring man's proper dominion in caring for God's world (Romans 8:18-21). Christian scholars in the humanities, therefore, can do eloquent and reawakening studies in order to put forward understandings of what it means to be human that are faithful to the biblical vision.

We can find ways to transform our humanity in our confused and distorted culture in the doctrines of Common Grace and General Revelation, building networks of encouragement, scholarly support and contributions in God's Grace.

Conclusion

The tradition of Christian studies in the humanities is time-honored as the church, and the studies are so valuable vocation of Christian scholars. Humane studies are warranted by our Lord, Creator God, molded into human beings as God-gifted creatures, can be inspired by our living Saviour and filled up with the freshness, wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.

Our studies should make it in the spread of "Christianophobia" in vast areas of the globe. This work, therefore, is not easy to do by or for ourselves. But if done with God's help and under His wisdom and mercy, and we ask our Saviour Jesus Christ to be with us, we are carried the arduous tasks. I hope that the Christian studies in the humanities will come up with an answer for revitalizing humanities education and scholarship, transforming our culture.

