

Implications of Mark R. Schwehn's
Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America

1. The Christian scholar must wrestle with the the meaning of the academic vocation in America (and elsewhere). What is the meaning and purpose of academic life? This involves at least two or three things:

a. Understanding Max Weber's influential essay *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, or "Science [Academics] as Vocation" which has set the stage and character of the contemporary understanding of the academic vocation in America.

b. Many academics, especially those who are religiously minded, have left the "Edens" of the academic world (Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, Stanford, etc), its alleged paradises, and established themselves on the peripheries and edges of academic life, BECAUSE SUCH A MOVE AFFORDED THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACADEMIC VOCATION, ONE THAT DEVIATES FROM THE CONTEMPORARY NORM, ESP. IN RELIGIOUSLY INFORMED WAYS. They are "exiles from Eden," and pursue their own sense of academic vocation on the periphery. viii-xi.

2. The Christian scholar will have to reflect deeply on the nature and vocation of the scholar: is it to help students learn to live more ethically fulfilling lives? Is it to transmit knowledge and skills? Is it or can it be both? Are the two connected: is there some link between the communication of knowledge and moral formation? Is the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of virtue separate tasks? Are the various ways of knowing (disciplines) morally neutral or morally directive? 4-5

3. The Christian scholar must also wrestle with the issue of what his/her work really is: is it (1) making knowledge in the form of research, experimentation, writing, and composing? (2) is transmitting knowledge to students in teaching? (3) is it helping students learn how to live more ethically fulfilling lives?

The common conception on today's research university campus is that of the three items listed, the first is the top priority over the other two. When a university professor complains that she cannot get enough of her own work done, what she means is that 2 and 3 are interfering with 1. What, then, is the academic vocation? What should it be, especially in a Christian light? 3-5

4. Christian scholars, esp. future ones who have not yet gone to graduate school, must be alert to the socialization that will take place in those contexts where the idea that research and publication constitutes the totality of a professor's work and the highest aspect of her academic calling. PUBLICATION IS THE VOCATIONAL ASPIRATION.5-6

a. The conception of today's academic calling largely comes from Max Weber's "Wissenschaft als Beruf," Science or Academics as Calling, an address delivered in 1918 at Munich University. In this addressed, he presented a view of the professoriate as one focused on rigorous scholarship over against *Bildung*, the cultivation of mind and spirit, the formation of character as the supreme end of education, that is, paideia (advocated by Karl Jaspers for example). 6-7

b. The debate over the nature and meaning of the academic vocation has been undertaken in Germany first and later in the USA. It consisted of two competing visions that moved from "inculcation (teaching) to inquiry," from the transmission of knowledge

and tradition to research. This also involved the tension between: (1) *Erziehung*, including *Bildung* (education with character development; (2) *Unterricht* which was the impartation of knowledge and skills. There are three levels, therefore:

1. *Erziehung/Bildung*—education and teaching as character formation
2. *Unterricht*—teaching and the impartation of knowledge/skills
3. *Wissenschaft*—research and publication, the advancement of knowledge.

Which model does Newman suggest? Luther? Augustine?

5. Christian scholars must be aware of the fact that the primary assumptions underlying Weber's account of the academic vocation and indeed of today's academy overall are distinctively those of MODERNITY, rationalization, intellectualization, scientism, calculation, progress, or in short, metaphysical naturalism. This constitutes the **disenchantment** of the world, that is, stripping it of all KNOWABLE spiritual significance, a desupernaturalization, demythologization, demoralization, and desacramentalization, etc of reality. See Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, Cornell, 1981;9-10.

Consequently, because ultimate questions about meaning and value, about the philosophical or religious conception of the world, could not be answered by these modern means, they were entirely out of bounds in the academy--the modern dichotomy between "facts and values." Academics must not speak to anything that cannot be empirically and scientifically and mathematically evaluated. 10 The intrusion of normative statements into the academy, according to Weber, was the work of the devil. 15

This also means the loss of friendship, brotherliness, sisterliness, and charity in the academy. It means that faculty who show concern for students are considered suspicious, that writing must be objective, distant, impersonal, first person only, and that faculty are alienated from their work because it is to be surpassed in the name of progress. 10-11.

Because Weber had DIVESTED the world and knowledge advancement of any possible form of enchantment and meaning, he had to INVEST the concept of CALLING (*Beruf*) with a meaning that the term had never possessed before: a religious one. As if it were God, the academic vocation became the source and center of the meaning of academic life: work was life, and the salvation of the academic souls depended on their scholarly prowess, making knowledge, which all depended on grace or inspiration from themselves, and the use of rational methods. 12

Weber's conception of the academic calling is a strange combination of austerity and religiosity; that is, it is disenchanting and it is described in religious terms derived from Protestant asceticism. He based his understanding of the academic vocation on his religious views of life in a world that lacked God. 12-3

7. The Christian scholar must recognize that the Weberian account is a secularization of protestant theological themes that have been transmuted into a different context. 13ff

- a. Whereas the Puritan calling was from God and for service to him and humanity, the modern notion of calling including academics is not from God, but from the impositions of modernity itself and its demands for specialization, rationalization, and intellectualization, indeed, for progress! The end was not service, but *Wissenschaft*: knowledge, period, not the public good or human well being. Calling and specialization, therefore, are reinterpreted in a modernist context. Such a person is a renunciatory hero, one who denies himself the full development of his person, and sacrifices himself on behalf of his speciality. 14

This kind of academic calling meant the loss of the most ultimate and sublime values (enjoyment, emotional satisfaction, communal satisfaction, etc.). World mastery demanded self mastery, hence, stoicism. The Weberian academic is characterized by a strict sense of duty and obligation, stoicism, an anti-prophetic, anti-normative stance, and loneliness. 14-6

8. The Christian scholar should recognize that Weberianism restricts the possibility of the vibrant transmission of moral traditions within the academy, thus thwarting any moral mission it might have; Weberianism does form character, but a modernist one that is characterized by clarity but not charity, honesty but not friendliness, devotion to calling, but not loyalty to a particular communities. The academy today is devoid of tradition and produces reductionistic humans. 18f

9. The Christian scholar must be aware of how the conception of community has in recent days replaced the questions about epistemology. Communities as bodies of people shaped by a tradition serve as sources of knowledge, and are in opposition to the epistemology of modernity that focused on foundationalism (R. Rorty) or objectivism (P. Palmer). While the construction of certain objectivists or foundationalist epistemologies were motivated by a desire to overcome violence between traditions, the irony is that in the 20th century at least, more violence has been committed in the name of secular objectivism than in all the wars and battles between diverse traditions. Still, the resurgence of communitarianism based on a *Weltanschauung* or worldview could lead to the reemergence of tribalism and violence. How does this apply to the academic community is the question that Schwehn explores.

10. The Christian scholar must peruse the nature and possibilities for community on the university campus. This is a first thing that must be clarified: the nature of community itself. Classroom meetings are an artificial form of community, more “focused gatherings” than true communities because of their brevity. Still they are immensely important for they are the contexts in which professors do at least two things: teach their subjects and the manners of learning (methods and virtues). There are all sorts of campus communities, but here is a description of a community:

- Face to face quality
- Common pursuit of knowledge and understanding
- Integral character
- Quality of individual and communal thought are reciprocal 34-5
- Is this an adequate description? What else needs to be added? Subtracted?
- Face to face engagement; aspirations to knowledge and truth; integral relationships between individual and communal thought 39

11. The Christian Scholar should investigate the second area of clarification in the relation of truth to community. Schwehn argues that truth is related to an epistemic context which itself conditions what counts as justification which is itself a communal endeavor: truth is produced in societies. This does not insure truth, for communities and inquiries can go wrong; nonetheless, it seems there is no alternative to the fact that community and truth are correlative. Hence there is a need for self critical dialogue within and without the community. 36-7

What do we mean when we talk about a Christian community? Do we just have romantic, nostalgic feelings about it where everyone smiles and is “nice”? What are the epistemological and moral implications of being in community? Can truth, knowledge, or wisdom be gained without it and its traditions? Is this all of divine design? What does the Bible say about how truth is known and transmitted? What of the role of the family, the priest, the church?

12. The Christian scholar must beware of the trappings of community in yet another way: nostalgia and a kind of utopianism based on the past. Be that as it may, a discussion of community is absolutely necessary because accounts of knowledge and truth have undermined Weber's conception of the academic calling, and thus a new conception of the academic calling based on a new account of knowledge and truth is in order: truth rooted in communities. 40

12. Christian scholars must recognize that all communities of learning are shaped by an ethos, a culture, a spirit of inquiry, moral dispositions, affections, attitudes, motivations, virtues that make inquiry possible and the community to develop. But as epistemologies differ, so do the spirits of inquiry, the virtues of a community. Here are the two dominate traditions being contrasted:

Weberian community: epistemology--instrumental view of reason; motives--mastery, manipulation, control; virtues--clarity, honesty, diligence, devotion, rigorism, etc.

Communitarianism: epistemology--truth in context and rationality shaped by tradition; virtues--interpersonal and social; care for the lives and thoughts of others

Christian community--God, truth, Spirit, wisdom, gifts, diversity, etc.

13. The Christian scholar should recognize the historical precedent of linking spiritual values and virtues to learning, that learning communities flourished when informed by spiritual virtues.45-7 What are the virtues that Schwehn recommends for development within a learning community? 48ff What contributions do Jeffrey Stout and James Gustafson make to this discussion? How does Schwehn define the implications of the following virtues in an academic context?

- Humility
- Faith
- Self-denial
- Charity

14. What consequences flow for understanding the means and ends of university education from this fresh redescription of the academic vocation? How does it connect with paideia? What is Leon Kass's particular view of the matter?

15. Discuss Schwehn's discussion of teaching as primary academic activity, the role of the spiritual virtues that make teaching and learning possible, and the restoration of charity to the academy. 58ff In regard to the last item, what do you make of this ultimately very Augustinian quotation from Bernard of Clairvaux:

"There are many who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who desire to know in order that they may themselves be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonorable. But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love."

Now, why do you seek knowledge? Why does DBU seek it? Why ought it be sought?

16. Give your response to the amazing quotation on the personal influence of the teacher upon students at the top of page 61!

17. Friendship and collegiality and fellowship are united with this view of the academic vocation. What is the definition and significance of academic friendship and learned collegiality?61ff

18. Which questions that Schwehn lists in chapter 4 are the most compelling and difficult for Schwehn and for YOU to answer? Is Schwehn's vision a mere "pipe dream"? 66ff

19. What purposes does Schwehn have for this exposition of *The Education of Henry Adams* as a concluding exercise in this book? How does this work make the connection between education and the 20th century's quest for meaning? Is it to be found? How could Christian higher education make all the difference in the world in this process? How does the *Education* illustrate the cognitive and ethical development (or lack thereof) of a 20th or 21st century student? Is it necessary for students to create meaning for themselves? How does Adam's life exemplify the developments in understanding the modern academic vocation from Weber on?

20. What kinds of comparisons and contrasts does Schwehn make between the education of Henry Adams and the education (divine purposes and judgments and redemption) of the biblical Adam? Do you see in Schwehn's last chapter a creation, fall and redemption model? Apply these ideas to our task at DBU.

21. In reading Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation," (a chewy, German piece, but don't despair), note that it begins rather slowly and takes its time to get to the heart of the issues that concern us, viz., that of the nature of the academic vocation. Isolate the key ideas and most germane quotes that demonstrate Weber's modernist understanding of what it is that academics ought to be and do and not to be and not to do. Offer your appraisal of his proposals, especially in a Christian light.