

Study Questions and Suggested Further Reading for  
*The Passionate Intellect: Incarnational Humanism  
and the Future of University Education*

by Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmermann

book published by BakerAcademic (2006); audio edition published by MARS HILL AUDIO (2008)

## Study Questions

### Introduction

1. Do you think the university is in crisis? If so, what signs have you noticed?
2. What do the authors mean by “interpretive frameworks”?
3. Do you think university education should have a moral dimension?
4. The authors tell the story of humanism. What is the plotline of this story?
5. What does postmodernism teach us about interpretation?
6. What is incarnational humanism? In what way do the authors think that postmodernism and incarnational thinking can go hand in hand?

### Chapter One

1. Have you ever experienced prejudice against your intellectual positions for whatever reason? For being a Christian?
2. What does Critchley mean when he says that “to have an experience of faith would mean stopping doing philosophy”?
3. What is the relationship between reason and tradition? Given the postmodern truth about interpretation, are reason and tradition strictly opposed to one another?
4. How can, does, and should the church preserve and stimulate genuine thinking?

### Chapter Two

1. Do you think the church should play any role in university education?
2. According to R. W. Southern, what are the indissolubly linked emphases of medieval university education?

3. Describe the tension between reason and tradition in the outlook of Abelard and Aquinas.
4. What does it mean to say that reason is socially embedded?
5. What role do affections and desire play in your intellectual journey?

## Chapter Three

1. When you think of the Renaissance, do you think of humanism? Why or why not?
2. This chapter distinguishes between medieval humanism and literary humanism. Describe one good feature and one bad feature of literary humanism.
3. According to literary humanists, a liberal arts education could prepare one for participation in public life. Do you think this claim is still relevant?
4. Renaissance or literary humanism is often celebrated as freeing the human spirit from the shackles of religious belief. According to this chapter, is literary humanism necessarily antagonistic to Christianity?
5. Why is an emphasis on language important to any understanding of humanism?

## Chapter Four

1. In your opinion, are science and humanism compatible?
2. What are the differences between secular scientific humanism and the other humanisms described so far?
3. In what fundamental regard are Bacon and Descartes alike?
4. According to Quentin Skinner, how does Hobbes blend scientific principles with humanistic ones? What, then, is secular scientific humanism, and what kind of voice does it exhibit?

## Chapter Five

1. Immanuel Kant used the phrase *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to think!”) against the church and religious traditions. Do you think Christians should accept the dare?
2. The authors define dualism in terms of a separation of faith and reason. What is deism? How does the picture of God as a watchmaker illustrate this problem?
3. What other manifestations of dualism do the authors suggest with reference to public life, the emotions, and the arts? Have you experienced any of these in your university education to date?

4. In light of the previous two questions, how do you, as a Christian, reconcile the interpretation of Scripture with the role of the church and tradition in interpretation? Can you see how the Protestant principle of sola scriptura could lead to interpretive dualism?

5. If the Enlightenment discourages the idea that religion is intrinsic to truth and thought, should Christians oppose the Enlightenment altogether?

## Chapter Six

1. Why should Christians lead the way in showing the limitations of the Enlightenment?
2. To challenge Descartes, Vico suggests a participatory model of knowledge, or self-knowledge. How is this model based on Christian principles? What is the goal of this “new science”?
3. To what extent do Vico’s views on language and culture reflect the notion that truth is interpretation?
4. What are the limitations of Vico’s critique of the Enlightenment?

## Chapter Seven

1. When you read the names Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, what comes to mind? What do the three have in common?
2. How do Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud each critique the Enlightenment, and why should Christians support their criticisms?
3. How does Heidegger challenge dualism? And humanism?
4. What do you think “worldview” means? How does your understanding differ from Heidegger’s when he claims that a worldview is not a theoretical formulation?
5. How does Polanyi make worldview thinking and scientific thinking compatible?

## Chapter Eight

1. Do you care about postmodernism? Do you think you should care about postmodernism? Why or why not?
2. Why does Gadamer care about humanism?
3. How does Gadamer’s humanism resemble pre-Enlightenment humanisms in terms of language and tradition?
4. In what way do Gadamer’s concerns suggest a postmodern humanism?

5. Why does Levinas care about humanism?
6. How does Levinas's humanism differ from Gadamer's in terms of his critique of secular scientific humanism?
7. How are Gadamer's and Levinas's postmodernisms ethically oriented?

## Chapter Nine

1. How might the goals of coherence and purpose for human knowledge be misguided?
2. Why and how does Foucault define the goal of *Sapere aude!* in opposition to humanism?
3. How does Foucault, as a postmodern antihumanist, differ from the postmodern humanists described in the last chapter on the interpretive nature of truth?
4. How does Lyotard's critique of metanarratives undermine the Enlightenment story of science as superior to religion?
5. According to the authors, which of the two strands of postmodernism—postmodern humanism or postmodern antihumanism—has had the greater influence on the intellectual environment of the contemporary university?

## Chapter Ten

1. Given what you have read so far, do you think Jesus is a humanist?
2. What three central humanistic elements does the incarnation affirm? How?
3. To what extent does the incarnation allow for convergence with current secular academic concern for the categories of agency, rationality, and textuality?

## Chapter Eleven

1. What have non-Christians ever done for you?
2. In what ways are Christians agents of common grace? In what ways are Christians recipients of common grace?
3. Why does C. S. Lewis argue that Christianity brought no new ethical code into the world?
4. According to Taylor, how does the great human tradition benefit from secular institutions? According to Newbigin, why can Christians join hands with people of other faiths and ideologies?

## Chapter Twelve

1. What is integration? How does it differ from interdisciplinarity?
2. According to incarnational humanism, why is the model of the student as client inadequate for university education?
3. In what sense is the academic enterprise spiritual? In what sense is it vocational, in the full Christian sense of that term?
4. Now that you have read through the book, how would you reply to the charge that Christians cannot think?
5. Discuss an occasion in which you have experienced the agony of thought as an expression of your freedom in Christ and as indication of God's love and grace.

## Suggested Further Reading

The works cited in the main text of the book help provide a good introductory picture of the history of the university and its current challenges. The following is a list of further reading on select topics.

### History and Development of the University

For a general overview of the medieval foundations of the university, C. H. Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), and Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, new ed., 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), though old, are still useful. If you want to delve deeply into the history of the university, we recommend the meticulously researched series *A History of the University in Europe*, under the general editorship of Walter Rüegg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992-). R. W. Southern's writings are very important, especially his multivolume magnum opus *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995-). He gives a good sense of the interconnectedness of humanism, the university, and sociocultural developments.

### Medieval Humanism

The most exhaustive treatment of this topic appears in R. W. Southern's books. Historians of science now look to figures wrestling with naturalistic aspects of inquiry in the thirteenth century as making an important contribution to the development of modern empirical science. For a brief general discussion of the stages of scientific development, see Alistair C. Crombie, "Science and the Arts in the Renaissance: The Search for Truth and Certainty, Old and New," in *Science and the Arts in the Renaissance*, ed. John W. Shirley and F. David Hoening (Washington:

The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1985), 15-26. See also David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). For medieval interest in the subjects of light and sight in particular, see David Lindberg, *Theories of Optics from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Bruce Eastwood, "Medieval Empiricism: The Case of Grosseteste's Optics," *Speculum* 43 (1968), 306-321. This fascination with natural aspects, notably in terms of light and sight, extended to the arts as well, with writers applying aspects of this learning to such cultural phenomena as courtly love. At the same time, inquiry retained a vital interest in spiritual dimensions.

The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas is the best example of holistic medieval humanism. Start with Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Nature and Grace*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954). A good introduction to Thomas's life and thought is G. K. Chesterton's biographical sketch *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1933; repr., New York: Image, 1956). Josef Pieper also makes Thomas very accessible in his *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: New American Library, 1962). See also Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). For insights into medieval humanism through the lens of the experience of Abelard and Heloise, see Étienne Gilson, *Heloise and Abelard* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

## Literary Humanism

The anthology *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley*, ed. Joanna Martindale (Dover, NH: Croom Helm, 1985), provides a fine selection of humanistic topics and concerns. For a deeper understanding of this movement, consult the primary texts of Erasmus of Rotterdam (particularly *Enchiridion* in vol. 66 of *Collected Works of Erasmus* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988]) and Thomas More (his best-known work is *Utopia* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002]); see also More's letters, particularly those written to his daughter from prison (*The Last Letters of Thomas More*, ed. Alvaro de Silva [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]). The Italian thinker Giambattista Vico is an extension of this literary humanism. His writings are rather difficult, but a very faithful interpretation of Vico appears in Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), which also contains a good summary of Enlightenment ideals and the counterarguments of contemporaries to this movement.

## Enlightenment Humanism

The best way to deepen your understanding of Enlightenment thinkers is to read primary sources. Kant's small but compact essay "An Answer to the Question, 'What is Enlightenment?'" will make a good start. But a full grasp of the various ideas and concepts requires wide reading. The German, English, and French Enlightenment thinkers are not all of the same opinion. French thinkers such as Voltaire, for instance, were much more antagonistic to Christianity than a German Enlightenment figure such as Lessing. *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), contains a reasonable selection of primary Enlightenment texts with current reflection on their importance.

## Scientific Secular Humanism

Descartes and Bacon are important, even iconic, figures in the rise of scientific objectivism. Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, *Novum Organum*, and *New Atlantis*, all available in various editions, make excellent reading, as does René Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979). A very good essay on this development and how it affected the university is Isaiah Berlin, "The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities," in Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (London: Pimlico, 1998), 326-58. Another source is Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* (1667), ed. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1958).

## Post-Enlightenment Humanism

For an overview of the rise of the Enlightenment and the attendant problems of modernity, Charles Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Toronto: Anansi, 1991), first given as a series of public lectures, makes excellent reading. Probably the most readable and most widely known secular philosopher we have discussed is Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), and *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), give a good sense of his criticisms both of the Enlightenment and of Christianity. Graham Good, *Humanism Betrayed: Theory, Ideology, and Culture in the Contemporary University* (Montreal and Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), conveys a sense of the anxiety many feel about the contemporary university from the vantage point of a secular academic. For a different, though still secular, approach to contemporary intellectual questions, Simon Critchley's little book *On Humour* (New York: Routledge, 2002) provides a good example of the posture he would have us all take to the challenge of being human.

## Postmodernism

Sympathizers and adherents usually write the best introductions to postmodernism. Christian assessments are often mere caricatures with unhelpful blanket statements. For a solid understanding of deconstruction, Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999), merits a high recommendation. Richard Kearney, *States of Mind* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), which contains interviews with key postmodern thinkers who state in a very conversational tone the reasons for their claims, is also excellent; the interview with Levinas is particularly good.

Reading Gadamer or Heidegger demands time and patience. Gadamer's essays collected in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), and *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), are recommended.

Heidegger is most accessible in his lectures. Instead of beginning with *Being and Time*, start with *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), which is much

more accessible and is considered by many as important as *Being and Time*. For determining what postmodernism means to you as a Christian, a helpful book is Robert Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003). Greer explains the different postmodern positions and discusses how they may or may not be compatible with Christian faith, without, however, claiming that the Christian has everything figured out. A detailed account of Gadamer and Levinas's thinking and their compatibility with Christian theology appears in Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 2004.

## Incarnational Humanism

N. T. Wright, "The Light of the World," chapter 8 in *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), which summarizes well Wright's notion of a new humanity in Christ, is a good starting point for further study of what we have called incarnational humanism. Other contemporary theologians encourage a proper sense of how the Christian is to live eschatologically—fully in this world but enacting the already come and yet coming kingdom. A very good beginning for the study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is his *Letters from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) rather than *Discipleship* (also called *The Cost of Discipleship*) (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); read also his *Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004). For Hans-Urs von Balthasar, a good introduction is his *Explorations in Theology*, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989). A pertinent contemporary theologian is Rowan Williams. One might start with the collection of his sermons and talks published as *A Ray of Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1995) (also published as *Open to Judgement* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994]). For his views on how specific individuals in the Christian tradition from New Testament times through the Reformation wrestled with a spirituality that embodies incarnational humanism, see *The Wound of Knowledge*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1991) (1st ed. published as *Christian Spirituality* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1980]).

## The Christian University

The extensive literature on this topic is often permeated with an anxiety that Christian colleges will eventually die unless they clamp down the dogmatic-denominational safety lid on dangerous humanistic tendencies. One of the best recent books on the Christian university and on learning in general is Nicholas Wolterstorff et al., *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Wolterstorff advocates a Christian humanism along the lines suggested here. Two other excellent introductions to faith-based universities are Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and the book it echoes, the classic nineteenth-century work (with the same title) by the Catholic theologian John Henry Newman, who also served as a university president: *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Various editions of this book are available, as are versions in electronic format on the Internet.