

# Emerging Christian Scholars among the Intellectual Virtues

or Why They All Should Be Thomists

Todd C. Ream and Thomas W. Seat, II

---

## Abstract

The reason why all of our students should be Thomists is that excellence among the intellectual virtues is what should come to define our aspirations for them as emerging Christian scholars. Such aspirations are formed by the design and implementation of practices of study. Such aspirations denounce any distinction between subject and object or finite and infinite. However, such aspirations are also guided by the narrative of excellence as defined by the beatific vision of God. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that this narrative is not one the academy generates on its own but is the story of Christianity as embodied by the Church. Failure to recognize such a narrative and design practices of study accordingly not only leaves our students beyond the formative influence of the intellectual virtues but also leaves them susceptible to the influences wielded by other narratives such as the narrative of the market economy.

## Keywords

Beatific Vision, Higher Education, Intellectual Virtues, Students, Thomas Aquinas

## Introduction

Despite approximately forty years of research surpassing in volume that of any previous epoch in the history of the academy, we propose we know less about who our students are to be upon graduation than our predecessors did about their respective students.<sup>1</sup> Like the occupants of Plato's cave, we often assume the shadow afforded to us

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most extensive records and analyses of this research are found in Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991), and Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students, Volume 2: A Third Decade of Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

by social psychology's various stage theories is the light itself. As a result, our highest ideals for our students become the most advanced stages offered by scales constructed from observable data in domains identified in areas such as cognitive development, moral development, and even spiritual development.<sup>2</sup> We pause now to ask whether our aspirations concerning who our students are to be upon graduation are the products of revelation and narration or merely what we can empirically verify.

At this point, a dependence upon mere narration could lead us into an interesting, albeit superficial, discussion about gaps in aesthetic inclinations. For example, our tastes in clothing and music invariably differ from the tastes of our students. Even college presidents here in the United States who were as different as Jeremiah Day and Robert Maynard Hutchins shared a similar sense of disconnect in relation to the generation of students they served during the years they respectively led Yale (from 1817 to 1846) and Chicago (from 1929 to 1945). However, for our generation, the sense of disconnect goes deeper and borders on alienation. Day and Hutchins each possessed a clear sense of vision as to who their students should be upon graduation. Despite our ability to quantify the developmental capacities of our students in a host of interesting ways, we are perhaps now more uncertain than ever as to whom we should be helping our students become. While we speak of excellence, perhaps one reason we may do so is because the vapid nature of such a term allows us to sound ambitious without the possibility of being held accountable for our inevitable shortcomings. Ironically, excellence among the intellectual virtues is what should define our aspirations. In the end, perhaps all of our students should be Thomists.

### Higher Education among Competing Narratives

Before we more formally propose that all of our students should be Thomists, we need to be clear in stating that our students themselves are not to blame for the sense of alienation which, at times, separates us from them. They live in a world which no longer possesses a metanarrative which can rectify such a dilemma. Elaborating on the

<sup>2</sup> In terms of cognitive development, please see Mary Field Belenky, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997) and William G. Perry, *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999). In terms of moral development, please see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) and Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stage and Sequence," *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, ed. by David A. Goslin (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally and Company, 1971) pp. 347–480. Finally, in terms of faith development, please see James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981).

insights of Jean-François Lyotard, James K. A. Smith contends that metanarratives were understood to be “stories that not only tell a grand story (since even premodern and tribal stories do this) but also claim to be able to legitimate or prove the story’s claim by an appeal to reason.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, we are left to persist amidst competing narratives. Neil Postman subsequently offers that a narrative is a kind of story “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.”<sup>4</sup> To know who our students should be upon graduation is to first be conscious as a community of the narratives forming their identity as well as our own. In the midst of these narratives, we as scholars and they as emerging scholars must share in an agreement about our common narrative and think through how such a narrative shapes how we approach not only other narratives but also the *telos* or end of our very existence.

For Jeremiah Day, the narrative was the story of Christianity as embodied by the Church. Upon graduation, students were hopefully better formed in terms of their ability to live out their lives as Christians than they were on the day they first arrived on the New Haven campus. In contrast, for Robert Maynard Hutchins, the narrative was the story of democracy as embodied by the state. Upon graduation, students were hopefully better formed in terms of their ability to live out their lives as citizens than they were on the day they first arrived on the Hyde Park campus. Both sets of students were introduced to the great texts—stories believed to possess a narrative quality worthy of shaping one’s identity. Day’s students heard these stories within the context of the larger story of Christianity. Hutchins’ students heard these stories within the context of the larger story of democracy. The enduring truth in terms of the current crisis concerning our inability to identify who our students should be upon graduation is not a lack of narratives. In contrast, the problem inherent in the current crisis is that narratives will persist in a tournament-like fashion with one competing against another.

Perhaps one narrative is seeking to assert its supremacy, at times, even by rhetorical force of will. Risking oversimplification, we will refer to this narrative as one reflective of the aspirations of the market economy. By now, most of us have heard a student qualify an argument he or she was about to make with the phrase, “I pay such and such an amount, therefore I should get such and such a product or such and such a service.” The narrative of the

<sup>3</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 5–6.

market economy resides below the surface much of the time yet simply announces its presence in moments when students perceive that this narrative holds true for those of us within the academy and perhaps those of us within society as a whole. Rhetorical force of will becomes the arbitrator when students acknowledge that they are paying for a particular experience while scholars are being paid to facilitate it.

This dilemma regarding the narrative of the market economy has proven to be a matter of great concern in the recent literature regarding higher education. The last five years have witnessed at least nine book-length projects concerning the changing relationship shared by the marketplace and the academy. The changing nature of this relationship is having repercussions on a host of fronts including the nature of scholarship and the identity of scholars called to generate it. For the sake of our purposes, we would note most of these authors contend that even the identity of emerging scholars or students has changed in recent years. In their book *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*, James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield argue that the narrative of the market economy as embodied by the current generation of college students is transforming the perception of the value of a college education. Engell and Dangerfield claim that such a “student is more likely to treat the undergraduate experience as a four-year pause on the way to a better lifestyle with strings of better cars and homes.”<sup>5</sup> The narrative of the market economy teaches students that higher education is not only a narcissistic respite but also a passport to financial prosperity.

Ironically, the more troubling nature of the narrative of the market economy does not fully come to the surface when students initiate their rhetorical force of will. However difficult, we must persist and see that something is underneath those moments when students preface their arguments with the assertion that they have paid a particular amount for their education. In contrast, we propose that the more troubling nature of the narrative of the market economy is the way that it has continued to redefine the modern distinction forged between the subject and the object. On one level, the narrative of the market economy has reduced the experience of higher education to an object. According to Engell and Dangerfield, “By the later 1970s, commodification was winning, and in 2004 it occupied the catbird seat.”<sup>6</sup> Emphasis is no longer placed on what an education can do to form a person but rather what it can do for a person in terms of economic production and consumption. Education is still a process through which students must persist yet it remains apart from them as

<sup>5</sup> James Engell and Rodney Dangerfield, *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

an objectified means to an end, in the absence of a common narrative, to be defined by each and every individual.

On another level, students defined by the narrative of the market economy have reduced themselves to that of an object as well. In his essay "On Subject and Object," Theodor Adorno reminds us that the irony of the modern distinction between subject and object is its inherent instability and thus its proclivity to turn back on itself.<sup>7</sup> As a result, students as subjects not only run the risk of reducing their education to an object but also run the risk of reducing themselves to objects in the process. For example, they reduce themselves to a collection of skills and techniques which can in turn be sold in the marketplace. Success in terms of the collegiate experience is now somehow measured in terms of mere percentages—percentage of students employed within six months after graduation or the percentage of students accepted to graduate or professional programs.

Please note that we believe that high percentages of students being employed within six months of graduation or high percentages of students being accepted to graduate or professional programs are not problems in and of themselves. In contrast, they are problems when they become the highest criteria for how students and their respective alma maters measure success. Skill and technique are important. However, we must ask ourselves to what end are skill and technique cultivated and what purpose do they serve. In the absence of a common narrative, the narrative of the market economy seeks to teach students that as objects they have no choice but to see their worth in light of how they perform in arenas such as the obtainment of either employment or admission to graduate or professional school.

Our question is that within a context which lacks a common narrative and is at best a tournament of competing narratives, are students provided with alternatives in terms of how they should understand themselves? In order to provide them with alternatives, we must take on the challenge that Joseph Dunne makes to educators as a whole and return to the rough ground versus the ground we have now made smooth.<sup>8</sup> Assessments of the cognitive, moral, and spiritual development of students mislead us into thinking that the lives of the people we serve, lives we ironically assess as objects in these cases, can be measured in clear, linear, and thus developmental fashions. In contrast, intellectual virtues are formed within the rough ground of human experience—ground which fails to recognize any distinction between subject and object. However, such formative efforts are also

<sup>7</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On Subject and Object," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York, NY: Columbia University Press), pp. 245–258.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

guided by the narrative of excellence as defined by the beatific vision of God. As a result, we propose that all of our students as emerging Christian scholars should, in fact, be Thomists.

### Higher Education in the light of the Beatific Vision

In our discussion of the work of Thomas Aquinas we will not pretend to be experts. Such instruction should come first and foremost from texts left by the Angelic Doctor himself, and, when necessary, clarified by the scholarship of individuals such as Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Romanus Cessario, and Jean-Pierre Torrell to name but only a few. In contrast, we would only dare to contend that we are experts in terms of our awareness of the need for Thomas Aquinas's influence. We sense it in our own lives and we sense it in the lives of the students we serve. In the absence of a common narrative guiding the lives of those of us who populate the academy, the narrative of the market economy is seeking to become our primary means of forming identity. The narrative of the story of democracy as embodied by the state proves to be inadequate in the face of such a challenge. Its inadequacy is evident in the sense that its horizon of possibility or vision is one confined to the finite nature of the relations shared by humanity. In contrast, the narrative of the story of Christianity as embodied by the Church proves to be more than adequate in the face of such a challenge. Its adequacy is evident in the sense that its horizon of possibility or vision is one which fails to recognize a distinction between the finite and the infinite. For Thomas Aquinas, such a vision is what he calls the beatific or the blissful. In simple terms, perhaps Thomists are those individuals for whom the narrative of the story of the Church allows them to see themselves and the world around them from such a perspective.

Essential to Thomas Aquinas's understanding of the beatific vision is his understanding of faith. According to Romanus Cessario, Thomas believes that "Faith sets the members of Christ's Body on the road to beatitude, the full and joyful possession of God that the Christian Gospel both announces and promises to fulfill."<sup>9</sup> In this sense, faith necessitates that Christians simultaneously see the finite and the infinite. The former can only make sense in light of the latter. To see the world in its proper context is to see the hand of God which brought it into existence. However, as Cessario notes, our ability to see the world in this manner is made possible by our presence amongst the body of Christ—the Church. The Church is the embodiment of the narrative of the Christian story. Through the practice of

<sup>9</sup> Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 134.

the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church is brought into beatific fellowship with God. Such a sense of fellowship reminds us that the world is not only both finite and infinite but that we are both subject and object. As beings created in God's image, we are defined by our ability to appreciate that image within ourselves and within others. Students are more than marketable skills and talents. By their very nature, they possess the ability to serve as agents of reconciliation. By reenacting the sacrifice of Christ in the practice of the Eucharist, God is established as the end of faith and we learn to see all before us in the light of the beatific vision described by Thomas Aquinas.

The concern which invariably emerges here in the United States involves what practical difference would such a narrative and the beatific vision it yields make in relation to the students we serve. We would contend that students would learn to see themselves in a different light if for no other reason than we have learned to see them in a different light. As a servant of the Church, the academy comes to be defined by its ability to extend the beatific vision of its students in light of practices of study. In the absence of such false distinctions as subject and object along with the finite and the infinite, even the academic disciplines are returned to their position as a means to this end versus being ends themselves. The merit of a particular discipline such as education or English is often defined by either what kind of job it might allow one to obtain or to what graduate or professional program it allows one to gain admission. In reality, the merit of a particular discipline is to be determined by how the practices involved in such a course of study are able to extend one's sense of the beatific vision. To bring our conversation full circle, we as scholars must develop practices that place the emerging generation of Christian scholars among the intellectual virtues.

### Higher Education amidst the Intellectual Virtues

The intellectual virtues, by their very nature, are defined by the habit of excellence. This sense of definition is not synonymous with the amorphous and thus relative definitions of excellence commonly yielded by the academy. In contrast, this sense of excellence is defined in relation to each and every person. According to Thomas Aquinas, "Virtue, from the very nature of the word, implies some perfection of power."<sup>10</sup> In particular, such a perception of power operates on two levels. On one level, it refers to one's very nature or being. On another level, it refers to one's ability to act. Such distinctions are perhaps more descriptive than actual. Thomas would likely have

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948), p. 820.

asserted that one acts in accordance with his or her being and that virtue is the perfection of power in relation to both. Therefore, one cannot think of virtue or excellence in terms of one's actions without also thinking of being. The modern distinction between subject and object proves to be illusory. No place exists for one to separate being and one's ability to act.

Virtue or the perfection of power as it relates to each and every person obtains its end purpose or *telos* from the depth of one's beatific vision. Being in this case not only defies the distinction of subject and object but also the infinite and the finite. Martin Heidegger discusses being in relation to one's choice of actions for the future as being predicated upon past experience.<sup>11</sup> Although one's sense of being in the present is simultaneously ahead of and behind oneself, its definition is captured by the conditions of the finite. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas speaks of virtue and the relationship shared by being and one's ability to act in light of "happiness or bliss by which man is made most perfectly conformed to God, and which is the end of human life."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the depth of one's beatific vision is inextricably tied to one's persistence in the very practices which define the body of Christ. To be conformed to God is to come to embody and act out the love which God demonstrated to humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ—not only as it occurred in history but in its reenactment in the sacrament of Eucharist. Without such a purpose, practices of study in relation to a particular discipline return to being ends in themselves as defined by a particular student versus being a means of extending his or her beatific vision.

For Thomas Aquinas, the term virtue persists within three particular categories—the intellectual, the moral, and the theological. Like the distinction he makes between being and one's ability to act, perhaps the distinctions Thomas makes between these three types of virtue are also more descriptive than they are actual. In the case of intellectual virtue, what is truly at stake, and what proves truly instructive for emerging Christian scholars, is the relationship that practices of study share with the moral virtue of prudence. Despite what the legacy of modernity is still trying to teach us in relation to reason, Thomas Aquinas contends that reason as applied in practices of study is not neutral in nature. "Consequently an intellectual virtue is needed in the reason, to perfect the reason, and make it suitably affected towards things ordained to the end; and this virtue is prudence."<sup>13</sup> In relation to matters of intellectual virtue, prudence carries a sense of priority. It allows our students to see how their efforts in relation to practices

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 820.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 831.



of study extend their ability to see all that is before them in the light of the beatific vision. In essence, prudence teaches students to consciously consider the end purpose of their efforts and to lead lives with both the finite and the infinite in mind.

With both the finite and the infinite in mind, prudence helps our students see that practices of study in which we ask them to participate on Monday exist within the context of the larger story which they heard and in which they participated on Sunday. The beatific vision of our students is extended when they learn that what they experience on Sunday gives shape and meaning to what they experience the rest of the week. What they experience on Sunday is the narrative of Christianity as embodied by the Church. What they experience on Monday are attempts to apply this narrative to all of life's details. In the case of the academy, those details exist in relation to practices of study. They strike at the level of why we study and to what end purpose do we study. Perhaps the most instructive thing that we as scholars can do for the emerging generation of scholars is to create practices of study which ask them to strive to connect the enduring logic of Sunday with even the most mundane of efforts come Monday. Within the light of the beatific vision and governed by the virtue of prudence, the difference between intellectual virtue and intellectual vice for our students is respectively found in one particular instance between what Thomas Aquinas identifies as studiousness and curiosity.

### Curiosity and/or Studiousness?

One of the ironies of the present situation in which the academy finds itself is that we often praise students who exhibit curiosity. In contrast to the manner in which the narrative of the market economy is seeking to teach students to reduce their education and even themselves to that of an object, curiosity appears to be a favorable alternative. It demonstrates initiative and a dedication to intellectual matters. However, the beatific vision which Thomas Aquinas brings to our attention is that a distinction exists between studiousness and curiosity. For Thomas, intellectual virtue "perfects man's speculative or practical intellect in order that his deed may be good."<sup>14</sup> As a result, studiousness is deemed a virtue while curiosity is deemed a vice. For individuals who learned that curiosity is worthy of praise, Thomas's argument at this point may appear to be one of mere semantics. If we persist and look more closely at what Thomas is arguing we will see that his point is instructive for how scholars are to live amongst the intellectual virtues.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 835.

The enduring difference between studiousness and curiosity is that curiosity is a vice for the very reason that it tempts students to transform knowledge and perhaps even themselves into objects. For Thomas Aquinas, “studiousness is directly, not about knowledge itself, but about the desire and study in the pursuit of knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> In light of the narrative of the story of Christianity as embodied by the Church and the beatific vision which it seeks to extend, studiousness is exhibited in the pursuit of knowledge if for no other reason than for Thomas, God proves to be the author of all truth. With a horizon in mind that spans the finite and the infinite, students understand that while they may be able to see the evidence of God’s efforts in creation, God’s essence escapes them. According to Thomas, “studiousness is properly ascribed to knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> However, for Thomas, all knowledge finds its origin in God. At this juncture, Gregory M. Reichberg suggests that Thomas is simultaneously concerned with curbing an inappropriate appetite for knowledge while fostering intellectual courage.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the virtue of studiousness propels students to extend the reach of their minds through practices of study in an attempt to come to deeper forms of appreciation for not only what God has done but also what God is continuing to do in and through the created order.

Since studiousness is a virtue and not an ethical means nor an ethical end, the challenge left to us is to evaluate how practices of study in which we ask students to participate either form the virtue of studiousness or the vice of curiosity. Invariably, practices of study look different, for example, in English than in education. However, Thomas provides us with four cautions to think through as we develop, implement, and evaluate how practices of study contribute to this understanding of perfection or excellence. These cautions once again relate to prudence and how prudence teaches students to be conscious of the end purpose of their efforts. As a result, Thomas’s first caution to us is to think through whether we are asking students to withdraw from more profitable forms of study in favor of less profitable ones. Drawing upon the wisdom of Jerome, the example that Thomas gives is whether “We see priests forsaking the gospels and the prophets, reading stage-plays, and singing the love songs of pastoral idylls.”<sup>18</sup> The problem which Thomas identifies is not so much with the reading of plays and the singing of love songs but in the participation in practices of study which come at the expense

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 1868.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1866.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory M. Reichberg, “Studiositas, The Virtue of Attention,” *The Common Things: Essays on Thomism and Education*, ed. by Daniel McInerney (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1999), pp. 143–152.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 1869.

of practices such as reading the gospels and the prophets. In the absence of such a sense of priority, the end purpose for practices of study succumbs to the vice of curiosity versus aspiring to the virtue of studiousness.

Second, Thomas cautions us to be aware of whether practices of study lead students into the temptation of learning “of one, by whom it is unlawful to be taught, as in the case of those who seek to know the future through the demons.”<sup>19</sup> On the surface, we may not spend a whole lot of time worrying about how practices of study in which we invite students to participate leads them to appeal to agents of Satan. Invariably, Thomas’s caution is certainly good to keep in mind as such instances do occur. However, prudence also teaches us to be concerned with how practices of study might teach our students to see themselves and their efforts in isolation from God. For example, the serpent which appears in the third chapter of Genesis is not so concerned with persuading Eve to listen to the voice of the serpent in absence of the voice of God but to listen to her own voice in absence of the voice of God. The serpent encouraged Eve to do what she alone thought to be true regardless of whether God instructed her not to eat from the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Such a temptation, reinforced by practices of study, leads students to the vice of curiosity and away from the virtue of studiousness.

Building upon his warning against appealing to the agents of Satan, Thomas’s third caution to us refers us to occasions “when a man desires to know the truth about creatures, without referring his knowledge to its due end, namely, the knowledge of God.”<sup>20</sup> Appealing to agents of Satan or even to ourselves as sources of authority in relation to knowledge leads students to the vice of curiosity and away from the virtue of studiousness. However, practices of study which teach students to make such appeals also lead students away from referring knowledge to its proper end or purpose. By severing both the subject from the object and the finite and the infinite, humanity is lured into thinking that it alone determines the end purpose of knowledge. Unfortunately, this lesson is not lost on our students. They are susceptible to the narrative of the market economy which tells them that the end purpose of knowledge and even those individuals who pursue knowledge is a cycle of production and consumption. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that the virtue of studiousness identifies the end purpose of knowledge as well as those individuals who pursue knowledge as being found in relationship to God alone.

Finally, Thomas Aquinas cautions us that the virtue of studiousness instills within those individuals who pursue knowledge an understanding of their own limitations. He contends error emerges “when

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

a man studies to know the truth above the capacity of his own intelligence.”<sup>21</sup> At some level, Thomas is reminding us that the virtue of studiousness brings with it an awareness of one’s capacity for knowledge and thus rightfully comes with limitations. Being human comes with certain limitations if for no other reason than we know that we are not God. In contrast, curiosity leaves us open to the thought that our capacity for knowledge is not bound in any way. As a result, limitless possibility proves to be the fertile ground for not only futile intellectual pursuits but also for pride. Thomas contends that perhaps the enduring problem with practices of study which facilitate pride is that they tempt our students to live out a variant strand of atheism. Such a strand of atheism does not necessarily deny God’s existence but tempts our students to think of themselves as being like God as a result of their efforts.

### Conclusion

By contrast to such a form of atheism, we conclude by offering that the reason why all of our students should be Thomists is that excellence among the intellectual virtues is what should come to define our aspirations for them as emerging Christian scholars. Such aspirations are formed by the design and implementation of practices of study. Such aspirations denounce any distinction between subject and object or finite and infinite. However, such aspirations are also guided by the narrative of excellence as defined by the beatific vision of God. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that this narrative is not one the academy generates on its own but is the story of Christianity as embodied by the Church. Failure to recognize such a narrative and design practices of study accordingly not only leaves our students beyond the formative influence of the intellectual virtues but also leaves them susceptible to a narrative that defines their worth by their mere ability to pay.

*Todd C. Ream, Ph.D.*  
*John Wesley Honors College*  
*Indiana Wesleyan University*  
 4201 S. Washington St. Marion, IN 46953 USA  
 Email: [todd.ream@indwes.edu](mailto:todd.ream@indwes.edu)

*and*

*Thomas W. Seat, II*  
*Princeton Theological Seminary*  
 64 Mercer St. 08540 USA  
 Email: [tom.seat@gmail.com](mailto:tom.seat@gmail.com)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.