When William F. Buckley, Jr., published *God and Man at Yale* in 1951, many observers reacted with consternation. Indeed, the book must have seemed hubristic, its young author critical of one of the oldest and most genteel of American universities. But it also drew ire for its specific claims. In the early days of McCarthyism, Buckley’s quiet reference to the “collectivist” members of the Yale faculty surely was one point of contention. A more stinging charge, however, was that Yale was thoroughly secularized and even atheistic in its goals and methods. Today it may seem hard to believe that a mere 50 years ago, Yale desired a reputation as a “Christian” university. But the most interesting twist to the story of the public controversy over Buckley’s book is the fact that these allegations were being put forward by a Roman Catholic. Did not this upstart realize that he was a guest at this prestigious Protestant establishment?

One of the most encouraging developments in American religious life during the past fifty years is that such outbursts of sectarianism have largely disappeared; many Christian intellectuals now emphasize common elements among different traditions. Sociologist James Davison Hunter, for instance, has argued compellingly that large majorities of the major denominations are similarly moved
primarily by what he calls an “impulse toward orthodoxy.”¹ There is also the so-called “ECT” movement (“Evangelicals and Catholics Together”), associated with Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus. The shift away from sectarianism has begun to affect higher education as well. A willingness to hear the voices of traditions different from one’s own is signaled in the title of an essay by W. Ward Gasque: “What We Can Learn about Higher Education from the Jesuits.”² Conversely, in a collection of mostly Catholic writers considering the future of the University of Notre Dame, George Marsden’s essay is called “What Can Catholic Universities Learn from Protestant Examples?”³

But what would a Christian university, stripped of its sectarian preoccupations, actually look like? What, in fact, might all interested parties learn from a concise distillation of the history of Christian approaches to education? It is my feeling, and my argument here, that we need a good deal less sectarianism among Christians, and as a result more cooperation throughout the body of Christ, if we are ever to approach a world-changing vision for the Christian university. Our challenge is to close ranks.

To begin, we should consider the end. All Christians, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox, should turn to St. Thomas Aquinas, and especially his subsequent legacy as an influence among the Jesuits of the 16th Century. Aquinas’s insight was simple: Education must and by definition always will have an aim, a goal, an end. Furthermore, the end is Christ. Consider the most regal and

surely the most influential theological treatise of the Middle Ages, Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, which begins famously with the following:

> Human well-being called for schooling in what God has revealed, in addition to the philosophical researches pursued by human reasoning. Above all because God destines us for an end beyond the grasp of reason; according to Isaiah, Eye hath not seen, O God, without thee what thou hast prepared for them that love thee. Now we have to recognize an end before we can stretch out and exert ourselves for it.

(7)

This passage communicates a concept that has come to be known as *telos*—a Greek word meaning "end" or "goal." By invoking Isaiah’s passionate prayer, Aquinas reveals a deep concern that his readers understand that the human *telos* is the *glory of God*. This goal--God's glory--is meant to infuse all of human activity with life, with a sense of purpose. As G. K. Chesterton observes in his study *St. Thomas Aquinas*: “The humanizing of divinity is actually the strongest and starkest and most incredible dogma in the creed” (24).

Aquinas brought these beliefs to bear on practically all learning of the Middle Ages in what has come to be called the Medieval Synthesis—an attempted construct of faith and reason in harmony. One gets a flavor of this in the passage quoted above from the *Summa*: “what God has revealed, in addition to the philosophical researches pursued by human reasoning.” Rather than opposing faith to reason, Aquinas begins from the premise that these two realms of knowledge, seemingly at odds and opposed to one another, are in fact one and the same.

History tells us that the greatest inheritors of the Thomist educational theory were the Jesuits, an order begun in the 16th century by a meager band of zealous young schoolmates at the University of Paris under the leadership of St. Ignatius of Loyola. As spelled out in the *Ratio Studiorum*, the definitive statement of Jesuit
educational philosophy published in 1599, and of which Aquinas was clearly the chief influence, “The educator has the ultimate objective of stimulating the student to relate his activity to his final end: knowledge and love of God and salvation of his soul.” More specifically, the term Ratio refers to a system or methodology of study that leads logically to a Telos—a curriculum, as it were, that will logically lead to the proposed end, the glory of God. Thus, according to historian George Ganss, the “goal of the curriculum as a whole [is] a scientifically reasoned Christian outlook on life, enabling the student to live well and meaningfully in this world and the next.” These objectives resonate with the overall purpose of the Society of Jesus, as proffered in the Jesuitical Constitutions: “to aid its own members and their fellowman to attain the ultimate end for which they were created.”

How might we create a more modern version of the Telos of education from a Christian viewpoint? A good place to start is in the magisterial volume, The Idea of a University, by Cardinal John Henry Newman. Its title is interesting to us today because he makes no mention of his theory being necessarily “Christian”: these views were, so to speak, created for all university life. In a famous declaration of the telos of the modern university, which he calls the “perfection of the Intellect,” Newman writes: “That perfection of the Intellect which is the result of Education, and its beau ideal, to be imparted to individuals in their respective measures, is the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things, as far as the finite mind can embrace them, each in its place, and with its own characteristics upon it.” (101)

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Today, parents are clamoring for a return to such traditional educational foundations. Moreover, Christian students as well as their parents are concerned with the loss of faith among college students during their years on campus—a trend that has been documented numerous times in recent decades. Steven Garber’s excellent book *The Fabric of Faithfulness* attempts, among other things, to determine why so many college students enter with a strong faith and yet exit the university as either vaguely agnostic or, at worst, as complete unbelievers. Garber found three characteristics that mark Christian young people who successfully have made the transition from adolescence to adulthood and whose faith has grown, and not been shaken or destroyed, by the university experience:

1. The student has formed a Christian worldview that can account for truth amidst the challenges of relativism, secularization, pluralism, and postmodernism.

2. The student has found a mentor whose life “pictured” the possibility of living with and in that worldview.

3. The student has forged friendships with folks whose common lives, values, beliefs, and aspirations offered a context for their convictions and worldviews to be embodied and to mature.

To a surprising extent, Garber’s findings coincide with three of the major implications of the *Ratio Studiorum* of 400 years ago, and together these two strange bedfellows provide Christian educators today with some major implications for the development of a Christian university:

1. The *Ratio’s* emphasis on curriculum, with a desire to abandon incoherence for telos and order, coincides with Garber’s findings that indicate the importance that each student has formed a Christian worldview.

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2. The Ratio’s emphasis on mentoring and faculty leadership, with a desire to inculcate among both teachers and students and incarnational faith, coincides with Garber’s insistence on an holistic and holy professoriate that cares deeply for the students, guaranteeing that the student has found a mentor.

3. The Ratio’s emphasis on deep and lifelong friendship as a key virtue of education coincides with Garber’s awareness of the crucial question of whether or not the student has forged friendships.

Furthermore, we should consider how these three basic ideas will have important implications for the crucial decisions we will be making in our profession in the coming years, such as:

1. How do these factors impinge on faculty hiring at Christian universities? Will we take more seriously the Christian character of our potential new colleagues? Or will we continue to make the national cultures of the professions, as it were, the single guiding force for hiring?

2. How do these factors impinge on faculty publishing and research at Christian universities? Will faculties consider ways to take seriously what George Marsden has called “Christian scholarship” (meaning, cutting-edge research informed by a Christian worldview)—along with the necessary reward system for this kind of work? Or will we continue to make the national cultures of the professions, highly prejudicial against such approaches, the single guiding force for evaluating and rewarding publications and research agendas?

3. How do these factors influence our valuing of advising and mentoring among our faculty? Is it possible to imagine structural supports for student mentoring that are not only viable but substantial?

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4. How do these factors change the ways we look at our student bodies and the kinds of students we wish to attract and/or not accept into our programs?

5. How do these factors change our discussions about core curricula? Is it possible to imagine a future in which some universities will actually move in the direction of strengthening the core with more hours in classics, languages, literature, and so on, even as the national trends move in the opposite direction?

Finally, I would like to challenge Christian educators in all fields of learning to consider with care the ends to which their classroom activities point. What is the telos implied by our methods and curricula? Can the telos of Christ compel today’s students? In building such a telos, all Christian voices must be heard and must contribute. Unlike the unfriendly rebukes of the Yale leadership toward the audacious critique by a Catholic of their staid Protestant edifice, Christian educators from all sectors of the church must dialogue across sectarian divides. Until now, Catholic thinkers have sadly ignored their Protestant counterparts, and vice versa. However, if the Bible is to be believed, all professing Christians are part of “one body.” Does that imply that this one body has, in fact, one telos? Yes, we might respond—the telos is the Kingdom of God, the one telos of all Christians that emphasizes the fact that that God would “tear open the heavens and come down” to incarnate his Kingdom in his people. The Kingdom, therefore, must become unequivocally the “end” of Christian universities. Otherwise, as witnessed by the secularization of recently “Christian” institutions such as Yale, the very idea of the possibility of a “Christian” university will come to an end.