The Christian Pilgrimage of a Liberal Arts Education: John Bunyan’s Lessons for Learning in Exile and Learning for Freedom

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John Bunyan found it fitting to include a warning at the end of the first part of The Pilgrim’s Progress:

Now, reader, I have told my dream to thee;  
See if thou canst interpret it to me,  
Or to thyself, or neighbour: but take heed  
Of misinterpreting; for that, instead  
Of doing good, will but thyself abuse:  
By misinterpreting evil ensues.

A stern cautionary word, indeed! Misinterpretation leads not simply to misunderstanding, but to evil. Bunyan might admonish even more harshly anyone who would deliberately read his allegory in ways he never intended – that is, to search it for more than merely an authentic and beautiful depiction of the sojourning exile of the Christian life. Amid this same warning, Bunyan also makes a promise to his readers: “Turn up my Metaphors and do not fail: / There, if thou seekest them, such things to find, / As will be helpful to an honest mind.”¹ With Bunyan’s warning and promise in mind, I ask: What has The Pilgrim’s Progress to do with a liberal arts education in the Christian university?

Very little, readers of Bunyan may reply. The Pilgrim’s Progress perhaps seems at best to address only minimally the vocation of liberal learning. However, in wonderfully wise and unexpected ways, Bunyan’s allegory speaks to the purpose and character of the liberal arts. Doing so was not Bunyan’s primary concern, of course. But he still provides profound instruction on why and how Christians ought to pursue the intellectual life. The Pilgrim’s

Progress can inspire a compelling and distinctly Christian vision of liberal education – perhaps even a characteristically Baptist vision.

Liberal education, like the faithful Christian life, is a pilgrimage. “To educate” is “to lead or draw out.” In the medieval liberal arts tradition, the trivium and quadrivium were understood as ways leading out toward a higher end. “Therefore they are called by the name trivium and quadrivium,” Hugh of St. Victor explains in his twelfth-century Didascalicon, “because by them, as by certain ways (viae), a quick mind enters into the secret places of wisdom.” Similarly, a vibrant biblical, theological, and literary tradition has long ruminated on the Christian faith and commitment as a pilgrimage: both a journey from bondage in sin to freedom in Christ, and also a call to sojourning exile on Earth. This tradition should deeply inform the work of Christian higher education. Rightly journeyed, the two pilgrimages – the way of liberal learning and the way of the Christian life – bear profound similarities in their character and purpose. In fact, liberal education in the Christian academy finds its full meaning in light of Christ’s call to live as strangers and pilgrims on Earth. A careful reading of Bunyan’s allegory clarifies how the pilgrimage of liberal learning should be like the pilgrimage of the Christian life.

In what follows, I will first reflect selectively on the two-millennia-long Christian pilgrimage tradition. My goal here is to suggest provisionally how this tradition might offer a persuasive rationale for liberal education. Then, I will turn specifically to The Pilgrim’s Progress and consider how its account of the pilgrimage of the Christian life can instruct potential sojourners pursuing the pilgrimage of liberal learning. The Pilgrim’s Progress, like the wider Christian pilgrimage tradition, offers a particularly sure foundation for a Christian understanding of how to pursue liberal learning and for what end. How are faithful learner-pilgrims in the

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Christian academy to undertake their pilgrimage of learning? As strangers and sojourners in exile on Earth. Why should learner-pilgrims, called out from bondage in sin to liberty in Christ, pursue a liberal education? So that they might come to better comprehend and live according to the freedom received in Christ.

I. The Christian Pilgrimage Tradition: As Strangers and Exiles, From Bondage to Freedom

The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews opens with a memorable declaration: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” By faith, the epistle continues, “the elders obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:1-2 KJV). After testifying to the faith of the earliest of these elders – Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham – the writer of the epistle commends them in two verses central to the Christian vision of the life of faith as a pilgrimage:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country (Heb. 11:13-14 KJV).

Strangers and pilgrims. The phrase in Greek suggests travelers who have arrived in a land not their own and reside there temporarily – foreigners on a sojourn. Martin Luther translated the phrase “Gäste und Fremdling,” guests and strangers, or simply “visiting strangers.” Before him, John Wycliffe rendered it “pilgryms, and herboryd men.” Modern translations have tended to do away entirely with the world “pilgrim.” The New Revised Standard Version reads “strangers and foreigners,” as does the New International Version (although it reverses the word order). In the English Standard Version: “strangers and exiles.” Eugene Peterson renders it in The Message as “transients in this world … looking for their true home.”
The English word “pilgrim” derives from the Latin *peregrinus*, which was meant to refer to a wanderer or alien, a passerby traveling from a foreign land. In that sense, *peregrinus* — pilgrim – fits perfectly the meaning of the writer of Hebrews (not surprisingly, the Latin Vulgate uses *peregrini* for Hebrews 11:13). As one Lollard tract explained, “Euery citizen of the hevenli countre is a pilgrim of this world for al tyme of this present lijf.” Hebrews 11:14 clarifies what is perhaps most important about these strangers and pilgrims: they seek their own country, the true home in which they were created to reside.

The other key New Testament passage on this dimension of the pilgrimage of the Christian life comes in the First Epistle of Peter, a letter addressed to the “elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1 ESV). The writer of the epistle tells the exiles they are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” and God has called them out of darkness into “marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9 KJV). The epistle continues:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:11-12 KJV).

True liberation from the bondage of sin means embracing the identity of an alien and exile on Earth. Therefore, here in I Peter 2, the two key meanings of pilgrimage in the Christian life become nearly one and the same. Christ’s followers are a *peculiar* people, not least because they abstain from worldly pleasures, but it is their peculiarity that marks their faithful witness as sojourners journeying toward their true home.

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As Hebrews 11 suggests, followers of Christ inherit from the Israelites a sense of exile as a foreign people not fully at home in the world. The story of this sojourning began when the Lord banished Adam and Eve from Eden into a hostile world, alienated from God by their sin. The story continued when the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1 ESV). It continued further when the Lord told Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them” (Ex. 3:7-8 ESV). After deliverance, though, came wandering. Still, the psalms testify that the God who spoke to Moses is a faithful liberator: “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (81:10). In the Exodus story, then, converge the two central meanings of pilgrimage: the journey from bondage to freedom by God’s faithful deliverance, and the wandering of exiles longing to reach Zion.

The two-fold pilgrimage of the Christian life finds its full meaning in the person and work of Christ: Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life; Christ, who in exile on Earth, lived as a true stranger and pilgrim; Christ who taught his followers how to sojourn and warned them “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt. 7:14 KJV). The same Christ who shows how to sojourn faithfully offers all people liberation from sin and death. Thus, according to the Gospel of John:

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:31-36 ESV).
The Apostle Paul adds in the Epistle to the Galatians that those who have been set free in the Son must “stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1 KJV).

In Confessions, Augustine vividly recounts the first thirty-one years of his life as a wayward journey from bondage in sin to freedom in the Son. As a young man, Augustine lived as a “vile slave of evil desires,” he confesses. Misdirected love left him enslaved to “own iron will … bound hand and foot.” After retelling the story of stealing from his neighbor’s pear tree, Augustine concludes, “I was that slave who fled from his Lord and pursued his Lord’s shadow.” His act of thievery was a pathetic “small gesture of liberty” befitting a young man in bondage not truly free. As Augustine writes elsewhere, “he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right, until, being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness. And this is true liberty.”

But in Christ Augustine found deliverance “from the chain of that desire of the flesh which held me so bound.” Obeying the call to “take and read, take and read,” Augustine took up scripture and read, “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” It was a moment of liberation. “Thou has broken my bonds,” Augustine proclaims to the Lord. “I am Thy servant.” Yet, his sojourning continues. His restless heart seeks full rest in the Lord, “groaning with inexpressible groaning in my pilgrimage.” Thus, in City of God, Augustine explains how the true church on Earth is a pilgrim people. While the Earthly City finds its form in “the love of self, even to the contempt of God,” the City of God is formed by “the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”

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5 Ibid., 32.
7 Augustine, Confessions, 149, 159, 271.
residents of the City of God still reside on Earth, and Augustine labels these faithful members “the pilgrim city.”\(^8\) Though in exile, these pilgrims need not necessarily utterly withdraw from the world through which they pass. They may still use the “advantages of time and of earth” to their benefit, at least the ones that “do not fascinate and divert them from God, but rather aid them to endure with greater ease.”\(^9\) The members of the exiled “pilgrim city” must keep their eyes fixed on their true home, the City of God, and “sigh for its beauty.”\(^10\)

Even before Augustine’s death in 430, however, “pilgrimage” in the Christian life had acquired a wide array of connotations and practices, a trend that only accelerated throughout late antiquity and the medieval era. The Christian world grew dotted with innumerable shrines and holy sites – some of international renown, some known only locally. The pious who undertook a “place pilgrimage,” as one scholar has termed it, found inspiration to do so for many reasons: as an act of penance or devotion, in hopes of healing, or to encounter God. These “place pilgrimages” always elicited criticism. Why would one need to travel far distances to encounter a God ever-present? (“Change of place does not effect any drawing nearer unto God,” according to Gregory of Nyssa). But that hardly dampened the growing prominence of place pilgrimage in medieval Christian life.\(^11\)

Still, despite ever more elaborate medieval pilgrim practices, perhaps the most important point is one made persuasively by Dee Dyas: “the primary meaning of pilgrimage [in medieval England] … [was] the journey of individual believers through an alien world to the homeland of

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\(^9\) Ibid., 2:326.
\(^10\) Ibid., 1:207.
heaven.” The metaphor of the Christian life as a pilgrimage still always proliferated in late antiquity and medieval Christian theological and literary expression. Cyprian, the third-century bishop of Carthage, writes that Christ’s followers “have renounced the world, and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers.” Likewise, the Anglo-Saxon Blickling Homilies proclaim: “we are in the foreign land of this world – we are exiles in this world, and so have been ever since the progenitor of the human race brake God’s behests, and for that sin we have been sent into this banishment, and now we must seek here-after another kingdom.” In The Canterbury Tales the Parson tells his fellow pilgrims that he shall seek to show them the way of a “glorious pilgrimag / That highte Jerusalem celestial.” Elsewhere, Geoffrey Chaucer in the same spirit declares: “Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy / stal! / Know they contree, look up, thank God of al.” “True pilgrims,” according to John Wyclif, travel toward “the bliss of heaven.” They know their country, as Chaucer says, and therefore keep “the commandments of God, hating and fleeing al the seven deadly sins.”

No one in the medieval era, though, rivaled Dante Alighieri’s poetic vision of the earnest Christian pilgrim’s sojourn to paradise. The Divine Comedy begins in media res with a realization, a confession: “Midway in our life’s journey, I went astray / from the straight road

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17 Quoted in Bartholomew and Hughes, eds., Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage, 96.
and woke to find myself / alone in a dark wood.”¹⁸ As Dante journeys through Hell’s nine circles, he sees souls of the damned wholly given over to their disordered passions and intellect. Their bondage is complete and self-imposed; the punishments the damned receive are “the fulfillment of a destiny freely chosen by each soul during his or her life.”¹⁹ But when Dante makes his way to Purgatory, he witnesses, “the course of time reversed, sin erased, the divine image restored.”²⁰ Unlike in Hell, the souls Dante encounters in Purgatory are in the midst of their own pilgrimage – penitents setting aright their misdirected love as they traverse up Mount Purgatory and are made ready for the Earthly Paradise. Once Dante’s own purification is complete, he describes himself as “remade, reborn, like a sun-wakened tree … perfect, pure, and ready for the Stars.”²¹

At the end of Paradiso, when he says goodbye to Beatrice, his guide and grace, Dante thanks her for having “led me from my bondage and set me free.”²² Virgil declares at the beginning of Purgatorio that the ultimate goal of Dante’s pilgrimage is “to win his freedom,” an end at which Dante has now arrived.²³ The movement of Dante’s pilgrimage, like all motion in the universe, is imparted from God, the unmoved mover, “Him who moves all things,” according to the opening lines of Paradiso.²⁴ At the poem’s end Dante receives a vision – a passing,

¹⁹Peter Brand and Lino Pertile, eds., The Cambridge History of Italian Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 63-64.
²³Dante Alighieri, The Purgatorio, 1.71.
²⁴Dante Alighieri, The Paradiso, 1.1.
ineffable glimpse – of God directly. Here, Dante’s love has been set right; his desires and will are aligned fully with God’s love:

Here my powers rest from their high fantasy,
But already I could feel my being turned –
Instinct and intellect balanced equally
As in a wheel whose motion nothing jars –
By the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars.\(^{25}\)

Dante’s journey ends with the rapturous freedom of “turning ever as one with the perfect motion of God’s love.”\(^{26}\)

The leading theologians of the sixteenth-century Reformation certainly rejected key elements of the intricate theological vision of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Many also condemned overwrought pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines. But these same Reformation theologians also, like Dante, still spoke of the Christian life as a pilgrimage – a redemptive journey from bondage to freedom, and a period of sojourning exile on Earth.\(^{27}\) In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther rejoices that the Christian enjoys a “marvelous liberty” from sin and death, a “real liberty … founded on Christ Himself.” Luther concludes, “Our conscience is free and quiet because it no longer has to fear the wrath of God.”\(^{28}\) John Calvin suggests that I Peter 2:11 unites together the Christian pilgrimage from bondage to sin with the sojourning spirit Christ’s followers on Earth are called to embrace:

And first, to call them away from the indulgence of carnal lusts, he employs this argument, that they were sojourners and strangers. And he so calls them, not because they were banished from their country, and scattered into various lands, but because the children of God, wherever they may be, are only guests in this world … For the lusts of the flesh hold us entangled, when in our minds we dwell in the world, and think not that

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 33.142-146.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 895, fn. 130-144.
\(^{28}\) Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, trans., Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 190.
heaven is our country; but when we pass as strangers through this life, we are not in bondage to the flesh.\textsuperscript{29}

John Milton, in \textit{Areopagitica}, similarly concludes that the “true wayfaring Christian” is the one who “can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better.”\textsuperscript{30} Milton, too, movingly captures the first moment of humanity’s exile on Earth, as Adam and Even, now wayfaring strangers, “hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow / Through Eden took their solitary way.”\textsuperscript{31}

When John Bunyan penned \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress}, then, he contributed to a rich theological and literary tradition ruminating on the character of the pilgrimage of the Christian life. Woven throughout Bunyan’s work is a similar kind of two-fold vision of Christian pilgrimage: as a journey from bondage in sin to freedom in Christ, and as sojourning through life on Earth as a stranger and exile headed toward one’s true home.

Bunyan memorably describes the pilgrim Christian in the opening lines of the allegory as weighed down by a “great burden upon his back,” his sinfulness and the despair it inspires.

When, still early in his pilgrimage, Christian comes upon the Cross and Sepulcher of Christ, “his burden loosed from off his Shoulders, and fell from off his back.” Christian describes his salvation as a moment of joyful liberation:

\begin{verbatim}
What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me, crack?
Blest Cross! Blest Sepulcher!
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Bunyan, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Progress}, 37.
Bunyan says plainly he desired to write about “the Way And Race of Saints … their Journey, and the way to Glory.”[^33] That is to say, Bunyan’s allegory is a story of exile, of pilgrimage on Earth towards one’s true home. “I desire a better Countrey; that is, an Heavenly,” Christian proclaims. He journeys along what Good Will calls, “this narrow way … cast up by the Patriarchs, Prophets, Christ, and his Apostles.”[^34] Soon after receiving this instruction from Good Will, Christian enters the House of the Interpreter and sees in one of the rooms two children, Passion and Patience. The children, in part, capture the difference between true pilgrims and those who are not. The Interpreter explains: “These two Lads are Figures; Passion, of the Men of this World; and Patience, of the Men of that which is to come … Passion will have all now, this year; that is to say, in this World.”[^35] True pilgrims are people of the world that is to come, upon which they fix their eyes. As Christian converses repeatedly with characters who have strayed from “this narrow way,” he appears ever more like a wayfaring exile. Nowhere, perhaps, is Christian’s character as a stranger and pilgrim more obvious than when he arrives at Vanity Fair. Christian and Faithful stand out there – in their clothing, speech, and what captures their attention. They are not of the world of Vanity Fair. Yet in their sojourn, even as they face persecution, they remain meek and faithful and therefore stay on the narrow way, even to Faithful’s martyrdom.

Bunyan emphasizes that Christian’s pilgrimage and exile is by its very nature one of great trials and hardships. As the Evangelist tells Christian and Faithful, “you must through many tribulations enter into the Kingdom of Heaven … and therefore you cannot expect that you

[^33]: Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 3.
should go long on your Pilgrimage without them, in some sort or other.”36 Not coincidentally, Bunyan also reiterates how important it is that Christian sojourns alongside fellow pilgrims of Christ’s church. The Pilgrim’s Progress, at least its first part, is ostensibly the story of one pilgrim; but that pilgrim is never really alone. He spends significant portions of his journey with either Faithful or Hopeful. He finds rest and renewal in the Palace Beautiful. The pilgrimage of the Christian life is not a solitary exile but a communal journey, undertaken alongside one’s fellow strangers and pilgrims on Earth.37

II. The Christian Pilgrimage of a Liberal Arts Education: Learning as Strangers and Exiles for Freedom in Christ

But what, then, does the Christian pilgrimage tradition have to do with a liberal arts education? What might The Pilgrim’s Progress teach its readers about the pilgrimage of liberal learning in the Christian university? Admittedly, to ask this question is to search Bunyan’s allegory for insight into matters he did not intend to address. I hope not to misinterpret Bunyan while showing how The Pilgrim’s Progress might inform why and how to pursue liberal learning. Bunyan follows a long tradition depicting the Christian life as a time of sojourned exile on Earth and a journey from bondage in sin to liberty in Christ. Ultimately, at its best, a liberal arts education in the Christian academy is a similar kind of pilgrimage: undertaken by strangers and pilgrims in exile, and leading to the true freedom of comprehending and abiding by the will of God.

But how might Christian learners pursue a liberal education as faithful strangers and pilgrims? How might they act like Bunyan’s Christian and journey through the liberal arts as

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36 Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, 85.
37 This theme is even more pronounced in the “Second Part” of The Pilgrim’s Progress in the story of the pilgrimage of Christian’s family.
wayfaring exiles? Mark R. Schwehn has suggested the best place to begin an inquiry into “the nature of the academic vocation” is to acknowledge a truth at the heart of the Genesis account of the creation and fall of humanity: “we are all exiles from Eden.” After all, the story of Adam and Eve’s fall and exile teaches enduring truths profoundly relevant to the intellectual life, especially for Christian pilgrims: truths about the perilous pursuit of power through knowledge, truths about humanity's limitations in mastering its disordered world, truths about how life on Earth is a wayward journey toward one’s true home. In professing that they are exiles from Eden, and then cultivating the faithful spirit of strangers and sojourns, liberal learners may more fully discern the truth and wisdom discovered through the liberal arts.

When learner-pilgrims live in a state of exile they live like Christ, the one in whom all truth has its meaning and coherence. To conform one’s heart and mind to Christ's is to see more clearly the beauty, truth, and goodness of God's creation. By being transformed in Christ in this way, pilgrims possess more than feelings of strangeness and exile on Earth. They also, by putting on the mind of Christ, grow to see the world aright, and thereby grow in true knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. For that reason, the exiled mindset of wayfaring pilgrims might also enable liberal learners them to engage thoughtfully with the prevailing norms of thought and behavior that define teaching and learning in the modern academy. This same mindset might inspire the inquisitive spirit needed to guard against an unthinking and complacent acceptance of counterproductive, even harmful, aspects of the status quo in academia.

All the while, the sojourner's unease remains, the longing for home. Mindful of this longing, Hugh of St. Victor offers in his Didascalicon an eloquent description of what it means to pursue liberal learning as an earthly exile:

It is, therefore, a great source of virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.  

Even as liberal learners uncover the truth and majesty in the world around them, they grow ever more aware that the Earth yet remains a foreign land.

It would be a mistake to seize upon Hugh of St. Victor’s call as justification for a spirit of utter anti-intellectualism. The call to live as strangers and exiles does not demand an utter rejection of all the good things of this world, intellectual study included. Augustine writes in *City of God* that true pilgrims who yet remain in this world are to use “such advantages of time and of earth as do not fascinate and divert them from God, but rather aid them to endure with greater ease, and to keep down the number of those burdens of the corruptible body which weigh upon the soul.” Liberal learning certainly falls among one of the “advantages of time and of earth” of which Augustine writes.

Even more pertinent, though, in preventing a sense of exile from degenerating into anti-intellectualism is the fact that the same Christ who modeled the life of the exiled pilgrim on Earth is also the one in whom all things hold together. In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Thus, Christian pilgrims should be lovers of truth wherever they encounter it amid their sojourning exile. For this reason, in *Purgatorio* Dante defends the spiritual knowledge and wisdom that can come through reading literature by non-Christians.

When Dante and Virgil converse with the Roman poet Statius on the terrace of Greed, Statius praises Virgil as the one who first “lit my way to God … through you I was a poet, through you a

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Christian.”\textsuperscript{41} John Calvin, despite his many differences with Dante, similarly found immense value in reading pagan authors precisely because of his conviction that God remained the source and meaning of all truth. “If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole foundation of truth,” Calvin writes, “we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God.”\textsuperscript{42} The truth and wisdom discovered through liberal learning emanates from the same heavenly Father who guides his pilgrim children toward their true home.

Faithful learner-pilgrims in exile, then, must embrace two convictions: that all truth contained in this world is from God and worth pursuing, and that this world – though charged with God’s grandeur – is yet still not their true home. By holding fast to both convictions, liberal learners can avoid utter conformity to the world and utter disregard for the goodness and truth that yet remains to discover in this world.

Moreover, liberal learning affords earthly exiles the chance to practice obedience as pilgrims and prepare their hearts and minds to heed the pilgrim’s call to be set apart. In Bunyan’s vision, true strangers and sojourners are transformed, obedient people who mature in wisdom as their pilgrimage progresses – attuned to the will of God, beholden to the call of Christ’s discipleship. Christian undoubtedly grows in discernment and understanding throughout his journey in The Pilgrim’s Progress. He becomes a more careful observer of the people he meets on his path. He grows more mindful of their deception or folly, how they stray from the narrow path and invite him to do the same. Christian cultivates humble self-awareness and an earnest endurance and resolve. He lives out his transformation in word and deed.

\textsuperscript{41} Dante Alighieri, The Purgatorio, 22.66, 73.
The character Talkative is Christian’s complete opposite in this respect. Bunyan uses him to warn against living as a mere hearer (even knower) but not doer of the Word. “The Soul of Religion is the practick part,” Christian concludes after conversing with Talkative, whose error is thinking “that hearing and saying will make a good Christian.” Talkative can speak knowledgeably on many matters, but his life is not transformed like a true pilgrim. The words of Faithful to Talkative contain humbling wisdom to pilgrim-learners pursuing the path of liberal education:

For there is a knowledge that is not attended with doing: He that knoweth his Masters will and doth it not. A man may know like an Angel, and yet be no Christian … Indeed to know, is a thing that pleaseth Talkers and boasters; but to do, is that which pleaseth God. Not that the heart can be good without knowledge; for without that the heart is naught: There is therefore knowledge, and knowledge. Knowledge that resteth in the bare speculation of things, and knowledge that is accompanied with the grace of faith and love, which puts a man upon doing even the will of God from the heart.

In the same way, the Christian pilgrimage of liberal learning should result in transformation of word and deed – growth in wisdom, understanding, and submission to the will of God. Bonaventure writes in his thirteenth-century work *Journey of the Mind to God* that liberal learning could arouse adoration and obedience to God, who will “enlighten the eyes of our mind to guide our feet into the way of that peace which surpasses all understanding.” An enlightened mind should give way to action, feet that walk in the way of Christ’s peace. The Quaker Parker Palmer similarly suggests, “to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.” Parker recalls the moment in his academic career that he realized he chronically failed “to incarnate what truth I had been given,” which meant his “words, lacking

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43 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 78.
flesh, were skeletons with no animation.”

Or, as Faithful might say, Palmer’s knowledge of the truth still failed to inspire him to do the will of God.

One way to avoid this error is to remember liberal learning offers an opportunity to cultivate and exercise fundamental Christian virtues. It takes humility to acknowledge the limits of your knowledge and turn to an ancient or obscure text as a source of eternal wisdom. It takes charity to read a literary work well, or to understand formulae or historical figures or symphonies in all their complex detail. The learning that occurs in the liberal arts classroom can foster many virtues in learner-pilgrims that they need in their journey as strangers and exiles – a love of justice and mercy and a hope-filled perseverance. Therefore, the pilgrimage of liberal education can contribute in meaningful ways to Christian pilgrims’ preparation to live transformed and obedient lives.

The pilgrimage of the obedient Christian life, though, is not a solitary undertaking. Fellow strangers and sojourners traverse the journey together, as Bunyan plainly emphasizes throughout The Pilgrim’s Progress. When Christian arrives at the Palace Beautiful he receives “relief and security” from the fellowship he discovers there. He benefits from edifying conversation with Prudence, Piety, and Charity. He finds hope and encouragement in learning of “the worthy Acts” of the great cloud of witnesses who faithfully sojourned before him. He gains strength and resolve after being outfitted from the “Armory” of the Lord.

At other stages of his journey, Christian travels with companions, Faithful or Hopeful. The pilgrimage of the Christian life is not an isolating endeavor, Bunyan suggests, but one that ought to bring pilgrims together into vital, life-sustaining community.

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46 Parker J. Palmer, To Know As We Are Know: Education as a Spiritual Journey (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 68, 44.
47 See Schwehn, Exiles from Eden, 48-54.
48 Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, 45-55.
In the same way, earthly exiles should embrace a communal vision of liberal learning. In meaningful community learner-pilgrims best grow in knowledge and wisdom, and flourish as human beings knit together as the body of Christ. The academy is not the church. But the church, as a gathered community of grace, still models the kind of community that should give form and meaning to liberal education in the Christian university. Liberal learners ought to gather together out of mutual love of truth and each another. They should gather to grow in the kind of knowledge and wisdom that enables them to restore justice, mercy, and shalom in their communities. In an updated preface for To Know As We Are Known, Parker Palmer rephrases his memorable axiom as: “To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.” By “community of truth,” Parker refers to “a rich and complex network of relationships in which we must both speak and listen, make claims on others, and make ourselves accountable.” What Parker imagines here resembles an ideal company of faithful learner-pilgrims who have gathered together to seek beauty, truth, and goodness in the liberal arts, and who thereby grow in wisdom and understanding of how to sojourn rightly as earthly exiles.

Christian pilgrims do not wander aimlessly through Earth; they sojourn toward their true home. They journey with a purpose toward a final resting place. “[T]hey seek a country,” a homeland, according to Hebrews 11:14. The pilgrimage of the Christian life finds its coherence and meaning in its end. In The Pilgrim’s Progress, the monster Apollyon asks Christian, “Whence come you, and whither are you bound?” Christian replies, “I come from the City of Destruction … and am going to the City of Zion.” The pilgrimage of the Christian life is a transformative journey from bondage in sin to freedom in Christ. Similarly, the liberal arts tradition, since its pre-Christian beginnings, has typically promised freedom of some kind – an

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49 Palmer, To Know As We Are Know, xii.
50 Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress, 57.
education for free persons that equips them for the right practice of their freedom. But, briefly, what is the nature of the freedom found in Christ, and how might liberal education prepare learner-pilgrims to comprehend and live according to Christ’s freedom? Pilgrims who undertake the journey of liberal education must also ask themselves Apollyon’s question: “Whence come you, and whither are you bound?”

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In the way of Christ’s discipleship is truth, and in that truth is freedom: “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin … if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:31-36). Of course, Christ’s freedom does not liberate people to do whatever is right in their own eyes. Unfettered license is the path back to bondage. Christ’s liberation is instead the freedom to will the good – not rootless autonomy for its own sake, but freedom to seek a holy and flourishing life, that is, to live faithfully as strangers and exiles. In a section of De Doctrina Christiana on “pagan learning,” Augustine beseeches learners to heed the liberating call of Christ: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.” To discover the liberating treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ, learners must remain enslaved to Christ. Under this yoke, Augustine memorably continues, liberal learners can faithfully re-appropriate from pagan learning what is “true and consistent with our faith,” just as the Israelites, when they fled Egypt, seized and put to holy use Egyptian gold and silver “dug … from the mines of providence.”51

The so-called Second London Confession of English Particular Baptists (first published one year before Bunyan’s allegory) beautifully describes the liberation found in Christ as the freedom to will the good. Prior to the fall, the Confession declares, humanity “had freedom, and power, to will, and to do that which was good, and well-pleasing to God,” a freedom lost in sin.

God’s grace frees a sinner from bondage to sin and “enables him freely to will, and to do that which is spiritually good.” Perfect freedom is found in obedience to what the Lord requires: “The Will of Man is made perfectly, and immutably free to good alone.” Yet, even after redemption, the will to sin and evil remains. Earthly exiles who have received life in Christ must therefore persevere in their sojourn in the way of Christ’s discipleship. In doing so, they lead free and righteous lives pleasing to the Lord:

They who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practice any sin, or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives.

An education in the liberal arts can form learner-pilgrims in the knowledge, wisdom, and love needed to avoid “wholly [destroying] the end of Christian liberty.” In the words of John Milton, liberal learning can prepare a person “to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him,” the flourishing life at its fullest, freed from the ruinous shackles of sin.

Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream have recently described this kind of education as “the redemptive development of humans and human creations.” They suggest that the formation that occurs within the Christian academy “needs to be understood within the Christian story,” that is, as part of “the larger mission of a particular Christian tradition as embodied by the worshipping community of the church.” In this respect, particularly important to the vocation of the Christian academy is the story of the creation, fall, and redemption of the cosmos. In light

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of this grand narrative, it becomes easier to recognize the end of liberal education as redemptive moral formation in and for Christ’s freedom. Teachers and students alike who pursue this kind of liberal learning likely will find themselves faithfully imitating God and rightly practicing the liberty found in Christ. It bears repeating that this is an intrinsically communal vision of liberal education, taking as its model both the Church and the Trinity. Thus, Glanzer and Ream conclude:

The major advantage of rearticulating Christian higher education’s task as the redemptive development of humans and human creations is that this language communicates the Christian’s scholar’s highest calling to imitate the model and actions of the Triune God … God continually engages in the business of developing and also redeeming his fallen creation. By understanding our task as the redemptive development of humans and human creations, Christian academics will undertake a sacred task – one of imitating and joining in on the actions embodied by the Triune God.  

Here, then, is a glimpse of the most life-enriching and sacrificial kind of freedom afforded by the liberal arts in the Christian academy: the true liberty found in imitating the Triune God.

As faithful pilgrims finish their sojourn and exile, they are made whole in Christ, like Christ. This is the end toward which both the pilgrimage of liberal learning and the pilgrimage of the Christian life should strive. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, at the end of Christian’s journey and the moment of his death, a “great darkness and horror” falls upon him. Hopeful, Christian’s companion, speaks to him in that moment words of comfort: “Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Learner-pilgrims cannot achieve this redemption and perfect wholeness through liberal learning alone. Yet, the liberal arts in the Christian academy should strive toward the same end: the true freedom and redemption found in being like God in Christ.

John Milton’s declaration, in full, is pertinent here again: “The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge

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57 Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, 149.
to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.”

To Milton, learning should lead to knowledge of God, which should lead to affection for God, an affection that should culminate in a desire to be like God, a mark of ultimate wisdom. In the medieval liberal arts tradition, the *quadrivium* likewise ideally led from knowledge of the harmonies of the universe (and therefore knowledge of God), to delight in God as the source of beauty, truth, and goodness, to a purity of soul that enables true devotion to God. Pilgrims who walk in “true vertue” and “heavenly grace” sojourn toward wholeness and perfection in Christ – the liberty that exists in knowing God and God’s creation and imitating God in Christ.

Together, Bunyan and Milton remind pilgrim-learners who journey through the liberal arts as strangers and exiles that they are truly free when they most faithfully bear the image of God in Christ. Justifications for liberal learning often appeal to the sometimes imprecisely defined goal of “becoming fully human.” But in light of Glanzer and Ream’s proposal for “the redemptive development of humans and human creations,” it would be far better to speak of the end of the pilgrimage of liberal education as being made into more faithful bearers of the image of God. The pilgrimage of the Christian life, of course, leads toward this same end. As the Apostle Paul instructs in the Epistle to the Colossians, strangers and exiles are to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth … Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience … and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:2-3, 12, 14 ESV).

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59 Stratford Caldecott, Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 53, 90.
Liberal education as *redemptive* education is a pilgrimage toward the free and flourishing life found in bearing faithfully the image of God. It is a wayward journey, however incomplete, toward the life enjoyed by Adam and Eve before their fall and exile, a life the Second London Baptist Confession describes as “being made in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and having the power to fulfill it.”

Liberal learning of this kind instills a love of beauty and truth and a yearning for wisdom and righteousness. C.S. Lewis describes this redemptive liberal education as “steeping ourselves in a Personality, acquiring a new outlook and temper, breathing a new atmosphere, suffering Him, in His own way, to rebuild in us the defaced image of Himself.” This happens not by liberal learning alone, but such an education can impart to alienated and exiled people a desire to know and imitate God, a yearning for the freedom and wholeness found in taking on Christ’s yoke.

Like the pilgrimage of the Christian life, redemptive liberal education should instill deep longing and hope – longing to become who we were created to be, and hope that we will arrive at the place we were created to reside. Near the end of *Confessions*, Augustine eloquently expresses this same longing and hope:

> Let me enter into my chamber and sing my songs of love to Thee, groaning with inexpressible groaning in my pilgrimage, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart stretching upwards in longing for it: Jerusalem my fatherland, Jerusalem which is my mother: and remembering Thee its Ruler, its Light, its Father and Tutor and Spouse, its pure and strong Delight, its Joy unshakeable and the sum of all ineffable good because Thou alone art the one supreme and true Good. So that I shall not turn away but shall come to the peace of that Jerusalem, my dear mother, where are the first-fruits of my spirit, from which all certitude comes to me, and there Thou shalt collect from my present scatteredness and deformity all that I am, and Thou shalt re-form me and confirm me unto eternity, O my God, my Mercy.

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60 Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 256.
The way of liberal learning and the way of Christ beckon scattered pilgrims groaning for their true home. Their groaning is not in vain. The same God who created the cosmos and is the source of all knowledge and wisdom desires also to re-form broken pilgrims. Having sojourned faithfully in the way of Christ, learner-pilgrims, like Christian, can take comfort in Hopeful’s words: “Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.”