

## The Chief End of Education

By Pastor Christopher Seah

Our Lord Jesus is the One through whom, in whom, and for whom the universe was made (Col 1:15-17). We must heartily embrace this truth because it influences how we relate to our society and world. Because Christ is the All-Lord, we Christians can work, rest, and play freely in this world to honor his name. And it goes without saying that this truth applies even to *education*, which is one of the great projects to which our society has devoted itself, not to mention one of the pillars on which it rests.

It is remarkable that wise men from the east visited our Lord Jesus when he was newly born (Mt 2:2). These folks were the sages, the intellectual elite, the philosophers of their civilizations. But they knew Wisdom incarnate when they saw him: “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt 2:11). In paying homage to the Messiah, these Gentile sages show the world where wisdom and education must ultimately end—not more money, not mere job skills, not higher positions, but Jesus Christ.

What implications does this truth—that Christ is the goal of education—have for our own education? The first implication is this: *All knowledge is ultimately united in him*. Christ is the common and unshakable holy ground under chemistry, biology, anatomy, exercise physiology, psychology, philosophy, literature, law, political science, economics, art, graphic design, theater, carpentry, farming, business, accounting, and all the human disciplines that serve our world. Although each discipline has its own area of service, all stem from the one Lord himself. Somehow, the diversity of all our disciplines reflects the multi-faceted wonder of our Lord God. Practically speaking, this means that a Christian should not set one discipline over against another. For example, literature is not more valuable than carpentry, neither are literature scholars more valuable than carpenters. It also means that Christians can and ought to see the value of interdisciplinary work. Christians should not be afraid to ask the following questions: How does political science speak to literature? How does biology affect psychology? What light can psychology shed on economics and political science, and vice versa? If Christ is the Creator of all earthly realities, we can expect that truths uncovered by one discipline will speak to others. The net effect looks very much like the work of our heavenly Father—interdependence amongst human communities. “If the whole body were an eye [or an artist], where would be the sense of hearing [or the sports psychologist]? If the whole body were an ear [or an engineer], where would be the sense of smell [or the poet]?” (1 Cor 12:17). If God calls his special human society, the Church, to be interdependent, it makes sense that the human community in general was meant to be that way as well.

But the greater implication of honoring Christ as the end of our education is to see that *all true knowledge summons us to righteousness*. When God completed the earth, he called it “very good” (Gen 1:31). That may be a technical evaluation, as in “very good

for human and animal use.” But it is also a moral evaluation, as in “very good with no evil at all.” If creation is “very good,” it means that we cannot study anything in creation without being confronted by the holy rule of God. The study of art evokes a hunger for eternal beauty. The study of biology confronts us with God’s wisdom, the staggering reach of his sovereign control, and the fragility of our earthly natures. The study of business impresses upon us the importance of knowing our fellow human beings in order to serve them better.

How is it that some people can do well in exams, ascend to high positions, and yet become self-centered, career-obsessed people who lord it over others? It is because they have rejected the silent Word that pleads in all creation. Hence, Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” The truth Paul had in mind was God’s eternal power revealed “in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20), the very things we study.

How do we make our education useful to Christ? The first thing we can do is to *pray* before we study. We thank Christ for the subject material, and for the truths it contains. We then ask Christ to help us receive whatever he has for us, and to forgive us for all the times we have used his truths in selfish ways. From there, we can do some *research*: How can my training be made useful to others? Or, going even further, Where can my training be used in the cause of the Kingdom? While our training may not involve us directly in Gospel ministry, it can often serve the Kingdom in an indirect sort of way. For example, when a sports psychologist comes on board a missions team and equips team members with mental skills to handle stress (assuming those tools do not go against Scripture), he is supporting the work of the Gospel with the training God has granted to him.

As one takes a whiff of the educational enterprise in our society, one cannot help but sense much fear: Fear at not making the grades; fear at being looked down on; fear at disappointing others. One could argue that fear can be helpful in the short-term. But it can only take us so far. Fear can make us pleasers of men, but not lovers of the truth. We were made for joyous service to Christ. Let passion for his glory be greater than your fears. Let your studies be a labor of love for him.