



# Southwestern

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



Christian Higher Education  
in the Baptist Tradition





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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## EDITORIAL

1. Baptist Higher Education: Continuities, Discontinuities, and Hopeful Trajectories <b>David S. Dockery</b> . . . . .	9
2. Academic Discipleship and the Baptist University <b>Nathan A. Finn</b> . . . . .	33
3. The Bible and the University: <i>Sola Scriptura</i> and Interdisciplinary Engagement <b>Keith Whitfield and Rhyné Putman</b> . . . . .	53
4. Intellectual Empathy: Operationalizing the Great Commandment through the University General Education Program <b>Gene C. Fant</b> . . . . .	77
5. Baptists and Secularism: Forthcoming Challenges for Christian Higher Education <b>Hunter Baker</b> . . . . .	93
6. Faithfully Transitioning to Online Education <b>Kristen A. Ferguson</b> . . . . .	103
7. What Christian Universities Owe Their Students <b>C. Ben Mitchell</b> . . . . .	119
BOOK REVIEWS . . . . .	127
BOOK NOTES . . . . .	151



## EDITORIAL

In his important institutional history of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Robert A. Baker, the esteemed Baptist historian, with a reference to the psalmist, encouraged Southwesterners to “tell the generations following.” One perspective on this amazing story of God’s providence at Southwestern Seminary through the years can be seen through the window of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*.

Initial efforts to launch the *Journal* can be traced to 1917, less than a decade after the birth of the seminary. The biblical scholar Charles Williams, who initiated one of the very first modern language translations of Scripture, served as the founding editor of the *Journal*. He was succeeded in 1919 by the legendary W. T. Conner. The Greek grammar specialist H. E. Dana next assumed the editorial role in 1923.

The *Journal* was not published for almost three decades before being reinstated during the years of the Robert Naylor presidency. The *SWJT* has been published consecutively, two issues per year, since 1958. James Leo Garrett Jr., Southern Baptists’ most significant theologian during the second half of the 20th century, served as editor in 1958. Others who have served in this role have left their stamp on Southwestern Seminary in visible and memorable ways, including W. R. Estep Jr. (1963), William Hendricks (1967), H. Leon McBeth (1971), F. B. Huey (1975), and several others. Al Fasol (1998) and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (2006) ushered the *Journal* into the 21st century. I am grateful for the efforts of Terry Wilder and Madison Grace in recent years to guide this project.

As an aspect of the overall vision for renewal and revitalization at Southwestern Seminary, President Adam W. Greenway has communicated his dream for serious scholarship, applied theology, engaging teaching, and service to the churches to be combined with a heart for ministry, evangelism, and global missions, seeing these emphases as partners together on a shared mission. He sees these shared commitments coming together as “One Southwestern,” reclaiming the best of the seminary’s heritage while

advancing the distinctive Southwestern mission.

The new editorial team of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* sees the continuation of the publication of this resource as one way of participating in that vision. We pray that the efforts to re-energize the *Journal* will be used of God to serve the Southwestern community and its various constituencies to help bring revitalization to the seminary we all love in the days and decades to come.

The issue that you hold in your hands has been shaped around the theme of “Christian Higher Education in the Baptist Tradition.” Contributors explore this theme from a variety of perspectives. Nathan Finn, provost and dean of the university faculty at North Greenville University, addresses the important theme of academic or intellectual discipleship. Two capable thinkers, Keith Whitfield, of Southeastern Seminary, and Rhyne Putman, of Williams Baptist University, help us understand the important roles that Christian Scripture and Christian worldview formation play in offering distinctive Christian education.

Gene Fant, president at North Greenville, takes a look at the place of empathy in the general education curriculum. Hunter Baker, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Union University, explores the implications of secularism for the future of Christian higher education. The COVID-19 issues have raised new questions related to virtual learning and online education. Kristen Ferguson, who guides the work of online learning at Gateway Seminary, seeks to interact with these important questions. Finally, with students in mind, our theme is examined by C. Ben Mitchell, Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union.

This issue marks the first efforts of the *Journal*'s new editorial team. The names of those who serve on the editorial council are listed on page two of this issue. I am truly thankful for the experience and wisdom that this group brings to this project. We salute Adam Covington and his team for the redesign of the cover and the overall look of the *Southwestern Journal*. I am grateful for the skills and editorial experience that Sarah Spring, James A. Smith, Sr., and Alex Sibley have offered in their roles as consulting editors. I am particularly thankful for the dedicated efforts of Katie McCoy and Andrew Streett. Their work as associate editors has been commendable in every way. We are all thankful to President Greenway for the privilege to serve the Southwestern Seminary community and the Southwestern constituencies through the work of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*.

We ask for your ongoing prayers for this work in the days to come. We trust that you will find the articles and the book reviews in this issue to be illuminating, instructive, and helpful.

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
David S. Dockery







## **BAPTIST HIGHER EDUCATION: Continuities, Discontinuities, and Hopeful Trajectories**

David S. Dockery\*

Baptist higher education in the twenty-first century must continue to carry out the essential task commissioned by the risen Christ (Matt 28:19–20). Baptist education in North America, and particularly among Southern Baptists since the middle of the nineteenth century, has attempted to be academically sound, Christ-centered, grounded in the Scriptures, and connected to and with the churches. Throughout these years, one can observe both continuities and discontinuities as Baptist educators have simultaneously demonstrated both the courage to lead and a listening ear to respond to the churches, for Baptist higher education is indeed a two-way street.<sup>1</sup> Our look at Baptist higher education in this article will include both the work of colleges and universities, as well as theological seminaries. We will provide a brief reminder and overview of Christian higher education prior to the nineteenth century before taking a more focused view of education in Baptist life. Doing so will help us be able to observe markers of continuity prior to the modern period.

### **I. CONTINUITIES IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: FROM THE APOSTLES TO THE BEGINNING OF NORTH AMERICAN EDUCATION**

1. *Apostolic and Postapostolic Period.* The student of history can discern little difference between the theological preparation provided for church

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<sup>1</sup> See David S. Dockery, “Ministry and Seminary in a New Century,” *Southern Seminary Magazine* 62:2 (1994): 20–22; Dockery, “A Theology for the Church,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 1:1 (2003): 10–20.

\* David S. Dockery serves as distinguished professor of theology and editor of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. A past president of the Evangelical Theological Society, he currently serves as president of the International Alliance for Christian Education. Dockery previously served as president at Union University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

members and that designed for church leaders in the apostolic and post-apostolic periods.<sup>2</sup> People were called to ongoing study (2 Tim 2:15) in order to provide oversight for the ministry of the Word of God in the midst of worship services, as well as to mentor and disciple new converts (2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9).

The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Thessalonica, urged followers of Jesus Christ to “stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught” (2 Thess 2:15). Similarly, the apostle exhorted Timothy, his apostolic legate, to “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching” (2 Tim 1:13). The history of Christian education is best understood as a chain of memory with succeeding generations building on that which has gone before them.<sup>3</sup>

Wherever the Christian faith has been found, there has been close association with the written Word of God, with books, education, and learning. Studying and interpreting the Bible became a pattern for members of the early Christian community, having inherited the practice from late Judaism.<sup>4</sup> The tradition that would eventually shape more formal approaches to both Christian higher education and to theological education locates its roots in the interpretation of Holy Scripture.

Beginning in the second century, the serious study of the Bible started to inform the early stages of theological education in the church, which was shaped by a shared faith in the uniqueness and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. Formal training by the time of the second century, during the time of Justin Martyr (100–165), Irenaeus (125–202), and Tertullian (150–225), tended to focus on areas of philosophy and rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed histories of this period, see: George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Michael Reeves, *Theologians You Should Know. An Introduction: From the Apostolic Period to the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016); Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); John Rogerson, Christopher Rowland, and Barnabas Lindars, *The History of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Justo L. Gonzalez, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015); Thomas A. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Intellect: The Aims and Purpose of Ante-Bellum Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> See David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> See Virginia Stem Owen, “Fiction and the Bible,” *Reformed Journal* 38 (July 1988): 12–13; Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Karlfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978); Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988).

authority of the church, affirmations regarding the biblical canon, and efforts toward theological formation had reached new heights by the beginning of the third century, which saw the rise of schools, intertwined with classical learning, science, philosophy, and centers of art. Steps toward serious educational engagement began to develop and mature in the schools of Alexandria and Antioch.<sup>6</sup>

Athanasius (296–371), more than anyone else during the fourth century, shaped the church’s understanding of the expanding rule of faith, which became the framework for theological understanding and catechesis. The consistent articulation of the church’s orthodox faith, coupled with pastoral concerns for the edification of the faithful, provided norms for the shaping and advancement of the work of educational instruction.<sup>7</sup>

2. *Augustine and the Medieval Period.* The most important and influential shaper of theology and education during the first thousand years of church history was Augustine (351–430), who paved the way for future theologians and educators. Some have even suggested that the past fifteen hundred years are best understood as a footnote to the work of Augustine.<sup>8</sup>

Justo Gonzalez has noted that during this time the practice also arose of employing monastic life as an opportunity to study. The monastic schools began to occupy a central place in European intellectual life as well as for those preparing for ministry. While serious educational advances took place during this time, we must recognize that there were still no formal academic institutions. Personal mentoring, guidance, and teaching from pastors and bishops, including Augustine himself, remained the primary model for theological education.<sup>9</sup> During the medieval period, educational efforts were expanded and strengthened through the efforts of Anselm (1033–1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).<sup>10</sup>

The students of these outstanding thinkers for the most part became pastors, but these teachers of the church did not perceive of their role

<sup>6</sup> See R. V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies: A Study in the Christological Thought of the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1954).

<sup>7</sup> See Craig A. Blasing, *Athanasius* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> See James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019); Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); and Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Early Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952).

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez, *History of Theological Education*, 19–23.

<sup>10</sup> See William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 146.

as primarily preparing people for ministry. In seeking to prioritize and advance the Christian intellectual tradition, they helped provide a prominent place for the developing universities birthed during these years. While early Christian education emphasized catechetical purposes, medieval universities were largely shaped for the purposes of professional education, with some general education for the elite. Of the seventy-nine universities in existence in Europe during this time, Salerno was best known for medicine, Bologna for law, and Paris for theology.<sup>11</sup> Thus the aim of most medieval universities was not focused on ministerial education so much as philosophical and contemplative inquiries.<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere was this kind of serious Christian engagement better seen in the medieval context than in the work of Thomas Aquinas. He and other medieval thinkers flourished in a context in which the Christian faith provided illumination for the intellectual landscape and the central mission of the university generally focused on inquiry in pursuit of truth. Faith in the context of medieval Christendom was understood to be an ally, not an enemy, of reason and intellectual exploration. Since the medieval period, Christian universities, which arose *ex corde ecclesiae* or “from the heart of the church,” have been one of the primary places where the Christian faith has been advanced and from which formal ministerial education began to take shape.<sup>13</sup>

3. *Renaissance and Reformation.* The Renaissance envisioned the revival of Greek and Roman literature while newer subjects were developing during the medieval periods such as arithmetic, geometry, and music. The Reformation period placed education within the context of a Christian worldview. While Martin Luther (1483–1546) is widely recognized as the father of the Reformation, in reality he, in many ways, carried forward the work of Peter Waldo (1140–1218), John Wycliffe (1330–1384), Jon Hus (1373–1415), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), and even Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536). All of these prioritized the Scriptures in bold ways, but Erasmus (even more so than Luther), through the influence of John Colet (1466–1519), rediscovered the priority of the historical sense of

<sup>11</sup> See Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 131–60.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Noll, “Reconsidering Christendom,” in *The Future of Christian Learning* (ed. Thomas A. Howard; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 23–70; Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 11–117.

<sup>13</sup> See John J. Piderit, “The University at the Heart of the Church,” *First Things* 94 (June/July 1999): 22–25; David Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 27 (1980): 31–32; E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957).

biblical interpretation.<sup>14</sup> As significant and innovative as the work of Erasmus was, the pivotal and shaping figures of the Reformation were Martin Luther and John Calvin (1509–1564).

Luther, reclaiming the key aspects of the Augustinian tradition, also insisted that the human intellect adjust itself to the teachings of Holy Scripture. Luther's bold advances have influenced Christian thinkers and the works of theological education for five centuries, yet John Calvin in a sense "Out-Luthered" Luther to shape aspects of the Christian intellectual tradition that have developed since the sixteenth century.<sup>15</sup> John Calvin was the finest interpreter of Scripture and the most precise Christian thinker of this period.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it was Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) more than anyone else during the Reformation period who advanced important educational initiatives. Melancthon's *Loci Communes* (1521), the first systematic expression of Lutheran ideas, gained widespread influence due to its clear and irenic approach. He helped to reform eight universities and to found four others, while penning numerous textbooks for use in various schools, academies, and institutions. These things earned him the title of "Preceptor of Germany."

Luther's colleague proposed a new theological curriculum from which came the threefold shape of theological education: (1) the study of the Bible and its interpretation, (2) the study of doctrinal theology, and (3) the application of these subjects with special attention to the practical administration of churches, preaching, worshipping, and ministry. Formal theological education became a requirement for ministerial ordination during the sixteenth century, a practice that has continued to be the expectation in many traditions up to the present day.<sup>17</sup>

By the seventeenth century, these streams proliferated, resulting in

<sup>14</sup> See David S. Dockery, "The History of Pre-critical Interpretation," *Faith and Mission* 10 (1992): 3–33; and Dockery, "Foundations for Reformation Hermeneutics: A Fresh Look at Erasmus," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (ed. M. Bauman and D. Hall; Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995), 53–76.

<sup>15</sup> See David S. Dockery, "Martin Luther's Christological Principle: Implications for Biblical Authority and Biblical Interpretation," in *The Reformation and the Irrepressible Word of God*, ed. Scott M. Manetsch (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 40–62.

<sup>16</sup> See Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 171–265.

<sup>17</sup> See Gregory B. Graybill, *The Honeycomb Scroll: Philip Melancthon and the Dawn of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 145–337; Gonzalez, *History of Theological Education*, 70–77; Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern University*, 60–79. Also see Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996).

both fragmentation and greater variety of the expressions of the Christian movement.<sup>18</sup> Many aspects of this expansion were good and helpful as the Christian message began to circle the globe. It was during this time that early American colleges were formed, governed by trustees from related Christian denominations. These institutions provided education within the context of faith and were grounded in the pursuit of truth for Christ and his church. Some of these schools included:

Institution/Location	Date	Denomination
Harvard (Massachusetts)	1636	Congregational
Yale (Connecticut)	1701	Congregational
Princeton (New Jersey)	1746	New Light Presbyterian
Columbia (New York)	1754	Anglican
Brown (Rhode Island)	1764	Baptist

Rhode Island was the ideal place to launch a Baptist institution in the middle of the eighteenth century, for this American colony had more Baptists than any other. While these early Baptists were not necessarily zealous for the cause of education, even for the preparation of their ministers, they still wanted their own institution rather than sending their best and brightest to Harvard or Yale. For as Leon McBeth observed, experience had taught them that “you could send a Baptist to Harvard, but you could not get one out.”<sup>19</sup> Donald Schmeltekopf and Dianna Vitanza have provided us with a detailed look at the history of Baptist higher education in this country in their volume on *The Future of Baptist Higher Education*.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, we will turn our attention to an exploration of continuities and discontinuities in Baptist higher education, with a focus on Southern Baptist higher education, realizing that the streams that influenced the practice and shape of Christian education during the church’s initial eighteen centuries provided the framework for education in Baptist life. We will seek to conclude with a look at hopeful trajectories related to

<sup>18</sup> See David S. Dockery, “Denominationalism: Historical Developments, Contemporary Challenges, and Global Opportunities,” in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity* (ed. Anthony L. Chute, Christopher W. Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson; Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 177–209.

<sup>19</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 235.

<sup>20</sup> See Donald D. Schmeltekopf and Dianna M. Vitanza, “Baptist Identity and Christian Higher Education,” in *The Future of Baptist Higher Education* (ed. Donald D. Schmeltekopf and Dianna M. Vitanza; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 3–21.

this movement.

## II. DISCONTINUITIES IN BAPTIST HIGHER EDUCATION

Baptists have been involved in higher education in America for more than 250 years. Brown University, the first Baptist institution established in this country, is now one of the premier Ivy League institutions. Brown rarely thinks of itself as having a Baptist identity or heritage, and unfortunately, this story can be told over and over again. The second Baptist institution in this country was Colby College (1813), a very fine institution in Maine for many years. Today, Colby is recognized as one of the top liberal arts colleges in the United States, but it no longer identifies itself as connected to Baptist life. Colgate was an institution founded in the state of New York by the Baptist Society of Education in 1819, but hardly anything at Colgate University still resembles a connection to its Baptist heritage. Understanding these developments provides contemporary distinctive Baptist institutions with a sober warning about the need to carry on a distinctive Baptist mission in a faithful manner. The list of former Baptist institutions who are no longer connected to Baptist life, sadly, is quite long. We must ask, how has this change taken place? At least three major factors can be identified.

1. *Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Thought.* The first of these is the influence of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, which challenged the very heart of the Christian faith by raising questions about authority, tradition, and the role of reason. The Enlightenment, which blossomed in the eighteenth century, was a watershed in the history of Western civilization. The Christian consensus that had existed from the fourth through the seventeenth centuries was hampered, if not broken, by a radical secular spirit. Enlightenment philosophy could be characterized by its stress on the primacy of nature and reason over special revelation. Along with this elevated view of reason, the movement reflected a low view of sin, an anti-supernatural bias, and an ongoing questioning of the place of authority and tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) led the way with his efforts to attempt to synthesize the Christian faith with Enlightenment ideas. His work, best seen in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799)

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<sup>21</sup> See Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas, and Movements* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 173–340; G. R. Evans, *History of Heresy* (London: Blackwell, 2003).



and *Brief Outline of Theological Studies* (1811), transformed the Christian faith into something quite different, evidencing observable discontinuity with Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin. Schleiermacher initiated a trajectory that emphasized critical studies, which, contrary to Schleiermacher's intention, tended to separate the study of the Bible and theology from the life of the church and create tensions between the head and heart, as well as between academy and congregations.

2. *Academic Specialization.* A second contributing factor involved the rise of academic specializations in all aspects of higher education. Christian higher education was not exempt from this development, particularly the implications of this shift in higher education offerings, which began around 1870 and greatly expanded throughout the twentieth century. At the heart of faithful Christian higher education can be found the belief that all knowledge, all truth, and all wisdom have their source in God. From this commitment, Christian educators have insisted on the unity of knowledge. Disciplinary specialization not only emphasized one academic discipline above others but suggested that a particular way of knowing was also distinctive to each discipline. This disciplinary specialization, when recognized as the dominant metanarrative for higher education, began to dismantle the coherence of the curriculum while disconnecting the presuppositional connection between the Christian faith and academic knowledge that had previously existed on both public and private campuses. Built on the framework of a Christian worldview, Christian higher education maintained a unity of knowledge from subject to subject. As James Turner has observed:

This assumption flowed from the elemental Christian beliefs: a single Omnipotent and all-wise God had created the universe, including human beings, who shared to some extent in the rationality behind creation. Given this creation story, it followed that knowledge, too, comprised a single whole, even if finite and fallible human beings could not perceive the connections clearly or immediately. And Christianity generated an intellectual aspiration, even imposed a duty, to grasp the connections, to understand how the parts of creation fitted together and related to divine intention.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 90. Even David Damrosch raised serious concerns about the impact

Together with the loss of the capstone course in moral philosophy, which had been characteristically taught by theologian-presidents such as Timothy Dwight at Yale, and the rise of philological historicism, which bracketed the pursuit of knowledge and truth in the humanities, combined with the influence of methodological naturalism in the sciences, the rise of disciplinary specialization severed the coherent approach to knowledge that had shaped so much of higher education in North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, most of these changes unknowingly took place on Baptist college campuses because Baptist higher education largely focused on providing education within a healthy moral context without a full-orbed philosophy of education,<sup>24</sup> thus separating faith and learning into two separate spheres. Academic offerings, without the anchors of Christian worldview commitments, soon appeared quite similar to the subject matter taught in more secular contexts.

3. *Loss of Relationship with the Churches.* The third contributing factor in this overall development had to do with the loss of connection with the churches. The disconnect from the churches also included an accompanying separation from the Christian intellectual tradition and the church's confessional heritage as well. A piece of this complex issue involved the disassociation of free-standing seminaries from the colleges and universities, opening the door for the dynamics associated with secularization, implications not intended by those who helped to birth Southern Seminary out of the Furman University community (and the same could be said for B. H. Carroll and the launch of Southwestern Seminary from within the context of Baylor University). One cannot overstate that Baptist colleges and universities are decidedly not churches, yet they must remain connected with the churches to carry out their mission in a faithful manner over the long term.<sup>25</sup>

James Burtchaell, in his massive study *The Dying of the Light*, surveyed dozens of institutions from various traditions, including the Baptist

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of disciplinary specialization in his important work called *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> The entire volume by Roberts and Turner addresses these developments over the decades. Also see Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*.

<sup>24</sup> See the insightful discussion by Donald D. Schmeltekopf in "A Christian University in the Baptist Tradition: History of a Vision" in *The Baptist and Christian Character of Baylor* (ed. Donald. D. Schmeltekopf and Dianna M. Vitanza with Bradley J. B. Toben; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 1–20.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion by John F. Wilson in his "Introduction" to *The Sacred and the Secular University*, 3–16.

tradition. His important work brings to the forefront the reality of how many institutions from various traditions have seen the light of the Christian faith die out on their campuses. Burtchaell may well have been wrong about some of the particulars in his research, but his big picture thesis generally holds true across the various traditions and across the decades. The moment an institution begins to lose its connection with the churches is the day the light starts to disappear on the campus. Baptist institutions, while not churches, are an extension of the churches, the academic arm of the kingdom of God. High quality teaching and scholarship can be done and must be done without neglecting the relationship with the churches.<sup>26</sup>

Today, the landscape of Baptist higher education institutions presents a varied picture, not only because of these major shifts in the world of Baptist higher education, which must be understood within the big picture of higher education in general in North America, but also due to the different Baptist traditions that influenced aspects of Baptist higher education. Many Baptist historians talk about these various shaping traditions, whether “the Charleston tradition,” “the Sandy Creek tradition,” “the Landmarkist tradition,” or the “frontier tradition.”<sup>27</sup> It is the Charleston tradition in which we find the strongest commitment to education and a corresponding commitment to serious scholarship informed by a confessional heritage.

Beyond these various geographical trajectories, a number of other elements have influenced the varied shape of Baptist higher education as we know it today. The influence of Princeton Seminary in the nineteenth century cannot be discounted. It was at Princeton that James Boyce and Basil Manly Jr., who influenced both Furman University and the founding of Southern Seminary, were educated. The pietistic revivalism of the frontier influenced Texas institutions, particularly Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. The Particular Baptist and General Baptist differences, including emphases on the importance of a theological confessional framework and the place of religious experiences, have also contributed to the diversity of perspectives. Over the past 75 years, questions concerning headways into Southern Baptist life by liberal European theology on the one hand and the influence of North American evangelicalism on the other have pulled Baptists in two different directions, while the presence of an

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<sup>26</sup> See James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> See Walter B. Shurden, “The Southern Baptist Synthesis,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2–10.

anti-intellectual fundamentalism has tended to raise suspicion about all aspects of the Baptist education project. All of these things, to one degree or another, have influenced at least an aspect of Southern Baptist life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the works of Baptist higher education in particular. In so many ways, Southern Baptist-related higher education reflects the synergistic confluence of these factors.<sup>28</sup>

4. *Understanding Baptist Distinctives.* Southern Baptists share many similarities with other North American Christians. We can identify at least four: (1) the Baptist heritage is formed by orthodox Christian convictions; (2) Baptists are influenced by the larger evangelical tradition; (3) Baptists are heirs of the sixteenth-century Reformation (with influence also from the “radical reformers”); and (4) Baptists share connections with the great historic Christian confessions. With these four overarching markers, Baptists relate to other Christians and Christian traditions.<sup>29</sup>

Distinctive Baptist markers include: (1) believer’s baptism instead of infant baptism; (2) voluntary ecclesiology based on a regenerate church membership instead of an inherited/parish ecclesiology; (3) local organization of church life instead of state control, with its implications for religious liberty; (4) biblical authority as priority over tradition; (5) populist biblical interpretation growing out of shared belief in the priesthood of all believers rather than the authoritative teaching of bishops; (6) Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper practiced primarily as matters of obedience rather than as a means of salvific grace; and (7) a commitment to religious liberty.<sup>30</sup>

These influences and distinctive markers have shaped Southern Baptist education. From these influences have also arisen challenges to Southern Baptist higher education, some of which have helped to push Baptist institutions away from their relationship with the churches. Matters such as localism, Landmarkism, an a-theological pietism, populism, as well as the presence of theological liberalism on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other, have tended to stifle sanctified intellectual development, or

<sup>28</sup> See Timothy George and David S. Dockery, *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: B&H, 1990); Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); as well as James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2009), 713–26.

<sup>29</sup> Leon McBeth was most likely correct when he observed that Baptists have often used confessions not only to proclaim Baptist distinctives but also to show how Baptists were similar to other orthodox Christians. See *The Baptist Heritage*, 66–69.

<sup>30</sup> See Timothy George and David S. Dockery, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 1–10; also, Keith Harper, ed., *Through a Glass Darkly: Contested Notions of Baptist Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012).

at least have made it nearly impossible to claim a shared consensus. In addition, these trajectories have failed to appreciate the importance and breadth of the Christian intellectual tradition, thus often disconnecting Baptist educational efforts from the continuity and sense of catholicity found in the first eighteen centuries.

Those seeking to carry forward faithful Baptist higher education will need to be aware of these potential pitfalls, learning from history while strengthening and renewing foundational confessional commitments. Our Baptist forbearers recognized the importance of such commitments. In 1905, when E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) and A. T. Robertson (1863–1934) led Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic to come together with Baptists from other parts of the world to think globally and confessionally about Baptist work, they acknowledged that the starting place for doing so was with a common confessional commitment as they stood together as one to recite in unison the Apostles' Creed.<sup>31</sup> It must be acknowledged, however, that W. O. Carver (1868–1954), professor of world religions and missions at Southern Seminary, W. L. Poteat (1856–1938), president and professor of biology at Wake Forest, Samuel Brooks (1863–1931), president at Baylor, and other important Baptist thinkers and leaders of the twentieth century were less than excited about such confessional commitments, particularly with application to Baptist higher education at the time when Southern Baptists led by Mullins and L. R. Scarborough (1870–1945) adopted their first convention-wide confession of faith at the annual convention in Memphis in 1925.<sup>32</sup>

As we think about moving beyond the various continuities and discontinuities of the past with a view toward a renewed vision for Baptist higher education, we believe that a confessional foundation will serve well to advance such a distinctive approach. We can begin with the Apostles' Creed, and from there we can begin to cultivate a holistic orthodoxy based on a high view of Scripture that is congruent with the great affirmations of the Early Church regarding Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. By reconnecting with the great *consensus fidei*, the great confessional tradition of the church, we can seek to avoid the errors of fundamentalist reductionism

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<sup>31</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 496.

<sup>32</sup> See David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 134–67, 180–220. Material from this section has been adapted from the Norton Lectures given on the campus of Southern Seminary in March of 2018 and the Hester Lectures given at the annual meeting of the International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities in June of 2018.

on the one hand and liberal revisionism on the other.

### III. TOWARD A RENEWED VISION AND HOPEFUL TRAJECTORIES FOR BAPTIST HIGHER EDUCATION

Baptist higher education blossomed in the middle of the twentieth century as new institutions were established and other more mature entities moved into phases of expansion and growth. Important for these efforts was the work of the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, which existed in various forms from 1917 to 1996. Leadership for this effort was carried out by Charles Johnson, R. L. Brantley, Orin Cornett, Ben Fisher, and Arthur Walker, among others.

In 1928, the purpose of the Commission was clearly articulated as follows:

The duties of the Commission shall be to stimulate and nurture interest in Christian education, to create educational convictions, and to strive for the development of an educational conscience among Baptist people. In short, this Commission shall be both eyes and mouth for Southern Baptists in all matters pertaining to education.<sup>33</sup>

For a number of reasons, the Education Commission came to an end in 1996 during the restructuring of the SBC in the mid-1990s. The closing of the Commission brought closure to the organizational consensus among Baptist educators and Baptist educational entities, though it must be acknowledged that there existed minimal consensus regarding the essence and overall purpose of Baptist higher education.<sup>34</sup> In the final section of this article, we would like to propose a vision for the renewal of Baptist higher education as we move together into the middle decades of the twenty-first century.

1. *Toward a New Consensus.* Baptist educational leaders have been entrusted with the Christian faith, the body of truth once for all delivered to the saints (Titus 1:9; Jude 3). We recognize that the Christian faith is not merely some personal, subjective, amorphous feeling. While personal

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<sup>33</sup> R. Orin Cornett, "Education Commission," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1, ed. Clifton J. Allen and Norman Wade Cox (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), 392–94.

<sup>34</sup> See the collection of diverse perspectives included in the compendium edited by Arthur L. Walker Jr., *Integrating Faith and Academic Discipline* (Nashville: SBC Education Commission, 1992).

faith in Christ and genuine piety are essential, an understanding of the Christian faith must include what H. E. W. Turner (1907–1995) called “the pattern of Christian truth.”<sup>35</sup> One of the first building blocks in the shaping of a new consensus will include shared affirmations regarding the Trinitarian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Scripture, humanity, sin, salvation, the Christian life, the church, the kingdom of God, eternal life, as well as important commitments in the area of Christian ethics. Such an approach recognizes that Baptist higher education is best done in, with, and for the church.

In 1996, William Hull (1930–2013), who at the time served as provost at Samford University, noted in his Hester Lecture that:

clearly this is a critical time to redefine the meaning and mission of Christian higher education, and to understand the distinctive reason for our existence. . . . Our need now is not for a general philosophy of education, but for an explicit theology of education rooted in the imperatives of the Christian gospel. In a time of spiritual confusion and moral anarchy, Baptists have been driven back to the Bible and to their core confessions of faith, which is where the church always goes when under furious attack.<sup>36</sup>

In many ways this proposal extends my own personal engagement with Provost Hull, who passed away in 2013.<sup>37</sup> In the midst of what Hull referred to as this “secular and empty age,” we offer a proposal that seeks to describe the heart of distinctive Baptist higher education.

A look around the globe points to a shift among the nations that will influence the world for decades to come. We must keep our eyes on cultural and global trends since our work never takes place in a vacuum,

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<sup>35</sup> See H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (1954; Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf And Stock, 2004); also see Timothy George, “The Pattern of Christian Truth,” *First Things* 154 (June/July 2005): 21–25.

<sup>36</sup> William E. Hull, “Southern Baptist Higher Education: Retrospect and Prospect,” Unpublished Hester Lecture given at the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Provost Hull responded to earlier aspects of this vision by suggesting that the Baptist educational vision being proposed by people like David Dockery and Robert Sloan was too heavily influenced by northern evangelicals. See Hull, “Where are the Baptists in the Higher Education Dialogue?” in *Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach* (ed. John M. Dunaway; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

and this observation does not begin to address the changes in higher education itself in terms of focus, funding, philosophy, methodology, and delivery systems, much less the changes that will be forthcoming in our post-COVID context.

2. *A Theological and Confessional Framework.* Baptist higher education involves a distinctive way of thinking about teaching, learning, scholarship, subject matter, student life, administration, and governance that is grounded in the orthodox Christian faith. The Christian faith not only influences our devotional lives and our understanding of piety and spirituality, as important as these things are, but it shapes and informs what we believe, how we think, how we teach, how we learn, how we write, how we lead, how we govern, and how we treat one another.<sup>38</sup> As Hull noted, we need an explicit theological vision to sustain Baptist higher education as we move forward. One thing that has led to the discontinuities within Baptist higher education and loss of distinctive Baptist institutions has been the lack of a theological vision to sustain them and to serve as an anchor and compass for the work.<sup>39</sup>

While at some of these institutions one can still find remnants of a theology or religion department, there is often confusion as to whether these programs belong to the areas of history or philosophy or with some other program such as sociology or the fine arts.<sup>40</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, the longtime professor at Duke Divinity School, has sadly observed that the loss of theological vision at these places and others means that few Christian institutions will leave behind “ruins,” the kind of material evidence of a vibrant Christian academic culture that glorified God, served the church, and influenced generation after generation of students.<sup>41</sup> It is our hope that a more full-orbed understanding of a theologically shaped vision for Baptist higher education will help us to engage the culture and to prepare a generation of leaders who can effectively serve both church and society.

<sup>38</sup> See David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 1–46.

<sup>39</sup> See David S. Dockery, “Toward a Theology of Higher Education,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62:1 (2019): 5–22.

<sup>40</sup> See Denise Lardner Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind: A Theology of Higher Education* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1–65; Nathan Finn, “Knowing and Loving God: Toward a Theology of Christian Higher Education,” in *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* (ed. David S. Dockery and Christopher Morgan; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 39–58. Also, Bradley J. Gundlach, “Foundations of Christian Higher Education: Learning from Church History,” in *Christian Higher Education*, 121–38.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 33–34.



We believe that an understanding of the self-revealing God who created humans in his image provides a beginning point for this vision. We believe that students created in the image of God are designed to discover truth and that the exploration of truth is possible because the universe, as created by the Trinitarian God, is intelligible. These beliefs are held together by our understanding that the unity of knowledge is grounded in Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17). The Christian faith then provides the lenses to see the world, recognizing that faith seeks to understand every dimension of life under the lordship of Christ.

The richness of the Christian tradition can provide guidance for the complex challenges facing Christian higher education at this time. At the heart of this work is the need to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, to serve society, and to renew the connection with the churches and their mission. To do so, the breadth and the depth of the Christian tradition must be reclaimed, revitalized, and revived for the good of Baptist higher education.<sup>42</sup>

When we contend that Baptist higher education must be intentionally Christ-centered education, we are in effect confessing that Jesus Christ, who was eternally the second person of the Trinity and shared all the divine attributes, became fully human.<sup>43</sup> To think of Christ-centeredness only in terms of piety or activism will not be enough to respond to the challenges of today's academy and culture.

A healthy future for Christian higher education must return to the past with the full affirmation that we see the whole man Jesus and confess that he is God when we point to Jesus. This is the great mystery of godliness—God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16). Any attempt to envision a faithful Baptist higher education for the days ahead that is not tightly tethered to the great confessional tradition will likely result in an educational model without a compass.<sup>44</sup> The only way to counter the sec-

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<sup>42</sup> See the fifteen-volume series *Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition* (ed. David S. Dockery; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012-2019); Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> See Donald E. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> See J. I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995); Albert Mohler, *The Apostles' Creed* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019); and Timothy George, ed., *Evangelicals and the Nicene Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). Two recent volumes addressing this important subject will serve as helpful guides for those seeking to prioritize these commitments at their institutions. Please see Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), and Rhyne Putman, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological*

ular assumptions<sup>45</sup> that shape so many sectors of higher education today is to confess that the exalted Christ, who spoke the world into being by his powerful word, is the providential sustainer of all of life (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2).<sup>46</sup>

As we seek to bring the Christian faith to bear on the teaching and learning process in the work of Baptist higher education, our approach must involve bringing these truths about Jesus Christ to bear on the great ideas of history as well as on the cultural and educational issues of our day.<sup>47</sup> In doing so, our aim will be to adjust the cultural assumptions of our post-Christian context in light of God's eternal truth. We therefore want to call for the future work of higher education to take place through the lenses of the confessional tradition that affirms a belief in the Holy Trinity, but also recognizes the transcendent, creating, sustaining, and self-disclosing Trinitarian God who has made humans in his image.<sup>48</sup>

3. *Relationship to the Churches.* A renewed vision for Baptist higher education must not only connect with the best of the Christian intellectual tradition and our confessional heritage but must also seek a purposeful connection with faithful Baptist congregations. We must once again connect Baptist institutions with the heart of the church. One aspect of this commitment will involve rethinking the primary focus of our theological efforts. It is important that we engage in both academic theology and public theology. At the same time, we acknowledge that our primary focus must recapture a commitment to doing theology for the church.<sup>49</sup> Our dream calls for Baptist colleges, universities, and seminaries to be not only Christ-centered and confessionally focused, but also church-connected. This multi-faceted awareness will help us avoid confusing what is merely a momentary expression from that which is of enduring importance for the sake of the churches, enabling us to avoid the tyranny of immediatism.

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*Diversity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> See Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); and Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> See Dockery and Morgan, *Christian Higher Education*; David S. Dockery, ed., *Faith and Learning: A Handbook for Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2012); and David S. Dockery, *The Thoughtful Christian* (Christ on Campus, ed. D. A. Carson and Scott Manetsch; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, forthcoming).

<sup>48</sup> See Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *God the Trinity* (Nashville: B&H, 2016).

<sup>49</sup> See David S. Dockery, ed., *Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2017).

4. *The Place of Academic Freedom.* The places of dissent and religious liberty have been significant markers for Baptists over the past 400 years. What do these distinctives have to do with academic freedom in the context of Baptist higher education? One way of sorting through these issues will be to navigate our understanding of primary, secondary, and tertiary matters. In the essentials of the Christian faith, there is no place for compromise. Faith and truth are primary issues, and we stand firm in those areas. Sometimes, however, Baptists have confused issues of primary and secondary importance. In secondary and tertiary matters, we need love and grace as we learn to disagree agreeably. We want to learn to love one another despite differences and to learn from those with whom we differ.

In essentials, faith and truth are primary, and we may not appeal to love or grace as an excuse to deny any essential aspect of the Christian faith.<sup>50</sup> When we center the work of Baptist higher education on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will build on the ultimate foundation. As we have previously noted, we also need to connect with the great Christian intellectual tradition of the church, which can provide illumination, insight, and guidance regarding these issues.

Our challenge is to preserve and pass on the Christian tradition while encouraging serious and honest intellectual inquiry. There is no place for anti-intellectualism on Baptist campuses. Baptist higher education should be academically rigorous and grounded in the confessional tradition while seeking to understand the great ideas of history and the pressing issues of our day. We pray that Baptist institutions will be places where serious reflection will take place about how to advance these essential Christian commitments while engaging the challenging issues of the twenty-first century.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, we recognize the place of academic freedom within a confessional context.<sup>52</sup> We encourage exploration across the disciplines while recognizing that some things may not be advocated within the commitments that bind us together as Baptist educational communities. Let us encourage genuine exploration and serious research while acknowledging that free inquiry, untethered from tradition or from the church, often

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<sup>50</sup> See David S. Dockery, "Blending Baptist with Orthodox in the Christian University," in *The Future of Baptist Higher Education*, 83–100; also, Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 78–90; 141–64.

<sup>51</sup> See C. Stephen Evans, "The Christian University and the Connectedness of Knowledge," in *The Baptist and Christian Character of Baylor*, 21–40.

<sup>52</sup> See Anthony J. Diekema, *Academic Freedom and Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

results in the unbelieving skepticism that characterizes so much of higher education today. The directionless state that can be seen as we look across so much of higher education is often found among many former church-related institutions that have become disconnected from the churches and their heritage. We need a renewed vision for Baptist higher education that will help us develop unifying principles for Christian thinking, founded on the tenet that all truth and all knowledge have their source in God, our Creator and Redeemer.<sup>53</sup>

As we do so, we will continue to struggle with many issues because there are numerous matters that remain ambiguous, matters on which we still see through a glass darkly. Some questions may have to remain unanswered for the short term as we continue to wrestle and struggle together. Yet, we envision a distinctive approach for Baptist higher education, an approach significantly different from the large majority of higher education institutions in North America.

5. *Taking the Next Steps.* We thus dream of Baptist campuses that are faithful to the lordship of Jesus Christ, that exemplify the Great Commandment, that seek justice, mercy, and love, that demonstrate responsible freedom, and that prioritize worship and service as central to all pursuits in life.<sup>54</sup> These institutions must seek to build grace-filled communities that emphasize love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control<sup>55</sup> as virtues needed to create a faithful and caring Christian context in which undergraduate and graduate education, grounded in the conviction that all truth has its source in God, can be offered. In sum, we trust for a new generation of leaders for Baptist higher education institutions who will promote confessional convictions, academic excellence, and character development that honors Christ and serves both church and society.

A commitment to rigorous and quality academics is best demonstrated by God-called faculty. While research should be encouraged in all fields, classroom teaching must be prioritized and emphasized. Faculty in all disciplines should be encouraged to explore how the truth of the Christian faith bears on all subject matter. Thus, Baptist higher education institutions cannot be content merely to display their Christian commitments with chapel services, mission trips, and required Bible classes, as important as

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<sup>53</sup> See Evans, "The Christian University and the Connectedness of Knowledge."

<sup>54</sup> Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 1–22.

<sup>55</sup> See David S. Dockery, "Fruit of the Spirit," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel E. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 316–19.

these activities may be. We desire to see students move toward a mature reflection of what the Christian faith means for every field of study. In doing so, we will see the development of grace-filled, convictional communities of learning.

Because we can think, relate, and communicate in understandable ways, since we are created in the image of God, we can creatively teach, learn, explore, and carry on research. We want to encourage a complementary, and even necessary, place for both teaching and scholarship. A Baptist institution, in common with other institutions of higher learning, must surely subordinate all other endeavors to the improvement of the mind in pursuit of truth. Yet, a focus on the mind and the mastery of content, though primary, is not enough. We believe that character and faith development are equally important, in addition to guidance in professional competencies. Furthermore, we maintain that the pursuit of truth is best undertaken within a community of learning that includes colleagues of the present and voices from the past, the communion of saints, and that also attends to the moral, spiritual, physical, and social development of its students following the pattern of Jesus, who himself increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and humankind (Luke 2:52).

As we envision faithful Christian academic communities, we dream of promoting genuine Christian community and unity on our campuses. We appeal for a oneness that is founded on the person and work of Jesus Christ and the common salvation we share in him. One of the ways that we authenticate the message of the gospel and our shared and collaborative work in Christian higher education is the way Christians love each other and live and serve together in harmony. It is this witness that our Lord wants and expects from us in the world so that the world may believe that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

We pray that our twenty-first century context will once again recognize the importance of serious Christian thinking as necessary and appropriate for the well-being of Baptist academic communities. We believe that efforts to reconnect with the best of the Christian intellectual tradition, aspects of which are reflected in the continuities described in the first part of this article, will serve Baptist higher education well in the days ahead as a guide to truth, to that which is imaginatively compelling, emotionally engaging, aesthetically enhancing, and personally liberating. We believe that the Christian faith, informed by scriptural interpretation, theology, philosophy, and history, has bearing on every subject and academic discipline.

While at times the Christian's research in any field might follow similar paths and methods as secular scholars, we believe that doxology at both the beginning and ending of one's teaching and research distinguishes the works of believers from that of secularists.<sup>56</sup>

The pursuit of the greater glory of God remains rooted in a Christian worldview in which God can be encountered in the search for truth in every discipline, a frame of reference affirming the importance of the unity of knowledge.<sup>57</sup> The application of the great Christian tradition will encourage members of Baptist higher education communities to see their teaching, research study, student formation, administrative service, and trustee oversight within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In those contexts, faithful Christian scholars will view their teaching and their scholarship as contributing to the advancement of a distinctive mission. Faculty, staff, and students will work together to enhance a love for learning that encourages a life of worship and service. We trust that this proposal will help Baptist educators better see the relationship between the Christian faith and the role of reason, while encouraging Christ-followers to seek truth and engage the culture, with a view toward strengthening the church and advancing the kingdom of God.<sup>58</sup>

We believe the time is right to reconsider afresh this vision because of the challenges and disorder across the academic spectrum. The reality of the fallen world in which we live is magnified for us in day-to-day life through global pandemics, broken families, sexual confusion, conflicts between nations, social injustices, and the racial and ethnic prejudice we observe all around us.<sup>59</sup>

This proposal is rooted in the conviction that God, the source of all truth, has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ (John 1:14,18), and it is in our belief in the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ that the unity of truth will ultimately be seen. What is needed is a renewed understanding and appreciation of the depth and breadth of the Christian intellectual tradition, with its commitments to the church's historic confession of the Trinitarian God, and a recognition of the world and all subject

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<sup>56</sup> See Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*.

<sup>57</sup> See Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 35–51.

<sup>58</sup> See Philip W. Eaton, *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World: The Christian University in a Post-Christian World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> See Peter Cha, "The Importance of Intercultural and International Approaches in Christian Higher Education," in *Christian Higher Education*, 505–24; Bruce Riley Ashford, "Mission, the Global Church, and Christian Higher Education," in *Christian Higher Education*, 525–43.

matter as fully understandable only in relation to this Trinitarian God.<sup>60</sup> While this approach to Baptist higher education values and prioritizes the life of the mind, it is also a holistic call for the engagement of head, heart, and hands.

We offer this proposal forty years on the other side of the beginning of “the controversy” in Southern Baptist life known as the Conservative Resurgence. Much has changed in Baptist life over the past four decades. People reading this article will, without doubt, have different responses to these changes. Many remain saddened by these developments, now seeing the Southern Baptist world, which they once called “home,” as a rather different place. Others will give genuine thanks for many of the changes, particularly the recovery of a clear understanding of the gospel message and renewed commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture. Still, those serving across the broad spectrum of Baptist-related higher education contexts must recognize that in the midst of these changes we all have been formed, shaped, and influenced by the larger Baptist story.<sup>61</sup> We share a common history and heritage from 1609 to 1979, particularly from 1814 to 1979. Most of the Baptist institutions that we serve and at which we studied were formed within this larger story.

Yet, the reality is that a number of those institutions no longer seek to relate to the Southern Baptist Convention in any way. Some of those institutions, like Baylor University, have recommitted themselves afresh to their “Baptist and Christian character.”<sup>62</sup> Other institutions have sadly drifted in a direction that more mirrors the discontinuities reflected at Brown, Colby, Colgate, and others in previous generations. And still others have attempted to maintain their church-related identity, adopting a two-sphere approach to higher education that primarily emphasizes the Christian atmosphere or context of the institution.

6. *Hopeful Trajectories.* As we move toward the third decade of the twenty-first century, all six of the Southern Baptist seminaries have made renewed commitments to Southern Baptist life, to their identity as Southern Baptist institutions, to the full truthfulness of Holy Scripture, and to the

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<sup>60</sup> See Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> See Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H, 2015); Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> See Schmeltkopf and Vitanza, *The Baptist and Christian Character of Baylor*. Robert Sloan deserves much credit for this reality and for his overall framing of the “Baylor 2012” vision.



transformational power of the gospel.<sup>63</sup> Nearly two dozen Baptist colleges and universities remain intentional about their distinctive missional commitments as well as their Baptist identity. Part of our responsibility seems to involve attempting to help the next generation develop a framework for interpreting and relating to Southern Baptist life in a constructive and hopeful manner in the days ahead.

The proposal in the latter part of this article attempts to connect this vision for Baptist higher education with continuities found in the first eighteen centuries of the Christian tradition described in the first section of this article, while clearly recognizing the diversity within that tradition. The proposal is grounded in the inspired prophetic-apostolic witness of Holy Scripture, in the best of the Christian intellectual tradition, in a Christian worldview that affirms the importance of a commitment to the unity of knowledge, in an understanding that all knowledge, truth, and wisdom find their source in God, and in the importance of church connectedness.

In the midst of the confused cultural ethos of our day, we need commitments that are firm but loving, clear but gracious, encouraging the people of God to be ready to respond to the numerous issues and challenges that will come our way, without getting drawn into every intramural squabble in the church or in the culture.<sup>64</sup> Let us pray that we will relate to one another in love and humility, bringing new life to our shared efforts in Christian higher education. We pray not only for renewed confessional convictions but also for a genuine orthopraxy that can be seen before a watching world, a world particularly in the Western Hemisphere that seemingly stands on the verge of giving up on the Christian faith.<sup>65</sup> We trust that our collaborative efforts to advance distinctive Baptist higher education in the days to come will bring forth fruit, will strengthen partnerships, alliances, and networks, and that our shared work will be used of God to extend his kingdom.

Let us ask God to renew our shared commitments to academic excellence in our teaching, our learning, our research, our scholarship, and

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<sup>63</sup> See David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009); Jason K. Allen, ed., *The SBC and the 21st Century: Reflection, Renewal, and Recommitment* (Nashville: B&H, revised 2019).

<sup>64</sup> See Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, 206–18.

<sup>65</sup> See Timothy George and John Woodbridge, *The Mark of Jesus: Loving in a Way the World Can See* (Chicago: Moody, 2005); Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century: Including the Church Before the Watching World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1985).



our service, as well as our whole life discipleship and churchmanship. We gladly join hands together with those within the larger Baptist story who desire to walk with us on this journey, seeking the good of all concerned as we serve together for the glory of our great God and the advancement of Baptist higher education in service to church and society.<sup>66</sup>



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<sup>66</sup> Some of the material in this article has been adapted from David S. Dockery and Christopher Morgan, eds., *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018); David S. Dockery, ed., *Theology, Church and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2017); David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2008); and David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008). I am genuinely grateful to Keith Harper and to the University of Tennessee Press for permission to adapt portions of this article from a chapter on Southern Baptist education in the forthcoming volume, edited by Keith Harper, *Southern Baptists Observed and Revisited* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, forthcoming).

## ACADEMIC DISCIPLESHIP AND THE BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Nathan A. Finn\*

Until well into the nineteenth century, the story of American higher education was largely a story about Christian higher education.<sup>1</sup> The Christians who founded the vast majority of the earliest colleges and universities in America were inheritors of a richly Christ-centered educational tradition that had roots in the Patristic era, flowered with the rise of the great medieval universities, and then expanded beyond Europe during the early modern era. In twenty-first-century America, a small minority of colleges and universities maintain a distinctively Christian identity, including my own institution, North Greenville University. Schools like mine are carrying the same torch that was previously borne by many of the greatest thinkers in Christian history and many of the pioneer educators in American history.

North Greenville University is a Baptist institution, one of three educational ministry partners of the South Carolina Baptist Convention along with Anderson University and Charleston Southern University. Like South Carolina Baptists, Baptists in general have long been committed to higher education. In 1720, Baptists in England began educating ministers at Bristol Baptist Academy because Baptists were unable to obtain an education at British universities at that time, all of which had close ties to the Established Church.<sup>2</sup> A generation later, in 1764, Baptists in New

<sup>1</sup> The best overview of the history of Christian higher education in America is William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). The standard history of American higher education in general is John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). For the Christian roots of the university, see James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 1–105.

<sup>2</sup> The founding date for Bristol Baptist Academy is sometimes given as 1679 because that is the

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England established The College of Rhode Island (later Brown University) in the wake of the New Light revivals, in part so that the anti-establishment Baptists could gain a measure of cultural respectability in a region dominated by the heirs of the Puritans.<sup>3</sup> By the 1820s, Baptists in the South were founding educational institutions, including the schools now known as Union University (1823), Furman University (1825), Mississippi College (1826), and Georgetown College (1829). As of this writing, there are over forty colleges and universities affiliated with the International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities (IABCU), in addition to a handful of Baptist theological seminaries (including Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary).<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I want to offer a brief vision for academic discipleship for distinctively Baptist universities. While I write primarily with schools like North Greenville University in mind, I believe much of this material is applicable to Bible colleges, theological seminaries, and other Baptist-related institutions of higher education. I use the phrase *academic discipleship* as shorthand for my conviction that Christ-centered higher education is a form of disciple-making. Faculty members are themselves disciples of Christ as well as disciple-makers of their students. The students, in turn, are disciples of their professors, who are forming them to be disciples of Christ within the context of the various disciplines, fields, and professions represented within their university. Part of the calling of Baptist universities, especially within the Southern Baptist tradition, is to put forward a vision of academic discipleship that is informed by core priorities shared by all Christ-centered institutions, yet to frame them within the context of the Baptist identity and distinctives that should characterize our educational institutions.

## I. ACADEMIC DISCIPLESHIP<sup>5</sup>

Academic discipleship is distinguished from other forms of discipleship

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year that the bequest was given that led to the formation of the school. However, classes were not offered until 1720. See Roger Hayden, "Able and Evangelical Ministers: The Beginnings of Ministerial Formation at Bristol Baptist College," *Baptist Quarterly* 47.3 (2016): 110–11.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, "Becoming Important in the Eye of the Civil Powers: New Light Baptists, Cultural Respectability, and the Founding of the College of Rhode Island," in *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy* (ed. Roger A. Ward and David P. Gushee; Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 50–67.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of IABCU member schools, see <https://www.baptistschools.org/member-schools/>.

<sup>5</sup> My own understanding of academic discipleship has been shaped profoundly by David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), as well as Dockery's other writings on the topic.

by two key features. First, the life of the mind plays a central role in the disciple-making process.<sup>6</sup> Making disciples involves teaching (Matt 28:19–20), so no form of discipleship can happen without the use of the intellect; however, not all forms of discipleship are distinctively *intellectual* like academic discipleship.<sup>7</sup> Second, this form of discipleship is centered in an educational institution rather than a local congregation or parachurch ministry. The context for academic discipleship is the academy. In the spirit of 2 Corinthians 10:5, students are taught to take captive every thought in every class and subject it all to the lordship of Jesus Christ. As good disciples and disciple-makers, faculty are called to embody the spirit of 1 Corinthians 11:1, inviting students to follow them as they follow the Lord Jesus Christ within their particular areas of expertise. When we focus on academic discipleship, education is understood to be concerned with *formation* more than simply *information*, and the university is understood to be an academic community of disciples that is seeking to obey Christ and advance his kingdom.

This vision of Christian education as academic discipleship is informed by three animating ideas that have influenced Christ-centered education, especially in evangelical traditions.<sup>8</sup> The first is the importance of a Christian worldview. According to Philip Ryken,

A worldview—or “world-and-life view,” as some people call it—is the structure of understanding that we use to make

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In many ways, this essay is an attempt to summarize some of Dockery’s key insights and put them into more intentional dialogue with Baptist identity and distinctives, another topic about which Dockery has written widely.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the intellectual component of academic discipleship, see Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God’s Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010); Bradley G. Green, *The Gospel and the Mind: Recovering and Shaping the Intellectual Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010); Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Andreas Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); and Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers, eds., *The State of the Evangelical Mind: Reflections on the Past, Prospects for the Future* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> For this reason, my president and close colleague, Gene Fant, prefers the term *intellectual discipleship* to academic discipleship. We agree we mean the same things by these terms, but we disagree as to which term best captures the intended meaning.

<sup>8</sup> The remainder of this section closely follows the second section of my forthcoming chapter “Evangelical by Conviction, Baptist by Tradition: David Dockery’s Vision for Southern Baptist Higher Education,” in *Baptists and Culture* (ed. William Pitts; Macon: Mercer University Press, forthcoming).

sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose. It is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, our orientation to reality.<sup>9</sup>

Worldview language has its origins in nineteenth-century German idealism, and it was imported into Christian circles around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Theologians such as Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and James Orr (1844–1913) first popularized the idea of a Christian worldview, though in the 1970s and 1980s, it was the writings of scholars such as James Sire, Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, and Albert Wolters that resulted in the promulgation of Christian worldview language in evangelical higher education. Sire, a former English professor and longtime editor for InterVarsity Press, provided a list of basic questions for discerning someone’s worldview.<sup>11</sup> Wolters, a Dutch Reformed theologian, offered an influential framework for Christian worldview that is built around the grand narrative of Scripture: creation, fall, and redemption.<sup>12</sup> Walsh, a Reformed theologian, and Middleton, a Wesleyan scholar, contrasted the biblical world with the modern world, attempting to bridge the gap for the sake of faithful cultural engagement.<sup>13</sup> Building on these thinkers, evangelical scholars also focused on matters such as philosophical foundations for a Christian worldview, the influence of Christian worldview thinking on higher education, and the place of Christian worldview analysis in an increasingly pluralistic context.<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, the trend has been in the direction of more expansive accounts of a Christian worldview. I offer two noteworthy examples. First, drawing upon Wolters’s earlier work, missiologist Michael Goheen and

<sup>9</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student’s Guide*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 19.

<sup>10</sup> For a history of worldview thinking, see David K. Naugle Jr., *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as Concept*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 20–21.

<sup>12</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds., *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundation of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2002); J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017); and Tawa J. Anderson, W. Michael Clark, and David K. Naugle, *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God’s Perspective in a Pluralistic World* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017).

biblical scholar Craig Bartholomew have asked how the disciplines of missional theology and biblical theology might be combined with worldview analysis to help bring cultural renewal to the postmodern West.<sup>15</sup> Second, philosopher James K. A. Smith has argued that we cannot ignore the affective elements of human nature, but must give attention to the heart as much as the head. Smith desires a liturgical and virtue-based understanding of Christian worldview that is more holistic than overly cognitive, philosophical accounts.<sup>16</sup> Despite such ongoing refinements, the language of Christian worldview remains prominent in Christ-centered higher education, and I find it to be helpful (though I personally prefer the term *biblical worldview*). Whether one opts to use the word *worldview* or not, we should all agree that there are distinctively Christian ways of thinking that are shaped by the biblical narrative and basic doctrinal and ethical considerations. Scripture provides us with what Goheen and Bartholomew call “the true story of the whole world,” and our own individual stories—and the stories of every academic discipline, field, and profession—only truly make sense when they are understood in light of that Story of Stories.<sup>17</sup> Academic discipleship involves thinking rightly about God and his world.

The second animating idea that informs academic discipleship is the integration of faith and learning. The conversation about faith-learning integration has roots in Dutch Reformed thought, though, as with the emphasis on Christian worldview, it has been embraced by a variety of evangelical institutions across the theological spectrum. Longtime Wheaton College philosopher Arthur Holmes popularized this terminology in his 1975 book *The Idea of a Christian College*, which has become a modern classic in Christian higher education. Holmes suggested that there are at least four different approaches to the integration of faith and learning, but argued that all of them recognize that “the Christian faith can touch the entire range of life and learning to which a liberal education exposes students.”<sup>18</sup> The reason integration is needed is because of the artificial separation of faith and learning that has accompanied the secularization of

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<sup>15</sup> Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 45.

higher education, even in schools that began as church-related institutions; this process has been ably (if sometimes controversially) described in the works of George Marsden and James Burtchaell.<sup>19</sup> If Colossians 1:17 is true and all things hold together in Jesus Christ, then the integration of faith and learning is really about putting back together what sinful humans have too often torn asunder.

While not all evangelicals have been enthusiastic about the concept of faith-learning integration, this language has been widely accepted. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) sponsors a number of faculty development initiatives to foster the integration of faith and learning, while journals such as *Christian Scholar's Review* and *Christian Higher Education* publish essays regularly on the topic from a variety of perspectives. The more recently formed International Alliance for Christian Education (IACE) is also committed to promoting faith-learning integration.<sup>20</sup> In just the past decade, books on this theme have included a guide for new faculty, a handbook-style introduction to the concept, an application of faith-learning integration to matters of pedagogy, and friendly critiques of the model from the vantage point of particular academic disciplines or ecclesial traditions.<sup>21</sup> As Baptist schools have engaged increasingly with other evangelical institutions, many have found the integration of faith and learning to offer a compelling antidote to the segregation of academic affairs and spiritual matters into two different spheres.<sup>22</sup> During the past two academic years, I have had conversations

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<sup>19</sup> See George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), and James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> The IACE was formed in 2019. The organization's founding president is David S. Dockery, who also serves in a variety of contexts at Southwestern Seminary.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Allen and Kenneth Rea Bradley, *Faith and Learning: A Guide for Faculty* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2014); Dockery, *Faith and Learning*; David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and David L. Riggs, eds., *Beyond Integration: Inter/Disciplinary Possibilities for the Future of Christian Higher Education* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012); and Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, eds., *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Baylor University is perhaps the most successful example of the two-sphere approach. See Michael Beatty and Larry Lyon, "Integration, Secularization, and the Two-Spheres View at Religious Colleges: Comparing Baylor University with the University of Notre Dame and Georgetown College," *Christian Scholars Review* 29.1 (1999): 73–112; and Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 112–17.

with faculty leaders at two different Baptist universities that have recognized the need to give greater emphasis to faith-learning integration as part of their faculty development process.

The third component of academic discipleship worth considering is the Christian intellectual tradition, sometimes also called the Great Tradition.<sup>23</sup> The Christian intellectual tradition is the best of the church's biblical, theological, philosophical, and ethical reflection over the past 2,000 years. It represents the broadly shared consensus of Christian thinking as it has developed from the second century to our present era. It is rooted in the Rule of Faith that summarized the grand biblical narrative in the earliest centuries of Christian history. It builds upon the ecumenical creedal consensus of the third and fourth centuries. It has been reflected upon by key thinkers throughout Christian history, and it represents what C. S. Lewis memorably referred to as "mere" Christianity.<sup>24</sup> As the late historian Jaroslav Pelikan once observed, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."<sup>25</sup>

In a Christ-centered university, the Christian intellectual tradition provides a treasure trove of resources to contribute to academic discipleship within the context of every discipline, field, and profession.<sup>26</sup> In C. S. Lewis's outstanding essay "Learning in War-Time," which was revised from a 1939 chapel sermon during World War II, he made the case for why academic disciples need to engage deeply with the Great Tradition:

Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much

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<sup>23</sup> As best I can tell, the origin of the former phrase is Robert Louis Wilken, "The Christian Intellectual Tradition," *First Things* (June 1991), available online at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1991/06/the-christian-intellectual-tradition>. Dockery fleshes out the concept of the Christian intellectual tradition in *Renewing Minds*, 52–69.

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 65.

<sup>26</sup> One initiative directed at students in evangelical colleges and universities is Crossway's Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series, which to date has published thirteen volumes. For the introductory volume that frames the series, see David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).



which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.<sup>27</sup>

Those of us who wish to be Christian scholars have an obligation to stand on the shoulders of thinkers who have gone before us by contextualizing our teaching and research within the context of the Great Tradition. In fact, you might think of the Christian intellectual tradition like a great river. Our various disciplines and professions are the boats in which we will travel down the river, and our denominational traditions offer the ramps that serve as our various points of entry. But we want to be on the same river as the church's most influential theologians and the most helpful Christian thinkers in our respective fields. We need to be certain that we are their academic disciples, even as we seek to make academic disciples of the students entrusted to us.

## II. BAPTIST IDEAS OF THE UNIVERSITY

So, what about academic discipleship in Baptist universities? Over the years, I have taught courses in Baptist history and identity at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. I often joke with students that you tend to have seventeen opinions wherever two or three Baptists are gathered together. Baptists have always championed freedom in matters of religion. We value freedom of conscience when it comes to one's religious faith and practice; we value the freedom of each congregation to set its own agenda for worship, witness, and service. We value religious freedom for all people, both believers and unbelievers, because it is not the place of the state to coerce individuals' convictions concerning ultimate matters. When Baptists have been at their best, we have argued that our commitment to freedom is not an end unto itself, but is a freedom to obey the commands of Jesus Christ. Freedom is for the sake of Christian faithfulness and human flourishing.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 58–59.

<sup>28</sup> For a brief overview of the historic Baptist emphasis upon freedom, as well as other traditional Baptist distinctives, see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015),

Unfortunately, Baptists have not always been at our best when it comes to a rightly ordered exercise of spiritual freedom. During the Inerrancy Controversy of the 1980s and 1990s, *freedom* became the watchword of the moderate Baptist vision, where it was sometimes untethered from biblical authority and leveraged in service of aberrant doctrine and revisionist morality.<sup>29</sup> But even in our best moments, when we take both the authority of Scripture and the best of our own tradition into account, sincere differences of opinion are common among Baptists. For example, Southern Baptists in the early twenty-first century agree upon biblical inerrancy and basic Baptist identity, but we debate a range of issues that include the number of pastors/elders in a church, how pastoral authority relates to congregational authority, the role of women within a complementarian framework, multisite churches, the doctrine of election, and the relationship between faith and political engagement. There are many other examples.

In light of our emphasis on freedom, it should come as no surprise that there is no such thing as “the” Baptist view of education. In his extensive survey of Baptist higher education in North America, historian William Brackney argues, “There is no one overarching theological principle inherent in the Baptist vision that defines or even suggests why Baptists should engage in higher education.”<sup>30</sup> To accentuate this point, Brackney even titles one of his chapters “Baptist *Ideas* of a University”—emphasis on the plural.<sup>31</sup> Some of the earliest Baptist-related schools in America, notably the College of Rhode Island and Columbian College (later George Washington University) were largely non-sectarian schools that were founded and led by Baptists. Other schools, such as the institutions now known as Colby College, Mercer University, and Samford University, were established as distinctively Baptist literary institutes with a special desire to educate men entering the Baptist ministry. Still other schools, including my current

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325–45. For a fuller treatment on religious freedom from a Baptist perspective, see Jason G. Duesing, Malcolm B. Yarnell III, and Thomas White, eds., *First Freedom: The Beginning and End of Religious Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> For examples of this perspective, see Alan Neely, ed., *Being Baptist Means Freedom* (Charlotte: Southern Baptist Alliance, 1988), and Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993). Stan Norman has offered a helpful challenge to the freedom-driven understanding of Baptist identity. See R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> William H. Brackney, *Congregation and Campus: North American Baptists in Higher Education* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 417.

<sup>31</sup> Brackney, *Campus and Culture*, 192–252; emphasis added. This is a clever nod to the Catholic theologian John Henry Newman’s classic nineteenth-century work *The Idea of the University*.

institution, North Greenville University, and my undergraduate alma mater, Brewton-Parker College, originated as Baptist secondary schools that evolved into junior colleges after a generation or so before finally becoming four-years institutions in the late-twentieth century.

Today, the landscape of colleges and universities with present or former ties to the Southern Baptist tradition includes Bible colleges, junior colleges, small liberal arts colleges, prestigious liberal arts universities, comprehensive regional universities, a military academy, and a research university. Within this diversity of institutions, one finds a variety of ecclesial identities. Some schools are literally owned by their respective state conventions, while others are simply historic partners with the Baptists in their state. Some schools adopt detailed confessions of faith that every faculty member affirms, while other schools have no stated doctrinal standard. Some schools identify as theologically conservative, a few as religiously pluralistic, and many as doctrinally centrist. Some schools require every professor to be a Baptist, while most limit the requirement to the President, key administrative leaders, and perhaps professors who teach religion or Christian Studies courses.

Baptist-related schools take the role of spiritual formation very seriously in the life of the university. Most offer some sort of chapel experience, and many require students to attend at least a certain percentage of chapel services. Most are home to Baptist Collegiate Ministry (formerly Baptist Student Union) chapters and other campus ministries that contribute to the spiritual life of students. Many schools have formal discipleship groups, sponsor mission trips and faith-themed study tours, and host lectures, concerts, and other events related to religious themes. Most have some sort of denominational relations office that is tasked with maintaining a good relationship with churches in the region. Campus revivals or spiritual emphasis weeks are still common, though perhaps less so than they used to be. But there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to cultivating a robust spiritual atmosphere, and many schools at least implicitly segregate spiritual formation from academic affairs. Spiritual life is considered the purview of a particular office, where it can remain detached from what happens inside the classroom.<sup>32</sup>

Among schools with ties to the Southern Baptist tradition, many are

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<sup>32</sup> For a more integrated, holistic vision of campus ministry as part of the larger life of the university, see Todd E. Brady, “Christian Worldview and Campus Ministry,” in *Shaping a Christian Worldview*, 359–76.

affiliated with the aforementioned IABCU, which has provided a venue for Baptist educators to exchange ideas and discuss common concerns. However, over the past generation or so, a growing number of Baptist colleges and universities have also been exposed to insights from other traditions, especially other evangelical groups. Baptist educators have networked with and learned from their counterparts in other Christian institutions through their participation in organizations like the CCCU and, more recently, the IACE. Many academic disciplines enjoy one or more scholarly societies that are intended for Christians working in the field. Examples include the Conference on Faith and History, the American Scientific Affiliation, the Society of Christian Philosophers, and the Christian Business Faculty Association. Through these networks, Baptist-related schools have imported emphases from the wider evangelical world, including the three I mentioned in the previous section, often “baptizing” them into a Baptist educational context.

During this same period, shifts in American culture, especially concerning issues such as the sanctity of human life, human sexuality, and religious liberty, have brought Baptists into closer contact, and sometimes strategic partnership, not just with other evangelicals but with theologically conservative Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians.<sup>33</sup> Faculty and administrators at many Baptist schools learn from colleagues at Wheaton College and Taylor University, attend professional conferences with fellow Baptists and other evangelicals who teach at secular institutions, subscribe to periodicals like *First Things* and *Touchstone*, and keep up with the *Chronicle of Higher Education* at least as much—and often much more than—Baptist Press or a state Baptist paper. In many ways, this is a healthy development that should be celebrated. The Baptist tradition has often struggled with sectarianism, so it is encouraging that a growing number of Baptist universities have taken steps to avoid institutional insularity and intellectual inbreeding. Nevertheless, the higher education landscape is littered with schools that used to be Baptist but drifted from their ecclesial roots, more often than not through the process of gradual secularization. David S. Dockery rightly warns Baptist educators to

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<sup>33</sup> One such initiative is The Manhattan Declaration, a 2009 document drafted by Southern Baptists Charles Colson and Timothy George and Roman Catholic Robert George. Hundreds of Baptists signed The Manhattan Declaration. A 2019 book celebrating The Manhattan Declaration was co-edited by David Dockery and included contributions from seven additional Baptists. See David S. Dockery and John Stonestreet, eds., *Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty: What Belongs to God, What Belongs to Caesar* (Nashville: Fidelis Books, 2019).

remain committed to distinctively Baptist higher education, arguing there is a “special responsibility for those colleges and universities who seek to maintain their Baptist identity.”<sup>34</sup>

### III. ACADEMIC DISCIPLESHIP AND THE BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

A little over a century ago, the Southern Baptist theologian and seminary president E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) wrote *The Axioms of Religion*. The book expounded six principles that Mullins believed characterized the Baptist tradition. Whether one agrees with his axioms or not (I tend to be appreciative-but-critical), scholars agree *The Axioms of Religion* was the most important book on Baptist identity written in the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Like Mullins, I am both a Southern Baptist theologian and an academic administrator, though my own present context is a Baptist-related university rather than a denominational theological seminary. Nevertheless, in the spirit of Mullins, I offer my own set of axioms related to academic discipleship in the context of a Baptist university. These axioms are rooted in Baptist priorities, but are applied to a college or university context. My goal is not to be exhaustive but to commend these axioms as guiding principles for Baptist educators who are committed to a robust vision of academic discipleship similar to what I described above.

*Axiom 1: Jesus Christ is Lord over all things, and Christian faithfulness is about bringing all of life into conformity with Christ’s lordship.* Baptists have frequently emphasized the lordship of Jesus Christ. As the English Baptist theologian Steve Holmes argues, “The primary doctrine of the church among Baptists is a stress on the Lordship of Christ.”<sup>36</sup> Baptists argue that conversion is the beginning of a lifetime of following Jesus and that baptism marks a believer out as one who has submitted to Jesus’s lordship over his or her life. Jesus is the Lord of every individual church, which is why Baptists champion congregational church polity and local church autonomy. Jesus alone is Lord of all creation, and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that this is true (Phil 2:11).

When we apply this principle of lordship to academic discipleship, it

<sup>34</sup> David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 136.

<sup>35</sup> For an updated edition of Mullins’s book, which includes a scholarly introduction that contextualizes Mullins’s ideas and their reception, see E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (ed. C. Douglas Weaver; Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *Baptist Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 101. See also R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2005), 33.

provides a theological motivation for thinking Christianly about our various disciplines, fields, and professions, for integrating faith and learning as part of our vocation as teachers and scholars, and for engaging deeply with the Christian intellectual tradition. If Jesus is the Lord of all creation, then that includes the subjects we study and teach. In fact, a key part of our calling as Christian educators is to bring the observable phenomena in our academic worlds into conformity with the spiritual reality that Jesus Christ is Lord. When we do so, we anticipate that day when all things will be made new in Christ. Christian higher education is kingdom work—and Jesus is our King. Students, their parents, trustees, area pastors, and other constituents need to know what it looks like when Christian scholars bow the knee to King Jesus in their vocations as mathematicians and musicologists, biologists and Bible scholars, accounting teachers and art instructors, and early childhood educators and English professors. Baptist universities can lead the way in this kingdom endeavor.

*Axiom 2: Christ reveals his sovereign will through Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority for faith and practice.*<sup>37</sup> Like most evangelicals, Baptists are a people of the Book. As such, our universities should be *radically* biblical in their orientation. I am not using this term in its most common contemporary understanding that something is extreme or even fringe. Rather, I am highlighting the older usage of that term, when *radical* spoke to the root (Latin = *radix*), or the foundation, or the basic principle. Scripture should be the root from which the university emerges, the foundation upon which it is built, the basic principle that animates its very life. The values that drive the university's mission and strategic plan should be biblical. Scripture should be the ultimate authority in every academic discipline. This is not a call for what has been called a "narrow bibliocentrism," but rather, it is a commitment to "renewed primary engagement with the actual foundation of Western intellectual culture."<sup>38</sup>

In a Baptist university, faculty should be equipped to interrogate the presuppositions of their disciplines biblically, something most scholars were never taught to do in secular graduate programs. Foundational general education courses should help all students to think biblically and cultivate

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<sup>37</sup> The next two paragraphs are adapted from my chapter "Knowing and Loving God: Toward a Theology of Christian Higher Education," in *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* (ed. David S. Dockery and Christopher W. Morgan; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 39–58.

<sup>38</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction," in *The Bible and the University*, (ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 9.

wisdom and virtues that arise from the Scriptures. Disciplinary courses within each major should intentionally speak to what it means to bring that particular discipline or profession into conformity with Scripture. As Craig Bartholomew argues, “Scripture is our foundational text and infallible authority, and without falling prey to biblicism or dualism, we ought, I think, to find exegesis popping up all over the place in the Christian university.”<sup>39</sup> Clinton Arnold agrees when he claims,

A uniquely Christian education is thus profoundly informed by all that we can learn from the Bible. It provides the essential framework for understanding God’s creational design, our place in creation, the phenomenon of evil and its corruption of the world, God’s merciful and benevolent response, how we are to live in a way that is pleasing to God, and God’s plans for the future.<sup>40</sup>

While universities are not Bible colleges or seminaries, the Bible should be the core text that informs every course in the curriculum, even if Scripture is not an assigned textbook for every course.

*Axiom 3: All believers are part of Christ’s royal priesthood and are called to and gifted for kingdom ministry, regardless of their particular vocations.* Arguably, no single ecclesial tradition has more fervently championed the priesthood of all believers than the Baptists.<sup>41</sup> In Exodus 19:6, the Lord refers to Israel as a “kingdom of priests,” and in 1 Peter 2:9, Peter calls the church a “royal priesthood.” Like the earliest Protestant reformers, Baptists embraced the concept of *vocatio*, or calling, from which we get our English word vocation.<sup>42</sup> Baptists reject any concept of a special priestly class that is uniquely holy in God’s eyes or mediates salvation to ordinary

<sup>39</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 307–08.

<sup>40</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, “The Role of Biblical Exegesis within the Christian College Curriculum,” in *Where Wisdom May Be Found: The Eternal Purpose of Christian Higher Education* (ed. Edward P. Meadors; Eugene: Pickwick, 2019), 29.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan A. Finn, “Baptist Identity as Reformational Identity,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 8.2 (Fall 2017): 36–40; Timothy George, “The Priesthood of all Believers,” in *The People of God: Essays on the Believer’s Church* (ed. Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 85–95; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “The Priesthood of Believers: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of the Royal Priesthood,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (ed. Jason G. Duesing, Malcolm B. Yarnell III, and Thomas White; Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2007), 222–45.

<sup>42</sup> For recent treatment of the doctrine of vocation, see Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).



Christians through the sacraments. In God's common grace, every calling or vocation possesses an inherent dignity and worth; furthermore, every single believer is set apart as an ambassador for Christ and his kingdom. All are called to be ministers of the gospel, though only some are called and gifted to serve as pastors or other so-called vocational ministers. Every believer is called to use his or her spiritual gifts, sanctified natural talents, and acquired skills to proclaim the good news, build up the body of Christ, serve others, and contribute to human flourishing.

Baptist universities should be places where the historic reformational and Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of all believers animates every corner of institutional life—believing students are called to the ministry of the gospel, regardless of why they choose to attend a given institution and their current employment hopes beyond graduation. Part of the calling of a Christian educator is to help each student to identify his or her abilities and to pursue a course of study that will prepare students to glorify God in their various vocations. Think about how this perspective changes the way universities recruit new majors and advise students who are undeclared. As academic disciple-makers, our real goal should not be to grow our respective departments, increase our share of majors, or convince students that what we have to offer is better than what our colleagues across campus are offering. Rather, we should be striving to help align students with majors and programs that prepare them to play their unique parts in Christ's royal priesthood. To say it another way, ministry preparation is not the exclusive purview of a Religion Department or School of Ministry. Every professor in every classroom in every department has a responsibility to form students for gospel ministry within the contexts of their respective areas of expertise and interest.

Every academic discipline and profession constitutes a unique sphere that includes certain knowledge, skills, rules, and expectations therein.<sup>43</sup> As educators, we must equip our students to be meaningful participants in those spheres by offering them an excellent education that is suited to the respective identity of each vocation. Each of these spheres is a context for kingdom work.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Admittedly, this insight has historically been more closely identified with the Kuyperian Neo-Calvinist tradition than the Baptist tradition. However, there are many points of contact between these two traditions. For a Kuyperian-Baptist reflection upon higher education, see Bruce Riley Ashford, "What Hath Nature to Do with Grace? A Theological Vision for Higher Education," *Southeastern Theological Review* 7.1 (2016): 3–22.

<sup>44</sup> In recent years, the "faith and work" conversation has offered a renewed vision for a Christ-centered vocational vision for so-called secular professions. Baptist universities would do well



Christian educators in Baptist universities must prepare students to advance the kingdom within the context of those spheres, for the glory of God and the good of others. This emphasis applies to every program: traditional undergraduate, online and hybrid offerings, graduate programs, and even professional development opportunities. Baptist universities are not in the credentialing business, but rather are called to prepare believer-priests to serve God and serve others in a variety of fields and professions.

*Axiom 4: The local church is central to God's kingdom purposes, and all believers should be meaningfully committed to a local expression of the wider body of Christ.* Most Baptists affirm that the universal church, which includes all believers throughout history, will one day assemble at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9) and is provisionally embodied among all Christians who are alive at any given time. Nevertheless, Baptists have always argued that the local church is “ground zero” for worship and witness.<sup>45</sup> The New Testament pattern is for believers to engage with the universal church through involvement in the life of local, contextual expressions of that one body of Christ. Over the past 400 years, Baptists have written hundreds of treatises and thousands of articles about the nature of church membership, discipline, and polity. In our own day, I believe Southern Baptists are experiencing an ecclesiological renaissance as a growing number of churches move toward a more meaningful approach to membership by embracing new strategies such as membership classes and by recovering classical practices such as church covenants and church discipline.<sup>46</sup>

Baptist universities must find ways to more closely partner with local churches, with emphasis on the churches of their sponsoring association or convention, which in most cases comprise the school's most important external constituency. Baptist universities cannot become complacent

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to be active participants in that conversation. See Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), and Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Viking, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> For recent Baptist accounts of the relationship between the universal church and local churches, see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29–35, 61–64; and John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 25–55.

<sup>46</sup> In many ways, this recovery has its roots in the writings of James Leo Garrett Jr. (1925–2020), who taught systematic theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and other Baptist institutions for over forty years. His shorter works on ecclesiology have recently been collected in James Leo Garrett Jr., *The Collected Writings of James Leo Garrett Jr., 1950–2015*, vol. 3, *Ecclesiology* (ed. Wyman Lewis Richardson; Eugene: Resource, 2019).

and assume the goodwill of area churches is a permanent blessing. Administrators and faculty members also need to cultivate churchmanship—vital, committed, even sacrificial involvement in the life of a local church—and model it for their students. The goal is for every member of the university community to also be meaningfully involved in healthy area churches. Chapel services and campus ministry activities should complement local churches rather than compete with them, even implicitly. Faculty should be encouraged to find ways to use their expertise to partner with local churches to help them accomplish their kingdom agendas. Baptist universities should enjoy a relationship of joyful, servant-minded accountability to the local churches in their regions, with all institutions growing in faithfulness on account of those mutually beneficial relationships.

*Axiom 5: The Great Commission is Christ's command to make disciples and extend knowledge of his lordship among all the peoples of the earth.* For most of our history, Baptists have been an evangelistic people. In those seasons where we were less so, it was because of alien ideologies that infiltrated Baptist ranks, whether the revisionist liberalism of the theological left or the insular hyper-Calvinism of the theological right. The first foreign missionary from England was the famed Baptist shoe cobbler-turned-pastor William Carey (1761–1834), who spent forty years in India.<sup>47</sup> In his 1792 missions manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, Carey made the case that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 is a binding command upon every generation of believers. Once in India, he shared the gospel, planted churches, translated the Bible into multiple dialects, and founded a Christian university.<sup>48</sup> Since Carey's time, Baptists have been tireless champions of domestic and global missions. In fact, at its core, the uniquely Baptist form of denominationalism is really cooperation for

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<sup>47</sup> While Carey is often considered the father of the modern missions movement in the English-speaking world, he was not the first Baptist foreign missionary. That distinction belongs to a freed slave named George Liele (1750–1820), who was part of the earliest recorded black Baptist church in our nation near present-day Aiken, South Carolina. In 1783, Liele fled to Jamaica to avoid re-enslavement at the hands of the British army during the American Revolution. While there, he became a prolific evangelist and church planter, starting what became called the Ethiopian Baptist movement in Jamaica among converted British slaves who worked the sugar plantations. See David T. Shannon Sr., Julie Frazier White, and Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, eds., *George Liele's Life and Legacy: An Unsung Hero* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Witness of William Carey* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991).

the sake of missions and other ministries that serve the cause of gospel advance, especially within the Southern Baptist tradition.<sup>49</sup>

I firmly believe that Baptist universities have a special vocation to be Great Commission institutions.<sup>50</sup> Naturally, this includes offering classes in related fields and providing opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to participate in short-term and mid-term mission trips. But Baptist universities also have the opportunity to implement other strategic initiatives that contribute to God's global advance. In every course, professors should think creatively about global application of the material they are teaching. They should intentionally expose students to voices that do not look like most of them, communicating that we are all global citizens and that the world—and the church—is bigger and more diverse than we often think. Individual departments should develop discipline-specific mission trips and service-learning opportunities that can match the knowledge and skills of their field with specific needs in particular mission contexts, whether in North America or another part of the world.<sup>51</sup> Universities should also be open to considering strategic interdisciplinary majors that combine business, health care, the sciences, and other fields with biblical and missiological studies that prepare graduates to serve in a variety of mission contexts.

The fact is that the number of full-time missionaries who serve primarily as evangelists and church planters is shrinking, but the sky is the limit when it comes to business people, educators, health care professionals, scientists, diplomats, and others working alongside traditional missionaries to win the lost and plant churches in some of the most unreached places in the world. Christ-centered universities are uniquely equipped to form missional professionals in a variety of fields who can be Great Commission partners to traditional missionaries. Baptist universities have the sacred and strategic opportunity to be educational “sending agencies” that are equipping students to proclaim the gospel and contribute to human flourishing in contexts all over the globe.

In closing, my prayer is that Baptist universities would be characterized

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<sup>49</sup> See Nathan A. Finn, “Southern Baptist History: A Great Commission Reading,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time* (ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 51–76.

<sup>50</sup> See David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 138–52; Bruce Riley Ashford, “Missions, the Global Church, and Christian Higher Education,” in *Christian Higher Education*, 525–43.

<sup>51</sup> See David N. Entwistle, *The Service Learning Book: Getting Ready, Serving Well, and Coming Back Transformed* (Eugene: Cascade, 2019).

by a vision of academic discipleship that helps students to think Christianly and live missionally, regardless of their program of study. But it cannot be done without intentionality, especially on the part of administrators and faculty leaders. A starting place for Baptist universities is a robust strategy for faculty development that emphasizes a holistic vision for the integration of faith and learning that equips professors to integrate both *their* faith and *the* faith with their respective academic discipline.<sup>52</sup> This strategy should be animated by the biblical worldview, in conversation with historical Baptist distinctives and the best of the wider Christian intellectual tradition. Even non-Baptist professors should be equipped to own certain “Baptist instincts,” summarized in the aforementioned axioms, which could benefit the wider academic community of disciples. As we have seen, there is no such thing as “the” Baptist view of university education. Yet, surely some Baptist approaches are healthier than others. I hope this essay makes a small contribution to a much-needed conversation about what it means to be a faithful Baptist university in the twenty-first century.



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<sup>52</sup> I reflect upon this theme more in my short essay “The Integration of Faith and Learning: More Than a Prayer,” IACE blog (February 4, 2020), <https://iace.education/blog/the-integration-of-faith-and-learning-more-than-a-prayer>.



## THE BIBLE AND THE UNIVERSITY: *Sola Scriptura* and Interdisciplinary Engagement

Keith Whitfield and Rhyne Putman\*

If the Bible is a sufficient source for Christian knowledge, why do we need the university? The answer to this question is that true Christian knowing requires a unified approach to knowledge and a recognition that knowing is ultimately for living. The crucial issue for knowing—the most basic of human actions—is whether what we claim to know informs the type of people we become and governs the “rightness” of our actions. The sufficient and necessary conditions for how we know have occupied modern epistemology. This article will deal with “how” we know at some level, but we will seek to address a more fundamental concern related to knowledge: we propose relating the Bible and the university in a way that provides the basis for knowledge that forms our being and acts. To do this, we must supply a unified vision for knowing that provides a foundation for interpreting the meaning and purpose for all things. We believe this foundation of knowledge reflects the biblical view of what it means to know (Prov 9:10) and of what knowledge is for (Matt 22:35–40). We must first establish a Christian conception of knowledge and truth before we relate them to the work of the university. Knowledge is often equated with the apprehension of certain propositions or states of affairs, and truth is often defined as the correspondence with reality.

These are foundational and essential commitments for claiming that one has right ideas about the world, but are they sufficient to account for a biblical vision of knowledge? Christian knowing is a peculiar type of knowledge that is more inclusive and comprehensive. It involves knowing God, his works, and his world. Christian knowing is not necessarily synonymous

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with the discipline of Christian theology, but Christian theology does offer an example of the “proper concerns” of Christian knowing. Christian theology interprets the world through the being and acts of God himself. It mediates the knowledge of God and his Word as the foundations for a Christian worldview that may be employed in other disciplines. Further, we recognize that knowledge of God’s world informs our knowledge of God and his Word. Christian knowing involves engaging in the robust process of knowing God, his Word, and his world that provides a basis for the type of persons we become and how we live our lives.

John Henry Newman expressed this vision for Christian knowing in *The Idea of University*: “All knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation.”<sup>1</sup> Pursuit of a robust Christian vision of knowledge requires engagement with reality at every level, with special attention paid to the unique voices of disciplines that speak to the various strata of reality. In this essay, we attempt to offer a framework for this pursuit. We seek to diagnose the fragmentation of the university and explain how it undermines both Newman’s vision for the university and more crucially the Christian vision for knowing, even while recognizing the ongoing challenges in doing so. Shaping this framework will involve an effort to situate Christian knowing within three complementary theological affirmations: *sola Scriptura*, general revelation, and common grace. This reflection suggests that the Christian worldview paired with a critical realism can facilitate a unified approach to knowing. Finally, in light of our framework, we will offer some implications for the Christian university.

## I. KNOWLEDGE AND THE STATE OF THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

Prior to modernity, knowledge was gained through the guidance of an authoritative voice, and the telos of knowing was sapience or wisdom—the proper pursuit of human excellence. Wisdom includes true beliefs about a subject of knowledge, but it also entails an attachment to the subject of one’s knowledge in order for it to be determinative of how one will see the world and live “rightly” in it. Two premodern epistemic commitments shaped this pursuit of knowledge. First, one looks through preunderstanding

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<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 45.

or commitment—even if only theoretically—to gain knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This understanding is reflected in the classic theological statement “faith seeking understanding.” Second, following Aristotle’s epistemic approach, the subject of inquiry dictates the very method one uses to inquire.<sup>3</sup>

With the dawn of the Enlightenment, however, the pursuit for “sapience” changed to a pursuit for “certainty.” Modernist epistemology redefined the pursuit of knowledge entirely, replacing *belief in pursuit of understanding* with *doubt in search of facts*. This modernist impulse, which distinguished between “scientific knowledge” and “value-judgments,” turned the world of theology upside down.<sup>4</sup> Key Christian doctrines have been under scrutiny ever since. Specifically, the legitimacy of revelation as the basis of Christian knowledge has been largely dismissed. The early and late modern notions of truth, reason, and knowledge—formed by empiricism, rationalism, and natural sciences—appear to unseat revelation and sapience as genuine truth and knowledge.

Modern understanding of reason and knowledge that follows Locke, Hume, and Kant displaces the two previously noted premodern epistemic commitments and establishes a method for obtaining “true” knowledge that excludes theological commitments. Dallas Willard notes that this approach to knowing becomes even more acute with the arrival of the scientific method; he says, “A vague but powerful idea of the ‘scientific methodology’ came to the fore, and claims to knowledge had to be measured by their conformity or lack of conformity to ‘scientific method.’” He further describes such methods as being “against traditional knowledge in all its forms” because of methodological “overreach” and “imperialism.”<sup>5</sup> Any claim not derived from it was rejected as not true knowledge but beliefs.

Julie Reuben tells the story of how this epistemic revolution impacted Christian universities. In her book *The Making of the Modern University*, she examines whether Christian American universities that emerged between 1870 and 1930 were able to maintain their mission of providing moral

<sup>2</sup> W. Jim Neidhardt, introduction to *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science*, by T. F. Torrance (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), xv–xx. See also Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 1–16.

<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, “The Bible, the University, and the God Who Hides,” in *The Bible and the University* (ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 27.

<sup>4</sup> See Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (3 vols., trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1900).

<sup>5</sup> Willard, “The Bible, the University, and the God Who Hides,” 27.



and theological education.<sup>6</sup> She demonstrates that a belief in the unity of knowledge and commitment to intellectual and moral development were inseparable both in the mission of the institution and curriculum design in these universities. Indeed, the institutional leaders early on possessed the conviction that the acquisition of knowledge had cognitive, moral, and practical characteristics.<sup>7</sup> However, the story of most of these schools has taken an unfortunate turn. The leaders were not able to retain their commitment to the unity of knowledge. The emergence of the natural science and social science methods led to a disintegrated curriculum, and the aspiration for the moral transformation was assigned to newly developed structures for student development rather than in the academic curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

The resulting fragmentation of disciplines in the modern university has largely eliminated interdisciplinary conversation. Disciplinary boundaries are now accepted, and knowledge is advanced by specialists where theories are proffered in isolation from larger frames of reality. The fragmentation and consequent processes for knowing reduce knowledge to interpretation and theory formation within discrete domains of inquiry. Willard concludes, “The effect of the historical progression in Western intellectual life and in higher education to the present is that knowledge itself, along with truth, disappears from the university setting as a goal.”<sup>9</sup> This situation emerges from equating knowledge with the results of the scientific method. The university has come to accept knowledge as either the accumulation of details and facts within disciplines or forms of criticism in some disciplines that deconstruct cultural norms.

Many Western intellectuals have sought an overarching method of inquiry, a *mathesis universalis*, by which the whole universe can be explained.<sup>10</sup> This effort, most often couched in the natural sciences, is called *reductionism* (from the Latin *reducere*, meaning “to lead back”). Reductionism is the tendency of some to reduce all the issues in a complex system to its smaller constituent parts. The broad appeal of reductionism is in its offer of simple answers to intricate matters and its alleged mastery

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<sup>6</sup> Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 189.

<sup>9</sup> Willard, “The Bible, the University, and the God Who Hides,” 28.

<sup>10</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 97–116.

over the universe. To misquote Tolkien, the reductionist seeks “one method to rule them all, one method to find them, one method to bring them all and in the academy bind them.”

Reductionism hinders a fuller engagement with reality by forcing a choice between disparate strategies for making sense of reality. C. S. Lewis provides an eloquent description of the problem with such dichotomous reductionism in his essay “Meditation in a Toolshed.” He describes standing in a dark toolshed when the sun beams through cracks above the door. He says, “From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. . . . I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.” But, as he tells the story, that only lasted for a few moments until his gaze changed from the beam to green leaves moving outside of the shed. From this perspective, he concludes, “Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.”<sup>11</sup> Lewis makes a clear distinction between objective knowledge (“looking at”) and subjective knowledge (“looking along”), and he rejects the reductionism of those who reduce genuine knowledge to merely “looking at.” Lewis concludes, “One must look both *along* and *at* everything.”<sup>12</sup> Lewis’s analogy is a helpful reminder that there is always more than one way to look at a thing, but even it stops short of describing the many ways something can be objectively explained or subjectively experienced.

The most negative characteristic associated with reductionism is the way in which its employment minimizes or dismisses outright the usefulness of other disciplines. A biologist might write off the methodologies and conclusions of sociology or anthropology, reducing all social or cultural behavior to evolutionary processes. A physicist may contend that the quark is the most fundamental component in the fabric of reality and consequently deserves more attention than other sciences. The reductionist under the sway of scientism may reject any explanation for reality outside of the methods of scientific investigation. The humanities, the arts, the social sciences, and religion are tangential detours that provide very little knowledge of the nature of things other than themselves.

## II. DOES *SOLA SCRIPTURA* ENTAIL REDUCTIONISM?

Theologians frequently go on the defensive when faced with reductionism

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<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (ed. Walter Hooper; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, “Mediation in a Toolshed,” 215.

from the natural and social sciences, but they too can be guilty of their own peculiar brands of reductionism. Liberal theologians inclined to reductionistic tendencies minimize the significance of Scripture for theological method. On the other hand, conservative theological reductionists often dismiss the findings of the natural and social sciences because they believe them to pose an inherent threat to biblical truth.<sup>13</sup> Conservative theological reductionism often goes hand-in-hand with a particular understanding of the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Despite its historical significance for Protestants and evangelicals, *sola Scriptura* has been one of the most widely misunderstood and abused tenets in evangelical theology. Uncritical mutations of this doctrine have resulted in the denial of any place for tradition, reason, and experience in theological formation and have not always accounted for all dimensions of what it means to know in our world.<sup>14</sup>

The tension between the sufficiency of Scripture and theological reductionism has several expressions in evangelicalism today. Since the beginning of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the early twentieth century, evangelicals have wrestled with questions about how biblical authority relates to the theories and conclusions of the natural sciences. Christian psychologists and counselors have heated debates about the degree to which they should appropriate the research of secular psychology and psychotherapy; evangelicals disagree about how much biblical interpretation should employ extra-biblical resources (e.g. hermeneutics, archaeology, linguistics) in interpreting the message of the Bible. All of these in-house debates rest on how *sola Scriptura* is defined and applied.

*Sola Scriptura* has been called the formal principle of Christian knowledge. Though the history of Christian thought bears witness to incipient forms of this doctrine long before the Reformation, the Reformers more fully developed the conviction in a late medieval context in which ecclesial tradition was given the same level of authority as Scripture.<sup>15</sup> They insisted that the written Word of God—not any human tradition—is the final standard by which all Christian doctrine and practice must be assessed.

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 77–78.

<sup>14</sup> Naïve biblicists have used the credo “no creed but Bible” to deny tradition any place in the interpretation of Scripture. This position has also been described as *nuda Scriptura* (“naked Scripture”) or *Scriptura solitaria* (“solitary Scripture”). See Timothy George, “An Evangelical Reflection on Scripture and Tradition,” *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (2000): 206.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent summary of the practice of *sola Scriptura* prior to and after the Reformation, see Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001).

Only Scripture provides a sufficient, clear, and certain standard for saving knowledge, doctrine, and Christian practice.<sup>16</sup> While the Bible does not explicitly teach a doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, this doctrine is a fitting implication of its inspiration, authority, and purpose: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17). Does this mean Scripture provides an explicit description of every good work? Certainly not. But it does mean Scripture meets the most basic needs in teaching doctrine and training people to make us wise for salvation and obedient to God. Scripture provides all the necessary articles of belief and commandments necessary for the Christian life.<sup>17</sup> As Thomas Aquinas says, “The truth of faith is sufficiently plain in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles.”<sup>18</sup> The divine inspiration of Scripture ensures its profitableness and sufficiency for doctrine, correction, and obedience. Because the Bible is inspired by God, it is reliable, in line with God’s character, infallible, and inerrant.

The Reformers did not teach *sola Scriptura* in such a way that they rejected a proper place for tradition, reason, and experience in theology or in their Christian knowing. Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers held a proper place for all these things.<sup>19</sup> Instead, they rejected a late medieval view of tradition that elevated it to the level of special revelation. They argued that Scripture was *materially sufficient*, meaning Scripture contains all that is necessary to know God, to be saved, and to be an obedient follower of Christ. This affirmation is not a claim to an exhaustive knowledge of God or his will.<sup>20</sup> According to the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), perhaps the most developed Reformation-era statement on this doctrine, Scripture’s sufficiency is for “true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety.”<sup>21</sup>

Tony Lane points out that we do not mean to say Scripture is the only

<sup>16</sup> *The Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689), 1.1.

<sup>17</sup> Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther’s Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 274.

<sup>18</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, II. II. I. 10 ad.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand*, 252–74; Anthony N. S. Lane, “*Sola Scriptura?* Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 300–12.

<sup>20</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith 1.1.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 224.

resource available to us when we say “Scripture alone” in Christian knowing. Tradition, experience (though we may disagree about what counts as a valid spiritual experience), and reason are all resources needed for interpretation. In addition, the insights of other disciplines in the natural sciences, social sciences, and history should all play a role in our knowledge of God, his Word, and his world.<sup>22</sup> The Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is not a denial of other forms of knowledge or other sources of authority in Christian knowing, but rather, it is an affirmation that Scripture is the only *norm* or standard by which these other resources and sources can be measured. Reason, experience, tradition, and other sciences present to us fallible knowledge. Inerrant and infallible Scripture must be the ruler by which the insights of these other sources is weighed.

The Reformers also taught that Scripture is *formally sufficient*, meaning no magisterium or church office is necessary to discern its basic meaning. Scripture is clear by design, and the Holy Spirit enables believers to understand and apply it to their lives. What is more, the clearer portions of Scripture help us make sense of the more difficult portions. This Reformation doctrine of the formal sufficiency of Scripture means, as Timothy Ward explains, that Scripture contains within itself all “the means by which the Lord can lead us into greater covenant faithfulness.”<sup>23</sup> To affirm the formal sufficiency of Scripture is not to reject tradition altogether—or even its derivative authority—but to assert that no extracanonical tradition is a necessary, binding norm needed for Scripture to be interpreted properly.<sup>24</sup>

A concept of *sola Scriptura* becomes reductionistic when it does not account for the full endeavor of Christian knowing. As the Reformers understood it, *sola Scriptura* is not a rejection of other sources of Christian knowledge but an affirmation that all other sources must be measured and

<sup>22</sup> Lane, “*Sola Scriptura?*,” 298–99.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 115.

<sup>24</sup> Rhynne R. Putman, *In Defense of Doctrine: Evangelicalism, Theology, and Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 211–14. The Second Helvetic Confession states: “The apostle Peter has said that the Holy Scriptures are not of private interpretation (II Peter 1:20), and thus we do not allow all possible interpretations. Nor consequently do we acknowledge as the true or genuine interpretation of the Scriptures what is called the conception of the Roman Church, that is, what the defenders of the Roman Church plainly maintain should be thrust upon all for acceptance. But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves . . . and which agree with the rule of faith and love, and contribute much to the glory of God and man’s salvation.” Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 226.

weighed by Scripture.<sup>25</sup> Though Scripture is the primary way we know God's truth, God "speaks" through other means such as nature, history, and the internal witness of the Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

### III. NATURE, GENERAL REVELATION, AND COMMON GRACE

Scripture is the only source for us to know the triune God, but it is not the only source for us to know about him and his world. The Bible describes creation itself as one way in which the character of God is revealed to the world. Theologians typically refer to this divine act of self-disclosure in creation as general revelation or natural revelation. It is an incomplete source of knowledge about God that was never meant to be the singular, definitive source. While it is a necessary source for knowing God, it must be complemented by the special revelation of Scripture. But coupled with Scripture, it provides a fuller picture of reality than we would have without it. Scripture and general revelation were meant to be read and understood together and not in isolation from one another. Non-theological disciplines within the university help us better understand the "text" of creation.

The primary locus of general revelation is the natural world. Everyone who examines nature bears witness to the majesty and greatness of the Creator. God purposed to reveal his "invisible attributes" in the creation of the world so that men who suppress the truth are without excuse (Rom 1:18-21). Biblical writers also use personification to describe the way creation "speaks" about the glory of God, even without human speech (Ps 19:1-3). The manifold works of God in creation are a testament to his perfect wisdom (Ps 104:24). God's wisdom has even been embedded in things found in nature (Prov 8:20-36; 30:24-28).

Human nature and history are also considered by some as a locus of general revelation. Since Immanuel Kant, philosophers and Christian apologists have argued that the moral nature of human beings is ample evidence for God's existence. Only an objective moral lawgiver can account for the moral law writ large in every culture and in every time and place. Paul makes this case in Romans 2:11-16 when he asserts God has imprinted his moral law on the hearts of all human beings (2:15). Scripture does not make a direct connection between revelation and the events of world history, but it contains several references to God's providential work in

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<sup>25</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Dogmatics*, 78.

<sup>26</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 212-13.

directing nations to accomplish his purposes (Job 12:23; Dan 2:21; 4:17; Acts 17:26).<sup>27</sup> The study of world history at least provides some evidence of the great theological truths of Scripture playing out before our eyes.

Most evangelical theologians agree that general revelation is inferior to the special revelation God gave through prophets, apostles, the incarnation, and Scripture. General revelation does not reveal God himself or provide saving knowledge of him. It is almost universally understood among evangelicals that the study of nature, history, and the human being is a “supplement to, not a substitute for, special revelation.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, evangelicals acknowledge the suppression of truth from general revelation and at least some distorting noetic effect of sin that prevents human beings from being fully aware of what creation reveals.

Though most evangelical theologians affirm the notion that God objectively reveals himself in nature and the human conscience, they disagree about the *scope* and *effectiveness* of general revelation. Some theologians suggest general revelation is restricted specifically to ways in which God directly reveals himself in creation. The late Robert L. Thomas writes, “Any efforts to widen the scope of general revelation to include information or theories about aspects of creation, man, or anything else besides God do not have support from the Bible, which limits the scope of general revelation to information about God.”<sup>29</sup> By contrast, Robert K. Johnston suggests that a biblical case can be made for including experience, culture, and art under the broader category of general revelation.<sup>30</sup>

Other evangelical theologians like Cornelius Van Til and Gordon Spykman posit a reciprocating relationship between general revelation as the created “Word” of God and special revelation as the inspired “Word” of God, so that they must be interpreted alongside of each other with the aid of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> The natural scientist plays a role in making better sense of God’s created word in nature because “all created reality reveals the holding power of God’s Word *reflexively*.”<sup>32</sup> Discoveries made in science correspond with things revealed in Scripture, but they also reflect the glory of God to those who see them so that “we gain insight into the

<sup>27</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 123.

<sup>28</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 141.

<sup>29</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics,” *TMSJ* 9.1 (1998): 11.

<sup>30</sup> Robert K. Johnston, *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 78–83.

<sup>32</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 80; italics his.

‘knowledge of God’ as Creator (Calvin) by observing how his various creatures respond to the holding power of his Word, each creature ‘after its kind.’”<sup>33</sup> This holding power of his Word has implications for every aspect of created reality: migrating birds, land use, human rationality, and child development, among others. Every aspect of reality has its own manner of testifying back to God: “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom 11:36).

God’s words have always been needed to interpret God’s works (Gen 2:15–18). Daniel Strange helpfully notes that God’s works in creation are “hermeneutically ambiguous.”<sup>34</sup> God’s purpose was never for general revelation to operate isolated from special revelation. We observe this fact in the pre-Fall reality present in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1–2). Furthermore, while the Fall created a new epistemic condition, that does not mean that special and natural revelation have ever been disentangled entirely.<sup>35</sup> While God’s revelation “comes to us through various media (nature, history, word, person), all of which are authoritative and consistent, all of which are interdependent on the others,”<sup>36</sup> to borrow from Calvin, the “spectacles of Scripture” correct our blurry vision and allow us to read creation rightly.<sup>37</sup> This is even more acutely the case after the Fall. We should always interpret the world *through* the Word.<sup>38</sup>

We ought to take seriously that we interpret the Word *in* the world, which according to Calvin is “the theatre of God’s glory.”<sup>39</sup> Van Til illuminates the significance of Calvin’s imagery when he says, “Saving grace is not manifested in nature; yet it is the God of saving grace who manifests himself by means of nature.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the purpose of general reve-

<sup>33</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Strange, “Not Ashamed! The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology,” *Themelios* 36.2 (2011): 251.

<sup>35</sup> Cornelius Van Till, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 78. “Hence we should not think of the revelation of God in nature and seek to establish man’s responsibility from that alone, as though nothing else were to be taken into consideration. No concrete case exists in which man has not more than the revelation of God in nature. It is no doubt true that many have *practically* nothing else, inasmuch as in their case the tradition of man’s original estate has not reached them and no echo of the redemptive principle has penetrated their vicinity. Yet it remains true that the race as a whole has once been in contact with the living God, and that it was created perfect. Man remains responsible for these facts. Back of this arrangement is the Creator and, therefore, the sovereign God.”

<sup>36</sup> Strange, “Not Ashamed!,” 251.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also John Calvin, *Institutes* I.vi.1, xiv.1.

<sup>38</sup> Strange, “Not Ashamed!,” 251.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.v.8; II.vi.1; cf. also I.xiv.20.

<sup>40</sup> Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium* (ed. N. B. Stonehouse



lation is to provide the theatrical set for God's redemptive works in Christ, and at the same time it also becomes an object of his very redeeming work. Van Til further states, "Here then is the picture of a well-integrated and unified philosophy of history in which revelation in nature and revelation in Scripture are mutually meaningless without one another and mutually fruitful when taken together."<sup>41</sup> Thus, natural revelation was never meant to function by itself and was insufficient for Christian knowing without special revelation. It is sufficient as the context for God's redeeming Words and works and is a sufficient object of God's redemption. The question remains, however, how we might (and can we) affirm the reciprocal claim. Special revelation was never meant to function by itself. We affirm that it is sufficient as the revelation of God and his interpretation of his redeeming works, and we affirm that it is also sufficient as the redeeming word-act. We do wonder if special revelation would be sufficient for Christian knowing without natural revelation.<sup>42</sup>

Knowledge advanced in the wider academy is a product of common grace. We suggest that common grace entails two components: God's sustaining and restraining power and a demonstration of God's goodness to allow (perhaps cause) fallen creatures to think and act with consistency and to inflect some harmony within the creation order.<sup>43</sup> This proposal is consistent with how the early Reformers viewed this doctrine. Calvin, along with his contemporaries Heinrich Bullinger, Wolfgang Musculus, and Peter Vermigli, affirmed a notion of divine mercy and favor (distinct from saving grace in operation and purpose) upon humanity in general—restraining sin and allowing human life to continue as a type of grace.<sup>44</sup>

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and Paul Woolley; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1946), 266.

<sup>41</sup> Van Til, "Nature and Scripture," 269. "God's revelation in nature, together with God's revelation in Scripture, form God's one grand scheme of covenant revelation of himself to man. The two forms of revelation must therefore be seen as presupposing and supplementing one another. They are aspects of one general philosophy of history" (266).

<sup>42</sup> John Frame expounds the relevance of this recognition from a worldview perspective when he says, "Christians sometimes say that Scripture is sufficient for religion, for preaching, or theology, but not for auto-repairs, plumbing, animal husbandry, and dentistry. That is to miss an important point. Certainly, Scripture contains more specific information relevant to theology than to dentistry. But sufficiency is not sufficiency of specific information but sufficiency of divine words. Scripture contains divine words sufficient for all of life. It has all the divine words the plumber needs, and all the divine words that the theologian needs. So, it is just as sufficient for plumbing as it is for theology. And in this sense, it is sufficient for science and ethics as well." John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R), 221.

<sup>43</sup> Strange, "Not Ashamed!," 248.

<sup>44</sup> For an overview of each, see J. Mark Beach, "The Idea of 'General Grace of God' in *Some Sixteenth Century Reformed Theologians other than Calvin*," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological*

Later, in development of this doctrine, Dutch Reformed theologians more explicitly emphasized that God grants grace for moral virtue and natural provisions.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Kuyper and Bavinck represent an “important shift in the discussion on common grace as an attempt to reconcile the doctrine of total depravity with one’s everyday experience of human creativity and virtue.”<sup>46</sup> Common grace served for Kuyper to reflect on God’s universal intent of saving grace. The accomplishment of Christ’s redemption restores humanity to its creational integrity and creational purposes. Thus, by God’s common grace, the created integrity is preserved because sin does not destroy the faculties and relational capacities of humanity but rather misdirects them.

We previously cautioned against a hard separation of general and natural revelation for epistemic/hermeneutic concerns. Within this vein, Peter Leithart argues for the needed category of a “middle grace.”<sup>47</sup> His argument determines that much of the efficacy of so-called “natural revelation,” in all actuality, finds its true epistemological ground in the “special revelation” of Scripture. So, the influence of notions such as a moral consensus and/or the sanctity of marriage are thus “not a product of pure ‘common grace’ (devoid of all contact with revelation), nor of ‘special grace’ (saving knowledge of God through Christ and his word), but what I call . . . ‘middle grace’ (non-saving knowledge of God and his will derived from both general and special revelation.”<sup>48</sup> His use of middle grace reminds us of Van Til’s observation that special and natural revelation have never been entirely disentangled.<sup>49</sup>

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*Tradition* (ed. Jordan Bailor, David Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema; Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 170; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 97–109.

<sup>45</sup> Herman Kuiper, *Appendix to Calvin on Common Grace* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1928), i–iv.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis Greeson, “Kuyperian Molinism? A New Perspective on the Problems of Common Grace,” accessed May 26, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/38244897/Kuyperian\\_Molinism\\_and\\_the\\_Problems\\_of\\_Common\\_Grace](https://www.academia.edu/38244897/Kuyperian_Molinism_and_the_Problems_of_Common_Grace).

<sup>47</sup> Strange, “Not Ashamed!,” 253.

<sup>48</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Did Plato Read Moses? Middle Grace and Moral Consensus* (Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper 23; Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995), 4–5. Elsewhere Strange notes the “importance of acknowledging phenomenologically the way religions, in their myths, doctrines, rituals, etc., have idolatrously taken and distorted not simply ‘natural’ revelation, but redemptive-historical ‘special’ revelation.” Gavin D’Costa, Paul Knitter, and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World* (London: SCM, 2011), 120.

<sup>49</sup> Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 78.

#### IV. THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE FOR THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

*Sola Scriptura* does not rebuke other sources of knowledge about God, his world, or how we live in it. It establishes the authoritative rule of God over all academic disciplines by establishing Scripture's final authority within the nexus of Christian knowing, which is "inspired" and "commissioned" by the very same God who inspired the Scriptures. Though God's Word is expressed in creation and the internal witness of the Word, Scripture is the only normative standard by which we assess the encounter with his Word in general revelation and discern the genuine activity of the Spirit in our lives.<sup>50</sup>

Scripture does not provide exhaustive knowledge of God, the human condition, or nature but does provide all the knowledge necessary and sufficient for formulating a robust Christian worldview. As Gordon Spykman observes, Scripture is "the only . . . noetic key to a right understanding of the ontic order of created reality. It is the indispensable pair of glasses . . . which we with our sin-blurred vision must now wear in order to discover the meaning of creation, history, Christ, religion, and the rest. If we are serious about the search for truth as related to the Truth, we cannot bypass this Book."<sup>51</sup> Scripture alone provides us with the essential framework for engaging reality, even if it does not account for all the methods of investigation needed at every stratum of reality. We recognize and practice the ultimate authority of Scripture whenever we submit to its truth as the lens through which we know our world and live in it.

The Bible is the best and most complete source of the knowledge of God on earth. With Scripture, God personally and verbally reveals his character, his nature, his purposes, and his activities in human history. Only the written Word of God provides us with sufficient knowledge of the work of God in Christ, who is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature" (Heb 1:3a). However, the divine author of Scripture is still selective about what he reveals about himself (Deut 29:29; Rom 11:34; 1 Cor 2:16) and Jesus Christ (John 20:30; 21:25). While no source provides us with better or more complete knowledge of God, other sources like tradition, reason, and experience remain valuable and necessary auxiliary tools for the theological enterprise. We may glean knowledge from other sources of truth, but Scripture alone is inerrant and infallible.

<sup>50</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 213.

<sup>51</sup> Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 76–77.

Scripture does not provide us with a comprehensive account of natural or human history. It does, however, provide us with the grand narrative through which all of natural and human history should be interpreted. Scripture accounts for the origin and meaning of creation, the Fall of that creation as a consequence of human sin, God's redemptive activity in Israel, Christ, the church, and the inevitable conclusion to human history in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God. The historian has his proper stratum for investigating reality, but the historian with a worldview shaped by the biblical narrative has a better grasp on the deeper meaning behind human events than one who does not. Human history repeatedly testifies to divine providence in human activity, the folly of sin and rebellion against God, and humanity's great need for Christ.

Only Scripture reveals the image of God in every human, the fallen nature of human beings, and the way by which we become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Scripture alone provides a clear revelation of human purpose. While human beings may recognize human dignity through general revelation or common grace, only Scripture provides a sufficient foundation for that dignity in the *imago Dei*.

Though Scripture is the primary means by which we know the fundamental human condition, it can be supplemented with other sources that bridge the gaps of our knowledge about it. Again, we must recognize the authorial intent of Scripture. If it was never intended by its divine-human authorship to describe all the mechanics of the human anatomy or every inner working in human psychology, then it is an affront to its authorial intent and authority to make such demands of it. No source better describes the spiritual nature of human beings than the Bible, but human beings are complex, embodied creatures who also wrestle with hormones, emotions, and memories not detailed by Scripture.

Every stratum of human nature has its own method of inquiry, and the resources of the natural and social sciences as well as philosophy can be of great value in making sense of the strata not explicitly addressed in the Bible. Scripture alone explains the root cause for human brokenness, but it does not enumerate every symptom and ailment of that broken human condition (e.g. physical illnesses, mental illnesses, reasons for economic disparity). Lane asks an important question of those who uncritically refuse social sciences any place in the contemporary study of theological anthropology: "How useful would a contemporary Christian doctrine of humanity that studiously refused to learn anything from modern

anthropology, psychology, sociology, biology, *etc.* be unless it was already found in the Bible? This does not imply an uncritical absorption of such disciplines, only that the denial that they have anything distinctive to contribute is not realistic.”<sup>52</sup>

Though it does not give specific instructions for every aspect of life, the Bible alone provides us with a sufficient ethical framework through which every moral decision can be made. Biblical authors provide clear moral teachings and pictures of moral goodness for us. The indwelling Holy Spirit aids the believer in comprehending and applying biblical instructions to his or her life. Even still, there is an important role for tradition, reason, and experience to play in addressing moral dilemmas not explicitly mentioned by Scripture.

## V. A CHRISTIAN VISION OF KNOWLEDGE FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Methodological reductionism has rendered a situation in which we are unable to unite all things and provide contact with the whole of reality. These moves lead to the displacement of the unique contribution of the Christian faith to knowledge. “The ethos of the modern secular research university,” John Webster says, “is such that Christian theology can only exist there at cost to some of its positive character as the reflective life of the culture of faith.”<sup>53</sup>

In recent decades, evangelical Christians working in higher education have sought to regain a place for the Christian faith within the university, and many have called for a recovery of a distinctive Christian approach to education.<sup>54</sup> Some of these efforts have proposed a model of integrating the Christian faith with other disciplines. Integration often results in unintended costs because it is advanced with what Webster calls “defensive gestures.” Webster identifies an “extraordinary high level of anxiety” that has often been shown by theology “about its place in the

<sup>52</sup> Lane, “*Sola Scriptura?*” 302; italics his.

<sup>53</sup> John Webster, *The Culture of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 101.

<sup>54</sup> David S. Dockery, *Renewing the Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); Dockery, ed., *Faith and Learning: Handbook for Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012); David Claerbaut, *Faith and Learning on the Edge: A Bold New Look at Religion in Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College: A College President Shares His Vision of Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Bruce Riley Ashford, “What Hath Nature to Do with Grace? A Theological Vision for Higher Education,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 7, no. 1 (2016): 3–22.

universe of learning,” along with a “deference to more prestigious models of inquiry” and a “reticence in fielding its own rhetoric or appealing to its own grounds.”<sup>55</sup> When this occurs, integration may accomplish limited results. The model may succeed in holding back the encroachment of various assumptions that undermine the Christian faith, and it may mitigate against the isolation of disciplines. Yet, the risk is that we surrender the “proper concerns” of Christian knowing and the contribution that it makes “by being nothing other than itself.”<sup>56</sup>

A truly Christian epistemology requires neither world-denying obscurantism nor a sacrifice of biblical convictions. Truth, wherever found, points back to reality, and reality ultimately serves as a witness to the glory of God. Our goal as knowers is not epistemic mastery over reality, *à la* modernistic reductionism. Rather, we want to engage with reality—to make sense of our experience and have a competent knowledge of God and the world he created as we move through it.<sup>57</sup> Our motivation as Christian believers is to know reality for God’s glory. Though all truth belongs to God no matter where we discover it, our uniquely Christian epistemology differs from those of the unbelieving world because we take the authority of Scripture seriously.<sup>58</sup>

Christian theologians and philosophers have shown ways in which a robust realism can prevent theological reductionism. Esther Meek, in her interaction with the work of Michael Polanyi, has developed a covenantal epistemology that stresses purposeful epistemic contact with the various levels of reality, not mere correspondence, and confidence in our ability to know, not burdened by certainty.<sup>59</sup> Following the work of Polanyi and sociologist Roy Bhaskar, Alister McGrath has made a case for critical realism that recognizes the stratification of all human knowledge.<sup>60</sup> We will here summarize the key points about their respective versions of realism that we believe are central to a truly interdisciplinary theological epistemology.

First, reality exists independently of our knowledge and perception

<sup>55</sup> Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 103.

<sup>57</sup> Esther Lightcap Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 199.

<sup>59</sup> Meek, *Longing to Know*, 124–40; Meek, *Contact with Reality: Michael Polanyi’s Realism and Why it Matters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 2, *Reality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 209–44; McGrath, *The Science of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 139–52.

of it. The majority of people intuitively believe this proposition and act accordingly, largely because its alternative, anti-realism, is an unlivable tenet. While this claim is by no means distinctively Christian, it is essential to a biblically informed Christian worldview. When we say we believe God exists, what we really mean is that God exists independently of our mental conceptions of him. The Christian doctrine of creation clearly distinguishes between the transcendent Creator and the created knowers that perceive him. Without a robust realism, there can be no ground for Christian truth or truth of any kind for that matter. Everyone would be solipsists, and everyone else would be figments of their imaginations.

Second, our minds play an active role in the way we know and perceive reality, as seen in Michael Polanyi's influential work *Personal Knowledge*. We are not passive recipients of objective knowledge about the real world. Instead, we formulate beliefs about the world as we perceive it, critically reflect on which of those beliefs actually correspond to reality, and offer creative proposals for explaining why the world is the way it is. We encode our beliefs with symbols and metaphors that act as catalysts for deeper understanding. We approximate in our descriptions. And because the human mind is prone to error and miscalculation, we hold all of our beliefs with varying degrees of provisionality.

Third, ontology directs epistemology. Simply put, the way things really are governs the way things are known. The "specific nature of some aspect of reality determines the *manner* in which it is to be known, and the *extent* to which it can be known."<sup>61</sup> Proving an explanation of Torrance's understanding of this very point, Elmer Colyer writes, "The nature of the object or subject-matter in question defines the methods employed in investigating it, the mode of rationality used in conceptualizing what is discovered, and the form of verification consonant with it."<sup>62</sup> As Bhaskar illustrates this idea, a stone can be thrown because it is solid; it is not solid because it can be thrown. In the same way, the nature of a thing defines the methodology by which it can be known. McGrath appropriates this important principle in defense of theology against positivists who insist that the only known truths are those that are directly observable. The fact that we cannot physically observe a non-material being does not logically necessitate that a non-material being does not exist.

<sup>61</sup> McGrath, *The Science of God*, 144.

<sup>62</sup> Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding his Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 322; cf. also Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), xii.

Finally, reality is complex and layered with different strata or levels of understanding. The various strata of reality require multiple methods of investigation. Each stratum could bring discipline-specific knowledge to bear on the same real thing because of the complexity of that reality. Real things exist with deference to these strata, and each stratum requires its own method of investigation. As McGrath observes, “A unitary understanding of reality, such as that mandated by a Christian doctrine of creation, does not demand that each human intellectual discipline should adopt identical methods for their tasks, but that they should accommodate themselves to the distinctive natures of those aspects of reality which they attempt to represent and depict.”<sup>63</sup> In the natural sciences, no one methodology has explanatory power over all the phenomena of nature. For example, a lion on the African plains could be studied by a veterinarian, a biologist, an ethologist, a biophysicist, a biochemist, an ecologist, and many other disciplines.

A biblical case study might better illustrate the many means within the university required to engage with the whole of reality. Consider the question, “Why did Jesus die?” As theologians, we instinctively answer that question with a theological answer: “Jesus died for sinners.” This answer is, of course, faithful to Scripture and true. Biblical authors give this answer as the *telos* or final cause of Jesus’s death (Isa 53:5–6; Rom 3:25; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 2:2). This proposition corresponds to a divinely ordained state of affairs, but it is not the only true answer someone could offer to this question as it is stated.

A social historian might answer the same “why” question differently: Jesus was executed because Jewish religious authorities and Roman officials perceived him to be a social, political, and religious threat. This proposition would also be true because it corresponds to the complex realities surrounding Jewish religious power in the first century, the claims made by or about Jesus, and the ongoing tension between Jews and their foreign rulers. Such a claim is consistent with the threat of death that followed Jesus throughout his ministry (Luke 4:29; John 8:59; 10:31) and that came to a head with his cleansing of the temple on the week of Passover (Luke 19:45–48).

Likewise, natural scientists may be able to shed new light on the same event. A biologist or medical doctor might spell out how Jesus died of asphyxiation and heart failure resulting from blood loss and difficulty

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<sup>63</sup> McGrath, *The Order of Things*, 107.



breathing on the cross. A biochemist could talk about the change of oxygen levels in the blood due to this asphyxiation. Physicists could wax eloquently about the change or redistribution of energy that occurred when Jesus died. Sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists may be able to offer additional insights into the emotions, motivations, and personality types involved in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Astronomers, astrophysicists, and meteorologists could offer competing natural explanations for why “darkness came over the whole land” and why “the sun’s light failed” (Luke 23:44-45).

If asked, a representative from every department in a Christian university could give a presentation on the real event of Christ’s suffering, either explaining the event itself or unpacking its ramifications in history, art, literature, etc. One might observe that none of these natural explanations relate to the “meaning” of events, whether theological or historical, but the “how” and “why” questions are indistinguishable on the level of natural observation. How and why questions both relate to different types of causes (i.e. material causes, formal causes, efficient causes, and final causes). A naturalistic reductionist would reduce the events surrounding Jesus’s death to a material or efficient cause. In so doing, he or she would miss the whole reason why Jesus died and its ongoing effects in history. The theological reductionist might discount the efficient and material causes of the other strata all together and consequently miss the beauty and complexity of the whole picture.

## VI. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES

So, how do we put into practice a Christian theory of knowledge that recognizes the sufficiency of Scripture for worldview formation *and* the complex nature of God’s created world with the need for interdisciplinary engagement? We here want to offer suggestions for Christian universities committed to a coherent Christian vision of knowledge, faith, and practice. First, integrate *worldview formation* into the mission and vision of the university. Many Christian liberal arts schools give lip service to the notion of a Christian worldview but give little attention to the integration of worldview studies at every level of the university. To integrate worldview formation thoroughly begins with viewing the Bible as God’s thesis for the world,<sup>64</sup> so that whatever we know, we know in relation to

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<sup>64</sup> H. Evan Runner, *The Relation of the Bible and Learning* (Jordan Station, Canada: Paideia,

our knowledge of God<sup>65</sup> and his purposes in the world.<sup>66</sup> If worldview integration is a vital part of a school's mission and vision statement, then there are internal accountability mechanisms to ensure this process is done well (e.g. institutional effectiveness, accrediting agencies, trustee systems).

Second, Christian universities would do well to appoint a theologically trained worldview specialist—who embodies personally and professionally the mission and vision of *worldview formation*—to the academic leadership of a school. This specialist's role would be similar to the professional development program that has been adopted by the newly formed International Alliance for Christian Education, and this academic officer would be responsible for developing specific curricular and cocurricular outcomes that reflect the robust appropriation of *worldview formation* in the mission and vision of the school. In addition, they should facilitate the formation of the needed conceptual frameworks and faculty and staff development initiatives to integrate *worldview formation* across the university, with specific attention given to implementation in every class and ensuring that it is integral to every major or discipline. It is not enough for Christian schools simply to offer a regular curriculum like those of their secular counterparts with the small addition of a Bible class or two. Concentrated efforts need to be made to assess the curriculum from top to bottom to ensure attention to worldview and to guarantee that a Christian theory of knowledge shapes the beginning of the student's journey and is reinforced in the capstone of the curriculum. Further, it is not enough for Christian schools to implement worldview integration merely academically. If formation of people is the ultimate goal, integration of Christian worldview must be embodied within the institution's culture and modeled by faculty, staff, and student leaders.

Third, a Christian worldview course at the beginning of a student's degree program can train students in what the sufficiency of Scripture means for their own outlook on the world and the way in which they engage in their respective majors and how it should shape the type of people they are becoming. A course like this would have an evangelistic or apologetic function for non-Christian students, but it would also provide confidence for students who are believers and supply a vision of Christian

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1982), 56.

<sup>65</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991): 30.

<sup>66</sup> Dallas Willard, "The Bible, the University, and the God Who Hides," 20–24; John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 99–114.

discipleship that calls for the stewardship of one's entire life. We would encourage offering a primary textbook on worldviews that would be coupled with worldview books geared directly toward the student's declared major. We strongly recommend individual volumes from the 15-volume Crossway series *Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition*, edited by David S. Dockery, as supplemental texts for education, history, science, literature, arts, political science, psychology, and biblical studies students.

Finally, and most importantly, non-religion faculty need hands-on training in worldview formation and expression. We mentioned the need for professional development and training above when we discussed the role of academic officers who will be needed to oversee worldview formation. It is important to recognize that appointing someone with these responsibilities and actually prioritizing the initiative are different. This distinction warrants highlighting it again. We may presume the faculties at evangelical universities profess faith in Christ and can even sign a doctrinal statement affiliated with the university. We cannot presume they have been trained in any formal way to give expression to Christian worldview concerns outside of their own personal discipleship experiences or time in the local church. For this reason, faculty workshops and seminars focused on worldview formation can encourage them to seek ways to bring explicit attention to God's creative Word in their classrooms. Within the Christian university, natural scientists, social scientists, historians, and humanities scholars should be able to articulate the Christian worldview in each of their distinctive disciplines.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Theology unifies the various strata of reality by pointing back to the God who stands behind reality at its every layer. Torrance says, "The kind of order that ought to be realized in the world is the law of God's love."<sup>67</sup> He explains that "[it] is creative and normative, redemptive and regulative, at the same time."<sup>68</sup> The natural world is God's creation, a created word that testifies to the existence and glory of God (Ps 19:1–4; Rom 1:20). The events of history communicate God's providence in bringing about his purposes. The human being is created in his image. Though natural and theological science pursue the created order in different directions, Torrance suggests, "Dialogue can help theology to purify its apparatus of

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<sup>67</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 20.

<sup>68</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 21.

concept and term ... freeing it to unfold knowledge of the living God on the proper ground of his self-revelation to mankind within the structured objectivities and intelligibilities of the space-time world where God has placed them.”<sup>69</sup> Torrance further reasons that “Since the new scientific view of the universe is not hostile to the Christian faith ... it is now possible for theology to engage in constructive dialogue with natural science.”<sup>70</sup> This is a crucial affirmation because of the role that natural science methodology played in the fragmentation of knowledge in the Modern period.<sup>71</sup>

In summation, as God’s good work of creation, we as humans are endowed with latent rational structures and categories that make the knowledge of God possible. And when God’s perfecting work of his gracious revelation takes effect, there is integration, ever so subtly, of these latent structures and categories. While by themselves these structures are not sufficient for true knowledge, they do account for the unanswered questions of life that serve as a pointer beyond our created order to God’s Trinitarian being.




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<sup>69</sup> Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 83–84.

<sup>70</sup> Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 83. Thanks to Stephen Lorange for pointing us to this material from Torrance.

<sup>71</sup> Thus, in *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance between Theology and Science* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), Torrance argues, “There is an area of overlap in the inquiries ... and it is in dialogue between theological and natural science within that overlap that natural theology has its natural place” (106).



## **INTELLECTUAL EMPATHY: Operationalizing the Great Commandment through the University General Education Program**

Gene C. Fant\*

The general education curricula of most American universities generate an incredible love-hate relationship with students. Often, students—even as alumni—will complain that “gen ed” classes are a waste of time and money because they are irrelevant to eventual careers even as they report that favorite professors in a gen ed class changed their lives in ways intangible and substantial.

General education curricula are essential to postsecondary education. When done well, they instill institutional distinctives to most undergraduate students. They connect students to the Great Intellectual Tradition of higher education, reflecting the inheritance of the humane letters and the best of liberal tradition in Western thought. They cultivate a deep sense of community among students and faculty. They are essential to the identity and the value proposition of a college education. Ideally, they confront students with the prominent questions of existence, as informed by the great thinkers of history, under the guidance of well-equipped professors, and assisted by the leadership of the co-curricular areas of the university (campus ministry, student life, etc.). However, too often the general education core devolves into a somewhat chaotic, pragmatic financial factor in the success of universities. These courses tend to have higher enrollments and are often taught by nonpermanent faculty (non-tenure-track) or even graduate assistants with minimal qualifications, which means they are the highest net revenue courses on campus. General education courses tend to be among the largest on campus, financially subsidizing smaller courses in academic majors but adding to the sense that they are something

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wholly different than “real” courses taught by “real” professors. Because permanent faculty are not involved in many institutions, the curricula are easily manipulated for political or philosophical purposes by small groups of faculty leaders, or they are completely ignored and left adrift.

For Christian institutions, these curricula are essential to the cultivation of spiritual vibrancy that should occur in traditional students during their time at university, even as they are essential to the formation of adult learners in nontraditional contexts. There is no place in the university where Christ-centered thought should reign supreme more than in the general education program. This is where a university should be the most intentional, the faculty the most engaged, the cocurricular leaders from student life the most connected, and the theological priorities of the institution the most self-evident.

A Christ-centered education is one where Christ not only reigns pre-eminently but where the attributes of Christ are inseparable from the outcomes of the enterprise. Certainly the liberal arts tradition is foundational to education in the West, but in a Christ-centered context, the Great Commandment found in the Gospels is a refining lens that focuses the task of education toward a singular outcome: the production of intellectual empathy rooted in the selfless love of Christ and understood in the redemptive mission of God to his creation. In particular, the value of intellectual empathy, which finds its definition in the Great Commandment of the Gospels, should be a hallmark of the general education program at a Christian institution of higher learning.

## I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the United States, the regional accrediting bodies governing most institutions require a general education program as part of the basic requirements for a degree.<sup>1</sup> Institutions retain great latitude in the construction of their own core curricula, but general education is a substantial part of the work completed by students. These courses are not preprofessional but rather provide foundational thinking skills for further study. Core courses are taken by all students, regardless of degree focus or postgraduation plans. This portion of the curriculum may be small (nontraditional institutions tend to have few requirements) or quite large (traditional

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools includes Standard 2.7.3 on general education requirements. *The Principles for Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* (2010): 17.

liberal arts institutions have extensive requirements). These courses are usually undertaken during the first two years of study, with many institutions mandating completion of a large portion of these courses prior to the pursuit of the academic major or minor. This approach to education reflects very specific historical foundations.

For millennia, education was conducted in the home. Sons were quickly initiated into the world of men and the professions, just as daughters were taught the domestic arts by their mothers. At some point, the system advanced into a more formal system, where professional educators or tutors taught the children of the wealthy or assembled children in small schools that were typically comprised of extended family groups. The Greeks termed these tutors *pedagogues* (meaning “to lead or guide a child”; pedagogues often were slaves who were attached to households with children), the word that has become the technical term in English for education, “pedagogy.”

Most educated persons, apart from the slave-pedagogues, were expected to apply their learning in professions or in their roles as citizens. The trades were given particular knowledge that might advance one’s career as a butcher, a weaver, or a baker, but for a select few, a more elaborate education was viewed as necessary to prepare for public service in particular. This breadth of learning developed into what became termed the liberal arts, which were fairly well codified by the time the Romans had established themselves as the cultural successors of the Greeks.

Seven “arts” or skills dominated the commonly taught core for education, which set the pattern for virtually all higher education in the West. The liberal arts were conceived of as a carefully wrought pattern that progressed deliberately toward the goal of producing rigorous thinkers. The first level of work was called the “Trivium” (the “three roads” or “paths”), which included grammar, rhetoric, and logic; the second level was the “Quadrivium” (the “four roads”), which explored arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry.

These two levels were both sequential *and* intentional, the goal being the advancement of higher-level abilities in analysis and thinking. In the Trivium, grammar sought to prepare students to understand how language works; logic (also called “dialectic”) helped students learn to think in disciplined (“rational”) ways; rhetoric sought to combine the two skills in the communication of thought from one person to another. As those skills were mastered, the Quadrivium refined how students understood the larger



world, using mathematics as the primary tool for ordering and analyzing the universe. The roads did not stop with the Quadrivium, however, as students who mastered both paths to learning were then allowed to pursue the highest aims for thinkers (at least until the Enlightenment): philosophy and theology (which was sometimes called “the queen of the sciences”).

The Enlightenment (post-Descartes, ca. 1637) began to detach theology from the liberal arts (viewing it as unworthy of rational inquiry equivalent to the empirical pursuits of modern science), but both the Industrial Revolution and the rising pragmatism that resulted from the advent of new technologies began the final process of undermining liberal arts education. The Enlightenment removed the first term from the idea of “Christian liberal arts education” while the narrower demands of technical education have stripped away the second term, leaving us with specialized professional education standing as the dominant form of education in the third millennium of the Christian era. Rampant empirical skepticism undermined liberal arts education in Europe, while the American love of practicality has circumscribed its dominance in the United States.

Most American institutions, however, have retained some of the nomenclature of the liberal arts in two of the primary undergraduate degrees conferred by most universities, the “bachelor of arts,” which emphasizes languages, arts, or humanities, and the “bachelor of science,” emphasizing mathematics or science, both of which are general degrees that prepare students for more specialized study in graduate or professional schools.<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE CHALLENGE OF THE SELF

A foundational contrast inherent between a pagan worldview and a Christocentric one is the problem of egocentrism. Even the pagans understood the dangers of egocentrism, and while their educational system did not include anything the early church would recognize as sound theology or orthopraxy, it did at least underscore the idea that heads, hands, and hearts were somehow united in the living out of the worthwhile life.

Higher education can devolve into a kind of self-guided intellectual

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<sup>2</sup> In the United States, almost all institutions of higher learning prior to the Civil War were established to be Christian colleges built on the liberal arts. From Harvard (whose original motto was *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, “Truth for Christ and Church”) to most of the smaller colleges that dotted the American frontier, the history of American higher education is impossible to write without noting the enablement of Christian sects and churches. Indeed, Brown University and the University of Chicago both began as Baptist colleges. For a helpful survey of Christian education in the United States, see William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

buffet, where universities provide a range of courses, consumed according to student tastes and preferences, with only a few cohesive requirements in the chosen major's subject providing substance. Thus, the goal of post-secondary work is the completion of a degree, typically one that prepares students for gainful employment; certain majors are "pre-rich" (pre-med, pre-law, engineering, and business), and the rest are "pre-service" (religion, social work, education, and psychology) or "pre-figuring out what to do with one's life." This exaltation of personal preference is the outgrowth of a shift in how the self is viewed in a post-Enlightenment philosophy of education.

For millennia, though, education was thought of as a formative process, the goal of which was *education for the sake of education*. The fruit of such labor was the students themselves—thinking persons in possession of high-level skill sets that could serve society ("the state"). Education produced abilities, not merely credentials for professional fields or the workforce. This process conveyed a moral force, which included a kind of soul formation. Developing students' minds was never detached from the development of character or the cultivation of the spirit.

The liberal arts were "liberal," then, in that they sought to free—"liberate"—individuals from their own selfish desires and delusions.<sup>3</sup> Fully educated persons were liberated from the delusion of viewing themselves as the centers of the world and the ultimate arbiters of right and wrong. The connection between liberal arts education and citizenship is quite strong; indeed, the "liberal" part of the term comes from the Latin term for "free" (*liber*), as the skills in thinking, communication, and leadership skills acquired through such an education were thought best for "free" men, not slaves. Through extensive readings, memorization, and dialogues, these sons of freemen were prepared for duties as citizen-leaders. Foremost among these skills were those of critical thinking and rational analysis, with an emphasis on the kinds of application that might be communicated to others. Further, a life of active reflection was encouraged, where one

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic philosopher, battled the idea of the selfish, pleasure-seeking ego in his influential treatise *Meditations* (trans. George Long; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), which became standard reading for young scholars. More recently, in 1946, Jose Ortega y Gasset wrote, "General education means the whole development of an individual, apart from his occupational training. It includes the civilizing of his life purposes, the refinishing of his emotional reaction, and the maturing of his understanding about the nature of things according to the best knowledge of our time" (quoted in Henry Rosovsky, *The University: An Owner's Manual* [New York: Norton, 1990], 100). Rosovsky himself spends a great deal of time exploring the value of humility, humanity, and humor in liberal education, traits that he learned from John Buchan (101).

would not merely react to the events of the day but would learn from them through rigorous pondering and hindsight analysis.

Learning was therefore a steady stream from the past to the future, with citizen-scholars standing in the midst of the flow, at once receiving the best thoughts of those who had gone before them and also transmitting those thoughts to present circumstances that would shape the future. This passing on of knowledge between generations and the compendious nature of the knowledge that was available was summed up in a term that the Greeks often employed: *enkuklios paideia*, the circle of scholars that yielded a fulsome knowledge base that was communal in nature and compendious in scope (this is where the English word “encyclopedia” derives its name).

This pagan system sought to produce citizens (for advanced education was reserved for those who would lead) who renounced the self and understood their lives in terms of duty to the state. By exploring the Trivium and Quadrivium, learners came to understand the world in which they lived and their place in it. Their outcomes were located in the city, as they became—at least ideally—citizens whose lives were dedicated to placing the needs of the city and, by extension, the culture above their own desires. While the examples of this attention to civic duty are manifold, there is no better exemplar than that of Aeneas, the hero of Virgil’s seminal *The Aeneid* (ca. 29 BC) who is tempted to follow his own desires with Dido, the Queen of Carthage, but who finally renounces the temptation to lead another city and moves forward to found Rome itself. The term that dominates his final resolution is “duty-bound,” an assertion of the selfless renunciation of the internal for the external.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate object of this duty is the state, the polis, and its composite element, the family.

The ultimate goal of education in this view is outside of the individual self, not internal to it. As John Adams wrote to his son, who would likewise become president of the United States, “You will ever remember that all the end of study is to make you a good [m]an and a useful [c]itizen.”<sup>5</sup> An educated citizenry meant a potent, stable state, or as Will Durant once observed, “How can a society be saved, or be strong, except it be led by its wisest men?”<sup>6</sup> This view of a well-rounded education reflects a view that is hostile to the passions and self-centeredness of the ego.

<sup>4</sup> *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, in *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, vol. A, 2nd ed. (ed. Sarah N. Lawall and Maynard Mack; New York: Norton, 2002), 1097.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Michael J. Hillyard, *Cincinnatus and the Citizen-Servant Ideal: The Roman Legend’s Life, Times, and Legacy* (Xlibris, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961), 8.

The post-Enlightenment shifts in the philosophical underpinnings of general education curricula, along with the progressive educational movements of the post-World War II era, shifted the emphasis to one of particular subjectivity. The goal in perhaps most secular universities is the emphasis on the self, the “freeing” of the individual from the “hegemonies” of authority structures, institutions, and traditions. This view of education is relentlessly horizontal. It speaks frequently about the individual’s relationship with the earth (from whence we came as products of blind chance or nature), our relationships with each other (from whence we gain our identities and intersectional “value” as humans), and our relationships with ourselves (from whence we gain our own “authentic” truth). Sometimes this horizontal perspective reveals itself as naturalism (nature is all there is and all that there ever will be), sometimes it reveals itself as altruism (caring for one another is all that matters), and sometimes it reveals itself as outright solipsism (the world is what I make it out to be because only the self is truly knowable). These presuppositions refuse to look up; they are horizontal. They look to the material world, to others, and within the self to see what they can learn. They refuse to consider revelation, their relationship with the divine, and the possibility of transcendence or eternal answers because they lie outside of this mortal plane.<sup>7</sup>

### III. THE CHRISTIAN ANTIDOTE: INTELLECTUAL EMPATHY

Educational philosophies that elevate the state, the self, or pragmatic career preparation all elide the primary goal of a Christ-centered education: loving God with our whole being *and* loving others as we love ourselves. Approaches to education that aim at practicality or the exclusion of theology risk the creation of “men without chests,” to use C. S. Lewis’s term.<sup>8</sup> In the twentieth century, Martin Luther King Jr. put an even finer point on this: “The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency

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<sup>7</sup> An example of this viewpoint can be found in the summer 2015 issue of *Stetson University Magazine*, the alumni and friends publication of Stetson University. The issue focused on the great questions of life, the pursuit of meaning that could be engaged in while attending the university. In response to the question, “What is the meaning of life?,” the answers from the community were quite revealing about the foundations of the university’s curricula. The magazine issue carried precious little that was vertical in perspective. There was nothing about transcendent love. There was nothing about a relationship with God. As would be expected, this lack of a Christocentric worldview reflects the eventual nihilistic or egocentric worldview that now dominates Western higher education.

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1974).

may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.”<sup>9</sup> Earlier, in the seventeenth century, John Milton described the purpose of education as being “to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.”<sup>10</sup> In an age where the news is filled with evidence of incredible moral failures among leaders, including the best-educated ones, the need for a model of education that includes ethics rooted in spiritual development is abundantly clear.<sup>11</sup>

Christian colleges have a unique opportunity to engage in such an approach to education that employs a specific worldview rooted in both Scripture and the extensive Christian Intellectual Tradition. One of the reasons that early Christian educators embraced the historic liberal arts (and continue to) is because of the resonance of the problem of the self and its evidence in Paul’s writings about the struggles between the old, sinful self and the new, redeemed self (Rom 6:5–7; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), as well as Peter’s words about the same struggle with the sinful self:

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you if holy, you also are to be holdy in all your conduct; for it is written “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Pet 1:13–16).

Post-Enlightenment views of religion and other institutions or schools of thought inverted the goal of liberation to one of the individual rebelling against external forces and exalting internal sufficiency. For these thinkers, to be liberal was to be free from the superstitions of outdated forms of

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<sup>9</sup> “The Purpose of Education,” *Maroon Tiger*, January-February 1947, 10, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/purpose-education>.

<sup>10</sup> John Milton, “On Education,” in *The Major Works, including Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 277.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent collection of essays on this topic, see Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, eds., *The Schooled Heart: Moral Formation in American Higher Education* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

thought and repressive forces; the individual is liberated *from* religion (or any other form of power over the individual) to live as one sees fit within one's own understanding and reckoning.<sup>12</sup> In the Christian view, though, one is liberated from the *self* to the exaltation of God. Rightly understood, a Christian glorification of God over the self is tied more closely with the historical basis of the liberal arts than is the exaltation of the self over and against God.

Perhaps no idea is more crucial to understanding a specifically Christian approach to general education than that of the Great Commandment. In Matt 22:36–40, an expert in the law addresses Christ as a pupil would:

“Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?”  
 [Jesus] said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

Christ calls attention to a correct self-view in his response, noting that we are to love God and love neighbors, both thoroughly and humbly. These words have in mind another foundational statement: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10), which is echoed in “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). Just as the Great Commandment advances the OT *shema* (Deut 6:4) and Lev 19:18 into an assertion of priority that emphasizes God and others, the roots of intellectual humility likewise are rooted in an OT view of God as the sovereign creator over all things.

In the gospel configuration, the Great Commandment is not merely about the individual and God; it is linked inexorably with fellow persons. To put it in modern theological terms, the essence of Christ's command is the simultaneous, coequal importance of both *orthodoxy* (“right thinking” about God) and *orthopraxy* (“right action” toward fellow persons). The distinctive mission of Christ-centered higher education should then see the general education program as a primary site of implementation,

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<sup>12</sup> This contrast seems to echo hauntingly the words of Satan in Gen 3:4–5: “No! You will certainly not die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” This same thought underlies the sentiment that Isaiah once offered: “We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way.” (53:6).

coherence, and community.

For a Christian liberal arts core curriculum to be faithful to the Great Commandment, it must find coherent ways to inculcate a love for God and for others. This does not mean watering down the academic coursework or content, but rather shifting the goal from the exaltation of the self to the exaltation of God. One of the best ways to do this is by creating a sense of a communal commitment to viewing learning itself as a devotional activity. Study is one means through which we may learn about God and his ways. This was, in fact, the primary methodology of Christian higher education for the past thousand years. The liberal arts were viewed as critical to building a foundation to proper thinking about God (theology). The Christian humanism of Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), Roger Ascham (ca. 1515–1568), Edmund Spenser (ca. 1552–1599), Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Isaac Newton (1643–1727), and so many others viewed all education as pointing to the divine order built into the universe. All truth, in this view, is God’s truth because he is the author of all that is true; thus, the pursuit of truth is the pursuit of God. The fullest fruit of this view toward education is the expansive Christian Intellectual Tradition, which may be broadly examined throughout the core curriculum.

Because the Great Commandment calls us to live in community with others, to love in ways that bring glory to God, a Christ-first, coherent core curriculum must provide students with a passion for loving their neighbors. Once we have humbled ourselves before God as the start of wisdom, exalting him as Lord of all, we are to serve humbly. This means employing fully integrative service learning and other kinds of applied learning in support of other assessments of student learning. Christian learning communities should emphasize a sense of connectedness among persons because the intellectual humility of understanding our proper place in the universe overflows into how we live in community, through intellectual empathy. Intellectual empathy allows the individual to not only serve others but to serve with a particular point of view: the shared human experience.

It is shared because there are many common experiences: love, loss, death, pain, suffering, and joy. While different worldviews propose ways of handling these issues, Christianity places an emphasis on how these things function in community. Emphasizing the shared nature of humanity, the NT in particular underscores the importance placed on sharing in the context of community. For example, Paul speaks in Phil 4:13–14 to his

reliance on God but includes his joy at the support of the church: “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.” This is a classic path forward to empathy: connecting with others in times of need and “partnering” in that solution.

Through a broad range of readings, reflections, and discipleship, students can be led to think empathetically about their fellow creatures. A strong sense of shared humanity allows us to feel more deeply, love more authentically, and serve more passionately. Empathy is certainly not a characteristic reserved exclusively for Christians,<sup>13</sup> but when combined with the gospel’s clarion call to care for the lost, the oppressed, and the downtrodden, it results in a special sensitivity to the world.

This is particularly true when academic work is connected to real-life applications in highly integrated, intentional service learning. Service learning is an academic overflow of content into praxis, helping students not only to integrate their work intellectually but to understand it more intimately as they find ways to use their work in the service of others. This strong, clear connection cultivates a clear understanding that content is not merely a passive abstraction but rather a powerful tool for serving and understanding others.

A similar application of intellectual empathy comes as the variety of courses undertaken introduce students to a variety of ways of thinking professionally about the world. Understanding different academic disciplines not only allows students to encounter areas of study they have not yet experienced (and therefore have not yet considered pursuing professionally) but also to learn a more well-rounded approach to problem-solving. Intellectual empathy includes the human equation in thoughts. It accounts for the effect of decision-making on others. An example of this would be in the negative, where the brutalist architectural movement ignored the human element of life in community and produced structures that have allegedly created stress and even mental illness in occupants of the structures.<sup>14</sup> An architect who approaches such a design project with Christ-first intellectual empathy should design projects with a deep emphasis on connectedness

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a kind of empathy is often cited as one of the primary results of a secular liberal arts education. See, for example, Howard W. Figler et al., *Keys to Liberal Arts Success* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 10.

<sup>14</sup> For various examples of this brutalist architecture, see several essays collected in Nikos A. Salingaros, *Anti-Architecture and Deconstruction*, 3rd ed. (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2008).



and community. Furthermore, thinkers should be exposed to other fields so that they can likewise think outside of the proverbial box. For example, when someone studies a controversial topic, it is helpful to be able to think like a scientist to understand the facts of the topic, like an economist to understand the costs of the proposed solutions, like a political scientist to critique how the solutions might play out in the realm of governments, like a sociologist to ponder its human effects on other cultures, and like an ethicist to scrutinize its larger-picture ramifications on creation as a whole. All disciplines are stronger when they have elements from other disciplines in their quiver of analytical and empathetic tools. In a Christian context, this is even more pronounced.

The successful combination of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a core curriculum that emphasizes intellectual empathy will yield several benefits for the institution. First, it will provide a sense of purpose and cohesion to the program in that courses will fit together (and even overlap) in complementary ways. This clarity of purpose can likewise produce a core curriculum that emphasizes shared experiences among the learning community. By having a strong overriding content in the general education program, both professors and students will be able to have common experiences over the course of the core, providing effective points of reference and teachable moments for their discussions. Finally, a strong core curriculum will allow students the opportunity to pursue a sense of calling for their lives. As students come under the intellectual mentorship of professors and are exposed to a variety of thinkers and academic disciplines, they will be able to learn about previously unknown opportunities for service and employment.

In traditional higher education communities, particularly residential universities, students are embedded in a highly relational context. Their professors are more likely to be available to them and to invest personally in them. Student life and athletics staff are more likely to be engaged in personal cultivation of each student. Even classmates are more likely to be interested in—and opinionated about—the larger questions of life and existence. The deeply layered elements of such communities produce intellectual discipleship that is greater than mere advising, relational connections, or even mentoring. Intellectual discipleship seeks the deliberate development of each student as not merely a person but as a person made in the image of God. Intellectual empathy understands a thorough anthropology that grasps the totality of a person's sinful nature, the need

for personal conversion, and the imperative of pursuing God's calling on one's life.<sup>15</sup>

This is the ultimate brilliance of a Christ-first approach to higher education. It avoids the temptation to emphasize one element of the faith to the exclusion of another. Christ has drawn out a "Way" (Acts 9:2) that avoids the path of a grace-free legalism on the right and a Christ-free gospel on the left. This helps to explain why Christian principles have been so closely associated with the intellectual achievements of Western civilization.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Christian Intellectual Tradition is one that has advanced human history, economic prosperity, cultural enrichment, and theological sophistication unlike any other single tradition, as it emphasizes shared humanity and a God-glorifying mindset.

#### IV. PRACTICAL CHALLENGES TO A GENERAL EDUCATION CORE ROOTED IN INTELLECTUAL EMPATHY

In our own era, with its increasingly hostile views of faith, there are many challenges to the cultivation of Christ-centered intellectual humility through the core curriculums. First is the notion that anything "Christian" is automatically intellectually defective because of its basis in faith. This view is particularly popular among secular critics of Christianity, many of whom follow the thoughts of either Karl Marx, who viewed religion as "the opiate of the people," or Sigmund Freud, who viewed religious fervor as a form of mental illness. The influences of Marx and Freud are manifold in the academy, and the ramifications of this kind of thought are felt even within some Christian college faculty members, who feel ashamed to be labeled as believers because of the largely secular academic guild's distaste for things faith-related. Likewise, some critics view the implicit and explicit authority of religious orthodoxy to be hostile to free thought,

<sup>15</sup> While I do not have space in this article to address the role of student life in the core curriculum, general education programs should have a clear, strong partnership with the co-curricular elements of the university, especially in a traditional, residential setting. Wise campus leaders will find ways to interleaf the work of residence life, student leadership development, and other units on campus with the work of the academic classroom curriculum. This is, of course, an extension of the view that a Christian university should be a learning community that considers all of its members as partners in the educational enterprise.

<sup>16</sup> This view of the West has been outlined clearly in works such as Philip J. Samson's *6 Modern Myths about Christianity and Western Civilization* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001). Indeed, even secularists admit this debt to Christianity; see John D. Steinrucken, "Secularism's Ongoing Debt to Christianity," *American Thinker*, July 30, 2010, [http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/03/secularisms\\_ongoing\\_debt\\_to\\_ch.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/03/secularisms_ongoing_debt_to_ch.html); and Camille Paglia, "Religion and the Arts in America," *Arion* 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2007): 1–20, <https://www.bu.edu/arion/files/2010/03/Paglia-Religion-and-the-Art.pdf>.

believing that any authority outside the individual thinker is intrinsically bogus and coercive.

The antidote to these criticisms is the recovery and extension of the vast Christian Intellectual Tradition and the expression of it with intellectual humility. In every academic discipline, it is impossible to create an honest survey of the discipline's history without an examination of the influence of Christian thought and worldview. In literature, for example, the entire practice of literary criticism would be impossible without the work of Augustine, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson, Eliot, and an almost endless stream of devout believers whose creative works and hermeneutical discourses have built Western literary thought.

A second challenge to a rigorous Christian liberal arts core curriculum comes in the form of degree compression—the three-fold challenge of alternative credit completion, reduced hours for undergraduate degree completion, and the increased hours for professional academic majors. The second half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of methods by which college credits could be earned outside of the traditional college classroom. Some approaches allowed high school students to “double-dip” their coursework, earning college credit for their high school courses; others allowed standardized examinations to provide credit; and still others allow unparalleled mobility of credit hours, taking courses at a variety of institutions (including online institutions) and transferring them to their “primary” institution. Rare is the student who completes every single college credit through the traditional offerings of a campus. These options mean that students are increasingly bypassing the traditional general education program. For a Christian college, this is particularly challenging because it also means that these students are missing out on the very courses that are often the institution's most distinctive courses in terms of mission and content.

Not only are students bypassing the traditional core, but a third challenge is that degree requirements have been eliminating the space once held by general education classes. The number of credit hours required for the completion of undergraduate degrees has been declining for the past few decades. Not long ago, it was common for degrees to require 128 semester hours of work, but the threshold is now moving to 120 hours. Additionally, many legislators are pressing for three-year baccalaureate degrees. While three-year degrees are nothing new, current proposals often have students completing a portion of their college courses during their

high school career and heading to college with most, if not all, of their freshman courses completed.<sup>17</sup> To ensure this possibility, these legislators have strongly encouraged institutions either to trim their degree hour counts or to find ways to credential other experiences as course-bearing.

A fourth and final challenge is that the expansion of the technical content of many fields has increased the number of credits required for the completion of the major requirements for the degree. This often stands at odds with the previous issue of degree compression. Demanding fields such as engineering, nursing, business, and even the fine arts have ramped up the rigor of their program contents, particularly in fields that require a licensure examination.

Christian colleges must be proactive in dealing with these four challenges to the core curriculum. The marketplace of higher education carries with it very real forces that must be recognized and met. The forbearance of all alternative credit is unrealistic for most institutions; it is difficult to maintain degree completion totals that are out of step with other universities in the same market. Likewise, it is impossible to resist accreditor mandates that enlarge academic major requirements. Campus leaders must find ways to protect the essential elements of the general education program, as well as the co-curricular activities that undergird the first year of college for traditional students. Additionally, institutions must ensure that a vigorous general education program is intact for nontraditional programming, ensuring that those programs, especially degree-completion programs, contain mission-specific content that reflects the Christian mission of the university, including intellectual empathy.

## V. CONCLUSION

When the Spanish conquistadors encountered the Aztec civilization (ca. 1520), they stumbled across a religious system that was built on human sacrifice. During festivals, sacrificial victims were taken to the tops of the stepped pyramids that anchored cities, and priests with obsidian knives cut out the hearts of the still-living persons. The hearts continued to beat, so that the excoriated victims lived long enough to behold their own hearts in the bloody hands of the priests. Excoriated bodies cannot, of course, live for long; they die quickly and begin the process of decay.

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<sup>17</sup> I have written about my own experiences in graduating with my undergraduate degree in three years of coursework: "Confessions of a 3-Year Degree Student," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 4, 2009, <http://chronicle.com/article/Confessions-of-a-3-Year-Deg/49001>.

Similarly, challenges to the general education program threaten to excoriate higher education, leaving it without a heart and heading toward eventual decay. Christian institutions should be about the business of intellectual encouragement and the development of students' hearts, souls, and minds. Rightly conceived, the core curriculum should reflect the very heartbeat of the institution: a vision for how we might love God and love others with every aspect of our beings.

Intellectual empathy operationalizes the love of God as the love of others. It changes how we view others and ultimately how we view the world and our work within the created world. It cultivates people who are more than selfless; they are truly whole as their worldview encompasses a reality that lies beyond the individual, a worldview rooted in the fear of God and the service of others. Intellectual empathy underscores that distinctive spirit of Christ-first higher education.



## BAPTISTS AND SECULARISM: Forthcoming Challenges for Christian Higher Education

Hunter Baker\*

While postmodernism is often considered a monster under the bed for both evangelical Christians and conservatives, I had viewed it as potentially positive and was even hopeful about its impact. After reading Stanley Grenz's *A Primer on Postmodernism*, it seemed postmodernism's idea of a "tournament of narratives" would deprivilege secular, enlightenment views, while simultaneously offering Christians a more equal position in the competition.<sup>1</sup> As a Christian motivated by Paul's appeal to the men of Athens (Acts 17) as well as Leslie Newbiggin's appeal that Christians should embody "a proper confidence,"<sup>2</sup> I was optimistic about the church participating in such a tournament of truth.

I was naïve.

Although postmodernism can be a leveler of the playing field between worldviews, the worldview reduces its arguments to a single currency: power. And it is with this currency of power that control over American educational institutions is bought, monopolized, and leveraged to manufacture one's view of reality.

For the last 60 years, American Christians have increasingly lost their erstwhile social currency of influence.<sup>3</sup>

Our debt spiral did not originate from a lack of reasonableness, but

<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Newbiggin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> James Davison Hunter describes the amazing lack of influence Christians have had relative to small, minority groups such as Jews and homosexuals in the culture of the last several decades. See *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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from a rejection of ethics. When I wrote *The End of Secularism*, I aimed to rebut the idea that secularism in politics is more virtuous than religious influence. As the secular argument goes, religious claims are inaccessible to the public, thus society must adhere to our common (and apparently irreligious) reason in the interest of promoting social harmony. Further, by discarding religious views from public discourse, social thought would also be free to embrace scientific progress. My goal was to demonstrate that arguments in favor of secularism were not as strong or satisfactory as one might suppose. The reason lies in the real danger to social harmony. The true threat is not religious argumentation, but the use of political power to compel a conclusion on controversial questions.

Leaving God out of the equation does not unite society; rather, it privileges the discourse of one group over another. For instance, when a religious public policy effort advocated a tax increase to promote tax fairness, secular liberal fellows were still perturbed, despite their common stance on the question of taxes. Moreover, the Christian often appreciates the power and benefit of scientific inquiry and discovery along with the secularist; the conflict is not over science but the moral and philosophical tenets inherent within the secularist worldview (i.e. differences over abortion, stem-cell research, the theory of evolution, etc.). The “war” between religion and science is more propaganda than substance.<sup>4</sup> And the propaganda is necessary if secularism is to maintain its currency of power.

Secularization may not be a fully accomplished fact in the United States; it is certainly less powerful here than in Western Europe. But it has gained control of the dominant institutions of American life. Believers live in a world that regards religious belief as either irrelevant or irrational. As a result, they learn to compartmentalize their private beliefs. This process of privatization and compartmentalization has increasingly caused the existence of religious faith in nearly every public activity to appear unusual, perplexing, and even bizarre.

The parallel track to social power is cultural development, and here Christians have also found themselves on the losing side. The sexual revolution inaugurated by the birth control pill brought a sea change in social mores. Marriage has declined as a major social institution, especially in its permanence. So, too, has the predominance of sex as a phenomenon that occurs within marriage. While these changes have isolated Christians

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<sup>4</sup> All of these arguments may be reviewed in Hunter Baker, *The End of Secularism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

(especially those thinking, speaking, and living in an integrated way), they have merely marked them as eccentric or perhaps suffering from sexual “hang ups.” Within that frame, Christians end up fighting against mandatory sex education for students in public schools or battling to make divorce more difficult so that families might stay together. Some have tried to caricature the pro-life movement as little more than a fig leaf disguising the intent to suppress women, but given the movement’s emphasis on the civil rights of the unborn, that argument is unconvincing. We may appear recalcitrant or puritanical to the secular world but hopefully not evil.

The same cannot be said for the debate over same-sex marriage. A critical development occurred in the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Kennedy, writing for the court, employed rational basis scrutiny in overturning the Texas law against sodomy.<sup>5</sup> In other cases involving classes such as women or people of a particular race, the court has employed a heightened level of scrutiny (whether “strict” or perhaps intermediate). In a heightened level of scrutiny, the court will not be deferential to claims made by a state government, for example, because the court believes it is reasonable to adapt a skeptical stance given historical or cultural conditions. Rational basis scrutiny, on the other hand, generally means the court will defer to government defendants. As long as a law is substantiated by a rationale, the court will accept that reasoning and rule in its favor. This ensures that the court does not argue policy with legislatures, which would be beyond its purview.

The decision against a sodomy bill using only rational basis scrutiny was significant, for it signified that the Christian sexual ethic<sup>6</sup> was headed for an ultimate collision with the American legal establishment. This is a rational basis scrutiny “with bite,” as one legal scholar has put it, and it overcomes deference to legislatures only by attaching the judgment of animus.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the governing assumption posits that laws against homosexual sex or same-sex marriage exist solely because of irrational hatred or discrimination. According to the court’s application of rational basis scrutiny, the law expresses animosity.

This posture was only magnified in *Obergefell*, a decision that was

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<sup>5</sup> 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Defined here as the belief that sex is only for marriage and marriage is only something that happens between a man and a woman.

<sup>7</sup> Kenji Yoshino, “Why the Court Can Strike Down Marriage Restrictions Under Rational Basis Review,” <http://www.scotusblog.com/2011/08/why-the-court-can-strike-down-marriage-restrictions-under-rational-basis-review/>.



akin to an asteroid hitting the planet. Aristotle viewed the male-female reproductive pairing as the fundamental unit of society—not the individual—because society has no future existence without them.<sup>8</sup> To the extent that we have a history to examine, there is no evidence of anything like same-sex marriage prior to the most recent period. Chief Justice John Roberts referred to this reality in his *Obergefell* dissent when he asked, “Who do we think we are?”<sup>9</sup> Despite these precedents, the court ruled as it did. The result is that the Christian view has been officially relegated to the category of prejudice, hatred, and bigotry.

Were same-sex marriage to have the same impact as that of the sexual revolution, the consequences may have been no different than what Christians have already seen and experienced: accusations of repression and eccentricity.<sup>10</sup> But gay marriage has brought us to the intersection of the new view of sex and marriage as well as the logic of civil rights. The Christian sexual ethic clashes with the new American legal principles regarding non-discrimination of homosexuality and transgenderism.

In the case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, Justice Kennedy expressed his surprise and disapproval that the Colorado commission treated Jack Phillips like a Nazi or a southern racist,<sup>11</sup> yet he failed to acknowledge the role of his own jurisprudence in Phillips’s mistreatment. For, if the court sees no rational basis for traditional sexual morality in law, then why should a state commission assume anything other than animus in the mind of Phillips as he refuses to create and design a cake for a same-sex wedding?

My purpose in describing this situation in detail is to illustrate the dynamic that has replaced principled arguments about secularism. The debate over secularism had to do with the question of whether removing religion from the public sphere resulted in a society that is more harmonious, fair, and rational. Once it became obvious that secularism cannot be ethically or politically neutral, but rather reflects a partisan position, the argument evolved to a more aggressive expression. I am convinced that the combination of same-sex marriage with the logic of civil rights is the ultimate wedge issue, a kind of secularism on steroids. This ideology labels itself as kindness, inclusion, and intelligence arrayed against the

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book I, Section ii. “Those who are incapable of existing without the other must be united as a pair.”

<sup>9</sup> *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. (2015).

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Andrew Walker for his discussion of the “freakishness” of Christian sexual ethics in a chapel presentation at Union University.

<sup>11</sup> *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. (2018).

purported bigotry, superstition, and irrationality of traditional Christians.

What of the consequences? What must we confront as Christians in an age of secularism? First, we can look to the non-profit sector. In addition to building and sustaining churches, Christians have invested human and financial resources in fields such as education, adoption, poverty alleviation, disaster relief, public policy, counseling, and addiction recovery. Where these institutions and projects intersect with government, churches and non-profit ministries may find themselves in a precarious position. Unless they conform to culturally dominant views regarding sex, marriage, and family, these organizations may be either unable to continue operating or compelled to work with reduced resources.

At first blush, this may seem to have a simple solution: separate all ministries and Christian organizations from government funding. But reality is far more complex. Christian colleges, for example, have participated in good faith with their peers as recipients of aid for their students. Those funds—whether loans, grants, or other aid—constitute the majority of revenue at most schools. To eliminate existing government-based financial aid programs would likely mean the closure of nearly all schools receiving funds. The Christian philanthropic community would have to make hard choices about saving a reduced number of institutions. Under such a scenario, many students would not be able to access Christian higher education.<sup>12</sup>

But let us suspend the question of money and consider another concern. Non-profits generally need the state's permission to operate. Further, they often need formal accreditation from secular organizations. It is then possible that even a well-funded, private Christian college would not be permitted to continue offering programs in fields such as education, social work, psychology, nursing, and even law and business. Within such a state of affairs, even wealthy Christian universities could still fail as pariahs. Given the heavy investments these institutions represent, pressure to conform could be extraordinary.

These considerations combine to form a central concern: that, in the wake of *Obergefell*, a blend of civil rights laws, professional ethics, and accreditation standards can be leveraged to secularize the entire non-profit sector. Even if religious liberty protections were to thwart some attacks,

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<sup>12</sup> Without going through a similar analysis, I note that the question of non-profit tax status is similarly consequential for the finances of Christian organizations.

recent history confirms that even these legal provisions would not stop all of them. It is not unreasonable to believe we are on the cusp of such a cultural shift. Barring a major change in our cultural ethos, a ratchet effect of secularizing higher education would likely be irreversible. Given the religious history and traditions of the non-profit sector in the United States, such a shift would be nothing less than a massive transformation, an aggressive privatization of religion, and all for the sake of a recently formed secular, social orthodoxy.

The election of Donald Trump did not stop the impact or fragment its effect. It did, however, slow down its progress. A Trump-era Department of Education or Justice has not made administrative decisions that would cripple Christian higher education, for example. Yet, we do not know with certainty what will happen next, either in his administration or subsequent presidencies.

This uncertain future leads me to encourage younger Christians to demonstrate solidarity with the church and Christian organizations concerning liberty. Thus far, the results have been rather alarming. Recall the number of young Christians who supported a counterstatement that denounced the Nashville Statement (a classic, orthodox, and clear explanation of Christian sexuality) as “a declaration of bigotry.” Many of them reflect the ethos of their day and reinforce the impact of law upon public attitudes. We must not underrate it. Generally speaking, Americans take moral cues from the law. Both *Roe v. Wade* and the Civil Rights Act changed public attitudes toward abortion and segregation, respectively. *Obergefell* has put Christian orthodoxy on the wrong side of the law. It teaches that we are outlaws, an out-of-step minority. It would not be overly bleak to hope that perhaps a quarter to a third of Americans may persevere with a biblical position on the same-sex marriage question.

Yet even that fraction will be significantly smaller should we confine it to younger Christians. Increasingly, they will be taught by the culture in this matter. My own children are teenagers. We sat and watched the finale of *Adventure Time*, a Cartoon Network show we have followed for many years. One of the final scenes featured two female protagonists realizing their love for each other during a battle and kissing passionately after one saved the other. The new understanding has already penetrated many children’s programs (including Disney Channel productions) and will be fully promoted in schools.

Describing 19th century America, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote:

The majority thus has in the United States an immense power in fact and a power of opinion almost as great; and once a majority has formed on a question, there are virtually no obstacles which can, never mind stop, but even slow down its march and allow it time to listen to the complaints of those it crushes in passing.<sup>13</sup>

Tocqueville was indeed an astute observer. Short of a movement of God, one can hardly conceive a reversal of the sexual revolution within our lifetimes. And this machine of the majority will be driven by those who are ready to crush any who stand in the way. Most of this majority will be indifferent to the pleas of those they consider to be retrograde, recalcitrant, unenlightened, and prejudiced. They will accept the explanation that religious liberty is merely code for discrimination, a refuge for scoundrels.<sup>14</sup>

Today's Baptist students face a far stricter test than my own generation did in their youth. When they uphold a Christian sexual ethic, they will not be simply "out of step" with the dominant culture. Rather, they will risk being regarded as the moral equivalent of a racist. And should they express their beliefs openly, they will likely find themselves isolated and with reduced career and social opportunities. Given their circumstances, I am not surprised that some affirmed a counterstatement to a declaration on biblical sexuality, even when they could not articulate a substantive rationale for their views. They are looking for a middle ground, a way to be faithful and yet still be viable in this culture.

What our students face individually, Christian higher education will face corporately. We will be tempted to err on the side of preserving institutions and organizations and compromise our orthodoxy. Our brothers and sisters in places along the West Coast and in the Northeast will face these choices sooner than the rest of us. Many will want to maintain peace at any price (which, as Augustine reminds us, is not peace at all), to revise and re-characterize until we reach a *modus vivendi* that works in the modern age.

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<sup>13</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, Part Two, chapter 7.

<sup>14</sup> Just to reinforce the sense of intent, I reference the ultra-wealthy Tim Gill's desire to "punish the wicked" on homosexual rights, which means ordinary, orthodox Christians who hope for religious liberty. Andy Kroll, "Meet the Megadonor behind the LGBTQ Rights Movement," <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/meet-the-megadonor-behind-the-lgbtq-rights-movement-193996/>.

This dilemma evokes Bonhoeffer's concept of cheap grace. A church that promotes cheap grace provides "a cheap covering" for the world's sins: "no contrition is required." Cheap grace denies "the living Word of God." The Christian content with cheap grace is happy to live like the rest of the world.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Bonhoeffer describes costly grace, the "treasure hidden in the field" and "the kingly rule of Christ." Costly grace issues commands that result in action from the one who receives them. But it is always in danger of being ignored and forgotten if one is turned toward the world and not God.<sup>16</sup> Will we receive the commands of costly grace?

Bonhoeffer claims the monastic vision of the Catholic Church was an attempt to preserve a place for costly grace. He also takes note of Luther coming to grips with costly grace that "shattered his whole existence."<sup>17</sup> We might also think of the Reformation and even the efforts made in the twentieth century to press the cause of vital evangelicalism against a mainline Christianity that was ready to merge with the world like a raindrop entering an ocean. This "Christ of Culture," to use Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase, stands ready to bless the *culture's progress* on the *culture's terms* almost as a matter of course.<sup>18</sup> Such a version will be at least ceremonially useful and will generally enjoy a good reputation. The "Christ of Culture" pastor can serve an inoffensive function. He or she may officiate a wedding, administer a baptism, or perform a funeral, all as cultural rites.<sup>19</sup> Cheap grace moves us in that direction if we do not counter it with costly grace.

One of Bonhoeffer's prophetic statements resonates powerfully in this cultural moment, given how the church and its members interpret their response to current controversies:

If a father sends his child to bed, the boy knows at once what he has to do. But suppose he has picked up a smattering of pseudo-theology. In that case he would argue more or less like this: "Father tells me to go to bed, but he really means that I am tired, and he does not want me to be tired. I can overcome my tiredness just as well if I go out and play. Therefore, though father tells me to go to bed, he really

<sup>15</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 44–45.

<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> H. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951).

<sup>19</sup> Baker, 146–48. In *The End of Secularism*, I discussed the state pastor as a functionary of the ersatz church we might call the Department of God.

means: ‘Go out and play.’”<sup>20</sup>

We can deceive ourselves into performing this trick. Our desire to avoid the censure of the new cultural majority will encourage us to do it. To those who look at our cultural position with a degree of despair, as I sometimes am tempted to do, Bonhoeffer realistically concludes that “following Jesus is not something we men can achieve for ourselves.” He quickly adds, “but with God all things are possible.”<sup>21</sup>

We are rapidly approaching an existential crisis both as individuals and as part of the church. Will we choose the modern equivalent of “bourgeois respectability” and its cheap grace, or will we walk the road of costly grace? Certainly, that is part of the special stewardship Americans have in this nation under the dogma of the sovereignty of the people (to borrow from Tocqueville’s terminology).<sup>22</sup> We all possess tiny pieces of the American sovereignty that we dare not sit upon like the inert talent of Christ’s parable.<sup>23</sup> So, we will organize and engage in advocacy. We will sometimes even enter the courts. But we also must recognize that the spirit of the age is the spirit of the age. It may be that what Francis Schaeffer identified in culture as the antithesis has become so sharp that the broader American culture will not be able to tolerate us as equal participants in the *res publica*. How shall we then live?<sup>24</sup>

If the power brokers of what counts as reality exclude us from their public frame except as rogues and villains to be cast as players where useful to the narrative, then we will have to draw back into a church community to blow upon embers or perhaps to plow old ground into fields that may once again put forth green shoots. We may be regulated out of the adoption business, the pregnancy center business, the formal education business, and more. But we will not abandon the church. We will be forced to return to the first things of faith and to achieve a greater emphasis on sanctification, the absence of which will make engagement with a hostile and dismissive culture null and void.

Sunday School may be the only school we will be able to run. And we will have to make it count. No trivial Sundays. No trivial hours.

<sup>20</sup> Baker, *The End of Secularism*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, *The End of Secularism*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Tocqueville, vol. 1, Part One, chapter 5.

<sup>23</sup> Matt 25:14-30.

<sup>24</sup> I believe this is what Rod Dreher is getting at with his Benedict Option. Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017).



## FAITHFULLY TRANSITIONING TO ONLINE EDUCATION

Kristen A. Ferguson\*

Teaching online is a unique experience. Professors of all ages, experiences, and disciplines approach their first online teaching assignment with much anxiety, some anticipation, and lots of uncertainty. They typically question if online education really is educationally equivalent, if it really can serve the purpose of transformation, and if the technology will be too much of a barrier to teaching.

In normal circumstances, those professors would have the opportunity to work up to that first teaching assignment months ahead of time. They may sit down with an instructional designer or director of online education to talk about their syllabus and consider carefully how to accomplish each learning objective in the online format. Once the professor and online office had a detailed plan for the curriculum, chosen educational technology tools, and developed a schedule to create the course elements, the team would work on the course piece by piece. The course would be assembled before the term, and the online team would assist with adjustments or support during the term as needed. After the first term, special consideration for the evaluation of the newly developed course would help the professor and online team make improvements for the next offering.

When professors complete their first semester teaching online, they are often relieved, encouraged, and excited about what they have learned. They comment about being surprised at the engagement students show online, the quality of work submitted, and the possibilities that they see for their next online course offering. Even more so, professors often consider how to improve their face-to-face courses as a direct result of their engagement in the careful curriculum planning process as they learn how to accomplish their course objectives in new ways. Although they are still learning the online environment and continue to have questions about

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how to do several things online, they are most often optimistic about the experience and their own growth as an instructor.

That typical online teaching experience was not what professors encountered during the coronavirus pandemic. Online education has been well-researched and tracked over the last two decades. Best practices have been fine-tuned to optimize learning and transformation;<sup>1</sup> support systems and development processes have been created so that professors can transition to online education with relative confidence.<sup>2</sup> In the crisis transition to online education, however, professors and online educators lacked something essential to implement all of that research into their courses—time.

### I. IN MOTION

LeRoy Ford, in his book *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education*, makes a joke about curriculum adjustments being akin to changing a tire on a moving truck.<sup>3</sup> That seems like a very fitting description for higher education's emergency transition to online education. The semester was already moving along, the syllabus already published, students already working on assignments due later in the semester, and the pace of the course already in an established rhythm. Then, abruptly, all in-person instruction came to a complete stop and moved to the online environment, which would typically require countless adjustments to curriculum, pace, tools, assignments, and communication. With the course already in motion, it was challenging to understand and implement all the necessary adjustments when transitioning to a different delivery method.

The emergency transition resulted in some bad reviews of online education as the entire world endured stress, panic, and isolation at home. Brian Rosenberg observed:

Finally, and most interesting, will people find the model of distance learning that has been forced upon us to be

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Vai and Kristen Sosulski, *Essentials of Online Course Design: A Standards-Based Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016); Timothy Paul Jones, et al., *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2017); Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E. Lowe, eds., *Best Practices for Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Elliot King and Neil Alperstein, *Best Practices in Online Program Development: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> LeRoy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2003), 41–43.

satisfactory? Almost no one will claim, I believe, that it is in most instances as good as the teaching and learning that take place on most college campuses. My own early experience with an exclusively virtual world is that it is serviceable but exhausting and, in some ineffable way, deeply unsatisfying.<sup>4</sup>

That unsatisfying exhaustion was noted elsewhere. Countless professors and students experienced what was labeled as “Zoom fatigue”<sup>5</sup> as they spent hours in front of their webcams attempting to finish the semester strong. With children running in the background and jobs teetering in the balance, an abnormal amount of stress and anxiety accompanied what would be many professors’ first experiences with “online education.”

Instead of the usual introduction to online learning through a careful and deliberate onboarding development process, professors and students of spring 2020 were thrown into the trenches of the internet to sink or swim. The outcome emerging from the end of the spring 2020 term has been exhaustion, doubt about online education, and discouragement about the future of higher education as it will depend on this delivery method, at least for now.

Knowing the decades of research in favor of online education, the more seasoned online educators, however, may observe that the spring 2020 phenomenon just does not line up with established data. For years, institutions, accreditors, and educational researchers have been carefully determining whether or not online education was a valid delivery method.<sup>6</sup> They have surveyed students, faculty, administrators, and other constituents, explored the quality of work between online and face-to-face students, and identified differences in retention and graduation rates, all in an effort to ensure the online education could be a sustainable and responsible way to educate. Both secular and Christian educational researchers have concluded over the years that online education is indeed an effective delivery method.<sup>7</sup>

If that is the case, then why has this experience with online education

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Rosenberg, “How Should Colleges Prepare for a Post-Pandemic World?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Renshaw, “Zoomed Out: Is This Really Online Education?,” <https://brianrenshaw.com/2020/04/24/zoomed-out-is-this-really-online-education/>.

<sup>6</sup> Allen and Seaman, *Online Report Card*; Garrett and Legon, *CHLOE 3 Behind the Numbers*.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Tanner, “Online Learning at ATS Schools: Part 2—Looking Around at Our Present,” *Colloquy*, March 2017, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/onlinelearning-part-2.pdf>; Allen and Seaman, *Online Report Card*; Garrett and Legon, *CHLOE 3 Behind the Numbers*.

been so difficult for so many? Besides the intense stress, fear, and panic brought on by the pandemic itself, one educational reason may be that the *way* institutions decided to transition to online education is not what has been historically considered “online education” at all. Instead of the typical online course designed and adapted entirely for the online environment, many institutions implemented remote teaching in which in-person class periods simply moved to a video conferencing software.<sup>8</sup> Although this choice may have made the transition quick and nimble as uncertainty shrouded every future scenario, teaching remotely in an emergency scenario is not the same as the detailed preparation that typically accompanies moving a course online.

As described in the introduction of this article, online course design and development have become a field of study and profession for many. Integrating the social science of learning with the art of user-experience design, online educators work with professors to accomplish their same learning objective as in their face-to-face course in the online environment through a detailed planning process. As they do so, a myriad of intentional design and delivery choices would ideally accompany the transition to online education:

- a. Ideally, online educators would recommend rethinking how students demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives in the online environment.
- b. Ideally, online educators would like professors to follow best practices for video creation and live class meetings (e.g. short and topical rather than a large block of time).
- c. Ideally, online educators would help professors understand how to create online community through intentional and planned interaction.
- d. Ideally, online educators would like to design the course in the learning management system with user-experience theory and universal design in mind.

Understanding the difference between the spring 2020 emergency transition to remote teaching and the typical transition to online education can help institutions evaluate their response in crisis more accurately. Professors need not make determined conclusions about online education in

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Hodges, et al., “The Difference between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning,” *Educause Review*, <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>.

general based on this emergency but, instead, appreciate the monumental shift they accomplished in relatively little time. Institutional leaders need not fret poor student evaluations or feedback about online education but instead prepare for an evaluation of how the emergency itself was handled as a whole and plan for future online offerings. Students need not feel defeated in their learning but instead realize that this was a unique situation that they weathered together. Online educators need not be defensive about the quality of what they do normally because it is not a perfect, one-to-one comparison.

## II. MAKING THE MOST OF REMOTE TEACHING

Education has experienced a pedagogical whiplash, but remote teaching does not have to be so painful. In fact, remote teaching could be the ideal method for upcoming semesters amid the uncertainties of the coronavirus pandemic. As the crises unfold, states will likely open up access to on-campus learning only to close it down again if another spike in coronavirus cases arises. This on-again, off-again access to the campus has led many institutions to choose remote teaching for their contingency plan. Doing so will allow students to access on-campus instruction whenever possible but also be ready for the video conferencing marathons if a stay-at-home order is issued once again. Although this scenario brings some tension to students and professors, educators who teach remotely can take a few tips from the field of online education to help them transition a bit more smoothly.

1. *Length of the class period.* The first tension between remote teaching and typical online education involves the length of the expected video time. In a face-to-face class, most institutions plan for an hour-and-a-half block twice a week or a three-hour block once a week (or somewhere in between). Spending an hour and a half or even three hours at one time in front of the computer screen is difficult for students and professors alike. Some common-sense explanations for this video fatigue include lag time in the video, anxiety with the technology, or non-technology related distractions.<sup>9</sup>

In an ideal online education situation, research would recommend “chunking” the course content up into topics that result in videos no longer

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<sup>9</sup> Manyu Jiang, “The Reason Zoom Calls Drain Your Energy,” *BBC Work Life Blog*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting>.

than twenty minutes each.<sup>10</sup> Multiple videos could be assigned in a given week, but the limit on the time and topic per video allows the student to remain engaged for longer. Then, the class would have a discussion or activity related to the video to ensure students have appropriately considered and understood the content.

Although professors likely cannot (or should not) change the length of the class period mid-semester for the remote teaching contingency plan, they can attempt to make the class period more engaging by breaking it up into twenty-minute segments. Professors can plan to add a discussion or activity to keep students attentive and allow them to digest the content. Sending them on a quick mission to find articles online, search resources at their disposal, or write up a simple reflection can change the pace just enough to allow everyone to come back more refreshed and ready for the next lecture segment. Alternating between lecture and a short activity or discussion will help students stay alert and attentive through the whole class meeting.

2. *Student engagement.* The next tension that educators face in remote teaching is a lack of engagement from students. In class, professors can see students' facial expressions, perceive the comprehension in the room, and hear from students on a whim with a quick question. Often in a face-to-face course, engagement comes with relative ease because of the shared physical space and time. In emergency remote teaching, professors may ask a question or begin a discussion only to hear crickets through their computer speakers.

In a planned, online course, professors would require intentional and regular engagement every week. Whether it be group work, discussion forums, or peer review opportunities, a large part of the final grade would be centered on engagement frequency and quality. Professors would communicate expectations for engagement early in the semester, even indicating precise criteria for grading participation found in a published course rubric.<sup>11</sup>

In remote teaching, there are actually many ways that professors can enhance student engagement. One way is to prime the pump before the class period by giving them some content and sample questions early in the week. Professors can tell students that they expect them to discuss that

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<sup>10</sup> C. J. Brame, "Effective Educational Videos," 2015, <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/effective-educational-videos/>.

<sup>11</sup> Linda B. Nilson and Ludwika A. Goodson, *Online Teaching at Its Best: Merging Instructional Design with Teaching and Learning Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2018), 131–64.

topic during the live meeting and will be grading them on specific things like critical thinking, understanding of the content, and argumentation. Providing them this sort of warning and structure can enhance their motivation to participate quickly and deeply during the live meeting. Professors can also set up an asynchronous discussion on the learning management system or assign peer review opportunities to align with existing assignments for facilitated student interaction.

3. *The Learning Management System.* The next tension that can frustrate professors and students is the inconsistent use of the online platform that houses online courses, called the learning management system (LMS).<sup>12</sup> Professors who teach in-person most often neglect to learn and use the LMS because they can complete all necessary tasks during the in-person class period, such as receiving papers, holding discussions, and providing general communication about upcoming assignments. In a coronavirus world that is prone to uncertain delivery methods, the misuse or underutilization of the LMS can limit potential learning when forced to move online.

In a purely online course, the LMS is the primary technology used for learning. Professors would use it to organize the course into modules so students could keep track of their completion of materials and assignments. Professors would work with the online office to ensure all necessary course elements—videos, files, assignment instructions, supplemental resources, and activities—were easy to find and available to students at pre-set times. Due dates set in assignments would notify students of work coming due and professors of work needing to be graded. With so many pieces moving around in online education, the LMS is an unquestioned necessity for online educators and students.

In the remote teaching contingency plan, the optimal use of the LMS would attempt to maintain consistency regardless of whether the class period was in-person or online at any given point in the semester. If professors and students are familiar with using the LMS for submitting papers, communication, and material downloads, then the class would have no trouble resuming work and communication in that online format when the need arose to move to remote teaching. The ideal scenario for this contingency plan would be to utilize the LMS consistently during the term to minimize the shift into the online format if remote teaching became necessary.

4. *Assignment variables.* One of the tensions felt near the end of spring

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<sup>12</sup> The most popular LMS options on the market include Canvas, Blackboard, and Moodle.

2020 was the alteration of certain assignment requirements and submissions to accommodate remote completion and submission. It is impossible to describe the full range of potential assignment changes that are necessary given the remote teaching contingency. However, the most considerable help with the transition of assignments will be an institution's online office and IT department.

When professors move a course online in normal circumstances, determining how they will assess the learning outcomes is the first and most crucial step. The online office can help the professor consider the different tools in the LMS, the particulars of writing clear assignment instructions, the technological support needs, and the various contexts that each student will encounter when accomplishing the assignment. This planning usually generates a good deal of creativity and a concrete plan of how each assignment should be executed.

Likewise, in the coronavirus remote contingency plan, assignments must be designed with the potential of a stay-at-home order in mind. For some assignments, this will pose no threat to student completion; for others, significant issues may occur. For example, if the final assignment requires observations in a context, interviews conducted, ample library research without digital resources, or any sort of group project, professors can anticipate the issues that may occur in a stay-at-home order and overcome them ahead of time with a contingency plan. Professors will need to consider the variables of the students' context, such as access to resources, the ability to secure a proctor if needed, and technical support provided by the institution. Communicating clearly, concisely, and consistently about these changes will help students understand exactly how to earn their grade for the course.

### III. PREPARING FOR EXCELLENT ONLINE EDUCATION

Although having a remote teaching contingency plan may be an excellent option for the uncertainties that lie ahead, some institutions have chosen to operate with as much certainty as they can by moving entirely online for the next semester. Although this means no in-person instruction, the advantage of knowing all classes will be online does allow professors to prepare and plan for excellence in online education leading up to that semester. With time being the missing element to excellent online education for the spring 2020 term, institutions can attempt to get ahead of the next semester by taking into consideration some preparation tips to

execute online education on a larger scale.

Some institutions are better prepared for an influx of online courses than others. Larger institutions typically have an online office with instructional designers and videographers to assist professors in their course development. In comparison, smaller institutions may have a few key faculty members who have run point for the online endeavors of the institution. Regardless of the institution's setup, an increase in online courses and students will add to the load of the online support team and faculty. Here are some ways institutions can offload that burden now so that their next semester of online education can be even better.

1. *Establish best practice principles.* If the only people who know what good online education looks like at any given institution are in the online office, then professors are going to experience a bottleneck when they try to access that specialized knowledge. One way to mitigate that bottleneck is by producing a document on the best practices for online education at the institution.<sup>13</sup> The best practices can be a simple document that includes bullet-pointed principles that make online education work well with the institution's context and mission. With those established guidelines, faculty and adjuncts can at least have a starting point on how to begin adjusting for the next semester.

2. *Provide research.* Along with the best practices, faculty would likely appreciate knowing some of the research. They might not have the time or desire to know it all, but it helps among academics to support those best practices with evidence from the field as well as qualitative data from the institution's own online students. Even pulling some data from the LMS analytics can provide faculty with helpful information to design and deliver a better online experience for students. Both quantitative and qualitative data may help give some grounding to the implementation of the best practices.

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<sup>13</sup> See Timothy Paul Jones, et al., *Teaching the World*; also, Maddix, Estep, and Lowe, *Best Practices for Online Education*; Neal Brian Ledbetter, "Best Practices of Online Undergraduate Spiritual Formation at Select Institutions of Christian Higher Education: A Delphi Study" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017) T. R. Baltrip, "Identifying Standards of Quality in Christian Online Theological Education." (Ph.D. diss., University of South Florida, 2015). Additionally, secular research offers best practices based on years of educational data: Vai and Sosulski, *Essentials of Online Course Design*; Robin M. Smith, *Conquering the Content: A Blueprint for Online Course Design and Development*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014). Also consider consulting Quality Matters ([qualitymatters.org](http://qualitymatters.org)) or the Online Learning Consortium ([onlinelearningconsortium.org](http://onlinelearningconsortium.org)) for formalized quality rubrics and certificates.



3. *Offer synchronous and asynchronous training.* Once professors know how online education should operate from a principled standpoint, it is time to train, train, and train some more. Some institutions have a strong faculty development strategy in place already, which likely means those professors are more prepared for online teaching than others. Nevertheless, offering specific training about technology and pedagogy will be helpful to the faculty as a whole. Since most professors are exhausted from the pandemic in general, institutions may decide to offer both live trainings on a regular schedule as well as recorded training for them to view later.

4. *Foster collaboration.* Institutions can also spread out the burden of helping all the faculty by allowing professors to talk to one another about what works and what does not in online education. Connecting the whole faculty to the most experienced online professors, online educators in the field, and even to online students can help foster a community of learning, attempting, and evaluating online education. It also serves the secondary purpose of supporting buy-in among faculty as well as fine-tuning the best practices with faculty input. Collaboration can take the form of discussion boards in a faculty-only online course, video conference sessions, or even a simple email group (depending on how large the faculty is).

5. *Begin syllabi creation early and give feedback.* Syllabus creation will need to look a bit different if the plan is to move everything online in the future semester. Instead of faculty members reusing their syllabi from previous semesters, academic leaders should encourage them to take a fresh look at their learning objectives to consider the best way to accomplish those online. It is important to understand that learning objectives do not need to change, but they can be accomplished in different ways, given the technology and distance learning. Professors can also request feedback from other professors or the online office about their syllabus if it can be submitted earlier than usual.

6. *Build templates.* The online office can multiply their efforts by creating templates that can be distributed and adapted as needed. For example, perhaps the online course will need a homepage that includes the course information, tech support contact, and other institutional policies. The online office might create something that can be imported into each course and then modified by the professor. Other templates like discussion board instructions, assignment instructions, tech support verbiage, and other commonly used items can help fast-track some of the online course creation.

7. *Streamline tech support.* Without direction, faculty and students will likely bombard the IT and online offices with questions. Instead, institutions can communicate where to access FAQs, video tutorials, and specific information regularly and clearly. Institutions can create a one-stop webpage with that information so that a URL can be the email response for many inquiries. This streamlined process allows the IT and online offices to triage tougher cases instead of spending the majority of time answering the same question repeatedly.

As institutions consider implementing some of these preparation tips for a fully online future semester, they are providing well-researched content, varying their teaching methods, supporting community interaction, setting clear expectations, and communicating consistently. As professors partake in the online training, collaboration, and research, they may even experience for themselves some of the strategic ways to implement excellent online education.

#### IV. COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION ONLINE

Christian institutions of higher education have a deep conviction that education is more than merely knowledge transfer. James Riley Estep Jr. states, "In short, something is Christian if it reflects the theological convictions of the Christian community in its content, purpose, message, and life implications; all of these rest on theologically informed criteria."<sup>14</sup> Thus, sharing information with students is only one part of the educator's responsibility if that education is to be Christian. Estep concludes, "Education that glorifies God is one that transforms individuals into mature followers of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup> Christian educators have not achieved their mission if their students are simply smarter. Instead, educators aim for whole-person transformation as students engage in a Christian worldview that integrates faith and learning, applies truth to their lives in meaningful ways, and fosters their growth toward Christlikeness as they interact in the educational community.

The theory and practice of facilitating this sort of discipleship-focused transformation in an online course has always been a concern for Christian

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<sup>14</sup> James Riley Estep Jr., "What Makes Education Christian?," in *A Theology for Christian Education* (ed. James R. Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison; Nashville: B&H, 2008), 40.

<sup>15</sup> Estep, "Toward a Theologically Informed Approach to Christian Education," in *Theology for Christian Education*, 265.

professors even since the earliest days of online education.<sup>16</sup> Those concerns have continued to be expressed over the years<sup>17</sup> and still linger in the minds of many Christian educators as they engage in this emergency transition to online education during the coronavirus pandemic. Thankfully, it is precisely *because* Christian educators have always been concerned about this topic that established research already exists to guide the way educators cultivate spiritual formation in their online courses.

The problem that many professors perceive with spiritual formation in the online environment is what online educators refer to as “transactional distance.”<sup>18</sup> This theory was articulated by secular educational theorist M. G. Moore and holds that the physical separation between professor and student results in a psychological distance, causing potential hindrances to learning and relational barriers.<sup>19</sup> Applied to the goal of student spiritual formation, the concern among Christian educators is that the physical distance between professor and student may result in stymied opportunities for spiritual growth that come as a result of interaction with biblical content through meaningful relationships with the student’s professor and peers. In other words, the physical distance, can reduce meaningful interactions, which in turn can reduce growth and transformation.

In online course design, educators who are more prone to replicate the traditional course without accounting for the online environment actually amplify transactional distance. Hours upon hours of pre-recorded video lectures with minimal engagement among students leave little opportunity for students to reflect, apply, and grow in community, which are critical activities for transformation. However, as online education research has become more popular, trends, tools, and methods for reducing transactional distance have become standard practice.<sup>20</sup> The key to reducing transactional distance is planned, intentional interaction within the online course.

Research in the field of Christian online education has identified an

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Delamarter, “Theological Educators and Their Concerns about Technology,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 8, no. 3 (July 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Kristen Ann Ferguson, “Evangelical Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning in Graduate-Level Theological Education” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Roger White, “Promoting Spiritual Formation in Distance Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 303–15.

<sup>19</sup> M. G. Moore, “Theory of Transactional Distance,” in D. Keegan, ed., *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Kemp, “Social Presence in Online Learning,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 41–53; Timothy Paul Jones, et al., “Social Presence and Theological Education,” in *Teaching the World*, 37–51.

important curriculum design framework called “the community of inquiry” to reduce the effects of transactional distance.<sup>21</sup> This framework consists of three necessary relationships that are established in the online environment by intentional interaction. Those relationships are between the student and the content of the course, the student and the professor, and the student and other students. When all three are present, the educational experience results in a learning community in which students grow in meaningful ways.

As Christians, the center of our educational community must be Christ. Therefore, although the community of inquiry was developed for a secular learning environment, our Christian convictions will direct specific implementations of the community of inquiry framework.<sup>22</sup> For example, students will not just interact with neutral content; Christian educators will provide them with content that is rich with Scripture and steeped in the Christian worldview. Professors will not just engage with students about their grades and homework instructions but seek every opportunity to point them to Christ. Student interaction with peers will not just pertain to acing the final but will be guided by the professor toward spiritual maturity as they grapple with biblical truth together.

All of that can happen online, and the result is a high potential for spiritual formation. From a Christian education standpoint, the following discussion provides professors with considerations on how to design and deliver an online course with this community interaction in mind.

1. *Student to content.* Content in video, audio, or written format can contain and prioritize the Christian worldview. Christian educators can faithfully integrate the authority of Scripture in the communication of their subject matter regardless of whether that content is given in person or online. This concept is not controversial, but the essential element that is commonly neglected in an online course is the need to create opportunities where students can engage with that content substantively. The passive reception of content is not the same as grappling with new concepts and ideas critically as the professor guides students toward the aim of personal transformation. Engagement with content should include

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<sup>21</sup> D. R. Garrison, T. Anderson, and W. Archer, “Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education Model,” *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2:2–3 (2000): 87–105.

<sup>22</sup> John David Trentham provides a helpful discussion on the integration of observable truth in the social sciences with the priority of Scripture; see “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically: Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Education Journal* 16:3 (2019): 458–75.

reflection and application, bringing the Scripture to bear on the student's real-life and context. In this way, the content in the online course is not static but is an interactive force in the course, guiding students toward an intended destination.

2. *Student to professor.* The professor has countless opportunities to foster and cultivate spiritual formation online beyond just providing the content. As a vital participant in the online community, the professor facilitates movement toward the course's aim of transformation by shaping the student through the routine tasks of grading, responding to emails, and engaging in discussion. Interaction must be regular and substantive throughout the length of the course so that the student knows that the professor is present and a participant in the community of learning. The professor can capitalize on these opportunities to build relationships, apply truth, and identify growth areas in students. Through this engagement, the student will see a model of what it looks like to pursue Christlikeness in every interaction.

3. *Student to student.* Even if students have excellent content and strong interaction with the professor, they still need to interact with one another as they reflect, respond, and react to their peers' critical engagement with the course content. Asynchronous discussion, peer review, group work, and a number of other creative activities can provide the opportunity for students to engage with one another and learn from one another as the community online builds. As they build a community centered on the biblical content that the professor provides, students can observe growth in one another, participate in application beyond their own lives, and articulate important ways in which they are being transformed.

4. *Missing missional mobilization.* The community of inquiry can provide a rich learning environment when developed from a Christian worldview through interaction with content, professor, and students. However, it is missing an essential Christian emphasis—mission. Spiritual formation is not complete until it mobilizes students to share the gospel in their context in fulfillment of the Great Commission mandate (Matt 28:19–20). The mission of the Christian is not just to soak up knowledge to be personally transformed, but biblical transformation seeks to replicate itself in others through sharing the gospel. This missing element is where online learning gets really exciting.

In an online course, students are typically scattered all around the country or even the globe. As students become disciples who make disciples,

their professor can design ways to send students into their own context to engage their community for Christ and then bring those experiences back to the online course community for feedback, insight, and growth. The online community can teach students about mission, send them on mission, and support their future missional experiences.

Online activities that facilitate this missional engagement can include interviews, field research, immersion experiences, and relationship building. For example, a course on literature may send students on a missional activity requiring several interviews regarding the impact of Christian literature on the general public. Specific questions regarding biblical themes found in that literature can begin conversations with the interviewee and reveal opportunities for the student to explain the gospel message. A course on graphic design or marketing might send students to the mall to observe and record messaging in the stores. Discussion with store representatives can assist with interpreting the messaging and branding as well as provide opportunities for concepts related to biblical teaching. In a course designed for training ministry leaders, activities that require discipleship relationships or teaching moments in a church context can provide the students with formative experiences and feedback from the course community as they engage their context directly.

Students can bring back summaries, photos, videos, or artifacts about their missional experiences for discussion and advice as they continue to learn how to engage their context with the gospel. In this way, professors can mobilize and equip students to practice what they are learning in class as students apply it in their context. Then, students can interact with one another and the professor about those activities to gain an appreciation of what mission looks like in the variety of contexts represented by the students in the online course.

Spiritual formation is possible in online courses. It happens by intentionally designing a community where content, professor interaction, and peer interaction are all present and heading toward the specific goal of transformation. The content in the course can be focused on a Christian worldview, the professor's interaction can guide students toward maturity in Christ, and the peer interaction can express and encourage growth among students. Online courses can even provide opportunities to further our mission as we seek to reproduce growth in others by applying truth in our own contexts wherever they may be.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has altered the immediate execution

and future plans for higher education in many ways, remote teaching and online education do not have to threaten a uniquely Christian approach to education. Institutions can make the most of remote teaching by applying some online education principles to improve the student experience. If institutions determine to move fully online for the future semester, they can create best practices and train faculty for excellent online teaching. Most importantly, whether teaching remotely or online, professors can establish a rich community where students can grow in Christ and be deployed in their context for faithful and Christ-exalting service.



## WHAT CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES OWE THEIR STUDENTS

C. Ben Mitchell\*

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.  
—Colossians 1:15-20 CSB

There are many who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who seek to know in order that they may themselves be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonorable. But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love.  
—Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1113)

Emblazoned on the seal of Union University where I teach is the motto *Religio et Eruditio*. This pithy Latin phrase has served the university well and is helpful shorthand for the mission of integrating faith and learning. Yet, however useful the motto is, Christian universities do not exist for

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faith and learning in the abstract, but for some other reason, or so I want to suggest.

Union's mission statement gets a little closer to the true aim: "Union University provides Christ-centered education that promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society." But even that mission statement can be understood as *a*-personal. Education is the direct object. To provide Christ-centered education for whom? Learning implies a learner. So, *raison d'être* is for our students and the glory of God. Not *religio et eruditio* in the abstract but, if we need the Latin, *Ad gloriam Dei et alumni*. So, as we think about our life together in a university, one of our central questions must be: "Under God, what do we owe our students?" I argue that it is at least this:

Christian universities owe students a "Greats" liberal arts and sciences Core, offered by master teachers, who integrate vibrant faith, meaningful scholarship, and Christ-like service, in Christian community, forming and cultivating the habits of faithful wisdom, life-long learning, and kingdom living.

Moreover, I further argue that there is no reason for the Christian university to survive if that is not its aim, much less to charge tuition for an educational experience. It is not a large task; it is a monumental one, requiring all of one's self and energy.

Readers can exegete this statement for themselves, but I offer the following to explain and elaborate on a few of the phrases.

### I. THE GREATS

The "Greats" points to the curated curriculum. I say curated curriculum because I believe that the faculty members are the curriculum of a Christian university in the formal sense. Their *vitae* (their lives) are the amalgam of embodied knowledge, experience, and wisdom faculty bring to the learning community. Faculty are not a valued addition to the curriculum; they *are* the curriculum. The syllabi and written texts are merely the codification of the requirements of the course of study and the curated literature for that course of study.

However, by "Greats," I do not necessarily mean a classical curriculum (though universities could do worse). I think Christian faculty are perfectly

capable of determining what they think the great texts are as a scholarly community (whether they are persons, schools of thought, or books). In fact, I agree with Stanley Hauerwas of Duke University, who says in his essay on “The Morality of Teaching” that “No issue is more central to the university than whether faculties will find the courage to determine the ‘classics’ that make any curriculum intelligible.”<sup>1</sup> What counts as Greats is a conversation the faculty need to have regularly with one another. What are the core texts to help achieve the mission of the Christian university? What ideas are essential to the curated curriculum? Does the liberal arts core adequately cover those texts? Christian faculty owe it to their students to saturate them in the Greats.

## II. MASTER TEACHERS

“Master Teachers” points to the importance of the daily task of the Christian faculty. Faculty must aspire to be a Master Teacher; the liberal arts core must only be taught by such Master Teachers. What is a Master Teacher? That would be determined by the faculty themselves. Baylor University, for instance, formally awards Master Teacher status on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Knowledge and use of effective pedagogies;
2. Advocacy for teaching and learning, as reflected in such characteristics as:
  - a. passion for teaching and learning
  - b. engagement of students—mentoring undergraduates and/or graduates in research, active learning classes, group work, service learning, and/or community-based learning,
  - c. impact beyond nominee’s own courses—e.g. curricular development, mentoring of other faculty colleagues, publications, presentations, or web resources; and
3. Sustained (minimum of 10 years at Baylor) commitment to teaching excellence.

Whether formalized or not, new faculty hires, the faculty development program, and other strategies should aim at producing a congregation of Master Teachers to teach the core and lead the mission of forming students. Christian faculty owe it to their students to be Master Teachers. As Christina Bieber Lake, Clyde S. Kilby Professor of English at Wheaton

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “The Morality of Teaching,” in *The Academic’s Handbook*, 3rd ed. (ed. A. Leigh DeNeef and C. D. Goodwin; Durham: Duke University Press), 45.

College, puts it, “All of us would do well to remember that teaching is not [just] about imparting knowledge to underlings. It is about inspiring fellow learners to think deeply about a subject that you know can transform them. If it cannot, then why are you teaching it? It’s time to get a different career.”<sup>2</sup>

### III. VIBRANT FAITH

Integration of “vibrant faith, meaningful scholarship, and Christ-like service” implies the incarnation of the faculty’s core values in their embodied practices. Union University identifies her core values as being Excellence-Driven, Christ-Centered, People-Focused, and Future-Directed. Those would be vacuous placeholders if they were not part of the actual practices and aspirations of the individuals who constitute the community of scholars of the university (not to mention of the administration and staff). One of the attractions that brought me to serve at Union was the awareness that these values were not platitudinous window dressing but represented the true aspirations of the community. Christ-centeredness drives the faculty to a vibrant orthodoxy. Being excellence-driven focuses faculty on both pedagogical proficiency and rigorous scholarship. Because faculty are people-focused, they aim to treat students and colleagues in a Christ-like manner and regularly remind one another that teaching and learning are about forming people, including faculty themselves, not about delivering a body of information. Future-directedness requires faculty not only to stay current in their discipline but also to remain cognizant of the fact that their disciples are going into all the world upon graduation, to ply their vocation for the glory of Christ.

While serving for three years as provost and vice president for academic affairs, I had the responsibility of interviewing more than one hundred potential faculty. I rediscovered during the interviews that being a Christian faculty member is not less than acting in a Christ-like manner among students, faculty, and others, but it is also more. Excellence and Christo-centrism at least entail a difference in the way one approaches the assumptions of his or her discipline, how one reframes the questions of the discipline, and how one applies wisdom in its various fields of inquiry. Christian faculty cannot—they must not—embrace uncritically the presuppositions and assumptions of the academic guilds. They must

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<sup>2</sup> Christina Bieber Lake, *The Flourishing Teacher: Vocational Renewal for a Sacred Profession* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 11.

not capitulate to the philosophical naturalism that dominates the academy. A Christ-centered universe is not a naturalistic universe. Christian faculty are not State University X at prayer or just a parochial private school. With due respect to conscientious faculty in both of those contexts, students in Christian universities deserve better than that.

Because our assumptions about both the nature of reality and the anthropology of the learner are different from those of the secular university, our aim must be to reimagine and rehabilitate the disciplines in the light of a distinctly Christian worldview, reconnecting with the Christian intellectual tradition along the way. The fact that we are not regularly having this conversation at a deep level across every campus, in every discipline, is an indication that we may not have yet fully embraced our unique mission as Christian institutions. That is not a criticism as much as a call to action. Faculty in every department of the university must not take their eyes off the question, “What does it mean to think, live, and teach Christianly?” Christian faculty owe it to their students to demonstrate the coherence of Christian wisdom both within and across the disciplines.

#### IV. MEANINGFUL SCHOLARSHIP

Meaningful scholarship is one aspect of the calling and responsibility of a university. Granted, not every Christian university is a Research 1 institution. Christian faculty, nevertheless, should engage in the ongoing scholarship of life-long learners. Faculty should want to encourage, support, and celebrate those efforts. And although publication is not the only form of scholarship, faculty who publish model the habits of a vocation for their students. They work hard to engage their disciplines, subjects, and research questions, and work doubly hard to articulate their findings to serve the world through publishing those findings. Students are beneficiaries of faculty scholarship either, in some cases, by participating with them in the research and publication or by sensing the joy faculty find in their vocations.

Furthermore, we believe that scholarship takes a variety of forms.<sup>3</sup> For instance, some faculty are involved in the scholarship of discovery, whether in the realm of ideas, the creation of art, or the act of empirical science. Others are involved in the scholarship of teaching and learning, asking how

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<sup>3</sup> For a very helpful model for what this might mean, see Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorship*, expanded ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015).

they can serve more effectively as mediators between knowledge/wisdom and their students. Like masters of any craft, faculty take on apprentices. Honing their craft and practicing it well before those who are eager to learn (as well as those who are not) are a great privilege and gift of one's calling. Christian faculty should also encourage, support, and celebrate the scholarship of teaching, finding increasingly effective ways to form the imaginations of their students. Christian faculty owe it to their students to cultivate a community of scholarship.

One of the great privileges that likely brought most of us to teach at a Christian university is, hopefully, the opportunity to practice our craft and live out our vocations in a context in which vibrant Christian belief is not only tolerated, not only welcomed, but woven into our daily experience. Through the great doctrines of the Christian intellectual tradition, the Holy Spirit breathes life into the liturgies of our lives in and out of the classroom. We find we need the Spirit's enablement when we read Toni Morrison just as we need the Spirit's illumination to read the apostle Paul. We need the Spirit's help just as much in interpreting the findings of particle physics as we do when interpreting Hosea. Surely these are the implications of the fact that all truth finds its source in God, that it is the Spirit who leads us into all truth (John 16:13). Of course, this does not mean, thankfully, that truth is not available to the unbeliever. God has vested his world with common grace so that truth may be discerned through multiple means, including the empirical and rational. However, this does mean that Christian teaching and learning should treat every classroom as a sacred space, and every desk, lab bench, and studio should be an altar before the omniscient God of the universe, who is pleased to give wisdom to those who ask and seek (Prov 2).

## V. FAITHFUL SERVICE

Christian faculty often speak of the integration of faith, learning, and service. Why? Because they realize that being human is not just about what goes on in the head. Minds are to be subject to the lordship of Christ, and hands and feet should be employed in his service. Faculty are whole persons who try to serve whole persons. The teaching vocation is one of serving as Jesus served through embodied practices. Office hours, for example, provide opportunities for Christian faculty to disciple, nurture, and care for the souls of students as those who will one day give an account (Heb 13:17). Students are precious lambs of God. Faculty have the opportunity

to shepherd their souls, and Christian faculty owe it to their students to be faithful followers of Jesus. Beyond office hours, faculty may serve one another and students in innumerable ways; Christian faculty must teach their students how to serve one another unselfishly and sacrificially.

## VI. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

As image-bearers of God, we are sociable creatures. As sociable creatures in a university context, we are a community of learners. The fact that the Christian university is a *Christian* community means that the congregation of scholars are motivated, shaped, formed, and transformed by the Christian story. Inhabiting that story individually and as a body creates an amazing environment in which students can flourish. From convocation to commencement, Christian faculty give testimony to the academic life being “monastic” in the best sense of the term, as life together in a covenantal community. Christian faculty owe students the experience, benefit, and example of living in a vibrant and healthy community of learning and living.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Finally, cultivating the habits of faithful wisdom, life-long learning, and kingdom living points to the *telos* of every Christian, including Christian faculty. I have said to parents on university preview days that the faculty share an important mission with the parents: “that your grandchildren don’t grow up to be stupid and agnostic.” As they thought about that for a minute, I could watch smiles slowly appear on their faces. They got it. Faculty are forming a generation of Christ-followers who will form the next generation of Christ-followers. Christian faculty owe it to their students to do all we can do to help them cultivate these Christian virtues for a lifetime of faithful service to Christ.

“Forming and cultivating habits . . .” is the clue that answers the “how” question. How do Christian universities accomplish all of this? At least one fruitful approach would be to begin with the virtues and practices they want to see embodied in their graduates and reverse engineer the curriculum and co-curriculum to help the community cultivate those virtues together. The great Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are surely the place to begin. A Christian learning community should nurture the practices of humility (without which there can be no learning), thoughtfulness, integrity, courage, compassion, stewardship, and justice.

Once the virtues have been identified, faculty can begin to think about the practices that will cultivate those virtues and the ways the curriculum, co-curriculum, and experience of life together can help the community of learners become increasingly the kind of people who can be wise, life-long learners, who serve our glorious King faithfully.

While browsing the shelves of the Notre Dame bookstore some time ago, I came across, serendipitously, two never-before-published essays by the estimable twentieth-century thinker Josef Pieper. Delivered in 1950, the title of the essays is *What Does "Academic" Mean? Essays on the Chances of the University*. The introduction to the volume is by the late James V. Schall, the prolific philosopher-priest who taught for many years at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Setting the stage for reading Pieper's lectures, Schall offers encouragement to Christian faculty:

The proper end of knowledge is truth and the proper end of knowing it is festivity, something that can only be a free response to the joy caused in us when we realize that reality is not a necessity but a gift for us to know, a gift to set us free to rejoice also in what is not ourselves.

The proper end of knowing is festivity . . . so, let the party begin!



## BOOK REVIEWS

***Who is the Holy Spirit? Biblical Insights into His Divine Person.* By Malcolm B. Yarnell III. Hobbs College Library. Nashville: B&H, 2019, xviii+137pp., \$19.99.**

Malcolm Yarnell provides a foundational study on the person of the Holy Spirit. Surveying “six grand vistas of Biblical revelation” (p. 1), Yarnell equips pastors and Bible teachers to worship the Spirit for who he is. In so doing, Yarnell not only equips pastors and teachers to worship the One who gives life, but also prepares them to equip churches for the same.

Let me begin with a brief overview, which will be followed by further reflections. The first scriptural vista, or chapter, Yarnell surveys is Genesis 1. Rejecting arguments that depersonalize the reference to the Spirit in 1:2, Yarnell argues that the Spirit is mysterious, the mover, and mighty. Mysteriously, the Spirit “simply is when nothing else is” (p. 7). Similar to the eagle in Deuteronomy 32, who hovers over his nest, the Spirit is the mover in creation who hovers over the waters “guiding his creation and protecting it” (p. 10). Third, Yarnell focuses on the Spirit’s might over all of life through other Scripture references that build upon the wording of Genesis 1:2.

Next, Yarnell explores the sovereignty of the Spirit in his interaction with the first kings of Israel. Studying 1 Samuel 10-19, Yarnell highlights the Spirit’s deity, sovereignty, and lordship. In the anointing of Saul, the activity of the Spirit is tightly related to the activity of God; there is an “essential unity of the Spirit with God” for the author of 1 Samuel (p. 23). Sovereignly, the Spirit freely chooses to empower and depart from individuals, as he does with Saul after his sinful actions and unwillingness to repent. In chapter 19, the Lord and the Spirit are used interchangeably, demonstrating the Spirit’s lordship.

Third, Yarnell explores why the Spirit is called holy through an examination of Psalm 51. Noting the context of David’s adulterous and murderous wickedness, Yarnell explains how the holiness, or pure otherness, of the



Spirit means that the sinner “can appeal to nothing within himself” to be made right with God but must instead confess his sin and God’s holy character (p. 43). When David describes the holiness of the Spirit, he speaks of the Spirit’s “deity as well as an indicator of divine transcendence and of moral purity” (p. 45). The holiness of the Spirit “changes those he loves by breaking their hearts and coming to live in them” (p. 54).

Turning from the OT, Yarnell examines the person of the Spirit through three aspects of NT teaching. First, in relationship to Christ, Matthew’s Gospel presents the Spirit as the conceiver of Christ in the incarnation, the commissioner of Christ who anoints Christ for ministry at Christ’s baptism, the companion of Christ who empowers Christ for his ministry of teaching, healing, and exorcism, and the equal of Christ in that both are fully God. To encounter Christ (and also the Father) is to also encounter the Spirit. The convert is only converted to confess Christ as Lord by the work of the Spirit (pp. 75-76).

Second, John’s Gospel presents the Spirit in his relationship with others. Tracing the Spirit’s relation to the Son and the Father, Yarnell demonstrates the Spirit’s sovereignty, transcendence, and eternity. He explores the person of the Spirit in light of the language of paraclete and concludes, “[T]he personal nature of the Spirit means that he is concerned with you, not merely from the frightening perspective of his transcendent otherness, but from the comforting perspective of his intimate nearness” (p. 95).

Yarnell’s final chapter surveys who the Spirit is to believers through an exegesis of Romans 8. For believers, the Spirit brings salvation and adoption into a “familial relation to Christ with God” (p. 112). Yarnell’s focus on worship stands as the culmination of the chapter: that the Spirit “indwells us and unites us with the Son and with the Father ought to drive us to worship God. [He] takes us out of our fallen state and places us in the family of God” (p. 113).

As Yarnell acknowledges, his approach to studying the Spirit is rare (p. xv). Contemporary controversies over the Spirit’s work in soteriology, Spirit baptism, and the Spirit’s gifting have resulted in scholars addressing the Spirit’s activity more than his actual person. While Yarnell acknowledges these controversies (pp. 24, 61-62, 98-99, 110-112), he carefully notes that such does not diminish the person of the Spirit. For example, regarding Spirit baptism, he notes that various understandings of the timing of Spirit baptism come from “equally fervent believers” (p. 61). Instead of rehashing the debate, he chooses to exegete Scripture and seeks consensus where

controversy exists. Specifically, Spirit baptism points to the importance “for all orthodox believers that life with Trinity—the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—remains necessarily an indivisible event” (p. 62).

While evangelicals have often hesitated to build their pneumatologies on the OT for fear of reading more into the OT than is there, fully one half of *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* is dedicated to exegeting his person in the OT. Because of higher critical methodologies, biblical scholars often hesitate to claim that various OT passages directly refer to the work of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, Yarnell is unafraid to assert that the reader catches a glimpse of the movement of the mysterious Holy Spirit in Genesis 1 because of the larger canonical context (pp. 8, 9, 11). He argues effectively that references to the Spirit in 1 Samuel (p. 23) and Psalms (p. 49) are references to the third person of the Trinity and thus that they should inform any canonical understanding of the Spirit’s person.

Such readings are unsurprising given Yarnell’s presuppositions. Both the divine authorship of the Scriptures in their entirety and the larger witness of Scripture and of the church inform the interpretation of each passage (pp. 1-2). For those who accept these presuppositions, Yarnell’s work will prove particularly valuable in informing why the Spirit is worthy of worship. For those who are more skeptical of Yarnell’s high view of Scripture or of such theological readings of OT passages, Yarnell’s method is worthy of consideration. His demonstration of the consistency of Scripture regarding the person of the Holy Spirit provides an apologetic for both his methodology and his assumptions.

Foundationally, Yarnell’s book successfully advances his goal “to encourage worship . . . of God *as* Spirit” (p. 3). Yarnell’s exploration of the person of the Spirit in the life of David is particularly instructive. Contrasting David with Saul, Yarnell notes how the Spirit did not depart from David yet abandoned Saul despite both having sinned. The reason? While “Saul engaged in a long, drawn-out attempt to justify himself . . . David was driven by a passion to be right with God once again” (p. 42). The chapter in question culminates with Yarnell asking the reader:

Consider your personal confession and your personal petition. First, do you understand how great the Lord God is? Unless you see that God is the source of all that is good and right and holy, of all that is perfect, you will not perceive anything else correctly. . . . [D]o you really know how

horrible of a person you truly are? Will you beg God to place his Holy Spirit in your life such that he will never leave you?

Yarnell's desire for readers to know, respond to, and rightly worship God through the Holy Spirit informs the entire project and equips each pastor and teacher for worship.

Bruce Ashford describes Yarnell as "perhaps the greatest living Baptist theologian" (p. i). I agree. His previous volumes on theological method, the royal priesthood, and the Trinity have substantively advanced the academic and theological discussion of each of the respective subdisciplines. Yarnell's thinking is characterized by a relentless textual focus that more speculative theologians would be wise to consider. In this work, Yarnell seeks to apply his text-driven method to a new audience: pastors and Bible teachers (p. 2). While Yarnell does address theological controversies regarding the Spirit, he largely sidesteps such disputes in favor of attempting to equip pastors and teachers to worship the Spirit. Toward that end, he is largely successful. Yarnell has the rare gift of being a true theological academic who also knows how to equip pastors.

Still, minor weaknesses in Yarnell's work can be noted as he addresses this audience. Specifically, while the well-educated pastor or Bible teacher will rejoice and worship with Yarnell in the Spirit's glory, Yarnell's significant use of Greek and Hebrew transliteration will prove an obstacle to some. Providing additional resources such as discussion questions to accompany each chapter would have further equipped readers to lead classes and congregations to worship the Spirit. Additionally, given that Yarnell elsewhere has described the book of Acts as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, the limited engagement of Acts in this text is surprising. Finally, slightly more interaction with some of the debates regarding the Spirit's activities (especially as it relates to the gifts, the timing of Spirit baptism, and the irresistibility of the Spirit's work in salvation) would no doubt prove helpful to church leaders as they wrestle with such questions. However, given the concise nature of books of this type, it is understandable that Yarnell did not have room to address these additional matters.

Because of its focus on Christian worship and the Spirit's person, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* should be required reading for pastors and teachers. This book will strengthen their love for the Spirit and help them to better understand his work. Yarnell successfully moves our discussion of the Spirit beyond simply what the Spirit does and helps each reader to understand

who the Holy Spirit is in light of the canonical teaching. Yarnell rightly closes challenging the reader to consider “who is the Holy Spirit to you?” so that each may worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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***The Atonement: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Study of the Cross of Christ.* By David L. Allen. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019, xviii+334 pp., \$34.99 paper.**

Allen is the distinguished professor of preaching and director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching, holding the George W. Truett Chair of Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allen begins with the claim, “The doctrine of the atonement of Christ is the heart of Christianity. The cross of Christ is the heart of the apostles’ preaching. Christians—those who bear the name of Christ—are not only a people of the Book but also a people of the cross” (p. xvii). This is not only uncontroversial but the literature on the subject is, Allen notes, “nothing less that staggering” (p. xvii). The author intends this book to make the literature accessible, to provide a summary and overview of the important doctrine.

The author asserts, “The gospel itself centers around the cross of Christ. In what is unarguably the key NT text stating the gospel in the clearest of terms, Paul writes: ‘[T]hat Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures’ (1 Cor 15:3–4)” (p. 1). Thus, as Allen asserts several times, the gospel does not center on the cross alone but on the cross and resurrection.

After the Introduction, the book is divided into nine chapters, beginning with definitions of terms and concepts. From the Old Testament, the author makes a compelling case that forgiveness and atonement have always been substitutionary—an animal dies instead of the sinner. He argues that the “NT authors build on that foundation, demonstrating the prophetic fulfillment in the Gospels and doctrinal development in

the letters” (p. 51). His multiple pages of quotations of NT texts make an undeniable case for substitutionary atonement. The atonement is a work of the Trinity and is an act rooted in divine love.

In “The Intent, Extent, and Application of the Atonement,” Allen asserts that “most Christians of any theological persuasion would accept” that the purpose of the atonement is God’s “plan to deal effectively and finally with human sin so as to redeem and forgive sinners, reconcile them to Himself, and deliver them from sin’s penalty, power, and ultimately its presence” (p. 149). On the extent of atonement Christians disagree; Allen argues confidently for unlimited atonement.

Allen argues “The Nature of the Atonement” can be summarized “in the following way: Christ substituted Himself for the sins of all people, living or dead; He died in their place bearing their sin” (p. 188). A penultimate chapter addresses “Special Issues Concerning the Atonement,” a list of ministerial questions the author has encountered. Finally, the book ends with an excellent summary of the development and diversity of views of atonement, “Historical Theories of the Atonement.”

This is an excellent resource, providing an accessible, non-technical, and readable survey of an essential Christian doctrine. In response to contemporary challenges to substitutionary penal atonement, Allen argues from the Bible and history in support. He is clearly well-versed in the subject, engaging the literature from a variety of eras and traditions, presenting his positions in a clear manner. No one who reads the book will be unsure of the author’s convictions.

There are, however, claims that could perhaps be clearer. For example, Allen writes, “Only at the cross do we learn who God is; only at the cross do we learn who Jesus is; only at the cross do we learn the sinners we are; and only at the cross do we learn what redemption and salvation are all about” (p. 22). Surely this is hyperbole. Then, on 1 Cor 15:3–4 (cf. Acts 18:1–18), Allen observes that “Paul’s message was ‘Christ died for our sins.’ Notice carefully that Paul is saying that this is what he preached pre-conversion, not post-conversion” (p. 95). It seems from the context that Allen means Paul preached this message to people not yet converted, not that Paul preached it prior to his conversion. Finally, Allen claims, “The first explicit mention of a covenant in Scripture is God’s covenant with Abraham in Gen 12:1–3” (p. 146). Since the word “covenant” does not appear in Gen 12, it would be best not to call it an “explicit mention.” Further, Gen 6:18 and 9:1–17 explicitly mention covenant. Perhaps Allen

means the first redemptive covenant is the one God made with Abraham. He also asserts, “The other covenants explicitly mentioned in Scripture are the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the new covenant... Of these four covenants, the only one that has specific reference to God’s plan of redemption for humanity is the new covenant” (p. 146). But in Gal 3:8 Paul declares that the gospel was announced to Abraham and quotes Gen 13:3. Surely the promise to bless all nations is an explicit reference to God’s plan of redemption.

Allen is to be praised for producing a work that will be helpful to scholars, students, pastors, and laypeople. This book is highly recommended.

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***Draw Near: The Heart of Communion with God.* By Scott Aniol. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020, lx + 90 pp., \$15.00 paper.**

In this little book, Scott Aniol, associate professor of church music and worship at Southwestern Seminary, beautifully pictures the Christian life as one characterized by authentic worship, genuine abiding, and faithful communion with the Triune God. In doing so, Aniol enables us to see afresh the importance of drawing near to God, the priority of sharing with other believers in corporate worship and community, as well as the significance of regularly partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

Building on Heb 10:22, Aniol expands on the exhortation to “Let us draw near.” He notes that the idea of drawing near is a translation of a term that means more than just a casual coming toward something. This exhortation to draw near means coming to the one, true, and living God. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author compares the idea of drawing near to Old Testament worship practices as indicated in terms like “holy place,” “the veil,” “high priest,” “sprinkling,” and “cleansing.” Drawing near, Aniol maintains, is the essence of worship, the heart of communion with God.

Aniol provides wise theological framing of his subject, focused on the worship of God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, and enabled and

energized by the Holy Spirit. The book is built around eight perspectives on the meaning of communion with God, including “the call to,” “the basis of,” “the meaning of,” “the heart of,” “the strengthening of,” “the fruit of,” “the threat to,” and “the recovery of communion with God.”

Recognizing that worship is central in the existence and continuation of the church as presented in the New Testament, Aniol extends the trajectory of thought found in the writings of W. T. Conner, the Southwestern Seminary theologian who so greatly influenced the Southwestern community and Southern Baptist life during the first half of the twentieth century. Finding themes of continuity between the Old and New Testaments, Aniol uses the book of Hebrews as a bridge to find elements of Christian worship that are similar to those found in the Old Testament.

He highlights the centrality of the Christological orientation that forms and informs New Testament believers. Readers are led to see that the risen and exalted Christ gives a new depth and content to the worshiping community. Moreover, the church’s worship is influenced by the Holy Spirit. Fitting and acceptable worship can only be offered by and through the Holy Spirit. Building on these priorities and the continuity of the Scriptures, Aniol emphasizes the importance of community, including the proclamation of the Word of God, the importance of *koinonia*, and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Each reader will find portions of this book that are more applicable for his or her own Christian journey. I personally found Aniol’s emphasis on the Lord’s Supper to be quite valuable. The Supper provides a vivid reminder for believers of the One who provided our redemption and who is coming again. The celebration of the Supper is central to the church’s worship and thus should be a regular and frequent occurrence for the believing community, providing enablement and guidance for our shared worship of the triune God, leading to fellowship, service, ministry, and outreach. In doing so, the church is reminded that it does not exist merely for itself but for the world. Aniol encourages believers to reflect on their call to discipleship, recognizing that the church has a missionary task that is not optional.

While thoroughly practical and pastoral, readers will find guidance that is shaped by Scripture and deeply informed by theological conviction, leading to paths of faithful Christian living designed to honor and exalt our majestic God. In all of these things, we find implications for Christian fellowship and unity, enhanced discipleship, and a winsome witness before

a watching world. Believers will be refreshed, renewed, strengthened, and encouraged by reflecting on the thoughtful insights offered in this fine work, which I am happy to recommend.

David S. Dockery  
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***The Doctrine of the Bible.* By David S. Dockery. Second Edition. Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2020, 140pp., \$15.99.**

The most important doctrine for American evangelicals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been that of Scripture. Having taught the doctrine of revelation in the churches and in the academy (at the master's and doctoral levels), I have long required an accessible introduction to the doctrine of Scripture. Sadly, nothing satisfactory has been available since the original and increasingly rare edition of this book was published in flimsy paper form in 1991. Happily, this significant introduction to the most important doctrine in contemporary evangelicalism has been republished in a more attractive and durable format in 2020 with a few changes to address recent scholarship.

David Dockery originally sought “to provide a careful overview of the important themes related to a doctrine of Scripture” in order to “help people in the churches better understand the nature of the Bible so we can better understand and obey its message” (pp. 1-2). Rooted among Southern Baptists, who regard themselves a “People of the Book,” Dockery agreed to reissue the text in light of recent changes to “plausibility structures” in Western culture and the ongoing need to “strengthen the convictions of God’s faithful people” (p. 6). Dockery fulfills his aim in a most satisfactory way.

The ecclesial and academic success of this book rests in large part on its digestible chapters, readable style, and comprehensible presentation. Nine chapters consider the Bible in relation to its source in divine revelation; its focus upon Jesus Christ; its divinely impressed attributes of self-witness, divine-human authorship, and inspiration; as well as its relationship to its human recipients as truthful and dependable, as text and canon, in its use



and interpretation, and in its authority. Each chapter begins with a helpful glossary of important terms and concludes with referential endnotes. While indices are not included, a helpful up-to-date bibliography is.

Dockery is fully aware of various intra-evangelical debates regarding the Bible. However, as one ensconced within the Southwestern Seminary tradition of gentleman theologians, he expresses himself not through polemic but through careful evaluation, biblical balance, and positive reinforcement of the truth. For instance, the first chapter draws a holistic picture of the Bible that fits judiciously within the broader Christian tradition as well as his own community. He affirms the theological basis of Scripture as the Spirit-inspired Word of God (pp. 9-25). A second instance occurs in his touching upon the debate over whether biblical truth is primarily personal or propositional. Aware of the alternatives, Dockery serenely concludes biblical truth is both propositional and personal (pp. 16-17). A third instance, among others, occurs when he adopts a "Christological model" for Scripture. Using orthodox Christology, which states Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human, as an analogy, Dockery argues Scripture comes entirely from God through its fully engaged human authors (pp. 35, 51-62).

While each chapter is filled with such evangelical wisdom, certain chapters providentially address critical issues that are challenging church and academy today. For instance, Dockery reminds his readers, "Jesus Christ is the central figure of the New Testament and the focus of the Christian faith" (p. 28). But Christ is not merely a New Testament figure, for he himself taught the apostles to engage in a new method of reading the Old Testament, "a Christological reading" (p. 29). Through our Lord's Christological method, the church learned that Jesus himself is the hinge between the Old and the New. "Christ is not merely a model for our view of the Bible or its interpretation. He is the main theme and goal of our study of Scripture. The focus is on Jesus" (p. 36). This "Christocentric perspective" centers the Bible hermeneutically. Jesus Christ, in his "exalted lordship," set "the pattern" in the early church, and we would do well to keep the worship of Christ and the preaching of his gospel in focus (p. 111).

An outworking of this theme occurs in the chapters on the canon and its interpretation. While evangelicalism has, since this book's original publication, settled on formally identifying Scripture as the inspired and thus inerrant Word of God, it has not always successfully remembered Scripture's hermeneutic unity is integrally bound with that claim. But

because Dockery believes the Bible is inspired by God the Holy Spirit, he also believes the Bible must be read as a unity centered on God's incarnate Word (pp. 20-21). The interpretive model proposed by Dockery comes from the Bible itself (pp. 112-15), builds on historic Christianity's contributions (pp. 116-19), and engages with contemporary hermeneutics. Rather than surrendering to the singular sirens of modernist hubris, Dockery argues there is a *sensus plenior* in the text greater than "what was possibly intended or known by the author" (p. 119). Fully cognizant of the difficulties provided by the two cultural horizons of author and reader, he carefully crafts ten guidelines of interpretation, giving a salient example of how the Bible's "fullest meaning is found in the Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 120-21).

Whether speaking of the Bible's origin, transmission, or reception, Dockery never allows us to forget the entire Bible is the Word of God "breathed out by God" (cover). Scripture comes to us as a grace of divine revelation (p. 10) through the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New. Across the millennia, Scripture remains the Word of God because it was inspired by, preserved in the church by, and is illuminated to contemporary hearers by God the Holy Spirit. This dependable written Word of God authoritatively points our minds and hearts toward the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. Evangelicals in general and Southern Baptists in particular should thank Seminary Hill Press for proposing and publishing a second and sorely needed edition of this now classic and still necessary theological introduction to the doctrine of Scripture.

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***The Flourishing Teacher: Vocational Renewal for a Sacred Profession.***  
**By Christina Bieber Lake. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020, 240**  
**pp., \$22.00 paperback.**

Christina Bieber Lake is the Clyde S. Kilby Professor of English at Wheaton College, a Flannery O'Connor scholar, and a seasoned academic who has written a volume that deserves to be read annually by anyone

who teaches in a formal academic setting. Dr. Bieber, as her students call her, is witty, wise, and experienced. She knows the agonies, ecstasies, and grind of the teaching life.

In *The Flourishing Teacher*, the author saves readers the pain of discovering for themselves twelve “Things About the Scholarly Life I Learned the Hard Way.” To do so, she takes readers on a journey of the academic year from “the month-that-shall-not-be-named” (August) to the end of the following summer. Bieber Lake is no Pollyanna. She admits that the academic year is a long slog, and that journey is sustained by passion. “Most of us,” she affirms, “went to graduate school because we had a deep passion for our discipline, a passion that typically translates into a desire to share that passion with other learners. We became teachers because we wanted to profess our love and persuade others to join us in it” (p. 7).

The evidence for her passion for students, her subject matter, and her craft surfaces on every page. For example, every year she begins her preparation for the “spiritual marathon” that is the academic year by retreating to some beautiful destination with only her planner, *Sacred Ordinary Days: A Liturgical Day Planner*, and a roster of her students for the upcoming semester. There she prays for her students because she realizes that “Although we are not primarily ministers of the gospel in our classes, we must never lose sight of the fact that it is souls that we are caring for when we teach” (p. 10).

There are real gems in this book. For instance, Bieber Lake has helpful tips about the first day of class. Instead of the blah, blah, blah, yada, yada, yada of reading the syllabus to the class, she offers alternatives that help form the class into a learning community from the beginning. Another example is her life-saving counsel about how to say “no,” which, if heeded, will preserve faculty members from that perennial temptation to overextend themselves.

Bieber Lake is brutally honest about the life of an academic. In “The Cruellest Month” (April) of the year, she helps us prepare for the Lenten season and the realization of our brokenness and need for repentance. And surely even our best teaching deserves repentance. It is during the chapter for that month that she offers her favorite examples of how to get out of teaching ruts. Some of them are grand gestures like decorating the classroom and giving a highly dramatized lecture. Others are less grand, but potentially as effective, such as turning off the lights in the classroom and reading a poem by flashlight and asking students to make

their comments about the poem in the darkness. She has a “soul shelf” in her personal library, where she keeps those volumes that help to sustain her through the journey. Browsing that shelf with her during the academic year is worth the price of the volume.

Bieber Lake is the academic daughter of her estimable mentor at Emory, the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. Those who knew “Miss Betsey” and her work will recognize the legacy of intellect, wit, and snarkiness in the work of Bieber Lake. And since snark is the *lingua franca* of the academy, this vernacular will be welcomed by readers of *The Flourishing Teacher*. But don’t be fooled by the acerbic style. This is a profound work of reflection, advice, and wisdom from someone who has worked very hard to hone her craft and will help sagacious readers do the same.

Read this book from cover to cover when you get it. Then read it month by month the first year. Then read it once a year. It’s that good!

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***The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament.* By Gregory K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020, xvii+538pp., \$55.00.**

Gregory K. Beale, J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, and Benjamin Gladd, associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, first conceived *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* approximately a decade prior to its publication. They initially envisioned a textbook that would take both the story of Scripture and biblical theology seriously. The final product has more than exceeded their original goal. The authors have produced a biblical-theological introduction to the NT that looks at every major NT passage in the light of the OT.

The intended audience is primarily college students with some familiarity with the Bible. Nevertheless, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* is remarkably accessible, even for students with limited exposure to the Bible.

One important aim of the authors is to survey the NT writings giving special attention to their retelling of the story of redemption, a grand narrative that follows the general pattern of creation, fall, and redemption. This story, which according to Beale and Gladd is both Israel's story and the church's story, began in the Garden with Adam and Eve (Gen 1-3) and will culminate with the arrival of the new heaven and earth (Rev 21-22). Seeing a continuity between the Testaments, then, the authors suggest that one must read the NT while also listening carefully for the voice of the OT. Beale and Gladd's approach of integrating the OT into the NT by incorporating the story of redemption is unique compared to most NT introductions in two specific ways. First, the majority of introductions explore the distinctive contribution of each NT writing *separate* from the OT (most NT introductions do not even include a chapter on the OT's influence on the NT). Second, they focus on relevant historical, cultural, and sociological features tied to the NT.

The book contains twenty-eight chapters. In chapter one, Beale and Gladd present the storyline of the entire Bible, a grand story that includes God's dealings with humanity to bring about his divine redemption. The authors return to this storyline throughout their work, seeking to trace its incorporation by each NT author into his writing(s).

In chapter two, the authors discuss the use of the OT in the NT through quotations, allusions, and concepts (pp. 18-23). Beale and Gladd provide a helpful presentation of the diverse ways in which the NT writers employ OT quotations and allusions (pp. 23-30), including direct fulfillment, indirect or typological fulfillment, analogy, symbol, abiding authority, prototype, and irony. They demonstrate that one should not understand most NT uses of the OT as examples of prophetic fulfillment.

The third chapter provides a brief introduction to the Gospels. The authors discuss basic issues in preparation for chapters four through seven, which examine the Gospels in greater detail. Additional chapters that review major genres such as history and epistle would have been helpful.

The longest portion of the book surveys each NT writing. Each chapter contains four subsections. Subsection one summarizes basic historical (e.g., authorship, date, purpose) and literary matters (e.g., outline, genre). In regard to issues of historical background, Beale and Gladd follow closely D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo's *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

In the second subsection (Biblical-Theological Themes), the authors

focus on one or two significant themes or passages within the NT writing under discussion and briefly discuss its tie to the history of redemption. For example, in their survey of Acts, Beale and Gladd highlight the link between Joel's prophecy of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29) and Pentecost (Acts 2) (pp. 154-155), as well as the theme of the Word of God as presented in Genesis (Gen 1:28; 2:16-17; 3:1-7) and Acts (Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20) (pp. 155-156). By identifying the biblical-theological connections, readers are able to grasp the important links between the Testaments.

Beale and Gladd's discussion of biblical-theological themes is followed in subsection three by a survey of the major sections of the NT writing. At the beginning of each major section, the authors isolate a particular thread that runs from the OT to the NT text under examination. For instance, in their discussion of Acts they see the expansion of God's glory as an important thread that runs from the OT into the NT (pp. 156-78). In addition, within this subsection Beale and Gladd incorporate Genesis 1-3 or some aspect of Israel's history or experience into the NT passage. The authors also include more than 285 images (e.g., paintings, sculptures, photos) that illustrate how biblical events have been portrayed throughout history, such as *Job and His Wife* (Dürer), *Belshazzar's Feast* (Rembrandt), and *The Prophet Zacharias* (Michelangelo).

In the last subsection, Beale and Gladd explore each major section of a NT writing, seeking to identify some textual or conceptual relationship to the OT. For example, they discuss the Passover behind Jesus's death in the fourth Gospel (p. 149), the Israelites' grumbling in the wilderness behind Phil 2:14 (p. 293), and the Egyptian plagues behind the trumpets in Rev 8:6-9:1 (pp. 478-479).

Beale and Gladd have written a commendable work. They illustrate well the unity between the Testaments, the reoccurrence of the story of redemption, and the role of the OT in informing the NT. A careful reading of *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* will result in a theologically rich reading of the NT.

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***Baylor Annotated Study Bible. New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha.* Edited by W. H. Bellinger Jr. and Todd D. Still. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019, 1992 pp. + maps, \$49.95.**

Following five years of coordinated and dedicated effort, the *Baylor Annotated Study Bible (BASB)* is now available for personal and classroom use. This significant project was capably guided by Bill Bellinger, who serves as chair of the Department of Religion and W. Marshall and Lulie Craig Professor of Bible at Baylor University, and Todd Still, who serves as dean and William M. Hinson Professor of Christian Scriptures in the George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor. These two fine scholars and capable leaders are to be commended for their oversight and editorial work.

The *BASB* is a joint project between Baylor University Press and Tyndale House Publishers. In addition to the handsome green and gold hardcover edition, which reflects the Baylor colors, this new study Bible is also available in a leathertouch green and gold, as well as chestnut brown. The two-column biblical text is quite readable, though the margins are rather narrow. The publishers have used high quality paper; the dark print on each page provides a consistent look from the front matter to the back. Based on the 1989 *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, the annotations are found at the bottom of each page in a smaller, but readable, font. I think that most will agree that the overall appearance is quite attractive.

Every study Bible project has a particular focus and is aimed at a distinctive group of readers. The *BASB* focuses on the literary and socio-historical aspects of the biblical text. The contributors have given attention to the literary flow of Scripture, noting connections with other biblical and literary works. The intercommunication and echoes between the biblical books are a noteworthy feature found in large sections of the study notes. The consistent quality of the literary observations throughout the notes provides the real strength for this publication.

The targeted readership seems to be a wide range of moderate Protestants. The contributors to the *BASB* represent various theological perspectives, including progressives, moderates, as well as evangelicals. The inclusion of the books of the Apocrypha probably reflects a generous attempt to connect with non-Protestant readers, even though no study notes accompany the Apocrypha, which has been placed at the back of the volume next to the nine instructive and helpful maps. The back matter also includes a detailed timeline with an emphasis on biblical backgrounds, a carefully designed

glossary, as well as a select concordance, with definitions, for the NRSV.

Representative participants in this project include well-known scholars such as N. T. Wright, Alan Culpepper, Richard Hays, Scot McKnight, John Barclay, Walter Brueggemann, Mikeal Parsons, Bruce Chilton, and Joel B. Green; highly regarded pastors such as Howie Batson and Duane Brooks; well-respected administrators such as Robert Sloan, Randall O'Brien, and David Lyle Jeffrey; and influential laypersons like attorney Mark Lanier. Most of the contributors have some connection to Baylor, including a number of the writers who currently serve as faculty members in Baylor's religion department or at Truett Seminary.

Modified aspects of historical and sociological critical approaches characterize the study notes on the Pentateuch and throughout the Old Testament. For example, three Isaiahs and two Zechariahs are assumed when discussing the authorship of these two OT books. The late date of 167 B.C. is proposed for the Book of Daniel. It is suggested that Acts might be a second-century document. The possibility that some of the Pauline writings, or those attributed to Peter, are pseudepigraphic is acknowledged.

Those looking for a more consistent, conservative evangelical approach to the interpretation of Scripture will need to look in the direction of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, the *ESV Study Bible*, or the *CSB Study Bible*. This observation is not to say, however, that many portions of the *BASB* commentary are anything less than orthodox or evangelical, particularly on the New Testament side. It should also be observed that many features of the *BASB* are superior to the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* and the *Harper Collins Study Bible*, which are both based on the NRSV and are also written with a broad mainline Protestant readership in mind.

Unlike the NIV, ESV, or CSB volumes noted above, the introductions prepared for each of the 66 canonical books are quite brief. While providing insights regarding the literary features of the biblical text, the introductions generally do not help the reader navigate critical or historical issues related to author, date, or theological contribution.

Those hoping to find outlines for each biblical book will be disappointed. Often the persons who contributed the comments for the introductory sections are different from those who provided the study notes for the same book, resulting in a sense of unevenness for readers. There are no feature articles on important themes, topics, or issues.

While thoughtful contributions can be found in the study notes for each book of the Bible as well as in each representative section of Scripture,



readers, no doubt, will make their own choices regarding favorite sections as they work through the *BASB*. I particularly appreciated the work on Ezra, Nehemiah, Psalms, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Titus, James, 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John.

Having been given the privilege of serving as co-editor of a major study Bible project, which also had a five-year timeline before reaching publication in 2017, I am aware of the amount of effort required and the time invested to bring a project of this magnitude to completion. I have also contributed to a handful of other study Bible projects, and I recognize the challenging task of trying to say something substantive and helpful within a limited word count. The task of directing 70 or more contributors toward a similar goal and outcome is certainly not easy. Thus, even with the concerns that have been noted, I want, once again, to commend Professor Bellinger and Dean Still, as well as Carey Newman, who directed the effort for Baylor University Press, for their guidance for, and years of investment in, this major project.

David S. Dockery



***Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage.* By Gavin Ortlund. Foreword by D. A. Carson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 176 pp., \$17.99 paper; *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity.* By Rhyne Putman. Foreword by David S. Dockery. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 320 pp., \$24.99 paper.**

Spend some time online perusing blogs and articles shared on social media and you are likely to stumble across writers who, with confidence and conviction, label other Christians as *heretics* or *false teachers*. Sometimes the descriptions are apt, as they refer to people who, for example, deny the Trinity and thus clearly fall outside the bounds of orthodox Christianity. Other times, however, the accusation of “heresy” refers to an area where Bible-believing, orthodox Christians disagree over doctrine or practice, such as the *ordo salutis*, speaking in tongues, or the ministry of women in the church.

What happens online rarely stays online, and unnecessary division can

easily spread to churches, where pastors and lay leaders find themselves in controversies concerning Christian leaders they may associate with or whose works they recommend. Whenever I see labels like “heresy” and “false teaching” being overused, I’m reminded of the great philosopher Inigo Montoya: “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

These controversies raise an important question: What constitutes false teaching? How do we know the difference between areas in which we may “agree to disagree” or areas in which the compromise is so dangerous as to obscure the gospel or the central tenets of the Christian faith? What do we do when doctrine divides people who love Jesus, believe the Bible, and agree on the fundamentals of the faith?

Two recent books, in different ways and with different audiences in mind, seek to provide helpful context and counsel on these questions. The first is Gavin Ortlund’s *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*. Ortlund’s book is concise and accessible, designed for discussing the analogy of “theological triage” introduced by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Triage assumes prioritization in medical contexts. A doctor on the battlefield cannot treat every wounded soldier simultaneously; he or she must rely on a process to determine which injuries receive first treatment.

Ortlund uses the concept of triage in the context of theology to make two points. First, doctrines have different kinds of importance. “Some hills are worth dying on,” Ortlund writes. “Others are not.” Second, triage assumes that some needs are more urgent than others. “The more demanding the issues, the more you have to make hard decisions.”

Building on this concept, Ortlund presents four categories of doctrine. First-rank doctrines are *essential* to the gospel itself. Second-rank doctrines are *urgent* for the health and practice of the church such that they frequently cause Christians to separate at the level of local church, denomination, and/or ministry. Third-rank doctrines are *important* to Christian theology, but not enough to justify separation or division among Christians. And, finally, fourth-rank doctrines are *unimportant* to our gospel witness and ministry collaboration (p. 19).

Ortlund offers the Trinity as an example of a first-rank doctrine, baptism as a second-rank doctrine, and the timing of the events surrounding the return of Christ as a third-rank doctrine. In personal correspondence with Ortlund, I asked about Calvinism (a doctrinal divide not addressed in his book), and we agreed that Calvinism and Arminianism would be a

third-rank doctrine when the debate remains focused on the narrow soteriological distinctions. This means people could have multiple views even within the same congregation or among the church leadership. In some cases, however, the focus may widen into a range of cultural and practical issues that flow from Reformed theology or revivalist impulses as a whole, and thus shift the debate toward the second-rank category. This explains why some denominations have grown up around different soteriological positions and the cultural and ecclesial practices that follow from them.

Ortlund not only establishes a ranking for these doctrines, but also helps us develop an appropriate mentality for each: courage and conviction in holding to first-rank doctrines, wisdom and balance concerning second-rank doctrines, and circumspection and restraint for third-rank doctrines (p. 95). Although he relies on the triage analogy to help the church avert unnecessary division, he also warns against “doctrinal minimalism,” which could lead us to underestimate how closely connected some doctrines are to the gospel. “Secondary” doctrines may not be first-rank, but they still make a difference in “how we uphold the gospel” (p. 47). They may *picture* the gospel, *protect* the gospel, or *pertain* to the gospel in important ways (pp. 57-58).

Some have pushed back on the idea of theological triage, which, like all analogies, breaks down at certain points. Further, why should we assume that we are the rightful doctors treating doctrinal error? Aren’t we all likely to be “infected” with some level of theological error of which we remain unaware? Do we dare rank the commands of Jesus to us, as if some are more important than others? Might this become a clever way of excusing or justifying wrong belief or behavior?

Critics of theological triage make salient points, and the analogy is not without its problems. Still, the fact that the apostle Paul speaks of the gospel as being “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3) while giving freedom for Christians to agree to disagree on other topics (Phil 3:15; Rom 14:1) shows that, at some level, he understood that certain doctrinal disputes matter more than others. Theological triage is an analogy that, while not perfect, helps us guard the unity of the church while we passionately “contend for the faith” (Jude 3)—a faith, we should remember, that includes the importance of church unity. Our Lord prayed for unity, and His apostles pursued it. We must not sacrifice the pursuit of unity for a pursuit of purity when it comes to second- or third-rank doctrines.

Rhyne Putman’s book, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An*

*Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity*, is much longer (313 pages) with a more ambitious goal. Putman also interacts with the “theological triage” analogy. Doctrinal taxonomies or dogmatic ranks have long been part of the Reformation tradition, he writes, in which “foundational doctrines are given greater weight and authority in a theological system, while other doctrines take a place of secondary or tertiary importance” (p. 204).

Putman’s aim goes beyond explaining and applying this analogy. His is a larger task: developing a theological method that “explores the nature of doctrinal diversity from a distinctly evangelical point of view.” To that end, he hopes to address “big-picture questions about the nature of doctrine, the sources of theology, and the processes by which we develop doctrine” (p. 29).

Likewise, Putman’s questions are more expansive. On page 30, he asks: “How do Christ-followers with similar convictions about Scripture and the gospel come to such drastically different points of view in matters of faith and practice?” “What should otherwise like-minded Christians do about the doctrines that divide them?”

The first part of the book answers the initial question, giving readers greater understanding of the reasons we approach the task of biblical interpretation and application differently. We read imperfectly (as fallible interpreters), we reason differently, we *feel* differently (here is where Putman makes his most unique contribution—helping us understand the role of emotions in Bible interpretation), and we come to the text with different biases.

Not surprisingly, Putman recommends reading deeply and widely in the broader Christian tradition in order to see that even as we are “both aware of our interpretive fallibility and committed to the truthfulness of God’s word, we should at least contemplate why other Bible-believing Christians throughout history have come to opinions contrary to our own” (p. 167).

A theme that runs through the second part of Putman’s book is the need for personal humility and forbearance with others. Forbearance requires us to give people space who have not come to a firm conclusion on these matters. Not all pastors on the spectrum have spent adequate time assessing disputed topics, and they should not be forced to take sides prematurely. Withholding judgment on a topic may be wiser than rushing to a conclusion (pp. 198-199).

Personal humility requires us to recognize our fallibility. It does not mean we loosen our convictions or throw up our hands in frustration.

Humility comes from acknowledging our own limitations. “The frailty of human interpretation should give us pause from interpretive pride and theological arrogance,” Putman writes (p. 266). Similarly, Ortlund observes that “the greatest impediment to theological triage is not a lack of theological skill or savvy but a lack of humility. A lack of skill can simply be the occasion for growth and learning, but when someone approaches theological disagreement with a self-assured, haughty spirit that has only answers and no questions, conflict becomes virtually inevitable” (p. 147).

I heartily recommend both of these books to students. Ortlund’s work will be more accessible to lay leaders in the church who have not benefited from seminary training. Putman’s deeper dive into these issues provides a larger foundation for further thought and reflection. Both are well-written, well-reasoned, and well-structured, providing a solid contribution to a topic of utmost importance for the church today.

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***Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise: Hymns and Poems.* By Justin Waincott. Eugene OR: Resource Publications, 2019, 114 pp., \$15.00 paper.**

Across the ages, the leading pastors of the Christian church have quite often been poets who also wrote many of the hymns of the church. I have long thought this was something we need to regain and have urged students preparing for the pastorate to give attention to poetry—reading and writing it. Surely attention to and care for words, which poetry requires and nurtures, is beneficial to those whose business it is to care for souls by tending to the Word and words used to proclaim it. Therefore, I was delighted to see this new book, written by a pastor-poet.

The book is divided into two sections labelled “Hymns” and “Poems.” The first section contains about 40 hymns including metrical psalms, additional stanzas to well-known hymns, and completely new hymns. Each one is provided with suggested tunes commonly used with well-known hymns, which makes it easy to incorporate these into corporate worship.

Many evangelicals have forgotten the church's practice of singing the Psalms, so these new metered Psalms are quite welcome. I have used some of them in events I have planned, and they have been well-received. For full disclosure, Justin Wainscott is one of my pastors. But, that just means I have had the privilege of seeing some of these poems emerge and make their way into the hymnody of our church. When we wanted a baptism hymn but could not find a strong one, Justin composed "Baptized in Union with Our Lord," which is now a staple for our church. I have also deeply appreciated his additional stanza for the Gettys' "He Will Hold Me Fast," which I have become so accustomed to that I forgot it was an added verse. These hymns are helpful for private devotion as well as corporate worship.

The second section of the book contains over 50 poems on a wide range of topics including motherhood, family, everyday life, and baseball, as well as theology and Christian living. Coming from the wide range of life, these poems represent the range of emotions from simple pleasures to love, joy, wonder, lament, contemplation, and rebuke. Reading good poetry like this helps you to be more human as you explore your own soul with the poet. He helps you to recognize these same emotions within you, often drawing out what is within you and giving it voice. Reading these poems helped me to wonder anew, to rejoice, to ponder more deeply, to express my grief, and to rise in hope.

I warmly commend this book of poems and hope it will also encourage other pastors to consider the soul-crafting value of poetry.

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## BOOK NOTES

It would be our wish that we had opportunity and space in each issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* to provide full-length book reviews for each book worthy of such engagement. Since, however, that it is not possible, we want to bring to the attention of *SWJT* readers a brief overview of several key 2019 publications.

### THEOLOGY AND APOLOGETICS

Among the numerous significant volumes published in recent months in the field of theology are two fine additions to the highly regarded Foundations of Evangelical Theology series, edited by John Feinberg and published by Crossway. In *Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons*, Graham A. Cole demonstrates once again why he is considered a trusted theological voice for our time. Bringing his careful research and wide-ranging interaction with major theological voices throughout the centuries alongside his own fresh theological engagement, Cole applies his superb theological skills to the oft-neglected themes of angels, Satan, and demons. Moreover, this thoughtfully designed and accessible volume offers several treatments of controversial subjects and challenging biblical texts, providing readers an opportunity to learn from Cole's insightful wisdom.

In *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*, Thomas McCall invites us to join him as he thoughtfully guides us through a thorough and careful exploration of the doctrine of sin from biblical, historical, philosophical, theological, pastoral, and practical perspectives. Serious interaction with the biblical text and with other key thinkers through the centuries by this first-rate theologian provides the context for the author's own wrestling with the personal, societal, private, and public aspects of this challenging area of theology. Offering careful exegesis of the central biblical texts on this subject, McCall serves as a judicious and astute guide through the issues of original sin, guilt, corruption, and the multiple dimensions of



sin. In doing so, he avoids the trap of popular psychobabble while, with pastoral sensitivities, leading readers to a deeper and more thoroughly biblical understanding of the misery of sin, idolatry, transgression, and depravity. McCall helps us all to gain a more theologically informed grasp of the important issues of humanity and our desperate need for rescue, redemption, forgiveness, and salvation.

Three systematic theology textbooks, worthy of our attention, have been published within the past year. Ben C. Blackwell and Randy L. Hatchett, both of Houston Baptist University, have written a commendable introductory volume titled *Engaging Theology: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan). Daniel Treier's *Introducing Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker) has attracted the attention of the broader evangelical community. *Systematic Theology*, by Robert Letham (Wheaton: Crossway), has received a glowing reception from Reformed thinkers. An important contribution to the field of biblical theology comes from two productive Southwestern Seminary alums and Ouachita Baptist University faculty members, Daniel Hayes and Scott Duvall. It is a delight to recommend their perspicacious work, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker).

Albert Mohler, one of the outstanding theological thinkers of this generation as well as one of the influential leaders in Southern Baptist life, has provided a thoughtful, insightful, and biblically informed commentary on *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville: Nelson). Offering a clearly written and incisive introduction to this historic confessional statement, this volume clarifies for readers the meaning of the essential truths of the Christian faith. Readers will be informed, instructed, and illumined by this helpful book, and students will be grateful for its conviction and wisdom. Two other works connect with this important tradition. Matt Jensen offers a nice overview of the development of theology through the centuries with his *Theology in the Democracy of the Dead: A Dialogue with the Living Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker). Gavin Ortlund convincingly makes the case for why such dialogue matters with his *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals* (Wheaton: Crossway).

Kirk Macgregor extends that conversation with a focus on more recent theological voices: *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction: Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical, and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids:

Zondervan). Lexham Press has reintroduced Carl F. H. Henry to this generation with two volumes: *Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry* along with an edited volume on the *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, which was initially published more than five decades ago. The new edition includes a fresh and sagacious introduction from Kevin J. Vanhoozer.

Glenn R. Kreider and Michael J. Svigel, with much wisdom, have written *A Practical Primer on Theological Method: Table Manners for Discussing God, His Works and His Ways* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan). Keith Whitfield has edited a fine book of essays on *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Applications* (Nashville: B&H), which includes an exceptional essay by Malcolm Yarnell on the influence of Trinitarian theology on theological anthropology.

Michael Horton's two-volume work on *Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018) is a vitally important contribution to the subject. Craig Ott has written an excellent work called *Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for the Transformation of All People* (Grand Rapids: Baker). At least three other works from Southern Baptist theologians are worthy of our attention: *Reenchanting Humanity* (Mentor/Christian Focus), by Owen Strachan; *Shalom Yesterday, Today, and Forever* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock); and an edited volume by Matthew Barrett, *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Wheaton: Crossway), which includes a persuasive introduction from D. A. Carson.

*Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton: Crossway), by Rebecca McLaughlin, is an outstanding book that should receive a wide readership. James Emery White has written a winsome volume called *Christianity for People Who Aren't Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker). Alister McGrath has offered an intriguing approach with his *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker)

## **BIBLICAL STUDIES**

Moving from the category of theology and apologetics to biblical studies, readers will want to examine *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP), by Kevin Chen. Chen adapts and expands the methodology of John Sailhimer to illuminate the meaning of the Mosaic writings. This widely engaging book contends that the network of Messianic prophecies can be understood as a complex array of interrelated

lenses designed and intended to project a coherent, sweeping vision of the Messiah at the center of their theological message. While wrestling with a variety of complex hermeneutical issues associated with his approach, Chen thoughtfully contends that these intertextual relationships point to the presence of an authorially intended unified Messianic theology in the Pentateuch. Offering perspectives on prophecy, typology, progressive revelation, and repetition, this volume offers readers much to consider with the hope of enabling biblical interpreters to read, understand, teach, and proclaim the Word of God in a more coherent and faithful manner.

Craig Keener's creative and brilliant work on the Gospels, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) deserves high praise. As is true for almost all of the Asbury scholar's prolific work, there is much to commend in Keener's commentary on *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker). *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria and Context in the Study of Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), edited by Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski, contains a number of excellent and persuasive essays. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton: Crossway), by Peter J. Williams, provides thoughtful and well-reasoned responses to the pressing questions associated with the first four New Testament books.

Readers will not want to miss James M. Houston and Bruce K. Waltke's *The Psalms as Christian Praise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans). Profound insights may be found in Christopher J. H. Wright's *Knowing God through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP). Kenneth A. Mathews has penned a careful exegetical study on *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People* (Wheaton: Crossway). Also, worthy of note is the *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, by Thomas R. Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Baker). The discerning study on *Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H), by Dana Harris, and the astute work on *Ephesians* (Downers Grove: IVP), by Darrell Bock, are both impressive.

Crossway has released two fine volumes in their *ESV Expository Commentary: John-Acts* (Brian Vickers) and *1 Samuel-2 Chronicles* (John Mackay, Gary Miller, and John Olley). Brad Green and Lee Gatiss have collaborated on the volume on *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* in the multi-volume Reformation Commentary Series, edited by Timothy George (Downers Grove: IVP).

## ETHICS, CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW, CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT, AND PHILOSOPHY

Turning to the areas of ethics, Christian worldview, cultural engagement, and philosophy, we find that Jacob Shatzer has provided genuine help to inform our thinking about issues related to *Transhumanism and the Image of God* (Downers Grove: IVP). In this volume, Shatzer grapples with the potential for technology to transform the way we think about what it means to be human in light of the doctrine of the incarnation. Guidance is provided for topics such as artificial intelligence, robotics, medical technology, and other matters. Jemar Tisby has given us a challenging book with a revealing title: *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).

*The Gospel of Our King: Bible, Worldview, and the Mission of Every Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker), by Bruce Ashford and Heath Thomas, is a superb introduction to worldview thinking for students and church leaders. C. Stephen Evans has added *Kierkegaard and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) to his ongoing contributions regarding the intriguing Danish thinker. The topic of religious liberty remains at the forefront of conversations related to matters of the public square. Two valuable works published in recent months are Luke Goodrich's *Free to Believe* (Portland: Multnomah) and *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, by Robert Louis Wilken (New Haven: Yale University Press).

## CHURCH HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

A number of fine works in the field of church history have recently made their way beyond the publishers' workrooms. Scott Manetsch, the brilliant Reformation scholar, has edited a significant collection of essays on the Reformers and their engagement with Scripture with the title, *The Reformation and the Irrepressible Word of God* (Downers Grove: IVP). Mark David Hall's work on early American history, *Did America Have a Christian Founding?* (Nashville: Nelson), is balanced, nuanced, and insightful. Thomas Kidd seems to write books faster than most of us can read them. Two quality works can be added to the list: *Who is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press) and *America's Religious History: Faith, Politics, and the Shaping of a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).

Hal Poe has written *Becoming C. S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack*

*Lewis, 1898-1918* (Wheaton: Crossway). This brilliant story is the first of a projected three-volume series on the life of Lewis. Grant Wacker has added *One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) to his previous work on Mr. Graham. Two moving accounts can be found in the courageous autobiographical stories of Rachael Denhollander, *What is a Girl Worth?* (Wheaton: Tyndale), and Andrew Brunson (with Craig Borlase), *God's Hostage: A True Story of Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Baker).

### **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP**

Since this issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* concentrates on themes of Christian higher education and discipleship, we will conclude our survey by noting contributions to this field. Edward P. Meadors is to be congratulated on bringing together an array of gifted thinkers to produce *Where Wisdom May Be Found: The Eternal Purpose of Christian Higher Education* (Eugene: Pickwick). Maintaining that the purpose of education is to cultivate eternal wisdom through the integration and interrelatedness of the various disciplines across the curriculum, the contributors skillfully amplify this theme for biblical and theological studies, the humanities, the arts, the sciences, and the various professional programs. This treasured resource is impressive in its scope, thematic in its focus, and compelling in its presentation. Freddy Cardoza and a strong group of contributors have put together a useful guide on *Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker). Two other beneficial volumes, among others that could be included in our survey, are Kevin Vanhoozer's *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham: Lexham) as well as *Discipling in a Multicultural World* (Wheaton: Crossway), by Ajith Fernando. We will look forward to extending this conversation and expanding the topics for consideration in the fall 2020 issue of *SWJT*.

David S. Dockery