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of Theology and Contemporary Application

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY



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Special issue on Christian higher education

# Evangelical Review of Theology

**A Global Forum**

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**Special issue on Christian higher education**

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# About this special issue

We are honored to welcome guest contributions from two esteemed sources in this special issue on Christian higher education. The first four papers, all by distinguished scholars, come from conferences of the International Alliance for Christian Education, whose founding president, David Dockery, has provided a brief introduction. The well-developed biblical understanding of higher education developed in these papers is relevant to every Christian, and the cultural threats addressed are likely to continue their global spread in the years ahead.

After that, we present the newly adopted ‘Manifesto II’ of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, with an introduction by the Manifesto’s primary drafter, Bernhard Ott.

Ian Atkinson shares an enlightening paper on a man whose amazing biblical literacy is underappreciated—Patrick, fifth-century missionary to Ireland—and how he found inspiration in the prophet Jeremiah. We close with three diverse book reviews. Happy reading!

— Bruce Barron, Executive Editor

## Table of Contents

Christian Higher Education and the Global Church.....	196
<i>David S. Dockery</i>	
A Biblical Theology of Education.....	199
<i>D. A. Carson</i>	
Biblical Authority and Faithful Christian Higher Education .....	211
<i>John D. Woodbridge</i>	
Wisdom for Cultural Challenges about Human Flourishing .....	226
<i>Jennifer Marshall Patterson</i>	
Theological Commitments of Distinctively Christ-Centred Higher Education.....	235
<i>Nathan A. Finn</i>	
Shaping the Future of Theological Education: Introducing the ICETE Manifesto II.....	250
<i>Bernhard Ott</i>	
ICETE Manifesto II: Call and Commitment to the Renewal of Theological Education .....	253
‘In the Land of My Captivity’: Patrick of Ireland’s Use of the Old Latin Jeremiah .....	274
<i>Ian Atkinson</i>	
Book Reviews.....	284

# Christian Higher Education and the Global Church

David S. Dockery

I am deeply grateful for the invitation to serve as editor for this special issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. As president of the International Alliance for Christian Education, I seek to help people think about the important work of Christian higher education and its influence within the global church. I have invited four good friends—D. A. Carson, John D. Woodbridge, Jennifer Marshall Patterson and Nathan A. Finn—to join with me in this effort. Their insightful and substantive articles should be a blessing to readers.

Although none of these articles addresses the connection of Christian higher education to the global church in a particular way, each one does address a distinctive aspect of the work of Christian education. I believe that the symphonic voice coming from this group of articles offers a picture of the kind of Christian presence that will strengthen the work of the global church in the days to come.

William Carey (1761–1834) is known as the father of modern missions. When he was 25 years old, Carey began to talk about taking the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth. Baptist leaders in England replied, ‘Sit down, young man. If God wants to reach the heathen, he will do it without you.’ In response, Carey wrote a brilliant treatise called *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. Carey exhorted his readers to join him in expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God.

In the same way as the resulting global missions movement served as a unifying and cooperative agent for believers in the 18th century, I believe that Christian higher education can perform that role in the 21st century. More than two centuries removed from the time of Carey, the church faces different tasks and challenges, but two primary lessons from William Carey are applicable to our context. First, he believed that the church needs to take the gospel to the world. Second, he emphasized that God uses *means* to accomplish the spread of this gospel message.

Christian higher education shares in the missional task by participating with others in the church of Jesus Christ to take the gospel around the world, recognizing that our unique role is to use education as a means to accomplish that end. Carey brilliantly argued that somehow within the mystery and providence of God, it has been ordained that the Great Commission will be fulfilled through means, which implies the use of human instruments to accomplish God’s purposes. In the changing world of the 21st century, it has never been more important to recognize

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education, and particularly higher education, as a unique agent to help carry forth Christ's commission.

We must recognize the growing opportunities which our increasingly networked globe offers for advancing the kingdom of God. Every person created by the hand of God now lives within reach of the gospel, be it through business, medicine, government or (most importantly for us) education. Indeed, the current hour is unprecedented, unchartered and unmatched. We are called to be members of this global family.

One role that Christian higher education can play is to help the church better understand the need to live always between gospel and culture. We must recognize the cultural dynamics that shape our societies while, at the same time, listening to the gospel that calls us to know and value things in a different way.

One challenge for Christian higher education is to maintain a distinctive but effective presence in contexts where the gospel is not well received. People cannot respond effectively to something they do not understand. One of our responsibilities as educators is to help our students and those with whom we partner around the world understand what religion teaches regarding the nature of ultimate reality and the fate of individuals at death.

Once the relativist recognizes that all religions cannot be true at the same time, he or she is generally more open to considering evidence for one particular faith. In this sense, the role of Christian higher education is to do the work of pre-evangelism, maintaining a credible Christian presence in the world. In light of the conflicting truth claims of various religions, it does not make sense to believe that all religions are equally valid. Although many people today think that no rational person could possibly believe that one religion alone is true while so many other religions exist and even thrive, we cannot simply jump ship from the historical truth claims of the Christian faith.

Our role in higher education can be both apologetic and educational. Our educational role may involve genuine pre-evangelism by being a Christian presence in the world. Creating such a context involves striving to connect the large unevangelized world eventually with the God of the Bible.

The role of Christian higher education is not so much shining a floodlight as lighting a candle. If someone is sitting in a dark room and you flip a switch that floods the room with light, the person in the room will wince and turn away from the source of the light, eyes tightly shut. On the other hand, if you walk into a dark room with a candle, the person in the darkness will be attracted to the light. The unique role of distinctive Christ-centred higher education in a global context is the lighting of a candle in a dark world. Our four authors have beautifully offered four different and distinctive features of authentic Christian higher education that can attract people to the light of the gospel.

The missional and educational task of Christian higher education, then, is to develop global Christians on our campuses. We can take leadership in our own situations, and we can join with others to forge relevant ties for our global work in the 21st century. We must not shy away from the task. We need to live as boldly as William Carey lived over 200 years ago. We need fresh eyes to see the potential role of

Christian higher education as the means of establishing a Christian presence in the world.

Let us therefore go forth in wisdom, humility and confidence, recognizing the unique calling that is ours, ready to provide an answer for the hope that is in us through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Pet 3:15). May God's favour and blessing rest on the work of distinctive, global Christian higher education around the world.

# A Biblical Theology of Education

D. A. Carson

The topic assigned to me is like an oversized, under-inflated beach ball: you cannot miss it, and it is easy to swat around, but it is very difficult to control.

Nevertheless, let me try to impose at least a little order on the topic. We can begin with the expression ‘biblical theology’. Although there are many variations, today’s use of the expression commonly conjures up one of two ideas.

*First:* Whereas ‘systematic theology’ tends to order its treatment of the theology of the Bible along logical and hierarchical lines (see, for example, a standard systematic theology like that of Bavinck or a more popular one like that of Grudem), biblical theology tends to order its treatment of the theology of the Bible along temporal lines, focusing on the contribution of each book and corpus in the Bible’s story line. The distinction between systematic and biblical theology is never absolute, of course, but it is strong enough to warrant recognition. Thus a biblical theology of the temple, for instance, traces temple themes in the early chapters of Genesis and follows their trajectories all the way to the Apocalypse, and it observes how these trajectories are not random but interrelated, constituting the warp and woof of interwoven themes, unfolding across time. Similarly, one can speak of the biblical theology of creation and new creation, of priesthood, of exile and of much more. But in this sense of ‘biblical theology’, can one legitimately speak of a biblical theology of education?

I do not think so. There is not a theological development of the theme of education from one end of the canon to the other. Of course, one could cheat a little and insist that all of God’s self-disclosure across human history constitutes an education of those humans. In that sense, education *is* biblical theology. But no one uses the term ‘education’ today in precisely that way. Consider the definition of education advanced by Wikipedia: ‘Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits.’ This static vision of education is not following the story line of redemptive history. To put it another way, it is difficult to discern that the canon provides developing reflection on education.

The *second* common contemporary meaning of ‘biblical theology’ is theology that is found in or based upon the Bible—in effect, a way of referring to systematic theology that is biblically faithful. On this view, our title makes education a subset of systematic theology. This is conceptually less problematic. To speak of the biblical theology of education, in this sense of biblical theology, is akin to talking about the biblical theology of ecology or the biblical theology of angels. Ecology, angels and (I

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would say) education are not central biblical themes like Christology, the atonement or theology proper, but enough is said about each of them that if we assemble these bits carefully and inquire as to how they fit into the Bible as a whole, it is surprising how much can be learned. So let us assemble some of the bits and pieces of what the Bible says about education.

### Observations on some biblical bits and pieces

One of the first passages cited by writers who survey what the Bible says about education is Deuteronomy 6:6–9: ‘These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of our houses and on our gates.’ Indeed, when a new generation asks what this is all about, the older generation is to fill them in on the entire exodus history, the history of the redemption of God’s covenant people and the bedrock that warrants the call to obedience (6:20–25). The concern is to educate each new generation.

Three details stand out here. First, the primary responsibility lies with the parents, who are called to shape their children. Second, the focus is not on education broadly conceived, but on knowing their own God-shaped history and the covenantal structure and stipulations that rest on that history. Third, the context in which this theological formation takes place is not a formal educational institution but family life—sitting at home, walking along the road, answering questions in the intimacy of the family.

A millennium and a half later, the same family structure is presupposed in the Olivet Discourse: ‘Two men will be in a field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left’ (Mt 24:40–41). In the economic culture of the time, the two men were likely to be two brothers, or a father and a son; the two women were likely to be two sisters, or a mother and a daughter. That is why the separation brought about by the Lord’s return is so shocking. But that is also where education takes place.

Of course, some training takes place outside family lines: Eli mentors Samuel and Elijah mentors Elisha, to cite two obvious instances. Nevertheless, recall the importance of the family in the wisdom literature:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years, and bring you peace and prosperity. ... Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. Then he taught me, and he said to me, ‘Take hold of my word with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live.’ ... My son, keep your father’s command and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. (Prov 3:1–2; 4:1–4; 6:20; cf. 1:8)

Family instruction lays emphasis on conduct: ‘Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it’ (Prov 22:6). The role of the mother in educating her son in the faith surfaces unforgettably in the

influence of Lois and Eunice on Timothy (2 Tim 1:5), and also sometimes regrettably, such as in the influence of Rebekah on her son Jacob. All such trans-generational education is, of course, informal.

The importance of the written materials that make up what we today call the Bible surfaces in both personal and institutional contexts. When an Israelite came to regal power, his first responsibility was not to audit the books of his predecessor, nor to appoint a full slate of cabinet officers, but to copy out, by hand, 'this law' (scholars continue to debate how much is included in the expression), then read it every day for the rest of his life (Deut 17:14–20). This stipulation was more commonly observed by its breach than by its performance, or all of Israel's history would have been different. Psalm 119 is a sustained meditation on the law of the Lord and its shaping power. Times of reformation and revival are driven by the rediscovery of the written Word (Josiah) or by the exposition of that Word (Nehemiah). Although the exact referents are disputed, Paul's desire to be reunited with his books and parchments discloses a similar priority (2 Tim 4:13), as do affirmations of the unyielding importance of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–20).

In recent years, scholars have shown how during the patristic period Christians stood out from their pagan peers, not least by being people of a book: their teaching, evangelism, catechizing and worship were all shaped by written documents, by Scripture. All this presupposes a sustained interest in *learning* what texts say—that is, in theological education. Whether early Christians read 1 Corinthians for themselves or accessed it primarily by hearing it read at length in the congregation, they stood out by their desire to become educated in their sacred texts.

The roots of such priorities lie deep within Old Testament soil. Unlike the other Israelite tribes, the Levites did not settle in one tribal area but were scattered among the tribes, not least because their responsibilities included teaching the Word of God to their fellow Israelites. In other words, there was an *institutional* pattern of educating the people in holy Scripture. On this side of the exile, that pattern morphed into the synagogue system, with its heavy emphasis on memory and recitation. In the New Testament, under the new covenant, assemblies were to be led by pastors/teachers/overseers, and one of the qualifications demanded of such leaders was that they be 'able to teach' (1 Tim 3:2). The Pastoral Epistles devote quite a lot of space to spelling out what the teachers must aim to accomplish: they must ground the believers in sound doctrine, warn divisive people, provide encouragement and so forth. More broadly, Christians are to admonish one another. All of these are forms of Christian education. And after all, even Christian proclamation of the gospel is a form of education.

The Bible also lays some stress on the lessons to be learned from history—or, more precisely, history as interpreted by God. The entire book of Judges overflows with its main point: when the covenant people slide into idolatry, God sends judgement until there is repentance and a desperate call for help. The book as a whole teaches that the people are incapable of long-term faithfulness without a godly king to keep them in line. The juxtaposed blessings and curses of Deuteronomy are designed to educate the people along similar lines. The seven churches of Revelation 2–3 are threatened with the dire consequences of prolonged sin: the candlestick is removed, the church is destroyed.

Although the Bible contains very little reflection on how each new generation was educated in the broader knowledge and science of the day, there are adequate glimpses of the range of expertise. Genesis 4 identifies nomadic herders, musicians and technical folk with rising mastery of tools made from bronze and iron. David was a poet; Solomon set himself to master proverbs; scribes collected and compiled them; and all these skills required training of some sort—education, if you will. The word ‘wisdom’ covers a wide range of competencies, of course, but in some contexts it refers to something like a technical skill. Bezalel and Oholiab are ‘wise’ men because they are endowed ‘with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts’ (Ex 31:3–5). When David reflects on the sky, he declares, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge’ (Ps 19:1–2; cf. vv. 1–6). Like Paul in his reflection on what can be learned about God from the natural order (Rom 1:19–20), David runs quickly to theological implications, but we cannot fail to note that these theological structures are anchored in observations of the natural order. Job knows about constellations such as Pleiades and Orion; presumably someone educated him in elementary astronomy. Again, there is little reflection on the processes, structures and methods of education, but quite regularly the biblical writers spell out nature’s theological implications.

I cannot abandon this survey without saying something about the Lord Jesus. One of the dominant ways by which his disciples referred to him was as ‘the Teacher’. After Jesus and Martha finished their quiet exchange in John 11, Martha, we are told, ‘went back [to her house] and called her sister Mary aside. “The teacher is here”, she said, “and is asking for you”’ (11:28). Jesus himself ratifies the appropriateness of the designation when he instructs his disciples how to prepare for the Passover: ‘Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, “The Teacher says: My appointed time is near”’ (Mt 26:18). Or again, in John’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord”, and rightly so, for that is what I am’ (13:13).

In Matthew’s Gospel, the apostle provides five large teaching blocks, the first of which is the Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the comment, ‘His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them’ (5:1–2), and ends with the observation that ‘the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law’ (7:28–29). Mark’s Gospel reports much less teaching, but the evangelist has a predilection for referring to Jesus as the Teacher. Certainly, the canonical gospels depict Jesus’s teaching in a variety of modes: lecturing, mentoring those closest to him, coining one-liners, interacting with opponents, illustrating some element of his teaching with parables or symbol-laden miracles, or unpacking grace, faith, obedience and more. None of this is presented as a disquisition on education. The focus, rather, is on the content—Jesus himself, the kingdom, his path to the cross and resurrection, eternal life—and that content is presented by a master teacher. One may legitimately learn some things about education by watching Jesus, but it would rather miss the point to come away and say, ‘After studying Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, I see how copying Jesus’s teaching styles will improve my performance in teaching students the challenges of how nuclear fusion might one day contribute to the electrical grid.’

## A miscellany of historical observations

Before trying to pull some of these strands together to see what kind of biblical theology of education we might weave, it might be worthwhile to offer a potted miscellany of historical observations. The reason for this is that when we talk about education, we unwittingly smuggle into our discussion such categories as colleges and universities, private Christian institutions versus public options, K-12 schools, private tutoring, the value or otherwise of scholastic aptitude exams, two-year associate degrees, technical colleges, distance learning, digital courses, universal access to libraries (hard copy or digital), or, more broadly, access to the internet—and not one of these categories had any place in the mind of Solomon, Hezekiah, Dr. Luke or Thomas Aquinas. Thinking about some of these categories for a moment enables us to ponder what we may and may not legitimately infer about education from the biblical texts.

In the first century, there was no ideal of government-supported, universal education. Some governments trained some of their employees or slaves; we catch glimpses of this practice as early as the time of Daniel and his three friends. Most Jewish lads in the time of Paul learned how to read, but most would not have owned any of their own books. There was nothing akin to a modern Western university. Lecturers or preachers often wandered from town to town, giving addresses in the public marketplace. If they were good enough, local nobility might pay them to educate their sons, and this could lead to the establishment of a one-man local academy, such as the school of Tyrannus. In relatively rare cases, a learned scholar attracted other would-be scholars who gathered around their master. The focus could be as broad as all philosophy or much narrower (e.g. mathematics).

One result of this diversity is that although these so-called schools could argue amongst themselves, there was no government-mandated curriculum. Of course, government pressure came in other ways—read the Apocalypse or 1 Peter. But it was not usually exerted through the rather slender first-century institutions of education. There were no trade schools. People who learned a trade did so in a master-apprentice relationship, in some cases controlled by the guilds (the ancient version of trade unions). Not infrequently, the son learned a trade from his father. That is why Jesus was labelled ‘the carpenter’s son’ or, in one remarkable passage, simply ‘the carpenter’ (Mk 6:3)—probably because Joseph had died and Jesus had taken over the family business before embarking on his public ministry. Thus, the moral and theological education envisaged in Deuteronomy 6 took place on the same platform, in the same fields and shops, as the formation needed to become a farmer or a carpenter.

In the early Middle Ages, because clergy were the citizens most likely to be able to read, and because collections of books (which were very expensive) could usually be accumulated only by institutions substantial enough to pay for them, cathedrals and monasteries became the preserve of learning and often ran their own schools. In *How the Irish Saved Civilization*,<sup>1</sup> what Thomas Cahill really discusses is how the Irish monasteries saved civilization. Certainly, there were other monasteries than Irish ones. The first three European universities—at Paris, Oxford and Cambridge—

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

were first of all monkish enclaves, and the trappings of Christendom, to say no more, have continued in them from the 12th century to the present day. Eventually these institutions became quite powerful. You can still visit the room in Queen's College, Cambridge where Erasmus did much of his work. John Owen (1616–1683) was an administrator at the University of Oxford and an advisor to Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. By and large, however, Oxford sided with the Catholics and Cambridge with the Protestants—no college more so than Emmanuel College ('Emma'), Cambridge, whose support of the Puritans meant that Cromwell wanted to replace the masters of the other colleges with Emma men. Meanwhile, the fall of Constantinople to the Muslims (1453) sent many scholars and their manuscripts to the West, strengthening the Renaissance by the recovery of ancient learning.

At this period in history, a university was indeed a *university*: it was *one* body, an organization given to research and teaching, with something approaching a unified vision, which had God at the centre. In the late medieval period, even university libraries were organized in such a way as to demonstrate that theology was the unifying queen of the sciences. Today, for many reasons, there is little that is conceptually and vibrantly unifying in most universities.

Where did the students come from who were admitted to Oxbridge (as Oxford and Cambridge together have come to be called) and other universities? Parents with means often paid for a part-time or even a live-in tutor to prepare their sons (at this historical juncture, only sons went to university) for the leap to Oxbridge. But meanwhile, another movement had sprung up. Eton College, a boarding school for boys ages 13 to 18, was founded in 1440 as a sister 'feeder school' for King's College, Cambridge, and other colleges with similar purposes followed in its train. They were called 'public schools' because they were open to any young man with the money and the gifts to get in—unlike students who made their way by relying on private tutors. Of course, they were not public in the sense that they were sustained and controlled by public funds. As measured by those standards, England's 'public schools' were, and still are, not public but private and elitist.

Five more steps completed the transformation to something akin to what we have today. First, in 1751 William King, followed very closely by Robert Raikes, started the first Sunday school. This was designed to provide basic education for children in the workforce who had no educational opportunities at all. Sunday schools grew very rapidly. They taught reading, writing, cyphering (arithmetic) and a basic knowledge of the Bible. This was Christian education organized by Christians and some others to provide basic content to the disadvantaged.

Second, the Education Act of 1870 provided elementary education to everyone at government expense. Eventually, this cut out the need for most Sunday schools as they had operated, and it gradually transformed them into what we mean by Sunday schools today. At the same time, this move brought the powerful force of government into play. The reach of government soon extended through secondary schools, technical colleges and universities. The power of the purse is often velvet-gloved, but it can be formidably coercive.

Third, Britain's demographics changed, especially after World War II. The polite but anemic Judeo-Christian perspective that had dominated the culture for centuries gave way to massive multi-culturalism. London currently boasts somewhat more

than 460 languages spoken on its streets. Some of us love the racial, cultural and linguistic diversity; others are frightened by it. Meanwhile, in such a population, where is the consensus on history, social studies, culture, religion, ethics, sexuality and gender identity, controlling literature, sense of humour, courtesy, justice or economics? How will the disagreements that undergird such diversity play out in government and in education at every level? It has become clear that the widespread attempts in government and the media to advocate a neutral ground called secularism are simultaneously naive and dangerous.

Fourth, we cannot ignore the impact on education of the Industrial Revolution. New skills were needed, and many of them could not be acquired at home. Gradually, the knowledge and skills needed in a scientific and technological society were taught by colleges and universities. The benefits were many, but the pattern of sending large numbers of 18-year-olds away from home to acquire an 'education' tended over time to weaken the influence of the home and to modify what we mean by education.

Fifth, as James Tunstead Burtchaell carefully traces (in almost 900 pages),<sup>2</sup> colleges and universities followed a series of common steps that departed from the confessional convictions of and organizational control by the denominations that founded them. One of these common steps was a change in the kind of leadership. Very often, these educational institutions were founded by visionary pastor-theologians. As the institutions grew in size, however, boards sought out leaders with administrative, financial and legal skills. The controlling pursuit of secularism was the result. The administrative skills are necessary, of course, but the question is whether they should be allowed to displace or domesticate the founding vision.

Obviously, with the exception of the last couple of points, I have slanted my potted history towards Britain, but with remarkably little modification I might have told the story of the US, France, Germany or Canada. The bearing of such historical realities on the topic of this paper will become obvious in a few moments. It is time to try to draw some of these reflections together.

## **Towards a biblical theology of education: Some synthetic perspectives**

*First: The centre of what the Bible intimates about education is that nothing is more important than the knowledge of God mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ.* That is as true for the diesel mechanic, the window washer and the neurosurgeon as for the pastor-theologian. What shall it profit anyone to gain the whole world, including a Nobel Prize or two, and lose their own soul? For those of us labouring in the fields of education, that axiomatic truth ought to shape not only our curriculum but our relationships with one another and with our students, our adorning of the gospel as well as our articulation of it.

There are many implications. For a start, we could not possibly be satisfied with a return to broad Judeo-Christian values, even if we could arrange their return (and of course, we cannot). A Dickensian Christmas, complete with a turn-over-a-new-

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<sup>2</sup> James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

leaf Scrooge, doesn't bring us any closer to 'the real meaning of Christmas' than a bacchanalian frenzy. In fact, Dickens may be more dangerous, since his sentimentality tends to swamp our discernment. Attempts to adhere to Jesus's second great command become thin when the first of the two commands is ignored. Nothing is more important than the knowledge of God, mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Second: It follows that, owing to the very nature of what it means in Scripture to know God, our educational priorities can never be merely curricular.* It is not enough to train students to recite the Nicene Creed; they must learn to integrate their knowledge of the Bible and theology with personal faith, ethics (including personal, sexual and social ethics), goals, use of time and money, and relationships with fellow believers in the life of the church. They must learn how to conduct themselves with those of different faiths, and with unbelievers whose carefree abandonment of all religious claims is utterly alien to us. All these things and more flow out of what Scripture and theology teach, that is, how Scripture educates us.

*Third: This does not mean that all our relationships with the unconverted world must be adversarial.* Those in the Reformed tradition often appeal to 'common grace'—the grace that God distributes commonly, to the redeemed and the unredeemed alike. It is not for nothing that Jeremiah tells us to seek the good of the pagan city in which we reside. In the end, according to Revelation, the kingdoms of this world are depicted as bringing their treasures into the new Jerusalem. The summary exhortation of the apostle Paul is striking: 'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things' (Phil 4:8). The implication is obvious: there are many fields of study where we may, and sometimes ought to, share the educational endeavours of our lives with others. The fact that this will demand wisdom and discernment should drive us to James 1:5: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.' If we are not to be conformed to this world but transformed (Rom 12:2), it will be by the renewal of our *mind*, by what and how we think, which presupposes sound educational formation.

*Fourth: It follows further that if we are to interact with the culture in which God has placed us, we must try hard to understand the culture and be discerning.* One of the most striking features of Western culture is how fast it is changing. It is hard to keep up; indeed, there is a danger that some of us will try so hard to keep up with the changing face of the culture that we will spend too little time in the Bible, leaving ourselves with little more than a Sunday-school grasp of what the Bible actually says.

So at the risk of considerable presumption, permit me to list a handful of authors whose insight has helped me. By their own self-description, most of them are not Christians; here, too, is a sign of common grace.

1. *Thomas Sowell.* Sowell has written many shrewd books over the past several decades, all of them graced with clear thinking and exceptionally clear writing. In *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*,<sup>3</sup> Sowell claims that the demand for a perfect solution on every known inequity soon coughs up doctrinaire 'solutions' that are not only simplistic but also damn anyone who disagrees. Worse, to qualify for the benefits of

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3 Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

the 'solution', it is necessary to be a victim, which results in long-term dependence on those claiming to have the 'solution'. Sowell writes:

On issue after issue, the morally self-anointed visionaries have for centuries argued as if no honest disagreement were possible, as if those who opposed them were not only in error but in sin. This has long been a hallmark of those with a cosmic vision of the world and of themselves as saviors of the world, whether they are saving it from war, overpopulation, capitalism, genetic degradation, environmental destruction, or whatever the crisis du jour might be.<sup>4</sup>

The number and intensity of such movements are escalating, along with the corresponding arrogance. The demand for perfect justice turns out to be impossible in this broken world, and it disenfranchises and belittles those who successfully make merely ameliorating improvements. Genuine modest improvements are sacrificed on the altar of reductionistic but absolutist visions to which all must bow. By contrast, in the name of King Jesus, Christians are educated to do good to all people and to confront wickedness and injustice, while knowing full well that perfection awaits the return of the King.

2. *Charles Taylor*. Of his many books, doubtless the most important for our purposes is *A Secular Age*.<sup>5</sup> Taylor's cultural analysis cascades onto his readers in prose that is sometimes dense but invariably enlightening. One of his most insightful notions is that our age has, for a number of complex reasons, elevated the notion of 'authenticity'. A person is to be held in high regard and celebrated if he or she is authentic—that is, living in conformity with what he or she claims to value. It matters little what that siren vision is; what matters is the authenticity of the pursuit. Traditional voices of authority against which we measured ourselves in the past—family traditions, religious commitments, social and governmental demands, sexual conformity—now have no intrinsic authority unless for some strange reason I choose to adopt them as mine. What makes me an admirable person is not the vision I choose to pursue but that my pursuit, in whatever direction, is authentic.

It is difficult to imagine a stance more calculated to baptize my opinions with public approval. It is equally difficult to imagine a stance more antithetical to what Jesus teaches us. He wants us to follow him, die to self-interest, and take up our cross and die daily, not in a pique of self-flagellation but because we have been educated to recognize that it is in dying that we live and in giving that we receive, and that the plaudits of a passing world are not to be compared with the glory to come and with the 'Well done!' of the Teacher.

A second insightful contribution is Taylor's exposition of what he calls the modern social imaginary. By this expression, he means the web of values, morals, direction, institutions, laws and symbols by which a society imagines and even realizes itself. The social imaginary of the Western world of 500 years ago included belief in a (more or less) Christian God; the social imaginary of today's Western world is functionally atheistic, even while many espouse belief in some kind of God (not uncommonly the moralistic, therapeutic, deistic god described by sociologist Christian

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4 Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 103.

5 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1997).



Smith). This is a fundamental shift in the social imaginary of talking about God and educating people in the Christian way.

3. *Douglas Murray*. A provocative essayist with many contributions to his credit, Murray came to prominence with the publication of *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*.<sup>6</sup> His more recent volume, on which I focus here, is *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*.<sup>7</sup> Some of this content could have been written only by someone self-described as gay. Murray brings two main things to the table: a remarkable degree of clarity as he discusses four of our culture's most disputed terms (gay, women, race, trans) and, above all, a passionate plea for sane discourse over against the carefully engineered mass hysteria of our time, 'the madness of crowds'. To illustrate: when Hillary Clinton ran against Barack Obama for US president in 2008, both of them declared that marriage should be between one man and one woman. How short a time it took to make homosexual marriage the law of the land, with penalties for those who dared to disagree. Once again, this is 'the madness of crowds'. Millennia of convictions as to what marriage is were jettisoned. Precisely how should an informed, compassionate yet dispassionate confessional stance educate the culture? How shall we recapture clarity, reason and sanity to declare the logic and coherence of the gospel when we are competing with the madness of crowds?

4. *Christopher Caldwell*. His book *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*<sup>8</sup> offers a reading of the past half-century that is thought-provoking and must be at least partially right. In brief, he argues that the attempt to resolve all our cultural disputes by legislation has generated a citizenry characterized by a deep sense of entitlement, complete with whining and a knee-jerk reliance on the courts to right all wrongs.

5. *Mary Eberstadt*. She has become one of our most insightful cultural commentators. Among her contributions is *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies*.<sup>9</sup> More recently, she wrote *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*.<sup>10</sup> In some ways this book is akin to Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, first published in 2000.<sup>11</sup> Eberstadt argues that with the arrival of the pill and the sexual revolution it helped to spawn, personal identity was no longer tied to family and community. Individualism was tied to freedom, not least sexual freedom, and if there was community, it was arbitrary community incapable of sustaining well-being. In the wake of what Eberstadt calls 'the great scattering', it is small wonder that teenage psycho-

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6 Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017).

7 Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019).

8 Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

9 Mary Eberstadt, *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* (New York: Harper, 2016).

10 Mary Eberstadt, *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton, 2019).

11 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

logical problems are on the rise, along with loneliness studies, a loss of social learning, and ‘the infantilized vernacular of identity politics itself.’<sup>12</sup> The primal scream of the title is the desperate cry, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where do I belong in the world?’

Space constraints prevent me from commenting on other important contributors, such as Jordan Peterson and Rod Dreher. Perhaps the most comprehensive and convincing analysis is Carl Trueman’s recent book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*.<sup>13</sup> If you have time to read only one of the books I have mentioned, let that be the one.

The point of this survey is to remind ourselves that if we are to interact with the culture in which God has placed us, we must try hard to understand it and be discerning. The challenge is captured in the well-known and strangely prescient lines of T. S. Eliot, drawn from the opening stanza of his *Choruses from the Rock*, now a century old:

Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

### Three concluding reflections

First, although the focus of this message has been on education, and especially how education surfaces in the theology of holy Scripture, we must never fall into the trap of thinking that if we educate people rightly, all will be well. I have said too little, except implicitly, about the moral dimensions of education, nor have I teased out the profound assumptions embedded in the words, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ (Prov 9:10) and ‘of knowledge’ (Prov 1:7). Nor have I considered the work of the Spirit and of regeneration, or the place of the life of the church in any truly Christian education.

Second, a responsible strategy of education must be shaped by the place where God has placed us. I recently read John and Bonnie Nystrom’s book *Sleeping Coconuts*,<sup>14</sup> relating their work of overseeing the translation of the Bible into Arop and nine other languages in Papua New Guinea. Part of their task of education entails the formation of tribal translators, teaching people what an alphabet is and teaching people how to read. All that is Christian education, even though it is very different from the courses taught by a Christian university.

Closer to home, when heavy-handed opposition tries to shut down Christian groups on US campuses, students appeal to freedom of religion and to constitutional rights. They cast their meetings as worship, which is constitutionally protected. That argument will not fly in France, where students, to preserve a hearing, insist that their meetings are *not* religious but academic and educational. This difference is because the French Revolution had a different shape from the American Revolution.

12 Eberstadt, *Primal Screams*, Kindle edition, 7.

13 Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

14 John and Bonnie Nystrom, *Sleeping Coconuts* (Orlando, FL: Wycliffe Bible Translators USA, 2012).

My point is that the Bible does not provide a detailed protocol for how education should properly and appropriately engage each culture, whether in Papua New Guinea, France, the US or anywhere else. That is why in trying to outline the fundamentals of a biblical theology of education and applying them to the Western cultures I know best, I have avoided universalizing the practical out-workings. Although many cultures may debate whether (for instance) it is wiser to stay in the public schools and exercise influence there or to withdraw and build independent Christian schools, the shape of this debate is very different in Hungary, China, Bahrain or first-century Athens. A faithful biblical theology of education will provide us with the framework for thinking through such questions, but it will not give us formulaic universals.

Third, the late Tim Keller outlined what the Bible teaches Christians to observe and practice in how they treat others.<sup>15</sup> Christians must (1) be multi-racial and multi-ethnic; (2) care for the poor and marginalized; (3) choose to forgive and not retaliate; (4) stand strongly against abortion and infanticide; and (5) insist on and practice what is today considered a revolutionary sexual ethic. At the risk of generalization, political liberals typically support items 1 and 2, political conservatives typically support 4 and 5, and neither side practices number 3. This means that the thoughtful Christian cannot totally align with political parties other than the kingdom of God. That does not mean there is no place for working with some such entities, as Daniel worked for the government of Babylon. It is the same in the field of education: doubtless there is a place for working with others, but we are called to do so in such a posture of faithfulness that we risk being cast into a den of lions.

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15 Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020). The material to which I refer is found on pages 26–29. I am grateful to my pastor, Steve Mathewson, for tracking down this reference.

# Biblical Authority and Faithful Christian Higher Education

John D. Woodbridge

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. ... May God help me. Amen. —Martin Luther

At the Diet of Worms (1521), the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) boldly took his epochal stand for the full truthfulness of Scripture. By contrast, he charged that councils and popes had erred. Luther refused to retract anything from the Scriptures he had quoted, saying it was not safe to go against conscience. The Reformer took this stand in the presence of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. As Luther left the highly dramatic proceedings, Spanish soldiers threatened him by chanting, ‘To the flames.’ Luther was now a criminal on the run. He had become a hunted heretic.

As Christian educators today, we do not face recriminations nearly as perilous as those Martin Luther encountered due to taking a similar stand for the truthfulness of Scripture. We do know, however, that some of our secular friends consider unacceptable any overture we may make to suggest that the Bible’s teachings should influence educational curricula. They tell us that such constitutes a religious, anti-intellectual intrusion. They say such a tribal gambit is clearly out of bounds in a pluralistic, secular society. They indicate that our society’s naked public square should remain naked, with no dominant religious or political ideology permitted.

By contrast, other secular commentators insist upon a public square awash with a so-called ‘woke culture’. A December 2022 American Civil Liberties Union fundraising letter underscores by inference their agenda for contemporary society: ‘Anti-liberty forces are turning to the states to pursue their extremist agenda. It is happening vigorously—and we need you to weigh in right away on this alarming development.’ Secularists often claim these ‘extremists’ are stoking bigotry by their sexual ethics, advocating white supremacy and whitewashed history, trampling on civil rights and threatening American democracy.

Many Americans are deeply worried and disheartened by the hurtful divisions in our polarized society. In the fall 2022 issue of *Veritas*, a publication of the Roman Catholic University of Dallas, Bridget Wagner of the Heritage Foundation sounds an alarm: ‘American civil society is in a moment of crisis. Knowledge of our past is

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abysmal; angry calls ring out for a radical change, and assault against Western heritage is underway across the nation. Students cannot explain the purpose of the separation of powers, or even answer whether the nation has a right to exist at all.’ Jonathan Sanford, also of the Heritage Foundation, adds, ‘There is a loss of the critical art of rational engagement and rational disagreement. We have lost the ability to argue without quarreling.’

Rusty Reno, the editor of *First Things*, apparently agrees with Sanford’s assessment. On national television, Reno indicated that he would no longer hire students from Ivy League schools. He believed the graduates had become so ‘woke’ that they could not serve effectively as give-and-take journalists.

An article in the October 2022 edition of *Town and Country* magazine chronicles a surge of northern US college students heading south to enrol in non-radical, ‘traditional’ southern schools. The by-line of the article, titled ‘Southern Exposure’, reads, ‘College applicants—including those from liberal Northern enclaves—are flocking to traditional Southern schools, where the vibe is more rah-rah than radical reckoning.’<sup>1</sup> The students have gained the impression that the Ivy League schools have migrated educationally too far to the political woke left. In the Texas Christian University freshman class of 2021, 57% of the students came from out of state.

Various organizations, including Disney and several Christian institutions of higher learning, have taken a serious financial hit after it was noised about in certain constituencies that they had gone ‘woke’. And of all things, in December 2022, the French government condemned American ‘woke culture’ as a dangerous import the French people should reject. Why? According to French President Emmanuel Macron, it racializes society.<sup>2</sup>

For evangelical believers, the anti-Christian hostilities of our day can be painful. They can also intimidate us. They can even weaken our resolve to be salt and light in today’s world. We may fear that we will be ‘cancelled’. We may worry about potential governmental reprisals. We may hesitate to advance our biblically based views and values in the public square, including educational institutions. As Carl F. H. Henry and Martin Luther King sagely reminded us years ago, our laser focus on our own personal well-being, assumed racial prerogatives and theological beliefs can also divert us from addressing instances of social injustice and loving our neighbours, whatever their race or economic station in life. One reason why the early church spread so rapidly is that Christians had a reputation for hospitality and mercy to strangers and for caring for widows, children, the poor and the sick. When a plague raged in the Roman Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180), many Christians rushed to help the afflicted, whereas pagans ran away.<sup>3</sup>

Today, in God’s good providence, an array of superb books devoted to higher Christian education provide us with wise guidance regarding the role of biblical authority in faithful higher Christian education. These writings have flowed from the

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1 Nicole Laporte, ‘Why Are More and More Northern Kids Heading South for College?’ *Town and Country*, 2 October 2022, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47301>.

2 Virginia Van Zandt, ‘Macron, France Reject American “Woke” Culture That’s “Racializing” Their Country’, *Newsweek*, 1 October 2021, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47302>.

3 Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 114–19.

pens and computers of seasoned Christian educators such as Frank E. Gaebel, Duane Litfin, David Dockery and others. Many experts in Christian education have authored valuable essays and books on the topic. We are very much indebted to their faithful Christian service.

We likewise have at our disposition the record of the efforts of Carl F. H. Henry to establish an inter-denominational, biblically faithful, evangelical university. We might reflect upon what lessons can be learned from this less than successful educational initiative.

An additional source of counsel is one with which we may be less familiar: the writings of the Protestant Reformers regarding Christian education. Obviously, the Reformers of the sixteenth century lived in a Constantinian church-state context different from our own. In their day, governments and churches often worked hand in glove. By contrast, in most Western countries today a nuanced separation of church and state exists. Nonetheless, the writings of the Reformers can refresh our thinking about the beneficial role Scripture might play in faithful higher Christian education.

In the present study, we shall first reflect upon a principle the Protestant Reformers adumbrated with conviction. They believed that a fully truthful or infallible Bible which speaks of Christ should reside squarely at the centre of Christian education. Second, we shall reflect upon additional factors of our day that counter our desire to give the Bible a significant role in Christian education. Third and finally, we shall consider ways in which the Protestant Reformers not only affirmed but applied a high view of biblical authority in shaping educational curricula. Their thoughts afford us wise counsel to ponder as we reflect upon these matters in our own day.

### **The Bible in Christian education**

We first consider an essential principle proclaimed by the Protestant Reformers. The Reformers believed the Bible, which speaks of Christ, should play the supreme role in faithful Christian education. Luther resorted to shocking language when he offered this fraught admonition: ‘I should advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God’s word becomes corrupt. . . . I fear the universities, unless they teach the Holy Scriptures diligently and impress them on their young students, are wide gates to hell.’<sup>4</sup> Upon reading this passage for the first time, I was jolted by its rhetorical severity and unsettling implications.

Why did Luther issue such a damning indictment? Luther wondered how educators could be so perilously blind. Did they not realize that the Bible is the most important book in the world? Did they not grasp that the Bible informs us about eternal life—a topic we desperately need to understand? A proponent of *sola Scriptura*, Luther declared, ‘First of all, you need to know that Holy Scripture is the kind of book that makes the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, since none of them teaches about eternal life except this one. Therefore, you should take no hope from your own reason and understanding. With them you will not reach eternal life.

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4 Martin Luther, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 520.

On the contrary, by such presumptions you and others will plunge from heaven into the abyss of hell as Lucifer did.<sup>5</sup> Since the Bible is so important, Luther thought its study should be a cornerstone of responsible evangelical school curricula.

Luther likewise warned self-assured critics not to sit cavalierly in judgement of Scripture. He wrote, 'Among Christians the rule is not to argue or investigate, not to be a smart aleck or a rationalistic know it all; but to hear, believe, and persevere in the Word of God, through which alone we obtain whatever knowledge we have of God and divine things. We are not to determine out of ourselves what we must believe about him, but to hear and learn it from him.'<sup>6</sup> Luther indicated that he followed Augustine's belief in the unerring truthfulness of Scripture.

On one occasion at a coffee pause of the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany (the Germans love to break up their morning studies by sharing coffee and conversation), I found myself sitting next to Heimo Reinitzer, the world's leading expert on the famous Luther Bible of 1534. To celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth in 1483, he had published a study on this edition of Luther's Bible. I asked Dr. Reinitzer, 'Did Martin Luther believe in biblical inerrancy?' He replied, 'Of course.' He then gave me an unsolicited history lesson that it was the Neo-Orthodox who created the myth that Luther did not believe in biblical inerrancy. He said, 'I did my doctoral dissertation on animals in the Bible. I was obliged to publish the dissertation in Austria because powerful forces here in Germany were worried it would prove that Luther believed the Bible was truthful in treating the natural world—in this case animals.'

The professor's answer was unequivocal. Luther believed the Bible was infallible not only for faith and practice but for history, nature and science. Luther indicated that 'Scripture is its own light. It is a grand thing when Scripture interprets Scripture.' Luther loved to seek personal spiritual nourishment from the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms. He likewise extolled the Apostles' Creed and other early Christian creeds. He also drew up catechisms to instruct the people.

Luther urged educators to place Scripture which speaks of Christ squarely at the centre of their curriculum. To give impetus to this practice, the Reformer proposed that everyone in schools should engage in the daily reading of Scripture: 'Above all, the foremost reading for everybody, both in the universities and in the schools, should be Holy Scripture and for the younger boys, the Gospel. And would to God that every town had a girls' school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel for an hour every day either in German or in Latin.'

Lutheran historian Robert Kolb has captured well the powerful impact of Luther's putting the Bible at the centre of faithful Christian education: 'Luther's reorientation of the foundations of religious life, placing God's Word and biblical teaching at its center or as its foundation, exercised a transforming impact on both public teaching and individual lives, on the understanding of the liturgy and other rituals of the office of the pastor.'<sup>7</sup>

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5 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1987), 13:237.

6 Martin Luther, *Luther's Spirituality*, ed. Philip Krey (New York: Paulist), 171.

7 Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 41.

John Calvin also commended the supreme role of Scripture in education. He wrote, ‘Ours [is] the obedience which, while it disposes us to listen to our elders and superiors, tests all obedience by the Word of God, ... ours [is] the Church whose supreme care it is humbly and religiously to venerate the Word of God and submit to its authority.’<sup>8</sup>

Calvin believed the goal of all knowledge is to know and glorify God through Christ. First Timothy 1:17 reads, ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.’ Calvin urged that at the beginning of each school day Genevan students should confess their desire to know God in Christ in their prayers: ‘In whatever kind of study I engage, enable me to remember to keep its proper end in view, namely, to know thee in Christ Jesus thy Son; and may everything that I learn assist me to observe the right rule of godliness.’ Each week the children of Geneva received catechetical instruction.

For Calvin, our knowledge of ourselves is dependent on our knowledge of God as expressed in self-authenticating Holy Scripture. Calvin wrote that ‘as soon as we lift our thoughts to God and reflect on his nature and how absolutely perfect he is in righteousness, wisdom and virtue, we realize that this is the standard to which we must conform.’<sup>9</sup> In his preface to the Genevan Psalter (1542), Calvin extolled the Psalms for teaching believers how to pray.

The Puritan founders of Harvard College (1636) also affirmed the supreme role Scripture should occupy in Christian education. Administrators urged Harvard students to read Scripture in their morning and evening devotions. The ‘Rules and Precepts of Harvard’ in fact stipulated this admonition: ‘Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let everyone seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seeke it of him (Prov 2:3). Every one shall so exercise himselfe in reading the Scriptures twice a day.’<sup>10</sup> The original motto of Harvard College also emphasized abiding in Christ’s Word: ‘If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.’<sup>11</sup> At early Harvard College, the gaining of sound knowledge was based in part on understanding the Word of God, Holy Scripture.

## Modern secular scepticism

Many of our earliest Protestant forebears, then, considered it essential for Christian educators to place Holy Scripture at the center of Christian educational curricula. In

8 John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. John Olin (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 75.

9 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), I.1.2.

10 This statement was adopted in 1646 as Harvard’s ‘Rules and Precepts’. See ‘Shield and “Veritas” History’, *Harvard Graduate School Christian Fellowship*, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47303>. Also, see ‘Faith and Veritas 2023’, *Harvard Law School Program on Biblical Law and Christian Legal Studies*, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47304>.

11 Stephen Flick, ‘The Christian Founding of Harvard’, *Christian Heritage Fellowship*, 8 September 2022, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47305>.



today's world, however, especially at secular schools, we know the Protestant Reformers' wise counsel is simply a non-starter. I have had the privilege of teaching at three secular schools: in the history department of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois; in the history department of the University of Toulouse; and in Hautes Études, the Religion Section, at the Sorbonne in Paris. I never heard any of my esteemed colleagues at these universities endorse Luther's contention that the Bible should reside squarely at the centre of an educational curriculum.

Today, the Sorbonne in Paris remains an academic powerhouse. But it is by no means a robust, theologically oriented university. Following France's separation of church and state in 1905, state-funded educational institutions generally embraced a straight-up, secular perspective regarding the teaching of religion. I was struck by the fact that at both the Protestant and Roman Catholic divisions of Hautes Études of the University of Paris I, it is mandated that religions should be scientifically studied and taught. However, professors were enjoined to avoid broaching the issue of deciding whether the religions studied are actually 'true'. In one of my lectures at the Sorbonne, I raised the issue of the 'truth' of a particular Christian faith statement. Upon doing so, I noticed a distinct look of chagrin spread across the faces of some of the Hautes Études professors present.

This circumstance leads us to our second question: What additional factors of our own day make it difficult to place Scripture at the centre of schools' curricula even if we believe the Reformers' stance on the matter is heuristic?

A first factor looms especially large. The Reformers' perspectives directly clash with the governing 'rules' of many academics in public schools. For them, it is a given that atheistic naturalism and or scientism must be the foundational principles upon which objective or scientific education should be built. In 2011, Notre Dame historian Brad S. Gregory described this reigning secular paradigm: 'Regardless of the academic discipline, knowledge in the Western world today is considered secular by definition. Its assumptions, methods, content, and truth claims are and can only be secular, framed not only by the logical demand of rational coherence, but also by the methodological postulate of naturalism and its epistemological correlate, evidentiary empiricism. Knowledge must be based on evidence.'<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, other academics in public education extol secular paradigms of 'post-modernism' which they tout as obligatory prisms through which to view their instruction. They do so even though a few commentators have warned that such post-modernisms can eviscerate the possibility of establishing agreed-upon standards of morality, whether public or personal, or an agreed-upon history of a nation's founding. After 9/11, for example, Princeton historian Jonathan Israel, a leading atheist academic, gravely warned that we face a dark future indeed if we no longer have agreed-upon criteria with which to identify something as evil. Members of certain communities did applaud the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City. Professor Israel wrote, 'The terrible events of the last several years have provided thoughtful readers with more than just a glimpse of the nightmare world apt to result from enshrining a new set of privileged and prevailing values, a thorough-

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<sup>12</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 299.

going relativism, and the doctrine that all sets of values, even the most questionable kinds of theology, are ultimately equivalent.<sup>13</sup>

We might suppose that the influence of these secular perspectives would be circumscribed to public schools and would not affect teaching at Christian schools. However, such is not the case. In *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (1998), James Burtchaell traces the stories of numerous Protestant and Roman Catholic schools which were church-related. Seeking the approval of the secular academy, their faculty members distanced themselves from the confession of the Christian church which sponsored the schools. Burtchaell observes, 'But the greatest outside authority to which all of these colleges in our study now defer is that of the academy itself.'<sup>14</sup> He recounted the way many professors functioned: 'But the Christian scholars, to be at home in this kind of academy, need not actually forswear their faith. All they must do is agree to criticize the church by the norms of the academy, and to judge the gospel by the culture. And most of them burnt that incense when bidden.'<sup>15</sup> Sometimes academic respectability is sought more intentionally than evangelical academic responsibility.

A second factor militating against the value of highlighting Scripture at the centre of our educational curriculum is the government's apparent dismissal of certain biblical and natural law-based standards of morality. The November 2022 edition of *First Things* includes the document 'Fear God, Honor the Emperor', signed by both Roman Catholics and evangelicals. The drafters, animated by Rusty Reno, editor of *First Things*, contend that the national government has assumed the prerogative to define what marriage is and what male and female sexual identities are, in contra-distinction to biblical teaching and natural law.

The government's apparent countenancing and promotion of moral teachings which contradict Scriptural teaching and natural law in civic life raise difficult questions for Christian schools, especially if the government ties financial support of the schools to the acceptance of its moral teachings. This is a complex and vexing problem for Christian educators. Many of them have been wrestling with the issue for years. Some are refusing to take state aid.

A third factor that militates against placing biblical teaching at the centre of Christian education is that we live in a generally anti-authoritarian era, celebrating the value of unbounded personal autonomy. University of Chicago professor Martha Nussbaum has emphasized the fostering of 'the world citizen', one who allegedly is like Socrates in espousing no dogmatic beliefs about religion, morality, race or nationality. Moreover, popular culture, from music to film to social blogs, often catechizes our young people with the drumbeat of a similar message of radical personal autonomy.

A fourth factor is that we have relatively few clear examples of mainstream universities to emulate which consistently promote core beliefs throughout their curriculum. The Ivy League schools do not exhibit the premise of Cardinal Newman's

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13 Jonathan Israel, 'Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 3 (July 2006): 524.

14 James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 834.

15 Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, 850.

book *The Idea of a University*, that a university should have unifying core beliefs (for Newman, this was theology). Today, many schools are multi-versities and not universities. In *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (2006), Harry R. Lewis, a former dean of Harvard College, complains about the fractured nature of Harvard's curriculum: 'The curriculum is richer than ever, but it is no longer wrapped around any identifiable ideals.'<sup>16</sup> Dean Lewis says that the other Ivies also lack identifiable core values. Professors work in the silos of their disciplines. Students migrate from one silo class to another silo class in which professors often teach out of different sets of presuppositions.

### Applying the Reformers' insights

We turn now to reflect on our third and final question. What transferable insights of the Protestant Reformers might help us to amplify the role of the Bible's authority in faithful higher Christian education? Undoubtedly, most evangelical educators want Holy Scripture to inform their schools' curricula in some measure. They understand that there are forces in society at large which are critical of such a perspective. They also realize that modifying the curriculum at a school, even for good reasons, is not an enterprise for the faint of heart. It takes real courage.

In these turbulent days, there are inklings of a growing sentiment in certain quarters that it would be worthwhile to revisit the question of what a school's core confessional commitments are regarding the role of the Bible in their curricula. I recently spoke with an esteemed faculty colleague at a major evangelical university. The person noted that the well-respected school professes to provide a solid Christian education. But such is not often taking place, the professor stated. Rather, the instruction of the university is often specifically Christian only during the times professors lead class devotions. A disconnect sometimes occurs because well-intentioned professors are specialists in their fields but do not feel sufficiently qualified or trained to assess how their fields relate to biblical teaching.

In this light, reviewing what the Reformers taught about Holy Scripture may be informative and inspiring. The Reformers remind administrators, professors and students about the enduring importance of biblical authority in Christian education. Why so? Scripture tells us about life from God's perspective.

The Reformers were quite alarmed regarding what was being taught in the schools. Luther strongly complained that some university professors had hidden the Bible below the floorboards of their classrooms. In his letter to the clergy of Augsburg (1530), Luther reviewed the sorry state of the Christian faith before he launched his reforming movement in 1517: 'Everything was so upside down with discordant doctrines and strange new opinions that no one knew any more what was certain or uncertain, what it was to be a Christian or an un-Christian. The old doctrine of the faith of Christ, of love, of prayer, of the Cross, of comfort in affliction was overthrown; nay all the world there was not a doctor who knew the whole catechism—that is, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed—to say nothing

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16 Harry R. Lewis, *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), xii.

of understanding and teaching it, as praise God it is now taught and learned every day by the young children.<sup>17</sup>

Luther held certain convictions about biblical authority which apparently contributed to the success of his educational reform. I will mention only four from among many.

1. *Scripture is spiritually powerful.* For Luther, Scripture is not a dead, archaic book but spiritually alive. According to *Table Talk*, Luther said, ‘The words of our Saviour Christ are exceeding powerful; they have hands and feet.’<sup>18</sup> In a sermon, he noted that the words of Scripture ‘are not inert or dead words, but active and living’. Luther was often not confident in his own abilities but counted on the power of the Word of God in his reforming ministry.

Historians have sought to explain the origins and success of the Protestant Reformation. However, they have sometimes neglected to cite Luther’s own explanation of the success of his reforming activities. Luther claimed the success was mainly due to the power of the preached Word of God. In a 1522 sermon, for example, Luther confessed that he personally did not have the skill and power to effect a reformation of the indulgence system. But Holy Scripture certainly did. Luther wrote:

In short, I will preach [Scripture], teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29] or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.

From the Reformation to modern times, evangelicals have often turned to Hebrews 4:12 as a passage which describes the nature of Scripture’s remarkable power: ‘For the word of God is quick, and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’ When the Reformer William Tyndale sent his English edition of Scripture back home to England, he referenced this passage and prayed that the convicting power of Scripture would open the eyes of the king of England to the truth of the biblically based Protestant faith. Calvin cited the same passage when he urged contemporary pastors not to stray to incidental topics in their sermons but to focus their preaching on the Word of God. Puritan pastors in 17th-century New England were often known for preaching while keeping in mind Hebrews 4:12. And Billy Graham referred to Hebrews 4:12 in a marvellous article that appeared in *Christianity Today* on 15 October 1956, ‘Biblical Authority in Evangelism’. The evangelist indicated that the secret of his preaching ministry was reliance upon the power of the truthful Word of God. In his gospel messages, Graham famously and repeatedly proclaimed, ‘The Bible says.’ He

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17 Martin Luther, ‘Luther’s Exhortation’ (1530), *Book of Concord*, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47306>.

18 Martin Luther, ‘Of God’s Word’, in *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. William Hazlitt (London: Bell and Daldy, 1872), lii.

confessed, 'I had my doubts about the Bible. Now I see Scripture as a flame that melts away unbelief.'<sup>19</sup>

In today's world with its multiple challenges, we may need a fresh sense of the truthfulness and power of the Word of God in the teaching at our schools and in our own ministries. The power of the Word of God can bring about profound changes if not revival in the lives of individuals and educational institutions.<sup>20</sup>

2. *Scripture teaches the meaning of life and how to enjoy authentic happiness.* Scripture focuses upon Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour. Luther wrote, 'All of Scripture everywhere deals only with Christ.' And it is Christ who gives life meaning. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. His gospel should play an essential role in a Christian worldview and in educational curricula. As we care for the physical needs of our neighbours, we should not forget to share the gospel with them. After all, as believers we are sent people under Christ's Great Commission.

In a sermon of 1522, Luther urged gentleness in the presentation of the gospel:

Let us, therefore, feed others also with the milk which we received, until they, too, become strong in the faith. For there are many who are otherwise in accord with us and who would also gladly accept this one thing, but they do not yet fully understand it—all such we drive away. Therefore, let us show love to our neighbours, or our work will not endure. We must have patience with them for a time, and not cast out him who is weak in the faith; much more should we regulate our doing and our not doing according to the demands of love, provided no injury is done to our faith.<sup>21</sup>

If we assume with Aristotle that human beings aspire as a principal goal to experience happiness, then Luther tells us where we can actually find it. We often look for happiness in all the wrong places. Luther says we should throw away Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, one of the finest pagan guides on how to live. We should instead turn to Scripture, which tells us not only about eternal life but gives sterling counsel on how to find authentic happiness in this life, namely through meditating upon Holy Scripture.

Luther extols Psalm 1 as providing pivotal instruction regarding experiencing a blessed or happy life. He commented on this psalm:

The psalmist, speaking from heaven, rejects the efforts of all men and gives a unique definition of blessedness which is unknown to everyone. Blessed is he who loves the Law of God. This is a short definition, but it is one which

19 Billy Graham, 'Biblical Authority in Evangelism', *Christianity Today*, 15 October 1956, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47307>.

20 In 1675, the German Pietist Philip Jacob Spener wrote, 'This much is certain: the diligent use of the Word of God, which consists not only of listening to sermons but also of reading, meditating, and discussing (Ps. 1:2), must be the chief means for reforming something, whether this occurs in the proposed fashion or in some other appropriate way. The Word of God remains the seed from which all that is good in us must grow. If we succeed in getting the people to seek eagerly and diligently in the book of life for their joy, their spiritual life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become altogether different people.' Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1964), 91.

21 Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, 2 vols. (1522; Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1916), 2:396.

contradicts all human reason, particularly that of the wise. . . . This ‘will’ [to meditate] is to be sought by us from heaven . . . by humble faith in Christ, when we are brought to despair of all strength in ourselves. And mark this well . . . this man that is blessed has his love, the law of the Lord, always in his mouth, always in his heart, and always (if he can) in his ear. For ‘he that is of God heareth God’s words’ (John 8:47).<sup>22</sup>

The theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) related the deep delight he experienced when as a new Christian he meditated on Scripture:

I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the Holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes, in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt harmony between something in my heart and those sweet and powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; and yet also most every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.<sup>23</sup>

David Brainerd (1718–1747), missionary to the Delaware Indians near Trenton, New Jersey, and beloved friend of Jonathan Edwards, put the matter in this way: ‘Oh, one hour with God infinitely exceeds all the pleasures and delights of this lower world.’<sup>24</sup>

Paul Meier, a psychologist at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School years ago, did a study of the mental health of students enrolled in MDiv and ThM programs at two evangelical seminaries. He discovered that their studies did not improve their mental health (based on the standards of the larger medical community). But at both schools, there were cohorts of students whose mental health did improve over their three or four years of study. According to Meier, the key factor explaining this fact was that these students had been meditating on Scripture during their programs. Meier indicated that their understanding of Psalm 1 had played an essential role in prompting them to do this. Meditating on Scripture can play a critically crucial role in faithful Christian education. Students generally flourish when they meditate on Scripture. The Navigators movement has wisely counselled that we should be memorizing Scripture.

3. *Scripture norms all knowledge, including the academic disciplines.* Scripture should reside at the centre of our educational curricula, if realistically feasible. By contrast, what we could call the helper academic disciplines should remain just that, highly honoured but ancillary disciplines. Due to common grace, they genuinely help us to understand the world. They can also buttress the Christian faith. For example, an article in the *Smithsonian Magazine* for January–February 2023 supplies ‘scientific’ archaeological evidence that King David existed, a startling revelation for many Old Testament scholars who have doubted this. It is not especially wise to bet against the historicity of biblically described persons or events. The church father Justin Martyr wrote regarding the value of the helper disciplines, ‘Whatever things

22 Robert F. Lay, *Readings in Historical Theology: Primary Sources of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 298.

23 Jonathan Edwards, ‘A Personal Narrative’, *A Puritan’s Mind*, <https://worldea.org/yourls/47308>.

24 David Brainerd, *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd* (New Haven, CT: Converse, 1822), 50.

were rightly said among all men, are the property of Christians.’ But helper knowledge should not displace or subvert the Bible as the infallible, revealed Word of God.

As Christian humanists, the Reformers praised the value of the liberal arts, even though they recognized with Augustine that the origins of the liberal arts were pagan. In many regards, they thought much the same way as did the Roman Catholic Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), the Chancellor of Florence at the turn of the 15th century. In *The Defense of the Liberal Arts*, Salutati lavished praise on the value of these disciplines in enhancing the understanding and skills of students. But then he wisely stipulated that the liberal arts and philosophy should not undermine the Christian faith. Salutati brought the Byzantine Manuel Chrysoloras to teach Greek at the University of Florence, thereby re-introducing the Greek language to Europe.<sup>25</sup> At the time, relatively few European scholars knew Greek except in Islamic Spain. The contemporary Florentine historian Leonardo Bruni (1374–1444) observed, ‘Then first came knowledge of Greek, which had not been in use among us for seven hundred years. Chrysoloras of Byzantium, a man of noble birth and well versed in Greek letters, brought Greek learning to us.’<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther acknowledged that the recovery of Greek enhanced enormously the advance of the Protestant Reformation. He wrote, ‘For in comparison with the comments of all the fathers, the languages are as sunlight to shadow. Since then, it becomes Christians to use the Holy Scriptures as their own and only book.’<sup>27</sup>

Despite his appreciation of the liberal arts and classical culture, Salutati nonetheless wrote:

Let the mob of philosophers run after Aristotle or Plato or the pestilent Averroes or any better man if there is one—never mind about the name! I am satisfied with Jesus Christ alone, who while learning flourished in Greece and Italy and while Italy was crushing everything at her own pleasure by force of arms, ‘made foolish the wisdom of this world’—foolish, not through the wisdom of the wise nor the power of the strong, but through the foolishness of his preaching and his cross: through fishermen, not philosophers; through men of low estate, not those in worldly power.<sup>28</sup>

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25 James Hankins, ‘Greek Studies in Italy, From Petrarch to Bruni’, in *Petrarca e il Mondo Greco Atti del Convegno Internazianoale di Studi, Reggio Calabria, 26–30 Novembre 2001*, ed. Michele Feo, Vincenzo Fera, Paola Megna and Antonio Rollo, 2 vols. (Firenze, Italy: Le Lettere, 2007), 329–39.

26 N. G. Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy: Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 9–25.

27 Here is the fuller context of Luther’s comment: ‘What is the reason that our faith is thus put to shame? It is because we do not know languages. ... Hence it was also a stupid undertaking to attempt to learn the meaning of Scripture by reading the exposition of the fathers and their numerous books and glosses. Instead of this, men should have given themselves to the study of languages. For because they were without languages the dear fathers at times belabored a text with many words and yet caught barely an inkling of its meaning; their comment is half guess work, half error ... for in comparison with the comments of all the fathers, the languages are as sunlight to shadow. Since then, it becomes Christians to use the Holy Scriptures as their one and only book.’ Martin Luther, ‘To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany’, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47309>.

28 Coluccio Salutati, ‘A Letter in Defense of Liberal Arts’, in *The Italian Renaissance*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 17.

Calvin thought much the same way. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin cited pagan authors if what they wrote buttressed the Christian faith but critiqued them if they directly or by inference undermined the Christian faith.

In today's world, much magnificent knowledge is taught in the various disciplines. Students should learn what is the 'best' knowledge in their disciplines. At the same time, for students to have a better and fuller understanding of the world, they should also weigh the assumptions of their disciplines from a biblical point of view. After all, the contents of the ancillary disciplines are sometimes infused by methodological naturalism and are thus error-prone. Back in 1935, the Protestant liberal Harry Emerson Fosdick surprisingly warned, in a sermon entitled 'The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism', that 'modern culture' is not a fit, stable foundation upon which to base religious beliefs. Fosdick wrote, 'We cannot harmonize Christ himself with modern culture; what Christ does to modern culture is to challenge it.'<sup>29</sup>

For example, the premises of sciences, paradigmatically speaking, change over time when new data sometimes falsify or modify old data. Up until the mid-19th century, Scripture often remained in judgement of secular knowledge in the West. Thomas Huxley, a major proponent of Darwin, astutely noted this point. He indicated that the most significant trait of European intellectual life during the second half of the 19th century was the replacement of revealed knowledge (from the Bible) by natural knowledge informed by science. The helper disciplines, especially in the sciences, displaced and sometimes discredited the authority of Scripture for many academics.

On one occasion, I directed a week-long seminar on the integration of Christian faith and the disciplines at a large evangelical university. As an assignment, I asked the professors to draft a paper in which they described the methodological assumptions of their discipline at its origins and the methodological assumptions that one was currently supposed to accept to remain an engaged and respected player in the discipline. If the professors encountered assumptions inimical to the Christian faith, such as methodological naturalism, what were they going to do about this as Christian educators? The exercise was quite enlightening for some professors who had never engaged previously in such reflections. They discovered that they had taken on board more naturalistic assumptions than they had realized. The activity also highlighted the need for members of the Bible and theological departments to work graciously with these professors. The professors were experts in their fields but not especially confident that they knew how to apply Scripture to their disciplines.

A personal example of this real dilemma and its resolution might make this point clearer. I as an historian have genuinely needed help from my colleagues. I sought out a member of the Bible department at Trinity, asking for help with the exegesis of Isaiah 55:7–9. This passage is often cited by some historian colleagues as a warrant for claiming that the Lord's ways are so different from our own that we cannot recognize God's providence in human affairs. My Old Testament friend graciously explained to me that the comparison in Isaiah 55 has to do with the way of righteousness, which is the Lord's, compared with our way which is unrighteousness. The passage does not teach that we are totally incapable of recognizing God at work

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29 Harry Emerson Fosdick, 'The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism' (New York: Riverside Church, 1935).



through particular providence. The Lord does know when the sparrow falls, and he knows and cares when we or our students are hurting. John Calvin commented wisely that knowledge of God's providence is happiness whereas lack of knowledge of providence is misery.

In our quest for a biblically faithful Christian education, we really do need each other—experts in the helper disciplines and biblically faithful and generous members of Bible and theology departments who uphold a belief in the full truthfulness of Scripture. In these exchanges, Christian cordiality, generosity and humility are desirable coins of the evangelical realm for all parties in their interactions. We need to help and root for each other.

4. *Scripture teaches that Jesus ultimately wins despite the fact that the devil harries us as believers.* Luther was very sensitive to the fact that the devil harries us and wants to keep us away from meditating on Scripture. As previously noted, Luther observed that we are sometimes so vulnerable and weak that we may even need to pray that the Lord will give us the will to read Scripture and to pray the Lord's Prayer. In the context of our weakness, Luther provides us this wise counsel about praying and reading Scripture:

*Oratio:* Kneel down in your little room (Mt 6:6) and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.

*Meditatio:* You should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you see what the Holy Spirit means by them.

*Tentatio:* For as soon as God's word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word.

The devil engages in clever, malevolent and often seductive machinations. Nonetheless, in the lyrics of 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God', Luther tells us that one word will fell the evil one. That word is the name of Jesus. He must win the battle. When all is said and done, Jesus wins. Likewise, the Word of God, Holy Scripture, which speaks of Christ, wins. In 1521 at the Diet of Worms, this conviction emboldened Luther to take a world-transforming stand for a biblically based evangelical faith.

## Concluding thoughts

Martin Luther sometimes felt quite incapable of reforming the church of his day, including the schools. He testified, however, that the preached Word of God could more than handle the situation regarding the indulgence controversy. Luther also boldly claimed that by 1530, a reform of education in parts of Germany had taken place.

Like Luther, some of us may feel challenged in our pursuit of a biblically faithful Christian education. But hopefully, we are thoroughly convinced that the Lord can handle the situation through the power of his Holy Word, Scripture, which speaks of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as Jesus teaches in Luke 11:13, may we likewise call upon the Holy Spirit and ask for his power and wisdom each day.

Applying Jonathan Edwards's 'distinguishing marks of the Holy Spirit' to our ministry can help us to discern if what we are doing is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>30</sup> We are very much dependent upon the Lord's beneficent power and blessing in this marvellous vocation of seeking to engage in biblically faithful higher Christian education.

*Closing prayer:* Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you commanded us to send out labourers into your harvest. Of your infinite mercy, give us true teachers and ministers of your word. Put your saving gospel in their hearts and on their lips, that they may truly fulfil your command to preach nothing contrary to your holy word, and that we, so being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted and strengthened by your heavenly word, may do those things which are well pleasing to you and profitable to us; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

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30 Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2010).

# Wisdom for Cultural Challenges about Human Flourishing

Jennifer Marshall Patterson

At the Christian elementary school I attended in Wheaton, Illinois, there was a cement cornerstone with an inscription in all capital letters reading, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). The things we pass by every day tend to fade into a sort of wallpaper of life. What I passively absorbed as a child walking by that cornerstone, others actively pursued with patience and perseverance as a way of formation.

The school moved to a larger campus about 10 years ago, and so did the old cornerstone. It is displayed as prominently as ever in the new building. In the school’s document of core principles, the first item states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.”

For many years, this familiar proverb remained an unexamined truth to me—more wallpaper than way of life. By adulthood, I could begin to testify to its truth from observation. But in these last few years, I have been reflecting on *how* it is true. That is what proverbs are supposed to do: they work on us as we work on them. Their meaning grows in us as we grow in our knowledge of God’s word and the world around us.

But Proverbs and other wisdom literature do not just shape us cognitively. Wisdom is a tuning fork that brings our thoughts, our habits, our actions—our whole lives—into resonance with God’s design for us as human beings.

## Dislocated from design

We live in a culture dislocated from that design. At an individual level, the dislocation is manifest in struggles from opioid addiction to gender dysphoria. At a social level, our most heated policy debates are challenges to truths taught in the first chapters of Genesis, about what it means to be human: that we are created, in the image of God, male and female, made for each other in marriage, and made for right relationship with God, our fellow human beings, creation and ourselves.

A biblical theology of humanity begins in these first few, rich chapters of Genesis, and every chapter of Scripture after it could give us some insight about it. Rather than trying to summarize the vast biblical data on anthropology, here I will focus on a practical theology of *being* human, with wisdom as its central idea. I offer it as a sort of preamble or prolegomenon to deeper biblical and systematic theological exploration of what it means to be human. As preamble, it also forecasts the end for

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which we undertake such study: a theology of humanity is for the purpose of being truly human according to God's design.

This approach grows out of reflecting on Proverbs as a source of wisdom for public life during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Wisdom's urgency is striking as she stands at the crossroads and calls out at the city gates. Human lives are passing by, dislocated from their created design. She's urgent about her message for their sake.

Wisdom's relation to God's character and creation yields unique insight on our human existence and purpose. It offers coherence and meaning that elude the quest for peace pursued by so many around us. It shows us how our existence relates to God, to our neighbours and to the rest of reality. Proverbs presents wisdom as an active pursuit that ought to engage us continually. It is a deliberate path of formation. Biblical wisdom is the *way* of true flourishing, and the way to *convey* true flourishing.

It is worthwhile to consider three ways in which wisdom works to sharpen our focus on being human. First, wisdom shapes us to be truly human. Second, wisdom can restore a vision of true human flourishing. Third, wisdom directs our cultural engagement in a society with fragmented ideas about what it means to be human.

Christian wisdom beckons a world dislocated from its design back to a flourishing that it cannot generate on its own. In the midst of cultural challenges over human flourishing, what institutions of Christian education have to offer is wisdom, and specifically formation in wisdom. This is a unique and irreplaceable service that the church, institutions of Christian formation, and individual Christians can render to public life.

## Wisdom

### *What is wisdom?*

Wisdom is a way of life, and it leads to true human flourishing. Wisdom is an organic combination of character and worldview that generates know-how for the here and now. It is correct knowledge correctly applied, real-time in real life.

The complexity of our cultural moment certainly calls for such discernment. But biblical wisdom also addresses the simple and mundane. To focus on wisdom for the complex but to neglect it for the mundane is one of the mistakes that lead towards the folly Proverbs warns against.

Wisdom is living well. It brings our character and our discernment about the world around us into alignment with the way God has made the world for our good and his glory. It is comprehensive in its implications for our lives. As the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck once wrote, 'God never grants us time off in order not to be what we are supposed to be.'<sup>1</sup> We need the coherence of the way of wisdom as much as we need to offer it to the world.

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1 Herman Bavinck, 'The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good', trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 152.

### *Where is wisdom?*

1. *In the Word of God.* True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord: that is, hearing and embracing the Word of God (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Before Scripture becomes the *object* of our theological investigations of what it means to be human, it needs to shape us as *subjects*, to be truly human by being rightly related to God.

2. *In the works of God.* Wisdom is also found in the works of God in creation and providence. Proverbs tells us to consider ants (6:6, 30:25), oxen (14:4), charging bears (28:15) and vomiting dogs (26:11). These show us something about God's wisdom woven into creation, either by reflecting his design (e.g. how ants and oxen go about their work) or by showing the effects of sin at odds with it (e.g. angry bears and vomiting dogs). Observing in this way teaches us the habit of looking for purpose and design in all God's works of creation and providence. It forms in us the conviction that we exist in a world of coherence and meaning, not chaos and nihilism.

3. *In the weathering of life.* Experience teaches us wisdom as well. The buffeting of life makes us learn the limits of our temporal nature. These are the contours of our freedom; respecting them allows us to flourish. Wisdom grasps the critical distinction between Creator and creature, along with what that implies for a life rightly related to God and the world he has made.

One way in which these three sources of wisdom come together is when experience teaches us the practice of what John Stott called 'double-listening'—i.e. listening to the Word and the world.<sup>2</sup> The habit of hearing God's Word should make us better listeners to the aspirations and frustrations of our neighbours. The experience of walking in the way of wisdom gives us opportunity to testify—and not just with our words—to what satisfies our longings as human beings.

### *How does wisdom work?*

Most proverbs are shorter than the average tweet—and far more weighty. They're short and concrete in order to stick with us, so that we puzzle over them and ponder how to apply them. As any puzzle forces us to look at a problem from multiple angles, so a proverb teaches us the habit of looking for the inter-connectedness of reality. It pushes us to see beyond a scatterplot of data points to the patterns that reflect purpose in the world.

Alasdair MacIntyre famously begins his 1981 book *After Virtue* with a scene reminiscent of the science fiction novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In this scene, catastrophe has wiped out modern scientific infrastructure. Scientists, laboratories, academic literature and programs—everything is gone. Shards of information are all that remain of science. A later generation that lacks the knowledge to properly connect these remnants nevertheless goes about the business of what it calls 'science', oblivious to the fact that it is missing the framework that made it all cohere as a system that actually reflected reality.<sup>3</sup>

2 John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 27, cited in Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 2.

3 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 1–2.

This parable introduces MacIntyre's diagnosis of the incoherence of modern moral thought. It exists, he says, in 'fragments of a conceptual scheme'.<sup>4</sup> In other words, contemporary society's moments of moral consciousness no longer share a consistent framework of first principles. Public life today is characterized by conflicting moral impulses, particularly about what it means to be human. Public rhetoric pledges allegiance to human dignity, but policy undermines it in laws sanctioning abortion and physician-assisted suicide, for example.

In an age professing concern for the whole person, we have an awfully hard time simultaneously addressing the material and immaterial aspects of human existence. On one hand, anti-poverty policy has generally reduced the perception of human need to the material realm, while neglecting the breakdown of relationships that typically coincides with material hardship. On the other hand, gender identity policy proposals insist that a person's most fundamental identity is disembodied and immaterial.

### Cultural challenges

Policy is connected to the personal. In 2020, journalist Abigail Shrier released a book on the sudden rise of adolescent girls identifying as transgender. She calls it an 'epidemic' that is affecting many girls who never questioned their biological sex before encountering trans 'influencers' and joining friends in declaring themselves transgender.<sup>5</sup> Shrier is documenting some extreme responses to a couple of very basic questions that everyone faces: *Who am I? How do I fit?*

These are questions that we all ask in one form or another throughout life. We agonize about them as adolescents. At some point, we reach a degree of confidence and comfort about our answers, only to have that disrupted by the next life change—and so it continues. Much of life involves wrestling, consciously or subconsciously, with how to be comfortable in one's own skin.

Lieutenant Dan—Gary Sinise's character in the movie *Forrest Gump*—wrestled mightily in this way. In a famous scene of the movie, Lt. Dan is on the mast of a shrimp boat in a violent storm, raging against nature and the Almighty. A Vietnam War veteran, he lost both legs in an ambush, from which Forrest rescued him. Instead of being grateful, Lt. Dan is bitter that he was not left to die in the fight rather than made to live what he considered a 'useless' life without his legs. In the midst of the storm on the bayou, Lt. Dan is looking for a showdown with God—and he gets it.

The storm is a turning point. In the next scene on that boat, calm has settled on the water—and on Lt. Dan. He finally thanks Forrest for saving his life, flashes a smile, jumps out of the boat and back-floats peacefully in the sunset on the water. As Forrest tells us, 'He made his peace with God.'

The elements of this placid scene symbolize the holistic peace of existing in right relationship—first with God and then with self, others and the created world. This is the substance of a life of wisdom, and a life of true flourishing. This harmony of

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4 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2.

5 Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2020), xx, 25–26.

restored relationships overcomes humanity's dislocation from design. It responds to the questions of *who am I?* and *how do I fit?* with answers that are true to reality and satisfying to our souls.

*Who am I?* is a question that tries to make sense of individual existence and how different aspects of our nature and experience relate. *How do I fit?* is a question that looks to the social level to sort out how to live together. These questions are central to human flourishing.

Lt. Dan's story reminds us that no one ever has the luxury of answering these questions in the abstract. They're always embedded in the context of life experiences, which—like his—can be full of hardship, suffering and bitterness. They are deeply personal. They're also always caught in the midst of prevailing cultural winds; in the context of Forrest Gump's montage of cultural history, Lt. Dan's rage is a picture of one aspect of the angst around the Vietnam War era.

As for today's cultural wind patterns, two are particularly powerful in dislocating our concept of human flourishing. The first pattern is the ideas of control and autonomy. Their logic has led, at the extreme, to legitimizing abortion and physician-assisted suicide. The desire for control has also propelled the transhumanist quest to defy the limits of human nature, e.g. through cryogenic preservation with the goal of revival one day. A second set of cultural winds fragments our view of human nature by emphasizing either material aspects (as in anti-poverty policy) or immaterial aspects (as in gender identity policy), to the neglect of the other.

We could list other examples in these categories. But if these two currents dislocate our understanding of flourishing as individuals and society, how can wisdom restore it? Wisdom can re-establish a vision of true human flourishing in at least two ways: first, by affirming the dignity as well as the limits of human identity, and second, by focusing cultural engagement on doing justice to that identity.

## **Wisdom restores flourishing**

### *Human identity: dignity and limits*

With apologies to Jason Bourne of the action thriller movies, I am going to use the title of his first film to make a point about the reality of human existence as a 'born identity'. To be *born* is to have limits. We are not here because of our own agency. There is a givenness to our existence. Many of the facts of our lives are settled long before we can take responsibility for our actions. Part of true flourishing is to be reconciled to the reality of this givenness.

The drama of life plays out in the tension between what is fixed and what is free in our human nature. All of us experience this tension regularly. But much more seriously, for some people at some times, the tension between what is fixed and what is free becomes a crisis of identity. These deeply personal struggles can become policy challenges when they come with demands for approval or for material support enabling people to reject aspects of the givenness of created existence. We see this in the push for guaranteed access to gender transition treatments, for example.

On a universal level, the tension from our human limits is nowhere more acute than in the prospect of our own death. Dying and death are outside our control. The desire to deal with this loss of control has provoked advocacy for physician-assisted

suicide. Fear of losing autonomy and becoming a burden to loved ones are the top reasons people give for seeking doctors' help to end their lives.<sup>6</sup> Physician-assisted suicide denies the givenness of dying and death by seizing control to hasten death.

Transhumanism, on the other hand, strives to delay death indefinitely. It seeks to circumvent the dying process, at a minimum, and ultimately hopes to evade death entirely. Physician-assisted suicide and the transhumanist quest for immortality are asking for their own showdown with God as they bid for control over life's limits.

In sharpest contrast to this, the wise person makes peace with God about the boundaries of dying and death. He or she can do so because to be born is not just to have limits. It is also to be created for transcendence—and, in spite of sin, to have the sure hope of transcendence because our Creator has become our Redeemer.

This hope gives a whole new outlook on the approach to death. It allows us to embrace a theology of aging that sees meaning in aging as 'sign and preparation for Sabbath rest', in the words of scholar Autumn Alcott Ridenour. (Here, 'Sabbath rest' recalls the term's use in the book of Hebrews to describe eternal existence in glory.)<sup>7</sup>

Sabbath rest is the ultimate calling for those united to Christ, and aging is preparation for that calling. This outlook can see the good in accepting limits, precisely because it keeps its sights set on transcendence.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing these boundaries enables us to value the days at hand differently. It encourages us to prioritize and make commitments to people and projects in light of an eternal perspective.<sup>9</sup>

The English Standard Version's 'Daily Bible Reading Plan' has Psalm 90 scheduled for December 31. It is an especially poignant psalm for the end of the year, because it is about reckoning with the passing of our lives. It also ties this practice of reckoning with our limits back to wisdom: 'So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom' (Ps 90:12).

Psalm 90 begins where wisdom begins: by acknowledging our Creator. 'Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"' (Ps 90:1–3).

Accepting our created dependence includes acknowledging God's control not only over the number of our days, but also over our capacity for joy in the midst of struggle. 'Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil' (Ps 90:14–15).

This kind of formation in wisdom shapes us and our cultural engagement in ways that will have public impact. With this in mind, and reflecting on the cultural challenges mentioned above, one of the most significant things we can do to counter the transhumanist quest is to age well. Each day that we grow older with grace and peace, cultivating communities that see aging as a sign and preparation for Sabbath

6 Kevin M. Simmons, 'Suicide and Death with Dignity', *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* 5, no. 2 (2018): 437.

7 Autumn Alcott Ridenour, *Sabbath Rest as Vocation: Aging Toward Death* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 9.

8 Ridenour, *Sabbath Rest as Vocation*, 9, 13.

9 Ridenour, *Sabbath Rest as Vocation*, 240.



rest, is a day that shows how to live with limits while looking forward to the reality of transcending them.

Across the life cycle, every long struggle with disease or disability, or every refusal to abort a child with Down syndrome or other genetic imperfections, becomes another opportunity to tell the old, old story of creation groaning under the effects of sin and death, beginning to be renewed through Christ's redemption, and headed for glory. This is what has made Joni Eareckson Tada's ministry so powerful. She has spent her life singing a new song about living with disability and longing for heaven. That is a song we all need to learn.

In the days ahead, as technology advances, we will be pressed to discern and describe more and more particularly what makes us human. Theology, philosophy and the sciences have important work to do here, as do the humanities and the arts. (Notably, one of the first publications of the President's Council on Bioethics, launched by President George W. Bush in 2001 and led by Leon Kass, was a literary anthology called *Being Human*.) But perhaps most powerfully of all, we need to embody what it means to be truly human, especially in the context of community.

### *Cultural engagement and the character of community*

The character of a community is formed by its view of the human person. Our cultural engagement ought to call on our society to live up to the high view of human dignity that it professes and to accept the limits of being human that it increasingly denies.

We must recognize the material and spiritual dimensions of human life and how they interact in complex ways in many social challenges today. To be human is to be relational, and true human flourishing depends on right relationships with God, self, others and the world.

What we believe about the image of God in humanity determines the character of community as well. Herman Bavinck, a contemporary of Abraham Kuyper, was a systematic theologian whose work on the doctrine of humanity, and of creation generally, is very helpful. Bavinck emphasized three aspects of the image of God that show the fullness of the picture we need. First, the whole human person images God. Second, both male and female image God, individually and relationally. Finally, the whole of humanity, around the globe and through all the centuries of human history, images God.<sup>10</sup>

'The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being', Bavinck wrote. 'Only humanity in its entirety ... is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.'<sup>11</sup> This observation has far-reaching implications throughout our culture and across the full range of policy issues.

If our concept of the human person shapes our communities, those communities shape us as persons as well. Yuval Levin, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote an essay called 'The Case for Wooden Pews'<sup>12</sup> that explores the steep

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10 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 533, 554–62, 576–78.

11 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 577.

12 Yuval Levin, 'The Case for Wooden Pews', *Deseret Magazine*, 13 January 2021, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47310>.

decline in Americans' confidence in institutions, including religious institutions. His investigation is more than academic because institutions teach us the skills we need to pursue shared goals in community—just the kind of habits that seem so out of reach in our politics right now.

Levin suggests that one reason for the decline is that the public does not trust institutions' ability to form people of integrity who will practice what they preach. If religious institutions are going to restore trust, he says, they must exhibit 'not that they are continuous with the larger culture but that they are capable of addressing its deficiencies—that they can speak with legitimate authority and be counted on to do the work of molding souls and shaping character'.

Yet some institutions seem to have abdicated that role and have instead become forums for the expressive individualism found in the broader culture. They have become, in Levin's words, 'platforms for performance and prominence'. To the extent that this is true of religious institutions, it has created scepticism that they can express truth with authority.

Despite these challenges, Levin sees a critical role for religious congregations and organizations in tackling our society's loss of trust in institutions. That is because the experience of religious formation is one of the most promising ways to multiply the kind of commitments our society needs to rebuild trust.

These are the habits that deliberate formation in wisdom can teach, in ways that will bear fruit at the personal and the policy levels. At the same time, the freedom to continue to play this role in society is increasingly challenged. That is one more reason why we must preserve religious freedom, besides the fact that it represents a proper recognition by public policy of the transcendent aspects of human existence.

## Conclusion

Wisdom is a deliberate path of formation that leads to true flourishing. As such, it ought to shape us, our institutions and our cultural engagement. Wisdom combines character, worldview and the skill to act well in current circumstances. It draws discernment from Scripture, creation and experience about how God has made the world for our flourishing.

We live in a culture that is experiencing dislocation and fragmentation: the dislocation of autonomy and fragmentation in its view of the human person. Personal and policy challenges emerge as answering the core questions of *Who am I?* and *How do I fit?* becomes more and more confusing. People need answers about individual and social existence that are true to reality and satisfying to the soul.

In relation to this need, Christian schools, as institutions committed to formation in wisdom, have two critical tasks. The first task is to establish a witness to true human identity that affirms human dignity and accepts temporal limits while aspiring to transcendence. The second is to focus our cultural engagement on calling our communities to do justice to this understanding of human flourishing.

These two aspects—individual identity and society's reflection of it—also offer a way of organizing our approach to the many topics that deal with anthropology. There is much more work to be done in theology and across the disciplines on what it means to be human. Much of it will in fact need to be interdisciplinary—theology and philosophy working together, for example.

Christian education is uniquely poised to undertake this work because it begins with the conviction of the coherence of all the academic disciplines, and of the coherence of human existence. As a primary step, this conviction must first form us and our institutions. May God's wisdom shape us so that we faithfully witness to biblical truth about being human.

# Theological Commitments of Distinctively Christ-Centred Higher Education

Nathan A. Finn

Once upon a time, almost all higher education could be considered Christian higher education. Historians have ably chronicled and sometimes lamented the secularization of higher education in the West, and particularly in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Many formerly church-related universities have abandoned their foundational faith commitments in pursuit of academic prestige and cultural respectability. Other current church-related schools maintain historic ties with their sponsoring bodies, but the faith and practice of those Christian traditions have little meaningful impact upon the ethos of the university. Some of these nominally Christian universities nurture ambitions to be the next Princeton or Vanderbilt, academically prestigious schools that have mostly ‘outgrown’ their Christian heritage.

As universities have drifted from their faith commitment, they have simultaneously rejected (or at least downplayed) a vision of higher education driven by Christian theology. In renouncing or shelving theology, formerly Christian and nominally Christian universities have lost their institutional ‘soul’, replacing it with non-theological alternatives such as their unique institutional traditions, a semi-religious or even non-religious commitment to the liberal arts or to research, or simply the (understandable) desire to be as large and influential as resources will allow.<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hauerwas laments that this loss of theological vision means fewer faith-related institutions will leave behind ‘ruins’—future material evidence of a vibrant Christian academic culture that glorified God and whose influence endured for generation after generation.<sup>3</sup>

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

2 See Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Allerman and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017).

3 Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 33–44.

In this essay, I address some of the core theological commitments that constitute a distinctively Christ-centred education. I argue that sound theology should inform every aspect of the life of a distinctively Christ-centred institution, from the classroom to the chapel, the cafeteria, the ball field, the dorm room and the faculty meeting. I direct most of my comments to college and university contexts, since that is my own academic context. However, I spent the first half of my career teaching in a seminary, and I continue to teach periodically as an adjunct for a couple of seminaries. Based on this experience, I believe that much of what I argue can be adapted to a seminary context, especially as many seminaries continue to add new programs of study that have traditionally been housed in colleges and universities. When appropriate, I address how my arguments apply more directly to seminaries and similar institutions that are more narrowly focused on theological education.

A commitment to Christian orthodoxy animates faithful institutions, re-animates schools that have experienced spiritual mission drift, and contributes to a vision of holistic human flourishing that simply cannot be replicated in secular or post-Christian schools. Rather than downplay or even simply assume the importance of theology, our institutions should wear our theological commitments on our sleeve, thus allowing them to guide our kingdom work of Christ-centred higher education.

### Defining theology

When people hear the word *theology*, they often immediately think of either the academic discipline of theology or the deeper sort of preaching one might hear from a highly educated pastor. And that is certainly a true and important way to think of theology. For example, Millard Erickson defines theology as ‘that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life’.<sup>4</sup> This sort of technical definition is appropriate for those studying Christian doctrine in an academic setting.

However, this is not the only way, or even the primary way, we should conceive of theology. As R. C. Sproul reminds us, everyone is a theologian.<sup>5</sup> Theology is for *all* Christians, the overwhelming majority of whom will never be trained pastors or theology professors. Also, technical definitions such as Erickson’s can sometimes unintentionally divorce belief and behaviour, two ideas that are closely connected in the Scriptures. I use technical definitions when I teach or write on Christian doctrine and the history of Christian theology, but for the purpose of this essay, I have in mind a more foundational understanding of theology that underlies the sort of work undertaken by theological educators and ordained clergy.

Etymologically, the word *theology* literally means the knowledge of God (Greek: *theos* = God, *logos* = knowledge). With this in mind, here is my ‘everyday’ definition of theology: *thinking rightly about God and his world for the sake of living rightly before God in his world*. The goal of theology is not simply to learn true information

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4 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 23.

5 R. C. Sproul, *Everyone’s a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019).

about God, valuable as that is. Theology is about knowing God, loving God, and living out that loving knowledge of God in this world that he so loves (Jn 3:16).<sup>6</sup> Theology is an expression of the Great Commandment, forming us into better lovers of God and lovers of others (Mt 22:34–40). Think about it this way: to love any other subject of inquiry too much is to commit the sin of idolatry. But the subject of inquiry in theology is God himself, so not only can we not love the Subject too much, but we are indeed commanded to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30).

Theological reflection is a form of Christian worship because we are worshipping the Lord with our minds. It is also a form of Christian discipleship because part of what it means for us to follow Jesus is to understand ourselves, others and the world around us in ways that reflect his understanding of these things. As Keith Johnson argues, ‘The traditional goal of Christian theology is to develop a better understanding of God so that we can think and speak rightly about God within the context of a life governed by our faith in Christ and our discipleship to him in community with other Christians.’<sup>7</sup>

Christian schools are a particular type of community where we learn to love rightly and live out some of the faith and discipleship implications of our theology. This is why I like to refer to my approach to Christ-centred education as ‘intellectual discipleship’ or ‘academic discipleship’.<sup>8</sup> One way in which many of our schools articulate their respective theological identities is by adopting creeds, confessions and other guiding theological documents.

## Creeds and confessions

One of the most meaningful moments of my own vocational journey came when I was elected to the faculty of a previous school where I worked and publicly signed that institution’s confessional statements. In the years since, I have affirmed a number of similar statements, whether verbally in a job interview or by signing a contract that obligates me to certain confessional commitments. The schools represented within the ecosystem of faithful higher education approach confessional statements in many different ways, often reflective of their denominational affiliations or unique histories.

Some schools adopt denominational confessional statements such as the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Baptist Faith and Message, while others have their own statements unique to their institutions. Some schools affirm classical creedal standards such as the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed, while others have adopted more narrowly focused documents like the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy or the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Some schools require strict affirmation by all faculty and administrators, while others simply use a confession to provide some general theological boundaries. I am firmly convinced that all

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6 I recommend that the first two books every student of theology should read are J. I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993) and James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

7 Keith Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), 34.

8 Nathan A. Finn, ‘Academic Discipleship and the Baptist University’, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 35–51.

seminaries should be robustly confessional, making their theological commitments clear, and agreeing to do their work within the boundaries of those commitments. However, universities are a bit more complicated.

I describe North Greenville University, where I work, as ‘semi-confessional’. All faculty at North Greenville affirm an understanding of, and willingness not to advocate contrary to, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and our University’s Statement on Human Flourishing, a document we drafted in 2020.<sup>9</sup> However, our Board of Trustees, our Senior Leadership Council, and our Christian Studies faculty affirm without reservation the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, our Statement on Human Flourishing, and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. These documents constitute a doctrinal thermostat, if you will, that sets the temperature of our theological identity at North Greenville. They are not doctrinal clubs used to beat down minority views, but they do establish the doctrinal ‘house rules’ for those who choose to be part of our community.

Regardless of a particular institution’s approach to confessions, here is the wider principle: creeds, confessions and other guiding documents can reinforce that school’s theological identity and provide guardrails against theological drift. Faculty members should familiarize themselves with the theological identity of their institutions, even if they are personally part of a different denomination or confessional tradition from the one to which their school is related. They should learn from their school’s tradition and see how some of its theological emphases might help them think about teaching, scholarship, service or leadership. Every denomination or confessional tradition is part of what David Dockery and Timothy George call the Great Tradition of Christian Thinking and what Robert Louis Wilken calls the Christian Intellectual Tradition.<sup>10</sup> There are theological riches to be mined from every corner of that tradition.

## Evangelicalism

One of the major streams within the Christian Intellectual Tradition is evangelicalism. Most of the faculty or prospective faculty who are reading this essay are probably evangelicals of some sort or other. Many likely teach at evangelical institutions of some sort, or perhaps they have been educated in one or more evangelical schools. As a convictional Southern Baptist, I am a type of evangelical.<sup>11</sup> North Greenville University is in the Southern Baptist tradition, which makes it an evangelical

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9 North Greenville University, ‘A Statement on Human Flourishing’, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47311>.

10 David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student’s Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Robert Louis Wilken, ‘The Christian Intellectual Tradition’, *First Things*, June 1991, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47312>.

11 Southern Baptists have long debated their relationship to evangelicalism. See James Leo Garrett, E. Glenn Hinson and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994); David S. Dockery, Ray Van Neste and Jerry Tidwell, eds., *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011). I discuss my own evangelical self-understanding in Nathan A. Finn, ‘Southern Baptists and Evangelicals: Passing on the Faith to the Next Generation’, in *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism*, 231–60.

institution. All our administrators and faculty are evangelicals of some sort. The vast majority of our students are professing evangelical Christians.

I am well aware that the words *evangelical* and *evangelicalism* mean different things to different people. There are historical, political, journalistic, sociological and theological definitions of evangelicalism, each carrying with them both merits and shortcomings. Not surprisingly, some believers push back against the evangelical label for a variety of reasons. Some suggest that real or perceived shortcomings make the evangelical label unhelpful. Others argue that traditional denominational labels are more valuable than the more ambiguous term *evangelical*. Still others go so far as to suggest that evangelicalism is a myth invented by scholars and pundits.

I do not think it would be helpful to wade deeply into this debate here. If you wish to do so, I recommend two books, one by an historian and one by a theologian: Thomas Kidd's *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* and Michael Reeves's *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity*.<sup>12</sup> I would also recommend the collection of essays *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, which includes reflections by four evangelical theologians.<sup>13</sup>

Evangelicals are not a people characterized by a particular theological system so much as we emphasize certain distinctives that can be found across denominational traditions and ethnic differences. These evangelical distinctives are rooted in the ecumenical consensus of ancient Christianity, were refined during the Reformation and post-Reformation period, and were given particular attention during the age of Enlightenment and 18th-century spiritual awakenings. The emphasis on heart religion found among the English Puritans and the Continental Pietists became a part of evangelical DNA, even as that DNA owned and sometimes revised the confessional identities and spiritual emphases of the denominational traditions that emerged from the 17th century onward.<sup>14</sup>

Historian David Bebbington has offered the most influential summary of evangelical distinctives with his 'quadrilateral' of biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism (cross-centredness) and activism (especially evangelism and mission).<sup>15</sup> Whereas Bebbington's goal is historical *description*, theologians have often provided more *prescriptive* accounts of evangelical theology that dig deeper into each of the four distinctives.<sup>16</sup> Until about a century ago, the overwhelming majority of American Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists affirmed evangelical distinctives. The same is true of newer traditions that came along later, including the various 19th-century Holiness movements, turn-of-the-century Pentecostals, or the plethora of non-

12 Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

13 Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

14 See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

15 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1–19.

16 For example, see the contributions by Albert Mohler and Kevin Bauder to Naselli and Hansen, *Four Views on the Spectrum*, as well as Michael Bird's textbook *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).



denominational movements and independent churches and ministries that identified with fundamentalism.

African American churches and denominations also normally embraced evangelical distinctives. However, their contextual expressions of those distinctives have been shaped by their history of enslavement, their experience of ongoing racial injustices after emancipation, and their continued minority status. Thus, we can speak of a black church tradition that is often *evangelical* but also somewhat disconnected from *evangelicalism*, which continues to be a predominantly white tradition.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, many African Americans of evangelical conviction wrestle with where exactly they fit into an evangelical movement that has at times tolerated or even affirmed white supremacy.<sup>18</sup> This tension has only increased over the past 15 years, during which time racial identity politics has characterized a growing number of voters in both major American political parties, incidents of racially motivated violence against African Americans and other ethnic minorities have increased, and progressive movements such as Black Lives Matter and anti-racism have advocated for social justice in ways that are at times incompatible with traditional evangelical theology. Today, many evangelicals are still wrestling with how best to think about racism and move toward greater racial reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

These groups are different patches on the quilt of American evangelicalism. Each patch is distinct in some ways, yet they are composed of the same basic fabric. In the remainder of this essay, I address four key threads in that evangelical fabric: Bible, humanity, gospel and witness. These threads, and the doctrines related to each of them, help to shape the commitments of the sort of Christ-centred schools that affiliate with groups like the International Alliance for Christian Education, as well as other theologically and morally orthodox universities, Bible colleges and theological seminaries. As such, they should inform how faculty in those institutions should pursue their vocations as Christ-centred educators.

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17 See Carl F. Ellis Jr., *Free at Last? The Gospel in the African American Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020); Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York: Penguin, 2021).

18 For more on this topic, see Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008); Anthony B. Bradley, *Aliens in the Promised Land: Why Minority Leadership Is Overlooked in White Christian Churches and Institutions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011); Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020); William Pannell, *The Coming Race Wars: A Cry for Justice, from Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021).

19 Helpful recent works on this topic include Isaac Adams, *Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022); Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: A Kingdom Race Theology for Reconciliation, Unity, and Justice* (Chicago: Moody, 2022); Derwin L. Gray, *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and the First Christians Knew, about Racial Reconciliation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2022); George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022).

## Bible

Evangelicals have always had a high regard for the Bible because it is God's written words to humans.<sup>20</sup> Two key New Testament texts have especially influenced the way evangelicals think about the Bible:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16–17)<sup>21</sup>

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1:19–21)

This is what the Bible says about itself. God himself has inspired ('breathed out') the Scriptures, even though men wrote the various books of the Bible. The Holy Spirit led men to write God's words and not just their own opinions. Because these human words are also God's words, they are fully authoritative in all matters to which they speak. As Wayne Grudem notes, 'The authority of Scripture means that all the words of Scripture are God's word in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.'<sup>22</sup>

During the Reformation era, our theological forebears used the slogan *sola Scriptura* ('Scripture alone') to summarize this view: the Bible alone is God's written word, so it alone is our ultimate authority for faith and practice. Today, most evangelical confessions of faith devote their first article to the doctrine of Scripture. For example, this is the first article in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, my denomination's confessional standard:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.<sup>23</sup>

It is also common (though not universal) for evangelical theologians to articulate their understanding of Scripture in the early chapters of their published systematic

20 For helpful introductions to the doctrine of Scripture from an evangelical perspective, see David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995); John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Mark D. Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

21 All biblical references are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

22 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 73.

23 The Baptist Faith and Message (2000), 'The Scriptures', <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47313>.

theologies. They then appeal to Scripture in developing the various doctrines such as God, creation, humanity, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the church. The very placement of Scripture in these theological treatises suggests that biblical authority is foundational to all our subsequent theological reflection.

Remember that evangelicals are a patchwork quilt of different denominational and confessional traditions. This necessarily means we debate the best way to articulate any number of theological topics. Within Christ-centred institutions, there are varying perspectives on doctrinal matters such as whom and how to baptize, predestination and perseverance, the continuation or cessation of miraculous spiritual gifts, the role of women in ministry, and the meaning of the millennium. Nevertheless, despite these honest differences of interpretation, educators who teach in these schools hold their respective views because they really do believe those views align better with Scripture than other alternatives. For evangelicals, if a doctrine is not biblical, then it is not correct.

I argue that Christian colleges and universities should be *radically* biblical in their orientation. I am not using this term in its most common contemporary understanding that someone or something is extreme or even fringe. Rather, I am highlighting the older usage of that term, when *radical* described a root (Latin *radix*), foundational or basic principle. Scripture should be the root from which the Christian 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 lazy proof-texting or some sort of overly simplistic biblicism, but rather a commitment to 'renewed primary engagement with the actual foundation of Western intellectual culture'.<sup>24</sup>

In a Christian university, one key aspect of faculty development should be helping professors learn to interrogate the presuppositions of their disciplines biblically, something most were never taught to do in secular graduate schools. Foundational courses in the core curriculum should help students learn to read and interpret the Bible, think biblically, and cultivate 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>25</sup>

The Bible is the only compass that always points to the 'true north' of faithfulness. I urge scholars of biblical and theological studies to train ministers to teach the Scriptures faithfully, and at least some of them should write works that help other evangelicals understand how to read and interpret the Bible. In so doing, they will help other evangelical scholars connect the dots from the Bible to all of life. Everything we say and do as Christ-centred educators needs to align with the Bible, as best

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24 David Lyle Jeffrey, 'Introduction', in *The Bible and the University*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 9.

25 Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 307–8.

we understand it, or we run the risk of our compass becoming defective and leading us into mission drift.

## Humanity

The second evangelical thread is the doctrine of humanity. This is a far larger topic than can be developed in a short essay. For the sake of space, I offer a 'mere evangelical' theological anthropology based upon the teachings of Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

Humans are created beings who, alone among God's creatures, reflect his divine image and represent the pinnacle of God's creative actions. These truths are the most important basis for any claims we make about inherent human dignity and the sanctity of human life. Humans are composed of both material and immaterial components, often referred to as the body and the soul or spirit. Although some theologians refer to us as embodied souls and others as ensouled bodies, the wider point is that we are created to be holistic creatures who relate to both God and other humans. Humans are created as gendered beings, either male or female; one's gender is fixed by divine intention, and males and females are designed to complement each other in the context of a one-flesh union that results in their flourishing and the procreation of the human race. Obviously, every one of these aforementioned claims is hotly contested in American culture today, and some of the most significant external threats to Christ-centred higher education result because traditional evangelicals and other orthodox Christians hold these classic convictions to be true.

Though we are the pinnacle of God's good creation, tragically, humans are fallen. We are sinful rebels against God's just rule, with devastating consequences for both our race and the rest of the created order. Sin corrupts every part of our lives to varying degrees, results in a spiritual separation between us and God, and distorts all our relationships with other people. Yet despite our sin, God continues to love humanity, desires to be reconciled with his sinful human creatures, and has taken decisive steps to bring about that reconciliation through the saving actions of Jesus Christ. I say more on this below.

Finally, because of God's common or creational grace, humans are not as sinful as we could possibly be, and we still have a divine mandate to exercise dominion over God's creation and be sub-creators of human culture. The family, community, politics, education, the arts and every other human sphere endure; however, their original design has been corrupted, and each will one day be redeemed.

A proper doctrine of humanity is central to a Christ-centred understanding of higher education. Our students, colleagues, alumni, donors, partners—every one of them matters because they are each created in God's image. As Francis Schaeffer memorably argued, in God's eyes there are no little people.<sup>27</sup> Academic disciplines matter because they educate students for innumerable vocations where God's image bearers fulfil the dominion mandate. Because of the fall, each academic discipline

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26 For helpful introductions to theological anthropology from an evangelical perspective, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); John S. Hammett and J. Katie McCoy, *Humanity* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2023).

27 Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Little People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

and professional field is corrupted to varying degrees from its original creational design. Nevertheless, a rightly ordered approach to the liberal arts helps students to understand authentic human flourishing before they begin to engage more deeply with their chosen disciplines.<sup>28</sup>

At different times in Christian history, different theological concerns bubble up to the top, becoming the focus of controversy and refinement because of temptations and threats from within the church (heretics) and outside the church (scoffers). If Jesus delays his return, future historians may well consider the early decades of the 21st century as the era when the church was forced to clarify theological anthropology in response to cultural challenges. Christ-centred higher education has a strategic role to play in reminding all of us what it really means to be human. And biblical and theological scholars in particular have a special obligation to form ministers who are committed to a faithful understanding of the doctrine of humanity so that they can help others think rightly about who we are and Whose we are.

## Gospel

The third evangelical thread is the gospel. Evangelicals have always prioritized the gospel; indeed, our very name reflects the centrality of the gospel to our identity (*evangel* = gospel). The gospel is at once the grandest concept in all the universe and a truth so simple that a young child can believe it. It is the announcement about what God has done, is doing and will do one day to rescue sinners and redeem the created order.

In *The Explicit Gospel*, Matt Chandler makes a helpful distinction between what he calls the ‘gospel in the air’ and the ‘gospel on the ground’.<sup>29</sup> The gospel in the air is Chandler’s way of referring to the grand biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. This grand biblical narrative is the central plot line of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. The main character is the triune God. The plot summary is that this God who created all things for his glory, including his human creatures, is now restoring everything that has been corrupted by sin and its consequences through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

This grand biblical narrative has been called the ‘true story of the whole world’ and is often also considered a helpful way to summarize a biblical worldview.<sup>30</sup> Many of the most important creedal statements in the ancient church, including the Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed, were other ways to summarize this big-picture vision of the gospel that is announced across the storyline of the Bible.

Whether you resonate with the ancient creeds or simply prefer to summarize the grand biblical narrative like Chandler, here is the takeaway: every other story truly

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28 See Jeffrey C. Davis and Philip G. Ryken, eds., *Liberal Arts for the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Gene C. Fant Jr., *The Liberal Arts: A Student’s Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

29 Matt Chandler with Jared Wilson, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). For other helpful works related to the gospel, see J. D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011); Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Deep: Reveling in the Excellencies of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

30 Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020).

makes sense only when framed within the context of the ‘story of stories’. This includes the stories of Christ-centred academic institutions, whose self-understandings, missions, core values, priorities, and strategic initiatives should be animated by the truths summarized in the grand biblical narrative. It also includes the stories of our respective academic disciplines. What about each discipline reflects God’s creative goodness? What has been corrupted by sinful ideas, attitudes and actions? What does it look like to think about and engage with each discipline redemptively? What does it mean to worship God and serve others within the unique contours of each discipline? Part of the task of Christ-centred faculty development is to help educators to think about these questions.<sup>31</sup>

The second understanding of the gospel, which Chandler calls the gospel on the ground, is often summarized as God, Man, Christ, Response. This is probably the more common way evangelicals think about the gospel. The triune God created all things, including humans, who alone among all his creatures reflect his divine image. He intends for us to love and adore him, but because of the original sin of the earliest humans, we are all sinners by nature and by choice. Because of God’s love for sinful humans, his eternal Son became a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who unlike each of us perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father for every moment of his life. Not only this, but Jesus also freely offered himself up as a sacrifice on the cross on our behalf, bearing God’s just wrath for our sins and conquering the powers of darkness. After being dead and buried for parts of three days, Jesus was resurrected—he came back to life. Whoever repents of his sins and trusts Jesus Christ alone as his King and Saviour is born again and will be forgiven of his sins, be justified by grace, receive everlasting life and be adopted into God’s family as his spiritual child for all eternity.

Another task of Christ-centred education is to be unashamed of the gospel and its power to transform lives. There should be no doubt that a Christian institution bows the knee to the kingship of Jesus. One fruit of the gospel is that such institutions exist to bring him glory by offering an education that is rooted in, reflects and commends that good news. Christian schools should hire faculty and staff who give credible evidence that they have believed these truths and are committed followers of Jesus Christ. This commitment should be evidenced not only in the professor’s personal piety, important as that is, but in how he or she actually engages in tasks such as teaching, research, advising, mentoring, leading colleagues and resourcing student needs.

Faculty development programs in colleges and universities should help professors grow in their own faith and mature in learning how to integrate the faith into their teaching and research.<sup>32</sup> Theological seminaries and Bible colleges should allow the gospel to guide their identity and frame their vision for theological education. Theological educators should help present and future ministers to best understand what it means to get the gospel right (orthodoxy), get the gospel into believers

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31 See Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy: Teaching at the Intersection of Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 115–32; Jacob Shatzer, *Faithful Learning: Basic Doctrines for Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2023).

32 I reflect on the importance of integrating one’s subjective personal faith and the objective Christian faith in Nathan A. Finn, ‘The Integration of Faith and Learning: More than a Prayer’, IACE website, 4 February 2020, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47314>.

(spiritual formation), and get the gospel out to others (evangelism), so that they can go and do likewise in their churches and other ministry contexts.

## Witness

Evangelicals have always been a people deeply committed to public witness. I use this term intentionally because it is broad enough to capture words and deeds, evangelism and social action, missions and service. All these overlapping aspects of witness should be part of what makes a Christ-centred institution distinctive.<sup>33</sup> In an effort to capture this holistic sense of witness, I want to engage with one of the most important evangelical documents of the previous generation: the Lausanne Covenant.

In 1974, the famed evangelist Billy Graham convened an International Congress on World Evangelization in the city of Lausanne, Switzerland. The meeting was attended by evangelists, missionaries, theologians and other Christian leaders from over 150 nations. The congress adopted a statement called the Lausanne Covenant, which was drafted by a committee chaired by the famous British pastor-theologian John Stott. The Lausanne Covenant was not a denominational confession, but rather was intended to be a pan-evangelical statement for believers throughout the world.

The Lausanne Covenant weaves together the threads of Bible, humanity and gospel but applies them to the topic of Christian witness. The covenant begins with a brief introduction noting that the reason for the gathering was to advance the cause of global evangelism. The drafters confess, 'We believe the Gospel is God's good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ's commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples of every nation.'<sup>34</sup> This, of course, is a reference to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20.

Next, the Lausanne Covenant addresses the doctrine of God, who 'has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of his name'. We are Christians because of God's eternal mission, and as his people, we are subsequently sent out as a part of that mission as his agents of redemption (Jn 20:21).

Scripture is confessed to be God's infallible written word, addressed to all people, for the purpose of bringing men and women to salvation. The Holy Spirit 'illuminates the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God'. The Bible is for the whole church, in every place, and in every age.

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33 For helpful introductions to the sort of holistic witness affirmed in this essay, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking The Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Mission of the Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014).

34 'The Lausanne Covenant', <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47315>. All subsequent citations of the document come from this edition. See also John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 3 (Lausanne, Switzerland: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1975), <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47316>.

The covenant then speaks to the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. This statement is worth quoting in its entirety:

We affirm that there is only one Saviour and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognise that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and people. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as 'the Saviour of the world' is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to invite everyone to respond to him as Saviour and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord.

This is a robust evangelical defence of the exclusivity of Christ, the efficacy of his saving work on behalf of sinners, the necessity of personal conversion through repentance and faith, and the importance of global evangelism among all peoples.

Building on these foundational evangelical themes, the bulk of the Lausanne Covenant focuses upon key mission themes such as evangelism, Christian social responsibility, cultural engagement, Christian education, spiritual warfare, persecution and religious freedom. The final two articles address the empowering of the Holy Spirit for mission and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Of particular interest for our purposes, the covenant considers both evangelism and faith-motivated works of justice, mercy and reconciliation to be crucial to Christian witness.

This holistic approach to witness was hotly debated at the Lausanne Congress. Billy Graham preferred a narrower emphasis on evangelism, while John Stott, influenced by non-Anglo missiologists, preferred a more holistic view of mission wherein evangelism and social activism were each seen as Christian responsibilities that reinforced each other. Stott's views carried the day, and he further developed his holistic vision of witness in his 1975 book *Christian Mission in the Modern World*.<sup>35</sup>

Lausanne reminds us that evangelicalism is a global movement, that witness is a pan-evangelical commitment rooted in our understanding of Scripture and the gospel, and that witness includes evangelism, social action and cultural engagement. The sort of holistic, evangelical vision of witness found in the Lausanne Covenant

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35 InterVarsity Press has published an updated version of this book, supplemented and expanded by missional theologian and Stott protégé Christopher Wright. See John Stott and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, updated and expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015). For the debate over holistic witness, see Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137–43.



ought to be a key commitment of Christ-centred schools. As I suggested above, Christian higher education is a uniquely academic form of Christian discipleship that builds upon and extends the formation that happens in local congregations, directing its application more intentionally into the various disciplines and professions to which our students are called. As such, our schools are part of the mission of the triune God to redeem the spiritually lost and restore the corrupted created order to its original design and ultimate intention, which is to glorify him through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Theological educators should form students as both orthodox theologians and dedicated soul-winners, both skilful and wise pastors and compassionate advocates for those in need. Faculty serving in Christ-centred colleges and universities should embrace an unapologetically evangelistic posture that permeates every aspect of their communities. Lest I be misunderstood, although evangelistic initiatives are often a core aspect of campus ministry at Christian institutions, every faculty member should be a maturing believer who is willing to share the gospel with unbelieving students (and others) as a matter of obedience to the Great Commission.

Christ-centred schools should also be vocational institutions, not in the same sense as a technical college but in the biblical understanding of that term. We are not simply inducting students into a discipline or training them for a career. That sort of technocratic education is widely available. Rather, educators in Christian schools should be helping students identify their callings and preparing them for witness within the context of those callings. Our classrooms, student organizations, lecture series, chapel services, missions and service opportunities, and strategic partnerships—everything we do in Christian higher education—should be about helping our students become disciple-makers who take ownership of the Great Commission within their present and future vocations. Professors and administrators need to be intentional in developing strategies to help students engage in evangelism and discipleship in every discipline and profession.

Schools also need to develop innovative strategies and strategic partnerships to provide Christian higher education and theological education in the Majority World. The relative ease of global travel, online learning platforms, and communication tools such as Zoom and FaceTime open up all sorts of opportunities for faculty to connect with students and colleagues across the globe. Although many traditional faculty have resisted online and hybrid models of education, when done well these approaches are an important form of academic witness to those who have limited access to Christ-centred education.<sup>36</sup> Christian educators need to find ways to promote a biblical vision of human flourishing in every sphere and to help our students see this as a more God-honouring motivation than the idolatrous accumulation of wealth, power or influence that tempts even evangelical students (and their professors). Our schools should orient their respective service agendas towards providing students, faculty and staff with hands-on opportunities to promote a Christ-centred vision of justice, mercy and reconciliation.

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36 For an excellent introduction to online education, including its missional component, see Kristen Ferguson, *Excellence in Online Education: Creating a Christian Community on Mission* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020).

## Conclusion

This essay has highlighted some theological distinctives of a Christ-centred education. I have written as an evangelical theologian for a primarily evangelical audience. Thus, I have chosen to frame most of my case around four core evangelical emphases. But even if you do not resonate with how I have articulated evangelical theological priorities, my larger point is that theology is a servant that nourishes the soul of the Christ-centred university and animates every aspect of theological education in a healthy seminary or Bible college.<sup>37</sup> As Christian educators, we should never be skittish about theology, even if many of us have never taken a single class on the Bible, doctrine or related topics. Theology is just *thinking rightly about God and his world for the sake of living rightly before God in his world*. That is a function for higher education in general and for every respective academic discipline.

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<sup>37</sup> Glanzer, Allerman and Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 227. Chapter 12 (pp, 225–43) is devoted to how theology can inform all the disciplines.

# Shaping the Future of Theological Education: Introducing the ICETE Manifesto II

Bernhard Ott

‘The connection between academic theology and the life of the church is often missing. However, theology without church practice is empty and church practice without theology is blind. An empty or blind theology is a luxury we do not want to afford.’<sup>1</sup>

This statement by the Catholic theologian Clemens Sedmak is a particular challenge to those who call themselves ‘evangelical’, since sound biblical teaching is as much a part of our basic convictions as the dynamic life of church and mission.

Theological education is of paramount importance for the healthy development of church and mission. However, it is not self-evident that theological education provides inspiration, foundation and orientation to church and mission. Nor is it a given that practitioners in church and mission are interested in sound theology.

These challenges call for a constant renewal of theological education. This is the purpose of Manifesto II of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), which is presented here. Its history is closely linked to that of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), predecessor organization to the World Evangelical Alliance, and in particular to the work of Bruce Nicholls, also founder of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.<sup>2</sup> He initiated the WEF Theological Assistance Program in 1974 to promote theological education, especially in the Global South. At the 1974 International Congress for World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, Nicholls presented a paper on ‘Theological Education and Evangelization’. In the following years, the commitment to promoting evangelical theological education worldwide gained momentum.

In this context, as early as 1975, accreditation was seen as the basic strategy for promoting theological education on six continents. Subsequently, accrediting agencies were established on all continents, if they did not already exist. In a further step, the International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education (ICAA) was established in 1980. The name was later changed to ICETE.

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1 Clemens Sedmak, *Theologie als ‘Handwerk’* (Regensburg, Germany: Pustet, 1999), 14–15.

2 This information on the origin and history of the ICETE Manifesto is based on Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1990).

One of the first tasks of the newly founded ICAA was to adopt a Manifesto on the Renewal of Theological Education, with the aim of providing inspiration, guidance and standards of excellence for evangelical theological education. A broad-based process led to the publication of this groundbreaking document in 1983. For many years, this first manifesto served as a guideline and point of reference for regional accreditation agencies in the development and promotion of evangelical theological education.

Since then, 40 years have passed. Much has been achieved worldwide in the development of evangelical theological education, especially in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation. Evangelical theological education as a whole has emerged from a niche existence and has established itself on the stage of higher education.

However, many realities have changed over the past 40 years. This has prompted the leadership of ICETE to re-articulate the Manifesto on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of this international network. In continuity with the vibrant spirit of renewal that characterized the first Manifesto, Manifesto II aims to tackle present and future challenges in a concrete way.

In this respect, several major trends can be identified that form the backdrop, so to speak, of the ICETE Manifesto II. I will briefly introduce four of them here.

1. Manifesto I put quality assurance and accreditation at the top of the agenda, and the last 40 years testify that much has been achieved in this area. At the same time, a trend towards institutionalization, academization and professionalization can be observed,<sup>3</sup> which has created a gap between the grassroots of church and mission, on one hand, and higher theological education on the other. Especially in regions where the church is growing and new congregations are being planted every day, our primary need is not highly educated theologians but evangelists, church planters and pastors with solid biblical and practical training. To meet this need, non-formal theological education is coming back into focus. It is not a question of either/or, but of a fruitful partnership between formal and non-formal theological education.

2. The promotion of theological education in the Global South or the Majority World was already an important concern in the 1983 Manifesto. However, the initiatives were led largely by Western theologians and aimed at contextualization in the sense of an understandable communication of established evangelical truths. Forty years later, we have seen strong, progressive theological work by men and women in the Majority World who, in the sense of decoloniality, question Western traditions of theological education and propose their own models of education that have grown in context. One example is the anthology edited by Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamray, *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2018).

3. Forty years ago, the majority of theological education was focused on traditional ministries in church and mission. In recent decades, however, it has become increasingly clear that men and women in all professions need a theological orientation that goes beyond discipleship programs in congregations. In this context, the need for a 'public theology' has also matured, in which questions of society are

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<sup>3</sup> See Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church* (Newburgh, IN: EDCOT Press, 2006).

reflected on and answered from a Christian perspective.<sup>4</sup> These developments call for theological education with a horizon that looks beyond the classical church-related ministries.

4. Finally, we are experiencing a radical change in the educational landscape, driven by the possibilities of the internet. Whereas 40 years ago most theological schools offered only full-time, residential programs, today distance learning, part-time study, flexibility and modularization have taken hold. The possibilities for disseminating theological education have thus increased rapidly. However, the pedagogical challenges are also immense.

Against the background of these and many other realities and challenges, an international team of eight persons was commissioned in summer 2022 to formulate an ICETE Manifesto II that would provide evangelical theological education worldwide with a fresh inspiration, orientation and framework so that it could remain sustainable in a rapidly changing world. The Manifesto II was introduced at ICETE's conference in Izmir, Turkey in November 2022. Through its publication in the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, we hope that its message will reach a broader global audience.

We desire that the visions and guidelines formulated in the Manifesto II are contextualized with sensitivity to regional and local realities, and that in this way, theological education will be promoted which fulfils its task and its purpose within the framework of God's mission.

I know no better way to conclude than by affirming the final words of Manifesto II: 'Building on the rich traditions of Christian theology and theological education, while at the same time aware of the opportunities and challenges ahead of us, we submit in "bold humility" the above call and commitments. We seek to realize this vision for theological education in dependence upon the creative power of the Spirit, inspired by God's immeasurable love, and devoted to Christ's matchless glory.'

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4 A recent example is Sunday Bobai Agang (ed.), *African Public Theology* (Bukuru, Nigeria: ACTS; Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2020).

# ICETE Manifesto II: Call and Commitment to the Renewal of Theological Education

## Executive Summary

Building on the rich traditions of Christian theology and theological education, while at the same time aware of the opportunities and challenges ahead of us, we submit in ‘bold humility’ the following call and commitments. We seek to realize this vision for theological education in dependence upon the creative power of the Spirit, inspired by God’s immeasurable love, and devoted to Christ’s matchless glory.

### ***Part 1. Foundations: The purpose and the task of theological education***

Theological education is called and committed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible, as the normative text of the Christian faith. This shapes the purpose, content and form of theological education.

1. *The purpose: Committed to God and his mission (missio Dei)*  
Theological education is called and committed to delivering educational programmes that are ‘fit for purpose’ by serving God’s mission (missio Dei).
2. *The content: Committed to biblical foundations*  
Theological education is called and committed to the Bible as the normative foundation for the articulation of theology.
3. *The form: Committed to a biblically rooted pedagogy*  
Theological education is called and committed to a pedagogy that reflects a biblical understanding of teaching and learning.

### ***Part 2. Contexts: Theological education in local and global contexts***

Theological education is called and committed to theologizing in concrete local contexts and in conversation with the global church. This shapes contexts, conversations and articulations of theological education.

4. *Contexts: Doing theology in various contexts*  
Theological education is committed to doing theology in specific contexts by addressing the questions, challenges and needs that arise from the various contexts.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Cf. Rupen Das 2015. *Connecting Curriculum with Context. A Handbook for Context Relevant Curriculum Development in Theological Education*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series); also, the following two papers presented at the ICETE International Consultation for Theological Educators, Nairobi, Kenya 2012: Havilah Dharamraj, ‘We Reap What We Sow: Engaging Curriculum and Context in Theological Education’; Myrto Theocharous, ‘Not Living on Bread Alone: Theological Education as Prophetism’ (<https://worlddea.org/yourls/47317>).

5. *Conversations: Doing theology in global dialogue and partnership*  
Theological education is called and committed to doing theology in conversation with the global church, which embraces different geographic regions, cultures, traditions and denominations.
6. *Articulations: Providing theological education that is relevant in ever-changing religious environments*  
Theological education is called and committed to articulate theologies that address the burning questions that religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism, and secularism pose to the church.

***Part 3. Processes: Designing and delivering teaching/learning processes that are ‘fit for purpose’***

Theological education is committed to providing formal and non-formal educational opportunities that are ‘fit for purpose’, enabling people to live a life in accordance with God’s vision and mission in church, mission and society. This requires outcome-oriented curricula, integrative learning processes, and appropriate quality assurance provisions.

7. *Outcome-oriented curricula: Designing programmes that are ‘fit for purpose’*  
Theological education is called and committed to designing curricula that are intentionally guided by learning objectives defined in collaboration with stakeholders.
8. *Integrative learning: Providing holistic learning processes in community*  
Theological education is called and committed to facilitating integrative learning processes that include action and reflection, individuality and community, rationality and spirituality, knowledge and character, wisdom and innovation, educating the entire person.
9. *Quality assurance: Becoming learning organizations*  
Theological education is called and committed to excellence and continuously assessing the achievement of desired outcomes, thus becoming a learning organization.

***Part 4. Scope: Theological education for all spheres of life***

Theological education is committed ‘to make sense of the whole of life by reference to God’, and to enable men and women ‘to be agents of transformation, so that the whole of life may reflect God’s intentions’.<sup>2</sup> This extends the scope of theological education beyond the realm of the sacred into all spheres of life: the private, the professional and the public.

10. *Private sphere: Transforming individual lives and households*  
Theological education is called and committed to educating the whole person for the whole life. Therefore, theological education has a spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Kirk 1997. *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 8, 31–42,

centre, focussing on the transformation of men and women in relation to God in a way that affects their immediate environment.<sup>3</sup>

11. *Professional sphere: Providing applied theology for all occupational domains*

Theological education is called and committed to providing theological reflection on relevant topics for men and women in all occupations. This means that theological education must address challenges and issues of the church and beyond the church's internal agenda.

12. *Public sphere: Contributing to the 'shalom' of society*

Theological education is called and committed to contributing to the flourishing of life in all spheres of society according to the biblical mandate to 'seek the shalom of the city' (Jer 29:7).

***Part 5. Institutions: Providing leadership and organizational structures that are 'fit for purpose'***

Theological education is committed to providing the institutional and organizational structures that enable and promote viable educational opportunities adapted to the educational goals and formats. This requires leadership with head, hands and heart.<sup>4</sup>

13. *Head: Moving into the future through strategic leadership*

Theological education is called and committed to intentionally and strategically providing the best possible educational programmes for the various leadership needs in mission, ministry and marketplace.

14. *Hands: Providing suitable and affordable structures through organizational leadership*

Theological education is called and committed to providing the appropriate organizational structures for the realization of its strategic goals.

15. *Heart: Shaping institutional cultures that promote learning*

Theological education is called and committed to cultivating organizational culture that promotes learning.

## Preamble

We affirm that the mission of the church and of theological education is inspired by the two central statements of Jesus, often called the 'Great Commandment' (Mt 22:37–40) and the 'Great Commission' (Mt 28:16–20). This is a call to see the purpose of theological education in the nurturing of a holistic spirituality (love) and in the empowerment to participate in God's mission.

The driving force behind all the church's efforts and endeavours is the words of the risen Christ: 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.' This

3 Cf. Robert W. Ferris 2018. *Ministry Education That Transforms*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

4 Bernhard Ott 2016. *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series), chapter 8.



puts into effect the promised reign of God. Death does not have the last word. Life and hope are announced. This is the good news.

The redemptive acts of God through Jesus Christ are an expression of the character of the triune God, and this character is love. Above everything that will be stated in this document, we confess, 'Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people.'<sup>5</sup>

Based on this reality, the church is sent into the entire world to bring people of all nations into communion with Christ and the fellowship of his disciples. The reign of Christ takes shape in his followers as their lives are transformed through the teachings and example of Jesus. Education is an essential part of this Great Commission and theological education finds its purpose and mission within the framework of this mandate.

Finally, the church sent by Jesus lives on the promise: 'I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

This is the source and the foundation of the reaffirmed call for renewal in theological education in the 21st century expressed in this Manifesto.

## Introduction

*The context: Where do we come from? Where are we? Where do we want to go?*

This Manifesto stands on the shoulders of previous generations, their work and reflections, their conversations and formulations. From the patristic period through the Middle Ages to the Reformation and on to the modern university of the Enlightenment and the Bible schools of the revival and missionary movements, the church has sought the study of the Bible and the formation of its teachers and leaders. Foremost, this Manifesto stands in the tradition of the evangelical movement as expressed more recently in the *Lausanne Covenant* of 1974 and following documents of the Lausanne Movement.

In particular, we see this document as a continuation of the concerns expressed in the *ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* of 1983,<sup>6</sup> and as further developed in many ICETE conferences and publications over the last 40 years. It is our desire to reaffirm the call for renewal of theological education. More specifically, we take up the developments of the past decades, take into account present opportunities and challenges, and set out a vision and a commitment for theological education that will empower the church and every Christian to participate in God's mission. This calling encompasses all spheres of life, and all cultures and contexts of the world.

It is our conviction that theological education is committed to a twofold agenda. Foremost, God's story with humanity and all of creation, as revealed in the inspired and authoritative text of the Bible, remains the normative agenda for the church in its mission and for theological education. At the same time, a missional church and

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5 David Bosch 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. 392.

6 Cf. Robert W. Ferris 1990. *Renewal in Theological Education. Strategies for Change*. Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Centre.

its theological education will take its secondary agenda from cultures and contexts of the present.

Looking over the last two decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, several fundamental changes in the world stand out that must be in view when reformulating a manifesto for theological education:

- The ‘centre of gravity’ of the Christian movement is no longer in the Western world<sup>7</sup> and the church has become a truly global church.
- The Western world has been experiencing a rapidly developing post-Christendom reality.
- The forces of globalization on the one hand, and the desire for contextual relevance on the other hand, are shaping realities and discourses in all areas of life.
- We experience multi-cultural and multi-religious societies in which persons increasingly have hybrid cultural identities.
- We experience diversification and pluralization in all areas of life.
- Political conflicts, endless wars and humanitarian disasters are leading to unprecedented migration, posing almost insurmountable challenges to the global community.
- Information technology, digitization and the internet revolutionize communication and education.
- Academization, professionalization and institutionalization influence all areas of society including education.
- We experience a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA world).
- We experienced how a pandemic has challenged and changed theological education as we knew it, especially as evidenced in the accelerated shift from residential to virtual modes of delivery.
- We observe an increasing awareness of problems related to ecology, energy and natural resources.
- We witness rising nationalistic movements, religious fundamentalism, persecution and opposition.

All these (and many more) developments and transitions must be taken into account as we reformulate our vision for theological education.

Perhaps the most formative insight of recent decades is the call for the integration of mission and theological education: Theology and theological education need to become missional in their very essence and orientation. The purpose of theological education must be defined within the framework of the *missio Dei* and a missional self-understanding of the church.<sup>8</sup>

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7 By ‘Western world’ we are referring here to Europe, North America, Australia and those lands most directly influenced by European culture and traditions.

8 David Bosch 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 489–98; Kirk, *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission*; Robert Banks 1999.

Within this basic orientation towards missional theological education, we observe various developments and shifts in theological thinking that can best be captured in the form of potential polarities and tensions:<sup>9</sup>

- Global and local: Globalization, on the one hand, pushes towards uniformity and occasionally new forms of colonialism emerge. On the other hand, we hear an urgent call for contextual and situational relevance of theology. Theological education is challenged to navigate between the global and the local.<sup>10</sup>
- Ecumenical and evangelical: We have been moving beyond the polarization between the ecumenical and the evangelical movements. We witness fruitful conversations at many levels—despite all remaining differences.
- The Christian faith in a world of many religions: More than ever the church and its theological education are challenged to engage meaningfully with other religions and particularly with Islam.
- Church/mission and academy: The academization of theological education has opened a gap between the needs of the church in mission and the agenda of academia. Programmes and institutions of theological education as well as the church are challenged to take concrete measures to bridge the gap between church and academy.
- The ‘ministry’ and the ministries: The limitation of theological education to the training of professional clergy has been questioned. For decades, there has been a call to provide theological education for all God’s people in order to empower them to serve in a wide spectrum of ministries in the church and beyond.
- Residential, full-time studies and the diversification of education: Information technology revolutionizes education. Traditional forms of residential full-time studies are being replaced more and more by flexible and modular Diversified Education<sup>11</sup> and Open Distance Learning and Education.<sup>12</sup> Often remote and online versus in-person and in-community delivery are in tension and we are challenged to optimize the provision of services and accessibility while ensuring holistic education.

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*Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models.* Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans; Bernhard Ott 2001. *Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education.* Oxford: Regnum; Peter F. Penner (ed.) 2005. *Theological Education as Mission.* Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag.

9 See many examples in Marilyn Neidoo (ed.) 2015. *Contested Issues in Training Ministers in South Africa.* Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press.

10 Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland 2006. *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity.* Grand Rapids: Baker.

11 Cf. Ross Kinsler 2008. *Diversified Theological Education: Equipping All God’s People.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University.

12 Cf. Christo Lombaard 2021. ‘The Bible, Open and Distance Education and Learning, and Spirituality: Possibilities in a Post-Secular Time’. *Acta Theologica Suppl 31: Integrating Theory and Practice: A Challenge in Theological Education.* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Sup31.4>, 48–65.

- Formal and non-formal education: Formal and non-formal theological education are equally important for church and mission. They should be offered in mutual respect and partnership.<sup>13</sup>
- Tradition and innovation: We need to cultivate a creative tension between continuity with tradition and creativity in mission; between the rich heritage of theological education and the need for innovative new forms of future-oriented, missional education.
- The ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’: Traditional theological education, focussing on ministerial formation, tends to be inward-oriented, focussing on the maintenance of pastoral ministries. This has promoted a growing gap between the sacred inner world of the church and the secular outer world of everyday life. Theological education is challenged to overcome this unhealthy divide.<sup>14</sup>
- Individual and communal: Much of theology and theological education has been shaped by a more individualistic versus a more collectivistic orientation to the nature of conversion, sanctification and the church. Theological education must seek a greater balance, integrating individual and community concerns.’

In the light of this background, the aim of this manifesto is to affirm and to formulate a call and a commitment for theological education in the years ahead.

*The scope and the task: What do we mean by ‘theological education’?*

This Manifesto uses the term ‘theological education’ in a broad sense. We can define this wide understanding of theological education in three ways:<sup>15</sup>

- Beyond ‘professional ministry’: We understand theological education in a broader sense than merely education for ‘the ministry’ of the professional and ordained clergy. It is about appropriate theological education for all God’s people.
- Beyond ‘academic’: While higher education, with its emphasis on academic teaching, scientific reasoning, research and interdisciplinary dialogue, makes an essential contribution to Christian theology, theological education must not be limited to academic discourse.
- Beyond ‘formal’: We understand theological education in a broad sense including formal and non-formal education and learning. Non-formal learning is normally defined as ‘learning which takes place through planned

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13 Cf. the ‘Pastoral Trainers Declaration’, Cape Town 2010 (<https://worldea.org/yourls/47318>); Ashish Chrispal 2019. ‘Restoring Missional Vision in Theological Education: The Need for Transformative Pastoral Training in the Majority World’. *Lausanne Global Analysis* 8 (5) (<https://worldea.org/yourls/47319>); Manfred Kohl 2021. ‘Re-Forma: Solving a Key Issue in Global Training of Pastors and Church Leaders’. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45 (2), 103–12; Ulf Strohheln (ed.) 2020. *A Manual for Starting and Developing Bible Schools: Appeals and Cases for Paradigm Shifts in Spiritual Formation*. Helsinki: Fida International.

14 Cf. Stuart Brooking, Paul Branch and Federico Villanueva (eds.) 2021. *Secular, Sacred, More Sacred: Four Calls to Bridge the Divide*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

15 Cf. Linda Cannell 2006. *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church*. Newburgh, IN: EDCOT Press.

activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present'. However, it typically occurs apart from institutionalized, programme-based and degree-oriented (academic) education. 'Informal' learning refers to 'learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective.'<sup>16</sup>

While this manifesto is a call and a commitment to the renewal of and excellence in theological education from an evangelical point of view, it does not define standards and guidelines for assessment and accreditation of theological education at the higher education level. For such purposes we refer to other documents of ICETE:

- 2021 ICETE Standards and Guidelines for Global Evangelical Theological Education (<https://icete.info/resources/sggete>)
- 2021 Guidelines for Research Doctoral Programmes (<https://icete.info/resources/doctoral-education-resources>)

Furthermore, this manifesto does not include specific applications to all areas and contexts. It is an invitation to regional agencies, colleges and seminaries, as well as other providers, to apply and contextualize the call and the commitment articulated in this document in their particular contexts.

### *The process: How was this Manifesto created?*

The initiative to revisit and restate the ICETE Manifesto was taken in the ICETE board meeting of June 2020. An international team, representing all regional members of ICETE, was commissioned to develop a first draft.<sup>17</sup> This first draft was

16 Cf. the definitions in the *Guidelines for the Recognition of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning* of the European Council for Theological Education: Formal learning is learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning is learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. learner-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organized by civil society organizations for their members, their target group or the general public.

17 The initial text was drafted by Bernhard Ott in close interaction with the following international team: Africa: Bruk Ayele Asale [bruk.ayelea@gmail.com](mailto:bruk.ayelea@gmail.com); Asia: Paul Cornelius [pcornelius.ata@gmail.com](mailto:pcornelius.ata@gmail.com); Caribbean: Vivienne Kerr [thepresident@cgstonline.org](http://thepresident@cgstonline.org); Europe: Bernhard Ott [bernhard.ott@atticstudio.ch](mailto:bernhard.ott@atticstudio.ch) (team leader); Euro-Asia: Roman Soloviy [Romansoloviy@e-aaa.info](mailto:Romansoloviy@e-aaa.info); Latin America: Paul (Pablo) Branch [pbranch@seteca.edu](mailto:pbranch@seteca.edu); Middle East and North Africa: Martin Accad [maccad@abtslebanon.org](mailto:maccad@abtslebanon.org); North America: Craig Ott [cott@tiu.edu](mailto:cott@tiu.edu). In addition, Alain Haudenschild, David Jaeggi and Stephanus Schael, PhD researchers at the European School of Culture and Theology/Columbia International University, contributed substantial background research, reading and synthesizing significant publications on the renewal of the theological education representing research, conferences and publications of the last two to three decades.

presented to a wider circle of partners and stakeholders in October 2021, and a revised text was presented and discussed at the virtual ICETE conference in November 2021.

While this document was produced in the context of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, the text was developed in open conversation with insights and formulations of other Christian traditions. Of particular importance were texts articulated around the Edinburgh 2010 consultations: in particular, the ‘World Report on the Future of Theological Education in the 21st Century’ by the Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education of the World Council of Churches (ETE/WCC) and World Conference of Theological Institutions (WOCATI). Beyond these concise documents, the *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*<sup>18</sup> provided a wide panorama on the issues and concerns in all regions of the world.

This Manifesto is not meant to present an evangelical view of theological education intended exclusively for evangelical theological institutions and churches. It rather hopes to contribute to the global and ecumenical search for the renewal of theological education and ministerial formation.

We do this in the framework of the ICETE mission statement: ‘Advancing quality and collaboration in global theological education to strengthen and accompany the church in its mission.’

## Part 1

### Foundations:

#### The purpose and the task of theological education

*Theological education is called and committed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the normative text of the Christian faith. This shapes the purpose, content and form of theological education.*

##### 1. The purpose: Committed to God and his mission (*missio Dei*)

*Theological education is called and committed to delivering educational programmes that are ‘fit for purpose’ by serving God’s mission (*missio Dei*).*

In the midst of all contextual needs and demands, theological education will ultimately find its purpose and primary agenda in honouring God and participating in his mission (*missio Dei*). The God who revealed himself in Jesus, the Messiah, and who works through his Spirit, as the Bible witnesses, desires life (Jn 20:31).

Theology and theological education therefore have the objective to contribute to a flourishing life lived in relationship with God, fellow human beings, and God’s creation.<sup>19</sup> Theological education informed by the *missio Dei* has God’s kingdom in view; it is inspired by God’s love and focusses on God’s entire creation.

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18 Dietrich Werner et al. 2010. *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*. Oxford: Regnum. See also many relevant texts in Dietrich Werner 2011. *Theological Education in World Christianity: Ecumenical Perspectives and Future Priorities*. Tainan, Taiwan: Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia.

19 Cf. Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun 2019. *For the Life of the World. Theology That Makes a Difference*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

By being committed to the vision of the *missio Dei*, theological education serves the church in mission. It does so by empowering men and women to love God and to serve the world.<sup>20</sup>

In order to be relevant for the church in mission in various contexts and situations, theological education is to be offered in many formats serving multiple needs. In addition, theological education must be accessible to all God's people. Special attention must be given to groups of people who have traditionally had and still have limited access to education. Neither gender nor social status, neither skin colour nor nationality, neither geographic location nor lack of personal connections should exclude people from theological education.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, our desire and aspiration is that theological education has an impact in people's lives, in the church and in the world.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. *The content: Committed to biblical foundations*

*Theological education is called and committed to the Bible as the normative foundation for the articulation of theology.*

The interpretation of the normative text of the Christian faith must be at the heart of theological education, because the Scriptures lead to faith in Jesus Christ and thus to life (Jn 20:31).

The Bible itself is not a book above history, but theology in context.<sup>23</sup> Its missional theology reflects the fact that mission is the mother of theology.<sup>24</sup> The texts of the Bible reflect various historical situations and many life experiences, and consequently they point to the articulation of theologies that are contextually relevant and speak into the lives of people.

In theological education, men and women learn to interpret the Bible missionally and in community, in light of the grand narrative of God's mission and the church's participation in that mission.<sup>25</sup> In theological education, men and women learn to give foundation and orientation to the church in mission through biblical-theological reflection.

This requires love and respect for the Bible as the Word of God as well as hermeneutical and exegetical skills, including the knowledge of biblical languages as

20 Cf. the Cape Town Commitment.

21 Cf. Dieumeme Noelliste 2005. 'Theological Education in the Context of Socio-Economic Deprivation', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29 (3), 270–83.

22 See the presentations of the ICETE Conference 2015 in Antalya, Turkey, on the theme 'Engaged and Effective—The Impact of Theological Education' (<https://worldidea.org/yourls/47320>).

23 See for example Dean Flemming 2005. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

24 The formula 'mission is the mother of theology' goes back to Martin Kähler, quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 16, 489. I. Howard Marshall writes, 'New Testament theology is essentially missionary theology, ... The theology *springs out of* this movement and is *shaped by* it, and in turn, the theology *shapes* the continuing mission of the church. ... A recognition of this missionary character of the documents will help us to see them in true perspective and to interpret them in the light of their *intention*.' *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 34–35.

25 Michael W. Goheen (ed.) 2016. *Reading the Bible Missionally*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Bernhard Ott 2011. 'Doing Theology in Community: Reflections on Quality in Theological Education', in Mary Raber and Peter Penner (eds.), *History and Mission in Europe: Continuing the Conversation*. Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld, 281–392.

appropriate to the type and the level of studies. We are committed to theological education that focusses on God, on God's Word, on God's intentions for the world, and on God's transforming power.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *The form: Committed to a biblically rooted pedagogy*

*Theological education is called and committed to a pedagogy that reflects a biblical understanding of teaching and learning.*

Our commitment to the Bible shall not only shape the content of our theology, but also the way we design educational processes and conduct teaching and learning. All efforts in Christian education are inspired by the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20) and the Great Commandment (Mt 22:35–40). This is a holistic pedagogy that cultivates love for God and for fellow human beings, integrates soul, heart and mind, and leads to action in God's mission. Such a pedagogy is modelled by Jesus and the apostle Paul.<sup>27</sup> Such 'kingdom learning'<sup>28</sup> moves beyond knowledge, skills and competencies to the transformation of lives and the cultivation of Christ-like virtues and character. Such education integrates the teaching of theology, the acquisition of skills, and the cultivation of spirituality and character in order to shape identity, flourish as humans, enable for ministry, and empower for mission even if it includes suffering.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, a biblical model of education is characterized by role models, relationships and community. Content is not only presented, but also represented by credible teachers. In theological education, the life of the teacher matters.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, we are committed to cultivating teachers who are rooted in the Bible—not only in terms of theological content, but also in the whole conduct of their lives.<sup>31</sup>

## Part 2

### **Contexts: Theological Education in Local and Global Contexts**

*Theological education is called and committed to theologizing in concrete local contexts and in conversation with the global church. This shapes contexts, conversations and articulations of theological education.*

#### 4. *Contexts: Doing theology in various contexts*

*Theological education is committed to 'doing theology' in specific contexts by addressing the questions, challenges and needs that arise from the various contexts.<sup>32</sup>*

26 Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*, 170–95.

27 Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*; David C. Wright 2022. *Integration: A Conversation between Theological Education and the Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Carlisle, UK: Langham.

28 David Heywood referring to 'discipleship-learning' according to Matthew 28:20 introduced the term 'kingdom learning', in David Heywood 2017. *Kingdom Learning. Experiential and Reflective Approaches to Christian Formation*. London: SCM Press.

29 Wright, *Integration*.

30 Cf. Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 115–47.

31 Cf. on faculty development: Fritz Deininger and Orbelina Eguizabal (eds.) 2018. *Leadership in Theological Education*. Vol. 3: *Foundations for Faculty Development*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

32 Cf. Das, *Connecting Curriculum with Context*; Dharamraj, 'We Reap What We Sow'; Theocharous, 'Not Living on Bread Alone'.



Theological education which is biblical in the aforementioned sense (Part 1) is not a-historical but rooted in particular cultures and contexts. We therefore commit ourselves to listening to the voices, the questions and the needs of people in specific contexts. We teach men and women to engage with the realities of church and society. We do not understand theology as content defined once and for all, but as a process of ongoing interaction between the normative Word of God and the concrete contexts and life situations in the sense of ‘critical contextualizations’.<sup>33</sup> Although the message of the Bible itself is universal and unchanging, all theology is contextual theology reflecting the specific language we speak, the questions we ask and the categories we employ.

We therefore practice methods of biblical interpretation and theological research that bring the message of the Bible and the realities of the present into conversation. This includes different ministerial needs and ministry models in various contexts, as well as the realities of everyday life of Christians in all areas of life and work. We are committed to theological education that bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular and enters in meaningful dialogue with the various fields of knowledge and human inquiry. We understand theology and theological education as a praxis which integrates practice and theory, action and reflection.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, context-sensitive theological education will also take into account the different cultural forms of thinking and learning.<sup>35</sup> This includes not least a sensitivity for oral cultures.<sup>36</sup>

In the end, context-sensitive theological education will only be fully realized if the dominance of English is overcome, if theology is articulated in indigenous languages, and if sufficient resources are provided in contextually relevant languages.

##### 5. Conversations: Doing theology in global dialogue and partnership

*Theological education is called and committed to ‘doing theology’ in conversation with the global church, which embraces different geographic regions, cultures, traditions and denominations.*

While theology is meant to be relevant in local contexts, it will also be an expression of the one global church. This requires conversation and interaction beyond local contexts, denominational boundaries and the horizon of single congregations. That also includes engagement with relevant international academic discourses.

We are committed to theological education which is ‘ecumenical’ and ‘catholic’ in the generic sense of these words, interacting with the voices of other church

33 Cf. Paul Hiebert 1984. ‘Critical Contextualization’. *Missiology: An International Review*, 12 (3), 287–96.

34 Cf. Bernhard Ott and Volker Kessler 2021. ‘Integrating Theory and Practice: A Challenge in Theological Education’, *Acta Theologica* Suppl. 31, <https://worlddea.org/yourls/47321>.

35 Cf. Marlene Enns 2003. *Towards a Theoretical Model of Mutuality and Its Implications for Intercultural Theological Education: Holistic and Analytical Cognition* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Trinity International University); Craig Ott 2021. *Teaching and Learning across Cultures: a Guide to Theory and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Perry Shaw, Cezar Lopez, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano and Bob Heaton 2021. *Teaching across Cultures: A Global Perspective*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library.

36 Cf. See International Orality Network, affiliated with the Lausanne Movement (<https://worlddea.org/yourls/47322>).

traditions, other cultures and contexts, representing various political, economic, societal and religious experiences. The entire church is enriched by such global theological exchanges.

Furthermore, in an increasingly globalized and polycentric world, partnerships in theological education will become more and more important and significant. Consequently, we are committed to the development of partnerships in theological education which are shaped by mutual respect and interdependence. We want to overcome all forms of unhealthy dependence and neo-colonialism.

#### *6. Articulations: Providing theological education that is relevant in ever-changing religious environments*

*Theological education is called and committed to articulate theologies that address the burning questions that religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism, and secularism pose to the church.*

In the midst of many contexts and situations, we—providers of theological education and churches—consider two realities to be particularly challenging in the years ahead: How can we provide meaningful and inspiring theological education for and with the church in its mission (1) in a post-Christendom age and (2) in multi-religious societies?

Theological education is called and committed to keeping in mind the challenges that Christians face in these global realities. This means that the mere continuation of conventional curricula and traditional teaching content will not suffice. We need a fresh theologizing that, on the one hand, is in continuity with the Christian tradition and, on the other hand, formulates fresh and relevant answers to the questions that post-Christendom and multi-religious realities pose. We are committed to theologies that are at the same time *reproductive* and *productive*.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, we want to empower people to theologize responsibly and relevantly by listening to the world's agenda and responding from the Bible.

This calls for theological education that enables respectful dialogue with people of other faiths and witness to one's own faith in bold humility. Theological education must engage with secularism, the post-Christian culture, and the new religious movements. This requires credible witness as well as sound apologetics.

### **Part 3**

#### **Processes: Designing and Delivering Teaching/Learning Processes That Are 'Fit for Purpose'**

*Theological education is committed to providing formal and non-formal educational opportunities that are 'fit for purpose', enabling people to live a life in accordance with God's vision and mission in church, mission and society. This requires outcome-oriented curricula, integrative learning processes, and appropriate quality assurance provisions.*

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37 On the *reproductive* and *productive* task of theology, see Ott, 'Doing Theology in Community', 287–90.

7. *Outcome-oriented curricula: Designing programmes that are 'fit for purpose'*<sup>38</sup>  
*Theological education is called and committed to designing curricula that are intentionally guided by learning objectives defined in collaboration with stakeholders.*

In the truest sense of the word, 'curriculum' includes not just a list of courses or modules, but a journey of learning. Therefore, when we design curricula, we will never just focus on content; our attention will be on the learning processes. What counts foremost is what the learners *do* and what they *learn*. What the teachers *know* and what they *do* serves the learning of the learner.

Based on this educational principle, we are committed to developing our curricula with the end in view: We articulate intended learning outcomes in terms of competencies and character. From there we define teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks.<sup>39</sup> We are committed to defining learning outcomes that are 'fit for purpose' and we do this in close partnership<sup>40</sup> with stakeholders<sup>41</sup> and based on the analysis of contexts and needs.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, we never lose sight of God's purposes (the *missio Dei*) as revealed in the narrative of the Bible.

Wherever possible we strive to overcome the traditional division of the curriculum into separated disciplines, which creates fragmentation and hinders integration. With creativity, we seek greater integration by designing courses, modules and programmes that reflect the realities of life and service rather than academic specializations and by emphasizing transversal competencies (spiritual and character formation, ministry skills) that are integrated across the disciplines.

8. *Integrative learning: Providing holistic learning processes in community*

*Theological education is called and committed to facilitating integrative learning processes that include action and reflection, individuality and community, rationality and spirituality, knowledge and character, wisdom and innovation, educating the entire person.*<sup>43</sup>

Based on a biblical view of men and women, we are committed to an understanding of education that focusses on the holistic development of the entire person.<sup>44</sup> This must lead us to develop integrative learning processes that are in line with

38 Cf. Fritz Deininger and Orbelina Eguizabal (eds.) 2017. *Leadership in Theological Education*. Vol. 2: *Foundations for Curriculum Design*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

39 See John Biggs and Catherine Tang 2011. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 95-110, for the concept of 'aligned curricula' using the terms 'Intended Learning Outcomes' (ILOs), Teaching/Learning Activities (TLAs), and Assessment Tasks (ATs).

40 Note the call for partnership between church and mission on the one hand and theological education on the other in the Cape Town Commitment, 68-69.

41 Cf. Robert Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis (eds.) 2006. *Integral Ministry Training: Design and Evaluation*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 67-78; Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*, 284-90.

42 Cf. Stuart Brooking 2018. *Is It Working? Researching Context to Improve Curriculum*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Publishing (ICETE Series); Perry Shaw 2014. *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*. Carlisle, UK: Langham.

43 Cf. Jessey Jaison 2017. *Towards Vital Wholeness in Theological Education*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

44 Cf. Paul D. Spears and Steven R. Looms 2009. *Education for Human Flourishing: A Christian Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*.

the principles of adult education and holistic transformative learning.<sup>45</sup> This includes learning-centred educational processes, the integration of action and reflection in the learning process, and emphasizing the cognitive, the affective and the behavioural dimensions of learning.

We are committed to the relational and communal dimension of seeking the truth, reading the Bible (hermeneutics) and articulating relevant theology in context. We value the communal dimension of holistic formation, shaping the Christian life through thinking, reflection and discussion as well as through corporate worship, community and collaboration. In summary: it is not just about education *for* discipleship and education *for* ministry, it is about education *in* discipleship and education *in* ministry.<sup>46</sup>

We are aware of the opportunities and challenges information technologies and ‘Open and Distance Learning’ (ODL) bring. We see the benefits of diversification, flexibility and extension which enhance accessibility for many more people; however, we also critically observe the challenges this means for holistic and integrated learning processes. Especially in emergency situations (e.g. pandemic, disaster, war) where theological institutions have to abruptly shift their programmes to online instruction or alternative delivery, there is need to ensure that important parts of the graduate profile are not lost in the shuffle. This includes effectively accomplishing by new means spiritual and character formation, and practical training for ministry.

### 9. Quality assurance: Becoming learning organizations

*Theological education is called and committed to excellence and continuously assessing the achievement of desired outcomes, thus becoming a learning organization.*

By striving for excellence and quality in our educational efforts we seek to honour God and serve people.<sup>47</sup> We are committed to internal quality assurance processes that help us to become learning organizations which are constantly seeking improvement so that we can better accomplish our mission. We understand external assessment and certification as an expression of accountability and we are committed to having our programmes assessed by external agencies so that they are ‘fit for purpose’.

While formal academic accreditation and government recognition have significant value for certain purposes,<sup>48</sup> our commitment to quality and excellence, evaluation and assessment should not be restricted to academic accreditation of formal

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45 Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*; Marie-Claire Weinski 2006. *Understanding and Promoting Life Change: An Inquiry into the Transformative Learning of Evangelical Theological Students in Germany* (Doctoral dissertation, Trinity International University), Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac; Deborah J. Kramlich 2017. *Teachers That Transform: Setting the Stage for Transformative Learning within the EEAA (European Evangelical Accrediting Association)* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, European School of Culture and Theology/Columbia International University).

46 Cf. Heywood, *Kingdom Learning*; David Heywood 2021. *Reimagining Ministerial Formation*. London: SCK Press; Strohhenn, *A Manual for Starting and Developing Bible Schools*.

47 Cf. Steven A. Hardy 2016. *Excellence in Theological Education: Effective Training for Church Leaders*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

48 Bernhard Ott 2017. ‘Accreditation: Importance and Benefits for the Institution’, in Fritz Deininger and Orbelina Eduizabal (eds.), *Leadership in Theological Education*. Vol. 1: *Foundations for Academic Leadership*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series), 183–215.

theological education. We want to invest in quality assurance procedures at all levels and for many formats of delivery—formal and non-formal.

The phrase ‘the faculty is the curriculum’ points to the fact that the quality of education is closely linked to the quality of faculty. The training, selection and development of faculty must therefore be a high priority in our theological education.<sup>49</sup>

The primary criterion of quality must always be ‘fitness for purpose’ with regard to the *missio Dei*. For this purpose, a ‘missional audit’<sup>50</sup> will be of particular importance and we are dedicated to implementing such procedures.

## Part 4

### Scope: Theological Education for All Spheres of Life

*Theological education is committed ‘to make sense of the whole of life by reference to God’, and to enable men and women ‘to be agents of transformation, so that the whole of life may reflect God’s intentions’.<sup>51</sup> This extends the scope of theological education beyond the realm of the sacred into all spheres of life: the private, the professional and the public.*

#### 10. Private sphere: Transforming individual lives and households

*Theological education is called and committed to educating the whole person for the whole life. Therefore, theological education has a spiritual centre, focussing on the transformation of men and women in relation to God in a way that affects their immediate environment.<sup>52</sup>*

Theological education is committed to spiritual formation, personality formation and character building in relationship to God the Creator and Saviour. In theological education, God must not be reduced to an object of investigation, and faith is not merely a phenomenon observed and analysed by disengaged researchers. Christian theology is ‘faith seeking understanding’ (Anselm). Theological education is therefore the ‘search for truth’ with the aim of living a ‘life in truth’.<sup>53</sup> This also comprises the formation of wisdom, which includes the cultivation of virtues and character.

Theological education understood as ‘kingdom learning’<sup>54</sup> is oriented towards the nature of the Kingdom of God, which the apostle Paul describes with the words

49 Cf. Deininger and Eguizabal, *Foundations for Faculty Development*.

50 Cf. the Cape Town Commitment, 69: ‘We urge that institutions and programmes of theological education conduct a “missional audit” of their curricula, structures and ethos, to ensure that they truly serve the needs and opportunities facing the Church in their cultures.’

51 Kirk, *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission*, 8, 31–42.

52 Cf. Ferris, *Ministry Education That Transforms*.

53 Miroslav Volf 2005. ‘Dancing for God: Challenges Facing Theological Education Today’. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29(3), 197–207; Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 115. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer 2000. ‘The Voice and the Actor’, in *Evangelical Futures: a Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse Jr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 82–83: ‘Theology yields instructions for deliberating well about the gospel—for deliberating well about what God has done in Christ, for deliberating well about what the church is to say about God and do in the name of God in particular situations, for deliberating well about how we can live well, as individuals and as communities, in light of the gospel.’

54 Heywood, *Kingdom Learning*.

‘righteousness, peace and joy through the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17). This is ‘flourishing life’ according to the Bible.<sup>55</sup>

This focus on personal faith-formation should never be understood individually. Such formation takes place in relationships and leads to community. The restoration of the human being always includes his or her closest relationships—first and foremost the sphere of the home, i.e. marriage, family and extended family. In short, theological education is fundamentally about helping us all, teachers and students, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves.

Theological education is committed to the formation of the entire person in community. It will never be satisfied with merely dealing cognitively and detachedly with theories about God and faith; it will always have the life-changing relationship with that God in mind.

### *11. Professional sphere: Providing applied theology for all occupational domains*

*Theological education is called and committed to providing theological reflection on relevant topics for men and women in all occupations. This means that theological education must address challenges and issues of the church and beyond the church’s internal agenda.*

The God who is the origin and content of all theological reflection and education is the God of the whole universe—creator, sustainer and redeemer of the world. His love, concerns, and reign relate not only to the personal piety of believers and the inner space of the church, but rather also to all aspects of life and therefore to all occupational domains in which men and women are active. Consequently, while it is the task of theological education to train for vocational church ministries, it must engage with the questions and challenges of all vocations. Men and women who are involved in workplaces outside of the church need theological orientation relevant for their professional field.

In a world where values, virtues and ethics are deteriorating, the formation of character and cultivation of wisdom are among the most essential contributions that the Christian community can make to a flourishing life in every occupational sphere.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, theological education must address the many challenging ethical questions with which men and women in all professional spheres are day after day confronted. This can only happen if educational institutions offer courses in applied theology for professionals.

### *12. Public sphere: Contributing to the ‘shalom’ of society*

*Theological education is called and committed to contributing to the flourishing of life in all spheres of society according to the biblical mandate to ‘seek the shalom of the city’ (Jer 29:7).*

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55 Volff and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 164–85.

56 Cf. the many publications on [Globethics.net](http://www.globethics.net) ([www.globethics.net](http://www.globethics.net)), especially Christoph Stückelberger 2016. ‘Integrity—the Virtue of Virtues’, in C. Stückelberger, W. Fust and O. Ike (eds.), *Global Ethics for Leadership, Values and Virtues for Life*, 311–28, Geneva: Globethics.net, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47323>.

The commitment to focus the purpose of theological education on the ‘church in mission’ does not mean that this is a vision restricted to the internal affairs of the church and its evangelistic mission to the world. There is ‘mission beyond evangelism’,<sup>57</sup> and this refers to the church’s responsibility in all spheres of public life. Theological education needs to have the *missio politica* on its agenda.<sup>58</sup>

As we observe global developments and challenges in the first two decades of the 21st century, we identify critical areas, which desperately call for serious theological reflection and responsible action; for example:<sup>59</sup>

- In a world torn apart by war and violence, the church has a mandate to work for reconciliation and peace.
- In a world that is negligent and destructive of God’s creation, the church has a mandate to advocate for the careful stewardship of creation.
- In a world overwhelmed with massive refugee and migration movements, the church has a mandate to promote hospitality, multicultural coexistence and interreligious encounter and dialogue.
- In a world where people are affected by drastic disasters (e.g. war, persecution, environmental catastrophes, pandemics), churches need to train ministers to serve people in such crises.
- In a world where religious minorities are increasingly oppressed and threatened, the church has a mandate to stand up for religious freedom and respectful treatment of religious minorities.
- In a world where we are still confronted with racism, extreme nationalism, dictatorial regimes and ruthless oppression of those who think differently, the church has a mandate to stand up for human rights, the protection of minorities and democratic political processes.
- In a world where our lives are increasingly dictated by a globalized economy, the church has a mandate to work for social justice, responsible use of resources, fair working conditions and responsible consumer behaviour.
- In a world where we are still far from men and women being equal partners in God’s mission, the church has a mandate to witness and live out a biblical partnership of men and women.
- In a world where human dignity and the protection of life are often disregarded, the church is called to speak and to act on such matters as issues around the beginning and end of life, human trafficking, and God’s gift of sexuality, marriage and family.

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57 For the concept ‘mission beyond evangelism’ see the Cape Town Commitment, 69: ‘Theological education is part of mission beyond evangelism.’

58 Johannes Reimer 2017. *Missio Politica: The Mission of the Church and Politics*. Carlisle, UK: Langham.

59 Most of the subsequent topics are taken from Part II of the Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment and topics from the Lausanne Content Library (<https://worlddea.org/yourls/47324>); publications from the World Evangelical Alliance, especially from the areas of Public Engagement and Global Advocacy (<https://worlddea.org/yourls/47325>); and documents published in Dietrich Werner et al. (eds.) 2010. *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*. Oxford: Regnum.

- In a world where science is a dominant force, theology is challenged to enter into competent dialogue with the various scientific disciplines.

Theological education is committed to addressing such challenging issues, because the world needs to hear the biblically grounded and theologically reflected voice of the church, and to see the corresponding actions of Christians.

## **Part 5**

### **Institutions: Providing Leadership and Organizational Structures That Are ‘Fit for Purpose’**

*Theological education is committed to providing the institutional and organizational structures that enable and promote viable educational opportunities adapted to the educational goals and formats. This requires leadership with head, hands and heart.*

#### *13. Head: Moving into the future through strategic leadership*

*Theological education is called and committed to intentionally and strategically providing the best possible educational programmes for the various leadership needs in mission, ministry and marketplace.*

Strategic leadership in theological education will take into consideration the social, demographic, economic, cultural, political and technological realities and developments, and respond with educational programmes that are ‘fit for purpose’ in these circumstances and contexts. This applies to formal and non-formal education, each to an appropriate extent.

One of the biggest challenges of educational leadership in our rapidly changing and fluid time is the tension between stability and continuity that makes education reliable on the one hand, and innovation and flexibility that makes it relevant in ever-changing situations on the other hand. This requires innovation, vision and strategic planning, while at the same time remaining rooted in the tradition of the Christian faith.

Theological education that wants to serve the church in mission in the years ahead will be committed to ongoing assessment of its programmes and to innovation as required by changing contexts, needs and opportunities.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, responsible leadership of theological education will avoid programmes that are driven only by economic considerations. Good education can never be determined by the market alone.

Viability and stability are core values in education, so that stakeholders and students can depend on reliable educational programmes. Consequently, we are committed to responsible, strategic leadership to ensure the integrity and reliability of theological education at every level and in all delivery formats.

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<sup>60</sup> For examples, see Meri MacLeod 2013. ‘Unconventional Educational Practices in Majority World Theological Education. A Qualitative Research Study Commissioned by Overseas Council International: A Comprehensive Report’ (unpublished manuscript).



#### 14. *Hands: Providing suitable and affordable structures through organizational leadership*

*Theological education is called and committed to providing the appropriate organizational structures for the realization of its strategic goals.*

Good structures are needed for the realization of good ideas. Content requires appropriate forms. This applies to education at all levels. Consequently, we are committed to organizational and institutional forms and structures that enable us to realize our mission.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution with regard to organization, structures and infrastructures for theological education. Cultural contexts, geographic location, national educational systems, types of programmes, target groups, collaboration and partnerships, economic capacity and many other circumstances require appropriate and adjusted forms and structures. We therefore avoid simplistically transferring organizational structures that are appropriate in one context to another, or even imposing them on people in another situation.

Appropriate structures and organizational procedure are normally required in the following areas, as appropriate to the format and level of education provided:

- Clear and transparent structures of leadership, management and decision-making.
- Clear distinction between governance and management.<sup>61</sup>
- Proper administration in all areas of the organization.
- Finances: A clear business plan, and integrity in fundraising, budgeting and accounting.
- Student services, through which students are accompanied and advised.
- Staff and faculty: recruitment, employment, support, supervision, assessment, development. Appropriate staff policy.
- Pedagogical development of faculty.
- Facilities as appropriate for the delivery of the programmes.
- Information technology: Provision of essential technical facilities, as well as the necessary support for lecturers and students, including appropriate training for teachers in the pedagogical use of technology.
- Access to study materials and other resources (e.g. libraries, internet).
- Maintenance and development of the entire physical and technical infrastructure.

#### 15. *Heart: Shaping institutional cultures that promote learning*

*Theological education is called and committed to cultivating organizational culture that promotes learning.*

At the heart of the educational institution is its culture. The ‘medium is the message’—the culture of an educational institution is part of the hidden curriculum, and this often speaks louder than the formal curriculum. Consequently, theological

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<sup>61</sup> On governance, see Jason Ferenczi 2015. *Serving Communities: Governance and the Potential of Theological Schools*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

education is committed to cultivating an institutional ethos that reflects the values and goals of the school.<sup>62</sup>

Theological education must be committed to an institutional culture which is characterized by Christian virtues, values and behaviour including mutual respect, a servant attitude, truthfulness, honesty and sense of community.

At a time when ethical standards in education and research are being compromised worldwide, theological educational institutions are challenged to set an example of integrity and fairness.<sup>63</sup>

Learning is promoted through a culture of eagerness to learn by all. Educational institutions are therefore committed to becoming learning organizations.

Institutions providing theological education are 'hybrid organizations'; they operate in different social spheres which can create tensions. As Christian communities, they adhere to Christian values and attitudes. As educational institutions, they are committed to cultural and national educational standards and procedures, especially when seeking academic accreditation. As businesses, they are subject to economic principles. It is the responsibility of culture-shaping leadership to navigate wisely between the different demands of the various social spheres and ensure that Christian values and behaviour shape the culture of the institution above all other forces.

We conclude: The quality of leadership is a key factor for the development of sustainable and relevant theological education. Consequently, we are committed to investing in excellence in leadership, governance and management in theological education. This includes appropriate training for those in leadership responsibilities.

Building on the rich traditions of Christian theology and theological education, while at the same time aware of the opportunities and challenges ahead of us, we submit in 'bold humility' the above call and commitments. We seek to realize this vision for theological education in dependence upon the creative power of the Spirit, inspired by God's immeasurable love, and devoted to Christ's matchless glory.

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62 Cf. Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, Part I; Davina Soh 2016. *The Motive of Hospitality in Theological Education*. Carlisle, UK: Langham (ICETE Series).

63 Cf. Divnya Singh and Christoph Stückelberger (eds.) 2017. *Ethics in Higher Education: Values-Driven Leaders for the Future*. Geneva: Globethics.net, <https://worldidea.org/yourls/47326>.

# ‘In the Land of My Captivity’: Patrick of Ireland’s Use of the Old Latin Jeremiah

Ian Atkinson

Patrician studies generally recognize that Patrick’s writings are saturated with biblical citations and allusions. However, few scholars have studied how Patrick develops specific motifs or uses individual books to develop his arguments. Michael Haykin is one exception, showing how Patrick’s eschatology informs his missional impetus. Along these lines, the exile and exodus motifs that pervade the book of Jeremiah dominate not only Patrick’s theology and missiology, but his own self-understanding within redemptive history. Though previous authors have noted these themes in Patrick’s first Irish experience as a captive, these same lenses are rarely applied to his voluntary life of ministry in Ireland.

In this paper, I explore Patrick’s use of the Old Latin (OL) text of Jeremiah in both his *Confessio* and *Epistola*, illuminating his hermeneutic and presenting him as a worthy model of both biblical literacy and missional zeal, derived from the personal conviction of his role in God’s redemptive plans.

## Introduction

The rise of canonical studies in recent decades has driven scholars to take seriously the study of *intertextuality*, or how certain biblical authors use previous biblical material. The study of intertextuality not only elucidates the writers’ hermeneutical technique, communicative purpose and possibly when they wrote, but also magnifies Scripture’s nature as a unified whole—as *one* book.

A related area of study concerns ancient saints’ use of biblical texts in their writing. The present study, though not primarily concerned with Scripture’s use of Scripture, employs a similar textual approach to Patrick of Ireland’s use of Scripture in his *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* and *Confessio*.<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, was famous for being saturated with the biblical text, as even a surface

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, Patrick’s words are not considered inspired Scripture and do not authoritatively reflect a canonical hermeneutic. Nevertheless, Patrick’s saturation in the biblical text is reflected in his writings, and the material focussed on in the present paper illuminates how our predecessors not only meditated on the Scriptures but also considered themselves within God’s redemptive plan as narrated therein.

reading of his works demonstrates.<sup>2</sup> Patrick less commonly enjoys the same recognition, although his works exhibit the same attribute.<sup>3</sup>

We know that the documentation of the lives of saints (often referred to as hagiography) is frequently adorned with details, both miraculous and mundane, that are designed to draw the reader's mind to events of the biblical narrative and portray their heroes as following a biblical blueprint. Patrick's life and ministry, not surprisingly, is similarly shrouded in mystery and myth, as the numerous versions of his life, written over the two centuries after his death, illustrate.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, as Freeman states, in this case "The true story of Patrick is far more compelling than the medieval legends",<sup>5</sup> and the evidence from Patrick's own writings is startling. His works enjoy scholarly consensus as historically reliable, penned by the man himself, and representing the earliest extant writings from the island of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Thus, "Everything that is said about Patrick that can lay claim to be historically factual about his life, beliefs and mission must be derived from them by textual exegesis"<sup>7</sup> of both his *Epistola* and *Confessio*.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than fabricating events to mimic the narratives of Old Testament saints, Patrick portrays himself as consciously reflecting on his ministry and experiences through the blueprint of redemptive history, particularly drawing on the book of Jeremiah as it relates to the framework of both exile and exodus. This material seems to have informed Patrick's writings in a special way, not only theologically but also experientially—Jeremiah being the example *par excellence* of a prophetic book abundant in biographical details of the prophet himself.<sup>9</sup> We will see that both Patrick's use of Jeremiah in his writings and his interpretation of the events of his own life

2 Spurgeon commented, "Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. . . . Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God." Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records*, vol. 4: 1878–1892 (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1900), 268.

3 This acknowledgement is not absent in patrician studies. See especially Daniel Conneely, *The Letters of Saint Patrick* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1993) and Thomas O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

4 See Richard Hanson, *Saint Patrick: His Origins and Career* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 79, and Philip Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 90 for specific cases of Old Testament appropriation in hagiographical accounts of Patrick.

5 Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland*, xvii.

6 "It would be an exaggeration, but not a gross exaggeration, to say that it is as certain that Patrick wrote these two books as it is that Jonathan Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels* and that W. B. Yeats wrote *The Wild Swans at Coole*." Edward Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1985), xii; cf. Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, 72; Michael Haykin, *Patrick of Ireland: His Life and Impact* (Rosh-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2014), 28–30.

7 O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 44.

8 It seems an uncontroversial claim that the methodological alternatives of relying on historical reconstruction or later hagiographers as the basis for our conclusions are less satisfactory.

9 See Andrew Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire: The Word of God in the Words of Jeremiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 118; Samuel Hildebrandt, "Woe Is Me! The Book of Jeremiah and the Language of Despair," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 3 (2020): 491; John Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah: The Book, the Man, the Message* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 5.

display a man particularly immersed in Jeremiah as the interpretive lens through which he viewed his own life and ministry.

After summarizing the content of Patrick's works and providing a brief overview of exile and exodus in Jeremiah, I will analyze Patrick's use of Jeremiah and his appropriation of the biblical text in his own day. In this section, I identify themes adopted by Patrick from the book of Jeremiah, either verbatim or by allusion, which seem to have shaped Patrick's understanding of his life and role in redemptive history. Finally, I offer some applications for the 21st-century church.

### Patrick's writings<sup>10</sup>

The first of Patrick's two works was the Epistle to the Soldiers of Coroticus (*Epistola ad Milites Corotici*). This brief letter concerns the Romano-British commander Coroticus, who had raided the Irish coast, murdering some residents and carrying others off as slaves. Although such an event was not unheard of along the Irish Sea in that day and age (indeed, Patrick had suffered the same fate in the opposite direction, being captured in Britain and brought to Ireland), two details were particularly repugnant to Patrick. In the first place, the victims were new believers, having recently been baptized by Patrick himself. Second, Coroticus and his men were also publicly known as Christians (probably only nominally, as any good Roman citizen of the day would have considered himself Christian) and should therefore have repented of their actions instead of scoffing at Patrick's previous warnings and admonitions.

Patrick was careful not to overstep the boundary into another ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but since his previous warnings had been ignored, he felt he had no choice but to speak up. This letter served not only as a final appeal on behalf of those enslaved, but also as a public witness, to 'be read before all people' (*Epis. 21; legatur coram cunctis plebibus*), calling for the shaming and effectual excommunication of Coroticus and all those who, calling themselves Christians, had carried out a 'crime so horrible' (*Epis. 17; scelus tam horrendum*).

Patrick's more substantial work is his *Confessio*, the title of which is taken from his concluding statement, 'And this is my confession before I die' (*Conf. 62; Et haec est confessio mea antequam moriar*), on which basis this composition is considered later than the *Epistola*. Though varied in its treatment, it serves primarily as a defence of his ministry in Ireland and an outline of his testimony. Evidently, Patrick was facing some opposition from church leaders in Britain who, perhaps out of jealousy, were keen to question his qualifications and point out his sinful youth. Patrick is transparent about his background in his testimony. Nevertheless, he defends his call and election from youth, not only to salvation but also to ministry in Ireland, drawing a number of parallels with Jeremiah's call along the way.

A rough sketch of Patrick's biography, derived primarily from this document, begins with his youth in a well-to-do Christian villa and his enslavement as a teenager. He felt the Lord's call to repentance during his captivity in Ireland, from which he escaped after six years. At some point during his early adulthood back in Britain, he received compelling visions directing him to return to Ireland to minister, which

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<sup>10</sup> The Latin text and critical apparatus can be found at <https://confessio.ie>. All translations from this text are my own.

he did from around age 30 to the end of his life. We will explore further details of the *Confessio* below as we analyze how he draws upon the Jeremianic material, but it will become clear that 'For someone with only a basic education, Patrick knew the Bible very well. Throughout both letters he easily and almost unconsciously weaves passages from the Old and New Testaments into his writing.'<sup>11</sup>

Patrick's education was quite limited since he was taken captive before finishing his schooling, yet he undoubtedly made up for some of this loss during his years of preparation for ministry in early adulthood, such that 'the words of the Bible come more readily to him than the words of ordinary (Latin) speech.'<sup>12</sup> Though his Latin abilities are often questioned, 'the jerkiness of some of his sentences stems entirely from his desire to cite the Christian scriptures or use their figures of speech—theyself clumsy attempts to render Greek and Hebrew into Latin idioms—at every turn in his prose.'<sup>13</sup> Such observations leave no doubt that he was a man of one book,<sup>14</sup> both intellectually and experientially, as astutely pointed out by Conneely: 'All this suggests that Patrick had fully assimilated and made his own the profound content and meaning of Scripture.'<sup>15</sup>

### Exile and exodus in Jeremiah

There exist a number of excellent works tracing the exile and exodus themes throughout the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> The exodus from Egypt serves as a blueprint throughout Israel's history, not only of God's redemptive power in the past but also, in light of another exile warned about and ultimately realized, as a type of a future exodus. Central to this idea of a new exodus from the exile that took place in Jeremiah's midst is the following promise: 'Therefore, look: the days are coming—a declaration of YHWH—when it will not be said anymore, "As YHWH lives, who brought up from sons of Israel from the land of Egypt", but "As YHWH lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north, from all the lands to which he had driven them." And he will make them return to their land, which he gave to their fathers' (Jer 16:14–15; cf. the allusion to the exodus in the context of the 587 BC Babylonian exile in Jer 31:2–3).<sup>17</sup> That is, the Egyptian exodus offered a model for this later exodus, though this time it would involve 'all the lands'. In short, 'The exodus story and its aftermath show that Yahweh could get his people out of serfdom and give them a land to live on. So he could do it again.'<sup>18</sup>

A brief sampling of applications of the exodus motif in Jeremiah includes the expectation of obedience, not sacrifice, after the exodus experience and the insistent

11 Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland*, 135

12 Hanson, *Saint Patrick*, 160.

13 O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 51.

14 I do not mean to imply that Patrick knew no other books. Though scholarship is divided, Conneely's study of textual connections with over 20 patristic authors casts doubt on Thompson's assertion that 'He had read little or nothing' (Thompson, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* 37).

15 Conneely, *The Letters of Saint Patrick*, 161.

16 See particularly Matthew Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

17 All Hebrew translations are my own from the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah.

18 Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, 5; cf. Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 121.

voice and crucial centrality of the prophetic ministry:

For in the day I brought them from the land of Egypt I did not speak to your fathers and I did not command them concerning burnt offering and sacrifice. But this thing I commanded them, saying: 'Listen to my voice and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the way which I will command you so that it will go well for you.' But they did not listen and they did not give me their ear. They walked in the counsel of the stubbornness of their evil heart, going backwards and not forward. From the day on which their fathers went out from the land of Egypt until this day I have sent to you all of my servants, the prophets, rising early in the day and sending them. But they did not listen to me and they did not give me their ear. They stiffened their neck. They became worse than their fathers. (Jer 7:22–26)

Later, in his temple sermon (Jer 9:21), Jeremiah returns to exodus imagery to describe the conditions of the Babylonian invasion with language borrowed from the Egyptian plagues: as death coming up through the windows and 'entering our palaces' (*ba be'armenothenu*), to cut off the children from 'the street' (*khuts*) and 'the squares' (*rekhovoth*).<sup>19</sup> But just as in Jeremiah 7:23, Jeremiah 11:4 makes clear that the foundation for Torah fidelity and covenant relationship ('you will be my people and I will be your God') was the exodus act itself: 'I commanded your ancestors on the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt' (*tsivvithi eth-avothekhem beyom hotsi'i-otham me'erets-mitsrayim*). So it would be with the new exodus: 'Such an exodus of the nations, like that of Abraham and Israel, will involve forsaking idols and turning to Yahweh, the true and living God.'<sup>20</sup>

I will analyze Patrick's use of OL Jeremiah in more detail below. Here I will simply note how such overarching exodus motifs are brought out in Patrick's biographical record. Typical of the current discussion is O'Loughlin's observation:

After a time of slavery in Ireland (equivalent to the time the Israelites spent in Egypt), he was rescued by God over water (equivalent to the crossing of the Red Sea) (*Confessio* 17). He then wandered in a wilderness and had to depend on God for food (equivalent to the wandering for 40 years in the desert being fed with manna) (*Confessio* 19). And during that time his faith was tested, just as the faith of the Israelites was tested (*Confessio* 20).<sup>21</sup>

Even sections of the later hagiographers that lack the typical embellishing tendencies noted, for example, 'the first Easter to be celebrated in the Egypt which is this island, as in the Land of Goshen.'<sup>22</sup>

Moving on from the first exodus as a blueprint for the return from Babylon, it seems clear that a number of magnificent promises were not fulfilled in the Second Temple period. For example, Jeremiah 23:1–8 repeats the content of 16:14–15 cited above—that is, Yahweh's new identity as the God who brought his people up out of

19 Similarly, though more explicitly, the prophet Hosea likens the exile to 'a return to Egypt' (8:14, 9:3).

20 *Morales, Exodus Old and New*, 125.

21 O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 57.

22 Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, Book 1[13] as quoted in Philip Freeman, *The World of Saint Patrick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69.

*all the nations*. Yet chapter 23 adds a crucial ingredient to this new exodus process: Yahweh declares that he will establish a righteous branch for David (v. 5), whose very name will be 'Yahweh, our righteousness' (v. 6). Until this King is enthroned and his kingdom consummated, the purposes of the new and final exodus will not be complete (cf. Jer 17:25). Furthermore, although the people had not improved their covenant fidelity since the time of the exodus (they actually became worse!), Jeremiah promises that a day is coming when YHWH will make a new covenant with them, *not* like the one established from the time of the exodus, so that his teaching will be on their hearts (Jer 31:32–33). Indeed, they will receive a new heart (Jer 24:7) and 'forgiveness will now have power to transform the forgiven as it never has before.'<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the *new* exodus would, in fact, find its fulfilment in a *final* exodus.<sup>24</sup> And thus, as will be explored below, Patrick could view his ministry as fulfilling the ingathering of this nation and effectively bringing about the new exodus for both himself and the Irish people, while his voluntary return to Ireland nonetheless portrays an ongoing life in exile, seeking the shalom of Ireland. Patrician scholars rarely discuss Patrick's view of his return to minister in Ireland as both another exile and the necessary labour towards a new exodus, for himself and for the nascent Irish church, though Patrick continues to identify himself as a 'stranger and exile' (*proselitus et profuga, Epis.* 1) and Ireland as 'the land of my captivity' (*in terra captiuitatis meae, Conf.* 33).<sup>25</sup>

Leaving aside the bigger picture of the exodus motif in Jeremiah in general, we will now turn our attention to Patrick's use of the OL of Jeremiah.

### Patrick's use of Old Latin Jeremiah

From the outset, although the two are separated by about a millennium and almost three thousand miles, Patrick finds similarities in his background with that of Jeremiah, son of a prophet (Jer 1:1), noting the legacy of spiritual leadership in his own lineage—his father having been a deacon and his grandfather an elder (*Conf.* 1). Although we lack the details of Jeremiah's exact age at his calling, we know he was young (Jer 1:6). Patrick, too, came to know the Lord in his youth (*Conf.* 44). As Jeremiah was consecrated as a prophet to the nations even before his birth (Jer 1:5), Patrick also understood, despite his youthful ignorance (*Conf.* 2), that his being 'scattered among many nations' (*Conf.* 1; *dispersit nos in gentibus multis*) as a teenager was a result of such ignorance, so that it served as spiritual preparation for his being sent again, not quite in the sense of 'as a prophet among the nations I placed you' (Jer 1:5b; *prophetam in Gentibus posui te*) but almost identically: 'as a witness to all nations before the end of the world' (*Conf.* 34; *in testimonium omnibus gentibus*

23 Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, 202.

24 See Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 122–33 for a more extended discussion of the superiority of the final exodus.

25 However, O'Loughlin (*Discovering Saint Patrick*, 67) makes the following observation: 'And having been taken, in his youth, as a captive to an alien land, he again takes up that slavery—and with it exile—in response to a divine call.' Thus, just like exodus, exile also encompasses both his first stay in Ireland and his second, in light of the homesickness and suffering experienced, even throughout fruitful years of ministry.



*ante finem mundi*). His second and last arrival in Ireland would not be as a slave to man, but as a slave to Christ, considering himself 'a stranger among non-Romans and an exile because of the love of God' (*Epis. 1; Inter barbaras itaque gentes habito proselitus et profuga ob amorem Dei*).

Although Jeremiah objected to taking on his role as prophet, the Lord promised that he himself would put his words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1:9). Likewise, Patrick confessed that he too did not know how to speak in *Conf.* 9–13, using Mosaic language: 'with my lack of knowledge and such slow tongue' (*Conf.* 11; *cum mea inscientia et tardiori lingua*). Here Patrick cites Exodus 4:10 (*tardiore lingua ego sum*) almost verbatim but also, as already noted, shares Jeremiah's concern for his youth and limited education: 'Look, I do not know how to speak, since I am so young' (Jer 1:6; *ecce nescio loqui, quia juvenior sum ego*). Their humble self-estimation produced in them a vibrant and burning prayer life, evidenced in Jeremiah's case by the frequent breaks in the narrative or his preaching as he directly addresses the Lord in lament or praise.

During his ministry, Patrick experienced his fair share of opposition from within the church (*Conf.* 26, 29). Indeed, his desire to defend himself was probably his primary motive for writing the *Confessio*. Similarly, Jeremiah also experienced a large dose of opposition from his Jerusalem neighbours (Jer 1:18–19 and elsewhere). Patrick experienced opposition not only from the church leadership in Britain, but also from unsolicited enemies produced by the Coroticus event. It seems that such figures would have been tacitly confident in their established ecclesiastical order. They were, after all, Roman Britons with a comfortable hierarchy already established, whereas Patrick was living on the fringes of civilization, where no Roman Catholic representation had existed previously, and working to achieve a firm foothold for Christianity that would last another 600 years.<sup>26</sup> Such false confidence among the established order was not new, as shown by Jeremiah's first temple sermon against a people who relied on the presence of the temple in their midst for ongoing shalom (Jer 7–10). Coroticus and the local church leaders who were not willing to accuse him may have been equally self-deceived, claiming that 'No evil will come upon us' (Jer 5:12). Nevertheless, neither Jeremiah nor Patrick had any doubt that the Spirit of God, not a temple or a more firmly established ecclesiastical organization, was the true sign of God's presence. Jeremiah makes it clear that the exiles will, in fact, enjoy a much brighter future than those remaining in Jerusalem (see Jer 24:4–10), and he records the faithful actions of outsiders such as Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian and Nebuzaradan the Babylonian in contrast to the faithless Judeans (Jer 39–40). Indeed, 'The word of the Lord had disappeared from Judah but is alive among the nations.'<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps more expectedly, Patrick's ministry in Ireland was further marked by pagan opposition there (*Conf.* 35), just as Jeremiah doubtless experienced the turmoil of the ongoing Babylonian threat. Citing Psalm 50:15 (49:15 in the Old Latin version), Patrick called on God in the day of his distress (*Conf.* 5; *Invoca me in die tribulationis tuae*); similarly, Jeremiah's writings show familiarity with YHWH as his 'refuge in the day of trouble' (Jer 16:19). Indeed, God would deliver Patrick from

26 After 600 years, the monastic centres of Christian learning and mission shifted to a more centralized ecclesiastical organization, largely initiated by the Synod of Ráth Breasail.

27 Shead, *A Mouth Full of Fire*, 103.

his captors on more than one occasion (*Conf.* 21; *liberavit me Dominus de manibus eorum*), just as Jeremiah would be liberated from the hands of his opposition (Jer 1:8, 19; *ego tecum sum, dicit Dominus, ut liberem te*).

As already noted, God put his words in Jeremiah's mouth (Jer 1:9), and the result was that God himself burned within the prophet (Jer 20:9; *factus est in corde meo ut ignis ardens, flammans in ossibus meis*). Likewise, Patrick confessed that he could not be silent (*Conf.* 3) but must shout aloud (*Conf.* 12), since, during his captivity as a young man, 'the Spirit was burning in me at that time' (*Conf.* 16; *tunc spiritus in me fervebat*). Though his opposition may laugh and insult him, he would not be quiet (*Conf.* 45). Likewise, Jeremiah was commanded to speak all YHWH commanded, not fearing his opposition (Jer 1:17), even though his message brought him 'reproach and mockery all day' (Jer 20:8). The effectual force of the in-dwelt Word was the Spirit testifying in the lives of all believers, who would receive Patrick's confession as the very word of YHWH, 'written on [their] hearts' (*Conf.* 11; *scripta in cordibus vestris*), just as YHWH would write his law on the people's hearts.<sup>28</sup>

As Jeremiah's audience hears time and again, there is a coming disaster from the north (Jer 1:14), just as Coroticus and his soldiers would sail the north Irish Sea. Indeed, disaster would come from the 'remote parts of the earth' (Jer 6:22). As already noted, the re-application of the exodus motif to the return from Babylon is made explicit in Jeremiah 16, where we read that YHWH would no longer be identified as the Lord who brought up (*he'elah*) the people of Israel from the land of Egypt, but as the Lord who brought up (*he'elah*) the people of Israel out of the land of the north and out of *every country* where He had exiled them (Jer 16:15).<sup>29</sup> The second exodus would become part of YHWH's renown among his people, just as Patrick was led into captivity once by force and again into 'exile' as a *profuga*, compelled by the love of God (*Epis.* 1), travelling to what was, in the Roman estimation, the end of the world. Of course, both writers were aware of the purifying effects of this exile (*Conf.* 28), as Patrick seemed to understand his initial captivity as not only a wakeup call but also preparation for his future ministry.

Though patrician scholarship wrestles with Patrick's seemingly simplistic understanding of causality under the Lord's sovereignty (*Conf.* 1: he sinned and therefore the Lord sent him to Ireland as a slave), the theme of exile as punishment for

28 Without updated critical editions of the Old Latin, it is difficult to determine why in Jeremiah 31:33 only 'giving my law, I will write it on their mind' (*Dans legem meam, in sensu eorum scribam illam*) is attested, whereas the Vulgate reads, 'I will put my law on their inner being and I will write it on their heart' (*Dabo legem meam in visceribus eorum, et in corde eorum scribam eam*).

29 Throughout the Scriptures, exile is referred to as *going down* (in parallel with going down to Sheol; see Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend to the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015], 85). In contrast, the return from Babylon is viewed as *going up*, as seen in our current texts. Indeed, this cosmic imagery becomes a repeated motif of leaving and entering the presence of the Lord throughout Israel's history (Morales, *Who Shall Ascend*, 132–37; Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 94–96). The ascending often occurs through water (ibid., 80–81), whether through the Nile or to the region 'beyond the river' (Euphrates). It is precisely between the world superpowers of Egypt and Neo-Babylon 'on either side' that the returning remnant would shine brightest as YHWH's newly redeemed people, inviting people from the ends of the earth, even the barely Romanized rural Ireland of the fifth century. Unfortunately, *educere* and *reducere* as found in OL Jeremiah do not reflect the topographical theme as the Hebrew's *yarad* and *alah* do.

rebellion cannot be missed in YHWH's dealings with the Israelites,<sup>30</sup> and Jeremiah's proclamation of the same could not be clearer.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Patrick counted himself among those whom the Lord 'scattered among the nations' (*dispersit in gentibus*), citing Jeremiah 9:16. He adds 'many' to modify 'among the nations', followed by 'even until the end of the earth' (*Conf. 1; dispersit nos in gentibus multis etiam usque ad ultimum terrae*), tying in well with YHWH's post-exilic identity of the Lord who would recover his people from every country where they had been exiled (Jer 16:15).

As early as the YHWH's foretelling of 400 years of slavery in Genesis 15:13–14, exile goes hand in hand with return, i.e. exodus. Indeed, a biblical-theological arch can be traced from the original exile of the Garden to the final exodus into the New Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that the redemptive-historic blessings that would come from YHWH's transformed identity as detailed in Jeremiah 16 and 23 would involve a much greater fame and glory, as the nations themselves would return to the Lord!

Patrick understands this in-gathering precisely through the lens of Jeremiah 16:19, quoting verbatim, 'From you people will come from the end of the earth' (*Conf. 38; ad te gentes venient ab extremis terrae*, cf. *Conf. 58*), while also drawing on Isaiah 49:6 to leave no doubt about the remnant's nature as a 'light for the nations', again, 'to the end of the earth' (*posui te lumen in gentibus ut sis in salutem usque ad extremum terrae*).<sup>33</sup> Transparently, the nations will 'be blessed in him' (Jer 4:2, adopting Abrahamic language from Gen 12:3), and Patrick's voluntary return to exile would induce a greater exodus for the Irish people as they were gathered into covenant relationship with YHWH. Patrick thus saw it as his responsibility to return to Ireland and fish well, regarding which he again quoted verbatim from Jeremiah 16:16: *ecce ego mittam piscatores ... multos* (cf. *Conf. 40; ecce mitto piscatores ... multos*). He seems to have maintained this conscious self-understanding expressed previously as one of the 'fishers whom long ago God predicted' (*Epis. 11; ut unus essem de uenatoribus siue piscatoribus quos olim Deus in nouissimis diebus ante praenuntiauit*). If Patrick's captivity, divine rescue and divine calling to return to Ireland to preach had taught him anything, it was that YHWH was watching over his word to do it (Jer 1:12), and that he would bring in the harvest—using Patrick's 'second exile' towards the eschatological in-gathering of the nations under YHWH's wing as they were led out in spiritual exodus.

### Patrick's exilic message for the church

It seems that Patrick's situation, on a mission outside the borders of established Christendom, is much more comparable to the Western church's contemporary experience than to the comforts of Roman Britain. Christians today in an increasingly post-Christian West would do well to view themselves within the strange and foreign streets of Babylon, rather than at home in the Jerusalem of Christendom. Taking

30 See Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 26–45.

31 See Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, 127–34.

32 See Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 126–27.

33 Similarly, Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 108, notes that in citing this very Isaianic material in his sermon at the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:47), 'Paul sees his [apostolic] ministry as a fulfillment of this restoration promise.'

Patrick's words and example to heart should involve following him as he followed Christ, and as he applied the words of Holy Scripture to his life and let them permeate his very being and mission.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, Patrick's zeal and courage in the face of danger and travels bring comfort to the believing immigrant or refugee, while the imminent danger of newly baptized believers being kidnapped may sound familiar to those suffering persecution around the globe. The nascent nature of the Irish church in Patrick's time is analogous to many parts of the world where the church is flourishing but young. Patrick was a zealous evangelist and church planter, but by no means did he neglect discipleship and pursuit of doctrine.

How confident is the church today that we have the Lord's words on our lips? Do we enjoy the privilege and weight of responsibility as a result of the Spirit burning within us, dwelling within us and equipping the church for every good work? Have we adopted the same posture of humility and recognition of the need for prayer? Are we working for the good of our captors' city?

To be sure, there are purifying effects of exile, suffering and growth pains, which may shake up the church for decades to come.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, if the biblical paradigm of exile is properly applied, it is to be welcomed, difficult as that may be. Despite the opposition and tragedy that occurred throughout Patrick's life and that of his followers, 'the paradox of hope that fuels prophetic preaching [is] that the One who cannot be controlled is still in control',<sup>36</sup> no matter on which side of the Irish Sea we find ourselves. Finally, if there is any hope in exile, it is for return—a final exodus in which we will witness the in-gathering of the nations. It is upon the Lord who brought about and is bringing about this exodus (Lk 9:31) that we fix our gaze.

*Appendix: Thematic comparison between Jeremiah and Patrick's writings*

Theme	Jeremiah	Patrick's writings
Family ministry tradition	1:1	<i>Conf.</i> 1
Age of calling	1:5	<i>Conf.</i> 44
A prophet to the nations	1:5	<i>Conf.</i> 1, 34; <i>Epis.</i> 1
Humble self-estimation	1:6	<i>Conf.</i> 9–13
Opposition from within	1:18–19 among others	<i>Conf.</i> 26, 29
Deliverance from danger	1:8, 19; 16:19	<i>Conf.</i> 5, 21, 35
Not keeping silent	1:9, 17; 20:8–9	<i>Conf.</i> 12, 16, 45
In-gathering and blessing of the nations	4:2, 16:15–16, 19	<i>Conf.</i> 38, 40, 58; <i>Epis.</i> 11

34 For a discussion of how to apply an exilic framework to the contemporary Western church, see Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 49–64.

35 Beach (*The Church in Exile*, 47) comments, 'It may be that the reality of life in a post-Christian culture serves as a therapeutic opportunity for the church as it provokes a time of deep reflection and self-analysis.'

36 Hildebrandt, 'Woe Is Me!' 497.

# Book Reviews

Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay? Second Edition*

Jukka Helle, *Towards a Truly Catholic and a Truly Asian Church: The Asian Way-faring Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970–2020*

Marcus Grohmann, *Seeking Reconciliation in the Context of Coloniality: A Study of White People's Approaches in a Multicultural South African Church*

## ***Is God Anti-Gay? Second Edition***

**Sam Allberry**

Surrey: Good Book Company, 2023

Pb., 121 pp.

*Reviewed by Andrew Messmer, Academic Dean, Seville Theological Seminary (Spain), and editor of the Spanish-language version of the Evangelical Review of Theology*

Ten years after its original publication, which sold over 200,000 copies, Allberry has published an updated and expanded edition of his work on same-sex attraction (hereafter SSA). Allberry is an SSA Christian and pastor, and his book is personal and practical as well as pastoral in nature. There are a few changes, though no substantial alterations of his original arguments. The new edition is 30 pages longer, includes a foreword by Tim Keller, rearranges various parts of the book (such as placing the chapter on Jesus at the beginning and relocating several question-and-answer sections), and adds a concluding 'Author's Note' (which contains information typically found in a prologue and would have better been placed near the beginning of the book).

Allberry has kept the book at a popular level, such that it can be read in an afternoon. He has added eight footnotes, none of which were present in the first edition, but these do not distract the reader's attention from the main text. The focus remains on SSA, as Allberry does not tackle other emerging topics in the realm of sexuality, such as transgenderism. There is an odd mistake on page 72, where he quotes insulting language that he has heard Christians use, 'That's so *l*' (first edition: 'gay'), but I saw no other typographical errors, and the uncluttered page layout and facilitates easy reading.

In response to his own question, 'Is God anti-gay?' Allberry maintains his firm response: 'No, not as if this one matter exercises him more than all the others.' As Allberry's first edition has served as a touchstone work on the issue of SSA for the past ten years, one gets the sense that it will continue to serve the same role for another ten.

Although the second edition is better in many ways than the first, a few minor issues could be fixed. First, the book does not treat some practical issues such as masturbation, or the many things unmarried SSA people can do that married people can't do because of family commitments (1 Cor 7:32–35). Second, the steps that Allberry suggests for Christian responses when either non-Christians or Christians come out to Christians as SSA need to be systematized and made clearer. For example, in both editions, Allberry says that when a non-Christian comes out as SSA, Christians should thank them, assure them that their fears of being rejected are ungrounded, listen to them, and pray for them, but that when a Christian comes out as SSA, Christians should thank them and listen to them. If there is an intentional difference in the advice, this should be clarified; if not, the potentially misleading distinction should be eliminated. Third, the question-and-answer section entitled 'Aren't People Just Born This Way?' is a bit weak. Now that Allberry has incorporated a limited number of footnotes into his work, he should consider including one that points readers to works on genetics and the influence that an individual's environment exerts on him or her.

Allberry's book is one of the few that address the issue of SSA from an explicitly biblical and historically Christian perspective, and thus an updated and expanded edition is quite welcome. This book is ideal for laymen seeking a pastoral introduction to the topic and could be used quite well for small-group discussions, Sunday school material, or personal enrichment reading. His balance of grace and truth, infused with pastoral care and years of experience in dealing with the issue, makes this work a model of how Christians should address contentious issues in the church and society.

***Towards a Truly Catholic and a Truly Asian Church: The Asian Wayfaring Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970–2020***

**Jukka Helle**

Leiden: Brill, 2022

Pb., xi + 324 pp., bibliography, author index

*Reviewed by Francis Jr. S. Samdao, Senior Lecturer of Historical and Systematic Theology at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary and assistant editor of the Evangelical Review of Theology*

Recent books by Asian scholars highlight the use of an Asian lens in reading Scripture (Johnson Thomaskutty, ed., *An Asian Introduction to the New Testament*), dealing with social concerns (Lorenzo C. Bautista, Aldrin M. Peñamora, and Federico G. Villanueva, eds., *Faith and Bayan: Evangelical Christian Engagement in the Philippine Context*), and doing theology (Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, *Asian Christianity and Theology: Inculturation, Interreligious Dialogue, Integral Liberation*). This search for an Asian Christian identity while being faithful to a church tradition has also been initiated by Asian Catholic bishops through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).

This volume, Helle's dissertation, is a treasure. It describes FABC's goal in this way: 'If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future' (1, 34). While the focus is on the Catholic Church and Asian contexts, Helle, a Lutheran missionary in Asia for more than two decades, believed that FABC theology could contribute to other Christian denominations in Asia. All Christians interested in understanding the relation between their particularities and the universality of the body of Christ will gain from this book.

The introductory chapter focuses on two meetings in the 1970s that called on the Catholic Church in Asia to fulfil its mission by addressing the challenges of Asians. At that time, the end of the colonial period was also interpreted as an opportunity to move beyond Western theologies.

Chapter 2 discusses what Asianness means and its components. Helle points out that Asianness is not easy to define because some scholars, such as Ruben Mendoza and Jonathan Tan, believe that Asia is not an historical concept but a geographic one constructed by scholars, philosophers and politicians. But for the FABC, Asianness refers to the priority of becoming local. With regard to the church, then, Asianness means an inculturated (incarnated) community that is still not detached from the universal body of Christ. The first place to become truly Asian should occur not in the contexts in which the church lives but in the church itself. Another aspect of Asianness appears in the centrality of the concept of harmony in Asian theologies and philosophies.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider how Asians perceive truth. Helle explains the necessity of dialogue with other religions in understanding truth. The FABC listens to how others view truth. In doing so, they do not treat truth as relative, for the bishops continue to assert that Jesus Christ is the only way, the truth, the life and the unique saviour of the world. The Asian bishops think that 'the Church can learn from other religions and contribute to them. In this way, the Church both gives and receives. Thus, dialogue means both a methodological approach and behavioural patterns: the way how the Church lives with the others' (75). This assertion is important for Christian work in Asia, where multiple world religions have a strong foothold.

Chapter 5 looks at how a local church can serve Asian people. The FABC bishops believe that it is essential to have a theological methodology compatible with Asians. That calls for the use of Asian cultural resources such as symbols, terminologies, concepts, proverbs and songs in presenting Jesus Christ. For example, Jesus is presented as a 'man of creative Spirit, friend of God, person of interiority, bringer of harmony, lover of the poor, healer and liberator, bold prophet, suffering companion, victor of death, and sharer of his Spirit' (236). Such a view of Jesus Christ is relevant to Asians who suffer heavily from poverty, injustice, corruption and natural calamities.

The FABC serves as a representative of the Asian Catholic Church in promoting Asian resources in doing theology and in living as a church. However, as Helle observes, this body has no formal ecclesial authority. The results of the FABC's proposals depend on the response of the local episcopate.

Although I wish that Helle had reflected more fully on the FABC's work from his Lutheran background, evangelicals in Asia can learn from the Roman Catholic undertaking described here. I appreciated learning that the FABC was the first Asian

conference to assemble bishops to develop theology aimed at Asians. Their effort to be both truly Christian and truly Asian—both universal and particular—can challenge non-Catholic Christians to do something similar, appreciating Asian identities and dealing more forthrightly with prominent Asian concerns such as poverty, interreligious dialogue, the impact of natural calamities, and social issues.

***Seeking Reconciliation in the Context of Coloniality:  
A Study of White People's Approaches in  
a Multicultural South African Church***  
**Marcus Grohmann**

Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS, 2023  
Pb., 265 pp, bibliog.

*Reviewed by Jim Harries, missionary in Africa and adjunct faculty  
at William Carey International University, California*

This innovative, qualitative ethnographic research considers how whites do things when seeking to achieve meaningful reconciliation within a mixed-race congregation. Grohmann immersed himself in a multi-cultural church in Cape Town, South Africa. He investigated three questions: (1) to what extent white people were aware of their continuing socio-economic and 'languacultural' privilege and dominance; (2) how white people imagined the idea of reconciliation, given their understanding of inter-cultural power relationships; and (3) what reconciliation in this context looked like at a practical level for white people.

The whites involved were quick to acknowledge their economic advantage. However, they were much less aware of ways in which the language being used, combined with the culture and theology of the church, was impeding reconciliation.

Reconciliation was understood as arising through increasing equality and through people of different ethnicities cooperating together effectively, both as groups and as individuals. Various avenues to reconciliation were recognized in which the default mode was to follow norms that originated amongst whites. To a lesser extent, there was some adaptation to the norms of blacks. 'Hope for transformation from within' was a particular strategy seen as helpful by church members.

Grohmann's research also encompassed three concept studies, comparing the way particular terms are widely understood in English and in the isiXhosa language spoken by blacks.

I hope this research will open people's eyes to ways in which their use of language and the theology arising from that language limit reconciliation options. The book concludes by encouraging churches and their members to be open to adopting aspects of language and theology that arise from culturally rooted interpretations by non-white people. That means taking black languages seriously. Grohmann sees this step as key to a kind of reconciliation that can overcome entrenched differences between peoples of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds.

Anthropologists' tendency to study Majority World people by smoothing over rocky epistemological difficulties, while assuming that Western observers are in some way neutral, contrasts with Grohmann's detailed investigations. The study



reveals the insecurities and struggles felt by white people in their endeavours towards racial integration. Prior to Grohmann's arrival, head-on debate on interracial issues between blacks and whites had raised emotional tensions on both sides of the congregation, resulting in anger, confusion and people leaving the church.

Grohmann briefly shares his own experience of reaching out to indigenous churches, an overt demonstration of the playing out of deep cultural differences using indigenous languages with Africans in control. This experience no doubt adds to his advocating for association from a distance—i.e. contact without domination—between white and black South Africans, as an alternative or complement to reconciliation efforts as they are widely understood today.

Sharing in the life and language of African people, rather than hearing them only as mediated through English, may be a good way forward. Furthermore, Grohmann's attempts at deep sharing of life with black people, enabling a profound appreciation of the needs of the underprivileged, can help to remind us that not everyone participates equally in South Africa's dominant culture.

Underlying Grohmann's thesis are his startling revelations of poorly grounded assumptions regarding the neutrality of English. Whereas white use of English presupposes cultural content of European origin not found amongst blacks, widespread use of English by all gives the misleading impression that Western culture is universal. This extends to English expressions of theology. English is not an abstract system but is strongly interlaced with a certain Western way of life. Assuming that one knows what blacks mean when they use English often results in ignorance amongst whites about what actually happens in African communities. In contrast, white people's familiarity with and regular use of indigenous African languages is advocated to bring rectification. Many key words (Grohmann mentions 'preaching' among others) are conceptualized differently according to diverse languacultural systems. Moreover, indigenous people who have adapted English for their own uses may conceal what they actually mean from the more naïve amongst whites.

The book, a published version of Grohmann's PhD thesis, is a challenging and ground-breaking text that deserves to be widely read. It will be of interest to missiologists, as well as to those concerned for the development of Africa or for interracial relations globally. As the foreword states, 'Marcus Grohmann helps us to become conscious of the historical and inherent ways in which colonialism continues to misshape our best efforts at Christian reconciliation.'