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“Gotta Serve Somebody”: The Challenge of Christian Scholarship¹

Paul Otto

Bob Dylan, that iconic bard of latter-twentieth-century popular music, apparently came to the Christian faith in the late seventies. At that time, he eloquently captured many aspects of Christian theology in songs produced on his album, *Slow Train Coming*.² Perhaps most memorable of these was “Gotta Serve Somebody.” Echoing Christ’s teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, Dylan proclaimed that no person—large or small, young or old, rich or poor, significant or insignificant—could escape the basic choice facing all people. “You may be a state trooper, you might be a young Turk,” he crooned:

You may be the head of some big TV network,
You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame,
You may be living in another country under another name.

But you’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You’re gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.³

These are poignant words confronting all people. But Christ’s teaching goes deeper than this challenge. Wherever Dylan may be in the faith today, his words continue to challenge listeners to make the ultimate choice between belief and unbelief. Christ, however, spoke to people already in the Covenant. He challenged those who already believed to inspect their lives and consider whether they served the Lord whose name they claimed: “No one can serve two masters,” Jesus spoke. “Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24a).⁴ This challenge, I argue, lies at the root of how Christian scholars should approach the integration of faith and learning. When considering how Christian scholars should think about their work, I believe we should be asking, “Whom are we serving in our work as academics?” This fundamental question is deeply rooted in the wisdom of Scripture and is also developed by thinkers in the Reformed tradition. This essay seeks to establish this question as a foundation for how Christian scholars should consider the integration of faith and learning. Further, it will elaborate on how faith and learning integration can look in application by recommending a framework for a Christian worldview.

Whom Will You Serve?

The fundamental question—whom are we serving?—is a question that recurs throughout Scripture. Humankind faced choices from the very beginning. Some were choices of preference or style, but others were fundamental, life-or-death, all-or-nothing choices. Adam and Eve, the parents of the human race, had many choices about how to tend the garden, name the animals, care for one another, and undertake all the myriad things encapsulated in that command to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). But none of these decisions were as crucial as the choice they had to make concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That was a fundamental choice—the legacy of which would not only affect the rest of their lives but the history of humankind. We all know what they chose and we know the outcome. What Adam and Eve thought was a choice between eating and not eating a piece of fruit turned out to be a choice between serving God and serving the Devil.

Our first parents’ action brought God’s curse on themselves and on all humankind. As a result of their actions, humans since that time have faced the same profound choice, not simply in connection with a piece of fruit, but in everything they do. The Bible is replete with examples of this choice between serving God and serving Satan (or more immediately man himself). The Tower of Babel provides the quintessential biblical example of how far man will go to be more like God. There, on the Plains of Shinar, God’s image bearers went to the work of developing His creation—improving agriculture, developing new construction techniques, and pooling their resources and organizing themselves into an urban society. None of these things were bad in and of themselves. If there is any doubt about whether cities are inherently evil, we are to be reminded that the vision of God’s consummated kingdom includes at its center a city—the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21).⁵ So, no, cities were not bad. Brick-making was not bad. Agriculture was not bad. Even building towers was not bad. It was the evil intent of these builders’ hearts that was the problem. It was their desire to “make a name for [them]selves,” to put themselves in God’s place. You “gotta serve somebody,” and they chose to serve the Devil by putting themselves ahead of their Creator (Gen. 11:1-9).

But, as already stated, this ongoing choice facing humankind is not just a choice to be in covenant with God or out of the covenant, since the teaching of Scriptures so often poses the question not universally to mankind, but more narrowly to those within the covenant community. As God’s covenant people were led out of Egypt by Moses and brought through the wilderness for forty years, they daily faced the choice to serve Him or to serve other gods. On the eve of entering the Promised Land, Joshua placed the question squarely before them, and did not put too fine a point on it either: “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:14-15a).

The choice runs throughout the Old Testament and clearly made a major theme in the Jewish scriptures. In the post-exilic collection of the psalms, what we know as Psalm 1 not only was placed at the beginning of the Psalter collection but also served as an introduction to the “Writings,” a major collection of Old Testament books. Well-known

to most Christians, Psalm 1 reminds us in no uncertain terms that two paths are laid out before us—the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

These two paths of the righteous and the wicked provide a major theme in the annals of Judah's and Israel's kings. From the time David's kingdom was divided between his grandson Rehoboam and Solomon's deputy Jeroboam, each successive ruler of his respective kingdom either chose to walk "in the ways of his father and in his sin" or "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done."

In his teachings, Christ made it clear that true service to God cuts right through those who claim his name: "No good tree bears bad fruit," Jesus proclaimed, "nor does a bad tree bear good fruit." He continued, "Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6: 43-46).

Similar teaching is repeated throughout the epistles. Paul admonishes his readers to "[p]ut to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.... [Y]ou have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:5-10). He also teaches, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24).

How Should We Serve God?

It is easy for us who live within the covenant family to take for granted these words and teachings. Most Christians recognize the biblical requirements to holy living. Many also recognize the broader implications of these teachings. We faithfully attend public worship of God, we actively support the work of the church with our time and

money, we raise our children with special attention to "bring[ing] them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). These days faithful Christians also recognize—and act upon—the need to be politically active and well informed. Many of us ask important questions about what we read, listen to, and watch on TV or in the movie theater, and increasingly the Christian community has turned—or returned—to acts of service. Indeed, one might say that in light of how intentional and active many Christians have become in the last generation, there is little need for me to quote Scripture about whom we should be serving. But with all this attention to a broader understanding of what it means to be a Christian, many still draw lines of division between their faith and other parts of their lives, most notably the part of their lives represented by their careers or daily employment. When it comes to individual piety or broader social and cultural issues, many Christians seem very much attuned to the call to be faithful to God's Word. But in their daily work, especially for those working outside the home or those engaged in making an income, the question of whom they serve doesn't often seem to come to mind.

Granted, such a statement is not absolutely true. We all know that we should treat our co-workers with charity and humility. We make an effort to be honest in our dealings with customers and those for whom we work. We know that we need to be people of integrity. But if we agree that Bob Dylan has captured a deep biblical truth with his "gotta serve somebody," we should ask if that could mean more than what Christians have already carved out for themselves. What does it mean for the homemaker? For the TV and stereo salesman? For the utility worker? For the beautician? For the carpenter? For the advertising executive? For the nurse? For the engineer? Indeed, what does it mean for the artist, historian, business professor, biologist, theologian, sociologist, writer, and philosopher?

Christian philosopher Roy Clouser has claimed that there is "a Christian view of everything from soup to nuts," and in so saying, he implies that there should be a Christian approach to each of these trades and professions ("Christian View"). He bases his claim in part on a Biblical study of the passages related to knowledge. In Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, and 15:33, we are told that "the fear of the Lord is the foundation of all knowledge." And we are reminded in I Corinthians 1:4-5 that in Christ Jesus we "have been enriched in every way—in all [our] speaking and in all [our] knowledge." Based upon these and other passages throughout the Scriptures, Clouser argues that according to the biblical authors there should be a Christian view of everything, that knowledge of God should lead to a different, and better, understanding of things. As Clouser puts it, "there is some kind of mistake with respect to every kind of truth and knowledge that can't be avoided if one does not know God but *can* be avoided if one does know God" ("Christian View" 2; emphasis mine).

Loving God with All Our Minds

When Christian scholars think about the relationship of faith to learning, a natural place to turn in Scripture is to Christ's reiteration of the Old Testament command when he was asked what is the greatest commandment:

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12: 29-31)

It is interesting that when both Jesus and a teacher of the law quoted the commandment found in Deuteronomy, they included with the list of heart, soul, and strength, the *mind* as well.⁶ Perhaps the difference is explained in differences between the Septuagint and original Hebrew scriptures. Perhaps there is another explanation. Whatever the case, the addition of the word "mind" suggests a particular way of serving God. Certainly when we begin to think about what it means for *academics* to serve God, our minds or intellects should become central in our thinking. The core of our identity as academics resides with our intellects, so I think it pressing that we inquire what this command means. And, of course, the command doesn't apply just to academics, but to all believers, as does Paul's admonition in the twelfth chapter of his epistle to the Romans: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (v. 2). And when Paul addressed the Corinthians about false teachers and slanderers of the apostle in their midst, he wrote, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10: 4-5).

Bob Dylan's lyrics from the *Slow Train Coming* album again come to mind. In another song, he wrote:

Gonna change my way of thinking,
Make myself a different set of rules.
Gonna change my way of thinking,
Make myself a different set of rules.
Gonna put my good foot forward,
And stop being influenced by fools....

He said, "He who is not for Me is against Me,"
Just so you know where He's coming from.⁷

How do we change our way of thinking? What are these weapons we fight with? As Clouser argues, these weapons are the insight we receive from God's word. The teachings and principles of Scripture should lead to a revolution in our understanding of the world and our way of thinking. In Psalm 119, we read, "I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts" (vv. 99-100). And Psalm 36:9 reminds us that "in your light we see light." Indeed, our faith in God and our study of His Word should transform our thinking. Scripture tells us that we are not our own, but God's (I Cor. 6:19). Sixteenth-century church reformer John Calvin articulated how total this transformation should be. He admonished his readers that "we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory" (3.7.1).

And further, "We are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal" (3.7.1). Our religion, Calvin also wrote, "must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us" (3.6.4).

The Role of Vocation

In fact, the Protestant Reformation has contributed another key concept which has implications for the question of faith and learning integration—the role of calling in our lives. The Reformed tradition has embraced the idea of calling, but calling (or vocation) means something more broad than the traditional Roman Catholic understanding. The Reformation challenged the old assumption that vocation was limited to the calling of priests and monks. Emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, Reformation thinking elevated the dignity and stature of all people and all professions. In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote:

So the ministers of the Word, the magistrates of commonwealths, parents, children, masters, servants, &c. are true saints, if first and before all things they assure themselves that Christ is their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption: secondly, if everyone do his duty in his vocation according to the rule of God's word, and obey not the flesh, but repress the lusts and desires thereof by the Spirit. (159)

John Calvin similarly wrote that "the Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling.... he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life.... he has named these various kinds of living 'callings.' Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post."⁸ Nineteenth-century Calvinist theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper applied the reformed idea of calling to the specific area of academics:

Scholarly research is not a matter of human pride but a God-given duty. The honor of God demands that the human mind penetrate the entire system of creation to discover His greatness and wisdom there and to translate these into human thought through human words. Since the knowledge of the unbelieving world cannot help but obscure God's greatness and wisdom, it is the Christian thinkers' calling to buckle down to this enormous task which they alone can accomplish, even if it did not yield benefit for their own life.⁹

The idea of calling is closely related to another prominent element in Reformed thinking: a "Kingdom" perspective. The Kingdom perspective emphasizes God's sovereignty over all things and seeks to unify heaven and earth in such a way that we see earthly concerns as important to God as heavenly concerns. This Kingdom perspective is also well articulated by Abraham Kuyper. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, he declared that

it is one and the same world which once exhibited all the glory of Paradise, which was afterwards smitten with the curse, and which, since the Fall, is upheld by common grace; which has now been redeemed and saved by Christ, in its center, and which shall pass through the horror of the judgment into the state of glory. For this very reason the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate. He feels, rather, his high calling to push the development of this world to an even higher stage, and to do this in constant accordance with God's ordinance, for the sake of God, upholding, in the midst of so much painful corruption, everything that is honorable, lovely, and of good report among men. (13)

When we as Christian academics understand our work in terms of calling in God's kingdom, it should become clear that there can be no neutral ground in what we do. In other words, when it comes to the question of integrating one's faith with learning, Christian academics do not have a choice, as though they could just do their scholarship in some neutral sense or simply add a Christian perspective. Some perspective will guide our teaching and scholarship. It will be rooted either in a biblical worldview or in a worldview antithetical to Christian beliefs and principles. We will either build God's kingdom or contribute to the dominion of Satan. Our teaching and research will reflect a particular perspective, and that perspective will either—to bring us back to Dylan—“serve God or serve the devil.” Dylan—not to make him out to be a reformational philosopher—again captures this issue in his song, “When You Gonna Wake Up?”

Ya either got faith or ya got unbelief and there ain't no neutral ground.

Counterfeit philosophies have polluted all of your thoughts.

Karl Marx has got ya by the throat, Henry Kissinger's got you tied up in knots.

When you gonna wake up, when you gonna wake up

When you gonna wake up and strengthen the things that remain?¹⁰

Four Approaches to Integrating Faith and Learning

Scripture, then, places squarely before believers the question of whom they are serving in all aspects of their lives. This applies no less to the Christian academic than to any other believer. The question of whom one serves presents a challenge to the Christian scholar and the answer to that question provides a key to answering the question of how Christian professors should integrate their faith and learning.

Many books have been written on the subject of faith-learning fusion, especially in recent years. Some of these are specific to disciplines, others are more general in scope.¹¹ Some attempts have been made to compile all these sources.¹² But, for all that

has been written, I am struck by the enduring value of a relatively early contribution to this discussion. In the mid-1970s, Arthur Holmes, long-time philosophy professor of Wheaton College, published *The Idea of a Christian College* which included a chapter titled “Integrating Faith and Learning.” Holmes's perspective on integration is all-encompassing and consistent with the foundation established in the first part of this essay: “the Christian college is distinctive in that the Christian faith can touch the entire range of life and learning to which a liberal education exposes students” (45).¹³ In putting forward such a bold claim, Holmes is essentially reminding us that everywhere in the Christian college choices are made, whether it is for the Christian faith or some other, which guide our thoughts, actions, and activities. Holmes lays out four ways that faith shapes learning: attitudinal, ethical, foundational, and worldview. In what follows, we will briefly look at each, and I will add some comments and suggestions of my own.

The attitudinal approach is one which Holmes argues applies to all disciplines and areas of study. Indeed, he claims it lays the foundation for Christian education more generally since “the Christian faith rightly understood creates a positive attitude toward liberal learning” (47). This is because “in God's creation every area of life and learning is related to the wisdom and power of God.” “All truth,” he proclaims in his famous maxim, “is God's truth” (47).¹⁴ This affects academics in different ways. For the Christian scholar, his or her “love of truth becomes an expression of love for God, just as the citizen's love of justice in society can be an expression of hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the artist's love for the creative and beautiful expresses love for the Creator” (48). For the Christian student, he or she “must realize that education is a Christian vocation, one's prime calling from God for these years, that education must be an act of love, of worship, of stewardship, a wholehearted response to God” (49). So whether the subject is theology or math, psychology or literature, biology or history, the approach to these studies must always be done with an attitude of reverence for God, respect for His creation, and a desire to understand Him, His world, and our place in His Kingdom better. It is a motivational force which drives us on in our teaching and research, gives us confidence, and encourages us. We need not feel guilty about not doing “Kingdom work,” “ministry,” or “service,” but instead recognize that we are fulfilling a calling from God. We are called, as Christian aestheticist Calvin Seerveld writes, to be “holy scholars” (12). We should pursue our studies with that attitude and try to inculcate the same in our students.

In the ethical approach, Holmes suggests another way of approaching faith and learning integration. He posits that “value-neutral education” is really not possible. The positivist assumptions upon which such opinions are built have weak theological and philosophical grounds. The events of the twentieth century—particularly the wide-scale death and destruction of World War II and the 1960s activism—have challenged value-free education, and language itself has been demonstrated to necessarily incorporate values and judgments. So the Christian scholar, even without explicitly doing so, cannot escape raising “ethical” issues when teaching. As Holmes puts it, a Christian scholar's “values will somehow or other show themselves, consciously or unconsciously, in her work. It had better be conscious and well reasoned rather than unconscious and unreasoned, or else it will likely appear dishonest and be confused” (51). He goes on to say, “The ethical approach to integration...must explore the intrinsic relationship between the facts and the values of justice and love, a relationship that goes beyond the

question of consequences" (51). In other words, consistent with our disciplines and on topic with the subject at hand, we should not ignore cases in which clear consequences stem from certain actions and developments, but we should also be mindful of our ethical values as Christians and how they apply in particular cases.

In my teaching of U.S. history, for example, when I discuss Progressive reform in the early twentieth century, I take the opportunity to help students assess the values underlying those reforms. Were these values consistent with biblical Christianity? What were the outcomes of those reforms? What role could orthodox Christianity have played? In communication courses, an instructor can explore how language includes embedded values and can explore how Christians should navigate those linguistic waters in ways which are faithful to the principles of Scripture. The professor of physics, chemistry, or biology should not shy away from posing questions about ethical research methods—either in pertaining to the process or to the subject. In the study of literature, Christian ethics applies to norms of literary writing such as choice of language and subject matter, to the social implications for certain stories and novels, and to the object of writing as a Christian author.

Thirdly, Holmes speaks of the foundational approach to integration. He identifies three interrelated foundations to learning and study—history, philosophy, and theology. While each represents a discipline in and of itself, these nonetheless provide a foundation upon which all other studies rest. Out of these three disciplines ultimately come the theoretical assumptions and pre-established traditions guiding all disciplines.¹⁵ This is reflected in typical courses of study such as "Foundations of Education" and "Foundations of the Social Sciences." If each discipline can be fully understood only by establishing such foundations, Christian scholars should readily recognize why such foundations must necessarily be considered from a uniquely Christian standpoint. History is important because, understood broadly, it includes both "the history of governing ideals" and "the creative and redemptive influence of Christianity in the shaping of our culture" (53). As we look at the history of our respective disciplines, we come to a better understanding of how they developed, what intellectual forces have shaped them, and how Christian thought and practice has, has not, could, or should affect them. By identifying those pagan and secular ideals and practices which have conditioned our discipline, we help students discern the "spirits of the age." By highlighting past practitioners and thinkers who have brought Christian insight to our respective disciplines, we provide a foundation for our students to build upon and develop.

If the ideas which have shaped our disciplines in the past are important, then certainly it is necessary to understand current theories and methodologies as they relate to our disciplines. Thus, it is of profound importance to explore the philosophical foundations of our respective fields. But, indeed, in the task of integration, it is not sufficient to study these things, but to bring Christian philosophical critique to them. How we define meaning, understanding, personhood, knowledge, reality, and so on, all reflect philosophical assumptions. In each of our areas of study, we need to work through these philosophical underpinnings and develop them in obedience to God's Word.

That brings us to theological foundations. Our philosophy should be rooted in Scripture, and theology should help us understand God's written Word. In the Bible, we

not only learn how to become right with God, but also are presented with a full-orbed view of the world—the originator of and reason for all creation, the identity of man, then nature of humanity, the source of knowledge and wisdom, and so forth. Every professor in the Christian academy cannot and should not be required to be a theologian, but it is profoundly important for every faculty member to be conversant in Scripture and secure in basic theology. On this foundation required of all believers, Christian academics need to think clearly and effectively about the implications of biblical teaching and wisdom for their respective fields of study. This does not so much mean particular teachings, although these may be available to us in Scripture, but the broad principles which lay the foundation for knowing in all disciplines from mathematics to sociology to theology.

Finally, Arthur Holmes offers the worldview approach as a fourth approach to the integration of faith and learning. Modern-day academia is so committed to disciplinary study that the very structure of the university presents students with a fragmented view of the world. This is compounded by the fact that colleges and universities are composed of widely diverse people with diverse ideas (except, perhaps, for the common commitment to the irrationality of Christianity). Pluralism is the word of the day, and, as a result, students go from class to class as though they were traveling from one foreign country to another. What is lacking is an integrated approach to academic study and a common view of things. What is needed is a common worldview, and more particularly, of course, a Christian worldview.

Holmes suggests that a Christian worldview should have the following characteristics. First, it should be "holistic or integrational" (58). It should provide a unified view of the world which is common throughout the curriculum. Second, a Christian worldview is "exploratory, not a closed system" (58). It provides a framework for exploring the creation but is not a final comment on the way things are. "We see through a glass darkly," Holmes reminds us, and we are only beginning to understand the complexity of the created order (59). Third, a Christian worldview is "likely to be pluralistic" (59). Within the diversity of Christendom, one cannot expect Christian scholars to develop complete unanimity on how to view and understand the world. Last, a Christian worldview is "confessional and perspectival." What Holmes means by this is that we begin our studies with a confession of faith, not "from either axioms or scientifically demonstrable propositions" (59).

As one can see, Arthur Holmes exhibits some elasticity in his definition of worldview, which has some merit in a setting with diverse Christian voices. But if Holmes is correct when he emphasizes the need for a common and integral vision upon which to found a Christian university and by which to guide our teaching and research, then we can fairly ask what the nature of that common vision is or should be. Indeed, in his four approaches to the integration of faith and learning, Holmes is assuming that the way Christians view the world should be different than the way non-believers do, and that unique view of the world should shape our scholarship. So what should our view be?

The "Creation-Fall-Redemption" Worldview

Here again we can profitably draw from the Reformed tradition. In the nineteenth century, Dutch Calvinists emphasized the need for Christians to develop an all-

encompassing and integrating life-system, a world-and-life view. Introducing Reformed thought may conjure up ideas of narrow doctrinalism; John Calvin's teaching centered upon the sovereignty of God, and this is sometimes narrowed to thinking about God's sovereignty strictly soteriologically—that is, regarding predestination—but it is certainly more than that. And it should certainly not be the exclusive domain of Reformed believers and thinkers. The breadth of God's sovereignty and the foundational idea of the Reformed worldview are well captured in this statement by systematic theologian Herman Bavink: "God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by His Spirit" (qtd. in Wolters 10).

Two points stand out in this statement. First is the obvious trinitarian construction: universally binding on all orthodox Christians, God as three-in-one—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—stands out as a key concept. But it is bound up with another feature, often referred to in short-hand as "creation-call-redemption." This basis for a Christian worldview is explicated by another Reformed theologian and philosopher, Al Wolters, who says that Bavink's framework just quoted

takes all the key terms in this ecumenical Trinitarian confession in a universal, all-encompassing sense. The terms "reconciled," "created," "fallen," "world," "renews," and "Kingdom of God" are held to be cosmic in scope. In principle, nothing apart from God himself falls outside the range of these foundational realities of biblical religion. (10)

In other words, God's sovereignty extends over His whole kingdom, and that kingdom is comprised of the whole created order, heaven and earth.

What do we mean when we talk about a "creation-fall-redemption" framework as a Christian worldview? (10).¹⁶ In the remainder of this essay, I can hardly do justice to all the nuances of this framework, but my brief comments will hopefully present enough to help readers begin to grapple with this means for understanding the world and the Christian's place in it. In the first place, we should understand creation as an event, an ongoing process, *and* an order or structure. The first two are not difficult to understand—most Christians recognize that God created the heavens and the earth, and, if we take to heart the teaching of the Psalms in particular, we also recognize God's ongoing work in sustaining the creation. But recognition of those facts has not kept Christians from missing the third fact: there is a creation *order*. Our tendency, likely stemming from ancient Greek thought, is to equate the creation with the world and look upon it with disdain. This world is not where our attention should be—it is full of corruption, sin, and evil. Instead, our focus should be on heaven and heavenly things. But that perspective fails to appreciate the implications of God's own judgment that His creation was "very good." It also fails to appreciate that in God's act and sustaining of creation, He has endowed it with order and structure. Or, to put it another way, the creation has an order which reflects God's loving intention for it. He made it with a purpose and established it with norms to guide its care and development.

Another reason the creation order is overlooked, and not without cause, is that Christians tend to view their world from the perspective of the Fall, not the perspective of creation. But if we push our starting point back before Adam and Eve's sin to the

beginning of our world, we should have a different perspective on things. That viewpoint should help us see how God intended things to be, not how they are because of human failures. And once we start with the creation order, we can reflect in a very different way on the nature of humankind and God's task for us in His creation. Instead of seeing human beings simply as corrupters of what is good and beautiful, we are reminded that we are, indeed, made in the image of God. This has major implications for our teaching. First and foremost, we are reminded that God's world is worthy of our attention as scholars. Second, we know that human beings have a special place and role in the creation. As we teach and research, we are exploring not just the world God made, but our place and responsibility in it. And third (I can't say last because I think there are yet many other implications), we recognize that there is an order to the universe and norms for how people live. As academics, we are in the business of exploring and understanding those norms.

This emphasis on the creation order is not to overlook the Fall and its implications for our world. Rather than promoting too rosy an outlook on the nature of things, we certainly cannot and should not underestimate the effects of humankind's fall into sin. As a result of Adam's disobedience, we are corrupted in our nature and bent to serve ourselves rather than God. And in our studies, we are continually confronted by questions about the effects of sin and evil in our world. We wonder about how deep that corruption runs, about how trustworthy the creation order is. These are very real questions posing very difficult challenges.

One way of thinking about the relationship of the creation order to the Fall is in terms of *structure* and *direction*. The creation order represents the structure which is neither good nor bad within itself. Direction is represented by the purposes to which this structure is put. The apostle Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 10 concerning food sacrificed to idols is instructive here. Paul wrote:

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. (vv. 18-21)

On the one hand, Paul is emphasizing the structure of things—meat is neither good nor bad, sacrifices are neither good nor bad, and even the carven images themselves are neither good nor bad. It is the purpose to which these are put or used. And Paul does not hesitate to emphasize what has been noted earlier in this essay—that the direction must point to God or to demons. Our acts are done in service to God or to Satan. While the structure and direction framework does not resolve all the difficulties and complexities of the intersection of the creation order and sin and evil, it is nonetheless helpful. As we think about structure and direction, we can ask, "In using and developing God's creation, are we acting in obedience to His norms or disobedience? Are we using His good creation to serve Him or to serve ourselves?" In academics, this is vitally important since one strain within Christianity so quickly deemphasizes the world; in fact, it over-

emphasizes the corruption of the world. But, as Christian academics, we are committed to studying that world and take comfort in the fact that God considers his creation good. But we can help our students explore music, art, engineering, historical development, and any number of other things by helping them discern between structure and direction.

Thus, the very real and distressing presence of sin in the world does not put a stop to our endeavors as academics. We know that God holds the world in His hand, but more particularly, we profess that God's son Christ Jesus has come into the world to redeem it and His elect from the jaws of death. Christ's birth, death, and resurrection give us "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."¹⁷ We undertake our studies with confidence in God's call to us as academics and with the knowledge that the world, while yet to be purged of all sin and evil, is still part of God's good creation and targeted for restoration. We can thus summarize our "creation-fall-redemption" motif in Al Wolters's phrase: "grace restores nature" (11). It is true that we don't live in a world free from sin today and that we must wait for the consummation of God's kingdom in Christ's return, but the promise remains. By God's spirit and through his grace, we are guided to work in His creation and, where we can and are enabled to do so, to renew it.

What does this worldview mean for Christian academics? It means that God places us in an orderly world and invites us to study it. In our respective fields we seek to understand that world better and to share that understanding with our students (and to teach them to also study it). It means that we can never be complacent or blind to the corruption which has existed since the Fall and particularly to how sin may disrupt or mislead us in our studies. It means that we should help students untangle the sinful purposes to which people can put the creation order and help them find ways to develop it in obedience to God's norms for it. It means, in fact, to help them discern how to serve God, not Satan. And it means that redemption gives us hope and confidence to continue our study of God's creation and to push for renewal and restoration wherever we are able.

Conclusion

Each day, in every way, we face a choice to serve God or to serve another. Martin Luther put it crassly but to the point: "Man is like a jackass. Somebody always rides his back. It's either God or the devil" (Clouser, "Christian View" 5). This reality should challenge Christian scholars to seriously consider their calling. The creation-fall-redemption framework is offered to provide an ontological means to do so. But most fundamentally, we should be challenged, as Christian academics, to consider whom we're serving in our teaching and research. Let me conclude by offering one last verse, a verse of my own making, to Dylan's classic song:

You may be a philosopher, or writer of great works
You might conduct interviews for sociological field work
You may teach the Bible, doctrine, and church history
You may study biology or calculate pi to infinity

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Notes

¹ This essay represents an elaboration on a lecture I presented at the Providence Christian College faculty orientation on August 21, 2006. I thank Mark Hall, John Mahaffy, and Lynn Otto who read a draft of that lecture and offered helpful suggestions. Comments I received from the Providence faculty were also helpful, particularly contributions from Russ Reeves and Scott Swanson. My research assistant, Kathleen Alaimo, assisted in preparing the essay for publication.

² Columbia, 1979. Two other albums followed which included explicitly Christian-themed lyrics: *Saved* (Columbia, 1980) and *Shot of Love* (Columbia, 1981).

³ Bob Dylan, "Gotta Serve Somebody," *Slow Train Coming* (Columbia, 1979), 12 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/serve.html>>.

⁴ All Scripture passages are quoted from the New International Version.

⁵ The common interpretation of this passage is to understand that the New Jerusalem represents the church: "the new Jerusalem...prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (v. 2). Without discounting this obvious exegesis, I believe that the use of the metaphor of a city for the church indicates God's general approval of cities *per se* as an appropriate manifestation of human development.

⁶ The command in Deuteronomy 4 reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts (vv. 4-6). Other gospel accounts include Matthew 22: 36-38: "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.'" And Luke 10: 26-28 reads, "'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'"

⁷ Bob Dylan, "Gonna Change My Way of Thinking," *Slow Train Coming*, Columbia, 1979, 12 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/changemyway.html>>.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.6. Note that Calvin's emphasis in this passage is on humans knowing their place in relation to God's will and plan lest they are "borne hither and thither" by their whims and desires. See also Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), pages 154 and 181.

⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie in Wetenschap en Kunst*, 36, excerpted in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 474.

¹⁰ Bob Dylan, "When You Gonna Wake Up?" *Slow Train Coming*, Columbia, 1979. 12 Oct. 2006 <<http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/wakeup.html>>.

¹¹ In the nineteenth century, John Henry Newman offered *The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1852). In the 1990s, Mark Noll and George Marsden made broad pleas in their *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and *Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), respectively. Several other volumes have appeared over the last three decades beginning with Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Harold Heie and David L. Wolfe, eds., *The Reality of Christian Learning: Strategies for Faith-Discipline Integration* (St. Paul: Christian College Consortium and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Richard T. Hughes, *How the Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Robert A. Harris, *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004); Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004); and David Claerbaut, *Faith and Learning on the Edge: A Bold New Look at Religion in Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

¹² Kenneth W. Hermann, *Every Thought Captive to Christ: A Guide to Resources for Developing a Christian Perspective in the Major Academic Disciplines* (Kent, OH: Radix Christian Studies, 1985); see also the online Faith and Learning Network (<http://www.icscanada.edu/library/flnsearch.shtml>).

¹³ All quotations are from the revised edition.

¹⁴ The sentiment, however, is not unique to Holmes. It can be traced back to the Church Fathers. Since that time, John Calvin wrote, "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God" (Calvin, 2.2.15).

¹⁵ This idea is developed with some sophistication by Roy Clouser in *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1991).

¹⁶ This idea was earlier developed by Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), where it is presented as the biblical "ground-motive." It provides the framework for Neil Plantiga's *Engaging God's World: A Christian View of Faith, Learning, Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁷ From the hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," Thomas O. Chisholm (1923).

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