

TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL ONE'S HEART, SOUL, AND STRENGTH:
A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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For every godly and well-prepared man or woman I have known leaving either Pacific Life Bible College or Regent College, I have met another radically disorientated and severed from the Bible. I am convinced that a significant cause of this is a failure of educational vision, a failure to answer appropriately the question “what is education?” In this paper I will attempt to biblically answer this question by providing my philosophy of education, so that if I get an opportunity to teach in the future, I may teach in a biblical manner for biblical results. To develop my philosophy, I will apply it to a hypothetical institution for training faithful Gospel ministers in Vancouver—the Vancouver School of Ministry (VSM). I will present my philosophy structured around Jeff Greenman’s nine components of learning:¹ I will move gradually from the greater setting of the school—considering culture (including worldview) and the goals of education—to the more specific institutional setting (teachers, learners, physical setting), and conclude with considerations of assessment, content, and methodology.

Macro Setting

Educational Goal

Of first importance is knowing the goal of education (GE) and, derivatively, the specific goal of an attempt to educate; decisions on every level will be determined by our understanding of education as a whole and a specific educational purpose. The older, now disparaged model of education is portrayed as prioritizing information deposition: the GE is to see the heads of the

¹ These nine components (Goals, Culture, Worldview, Learner, Teacher, Setting, Assessment, Content, Method) are presented throughout Jeff Greenman’s lectures in APPL570 at Regent College. Jeff Greenman, “APPL 570” (Regent College, Vancouver; Winter 2017).

learner filled with knowledge from the educator.² The GE in vogue today is the holistic transformation of the learner. This sounds better, yet what is meant by “holistic” and “transformation”?³ At the base of both the older and newer goals are worldviews, comprehensive frameworks for interpreting the world and making decisions within it. What we see from these two GEs is a picture of education within two general worldviews—Modernism and Postmodernism. As a Christian, I have a worldview that differs drastically from these worldviews: the GE I adopt must emerge from this distinct worldview.⁴ We must, then, ask what the biblical goal for education is.

I suggest that this is the Biblical GE: *Education is the training and equipping of one another with what is necessary to glorify God by finding satisfaction in Him and performing His will.* I derive this definition from the Bible via three of its themes. The first is the purpose of each person: according to the Westminster Catechism, the chief end of man is “to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.”⁵ John Piper, in *Desiring God*, argues that this is biblical and that the second half of this phrase is intended to be the means by which the first is accomplished.⁶ Therefore, the goal of every human activity, including education, is to glorify God by enjoying Him—knowing Him more, becoming more like Him, and doing His will.

² cf., Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1970).

³ E.g., Greenman, “APPL 570.”

⁴ All Christians, in practice, have worldviews that differ in details but are to some extent shaped by the Bible, and so they will be more similar than dissimilar. When I speak of “the Christian worldview,” I mean the whole of the Bible’s teachings, which provides a framework for interpreting and living in the world.

⁵ “The Westminster Larger Catechism”, July 2, 1648, Q. 1, accessed March 3, 2013, http://puritanseminary.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Larger_Catechism.pdf.

⁶ The evidence that this is indeed a biblical truth is abundant, see especially John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 25th anniversary reference ed. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah, 2011); Thomas R. Schreiner, “A Biblical Theology of the Glory of God,” in *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).

The second is the orientation of education given throughout the Bible: all Christians are called to teach one another so that they may grow in maturity and the knowledge of God, resulting in faithful living (e.g., Deut. 6:20-24, Eph. 4:11-13, Titus 2:1-15).

The third is the holistic transformation that is necessary for glorifying God and enjoying Him. Knowledge of God necessary, yet Romans 1:18-32 tell us that everyone has such knowledge and that this is not enough. We must add knowledge of Jesus Christ and faith (Romans 10:5-17), and to have faith one needs a regenerate, circumcised, heart (Deut. 30:6, John 6:44-45).⁷ So God's initial work is necessary, producing faith rooted in knowledge. Furthermore, according to James and Paul, this faith needs to be obedient, active faith (Rom. 1:5; James 2:14-26). So to glorify God, one needs physically and intellectually active faith. However, this faith cannot be a God-despising, reluctant, faith: to glorify Him it must be joyful (Deut. 28:46-47; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 3:1, 4:4). So to glorify God, humans need to be transformed in what they think, feel, and do: they need to fulfill, through faith coming forth from a heart renewed by the Spirit, the great commandments (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:29-31). This, then, is the end of education from a Christian perspective, glorifying God through an abiding enjoyment of Him expressed in actions, affections, and knowledge.⁸

From this general goal, the specific goal for VSM can be formulated. VSM aims to educate those who intend to be officially recognized ministers of the Gospel (i.e., elders, teachers, etc.) so that they might enjoy God and faithfully perform their specific vocation of

⁷ On the later point, see the first chapter of J. Alexander Rutherford, *Prevenient Grace: An Investigation into Arminianism* (Vancouver: Teleiotēti, 2016), 13–49.

⁸ This implies that education can only truly happen by Christians for Christians. This is, in one sense, true: 'holistic transformation' is a pointless goal if it is not orientated towards Christ. Yet non-Christians learn, so they are 'educated' in the sense that they will learn truths about God's world and do things that—on the surface (cf. Rom.8:6-8)—accord with God's revealed will, but apart from faith they will fail to meet the Biblical requirements of education. They will be 'educated' only as far as the word is defined within a non-Christian worldview.

equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). Adapting our general definition by specifying those being educated and the intended ministry, the specific goal of VSM is *to facilitate the training and equipping of church leaders by church leaders for faithful ministry, with all that is necessary for them to find their satisfaction in God and minister to His Church so that every Christian may be equipped with what is necessary to glorify God by finding satisfaction in Him and performing His will.*

Culture

The realization of a GE will always take place in a concrete context; the broadest context is culture, part of which is a worldview.⁹ We earlier defined “worldview” as a comprehensive framework for interpreting and making decisions: it is the sum-total of ones presupposed beliefs about the nature of the world, knowledge, ethics, life’s purpose, etc.¹⁰ This definition corresponds to the common use of “worldview,” but “culture” is a bit more nebulous.

“Culture” is used both of a shared value system within a society or group of people and the products produced by such groups (“high culture”). In the abstract, then, culture is a shared worldview, but the term “culture” is also used to refer to the embodiment of these value systems and so encompasses not just the values but also the defining physical symbols of these underlying values—political and economic systems, art, language, etc. John Frame defines culture similarly as “what human society is and what it ought to be, both real and ideal”: it is a system of values

⁹ I will thus discuss here two of Greenman’s components of learning, culture and worldview, together.

¹⁰ Not all of these beliefs will be explicitly recognized, all worldviews involve tacit beliefs.

defining what is ‘ideal’ and the imperfect embodiment of those ideals.¹¹ The ideal side of culture is its worldview, and it is this worldview that has the primary impact on the fulfillment of GEs.

Worldview affects education in three ways. First, the worldviews of the learners and of the culture in which they will be ministering are, to various degrees, different. The GE for VSM is to equip ministers for ministry in Vancouver, so its teaching must be addressed to the specific needs of that culture.

Second, the worldviews of those who are learning will differ from one another and from the faculty and vision of VSM. The teaching content and methodology must, then, be tailored to meet the various students where they are and to move towards the goal from their starting points.¹²

Third, because the goal derives from and is married to the Bible’s worldview, the teaching and learning that takes place at VSM will be essentially worldview formation. In interaction with the learners own perspectives—acknowledging that the vision set by VSM and its faculty will not be perfect and can be refined by students’ contributions—the program of VSM will seek to transform the worldview of students and teachers alike in conformity with Scripture.¹³ Having sketched the broader contours of my philosophy of education as embodied in VSM, we are now in a place to consider the role of physical setting, learner, and teacher.

¹¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship 4 (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2008), 854–857. Cf. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1959), 27–33; D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids.; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 67–70.

¹² Waldemar Loewen, “Christian Education in an African Context: Discipling Cross-Culturally,” *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (September 2016): 343.

¹³ Though I am presupposing that Scripture presents a comprehensive worldview, I acknowledge that in the NT there is freedom for diversity in the peripheral areas of culture—food preference, some degree of family dynamics (independence, dependence of extended families), etc. (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Micro Setting

Setting

If the GE is whole-life transformation for the glory of God, the settings in which it could be pursued are varied: education can happen at work, through small groups in Church, or in the home. The specific goals will determine where education should be pursued: if someone is being trained to fix cars for God’s glory, a garage is necessary. VSM’s specific goal is *to facilitate the training and equipping of church leaders by church leaders for faithful ministry, with all that is necessary for them to find their satisfaction in God and minister to His Church so that every Christian may be equipped with what is necessary to glorify God by finding satisfaction in Him and doing His will*. Because this goal seeks the training of leaders for the local church by those who are leading in the local church to build up the local church, the education that takes place at VSM should involve, to some extent, the local church.¹⁴

For the traditional Bible College or Seminary, at least part of education takes place through practicums, working in a local church.¹⁵ To facilitate and be able to assess holistic growth in the students of VSM, there must be a high level of interaction between the students, the teachers evaluating them, and the local churches in which their specific gifts and spiritual fruit are to be worked out. This, paired with the goal to have the teaching done by current church leaders, suggests the need for a high level of participation in the local church. Yet, if all the education is left to the leaders of local churches, great strain will be placed upon their time and the learning that results will lack the specialized focus a classroom provides—learning from

¹⁴ Because VSM is a hypothetical school, I will consider here the ideal setting—excluding the many other factors necessary for determining the setting for ministerial education.

¹⁵ In Northwest Baptist Seminary’s “Immerse” program, the local church is the primary context for education. “Immerse,” *Northwest Baptist Seminary*, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.nbseminary.ca/programs/immerse>.

those with specialized knowledge and aptitude. Some classroom learning is thus desirable. An additional boon provided by some degree of centralized learning is peer-mentoring, the opportunities for fellow-learners to learn from, teach, and work with one another. So the setting envisioned for VSM, derived from its goal and these considerations is three-fold: centralized instruction in a classroom, peer groups, and individual or small group mentorship under active church leaders.

Learner

Having considered the settings in which VSM's GEs will be pursued, we must now consider the learners. As I see it, we must consider learners in two ways: abstractly, what is a learner? concretely, who will learn at VSM?

Beginning with the abstract, let us consider the word "learner" itself: a learner is often a student, one who studies, yet not all education involves academic study. So in a sense, "learner" is the most basic description of the active participant in education: the one who learns what is necessary to glorify God. In the NT, the most common word for one receiving education in this sense is μαθητης (*mathētēs*), usually translate "disciple." A μαθητης is one who learns, often by accompanying someone (Jesus's disciples) or learning from a διδασκαλος (*didaskalos*, teacher). Being a disciple is an important part of being a learner: learning what is necessary to glorify God requires learning at the feet of those who are farther along than oneself. This begins in the home (Deut. 6:20-25), but characterizes the entire Christian life: Paul regularly exhorts Christians to imitate him in as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7; cf. Heb. 13:7) and more mature Christians to teach those less so (Titus 2:3-5). A learner, therefore, learns from other

believers, but is also subject to the teaching of church elders: the elders are commissioned to teach with authority (Titus 1:5-9, 2:15) and believers to submit to those appointed over them (Heb. 13:17). Learners are to be humble towards teachers but most significantly towards Scripture, from which teachers have their authority (Acts 17:11; Rom. 6:17; Gal. 6:6; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:14-17, 4:2).

This describes the learner's role with reference to those from whom he or she learns—God and His people—but we must also consider the learner as a human, made in the image of God but fallen into sin, and a believer, regenerate. As a human being in God's image, each learner has the potential to fulfill the obligation laid upon them to glorify God: in relationship to others and the world, the image of God implies the uniquely human capacity to mirror the character of God and represent Him in ruling His creation (Genesis 1:26-31).¹⁶ Yet, Scripture teaches that each and every human being has a hostile disposition towards God unless He circumcises their heart (Deut. 30:6-14; John 6:44-45; Rom. 5:10, 8:5-8; Eph. 2:1-3).¹⁷ This means that apart from the Holy Spirit no learner is able to glorify God: they possess an inherent hostility towards the GE and the means of achieving it—the Christian worldview. Faith-producing regeneration (John 6:35-44) is then a prerequisite for education. Scripture teaches that even after regeneration, the Christian life is still characterized by a struggle between sin and the Spirit (Gal. 5), so the means employed to realize the GE will need to account for this struggle. Knowing does not result from merely hearing truth, right affections from knowing what should be felt, or application from learning what to do: education needs to more just report knowledge;

¹⁶ Cf. Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 184–202.

¹⁷ See Rutherford, *Prevenient Grace*, 13–49.

it needs to argue persuasively and affectively and incorporate prayer and discipline (self-imposed and external).

Furthermore, every believer has been outfitted with various gifts for the building up of the Church; broadly conceived this means that each Christian will be adept in various areas and will require different approaches to succeed in learning (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; 1 Pet. 10-11). Christians will all also have different niches in the Church and the world through which they will glorify God, each requiring different abilities and knowledge, so education must be personalized.

The learners envisioned by VSM are Christians seeking training to be church leaders. Ideally, then, those learning through VSM will have saving faith and be, therefore, regenerate. There are various roles described by the broad term “church leader,” so different learners will require different focuses within their program. Individual learners will also have their own abilities and strengths that will affect the way they learn, so the education given at VSM will be flexible. VSM will occasionally host classes aimed generally at equipping the Church, but its core classes and programs will target mature Christians called to church leadership.¹⁸

¹⁸ Though this is especially controversial, VSM’s programs will be aimed particularly at male Christians, training leaders in accord with Paul’s proscription of teaching and governing roles in the Church from women (1 Cor. 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15, 3:1-7 [cf. Eph. 5:22-33]; Titus 1:5-9). This is ably defended in various works, e.g., Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002); John Piper and Wayne A Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood : A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006); Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*, Reprint ed. (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

Teacher

Having considered those seeking education, we must now consider the leaders facilitating this education. There is much discussion today concerning the teacher's role: are they facilitators or fellow learners? Should they have positions of authority? Some of these questions are better considered questions of methodology and so will be addressed in a later; here I will discuss the role of the teacher in realizing the Christian GE in a formal setting and then, specifically, the role of a teacher at VSM.

Teachers in a formal setting have been considered in recent thought as fellow learners, facilitators of learning, who do not tell people what to think but skillfully aid the learners in their own learning and discovery of information. There is much that is good in this model: it recognizes the genuine deficiencies of education that focused on information deposition apart from synthesis and application and the learning advantages of actively engaging students in learning.¹⁹ Yet, when measured against Scripture, the egalitarian tone of contemporary thought is more a product of our culture than the Bible.

To see the Christian educational vision fulfilled, teachers in a formal setting²⁰ need to function in an authoritative role, passing on sound doctrine and practice. The teacher's authoritative role is amply attested in the NT; it is especially seen in the Pastoral Epistles (e.g., 1

¹⁹ L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 31–65; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Alison King, "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side," *College Teaching* 41, no. 1 (1993): 30–35; David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2002); Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

²⁰ Here, a formal setting would be teaching within an official church position or in an institution for learning. Much Christian education will take place in an informal setting.

Tim. 4:11; Tit. 1:9, 2:15) and in the call for submission to church leaders, a group that includes teachers (1 Cor. 16:16; Heb. 13:17). To better engage students in learning, teachers should also facilitate student learning and the development of skills for critical thinking by providing the atmosphere and tools for the learners to learn. This draws on the insights of contemporary educational theory and is by no means inconsistent with the biblical picture of education.

Though occupying an authoritative role, they must also be humble and learn from the perspectives their students will offer, placing themselves under the authority of God through Scripture, alongside their students. As believers, they are themselves subject to God and His revelation in Scripture;²¹ because they are alongside their students in submission to Scripture, they will be able to learn from them, especially from the unique perspectives they possess.²²

They must, lastly, provide a model in their lives and teaching of right thinking, feeling, and acting in submission to God for the glory of His name. This is amply attested in the NT and demands that Christian teachers meet a high standard in their life and teaching.²³

Implicit in these roles teachers take is the embodiment of the fruit of the Spirit in their relationships with their students: teachers must take care to shepherd their students, to care for their souls, to protect them from false doctrine, and love them as neighbours and as brothers and sisters in Christ. Such a pastoral understanding of teaching implies that teachers will be, to the degree that their specific context and relationships permit, mentors towards those they teach.²⁴

²¹ They are to teach sound doctrine which is correlated with the trustworthy word taught, the Scriptures and the apostolic teaching (2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:13, 2:15, 3:16-17; Tit. 1:9, 2:1; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

²² On the benefit in exegesis and theology of alternative perspectives that emerge from different experiences and cultures, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1987).

²³ Paul presents himself explicitly as an example for imitation (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7; cf. Heb. 13:7), he instructs his pupils to act in such a way that they may be examples as well (1 Tim. 4:12, Tit. 2:7, cf. 1 Pet. 5:3), and his instructions for the qualifications of a Church leader set a high standard with regard to behaviour (1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1:5-16).

²⁴ In Eph. 4:11, when Paul describes various kinds of people gifted to the church for ministry, he draws a closer connection between “pastors” and “teachers” than the others by connecting them with *καὶ* (*kai*, and) instead of

Mentor, or pastor, is a key role that teachers will take in the context of VSM. To achieve its specific GEs, VSM will employ, as we saw earlier, a threefold context for education: two of these, mentorship and classroom, involve a teacher. In both settings, those teaching will be, in some manner, recognized church leaders. Teachers will be sought for the classroom setting who are gifted and knowledgeable in particular fields, who demonstrate the character necessary for a teacher, and who are able to teach well in such a setting. The same teachers, and others, will also teach in the setting of the local church through more personal training, either one on one or in groups of two. This training will involve personal discipleship (guided spiritual formation), dedicated supervised academic work,²⁵ and guided participation in church leadership. Teachers, then, at VSM will train and equip learners in the formal classroom and informal church setting through relational skill development and the passing on of Christian teaching so that the student might be equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and spiritual maturity to glorify God through a vibrant Christian life and faithful ministry. This discussion of the teacher has brought us now to our final area of the consideration, curriculum.

δε (*de*, and), which he had been using previously, and grouping them together with a shared article (τοὺς, *tous* the). This suggests a close connection between these roles: all overseers have pastoral roles and must be able to teach (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet 5:2), but Paul specifically identifies a subset of elders who teach and preach (1 Tim. 5:17), so it is possible that teachers are a subset of “pastors.” Thus, all who are official teachers within the Church (not just someone who occasionally teaches) would also be shepherds, a role comparable to the contemporary concept of mentor. Wallace argues the reverse—that not all teachers are pastors, but all pastors are teachers. This assumes that “pastor” is to be exclusively identified with “elder” and “overseer,” and that “teachers” in Eph. 4:11 refers generally to those who teach and not a specific teaching role such as Paul envisages in 1 Tim. 5:17. Tod Kennedy, “The Shepherding Aspect Of The Pastoring And Teaching Ministry,” *Chafer Theological Seminary* 9, no. 2 (Fall 03): 37; Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1983), 52; John Piper, “Elders, Pastors, Bishops, and Bethlehem,” *Desiring God*, last modified March 1, 1987, accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/elders-pastors-bishops-and-bethlehem.pdf?lang=en>; Keith Schooley, “What Is a Pastor? Examining the Biblical Job Description of the ‘Poimenas’ of Ephesians 4:11,” *Quodlibet Journal* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2000), accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/schooley-pastor.shtml>; Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament With Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 284.

²⁵ Such work would be similar to the Oxford tutorial model, though with a more holistic emphasis on intellectual and spiritual growth.

Curriculum

Thus far we have considered the GE, the cultural and physical settings in which education take place, and the roles of learner and teacher. We are now, therefore, able to consider the matters of curriculum, here considered as the manner of assessing the attainment of GEs, the content that is necessary to attain them, and the methods used to attain them. As we have been doing so far, here we will consider briefly the roles of assessment, content, and method in education abstractly and then concretely in VSM.

Assessment

Our first consideration is that of assessment, the ways in which those attempting to teach and to learn will know they have attained their goal. The standard, and still dominant, answer has been through grading: learning is achieved when students reproduce knowledge and demonstrate their proficiency in their academic assignments. Grading assigns a quantitative value to learning, it is something weighable: educational success is determined by grade averages. Yet educational theorists have subjected grading to weighty criticism in the 20th century.

The criticisms raised are varied. Some allege that grading is part of an academic atmosphere that often encourages competition over cooperation;²⁶ that it puts the focus on how well a student is doing and not what they are doing; and that it often leads students to avoid risks, to take the easiest possible tasks.²⁷ These objections should lead us to consider alternative assessment forms and, more importantly, bring us to the fundamental question of assessment:

²⁶ Perry W. H. Shaw, "The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education," *Journal of Asian Mission* 8, no. 1–2 (2006): 36–38.

²⁷ Alfie Kohn, "The Case Against Grades," *Educational Leadership* 69, no. 3, Effective Grading Practices (November 2011): 30–31.

what form(s) of assessment are best for measuring learning as defined by our educational objective?²⁸

Assessment, then, must hold in balance considerations of the best means to assess the achievement of the GEs with regard to each student and of the hidden curriculum communicated by the chosen forms of assessment while providing sufficient feedback for the learners to grow in those areas covered by their assignments. The later requirement of assessment necessitates its prompt return.

Our considerations in the abstract suggest that there should, ideally, be no single form of assessment promulgated at VSM. The various assignments given for each class or under the mentorship of teachers will engage the students in remembering and using the knowledge they have used; confronting their own character flaws and pursuing conformity to Christ through the cultivation of godly affections; and acting upon all that they have been learning in their personal and public lives, ministry context, and studies.²⁹ Individual assignments may emphasize one aspect over another, but wherever possible these will be integrated and, taken as a whole, the assignments of a class will address these three emphases. When assignments concern disciplines that require competency in detailed knowledge (Greek parsing and literal translations), assessment will take the form of objective quantification—grading—but qualitative assessment

²⁸ An answer to this question must consider the role of so-called “hidden curriculums.” In this case, what different forms of assessment communicate to students about the priorities and relative values of the things being learned need to be considered: if the GEs established emphasize cooperation and humility, a form of assessment that encourages competition and boasting will contradict these stated goals. Alternatively, if a class aims to communicate quantifiable knowledge (e.g., the ability to recognize and use the data represented by Greek paradigms) in which proficiency is largely correlate with the accumulation and retention of quantifiable knowledge, a system that neglects quantifying forms of assessment may communicate that the detailed knowledge in question is not what matters.

²⁹ That is, they will be called in their assignments to love God and their neighbour with all their heart, soul, and strength.

in the form of evaluative constructive feedback will be the preferred form of assessment. That is, assessment will note errors and room for improvement (evaluative); but the goal of assessment will be returning to the learners, in a timely fashion, feedback that will provide appropriate encouragement and sufficient comment to help the learner grow in areas where misunderstanding is present, communication is unclear, or improvement is possible (constructive). Final feedback on a course will not be quantitative but involve evaluation of a student's progress and success with regard to the goals of the class.³⁰

Content

Regarding curriculum, we have thus far delineated the ways by which the fulfillment of GEs is measured; we must now consider the content that will be taught to see GEs fulfilled. We began with the definition of education as *the training and equipping of one another with what is necessary to glorify God by finding satisfaction in Him and performing His will*. We saw earlier that “what is necessary” involves holistic transformation, of the mind, soul, and strength (mind, affections, and actions). The content of any education with this as its goal must, then, be holistic in its scope.

Because education seeks holistic transformation, the primary content will be the Bible: Paul writes that all Scripture is provided so that the Christian might be equipped for *every* good work, and that it is in beholding Christ, as we do only in Scripture and the various ways it is communicated, that we become more like Him (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Cor. 3:17-18). We can, then,

³⁰ Though final feedback will not be quantitative, pass-fail will be reckoned on account of each learner's demonstration of sufficient learning as measured by each classes learning goals (e.g., a student would receive a fail in an introductory class on Greek if they did not demonstrate any ability to translate sentences at the requisite level; a student in a theology class would fail if they were unable to demonstrate basic understanding of sound doctrine and methods for growing in such understanding).

summarize the content of Christian education as *theology*: the knowledge of theology, the affections demanded by it, and the skills required to do it.

By theology I do not mean the academic study of God and the Christian faith: I follow John Frame in defining theology as “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life.”³¹ By this definition, the knowledge involved in education will be, foremost, knowledge of Scripture. The affections cultivated will be those aligned with Scripture. The skills acquired will be those necessary to understand the Bible and apply it to the heads, hearts, and hands of the learners themselves and those to whom they will minister. Furthermore, the content of education will include knowledge of the surrounding culture and the skills necessary to apply Scripture and fulfill God’s will there—whether that be the skills and knowledge necessary to be an evangelist or a Christian nurse.³² The content, then, of education in the abstract is the Scriptures and the extra-biblical content necessary to apply Scripture to the contemporary world.

The specific goal of VSM is *to facilitate the training and equipping of church leaders by church leaders for faithful ministry, with all that is necessary for them to find their satisfaction in God and minister to His Church so that every Christian may be equipped with what is necessary to glorify God by finding satisfaction in Him and doing His will.* The primary content will be the

³¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1987), 81.

³² Lest this be misunderstood, teaching the Bible as I conceive it involves passing on, alongside the tools necessary to exegete and apply Scripture, the tradition of the Church as the necessary presupposition for reading Scripture. That is, no person is born *tabula rasa*, a blank slate; when anyone comes to the Bible they will read it through their own worldview and distort it to fit that view (cf. the work of Bultmann). To understand the Bible one needs a basic understanding of its contents—e.g., knowledge of the God who wrote it, Jesus whom it is about. When we come to faith, we receive from teachers, evangelists, and our churches an imperfect approximation of what Scripture teaches—a specific and, at times, erring application of Scripture to a particular context. Through these glasses we are then able to further refine this received worldview through the study of Scripture: tradition, here defined as the received teachings of the Church (encompassing everything from the apostolic creed to the teachings of specific local churches), is thus our entrance into the hermeneutical spiral—Scripture is the ultimate authority by which we progressively refine the beliefs with which we first began to interpret it.

Bible as understood by ‘tradition’ (the received faith) and the individual (exegesis). So the biblical worldview will be taught with the tools to begin refining the received form of this worldview by Scripture and to apply Scripture to the needs of one self (spiritual formation), the culture (evangelism and apologetics), and the Church (preaching, teaching, administration, and discipleship). The insights of the Biblical Counselling movement will especially be employed to train leaders for discipleship.³³ Interdisciplinary learning will primarily be employed for the application of Scripture to culture, the skills for understanding Scripture (linguistics, logic, etc.), and church ministry (skills in teaching, administration, etc.).

Method

Having considered the assessment of education and its content, all that remains is to consider the methods by which content will be taught and learning will be fostered. Much of the discussion concerning method during the last half-century has involved a repudiation of the older lecture driven, ‘objectivist,’ approaches to education. In their place, a more egalitarian conception of teaching methodology has emerged, where the focus of the classroom is on enabling students to arrive at their own understanding—facilitating the students learning is emphasized over teaching the learner something.³⁴ More recently, the discussion of educational methodology has turned towards online learning and the opportunities provided by various web-

³³ The Biblical Counselling movement, formally Nouthetic Counselling, refers to the various organizations such as the Christian Counselling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) and Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (AABC) who have followed and built upon Jay Adam’s vision for a bible centred, pastoral, approach to counselling.

³⁴ E.g., Graham Gibbs, “Twenty Terrible Reasons for Lecturing,” *Oxford Brookes University*, last modified 2011, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslid/resources/20reasons.html>; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 57–74; Palmer, *To Know*.

based environments and tools.³⁵ These discussions have done much to broaden my understanding of the variety of methods that can be used in education, yet the methodology we use for achieving our GEs cannot be determined by current fads, traditional practices, or statistical success: the method(s) we use must be those that are best suited for attaining our GE in a particular context. Because one of the contexts envisioned in the Christian GE is the world created by God, our considerations of methods to use must take into account the Christian worldview. This worldview has implications for the value of lecturing and any alternative methods proposed in its place.

Much criticism raised against lectures is directed against the position of authority it gives the teacher, yet we saw above that a Biblical model of education assigns teachers authoritative positions. Furthermore, lecturing—protracted speech by one person—has a long tradition in Christian circles as way of placing the Word of God in the centre, of presenting with authority the truth of God’s Word. Though lecturing is not the only way to do this, it remains a valuable way of pointing to the authority of the Word and of passing on—as interpretations of the Word—the traditions of the Church.³⁶ Lecturing has a place where knowledge needs to be passed on or

³⁵ E.g., Terry Anderson, “Towards a Theory of Online Learning,” in *Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, 2nd ed. (Canada: AU Press, 2008); Rhonda M. McEwen, “Blended Learning: Curriculum Design for Effective Learning,” in *Foundations of Curriculum Development in Theological Education*, Draft. (Germany: VTR Publications, 2015); Terry Anderson, “The Hidden Curriculum in Distance Education: An Updated View,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 33, no. 6 (November 1, 2001): 28–35.

³⁶ In Reformed circles, the preacher is considered to represent God, and therefore bear His authority in a derived manner, from the pulpit: this does not ensure his infallibility (a minister does not speak *ex cathedra*) but commends the humble reception of the preached word unless it is in contradiction with the written Word being expounded. Therefore, checking the preachers words against Scripture is encouraged (e.g., Acts 17:11), but submission to the authority of appointed leaders as representatives of God is simultaneously encouraged (Heb. 13:7, 17). That the preacher himself is under the authority of Scripture and is under grave responsibility to teach soundly (2 Tim. 4:1-2; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:17; James 3:1) commends diligent study and preaching that stays close to the text being preached (exposition). John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2013), 643–647; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2010), 258–263; John Piper, “The Authority of Preaching for Readers and Non-Readers,” *Desiring God*, last modified July 6, 2011, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-authority-of-preaching-for-readers-and-non-readers>; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 916–917.

reinforced in ways that complement out-of-class reading or where it is best communicated verbally—for auditory learners or in the mode of preaching that stirs the affections in accord with the Word.³⁷

Furthermore, contemporary models of education stress the value of learning and learners coming to their own understanding, from which we have much to learn, but this stress is often made to the exclusion of a Biblical epistemology and anthropology. That is, often the focus on the learner’s own learning neglects the radical effects of sin and the ways in which it can pervert understanding; part of the role of the teacher, then, is to model faithful submission to God in Scripture and to pass on sound doctrine, rebuking what is false. Furthermore, according to a biblical epistemology, knowledge is found outside of ourselves, as we consider external reality with our mental faculties in conformity to the Word of God.³⁸ Therefore all knowing must take into consideration the subject that is knowing, the object known, and God’s revelation. Because of the necessity of a norm for proper knowing, discussion must be open to the input of authorities—whether a textbook, teacher, or Scripture itself. Yet, in learning, we will all bring varying perspectives and so have mutually reinforcing ways of looking at the same objects and events: truth is objective, but it is not exhausted by any one finite perspective.³⁹ Thus discussion and learning from one another is an important part of learning that need not reject objective norms for truth. It is the case, then, that there is a multiplicity of potentially valid methods that

³⁷ What Piper calls “expository exultation.” John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation for the Glory of God,” in *Preaching the Cross*, by Mark Dever et al. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 103–115; John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, Revised and expanded edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

³⁸ John Frame outlines epistemology through three perspectives: the situational (object known), the existential (the knower), and the normative (the standard of truth). All knowledge involves each perspective. The norm for our knowing is God’s interpretation of the World through His revelation, as foremost found in the Word. Frame, *Doctrine of Knowledge*; John M. Frame, “Epistemological Perspectives and Evangelical Apologetics,” in *Far West Regional Conference* (presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, La Mirada, Ca., 1982), 14, accessed March 27, 2017, http://www.tren.com/e-docs/search_w_preview.cfm?pEts-1031.

³⁹ Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*.

can be employed to achieve our GE—some better suited for specific circumstances: the method used is best determined case by case in consideration of the teacher’s abilities, the individual students’ needs, and the particular goals of the educational situation.

What method, then, will be used by VSM to communicate the content and foster the learning necessary to fulfill its goal of seeing church leaders equipped for their own personal growth and the teaching of others? As suggested by our earlier discussion, many methods will be employed within the classroom and church. Because its goal involves training Church leaders, lecturing will have some role in classroom education—at the very least for modeling Bibliocentric preaching. Yet lecturing will neither be the default methodology nor the only one employed: individual teachers will be encouraged to employ whatever methods best suit their own abilities, the needs of students, and the specific goals of a class.

In this paper I have sought to lay out my personal philosophy of education with a hypothetical school, the Vancouver School of Ministry, serving as an example. Using Greenman’s nine components of learning, I have outlined my philosophy of education in consideration of culture and the goals of education, the more immediate contexts of the physical setting where education occurs and the learners and teachers involved in it, and the curriculum used for education. I argued that education as conceived from a Christian perspective is a uniquely Christian endeavour tied to God’s purposes in the world. Using VSM as an example, I presented a sketch of the education that would take place to fulfill the goal of seeing church leaders equipped to glorify God by enjoying Him and doing the work ministry given them for the sake of the local church. Applied to a school desiring to equip church leaders for faithful

ministry, my philosophy of education is no less than a vision for holistic transformative learning grounded firmly in the Bible.

Appendix 1: The Christian Worldview

Throughout this paper I have referred to *the Christian worldview*; this is not exactly helpful as a standard for developing a philosophy of education unless I make clear what exactly I mean by this. What I don't mean is my worldview, though at the moment my worldview is the Christian worldview to the best of my knowledge. That is, by the Christian Worldview I refer to the ideal worldview, the true worldview, against which each of our individual worldviews is compared. As Christians, each of us has a *Christian worldview* which bears a close resemblance to but does not equal *the Christian worldview*. The Christian worldview, then, is the worldview God has for us—the best approximation a human can get to His perfect understanding of reality. The entire Bible is the standard for this worldview: it is the only infallible embodiment of God's perspective on world and life within it. The Christian Worldview is, then, the whole of the Bible. If systematic theology is defined as “the application of the Word of God by persons to all areas of life,”⁴⁰ then systematic theology is the articulation of the Biblical worldview in a concrete setting. I defined a worldview earlier as a comprehensive framework through which an individual interprets and acts within the world.⁴¹ Because a worldview involves the actions we take, the things we think, and way we feel, the ways to communicate and argue for a specific worldview are innumerable. I will here give a brief sketch the Christian Worldview as far as I

⁴⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1987), 81. For Frame, “the Word of God” refers to all God's revelation, but the Bible is has a special function as the standard by which we understand God's revelation and evaluate our interpretations of it.

⁴¹ Keller notes that James K. A. Smith critiques the overly cognitive views of worldview in his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, arguing that a worldview is more than just bullet point beliefs consciously adopted. I agree with this: a worldview involves beliefs as well as the things we do and our affections. Each of these is a perspective on the other, we build cognitive beliefs by doing and feeling, actions by thinking and orienting our affections correctly, our affections by acting in line with right thinking. The ideal worldview, that which no human embodies, sees perfect convergence between actions, affections, and thought—where looking at any one reveals the other two. In practice, our actions and affections are often at odd with our beliefs and vice versa. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 199.

understand it, only touching upon the major points. I will outline the Christian perspective on metaphysics, then epistemology, and finally life (ethics).⁴²

Metaphysics

The Bible begins with creation; this is a good place for us to start. From the Bible's view of creation we are given the heart of the Biblical worldview, the creator-creature distinction. There are two fundamental realities according to the Bible, God and His creation. Everything we can consider is either part of God's creation or God Himself—there is nothing else. The Bible tells us much about God: He is three and yet one, not bound by any limitations—able to do whatever He desires—yet perfectly faithful to His character—never acting in contradiction. God is absolute, ultimately unchanging, yet personal and eternally relational. God is perfect in Himself and freely chose to create the universe, which exists outside of Himself (in distinction from Him) yet is not independent of Him—it is dependent on His will and power for its existence. All reality can further be considered as visible or invisible (somewhat parallel to material and immaterial, though these are not the biblical categories): God and spiritual beings are usually invisible but can make themselves visible. His creation consists of both the visible,

⁴² Each of these is reciprocal, a perspective on one another: one does not consider metaphysics for long before touching on epistemology and ethics. The same goes for the others. Metaphysics considers all of reality in terms of ontology, existence—what exists? what is its nature? Epistemology considers all reality from the perspective of knowing—how do we know what exists? what is our basis for knowing? how can we be certain of what we know? Ethics considers all reality from the perspective of morality—what is the appropriate way for me to act towards the world, to know, to think, to feel? Though I disagree with him on various details, I am largely indebted to John Frame for the categories and methods by which I present the Christian Worldview and for the broad contours of its content. John M. Frame, *Van Til: The Theologian* (Phillipsburg: Pilgrim Publishing Company, 1976); Frame, *Doctrine of Knowledge*; John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship 4* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008); John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2013); John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2015).

the earth, heavens, etc.; the invisible, spiritual beings; and humanity, a mixture of the visible (body) and the invisible (spirit). Man was the pinnacle of God's creation, made in His image to be mirrors of His glory.

The next step of the biblical story is the fall. Because of the fall, we are told that all things have been subject to decay—that God's good creation is now subject to death. Humanity especially is subject to sin—is by default living under the realm of Satan and devoted to rebellion against God. This is the state of the world as we encounter it: a good creation cursed by God, plagued by death and strife. There is conflict between the earth and humanity, the beasts and humanity, the spiritual realm and humanity, and within the spiritual realm itself. The transition from creation to fall reveals two other significant features of the biblical worldview.

The first is a linear view of history. Whatever we make of God's relationship to time,⁴³ it is clear that we as humans experience time in a linear fashion—one moment follows another and the past remains inaccessible to us as something that has passed away, the future as something yet to come; Augustine describes our experience of the present as existing on the razors edge between the past that is ceasing to exist and the future that is about to come into existence.⁴⁴ Many worldviews reject the way time seems to function and hold that history is in fact cyclical: nothing only happens once; we are trapped in a cycle of never ending repetition unless we transcend the flow of history. Scripture rejects this cyclical worldview by positing a beginning of history, the creation; unique moments in history, the fall, Christ's incarnation, and the second

⁴³ There is extended debate in theological circles concerning God's relationship to time before creation (has God always experienced time in a way analogous to the way we do or has He existed in a timeless eternity) and his relationship after time (has he bound himself to His created world, entering into temporality, or is he timelessly aloof). I think Frame is right to affirm that God is the Lord of time and in control of His participation in it. Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 543–575.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), 290–293. Confessions 290-293

coming; and the historical transitions from pre-fall creation to redemptive history and from the Old Creation to the New Creation (the beginning a of a new history). This linear nature of history is closely linked with a Biblical philosophy of history.

A “philosophy of history” is also called a metanarrative, an explanation or interpretation of the whole scope of history, which explains each event within it. The Bible teaches that all things transpire according to the will of God—His eternal plan—so the Biblical interpretation of History is God’s interpretation of History: all human attempts to interpret the world are attempts to think God’s thoughts after him. In the Bible, we are given a big picture view of the creation’s history, the key events that shape and provide the interpretation of each less significant event. This history—often called redemptive history—is sometimes summarized as *Creation*, God created a good creation; *Fall*, humanity brought a curse upon the whole creation through the sin of its first parents; *Redemption*, God began to work through chosen people to bring about the redemption of a people as His own possession; and *Consummation*, God will at the end of the first creation’s history return for His people and bring judgment against all the evil works of man, consuming the Old Creation in fire and creating a new heavens and a new earth in its place. Most human history takes place during the Redemption phase of this history: the Bible addresses primarily redemption, explaining it in terms of creation and fall with an eye to consummation. The key moment of this whole history is the incarnation and Jesus’ death and resurrection, the beginning of the New Creation in the midst of the old. The Bible furthers explains the events of history as a conflict between two kingdoms, the kingdom of the man, under the power of Satan and Sin, and the Kingdom of God, as manifest first through Israel and then through Christ’s Church. The history of creation is theocentric and anthropocentric: its revolves primarily around God and His glory, yet the main actors, after God, are human beings—they represent Him, are to

be redeemed by Him, and in opposition to Him. Man, relative to all created beings, has the central position in all the created order: man is created to mirror God in His creation, plunges the whole creation into sin, and is the object of all of God's redemptive activity—climaxing in the coming of God as a man.

On the Christian metaphysic, humanity has a unique role in the created order as the representatives of the creator God in the created world: we were to rule as His representatives. The biblical language for this is the image of God. Yet in the fall, all humanity is under a curse: each person is sinful to the very core of their being, under the condemnation of God from the beginning, and ever in rebellion against him. Yet, despite this opposition to God, all humans are recipients of common grace—God showing kindness to the righteous and unrighteous alike. When God reaches into His creation to save some of humanity as a people for His possession, a bride for Christ, there is introduced a sharp antithesis among humanity: there are those who are believers—regenerate—and those who are unbelievers—unregenerate. Believers are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, friends of God, followers of Christ; unbelievers are citizens of Satan's earthly kingdom, enemies of God, and persecutors of Christ and His body. Thus the Christian metaphysic begins with the creator-creature distinction and offers an explanation of history and reality, with God's glory and man, His created representatives, at the centre. This metaphysic implies, of course, a unique epistemology.

Epistemology

Books have been written on what the Bible says about epistemology, I cannot hope in a few pages to provide a comprehensive epistemology. The best book in this regard, I believe, is John Frame's *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*: I will here highlight a few salient points of

a biblical epistemology based on his work. Frame approaches epistemology through a model he describes as tri-perspectival: considering all the major approaches to epistemology in secular philosophy (rationalism, empiricism, subjectivism), he suggests that each of these is partially true: they each capture one aspect of a right epistemology, but they each fail because they exclude the perspectives of the others. A true epistemology needs to incorporate the perspectives of the normative standard for what is known (rationalism), the situational object known (empiricism), and the existential subject who is doing the knowing (subjectivism).⁴⁵ Frame argues that all knowledge, and knowing, cannot be exhausted by considering only the object under consideration, only the standards of what is true, or the subject that is knowing: all three need to be considered, as perspectives that only together explain the whole.

When we observe anything in the created world, let us say a tree, we must consider what is actually before our eyes; yet, we cannot ignore what is happening in our own minds as we consider the tree. As we look upon the tree, we fit it into pre-existing categories and relations—we compare it to other trees we have seen, we recognize the colour of the bark and of the nettles as brown and green, colours we learned about elsewhere; we remember lessons we have learned about trees such as this, recognizing that the nettles and pinecones identify it as a coniferous not a deciduous tree. We as persons, shaped by experience and nature, are then involved in knowing. Finally, knowledge needs a point of reference, we need something objective outside of ourselves and above the particular object in view that allows us to identify and understand it. One such example of a reference point is the so-called universals—“treeness” that which all trees have in common, etc. We bring to bear our knowledge of the universals—the unity shared by every

⁴⁵ “So knowledge is always, simultaneously, (1) an application of God's norms for knowledge, (2) an understanding of the facts of God's creation and providence, (3) use of our God-given cognitive faculties.” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 33.

individual, particular, tree—in knowing, yet the universals are not merely in our minds—there is true unity among actual trees. Unlike Plato’s rationalist epistemology, though, the universals are not independent entities floating in free space (there is no form of “treeness” that exists independent of my mind and the tree): a universal is inseparably bound to the individuals that are instantiations, embodiments, of it.⁴⁶ The normativity necessary for knowledge—the objective standard by which we know—is not to be found independent of the objects that embody their forms. Frame argues that normativity ultimately rests in God’s interpretation of reality, but the Bible tells us that God has revealed Himself in creation, so we encounter His Word—His revelation—in the world He has created.⁴⁷ For our purposes here, sketching the Christian worldview, I want to consider further only the authority for knowing and humans as the subjects knowing.

Above, I identified normativity with the universals—the forms or categories that make knowing possible—yet the normative factor in epistemology is more than just the universals of objects. We need to understand objects not only in comparison to similar objects and in contrast with dissimilar ones, but in relation to the whole of the created order. Furthermore, we often seek to know something about events, where categories of objects do not explain the meaning of the event. Normativity involves, then, the knowledge of the unity objects share, as well as the

⁴⁶ One way this can be shown is to consider the Trinity: in our God, particularity (three persons) co-exists eternally with unity (one God). Yet, there is difference here, for as Van Til has pointed out, the unity of God is personal as much as His plurality is personal. See Frame, *Van Til*; Frame, *Cornelius*; Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centred Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought*, Electronic. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013); Vern S. Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til’s Idea of Analogy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 187–219.

⁴⁷ “When we consider the world as standing under the *authority* of God, we can learn that everything in creation reveals him and his will (see my study of Romans 1 in the following section). To study the world this way is to focus on the *normative* perspective. When we consider the world as the locus of God’s *presence*, both outside and within us, we are focusing on the *existential perspective*.” Frame, *A History*, 20.

relation objects bear towards one another, their relation to the events of history, and the rules by which we relate them to one another (logic, reasoning). Only God has exhaustive knowledge of creation, history, and is perfectly reasonable: He has pre-interpreted all history, all objects of knowledge, and it is His faithfulness that sustains the so-called laws of nature and logic.⁴⁸ God has revealed Himself, though: He has revealed His interpretation of History, creation, and objects. Every particular object furnishes a perspective on all similar objects—we can learn something about all animals by studying one; therefore, God reveals some of what is necessary to understand the created order in the order itself. Furthermore, the entire universe is the *created* universe: it can only be properly understood with reference to the One who created it. In Romans, Paul writes that God has made Himself known in all creation: when humans look at the created order, they recognize the invisible attributes and power of the Biblical God. This suggests that God has both left His recognizable imprint on the created realm and given us, as His image bearers, the necessary mental faculties to connect this revelation in creation with His character—we have in our minds the necessary ideas to interpret correctly the world when we observe it. Above all though, God has spoken uniquely in the Bible.

God has spoken at many times and in many ways throughout the created history, yet we don't have access to every word He has spoken. What we have access to is a canonical document, a document that God has ordained as a standard of truth so that those who follow Him might be able to perform every good work (1 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible gives us necessary categories for interpreting the world—it is sensible, created, not God, it reveals God, it is originally good yet cursed, etc.—and the true account of its history necessary to understand the events that take place within it. Therefore, though all objects of knowledge reveal God and

⁴⁸ See Poythress, *Logic*.

function in a normative way, the Bible has been ordained by God to have a special place—a uniquely normative function. It is the ultimate reference point, to which all our fallible judgments must be compared.⁴⁹ If God’s interpretation of creation and God’s revealed Scriptures are ultimately normative, this has significant implications for the way we seek knowledge: it determines our ultimate authority.

Every time we seek to know something, we do so with reference to an authority: we consciously or sub-consciously have a standard to which we give the final decision whether something is to be believed or not. All worldviews have an ultimate authority: for any unbelieving worldview, this authority is ultimately man himself, but for the Christian it can only be God. If only two levels of reality exist, the creator and the creature, then our ultimate epistemic authority must rest on one of these two levels: either God our creator is the final measure of truth of His creatures are. Once we eliminate God, we are left with man—man is the one who interprets the world, uses reason, creates idolatrous religions (though sinful spiritual beings may at times be involved too). The worldviews that most explicitly put humanity in the seat of ultimate authority are those descended from the Enlightenment, the various forms of Modernism and Post-modernism.⁵⁰ The entire project of Modernism rests on the assumptions that the universe is a closed system without any outside interference and that human beings have the capacity to rightly interpret and systematize this universe: in theology, this was seen in the exclusion of God from reality. God was either made so immanent that he collapsed into man

⁴⁹ This suggests that Scripture must be more perspicuous than creation. This is affirmed throughout the Scriptures, and is also supported by the fact that the Holy Spirit accompanies the believer in his or her reading, illuminating the Scriptures, and that the Bible is a closed book, allowing firm and certain conclusion to be drawn from it—which cannot be said about the incredibly vast universe that is the subject of inductive study. On the last point, see J. Alexander Rutherford, “The Irrationalism of Rational Thought,” Blog, *All for the Glory of His Kingdom*, February 27, 2017, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://allforthegloryofhiskingdom.wordpress.com/2017/02/27/the-irrationalism-of-rational-thought/>.

⁵⁰ This is also seen clearly in Greek Philosophy before this.

(e.g., Schleiermacher, Hegel, Feuerbach, Bultmann) or so transcendent that he left humanity alone (e.g., Deism, Kant, Harnack, Barth). In Modernism, God is excluded from the realm of rational thought: what is true is what corresponds to man's experience and is derivable from their or is deducible from man's reason. In Post-modernism, the same authority is given to man, but it is denied that one man's interpretation of the world, history, or even a text is determinative for others. There is no one right interpretation: the subject is so inextricably involved in knowing and experiencing the world that meaning doesn't ultimately exist apart from each individual's interpretation.

The Bible will not allow these worldviews: God has interpreted all history, the whole world; there is objectivity. Though no single human being can capture the richness of God's knowledge from their finite perspective, they can truly know many things: they will be able to apprehend on a creaturely level many things but will never be able to fully comprehend the fullness of truth as God does. Because God, and God alone, holds the ultimate perspective, because He knows all things exhaustively—including what is true and what is false—He must be the Christian's standard of authority⁵¹. This means that when He speaks, His words have authority over even our most sure reasoning. God has revealed Himself in all creation, so His authority is impressed upon us as we interpret the world around us, but He has ultimately revealed Himself in His Word. Therefore, "*When we have a settled view that Scripture teaches p, then we must believe p, over against any claim that p is false.*"⁵² Because we do not have exhaustive knowledge of the universe, there is a measure of possibility in even our most sure

⁵¹ "God knows everything, every fact, every person, every event. He not only knows every state of affairs; he knows each one from every possible perspective. He not only knows the number of books in my study, but also knows how those books appear from the perspective of a fly on the wall. And even if there were no fly, he knows how my study would look from the perspective of a *possible* fly." Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 698.

⁵² "P" being a placeholder for any true statement. *Ibid.*, 721.

applications of logic, yet God knows everything exhaustively. If He saws something is true, then we have no choice but to trust that this is indeed the case (e.g., God can be three in one sense while being one in another). It is in God's great mercy that He has revealed Himself, making it possible for us to have true—even certain—knowledge, for finitude is not the only impediment to learning and knowing: all human beings are affected by what theologians sometimes call the *noetic effects of sin*.

Because we do not have exhaustive knowledge the universe, we will only ever know in part: certainty in our knowledge must come from the One who knows all things, who can assure us that this would still be true even if we were aware of every factor. Yet to trust God for this certainty is to confess that He is in control, that He knows more than us, and that He is trustworthy: it is to have faith in Him. Scripture tells us that every single human being is hostile towards God, is unable to follow God's law because they hate Him. So no human being, apart from the Holy Spirit, will submit to God as their absolute epistemic authority: we will all continue to follow our own reason and ideas of rationality. Paul writes in Romans that every man sees God in creation yet rebels against Him and creates idols, deifies the Creator. This means that from birth each of us commits epistemic suicide: by rejecting God's revelation, by rejecting His absolute claims for obedience presented in Scripture and creation, we exclude consideration of God from every fact we consider.

If God's interpretation is the right interpretation and if every event and object is put in place by God, held in being by God, created by God, and finds its meaning in God's plan; then to interpret any event or object apart from God is to give up from the beginning any chance of rightly knowing anything. Because of common grace—our inability to be %100 consistent in our

rebellion against God—humans discover truths about God’s creation, but it is never the whole truth, never completely right, because their ultimate reference point is man, not God the creator. Thus, the Christian worldview presents an epistemology that opposes every other worldview: in the place of a creaturely authority it turns to God as its authority; in the place of the optimistic view of man, it acknowledges the radical depravity of man; and instead of a fragmented approach, it presents a holistic union of the subject, object, and norm. This puts us in an appropriate place to consider our last perspective on the Christian worldview, life or ethics.

Ethics

Ethics is traditionally the third realm covered by philosophy: once we know what is (metaphysics) and how we have knowledge (epistemology), it is then necessary to ask, what do we do? How does one act in such a world? If our metaphysic posits that what is real is not the physical world, but the immaterial realm beyond it, the resulting ethic will involve the repudiation of the physical. If knowledge is based on the world beyond, not the present, then the standard for what is ethically right or wrong will be sought not in the physical world but in the immaterial beyond. Thus, in Platonism, virtue was to be cultivated, but the standard of virtuosity was conformity with the eternal patterns of the real world—the immaterial world of which the physical is just a shadow. This is not the Christian worldview: Christianity says that matter is good, created by God, and that the ultimate standard of knowing is God Himself. This demands that ethical norms—the laws concerning what is right and wrong—should be sought in Him and His revelation. The Bible itself recognizes that ethical decision making is not a black and white matter, it is situational: murder is wrong, but killing in war is not. The Old Testament case laws demonstrate this attention to the particularities of each situation for determining right and wrong

in each case. Frame helpfully discusses ethics in terms of the tri-perspectival model we saw above applied to epistemology.⁵³

When facing any ethical dilemma, one must consult the standards of right and wrong (the law), consider the concrete situation faced (how does the law apply here), and consider the individual acting (a human is not allowed to take any life and any time, but God can). I will consider the situational context, the world in which we live as Christians, in the following appendix; here I want to briefly unpack the normative (law) and existential (acting subject) contexts as they regard ethics—what law Christians use for ethical situations and what considerations must be given to us as individuals in the actions we take.

In the Old Testament, Israel was given an extensive series of laws that dictated the actions individuals and the state should take in many different contexts. This law provided a sufficient guide for making ethical decisions in God's world at the time, that is, under the Old Covenant and in the kingdom of Israel. However, things have changed since then: Christians are no longer under the Old Covenant; we are no longer under the law. We are free (e.g., Gal. 3-4). The debate over how the OT laws relate to NT Christians is complex and has been discussed since the completion of the NT; I cannot hope to give a definitive answer or even interact with the greater theological debate to any serious extent here. All I will do is outline a few principles I believe the New Testament provides Christians as they consider ethical decisions.

The first is discontinuity. Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 5 that not even the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet will pass from the law until it is fulfilled, and we read that the law

⁵³ Frame originally developed his tri-perspectival model for ethics.

is indeed fulfilled in Jesus (Gal. 3). Paul spends much of His writing ministry explaining to Jews and Gentiles that the law is no longer valid for Christians; they have died to it (Rom., esp. Ch. 6-7; Gal., esp. Ch. 3-4). The author of Hebrews confirms this: where a new covenant is instituted, the old is clearly obsolete and passing away (Heb. 8). Yet, in the place of the OT Law, the NT authors do not propose radical license—do whatever you desire, eat drink and be merry! Paul appeals to the teachings of Jesus and his own God-given authority to provide moral direction for the churches to which he writes. James goes so far as to appeal to “the perfect law, the law of liberty” (James 1:25), Paul to the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Speaking of the transition from the Levitical priesthood to Jesus under the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews writes that a change in priesthood requires “necessarily a change in the law as well” (Heb. 7:12). There is then a new law, connected to the institution of the New Covenant. The original law was God’s divine will communicated to a specific people, Israel, to be His kingdom on earth; it was inextricably connected to the Old Covenant, which mandated an earthly kingdom. Jesus ministry was concerned primarily with the coming of a new kingdom, the institution of a new covenant: therefore, Jesus ministry was the institution of a new law—the law of Christ. Jesus teachings, His own words and the apostles’ interpretation and application thereof, are then a new law—a law governing a new people and a new kingdom.

The second principle is continuity. The original law was given by God, so it is an expression of His eternal will: we saw that there is discontinuity in the changing of the covenant, of the kingdom, yet there is also continuity in that the giver of the law is our unchanging God. Thus, Jesus is able to apply the law to the new circumstances of His new kingdom: adultery is about the heart, not only actions (Matt. 5:27-28). Paul is able to apply the OT to the new

circumstances of the Church (1 Cor. 9:9), and extol its goodness (Rom. 7:7, 12). God's character has not changed, what has changed are the circumstances in which His standards are applied. No longer are God's people an earthly kingdom; they are citizens of a heavenly city (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:1). No longer does God's law legislate unbeliever and believer alike; it is communicated by the Holy Spirit in regeneration (Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 3:1-18, 4:6). No longer is it the believer's job to spread an earthly kingdom (Gen. 1:28) but to spread the Kingdom of God through the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). Thus, the OT is still applicable to us today, but it must be filtered through the lens of the New Covenant and the New Creation (of which Christians are participants). Jesus did this, the apostles did this, and we can continue to do this in our day.

The third principle is eschatology: Christians are to make decisions in light of the age in which they partake and the goals of the end of time. God, we read in Scripture, has a plan to work all things together for His glory in Christ: this is the ultimate purpose of creation. Thus, it is no surprise when an orientation towards God's glory is given as a key ethical principle in the New Testament: Paul says that whatever we do we are to do to God's glory, that we are to all things with thanksgiving, prayerfully—that is, in dependence on God (1 Cor. 10:31-33; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6, 10-13; Col. 3:17, 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11). Our goal is the glory of God, and we seek that goal as aliens, sojourners in a foreign land. Paul writes that in Christ we are new creations: God's eschatological New Creation has broken into the fallen, Old Creation through His Church. We live between the times: the Old Age or Creation is on the verge of passing away, the New has come in Christ, through His resurrection. Christians, therefore, live on the razor's edge of two ages: we are ever in anticipation of the coming of Christ, the last event in salvation history, in the history of this creation. Jesus' Parousia is the next event slated to happen, it is the next thing God

has promised: therefore the time is short; it could happen at any time. Christian ethics are then the ethics of the immanent end: time is short! we are to redeem every moment, make the most of our time (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 4:5), for Christ could return any minute. We are called to hast His coming and fulfill His will while time remains (2 Pet. 3:12). Though Christ's return has been at the threshold for two millennia, we are not to scoff as if He will not return; for "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" to the Lord, "he is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter. 3:8-9). The Lord tarries for the sake of the repentance of the nations, yet we must not shrink back for He will come soon (Heb. 10:36-39). With sober expectation we are to await his coming, ever ready (1 Thess. 4:6). This ethical orientation towards the eschaton is not a call for withdrawal from society, to sell everything and be idle: Christ could come at any moment, meaning that we should make every effort to live a life pleasing before Him, to fulfill His will in the great commission, build up the body of Christ, and be lights shining for the glory of God in the dark world around us (2 Thess. 3:6-15).

In sum, we are not to get relaxed in this world and lose sight of our nature and the next step in history: we are aliens, new creatures in an old world, and Christ is coming soon. We are to be awake, ready, vigilant in doing good and giving all our effort to seeking God's kingdom above all else. We are to work normal jobs, lest we be idle and burden the church, but we are to do so with an eye to the coming of Christ—not finding fulfillment or comfort in it: we are to make plans confessing "as the Lord wills" (James 4:15). Above all else we are to seek His glory through obedience to His will. This is the normative context, as I understand it: how we as

Christians are to understand the Bible as it gives us ethical guidance in the world. What remains for us to consider is the individual Christian and his or her life.

Under the perspective of normativity, we have already seen much of what we could discuss under the perspective of the individual Christians role in ethical decisions. Each Christian is a member of the new age, expected to act accordingly, under the law of Christ and expected to seek the glory of God in everything he or she does. We could add that the Holy Spirit is ever with us, so we are to act as those who are participants in Christ by the Spirit, who bring God into all the sin in which we partake (1Cor. 6:19-20). Instead, I want to briefly discuss the individual Christian as an ethical agent and the role of individual experience and gifting in ethical decision making.

First, the Bible stresses everywhere the sovereignty of God: He predestines, plans, works all things together, orders the steps and searches the hearts of humans, raises up nations, brings down rulers, and orchestrates the whole of human history (e.g., Hab. 1:5-11, 2:5-20; Romans 8:28-39; Eph. 1:2-14). God is the giver of faith, the one who enacts the necessary heart change so that individuals can believe (Deut. 30:6-14, John 6:44-45, Rom. 10:5-13). Yet, humans are held responsible for their actions: those who crucified Jesus were not given pardon because God predestined their actions (Acts 2:23; 3:17-21); Babylon was not excused because God raised them up for their horrific acts of conquest (Hab. 1:5-11, 2:5-20). Wicked trees cannot help but bear wicked fruit, yet Jesus says that they will be judged on the final day (Matt. 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45). This tension between God's sovereign work and our responsible contribution is seen in ethical action: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works

in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). We are called to walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Gal. 5), to put to death the flesh and set our minds on things above (Col. 3:1-2, 5), yet the only way we can do this is through God’s help. So Christians, as moral agents, are responsible for their actions but are utterly dependent on the Spirit for right living. We are, then, a dependent people, who need the Spirit for ethical action and, because of noetic effects of sin, right ethical decision making. The opposite side of this is that Biblical ethical living, right action before God, is impossible for one who is not regenerate: at the level of actions, the Spirit is needed to walk according to God’s law. At the level of ethical decision making, only actions done in faith, in consideration of God and humbly dependent orientation towards Him, are right (e.g., Rom. 3:9-18, 14:23; Heb. 11:4-7). Because unbelievers are in rebellion against him, they are unable to obey His law (Rom. 8:6-8)—to even understand it (1 Cor. 2:6-16).

Second, the Bible makes clear that the individual is a factor in ethical decision making, in determining what it means to individually glorify God—to redeem the time given to us. Consider sins of omission: James writes that to know what is right yet to fail to do it is sin (James 4:17). That is, sin is not just doing what is wrong, but failing in the appropriate situation to do what is right: thus, ethics is not just a consideration of what one shouldn’t do, but also due diligence in seeking to do what is right. A sin of omission is a failure of an individual to do what they know the law commands in a particular situation.

An individual also brings a role or social position to the ethical decision making table: what to do in a specific situation will differ if the subject acting is a parent or a child. Thus, Christian ethics must take into consideration God’s particular commission to those in particular

stations: married Christians are instructed not to withhold sexual intimacy from one another (1 Cor. 7:3-4), yet singles are to abstain from all sexual intimacy. Slaves are to be good servants towards their masters as to the Lord, being content with their position until opportunity arises to become free (1 Cor. 7:17-24, Eph. 5:5-8, 1 Pet. 2:18-21). A Christian already married to an unbeliever should attempt to remain married (1 Cor. 7:13-16), yet Christians are to only marry other believers (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14). An elder is to lead well, rebuking and acting with unique authority (1 Pet. 5:1-4); someone who is not an elder is to submit to the elders' authority (1 Pet. 5:5).

In addition to individual knowledge of the law and individual social position, ethical decision making for a Christian involves discernment concerning his or her role in the Church. Christ commissioned His apostles, and so His Church, to go into all the nations and make disciples, baptizing and teaching. Yet, if every Christian went from North America into China, who would be left to evangelize Canada? If every Christian spent his or her time learning and teaching Christian doctrine to other Christians, who would be going out into the nations? Paul puts it like this: "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (1 Cor. 12:17-18). God has gifted each and every Christian to do the work of ministry and to train others for the work of ministry, each in differing ways (Eph. 4:11-14; Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4; Titus 2:2-8). The great commission is the mission of the Church; each individual's responsibility as it regards the fulfillment of the commission depends on their place within the local church. To set up for a church gathering every Sunday is part of fulfilling the great commission, as is contributing money for missions training and travel; preaching the Gospel from the pulpit is as essential to the great commission

as preaching the Gospel to co-workers. No individual Christians bears the full weight of the commission God has given the whole body of Christ: each Christian bears the responsibility of identifying their contribution to the local and universal church, with the aid of other Christians, and seeking God's kingdom first by doing everything in their power with the time given them to glorify God in that role.

This sketch has shown that the Bible has much to say about the traditional categories of philosophy: it teaches a worldview. The Bible shows us that humans are subordinate to God, yet created in His image; we are participants in the grand narrative of this created world, which God has ordained for the end of His glory. We know the things in this world because God has revealed Himself; all our knowledge is true in as much as it is consistent with God's interpretation of reality, and all our efforts to know must therefore be performed in submission to the authority of God. Ethically, humanity has fallen into sin but God has given us His Spirit so that we might be obedient to Him: ethics is dependent on the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit. Ethics involves submission to God's law as revealed in Scripture, applying it to each situation in the world through consideration of an individual's knowledge, role, and gifting. When I speak of the Christian worldview, this is what I mean.

Appendix 2: Christianity and Culture

In the first appendix, I attempted to sketch the Christian worldview. In the discussion of ethics, I deliberately set aside discussion of the situational context of ethics—the orientation of the Christian towards the world in which he or she acts—until later. We are now in a place to resume this discussion. Here I want to examine a particular aspect of situational context: I want to discuss the posture of the Church, and so individual Christians, towards the World—Christ and Culture. Specifically, I want to look at how the Bible prescribes the involvement of Christians in the World, in interaction with the Old Creation and a kingdom hostile towards them.

I will continue to employ the definition of culture established in the main paper: culture is a society's worldview, its values, and its expressions in that society—socio-economic systems, arts, language, etc. I will discuss the Bible's view of the "World" below; but, pre-empting that discussion, I am using "World" here to refer to the whole of creation that is in opposition to God—humanity and the spiritual forces of darkness. The discussion of the relationship between the Church and the World, Christ and Culture, revolves around two axes in contemporary discussion: amongst reformed circles, the so-called cultural mandate is cited as justification for interaction with culture and the transformation of it; in the discussion of Christ and Culture, the taxonomy of Niebuhr—or variations thereof—are discussed as to their various merits and failings. Presupposed in my Philosophy of Education is a posture towards the World that, at times, sounds "transformationist" or "conversionist"—training a Christian "to fix cars for God's glory"—but also adversarial, "counterculturalist"—on the Biblical definition of education, "education can only happen by Christians for Christians." To tease out the view of Christ and Culture presupposed in my philosophy of education, I will first summarise briefly the categories

of Niebuhr, then discuss the cultural mandate, finally I will draw out various key Scriptural motifs that govern how we as Christians are to live in the world. I will then, in conclusion, attempt a synthesis.

Since the release of Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* in 1951, his five-category taxonomy describing the relationship between Christ and Culture has dominated the discussion. The question Niebuhr was addressing in presenting his five models was the relationship between Christ, as understood in various ways by Protestant Christians, as the Christian's authority and culture, the "World" considered abstractly— described by D.A. Carson as "culture-devoid-of-Christ."⁵⁴ When Christ through His followers meets the World, the Christian understanding of their relationship can be summarized, according to Niebuhr, as *Christ Against Culture*, *Christ of Culture*, *Christ and Culture in Paradox*, *Christ Above Culture (Synthesis)*, *Christ and Culture in Paradox*, and *Christ the Transformer of Culture*.⁵⁵

Those who hold to the first position advocate withdrawal from culture and hold to Christ's sole authority, rejecting all claims of loyalty presented by the culture and its categories.⁵⁶ Proponents of the *Christ of Culture* position see strong continuity between Christ and Culture, advocating a model of accommodation—Christ is the saviour of secular society, the fulfiller of its aspirations. The last three positions acknowledge both interaction with culture and Christ's authority over culture, disagreeing on how these two relate. The synthesis view seeks to build upon what is good within culture with the addition of Christ. The paradox view sees a

⁵⁴ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 12.

⁵⁵ The last three are grouped together as three different understandings of *Christ Above Culture*. I am reliant here on D.A. Carson's helpful summary of Niebuhr's long discussion. *Ibid.*, 15–25.

⁵⁶ Though they advocate this, Niebuhr takes note of the fact that no one can truly remove himself or herself from the culture and so this radical position often ends up ignoring those aspects of culture it absorbs.

fundamental division between God and humanity—all humanity, Christian and non-Christian alike, are terribly sinful. Like the counterculturalist, those holding the paradox position recognize the fallenness of human culture, yet they trust God to sustain them within culture, in interaction with it. Lastly, those who hold to Christ the transformer of culture seek to transform culture into a society submitted to Christ, to convert culture and not just those within it.

Keller combines Niebuhr’s Synthesis and Paradox positions and summarizes the four possibilities as *Counterculturalist*, *Relevance*, *Two Kingdoms*, and *Transformationist* models. He identifies in each of these a guiding motif that has shaped their respective approaches to culture: respectively, “*to be a contrast community and a sign of the future kingdom*,” “*doing sacrificial service for the common good*,” “the importance of doing [secular] work in a way *marked by an excellence that all can see*,” and “*thinking and living in all areas of life in a distinctively Christian manner*.”⁵⁷ Implicit in a few of these models is the idea that we as Christians bear a “cultural mandate,” to not only “care for earth and animals (‘subduing’ what’s already there) but also [to develop] certain cultural possibilities (‘filling’ out what is only potentially there).”⁵⁸ After the fall this becomes the task of renewing the creation and fallen human culture.⁵⁹

The idea of a cultural, or creation, mandate emerges from Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subject it; rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and over all the living creatures that crawl upon the

⁵⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 235.

⁵⁸ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 33. Cf. C. Gregg Singer, “A Philosophy of History,” in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), 331; Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 27; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 270.

⁵⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 499–500.

earth.”⁶⁰ In this command, proponents of the cultural mandate see a commission to imitate God’s creation acts and to rule as God’s vice-regents upon the earth.⁶¹ Culture is the fulfillment of this commission, imitating God in the creation of tools and art, putting the earth to the service of man: this is seen almost immediately in the works of Cain and his descendants.⁶² The culture creation God commissioned, though, is not the creation of culture for the sake of culture but for the sake of the extension of God’s kingdom throughout the earth. Thus, after the fall, Cain and his descendants hijack the cultural mandate for the glory of man.⁶³ Christians, it is supposed, fulfill the mandate by renewing the earth, spreading God’s kingdom through the work of their hands.⁶⁴ Though many highly respected scholars hold to this view, I am not convinced that there is a cultural mandate in effect for Christians today—at least not in the sense that it is envisaged by these scholars.

In Genesis 1:28, God blesses humanity and commissions them to rule in His stead, to glorify Him by imitating His acts upon the earth and putting His good creation to service. Yet, when we reach Genesis 3, something goes terribly wrong—humanity usurps the role of God, attempts to decide what is good or bad, right or wrong. In the following generations, we see the creation mandate being fulfilled, but not for the glory of God: Adam and Eve bear two children, yet Cain murders his brother, a serious affront to God (Gen. 9:6), and it is his children who begin the task of subduing the earth—making tools, cities, beginning agriculture. This new civilization culminates in the idolatrous society God wipes out with the flood. God then recommission Noah

⁶⁰ My translation. Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the ESV.

⁶¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 384.

⁶² Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 220.

⁶³ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 863; Cornelius Van Til, “Part 3--A. The Dilemma of Education,” in *Essays on Christian Education* (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979).

⁶⁴ bFrame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 874; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 499–500.

to fulfill this task, but Noah's descendants gather together at Babel and again further culture to their own glory. God intervenes and declares the cultural task as they have pursued it idolatrous; He disperses them across the land and confuses their languages so that they could never again work together for their own kingdom. The next echo of cultural mandate language appears in Genesis 12: God will multiply Abraham and fill the earth with his descendants (12:2; 17:6). With Abraham begins God's plan of redemption, to bless all the peoples of the earth through him. From Abraham until the coming of Christ, history takes a different path than that envisioned in Gen. 1:28: God's kingdom does not come through humanity as a whole subduing the earth, it comes through Abraham's descendants—Israel—and an earthly theocracy intended to bless all the nations. Even here though, Israel fails their task: the cultural mandate, now the redemption of humanity through a chosen people, is again subverted for the glory of man. So in the OT, the cultural mandate begins as the commission for man to fill the earth and rule it representing God, yet humanity subdues and fills the earth for its own glory. God then begins to bring His kingdom on the earth through Abraham and his descendants, yet even here sin mars this task.

The OT ends there; in the NT we read of Jesus heralding the arrival of God's kingdom in Himself, but God's Kingdom is different than it was conceived under the Old Testament. God's Kingdom is the in-breaking of the New Creation—the future perfection of God's creation and eternal reign—through a people created anew by His Spirit and ransomed from their sins. It is in this context, of the New Covenant and the New Creation, that we find the next echo of the cultural mandate. Before Jesus ascends into heaven, He tells His disciples that He has all authority in heaven and earth—that is, He has dominion over all the creation—and that His disciples are to go out among all the earth and make disciples who will observe all God's

commands—they are to further the Lord’s kingdom, filling the earth with believers.⁶⁵ Therefore, I think that with the change in the nature of the kingdom of God—from an earthly kingdom to a heavenly kingdom that has broken into the world through the Church—the nature of the creation mandate has changed. We are to rule with Christ and represent God, but this is not done through an earthly dominion: we spread His kingdom through the expansion of the Church until His return.⁶⁶ If I am correct, then, the cultural mandate does not give impetus to partake in the activities of the World’s cultures: it orients the role of the Christian in this world to the task of spreading the kingdom through the making, maturing, and multiplying of disciples.

Before attempting to synthesize the insights of Niebuhr, Carson, and Keller with the cultural mandate as I understand it, I want to address four motifs Scripture gives to describe the Christian’s life in this World, and so in relation to the cultures of fallen humanity. Each of these four motifs could be subdivided into several parts, but for the sake of space I have gathered together themes that bear close similarities; we will begin with the motif of two kingdoms on this earth, then God’s people as kingdom people—priests, soldiers, and slaves in the kingdom—Christians as sojourners or exiles on the earth, and we will conclude with the radical orientation of the Christians life to the Church.

In the New Testament, Jesus and His apostles after Him draw a sharp antithesis between the Kingdom of God and the World, between Christ’s Kingdom and Satan’s, between redeemed and unredeemed humanity. John describes all unredeemed humanity with the term “World,” the

⁶⁵ Frame recognizes in the Great Commission a “republication of the cultural mandate,” yet he argues that the original mandate is still in place, though it will only be fulfilled in at Christ’s return. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 203, 310.

⁶⁶ Turner sees in the success of the Great Commission an accidental fulfillment of the original creation mandate. I am arguing here that it is no accident, that the great commission is the cultural mandate contextualized to the Kingdom of God as it is unfolding in redemptive history—post-fall and in the Church age. David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 691.

dark, sinful, rebellious mass of humanity and spiritual darkness that sets itself up in opposition to God: Jesus came to save this World, yet it is this world that rejected Him and opposes His people.⁶⁷ Jesus told His disciples that all who were not with Him were against Him (Matt. 12:30, cf. Luke 11:23; Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50). In Ephesians 2:2, Paul describes the Ephesians before God saved them as those “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of obedience”: they were followers of Satan, “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31: cf. 14:30, 2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 6:12). All those who are not in Christ are in rebellion against Him (Rom. 1:18-23) and are hostile towards God (Rom. 5:10, 8:6-8). In this way, the NT divides all the earth into two groups, two kingdoms: those in opposition to God, the kingdom of Satan, and those who are in Christ, the kingdom of God. The kingdom of Satan is darkness and rebellion, yet Christians live in it as a light (Matt. 5:14-16; John 8:12; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15). So Christians live in a world hostile towards them and their God, and by their life and words they shine forth in distinction.

The second motif is the identity of Christians as people within the Kingdom of God, described as priests, soldiers, and servants. As priests, Christians present to God spiritual sacrifices—their own lives and works—and proclaim to the World the excellencies of the God who saved them (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 1:6, 5:10). Paul encourages Timothy as soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-3) and gives instruction to him in 1 Timothy so that he might “wage the good warfare” (1:18). He speaks of Epaphroditus and Arichippus as his “fellow soldiers” (Phil.

⁶⁷ 1 John 2:15-17, 3:1, 13. “The world, fallen and rebellious human beings in general, does not and cannot love God ([John] 3:19; 5:42; 8:42)” (*The Gospel According to John*); “If God sent Christ so that the *kosmos* might be saved by him ([John] 3.17), it is because the *kosmos* is lost without him. Similarly, 1.29 says a great deal for the Lamb of God, but not much for the *kosmos*. In short, the *kosmos* hates (7.7). In particular it hates Jesus, because he lays bare the horror of its evil, which exposure it tries to shun (3.20)” (*Sovereignty*). D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 204; D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 164.

2:25; Phlm 2), describing the Christian ministry as warfare against ideas raised against Christ, a warfare waged with divine power (2 Cor. 10:4). This idea of Christianity as warfare and Christians as soldiers in Christ's Kingdom is applied to all believers in Eph. 6:10-20, where Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle with spiritual powers of darkness, fought by taking up the spiritual armor that God provides. So Christians are engaged in warfare in this world, against ideas and spiritual forces of evil, to see Christ's Kingdom expand through the saving message of His Gospel. Lastly, Christians are at times identified as servants or slaves (the same Greek word, δουλος) of Jesus. In John 15:15, Jesus distinguishes his disciples from mere slaves: a slave obeys his master without knowledge of his master's purpose; Jesus' disciples are not servants in this way, they are friends, for Jesus gave to them all that He received from the Father. However, there is a sense in which Christians remain servants of Jesus: they know their master's plans, yet He is still their master—they are pledged in obedience to their Lord. Elsewhere, Jesus tells a parable of a dishonest manager, concluding that His followers cannot serve both God and money: they must choose whom they will serve, to whom they will be a slave (Luke 16:1-13, cf. Rom. 6:16). When he addresses slaves, Paul identifies them as "bondservants of Christ" along with their fellow believers (1 Cor. 7:22); Paul also calls all Christians, who have been freed from domain of sin, slaves of righteousness, slaves to God (Rom. 6:15-23). They are freed from obedience to sin to be obedient to God, this is in fact their obligation now that they are Christians—how could they continue in sin! Yet, this slavery is true freedom (Rom. 6:22, 2 Cor. 4:17, Gal. 5:1): Peter exhorts his readers to live in their freedom as servants of God (1 Pet. 2:16). Paul also identifies his coworkers as fellow servants of Christ Jesus (Col. 1:7, 4:7). Christ is the

Christian's Lord: He has all rule and authority, we are His people, the citizens of His kingdom, and ought to obey him.⁶⁸

The third motif that describes the Christian life in this world is the language of elect exiles. Christians throughout the New Testament are identified as exiles, aliens, or sojourners on the earth: they are exiles in two senses, citizens of foreign kingdoms and residents of a different land. As citizens of a foreign kingdom, Christians are not completely at home in this world: they are always looking to the city from which they get their true citizenship (Heb. 11:10, 16).⁶⁹ The ultimate allegiance of Christian is not to an earthly state: it is to the Kingdom of God and the heavenly Jerusalem—their true city (Rev. 21:9-27). Thus, though Christians are called to obey their earthly rulers, they do not owe them their ultimate allegiance: they are to honor those God has put in power (Rom. 13:1-7), to not cause offense (Matt. 17:25-27), yet their ultimate allegiance is to God (Mark 12:17). It is out of their freedom as servants of God that they are to submit to every human institution (1 Pet. 2:13-17). But, because they are citizens of a different city, Christians are called to be different than those of the earthly city: “let us go to [Jesus] outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴For there we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:13-14).⁷⁰ Furthermore, Christians live as exiles in a foreign land: they have no home here, they are from a different land, the New Creation.

⁶⁸ The motif of servant is never used to indicate that God needs service, that He has jobs to do that require servants to fulfill: the use of the term servant focuses on obedience towards a master.

⁶⁹ Before the rise of nations, even empires, citizenship was often municipal: your rights came from the city you belonged to. In the Greece there existed city-states: each city had its own king, functioned as its own kingdom with land it controlled and vassal cities, but the identity of the kingdom lay not in the region it controlled but in the *πολις* (*polis*), the city that was its centre. Thus the word in Greek for citizenship derives from the word city (*πολιτευμα*, *politeuma*). At the time of the writing of the New Testament, Roman citizenship is usually intended.

⁷⁰ In context, the author is exhorting his readers not to go back to Judaism and the Old Covenant but to cling fast to Christ, to endure in the faith they have received. Here, he draws a parallel between Christ and the sacrifice for the altar: the sacrifice is burned outside the camp; it is distinguished from the camp itself, unable to exist in it any longer. Similarly, Christ suffered outside Jerusalem, he was distinguished from it, separated from the city: so also Christians by their identification with Christ separate themselves from earthly identities, they identify themselves with what is outside, foreign, unclean (Heb. 13:9-12).

Christians are new creatures in Christ, therefore they are not at home in the Old Creation: they are ambassadors of the coming world sent to minister in their old country, to demonstrate the newness of what is to come in the midst of the darkness of what is fading away (Rom. 6:4, Rom. 8:18-15; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; 1 Pet. 1:17, 2:10-17; 2 Pet. 3:11-13). Christians, then, are freed from earthly allegiance to become what is necessary for the sake of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23); they are not bound to a specific people, but share a citizenship that transcends ethnic and social-economic boundaries (1 Cor. 1:26-31, 12:13; Gal. 3:28-29, 5:6; Eph. 2:19; Col. 3:11). Giving a description of Christianity in a letter written to Diognetus, an unbeliever, an early Christian writer wrote that Christians “live in their own homelands, but as aliens: they participate in everything as citizens, but endure all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their homeland, and every homeland is foreign.”⁷¹ Christians are thus radically free to use the benefits of citizenship for the furthering of the kingdom, as Paul did (Acts 16:37, 21:39, 22:25-29), but also free from the constraints of allegiance to any earthly nation.

This radical freedom given by the Christian’s new identity extends beyond the redefinition of political or national identity; it redefines even the closest of human relationships. The fourth and final motif I want to consider is that of Christians as members of a new family. Jesus, in His preaching, called for a radical re-orientation in the lives of his followers related to a radical re-orientation in their relationship to God. Though the language of God as Father is not unique to the New Testament (Deut. 32:6; 2 Sam. 7:14; Isa. 9:5, 63:16), it becomes central to the identity of Christians. Jesus teaches believers to pray to God as their Father (Matt. 6:9), calls God the Father of His disciples (Matt. 5:16; 6:1, 18), and identifies His true family not as those who are biologically related to Him but those who obey God (Matt. 12:46-50). Throughout the

⁷¹ My translation from *the Epistle of Diognetus*.

New Testament, believers are frequently identified as “brothers”⁷² and exhorted to grow in their familial love for one another (brotherly love) (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22, 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:7). The Church becomes, in the New Testament, the closest unit in society, a new society in the midst of, but different from, the surrounding society. At a time when family obligations were much stronger than they are in North America today, Jesus told His followers that following Him would mean being hated by their families (Matt. 10:21-22, Mark 13:12), that they would have to, at times, lose their families for His name sake (Matt. 19:29). The extent to which Christianity reshapes family loyalties is seen in 1 Cor. 7:12-16, where Paul tells believing spouses of unbelievers that they are free, to be at peace, if their unbelieving spouse leaves them (though they are not to initiate a divorce, for God might use them to save their spouse). Because of this relationship believers have in Christ—brothers and sisters, bound by the Holy Spirit with a relationship closer than any other intra-human relationship—Christian ethics (good works) takes on a radically internalized nature. The Romans are called especially to give to the needs to the saints (12:13); in Galatians, Paul instructs them to do good to everyone, “especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:10, cf. 1 Thess. 15:15); the motivation for working becomes taking care of one another’s needs and not being a burden to the Church, implying that it takes up the obligation to take care of its members in need (Eph. 4:28, 2 Thess. 3:7-12; 1 Tim. 5:16; Heb. 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18); and hospitality becomes a key Christian virtue (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 5:10; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 John 5-8). This focus on the saints is not at the exclusion of the outside world but ultimately for the sake of the great commission, in order that the body might be built up, equipped, and ready to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth and so that it

⁷² The significance of the male term is not the exclusion of females but the specific rights of a male heir, a son, that are given to all believers—male and female. The word for “sister” is used occasionally, but the usual practice in the NT is to use the word “brothers,” it being understood that both men and women are included.

might shine in this dark world as a community shaped by God and exemplifying the New Creation in the midst of the Old (Eph. 4:11-16, 25-32; Matt. 5:14-16; Eph. 5:7-16; Phil. 2:15).

From all we have seen thus far, what can we synthesize? how does the Bible describe the relationship between the Church and the World, individual Christians and their cultures? Beginning with the four categories Keller distilled from Niebuhr's original five, we see three of their defining characteristics affirmed in the Bible. From our examination of four biblical motifs describing Christians in relation to the world, we saw that Christians are *"to be a contrast community and a sign of the future kingdom"* (Counterculturalist: e.g., Matt. 5:14-16, Phil. 2:15). However, in doing so they are not to neglect *"the importance of doing [secular] work in a way marked by an excellence that all can see"* (Two Kingdoms: e.g., Eph. 5:5-8, Col. 3:17, 1 Pet. 2:18-21). And, though they are not called to create an earthly kingdom, they are obligated to *"[think and live] in all areas of life in a distinctively Christian manner"* (Conversionist: e.g., Col. 3:17).⁷³ However, though Christians are called to do good to their unbelieving neighbours (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:15), they are never called to do *"sacrificial service for the common good"*: they are called to sacrificial service before God for the spreading of His kingdom—the ultimate good with reference to God, not in a merely anthropocentric sense.⁷⁴

This is affirmed by the evolution of the cultural mandate: Christians are not called to continue the mandate of creating culture, supposed to have been introduced in Gen. 1:28; their mandate is to spread the kingdom of God, baptizing and teaching the nations Christ's commandments (Matt. 28:18-20). Christians are to devote everything to the treasure they have

⁷³ Keller, *Center Church*, 235.

⁷⁴ That is, if good is defined as anything other than the coming of the kingdom of God, then Christians are not called to further it. Yet, the spreading of the Kingdom of God is the best thing for humanity, contingent for the individual upon their acceptance of its salvific offer.

discovered in the kingdom (Matt. 6:19-24, 33; 13:44-45; Mark 8:34-35). Christians primary goal, therefore, is to further the kingdom through their participation in the great commission, using their God given gifts to further God's purpose in the local church. So, though Christians are to do everything they do in a uniquely Christian manner, they are not to try and convert culture—create an earthly kingdom that corresponds to their heavenly one.

In their commitment to the cause of Christ, Christians are to live as if in times of war, arming themselves with the Word, Spirit wrought character, and prayer; using the time given them to fulfill God's will; and being ever vigilant in waiting for Christ's coming. They are to offer their lives as living sacrifices in the service of God. As exiles in this world, adopted into God's family, they are to identify foremost as citizens of Christ's kingdom and members of God's household (Eph. 4:19-22): Christians are to make their relationship to Christ and His Church their ultimate priority, their ultimate allegiance, so that they may be an effective witness in the world for His name. Thus, the way the Epistles envision the fulfilling of great commission is almost counter-intuitive: Christians are to prioritize their own community in order to be an effect witness to those outside. Christians are to be radically internalized so that they might be an effective witness to those outside. Christians, through their radical commitment to Christ and His Kingdom, to His bride and God's family, are to draw a distinct line between themselves and unbelievers, without ever abandoning the world or withdrawing from it (John 17:15; 1 Cor. 5:10). Their community is to be so remarkably different that being excommunicated can function as a profound wake-up call for sinners (1 Cor. 5:3-5, 1 Tim. 1:20). They are to be radically distinct for the sake of those with whom they differ.

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