

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This article provides a call for a full-orbed and theologically-shaped vision for the work of evangelical higher education. Recognizing the abundance of challenges to such a vision, the author appeals to the best of the evangelical heritage and the larger Christian tradition to encourage faculty and staff to think deeply about the distinctive work of Christian higher education. Believing that a theology of evangelical higher education will help develop connecting and unifying principles for Christian thinking, living, and learning, grounded in the truth that God is Creator and Redeemer, the article appeals for thoughtful and exploration and wrestling with the foundational questions of human existence as understood from the vantage point of the Christian gospel. The author suggests that these commitments will help develop a comprehensive and historically informed view of what it means to be a part of the Christian intellectual tradition as we seek to shape the Christian educational enterprise for the years ahead.*

Key words: *theology, evangelical, Christian intellectual tradition, faith, learning, academic freedom, higher education*

Challenges abound in the world of evangelical higher education in 2018.¹ Today there are more challenges from more different directions than I have ever seen. Anyone interested in the present state and future challenges of evangelical higher education will want to keep an eye on cultural and global trends, for our work never takes place in a vacuum.² These introductory observations do not begin to address changes in higher education such as focus, funding, philosophy, methodology, and delivery systems. The list of challenges facing evangelical higher education is lengthy, including legal, cultural, governmental, denominational, financial, and

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¹ Portions of this address have been previously published in a variety of places: David S. Dockery, “Christian Higher Education: An Introduction,” in *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching, and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition* (ed. David S. Dockery and Christopher W. Morgan; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 17–37; idem, ed., *Faith and Learning: A Handbook for Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012); idem, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); and idem, “Blending Baptist with Orthodox in the Christian University,” in *The Future of Baptist Higher Education* (ed. Donald S. Schmeltekopf and Dianna M. Vitanza; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 83–100.

² David S. Dockery, “Toward a Future for Christian Higher Education: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future,” *Christian Higher Education* 15.1–2 (2016): 115–20.

more.³ Tonight, however, I want to address a big-picture issue that moves to the very heart of the mission of evangelical higher education.⁴

I. EVANGELICAL HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Evangelical higher education involves a distinctive way of thinking about teaching, learning, scholarship, service, subject matter, student life, administration, and governance that is grounded in the orthodox Christian faith. Our vision for evangelical higher education is not just about an inward, subjective, and pious Christianity, as important as that may be. Christian educators need to recognize that the Christian faith is more than a framework of warmhearted devotional practices, as vital as these are for our Christian formation. Our appeal this evening is for a more fully-orbed and theologically-shaped vision for our work that will influence what we believe, how we think, how we teach, how we learn, how we write, how we lead, how we govern, how we engage culture, how we prepare students, how we act, and how we treat one another.⁵

Almost every institution in the world of private higher education at one time was founded with a Christian vision.⁶ In fact, as Brad Gundlach and Nathan Finn have noted, at one time almost all higher education could broadly be considered Christian higher education.⁷ George Marsden, James Burtchaell, and other capable historians have chronicled the secularization of higher education, lamenting “the loss of the soul” and the “dying of the light” among dozens and dozens of formerly church-related colleges and universities in North America and Western Europe.⁸ Often the cause for such abandonment of the Christian faith has been traced to the pursuit of academic prestige and cultural respectability in addition to the pressures felt within a rapidly changing secular and pluralistic context.⁹ Some church-related

³ David S. Dockery, “Christian Higher Education in a Changing Cultural Landscape: Tradition as a Source of Renewal,” *Faith and the Academy* 1.2 (2017): 27–30.

⁴ While the list of challenges facing higher education is lengthy, the issue of mission faithfulness remains at the top of the list. See David S. Dockery, “Leadership, Current Challenges, and the Future of Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Education Journal* (forthcoming, 2019).

⁵ David S. Dockery, “The Thoughtful Christian,” *Christ on Campus Initiative* (ed. D. A. Carson and Scott M. Manetsch), <http://www.christoncampusci.org/the-thoughtful-christian>.

⁶ See Gregory Alan Thornbury, “The Lessons of History,” in *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (ed. David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2002), 40–61; David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student’s Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁷ See Bradley J. Gundlach, “Foundations of Christian Higher Education: Learning from Church History,” in *Christian Higher Education*, 121–38; Nathan A. Finn, “Knowing and Loving God: Toward a Theology of Christian Higher Education,” in *Christian Higher Education*, 39–58.

⁸ See George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); James Turnstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

⁹ See Finn, “Knowing and Loving God,” 39–41; Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 1–17; Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University

schools have managed to maintain historic ties and denominational connections, but now the Christian faith has little, if any, meaningful influence on the life and work of these campuses, several of which have become some of the most prestigious institutions in this country and around the world.¹⁰

I want to suggest that one thing which has characterized the drift among these institutions has been a lack of a theological vision to sustain them and to serve as an anchor and compass for the work.¹¹ While at some of these institutions one can still find remnants of a theology or religion department, there is often confusion as to whether these programs belong to the areas of history or philosophy, or with some other program such as sociology or the fine arts.¹² Stanley Hauerwas has sadly observed that the loss of theological vision at these places and others means that few Christian institutions will leave behind “ruins,” the kind of material evidence of a vibrant Christian academic culture that glorified God, served the church, and influenced generation after generation of students.¹³ Thus, people who wish to think about education from a theological perspective find themselves speaking from the margins.¹⁴

My proposal tonight, as I stand before members of the Evangelical Theological Society, is not so much to retrace the history of higher education or of Christian higher education in the West so much as it is to suggest that similar pressures and patterns described by these and other historians can now be seen in and among the evangelical institutions with which many of us are associated. On these campuses there is a growing academic reputation with expanding academic offerings, something that we celebrate and something for which we are genuinely grateful. On these campuses can be found markers of both piety and Christian activism, but lacking, for the most part, is a fully-developed theological vision to sustain the mission of evangelical higher education.¹⁵ A failure to do so will result in a restlessness

Press, 2006); Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2002); see also Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

¹⁰ See D. Bruce Lockerbie, *A Passion for Learning: A History of Christian Thought on Education* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 312–40; Kenneth O. Gangel and Warren S. Benson, *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 241–366.

¹¹ I have attempted to make this case in other places. See Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 124–37; idem, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 134–67.

¹² See Denise Lardner Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind: A Theology of Higher Education* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1–65; Finn, “Knowing and Loving God,” 39–40.

¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 33–44. I am grateful to Nathan Finn for reminding me of this reference.

¹⁴ See Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind*, 60–65.

¹⁵ Dockery, “Christian Higher Education,” 17–37; Dockery, “Blending Baptist with Orthodox in the Christian University,” 83–100; Finn, “Knowing and Loving God,” 39–58; Brad Green, “Theological and Philosophical Foundations,” *Shaping a Christian Worldview*, 62–91; Klaus Issler, “Philosophy of Education,” in *Faith and Learning*, 97–121; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Theology of Wisdom: Creation as Context; Christ as Content; Canon as Curriculum,” in *Where Wisdom May Be Found: The Eternal Purpose of Integrated Christian Education* (ed. Edward P. Meadors; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

about the meaning of Christian higher education, negatively influencing our attempts to think rightly about the meaning of true wisdom and human flourishing.¹⁶

We offer thanks that evangelicals have seen progress in the faith and learning conversation,¹⁷ in the area of worldview formation,¹⁸ and in efforts to begin to reclaim the Christian intellectual tradition.¹⁹ All of these developments are steps toward the development of a theology for evangelical higher education or an evangelical theology for Christian higher education, but there remains a need for a serious evangelical theology that is focused on a faithful vision for distinctive Christian higher education.²⁰

Tonight's presentation will not fulfill the need for a full-scale theology of higher education, but hopefully it will provide a runway for such an effort which can be pursued in the very near future. I am convinced that Christian higher education can only be sustained in the days and years ahead with such a theological vision. One of the things that needs to take place for this vision to take hold is to break down the bifurcation of theological centrality and expertise between evangelical seminaries on the one hand, and evangelical colleges and universities on the other.²¹ We will need the people gathered together in this room tonight to begin to develop and enhance collegial partnerships that will help to bridge the divide between siloed disciplines and the insularity that develops around scholarly specializations.

I believe this is a critical time to refocus the meaning and mission of evangelical higher education in order to understand the distinctive reason for its existence.²² In this secular age, to borrow a phrase from Charles Taylor, a time characterized by spiritual confusion, moral anarchy, polarization, and fragmentation, we need to ask foundational questions about the core confessions of our faith.²³ What then would be involved in the development of a theology of evangelical higher education? Before addressing this key question, let me offer a word about the use of "evangelical" and the meaning of "theology."

¹⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Cultural Liturgies 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

¹⁷ See Dockery, *Faith and Learning*.

¹⁸ See Dockery and Thornbury, *Shaping a Christian Worldview*, see also David Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., *CSB Worldview Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2018).

¹⁹ See the fifteen-volume series, *Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition* (ed. David S. Dockery; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012–2019).

²⁰ Nathan Finn has provided a most helpful outline for such a project. See "Knowing and Loving God," 39–58. See also Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); James R. Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

²¹ This proposal served to focus the presentations and discussions at the annual meeting of the Society of Professors of Christian Education meeting in St. Louis, MO (October 2018).

²² See Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, eds., *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

²³ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2007); James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Collin Hansen, ed., *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2017).

II. UNDERSTANDING OUR TERMINOLOGY

Let me note that I am fully aware of the conversations and debates currently swirling around the term “evangelical,” and I understand why these questions are being raised at this time.²⁴ Given that we are all participants this week in the work of the *Evangelical* Theological Society, these conversations should not be a surprise. For our purposes tonight, we will employ the term in a way faithful to the heritage of this society. I am using the term “evangelical” to describe Trinitarian Christians who believe in the truthfulness and authority of the Bible and the uniqueness and universality of the gospel.²⁵ Kenneth Kantzer would have added that these commitments are in continuity with both the material and formal principles of the Reformation.²⁶ This means that evangelical higher education points to institutions including Bible colleges, gap-year programs, liberal arts and liberal arts-based institutions, graduate and professional programs, and theological seminaries and divinity schools that would affirm these general truths. Still, my primary focus has to do with the development of a theology for evangelical liberal arts and liberal arts-based campuses, along with their accompanying professional and graduate programs, though as mentioned I want to invite seminaries and divinity schools, as well as Bible colleges, to serve as resource partners in this effort.²⁷ While the discussions around the term “evangelical” are complicated, the term “theology” is equally problematic, at least for some.

The reality is that the term “theology” scares many people who serve in Christian colleges and universities. The term sounds formidable, abstract, technical, and esoteric. Many people are suspicious of a conversation like the one we are proposing because they are fearful of the word “theology,” thinking it to be irrelevant for our lives in general and for our serious academic work in particular.²⁸ While the suspicion of theology is not limited to those who serve in academic settings, it is nevertheless certainly present there.²⁹

Theology is not just an attempt to articulate our feelings about our dependence on God, as the influential German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher said more than two hundred years ago.³⁰ On the other hand, it is not merely an attempt

²⁴ See Mark Labberton, ed., *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018); Keith C. Sewell, *The Crisis of Evangelical Christianity: Roots, Consequences, and Resolutions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); and Kenneth J. Stewart, *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017).

²⁵ David S. Dockery, “Evangelicalism: Past, Present, and Future,” *TrinJ* 36 NS (2015): 3–21.

²⁶ Kenneth S. Kantzer, “Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith,” in *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing* (ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 38–67.

²⁷ See Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

²⁸ See Robert Saucy, “Doing Theology for the Church,” in *The Necessity of Systematic Theology* (ed. John Jefferson Davis; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

²⁹ See the discussion in John Frame, “Studying Theology as a Servant of Jesus,” *Reformation and Renewal* 11.1 (Winter 2002): 45–69.

³⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (trans. John Orman; New York: Harper & Row, 1965 [1799]).

to state the objective truth and to put the truth in proper order, as the well-known Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge suggested when he attempted to articulate theology in nineteenth-century scientific terms.³¹ As Kevin Vanhoozer has suggested, we need to treat questions of God, Scripture, hermeneutics, and application together in order to understand the triune identity of the God who is communicative, loving, and sovereign. Doing so will provide a first step for seeing how the study of theology provides an “anchored set” to influence all other academic disciplines in an interrelated way to and for the glory of God. Jaroslav Pelikan has rightly clarified that theology is what the church believes, teaches, and confesses based on the word of God.³²

Borrowing from and conflating the thoughts of a number of skilled thinkers, we can begin to think of theology as developing a mind for truth so that we can indeed articulate the faith once for all delivered to the saints while developing a heart for God so that our lives and academic communities are both built upon the faith and built up in the faith.³³ An evangelical theology for Christian higher education will have Scripture as its foundation, Christ at its center, the church as its focus, and the influencing of society and culture as a key element of its vision.³⁴

We believe theology can render service to Christian higher education in multiple ways. It addresses the mind so that we can know the triune God as the revelation of himself to us. Theology informs and undergirds the mission of Christian higher education, making it vitally important for teaching, for connecting the academy with the church, and for the task of culture-engagement. Theology thus serves as a touchstone for understanding what we believe and for recognizing the principles by which our lives are to be shaped.³⁵ Such beliefs and practices come from serious theological reflection. A theology of and for evangelical higher education also points to ethics.³⁶ One of the goals of evangelical higher education is to guide and enable our students as they seek to live in the world with a lifestyle that issues in glory to God. We must therefore help our students connect the dots to begin to

³¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1871–1872]).

³² See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1; idem, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

³³ Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, 152–67; Finn, “Knowing and Loving God,” 40–42; David S. Dockery, *Basic Christian Beliefs* (Nashville, B&H, 2000), 2–6; A. T. B. McGowan, “Why Study Theology?” *Reformation & Renewal* 11.1 (Winter 2002): 22–44; Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “Systematic Theology,” in *Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education* (ed. David S. Dockery; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 257–80; Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

³⁴ Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, 152–57; Daniel L. Akin, ed., *Theology for the Church* (2nd ed.; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014); Miroslav Volf, ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); David S. Dockery, “A Theology for the Church,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 1.1 (2003): 10–20.

³⁵ Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 126–35.

³⁶ See Graham A. Cole, “Theological Ethics,” in *Theology, Church, and Ministry*, 316–31.

see the implications of a full-orbed theological vision for social, economic, and political ethics as well. Such necessities touch the heart of the life and mission of evangelical higher education. As we begin to take these steps, we need to be aware that there are issues in our heritage that may create difficulties for our proposal.

III. CHALLENGES FROM OUR EVANGELICAL HERITAGE

When we think about the particular challenges flowing from our evangelical heritage to engage the culture, to carry forth the best of the Christian intellectual tradition, and to develop a theology of higher education, we recognize a number of things with which we must come to grips. First, the emphasis on conversion and piety, which has been at the core of the evangelical movement and which remains essential, has, at times, however, stood in the way of sanctified intellectual development and cultural engagement. Second, the emphases on localism, populism, and activism, all of which have frequently acted to spur renewal and mobilization for ministry, have often carried with them a lack of appreciation for the life of the mind and theological development. Third, the diverse camps and entrepreneurial spirit within our larger evangelical world have kept us from appreciating the breadth and depth of the Christian theological tradition through the centuries. We recognize that some pockets of evangelicalism carry with them an embedded anti-intellectualism which has pushed back against serious theological development and serious academic endeavor. Fourth, while seeking to address some of these challenges in years gone by, a form of liberalism has been adopted, which has brought about a loss of direction for both churches and institutions. Fifth, in response to the rise of liberalism has been the rise of a reactionary fundamentalism.³⁷

Any attempt to develop a theology of evangelical higher education must seek to refocus questions related to how Scripture bears upon the various academic disciplines, how we reappropriate the best of our evangelical heritage, how we clarify our confessional commitments, and how we engage the academy and the culture in this rapidly changing twenty-first century context.³⁸

IV. FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

We begin with an acknowledgement that we will approach the educational enterprise from the perspective of faith seeking understanding.³⁹ We will then need to develop a framework to cultivate a holistic orthodoxy based on a high view of

³⁷ Dockery, "Evangelicalism," 3–21; see also Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995); Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). It should, by the way, be noted how Billy Graham attempted to address these things in his work with Carl Henry by seeking to bring together the work of evangelism, the cultivation of piety, the engagement of culture, and the importance of serious Christian thinking. See David S. Dockery, "Just As I Am: Billy Graham (1918–2018)," <http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2018/02/just-as-i-am-billy-graham-1918-2018>.

³⁸ Finn, "Knowing and Loving God," 39–50.

³⁹ See Dockery, "Thoughtful Christian"; see also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

Scripture, which is also congruent with the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church.⁴⁰ I would suggest that an effort to develop a theological vision for the work of evangelical higher education will not be able to move forward without confessional convictions, which inform both the core and the boundaries of our work. This, however, does not mean that we should expect or demand uniformity of belief or conviction.⁴¹ The world in which we live with its emphasis on diversity and plurality may well be a creative setting for us once again to pray for a far-reaching renewal of evangelical higher education. Our first steps will involve an articulation of foundational commitments, followed by an overview of the early church tradition that will form a framework for this effort.⁴² The commitments represented by this Society to the fully truthful and authoritative Scriptures need to be foundational for our work.⁴³

Our approach must be framed by an understanding of the self-revealing God who has created humans in his image. We believe that students created in the image of God and enabled by God's Spirit are designed to discover truth and that the exploration of truth is possible because the universe, as created by the Trinitarian God, is intelligible.⁴⁴ At the same time we want to affirm that human beings find their ultimate fulfillment in God, who, though knowable, can never be exhausted or fully known.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, many of our "faith and learning" efforts on our campuses are merely attempts to show how our own Christian experiences influence learning rather than a recognition that Scripture should be the primary authority in every academic discipline.⁴⁶ Faculty development programs as well as foundational courses in the curriculum should be designed to help faculty and students understand

⁴⁰ See David S. Dockery, "So Many Denominations: The Rise, Decline, and Future of Denominationalism," in *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (ed. David S. Dockery; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 24–31.

⁴¹ See Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 131–47; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 480–81; R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center Without a Circumference," in *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times* (ed. Michael S. Horton; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 146.

⁴² See Thomas Oden, *After Modernity ... What?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); idem, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2003), 22–40.

⁴³ See John D. Woodbridge, "The Authority of Holy Scripture: Commitments for Christian Higher Education in the Evangelical Tradition," in *Christian Higher Education*, 59–80.

⁴⁴ See John F. Kilner, "Made in the Image of God: Implications for Teaching and Learning," in *Christian Higher Education*, 101–19; idem, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁴⁵ See Erik Thoennes, "The Incomprehensibility of God," in *ESV Study Bible* (ed. Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2509–10; see also Michael J. Wilkins and Erik Thoennes, *Biblical and Theological Studies: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 85–109.

⁴⁶ Dockery, "Christian Higher Education," 17–37; Finn, "Knowing and Loving God," 39–58; Woodbridge, "Authority of Holy Scripture," 59–79; George H. Guthrie, "The Study of Holy Scripture and the Work of Christian Higher Education," in *Christian Higher Education*, 81–100.

how to interpret Scripture in order to begin to think biblically, bringing scripturally-informed faith to bear upon every discipline.⁴⁷

With the apostle Paul, we want to emphasize the Christ-centered approach to developing such a vision. In Eph 4:21, we are reminded that “you heard him [Christ] and were taught by Him, because the truth is in Jesus.” In many ways, we recognize that Jesus Christ is not only the subject matter in our educational pursuits, but he is also the teacher and the context in which the teaching takes place.⁴⁸ Thus, a commitment to a truthful and authoritative Bible will provide the guide to point us to Jesus Christ.⁴⁹

V. LEARNING FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

We therefore want to center our work on Jesus Christ and in the confession that Jesus is Lord, as well as in the great tradition flowing from the Apostles’ Creed to the confession of Nicea in the fourth century and Chalcedon in the middle of the fifth century. Such historic confessions can provide guidance for us in seeking to balance the mandates for right Christian thinking, right Christian believing, and right Christian living.⁵⁰

When we contend today that Christian higher education must be distinctive Christ-centered education, we are in effect confessing that Jesus Christ, who was eternally the second person of the Trinity, sharing all the divine attributes became fully human.⁵¹ Thus, to think of Christ-centeredness only in terms of Christian experience resulting from following certain select teachings of Jesus, while important, will be inadequate.

A healthy future for Christian higher education must return to the past with the full affirmation that when we point to Jesus, we see the whole man Jesus and say that is God. This is the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh

⁴⁷ Finn, “Knowing and Loving God,” 39–50; Guthrie, “Study of Holy Scripture,” 81–100; idem, “The Authority of Scripture,” in *Shaping a Christian Worldview*, 19–39; David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans, eds., *The Bible and the University* (Scripture and Hermeneutics 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); see also David S. Dockery, Kenneth A Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan, eds., *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: B&H, 1994). One of the early initiatives in my presidency at Union was the establishment of a Center for Faculty Development. Likewise, at Trinity, a Center for Integrated Faculty Development was established. In response to my Faculty Lectures at Biola University in August 2018, it was suggested to me that attention to students and the core curriculum was as important as the faculty development initiatives. See Gene C. Fant Jr., “The Heartbeat of Christian Higher Education: The Core Curriculum,” in *Faith and Learning*, 27–49. See also the illuminating discussion in Rick Kennedy, “How Shall We Then Read the Bible: An Extended Review,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 48.1 (Fall 2018): 77–83.

⁴⁸ David S. Dockery, *Ephesians: One Body in Christ* (Nashville: Convention, 1996), 82–84; idem, “An Outline of Paul’s View of the Spiritual Life: Foundation for an Evangelical Spirituality,” *CTR* 3 (1989): 327–39; John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 179–83.

⁴⁹ See David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: B&H, 1995).

⁵⁰ Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 53–69.

⁵¹ See Donald E. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord* (Christian Foundations; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997)

(1 Tim 3:16). Our approach to education is thus significantly shaped and informed by the incarnation.⁵²

It is necessary that Christ should be both God and man. Only as a human could he be the redeemer for all humanity; only as a sinless man could he fittingly die for others. Only as God could his life, ministry, and redeeming death have infinite value and satisfy the demands of God so as to deliver others from death. Any attempt to envision a faithful evangelical higher education for the future that is not tightly tethered to the great confessional tradition of the church will most likely result in an educational model without a compass.⁵³

Such historically grounded confessions can also help us think rightly about faith and about how we relate to one another in love, pointing out the differences between primary, secondary, and tertiary issues in theology and practice. In that regard we want to invite Calvinists, Amyraldians, and Wesleyans; credobaptists and pedobaptists; and premillennialists, amillennialists, and others to join us in this effort.⁵⁴ The great confessional tradition, though not the final authoritative word, can serve as a tremendously helpful resource for us in distinguishing primary issues from second- and third-order doctrines, as well as for providing a safeguard against modern day expressions and echoes of Marcion, Arius, Pelagius, Abelard, and others.⁵⁵ We want to learn from the examples of saints and sages who have gone before us, providing images for us of what it means to be educators who are imitators of Christ.⁵⁶

As we take the next steps in thinking about a theology of evangelical higher education, it is important not only to affirm these central consensus beliefs of the Christian faith, but we must exclude errors on the right and left that are not faithful to Holy Scripture. In our day we must reclaim such bedrock convictions in the midst of a growing secularized academy. Christian colleges and universities will be called to swim upstream in order to be faithful to the scripturally-grounded and Christ-centered character of our institutions.

Some at this time might be asking, “Does this mean that all involved in Christian higher education are to be theologians?” Not necessarily in the technical sense, but certainly we would like to encourage all faculty and staff to think faithfully about God, his revelation, and his creation, and to live according to Holy Scripture. James Leo Garrett Jr. says that Christian theology is indeed necessary for the well-

⁵² Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁵³ See D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); J. I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Timothy George, ed., *Evangelicals and the Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness* (Beeson Divinity Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

⁵⁴ See John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); Alister McGrath, *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles' Creed* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997); idem, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996).

⁵⁵ Dockery and George, *Great Tradition of Christian Thinking*, 51–78.

⁵⁶ Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

being of Christians and of contemporary Christianity.⁵⁷ Some theologians suggest that theology is essentially thinking about God. While this is basically true, and theology is certainly no less than this, we would like to suggest something more. Donald Bloesch suggests that evangelical theology aims not only to be faithful to Scripture but also to explore the unfaithfulness of the Christian community to Scripture.⁵⁸ And Millard Erickson expands these thoughts, suggesting that Christian theology seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding of God's creation, particularly human beings and their condition, and God's redemptive work.⁵⁹

We must recognize that to abdicate the theological domain to specialists alone either because of a lack of interest or because of the technicalities involved will be harmful to the work of evangelical higher education. The truth is that every faithful Christ-follower called to teach or serve in the world of evangelical higher education, as they are gifted and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to do so, should be in some sense a theologian, for as believers who know God, they have the responsibility to see and understand the revelation of God for their foundational beliefs while integrating these beliefs into their calling as scholars, teachers, and leaders in the academic world.⁶⁰

VI. THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

Theology is certainly not the whole of academic life, but there must be a place for a holistic love of God, for Jesus has told us to love God with our heart, soul, strength, *and mind*, and to love our neighbor as well. This should not lead to some cold intellectual approach to the faith unaccompanied by affection.⁶¹ For too many, theology is a kind of intellectual aloofness or an intellectual curiosity lacking heartfelt commitments. But before we can develop a theology of evangelical higher education, we need careful reflection about the meaning of human nature, who we are as educators and students, where we stand in the universe, how we think about teaching and learning, goals and tasks, the place of relationships in community, and the implications of sin and the meaning of the forgiveness of sins.⁶² We must ask what does it mean for our work as educators to confess that we believe in “the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life

⁵⁷ See James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

⁵⁸ See Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1: *God, Authority, and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁵⁹ See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁶⁰ See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

⁶¹ See Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Arthur F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Keith L. Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015); Scott R. Swain, “The Godward Mind: An Evangelical Framework for Aspiring to Think Theologically,” *Didaktikos* 2.3 (November 2018): 33–36.

⁶² Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 87–123.

everlasting.”⁶³ It will also be helpful to think about the relationship of theology to the church and others across the academy, including an understanding of the responsibility of higher education to prepare future church and denominational leaders.⁶⁴

For the church is not only central to history but to the gospel and to Christian living as well. Thus, theology is more than God’s words for me as an individual; theology is God’s word for us, the community of faith. We recognize that God is not just saving individuals, he is saving a people for himself. It is vitally important that we understand theology not merely in individualistic terms; we need to also include a corporate and community understanding of these ideas.⁶⁵ For these reasons, the early years of Christian higher education placed their focus first in terms of service for the churches and then more broadly for society.⁶⁶

In other contexts, I have previously observed that the contemporary discipline-specific separation or fragmentation of knowledge in which we find ourselves in today’s academy has resulted in a twofold problem: (1) an unhealthy individuality; and (2) a suspicion and hostility of the theological enterprise. Certainly, the academy at large, and sometimes even the faith-based academy, does not encourage, and in fact at times seemingly discourages, the need for the creative and collaborative efforts of theologians.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, there is seldom sufficient cross-fertilization between theologians and other disciplines within the academy, which is one reason I am bringing this appeal to this gathering tonight.

VII. INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATIONS

Theologians and scholars from other disciplines, whether the arts, humanities, sciences, social sciences, or professional areas, read different books, listen to different experts, identify different problems, consider different issues, contribute to different journals, and gather in different guilds and societies as they pursue diverse and sometimes competing agendas.⁶⁸ Our concern is not to be another cantankerous voice on the contemporary scene bemoaning the challenge of overspecialization, though my concerns about this issue and other related matters are very real.

Granted, the lack of theological understanding on the part of many in the academy is due to many factors beyond the control of professional theologians;

⁶³ See J. I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles’ Creed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine through the Apostles’ Creed* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); and R. Albert Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 151–205.

⁶⁴ See Dockery, ed., *Theology, Church, and Ministry*.

⁶⁵ Though I think that Stanley J. Grenz overemphasized the place of community, there are nonetheless helpful proposals to be found in his work *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶⁶ See the discussions in William H. Brackney, *Congregation and Campus: North American Baptists in Higher Education* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008); see also Thomas H. L. Cornman, “Faith, Teaching, and Learning in Service to the Church,” in *Christian Higher Education*, 485–504.

⁶⁷ See Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 18–34, 70–85.

⁶⁸ See Dockery, “Thoughtful Christian”; see also Dockery, ed., *Christian Higher Education*, 149–361.

nevertheless, it is important that we recognize the need for enhanced relationships between faithful theologians and other faithful Christ-centered academics.

VIII. A FULL-ORBED THEOLOGICAL VISION

We need a theological vision for evangelical higher education that will help us recover a true understanding of human life. In this sense, faculty, staff, and students can once again gain a sense of the greatness of the soul. Theology can help us recover an awareness that God is more important than we are, that the future life is more important than this one, and that a right view of God gives genuine significance to our academic calling.⁶⁹

Theology can help those who are called to serve in evangelical higher education better understand what we believe and why we believe it. We can all learn to appreciate our heritage and enliven our future hope. When this takes place, evangelical colleges and universities, many of whom lack clear direction at the present time, will be strengthened. Without the foundation of solid theology, I do not believe there will be effective long-term educational efforts that are truly and distinctively Christian.

While we unhesitatingly affirm these truths, we simultaneously recognize that no one single group, however orthodox, strictly and faithfully follows this revelation from God. While the church has characteristically sought to be faithful to Scripture, the depth of meaning in the biblical text is rarely fully understood at any one moment in history.⁷⁰ Theology in every tradition rightly recognizes this frailty, though there is certainly continuity throughout the centuries, resulting in what H. E. W. Turner has called “the pattern of Christian truth,” particularly in the teachings concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which provides the central core for the work of evangelical higher education.⁷¹

Guided by these basic commitments, theology can help us engage the misdirected thinking often evident in today’s academy. An appreciation for our theological heritage and the best of the Christian confessional tradition keeps us from confusing what is merely a contemporary expression from that which is enduringly relevant.⁷² Theology done with a focus on the church and done for the good of the academy will always have one eye on the best of the Christian tradition.⁷³

Knowledge of such continuities and discontinuities in the past will help us focus on the areas of truth that are enduring while encouraging humility as well as

⁶⁹ See Dockery, “Blending Baptist with Orthodox,” 88–92.

⁷⁰ See John Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001)

⁷¹ See H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Moberly, 1954); Timothy George, “The Pattern of Christian Truth,” *First Things* 154 (2005): 21–25.

⁷² See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition*, 54–56; see also idem, *The Christian Tradition* (5 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁷³ Dockery and George, *Great Tradition of Christian Thinking*, 79–96.

dependency on God's Spirit. Hopefully such an awareness will drive us back again and again to the primary source of our theology in Holy Scripture.⁷⁴

IX. THE PLACE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Some across the Christian college world will no doubt be asking, "Will these theological commitments stifle honest intellectual exploration?" Our challenge will be to preserve faithfully and pass on the Christian faith while encouraging serious intellectual inquiry. We believe that these two things can coexist on the campuses of evangelical colleges and universities, even if in tension, advancing our shared work in an enriching dialectical dependence.⁷⁵

Guidance and balance in these matters will come as we are faithful in bringing together an informed theological foundation with all areas of learning. This kind of thoughtful integration will enable us to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), a wholehearted devotion to distinctively Christian thinking, helping us to begin to think theologically across the curriculum. When we look at students, the arts and sciences, the heart of the work of higher education, as well as community service and issues of academic freedom, these ongoing concerns of all involved in higher education, we will begin to find wisdom to make connections across our fragmented landscape.⁷⁶

X. TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE VISION FOR EVANGELICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

A theologically informed approach to evangelical higher education must offer a way to teach, study, live, and serve that is consistent with reality by offering a comprehensive understanding of all areas of life and thought.⁷⁷ We begin with God, which brings us into his presence without delay. The central affirmation of Scripture is not only that there is a God, but that this God has acted and spoken in history. The triune God is Lord over this world, ruling all things for his glory, displaying his perfections in all that he does in order that humans and angels may adore him.⁷⁸ Such thinking provides a coherent way of seeing life, of seeing the world distinct from deism, naturalism, materialism, existentialism, polytheism, pantheism, mysticism, or deconstructionism. Such a God-centered perspective provides bearings and direction when confronted with secularistic and pluralistic approaches to various ideas and issues across the curriculum.

⁷⁴ See D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

⁷⁵ See Anthony J. Diekema, *Academic Freedom and Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 78–90; idem, "Christian Higher Education," 27–29.

⁷⁶ See the important conversations in Paul J. Dovre, *The Future of Religious Colleges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁷⁷ See John Mark Reynolds, *When Athens Met Jerusalem: An Introduction to Classical and Christian Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

⁷⁸ See D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

Our twenty-first century context must once again recognize the importance of serious Christian thinking as necessary and appropriate for the wellbeing of Christian academic communities. We need a theologically-shaped vision that is imaginatively compelling, emotionally engaging, aesthetically enhancing, and personally edifying.⁷⁹ We believe that the Christian faith, informed by scriptural interpretation, theology, philosophy, and history, has bearing on every subject and academic discipline.⁸⁰ While at times the Christian's research in any field might follow similar paths and methods as the secularists, doxology at both the beginning and ending of one's teaching and research marks the work of believers from that of secularists.⁸¹

The pursuit of the greater glory of God remains rooted in a Christian way of thinking in which God can be encountered in the search for truth in every discipline. The application of these things will encourage Christian scholars in the arts, humanities, sciences, social sciences, and professional areas to see their teaching, research, service, and scholarship within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In these contexts, faithful Christian scholars will be able to see their teaching and their scholarship as contributing to the unity of knowledge.⁸² Faculty, staff, and students will work together to enhance a love for learning that encourages a life of worship and service. Such a theologically-informed vision will help us to see more clearly the relationship between the Christian faith and the role of reason, while encouraging Christ-followers to seek truth and engage the culture, with a view toward strengthening the church and extending the kingdom of God, including the enhancement of intercultural initiatives and commitments to racial reconciliation.⁸³

We are calling for a vision for evangelical higher education that is unapologetically Christian and rigorously academic. It involves developing resources for serious Christian thinking and scholarship in all disciplines, not just theology, biblical studies, and philosophy. We believe now is the right time to reconsider afresh such a vision, especially with consideration for the challenges and disorder across the academic spectrum.⁸⁴ The reality of the fallen world in which we live is magnified for us in day-to-day life through broken families, sexual confusion, conflicts between the nations, and the racial and ethnic prejudice we observe all around us.

⁷⁹ Together with more than two dozen other authors, I tried to present such a coherent chorus in *Christian Higher Education*.

⁸⁰ See Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003).

⁸¹ See Mark A. Noll, "The Future of the Religious College: Looking Ahead by Looking Back," in *Future of Religious Colleges*, 73–94; Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*.

⁸² See the illustrative chapters in Dockery, *Faith and Learning*, idem, *Christian Higher Education*; and Meadors, *Where Wisdom May Found: The Eternal Purpose of Integrated Christian Education*.

⁸³ See Peter T. Cha, "The Importance of Intercultural and International Approaches in Christian Higher Education," in *Christian Higher Education*, 505–24.

⁸⁴ See David Damrosch, *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). See also discussions in David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee, eds., *The Future of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H, 1999).

This approach to education will help provide for us a firm grasp of the complexities of the human condition and the natural world.⁸⁵

This proposal will help us to understand that there is a place for music and the arts because God is the God of creation and beauty.⁸⁶ We will encourage scientists to explore the natural sciences in order to contemplate the majesty and greatness of God's creation.⁸⁷ We will recognize that the social sciences can make observations to strengthen society, family, and religious structures by recognizing the presence of the image of God in all women and men.⁸⁸ Those who study economics will be able to help address problems facing communities and society at large, as well as expand our awareness of how wealth is produced and how good stewardship calls for it to be used.⁸⁹ Scholars of political philosophy will thoughtfully strategize about ways to address issues of government, law, public policy, war, justice, and peace. These principles include the dignity of men and women from conception to natural death, the place of marriage and family as foundational for society and the common good, as well as our stewardship of all aspects of this life, from birth to rebirth and beyond.⁹⁰ Ethical challenges in business, education, and healthcare can be illuminated by reflection on these truths.⁹¹ This will demand that all of us in every field of learning think comprehensively about what it means that God is the source of all truth, all knowledge, and all wisdom, the source of everything that is. The omnirelevance of theology as the creative source in which all creatures live and move and have their being calls for this vision of evangelical higher education to become a priority for all of us.⁹²

Exploring every discipline from a theological perspective, which affirms that "we believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," will both shape and sharpen our focus. The more we emphasize the pattern of Christian truth, the more important will its role become for teaching, learning, research, and scholarship. This proposal is rooted in the conviction that God, the source of all truth, has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ (John 1:14–18), and it is in our belief in the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ that the unity of truth will ultimately be seen. We will need a renewed realization and appreciation of the

⁸⁵ See the vision for faithful Christian engagement in Philip W. Eaton, *Engaging the Culture, Changing the World: The Christian University in a Post-Christian World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011).

⁸⁶ See Paul Munson and Joshua Ferris Drake, *Art and Music: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

⁸⁷ See John A. Bloom, *The Natural Sciences: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁸⁸ See Stanton L. Jones, *Psychology: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

⁸⁹ See Greg Forster, *Economics: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

⁹⁰ See Hunter Baker, *Political Thought: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁹¹ C. Ben Mitchell, *Ethics and Moral Reasoning: A Student's Guide* (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁹² See Yarnell, *Systematic Theology*, 257–80; Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind*, 84–92, 219–23.

depth and breadth of this pattern of Christian truth, with its commitments to the church's historic confession of the Trinitarian God, and a recognition of the world and all subject matter as fully understandable only in relation to this Trinitarian God. While our approach to evangelical higher education values and prioritizes the life of the mind, it should be seen simultaneously as a holistic call for the engagement of the head, heart, and hands.⁹³

We need to relate to one another in love and humility, bringing about genuine fellowship and community, resulting not only in a rebirth of orthodox foundations but also a renewal of Christian orthopraxy before a watching world.⁹⁴ If evangelical higher education entities demonstrated this kind of love and unity, it would do wonders for the larger evangelical community. So, the choice is not between theology or ethics, truth or piety, orthodoxy or orthopraxy. The vision we seek is therefore both theoretical and practical. Theology is not merely about thinking, but also about loving, living, and doing (Matt 22:37–39).

Some across the campuses of evangelical institutions fear that the commitments called for in this address this evening will be divisive and thus should be deemphasized in their importance. But we believe that these theological commitments are the very backbone, the underpinnings of distinctive evangelical higher education. Following this path will allow us to see that pragmatic approaches to education may not be the best way to understand our work, for we will be called to look beyond the horizons that can only be seen from a this-world perspective.

What we are proposing may not be self-evident for some and these approaches will be institutionally challenging for many. It will not be the easiest road to travel, but I believe it provides a faithful path in continuity with the best of our heritage. This proposal offers no room for some vague spirituality to serve as a substitute guide for the work of evangelical higher education. This proposal certainly will require us to think deeply and wrestle seriously with the shaping ideas of history and the challenging issues of our day in the academy and the culture, recognizing that the modern university has become intrinsically secular. At the same time, we must expand our horizons to help our students appreciate and explore the realities of the global world in which we live and serve, especially in light of what God is doing in and across the Global South at this time. To think otherwise will result in a generation of students ill equipped for faithful service in this new century. Instead of allowing our thoughts to be captive to culture, we must take every thought captive to Jesus Christ.

XI. CONCLUSION

A theology for evangelical higher education will help us develop connecting and unifying principles for Christian thinking, grounded in the truth that God is

⁹³ See Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*, 206–18; idem, “Christian Higher Education,” 33–37.

⁹⁴ See Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century, Including, The Church before the Watching World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985).

Creator and Redeemer. A call for a theology of evangelical higher education will encourage thoughtful exploration and wrestling with the foundational questions of human existence as understood from the vantage point of the Christian gospel. We believe that such a commitment will help us develop a comprehensive and historically informed view of what it means to be a part of the great Christian intellectual tradition as we seek to shape the Christian educational enterprise for the years ahead. We believe that we will be able to encourage our students in their studies with the confidence that their education is grounded in the reality of the self-revealing God.

A theology of evangelical higher education will help us to be aware of contemporary cultural, cross-cultural, social, and religious trends. What we are suggesting will require us to live in tension in the academy, reflecting a theological outlook while simultaneously encouraging and highlighting particular discipline-specific emphases across the curriculum.⁹⁵ Sometimes, however, the issues with which we wrestle will remain filled with ambiguities, which we trust will provide a springboard for lifelong learning and ongoing wrestling with these daunting issues.

We would be naïve not to realize that the times in which we live and the context and culture for which our students are preparing to serve will likely push back against this proposal. What will be needed is a bedrock, nonnegotiable commitment to a belief in a triune God—in one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, who was God incarnate.

This commitment represents a belief in a totally truthful and authoritative Bible and in the message of salvation in Jesus Christ by grace through faith. It is rooted in a focus on the church, and it lives in hope of the return of Christ, resulting in a commitment to a life of prayer, holiness, obedience, and growth in Christ.

Faith and courage will be needed for these efforts, commitments that are both firm and loving, clear and gracious. We will need faculty, staff, and students who are ready to respond to the perplexing issues and challenges that the culture and the world present to Christ-followers without responding to every contextual skirmish or intramural squabble on the horizon. Let us instead seek to prioritize matters of faith and theology that will serve as a guide for us and our students toward lives of faithful discipleship and kingdom living as together we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

In all of these things we will need to be reminded of our own finitude and sinfulness, which should lead us to fall on our knees in dependence on the triune God who will need to help us and strengthen us by his Spirit for this task if we are to do any good along the way. We are called to seek wisdom, to have our minds opened and ordered, to be oriented toward worship and service, and trust God for further illumination along these paths.

⁹⁵ See James T. Burtchaell, "The Alienation of Christian Higher Education," in *Schooling Christians: Holy Experiments in American Education* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 129–83.

May God renew evangelical higher education as we seek to develop a theological framework for our shared efforts, even as we pray for all involved in this significant enterprise. Doing so will not address all or even many of the manifold challenges currently facing evangelical higher education, but we believe it will indeed help to restore and strengthen the soul of our colleges and universities, and our seminaries and divinity schools as well, uniting our vision for evangelical higher education in 2018 and the years to come.⁹⁶ With that hope, let us join together to trust that these shared commitments will not be easily lost or forgotten, but will remain firmly rooted in our minds and hearts for years and decades to come for the glory of our great and majestic God.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ See Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Alleman, and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017).

⁹⁷ This address, which was delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on November 14, 2018 in Denver, CO, is dedicated to the memory of our former colleague and friend, Grant Osborne, a longtime member of ETS, who went to be with the Lord on November 4, 2018.