

## *The Power of the Gospel and the Renewal of Scholarship*

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### *The Gospel is the Power of God*

Jesus announced good news: ‘The kingdom of God is breaking into history.’ This is not the kind of announcement that could be relegated to the religion page of a newspaper. This is world news—front page stuff! This is headline news on CNN. It was an announcement that God’s healing power was invading history in Jesus and by the Spirit to restore the whole creation to again live under the gracious rule of God. His proclamation of good news stood as the climactic moment of a story of God’s redemptive work told in the Old Testament that stretched back to God’s promise to Adam and Eve. Jesus announced that the power of God to renew the entire creation was now present in Jesus by the Spirit. This liberating power was demonstrated in Jesus’ life and deeds, and explained by his words. At the cross he battled the power of evil and gained the decisive victory. In his resurrection he entered as the firstborn into the resurrection life of the new creation. Before his ascension he commissioned his followers to continue his mission of making the gospel known until he returned. He now reigns in power at the right hand of God over all creation and by His Spirit is making known his restoring and comprehensive rule through His people as they embody and proclaim the good news. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. But until then the church has been taken up into the Spirit’s work of making the good news of the kingdom known.

From this brief summary of the gospel, the following observations are important. First, the gospel is a redirecting *power*. It is not first of all doctrine or theology, nor is it worldview, but the renewing power of God unto salvation. The gospel is the instrument of God’s Spirit to restore all of creation. George E. Ladd has captured the dynamically active power of God’s kingdom to restore His rule over the world:

. . . the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and that this Kingdom which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign.<sup>1</sup>

Later in his ministry Jesus used the parable of the sower to illustrate the power of the good news to produce the life of the kingdom. Herman Ridderbos puts it this way:

The eschatological world comes in the form of a sower, an apparently impotent figure, who must surrender the seed to all the influences and resistance of climate, of soil, of birds, of hostile or superficial men. But at the same time the sower is also the man who receives his gain from the *incalculable, miraculous power of*

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<sup>1</sup> Ladd, George. E. *A Theology of the New Testament* [ed. Donald Hagner; revised edition] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 89-90.

*the seed*. He sleeps and awakes, night and day, and the seed comes up and grows, while he himself does not know how. So the kingdom enters the world with the vehicle of the Word. There must be plowing and sowing and cultivating, with discretion and tact. But the increase is of God. Not of men; it is not we who extend the kingdom of God. Men are surely sent out in the service of the kingdom. But their weapon is not force (however often also enlisted in behalf of the kingdom), nor is it the might of influence and organization, but *it is the power of the Word of God alone*.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Acts narrates the progress of the powerful word as it renews the lives of God's people. Indeed we read of progress reports of the power of the gospel like Acts 19:20 'In this way the word of God spread widely and grew in power.' (cf. 6:7, 12:24).<sup>3</sup> Paul speaks of the gospel as 'the power of God that brings salvation' (Rom.1:16), as 'the power of God' (1 Cor.1:18), and as 'a demonstration of the Spirit's power' (1 Cor.2:4). The gospel is the gospel *of the kingdom*, the power of God to renew *all* of human life to again live under the rule of God.

Second, the gospel is *restorative*, that is, Jesus announces the restoration of the creation from sin. The most basic categories present in the gospel are creation, fall, and redemption. Jesus' announcement declares a resounding 'yes' to his good creation and at the same time a definitive 'no' to the sin that has defiled it. The gospel is about the restoration and renewal of the creation from sin. In the history of the Western church redemption has often been misunderstood to be salvation *from* the creation rather than salvation *of* the creation. In the proclamation of the gospel Jesus announces that he is liberating the good creation from the power of sin.

Third, the gospel is *comprehensive* in its scope. The gospel Jesus announced was a gospel of the kingdom. Surprisingly even though this was the central category of Jesus' proclamation and ministry it has often disappeared into obscurity. The result has been a greatly reduced scope of salvation, limited to humanity, even human souls. Scripturally, the kingdom is about God's reign over his entire creation; the kingdom stresses the all-encompassing nature of the salvation Jesus embodied, announced, and accomplished. The gospel which forms the lens through which we look at the world is the *power* of God through which the exalted Christ, on the basis of his death and resurrection, *restores all of life* by His Spirit to again live under His authority and Word.

The fourth observation is central to our topic: Jesus and the good news that he announces is the fulfillment of a long *story* that unfolds in the Old Testament. Jesus' arrival into history is into a Jewish community who was looking for the ending and climax of a long story of God's redemptive acts. All Jews knew that this story was leading up to the grand culmination when God would act decisively and finally to redeem the world. They disagreed on who would do it, how it would be done, when it would happen, and how they were to live until it did. But they all recognized that the story of God's redemptive acts was moving toward a consummation. Jesus announces that he is the goal of this redemptive story. So, on the one hand, if we are to understand the gospel of Jesus we must see Jesus in the context of the Old Testament story (cf. Luke 24:25-27). On the other hand, if we are to properly understand the Biblical story, we must see it through the lens of Jesus and the gospel (cf. John 5:36-57; Luke 24:44-45). But not only is

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<sup>2</sup> Ridderbos, Herman, Kingdom, Church, and World. Reprint from *International Reformed Bulletin*, October 1966, January 1967, Amstelveen, Netherlands, 5.

<sup>3</sup> See Brian Rosner, The Progress of the Word, in eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 215-233.

Jesus the climactic moment in the story, he points forward to the end. The end has not yet come (Acts 1:6-7). Thus attending to Jesus points us back to a story told in the Old Testament, and forward to the end of the story.

There is a final observation: the church is essential to the gospel. That is, Jesus did not make provision for the communication of the good news through history and in every culture until the end of the story by writing a book as did Mohammed. Rather he formed a community to be the bearer of this good news, to be, do, and speak the gospel. Their identity is bound up in their being sent by Jesus to make known the good news of the kingdom. The Contemporary Testimony *Our World Belongs to God*<sup>4</sup> confesses this eloquently:

The Spirit thrusts God's people into worldwide mission.  
He impels young and old, men and women,  
to go next door and far away  
into science and art, media and marketplace  
with the good news of God's grace. . . . (32)

Following the apostles, the church is sent—  
sent with the gospel of the kingdom . . .  
In a world estranged from God,  
where millions face confusing choices,  
this mission is central to our being . . . (44)

The rule of Jesus Christ covers the whole world.  
To follow this Lord is to serve him everywhere,  
without fitting in,  
as light in the darkness, as salt in a spoiling world. (45)

### *The Gospel and Scholarship*

From this then we can draw some starting conclusions about the gospel and scholarship. Scholarship is a part of human life, part of the task God has entrusted humanity with from the beginning. Like all of human life, it has been twisted and distorted by human rebellion and idolatry. But the announcement of the good news of the kingdom includes scholarship and the university within its scope. That is, part of the good news is that God is renewing that academic part of human life to again live under His liberating rule. Bound up in our kingdom mission is the call to witness to this gospel in the university and in our scholarship. If we are to be faithful to the gospel in our scholarly endeavours the gospel will be the renewing power that animates, directs, and liberates from the constricting and debilitating power of idols that plague scholarship in our culture.

Understanding scholarship in our culture is a pressing issue in the church's mission today and essential if the Christian university is to carry out its task faithfully. Trinity Western emphasizes the importance of discipling leaders to enter every sphere of the marketplace with the good news. Scholarship ever being renewed by the gospel is central to this task.

But it might be objected that in light of escalating global crises, it is irresponsible to give such attention to this aspect of the church's mission. Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton succinctly press this question: 'Some might argue that in the face of such human tragedies as starvation, political

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<sup>4</sup> *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*. 1987. Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications.

oppression, and the threat of nuclear holocaust, it is unconscionable for Christians to engage in the frivolity of scholarship. Why engage in studies when the whole of culture is in such a crisis?’<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the answer that we must witness to the good news that Christ is Creator, Redeemer, and Lord of all of life, there are at least two important reasons for this attention. The first is the power of the university and ideas in culture. Charles Malik has stated this strongly:

This great Western institution, the university, dominates the world today more than any other institution: more than the church, more than the government, more than all other institutions. All the leaders of government are graduates of universities, or at least of secondary schools or colleges whose administrators and teachers are themselves graduates of universities. The same applies to all church leaders. . . . The professionals—doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.—have all passed through the mill of secondary school, the college and the university. And the men of the media are university trained. . . . The universities, then, directly and indirectly dominate the world; their influence is so pervasive and total that whatever problem afflicts them is bound to have far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire fabric of Western civilization. No task is more crucial and urgent today than to examine the state of mind and spirit of the Western university.<sup>6</sup>

Al Wolters has given us a helpful picture of the power of scholarship in his article *Ideas Have Legs*. He says: ‘Ideas have legs in the sense that they are not the disembodied abstractions of some ivory-tower academic, but are real spiritual forces that go somewhere, that are on the march in someone’s army, and that have a widespread effect on our practical, everyday lives.’<sup>7</sup> He goes on to quote the influential 20<sup>th</sup> century economist John Maynard Keynes: ‘The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences are usually the slaves of some defunct economists.’<sup>8</sup> Wolters gives examples of distinctions that have made their way into common life and now unconsciously direct peoples’ lives. Ideas *are* important in the spiritual battle for creation. Ideas will march in the battle for God’s creation either in the kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness. Christian scholarship will play a big part in our Christian witness and in equipping Christian young people for faithful witness in all of life.<sup>9</sup>

A closely related second reason that this task is essential and strategic in the mission of God’s people is the tremendous power and influence of *secularized*<sup>10</sup> scholarship and science in our culture.

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<sup>5</sup> Walsh, Brian and Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, Downers Grove: IVP, 163.

<sup>6</sup> Malik, 1982. *A Christian Critique of the University*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Wolters, Al. 1987. *Ideas Have Legs*. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See also Walsh and Middleton, *Transforming Vision*, 164-166 for ways that theories in psychology and economics have been powerfully influential in society and culture.

<sup>10</sup> I want to avoid two misunderstandings in my use of the word secular. By secular I do not mean, first, that science has been removed from the authority of the church. This was the original meaning of the word as many spheres of life were removed from the authority of the institutional church. Neither do I mean growing interest in this world that arose in the high middle ages. In both of these cases I can affirm the development that took place. What I do mean is *the development and practice of scholarship apart from the authority of God’s word in Scripture and creation*. I use this almost as a synonym of the autonomy of human reason, that is reason ‘liberated’ from all revelational authority.

In other words, secular scholarship has become a religious power that functions at the core of our culture shaping much more than the university and sweeping even Christian scholars into its current. The Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd has stated this quite strongly: ‘. . . science, secularized and isolated, has become a satanic power, an idol which dominates all of culture.’<sup>11</sup> This is, to use the language again of Malik, the spirit, the idolatrous spirit of the Western academy.

### *The Role of Worldview Studies*

What is the role worldview studies can play? Before I outline an answer to that question let me make three introductory comments. First, the full title of chair is the Geneva Chair of *Reformational Worldview Studies*. TWU is a broadly ecumenical evangelical institution. What role then would the reformational tradition play? I believe that all confessional traditions have developed different aspects of Biblical teaching, sometimes to the neglect of others. Therefore, we need each other. We can be corrected and enriched by one another’s traditions. The reformational tradition certainly has its weaknesses but its strength is that it has a long history of struggling with questions of the gospel and public life. The topic of worldview and its relation to scholarship has been well worked over in the reformational tradition. It is in the spirit of mutual enrichment that I offer the insights of this tradition for the building up of the body while standing ready to be enriched and corrected by other traditions.

A second introductory observation draws on the apostle Paul’s imagery of the body of Christ. Trinity Western University is a Christian academic community called to engage secular scholarship bringing the renewing power of the gospel to bear on its work. Using Paul’s image of the body, there are many parts but one body. There are many tasks and roles; we all play different parts in this task of Christian scholarship. What I want to deal with in the rest of this lecture is *the small part that worldview studies can play* in this task. The Geneva Chair is a chair established to address precisely this area of scholarly life we call ‘worldview studies.’ How can worldview studies contribute to the task of developing Christian scholarship?

A final introductory word about what I mean by worldview is also important. This word ‘worldview’ is becoming increasingly popular in evangelical circles and beyond in the past two or three decades. A brief survey of the various ways this word is being used would show that there is a wide variety of understandings of worldview. I will not map those out but simply give you a rough and ready working understanding of how I understand worldview.

Worldview has to do with our most basic and foundational, that is, religious beliefs. These are the beliefs, the commitments that lie at the bedrock of our lives and shape both our social and individual lives in their entirety. These beliefs cohere together in some kind of framework. More specifically in the case of the Bible and the humanist worldview that shapes western culture, that framework is a story. So I offer this provisional definition: A worldview is a storied framework of our most basic beliefs that shape the whole of our individual and social lives.<sup>12</sup> If this is the case worldview will play an important role in scholarship: All of our scholarship will be shaped by some set of basic beliefs—Christian or otherwise. So what role can worldview studies play in the renewal of scholarship?<sup>13</sup> Let me suggest four.

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<sup>11</sup> Dooyeweerd, Herman. 1954 (English Translation). *The Secularization of Science*. Memphis, TN: Christian Studies Center, 2.

<sup>12</sup> See Brian Walsh, Worldviews, Modernity, and the Task of Christian College Education, *Faculty Dialogue*, 18 (Fall 1992) for a good discussion of the nature of a worldview. It can be accessed at the following website <http://crc.sa.utoronto.ca/articles/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> See Walsh, *ibid*.

1. Worldview studies can hold before the Christian academic community the story of Scripture as the true story by which faithful Christian scholarship should be shaped.

My definition of worldview has stressed the *storied* framework<sup>14</sup> of the Christian and western worldviews.<sup>15</sup> All of our lives including our scholarship is shaped by some story. Alasdair MacIntyre offers a mildly humorous illustration of how an action can only be understood in terms of a story.

I am standing waiting for a bus and the young man standing next to me suddenly says: ‘The name of the common wild duck is *Histrionicus, histrionicus histrionicus.*’ There is no problem as to the meaning of the sentence he uttered: the problem is, how to answer the question, what was he doing in uttering it? We would render his action of utterance intelligible if one of the following turned out to be true. He has mistaken me for someone who yesterday had approached him in the library and asked ‘Do you by any chance know the Latin name of the common wild duck?’ Or he has just come from a session with his psychotherapist who has urged him to break down his shyness by talking to strangers. ‘But what shall I say?’ ‘Oh, anything at all.’ Or he is a Soviet spy waiting at a pre-arranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact. In each case the act of utterance become [sic] intelligible by finding its place in a narrative.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise on a more global scale our lives can only find meaning in light of some story. Lesslie Newbigin puts it this way: ‘The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story. What is the real story of which my life story is a part?’<sup>17</sup> What Newbigin is referring to here is not a linguistically constructed narrative world that we choose to live in. Rather it is to speak of story as the essential shape of a worldview, as an interpretation of cosmic history that gives meaning to human life. Story provides the deepest structural framework in which human life is to be understood. There is no more fundamental way

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<sup>14</sup> A number of people have critiqued the narrowing of worldview to an intellectual system and have stressed story as a more faithful way of understanding worldview. See especially Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Downers Grove: IVP, 64-71; Harry Fernhout, *Christian Schooling: Telling a Worldview Story*, in Eds. Ian Lambert and Suzanne Mitchell, *The Crumbling Walls of Certainty: Toward a Christian Critique of Postmodernity and Education*. Sydney: The Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1997, 75-98. Certainly Lesslie Newbigin’s stress on story is significant in this context as well although ‘worldview’ language was not common for him. See his *Gospel and a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. Chapters 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Many evangelical approaches to worldview, especially those popular in the USA, view worldview in intellectualistic terms. That is, worldview is a rational system. At this point I will not take up the advantages to speaking of worldview in terms of story but it is worth pointing out the following: 1) Story is a truer representation of the way the world really is; 2) Both the Bible and the humanist worldviews are story in form; 3) Story is more communal. That is, it is embodied by a community; 4) Story is invitational. That is, it invites participation. This is what Harry Fernhout calls the ‘beckoning aspect’ of the big story; 5) Story is more historically sensitive and contextual. Story provides a vision and one is invited to embody the story creatively and imaginatively in changing cultural circumstances; 6) Story engages us more wholistically. That is, it does not simply appeal to our intellect but our emotions, imagination, and more. (Cf. Fernhout, and Middleton and Walsh above; David I. Smith and John Shortt, *The Bible and the Task of Teaching*. Nottingham, UK: The Stapleford Centre, 2002, 89-100.)

<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 210. I believe the young man is mistaken.

<sup>17</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 15.

in which human beings interpret their lives than through a story. N. T. Wright says that ‘a story . . . is . . . the best way of talking about *the way the world actually is*.’<sup>18</sup> It is because the world has been created by God in a temporal way that story can help us understand the way the world is. Brian Walsh says that ‘because the world is temporal, in process, a worldview always entails a story, a myth which provides its adherents with an understanding of their own role in the global history of good and evil. Such a story tells us who we are in history and why we are here.’<sup>19</sup>

The Bible is just this kind of a story. Its basic structure is narrative; it is one unfolding story of redemption. When we speak of the biblical story as a narrative we are making an *ontological* claim. It is a claim that this is the way God created the world; the story of the Bible tells us the way the world really is. There is no more fundamental way to speak about the nature of God’s world than to speak of it in terms of a story. Nor is the biblical story to be understood simply as a local tale about a certain ethnic group or religion. It makes a *comprehensive* claim about the world: it is public truth. The biblical story encompasses all of reality—north, south, east, west, past, present, and future. It begins with the creation of all things and ends with the renewal of all things. In between it offers an interpretation of the meaning of cosmic history. In the language of postmodernity it is a grand story or a metanarrative. In the language of Hegel it is universal history. That is, an understanding of where the whole world began, where it is going, and the meaning of history. The Christian believes that the ‘real story’ of the world is found in Scripture.

This insight has been gaining ground in various areas of theology. In practical theology, for example, C. V. Gerkin says ‘This sense in which practical theological thinking is grounded in narrative is, of course, rooted in the faith that *the Bible provides us with an overarching narrative in which all other narratives of the world are nested*. The Bible is the story of God. The story of the world is first and foremost the story of God’s activity in creating, sustaining, and redeeming the world to fulfill God’s purposes for it.’<sup>20</sup> In ethics Stanley Hauerwas contends that ‘the narrative character of Christian convictions is neither incidental nor accidental to Christian belief. There is no more fundamental way to talk of God than in a story. The fact that we come to know God through the recounting of the story of Israel and the life of Jesus is decisive for our truthful understanding of the kind of God we worship as well as the world in which we exist.’<sup>21</sup> Sidney Greidanus believes it is important for preaching to hold that ‘Scripture teaches one universal kingdom history that encompasses all of created reality: past, present, and future. . . . its vision of history extends backward all the way to the beginning of time and forward all the way to the last day. . . . the biblical vision of history spans time from the first creation to the new creation, encompassing all of created reality.’<sup>22</sup> And finally, in Biblical studies N. T. Wright that the divine drama told in Scripture, ‘offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth.’<sup>23</sup>

And yet it is the case that often Christians do not see the Bible as one story. A Hindu scholar of the world’s religions once said to Lesslie Newbigin:

I can’t understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion—and anyway we have plenty of books of

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<sup>18</sup> Wright, N.T. 1992. *The New Testament and the People of God*, London: SPCK, 40. Italics added.

<sup>19</sup> Walsh, Worldviews, Modernity, and the Task of Christian College Education, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Gerkin, C.V. 1986. *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Hauerwas, Stanley. 1983. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Greidanus, Sidney. 1988. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 41-42.

religion in India. We don't need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it.<sup>24</sup>

We have fragmented the Bible into bits—moral bits, systematic-theological bits, devotional bits, historical-critical bits, narrative bits. When the Bible is broken up in this way there is no comprehensive grand narrative to withstand the power of the comprehensive humanist narrative that shapes our culture. The Bible bits are accommodated to the more comprehensive cultural story, and it becomes *that* story—i.e. the cultural story—that shapes our lives.

It is important not only to understand that the Bible is one cosmic story of the world but also where we are at in the story. The Old Testament looked to a time when the kingdom of God would be ushered in in fullness. This was the goal of God's redemptive work. When Jesus emerged he announced the arrival of the kingdom yet it did not come as expected. Examining the gospels and listening to Jesus we hear that the kingdom of God is *already* here but *not yet* arrived. What can this mean? If my wife tells me that our guests from out of town are already here but not yet arrived I would wonder what on earth she is saying. How can the kingdom be already here but not yet arrived? And what is the significance of the 'already-not yet' time period of the coming kingdom?

First we have been given a foretaste of the kingdom. The gospels often compare the kingdom to a feast, a banquet. When the end comes we will enjoy the full banquet of the kingdom. However, the church has been given a *foretaste* of that kingdom banquet. A foretaste of the kingdom constitutes us as witnesses. The reason we have been offered a foretaste of the salvation of the end is so that we can witness to that salvation. Let me offer another illustration. The people of God are like a movie preview or trailer. A movie trailer gives *actual footage* of the movie that is coming in the future *so that people will want to watch it*. The people of God are a kingdom preview. We embody the salvation of the kingdom which is coming in the future so that people will see it and want it. That is what the witness is all about. We are a sign that points to the coming of the fullness of the kingdom in the future. We witness to its presence and its future consummation. A biblical witness is a witness to the kingdom, to God's rule over all of human life.

The worldview significance of our place in the story can be illustrated by N. T. Wright's reflection on worldview. In their popular book on worldview, Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh argue that the Bible provides a worldview by answering foundational questions that shape our lives. Those questions are: Who are we? Where are we? What's wrong? What's the remedy?<sup>25</sup> Wright follows Walsh and Middleton in his masterly discussion of the importance of worldview for New Testament studies.<sup>26</sup> Four years later in his second volume he writes that there is a fifth question that needs to be added to the other four, a question that is fundamental for human life. That question is 'what time is it?' He says: 'Since writing *The New Testament and the People of God* I have realized that 'what time is it?' needs adding to the four questions I started with (though at what point in the

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<sup>24</sup> Newbigin, 1999, *A Walk Through the Bible*, Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 4. See also Lesslie Newbigin, 1989, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 89.

<sup>25</sup> Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View*, Downers Grove: IVP, 1984, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, N. T. 1992. *The New Testament and the People of God*. London: SPCK, 29-144.

order could be discussed further). Without it, the structure collapses into timelessness which characterizes some non-Judaeo-Christian worldviews.<sup>27</sup>

Our scholarship will be shaped by some story. As Christians our goal is that it be shaped by the story of Scripture. Worldview studies can hold before the academic community (1) the fact *that* our scholarship is shaped by some story; (2) the fact *that* the Bible is narrative in its most basic shape and is the true story of the world; (3) our *place* in this story; and (4) why this is so *important* to our scholarship.

2. Worldview studies can elaborate the most basic beliefs of the Biblical story so they can be brought to bear on scholarship.

Recognition that the Bible is one story is not sufficient to bring the Bible to bear on scholarship in a formative way. An example from Oliver O'Donovan's highly creative work in political theology in his *The Desire of the Nations*<sup>28</sup> is helpful. In this book reading the Bible as a single narrative is fundamental to O'Donovan's work. However, O'Donovan rightly points out that *sola narratio* is insufficient for Christian analysis. A grand story provides the most comprehensive context and meaning for human life. But something more specific is needed for scholarship. We need to develop, says O'Donovan, concepts normed by Scripture in order to do analysis in the area of politics.

In the task of bringing Scripture to bear on scholarship there are two dangers. The first may be termed *biblicism*. The error here is that we attempt to make the Bible answer questions it was never meant to answer. The Bible becomes a handbook or answer book that gives direct answers to issues within various disciplines. It does not recognize the fundamental redemptive purpose of Scripture (2 Tim.3:15-16) nor the cultural gap between Scripture and our time. There is no simple line between the Biblical text and contemporary scholarship. To establish a direct relationship between the language of the text and our theory formation in various modern disciplines is to risk 'concordism' which 'equates the social groups and forces [or concepts M.G.] within first century Palestine with those of our own time.'<sup>29</sup> The historical, cultural, and social gaps are such that there can be no simplistic or obvious moves from the Bible to our contemporary academic disciplines.<sup>30</sup> While it is commendable to acknowledge the divine authority of Scripture as well as its comprehensive scope, that is, its authority over all of our lives including academic work, biblicism dehistoricizes the Bible and opens up the enormous danger of reading our own views back into the text.

A solution in the opposite direction is *dualism*. Here the Bible is kept separate from public life. In this view, since the purpose of the Bible addresses 'spiritual issues' its authority is only applicable in the area of theology or religion narrowly defined. Scholarship is beyond its reach. This declares the Bible irrelevant to the content of academic disciplines and ultimately denies the possibility of faithful *Christian* scholarship. The idolatrous cultural story fills the vacuum and provides the foundation on which academic engagement takes place.

I want the Bible to bring its light to bear on scholarship, and thus I reject dualism. I also want to read the Bible in its own historical-cultural setting and in light of its own purpose, and thus reject biblicism. There are at least three ways the Bible can be used that avoids these two dangers: (1) the

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, N. T. 1996. *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 443, footnote 1; see also 467-472.

<sup>28</sup> O'Donovan, Oliver. 1996. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, quoted in Echegaray, Hugo. 1984. *The Practice of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, xi.

<sup>30</sup> See Breuggemann, Walter. 1982. The Bible and Mission: Some Interdisciplinary Implications for Teaching, *Missiology* 10:4 (October), 408.

most basic categories of the Biblical story can be articulated in a worldview; (2) a Christian philosophy (ontology, epistemology, anthropology, social philosophy) can be shaped in harmony with Scripture; and (3) various themes within Scripture can provide guidance for specific disciplines. The third use will be the task of all Christian scholars. Sidney Greidanus, in his excellent essay on the Bible and scholarship, offers specific examples of the last of these, that is, ways the Bible might provide 'concepts' to do analysis in various academic subjects.

The Bible also reveals other norms that guide the Christian scholar. In the discipline of ethics, for example, one can draw on the biblically revealed norms for right conduct. Of central importance here is the love commandment, but the significance of other biblical passages should not be overlooked. Biblical laws relating to the protection of life, the concern for the poor, the care for animals, trees, and land—all these and more give us insights into the divine norms for justice and stewardship. In political science one would be guided by such biblical themes as the sovereignty of God, the God-given authority of government, the task of the government to promote (the biblical norms of) justice, liberty and peace, and the required obedience of citizens. In sociology one would take into account the biblical norms for marriage, family, and other societal structures. In psychology one would view man not as an animal that can be conditioned, nor as a machine that can be programmed, but as a creature of exceptional worth because man alone is made in the image of God. One would be guided by biblical insights into the essence of man (his relationship with God) and the fundamental unity of man ("a living soul," "heart"). In the discipline of history, one would be guided by the biblical theme that God acts in history, that he is bringing his Kingdom into the world, and by biblical insights concerning humanity's origin, purpose, and destiny, the cultural mandate, and the antithesis between believers and unbelievers. In economics one would want to take into account the biblical ideas of justice and stewardship, of ownership, of work and play.<sup>31</sup>

Worldview studies will differ from the more specific disciplines, in that it will be concerned with articulating and developing the most basic, the most fundamental, the most comprehensive beliefs of the Biblical story. It is important to clarify here the relationship between story and worldview. A story is the fundamental shape of a worldview. Wright calls this a 'worldview-story'<sup>32</sup> or a 'controlling story.'<sup>33</sup> These worldview-stories 'are the basic stuff of human existence, the lenses through which the world is seen, the blueprint for how one should live in it, and above all the sense of identity and place which enables human beings to be what they are.'<sup>34</sup> Worldview-stories are 'like the foundations of a house: vital, but invisible. They are that *through* which, not *at* which, a society or an individual normally looks; they form the grid according to which humans organize reality . . .'<sup>35</sup> These stories function at a presuppositional and precognitive level. Entailed in these stories are basic beliefs and answers to the deepest questions of human existence. Worldview articulation, then, may be the

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<sup>31</sup> Greidanus, Sidney. 1982. The Use of the Bible in Christian Scholarship, *Christian Scholar's Review*, Volume XI, Number 2, 147.

<sup>32</sup> *The New Testament and the People of God*, p.135.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.42, 124.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.125.

exposition of the fundamental beliefs or an explication of the answers to the most foundational questions of human life that are entailed in the story. This understanding of story and worldview articulation is stated by N. T. Wright and Harry Fernhout. According to Fernhout, story provides the 'matrix of a worldview': '... an all-embracing, plausibility-giving story provides a world view. A worldview is story-formed; we could say that a world view is a kind of condensation or shorthand (a first ordering) of a life-shaping story.'<sup>36</sup> Wright suggests that our basic beliefs are 'shorthand forms of the stories which those who hold them are telling themselves and one another about the way the world is.'<sup>37</sup>

Two ways that the Biblical story has been condensed or elaborated in shorthand form in this way might be mentioned here. In the first, the most basic beliefs of the Bible's teaching on creation, fall, and redemption are explicated. This has been done marvelously well in Al Wolters' *Creation Regained*.<sup>38</sup> In this book Wolters elaborates the biblical story in terms of creation, fall, and redemption. Another way to get at the same issues is to elaborate the Biblical answers to life's most foundational questions, answers that shape the entirety of human life. This is the approach of Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton in their books *The Transforming Vision* and *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*. As noted above the Biblical narrative answers fundamental questions of human identity, the kind of world we live in, the problem with our world, and the remedy for that problem. The question might be asked how will worldview reflection on the most basic beliefs of the Biblical story equip the church for its task of bearing witness to the gospel of the kingdom in scholarship?

There has always been the need for reflection on the gospel that enables and equips the church for its missionary task in its contemporary setting. Faithfulness to the gospel does not mean simply repeating the words of Scripture. Part of the church's calling is to restate and explicate the gospel in each generation opening up its significance for the present. There has been and always will be an ongoing need to express the teaching of Scripture in its significance for contemporary life to address current needs. Thus reflection on the gospel in terms of its basic categories of creation-fall-redemption is part of the abiding task of the church to address the needs of the present day.

We might speak of worldview reflection on the gospel as a mediating task. That is, it mediates the power of the gospel to the life of the church in the present. Two illustrations can clarify this task. Worldview functions like a gear-box on a car. The gear-box functions in a mediating way between the power of the engine, on the one hand, and the tires that move the car, where the rubber meets the road, on the other. Worldview reflection on Scripture mediates between the power of the gospel and human life where that gospel must be brought to bear. Or again, worldview reflection functions like the plumbing in a house. The pipes function as channels which bring water from its source to the drinking or washing needs of the household. Worldview elaboration plays a channelling role bringing the gospel to meet the life needs of the church in its mission in the world.

Thus worldview articulation will always be a matter of human reflection and construction. Worldview is not the gospel: The gospel is the power of God unto salvation while worldview is a human attempt to get hold of and elucidate the basic categories of the gospel to equip the church for its missionary task. It therefore shares in the qualities of all human reflection: it is contextual, partial, shaped by tradition, and so on. Nevertheless if worldview reflection can play a role in elucidating the

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<sup>36</sup> Fernhout, Harry. 1997. Christian Schooling: Telling a Worldview Story, in eds. Ian Lambert and Suzanne Mitchell, *The Crumbling Walls of Certainty: Towards a Christian Critique of Postmodernity and Education*, Sydney: CSAC, 85-86.

<sup>37</sup> *The New Testament and the People of God*, p.125-126.

<sup>38</sup> Wolters, Albert M. 1985. *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. A revised and expanded version to which both Al and I have contributed a concluding chapter (postscript) will be out from Eerdmans in November 2005.

missionary task of the church by mediating the gospel to the present, it remains an important part of the church's task today.

This is true of all human reflection on the gospel whether creedal, theological, ethical, or liturgical. Yet the task of worldview reflection is unique: it is more fundamental and foundational than all these. The reason is that what is unique about worldview elaboration is that it reflects on the *most basic* categories of the Biblical story. Creation, fall, and redemption provide the most basic lens through which we view *all* of the world. Everything is part of God's creation, everything has been touched by sin's destructive power, and everything can participate in the renewing work of God in Christ and by the Spirit. Or again everything has a creational structure but participates in sinful misdirection and/or redemptive redirection.

Two further things may be said by way of clarification. By this I am not saying that creation, fall, and redemption are the most important events of Scripture. The cross and resurrection stand as the central events of the Biblical story. However, creation, fall, and redemption are the most basic and fundamental beliefs of Scripture. The cross and resurrection share in the broader category of redemption; these events are part of God's acts for the renewal of creation. Moreover some might argue that it is more basic to speak of God or the trinity as the primary categories. However, we are speaking of categories by which we understand *the world*. The world is created, fallen, and is and will be redeemed. Creation, fall, redemption are the most comprehensive beliefs about the world and therefore form a tripartite yet single Scriptural lens through which we can properly view the world.

I believe that worldview is one way we can mediate the most basic categories of the gospel to all of life, including scholarship, equipping the church for its missional task. Concretely this happens in four ways. In the first place, worldview elaborates and unpacks Scripture's teaching on these basic beliefs. One can look for an example in the Bible's teaching on creation. Few Christians would dispute the importance of this belief. However, exactly what it means to live life in the light of Scripture's teaching on creation is another matter. The reduction of our world to a nexus of cause and effect relationships has had the effect of eliminating God from this world. The most devoted Christian is affected. Understanding creation as the correlation of God's ruling word and the created order will keep us from 'the treacherous waters of deism.' Then we are primed to recognize God's work in the feeding of the animals, the growth of grass, the melting of ice or the falling of snow and hail (Ps.147:8-9, 15-17). Understanding this will help the scholar in the natural sciences, for example, to understand the status of his or her scientific theories. Vern Poythress puts it this way:

The Bible shows us a personalistic world, not impersonal law. What we call scientific law is an approximate human description of just how faithfully and consistently God acts in ruling the world by speaking. There is not mathematical, physical, or theoretical "cosmic machinery" behind what we see and know, holding everything in place. Rather, God rules, and rules consistently.<sup>39</sup>

A second way in which worldview mediates the gospel is by clarifying the relationship between the basic beliefs of the Biblical story. The church at all times has affirmed the Bible's teaching on creation, fall, and redemption. However, it has understood the relationship between those three in different ways. The differences have had an impact, for better or worse, on the church's mission in culture. H. Richard Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture* argues that there has been at least five different ways that the church has understood the relationship of the gospel of Jesus Christ to its

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<sup>39</sup> Poythress, Vern. 1987. *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 107.

cultural endeavours: Christ against culture, Christ and culture, Christ above culture, Christ in paradox with culture, Christ restores culture. At root this is a difference between ways of relating creation (cultural task) to redemption (Christ). It is clear that the stance one adopts will affect the church's task in scholarship. One who adopts the Christ above culture view will be far less critical of non-Christian scholarship than the one who adopts the Christ restores culture view.

There is a third way in which worldview can equip the church for its academic calling by mediating the gospel to scholarly endeavours. This is entailed in the first two. When the basic beliefs of the Scriptural story are elaborated and clarified it defends the gospel against error. In turn this protects the church against a misunderstanding of its missionary calling.

It is instructive in this regard to look at the very reason the term 'worldview' arose in Christian circles and has become so popular. Key to this historical development was the threat the church perceived to its faith from its cultural story. The modern scientific worldview, which came to maturity at the Enlightenment, was a coherent and comprehensive way of understanding the world that stood in opposition to the Christian faith. In response to this threat the church succumbed to modernity by reducing the comprehensive claims of the gospel and relegating its faith to a private or religious realm. Thus the gospel did not speak to much of created reality. The confession 'Jesus is Lord' certainly did not reflect the comprehensive scope of his reign in a way faithful to the original gospel. The mission of the church was thus misunderstood and narrowed in keeping with an emaciated and reductionistic gospel. The term 'worldview' offered a way of speaking that expressed that the Christian faith is also a comprehensive and coherent way of understanding the whole world. The gospel is good news that God's redeeming work is as broad as creation. This understanding of the gospel offers a much more comprehensive understanding of the church's mission in the world. Indeed it provides an impetus for *Christian* scholarship.

This leads into the final way that worldview can play an important role in empowering the church in its missionary task. The elaboration of a worldview can establish a solid foundation for vigorous cultural engagement whether it be political, economic, scholarly or artistic. It does so first by offering a comprehensive and coherent way of understanding the whole world as elaborated in the preceding paragraph. But it does more: it provides specific insight and tools to carry out the task. A number of examples can illustrate this. The distinction between norms and laws of nature supplies the scholar with insight that brings clarity to the differences between the natural and social sciences, and enables him or her to avoid the naturalism of the former and the relativism of the latter. Understanding sin as idolatry gives the believing academic community tools to analyse various academic traditions in light of both their insight and distortion. For example, the powerful traditions of feminism and Marxism in scholarly circles combine both insight into creation and idolatry. Distinguishing reformation from revolution on the one hand and conservatism on the other offers the church a strategy in dealing with the twisted institutions of its culture. Sphere sovereignty in opposition to totalitarianism of an economic sort furnishes insight into many of the problems we face in today's world of global, consumer, and economic idolatry.<sup>40</sup> The point of each of these illustrations is that reflection on worldview will equip the church for its missionary encounter with the public life of western culture.

Seeing worldview as a mediating category enables us to struggle with the relevance of the Biblical text but also struggles with how Scripture can address cultural life with integrity. By articulating the Bible's teaching in a worldview, the Bible does not offer ready-made answers but provides the light in which answers can be found. As Stuart Fowler has put it:

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<sup>40</sup> All of these examples can be found in Al Wolters' *Creation Regained*.

The place of the Bible in our task of studying the creation is not to given answers, but to guide us in our search for the answers, to be the light by whose illumination we will find the answers in the creation itself.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, worldview equips the church for its missionary task by mediating between the gospel and human life. Worldview plays this mediating or channelling function by unpacking the basic categories of the biblical story, clarifying their relationship, defending the gospel against error, and by providing a light for the church's missionary task in culture.

3. Worldview studies can help uncover the Western cultural story along with its foundational religious beliefs that shape scholarship.

Lesslie Newbigin suggests that to understand that the Western cultural story is rooted in religious confession is one of the most important things that church can do today. He says:

Incomparably the most urgent missionary task for the next few decades is the mission to 'modernity' . . . It calls for the use of sharp intellectual tools, to probe behind the unquestioned assumptions of modernity and uncover the *hidden credo* which supports them . . .<sup>42</sup>

*Credo*, of course, means 'I believe.' In Newbigin's understanding it refers to the most foundational and religious commitments or ultimate beliefs that we as a cultural community hold together; it is 'our creed.' However, the notion of religious cultural beliefs may sound odd to us. We have learned as we have been socialized into our cultural story that we are a 'secular' or a 'pluralistic' society. At the beginning of the so-called secular decade, the 1960s, the Oxford economist Denys Munby published a book entitled *The Idea of a Secular Society*.<sup>43</sup> According to Munby three of the essential marks of a secular society are: it is uncommitted to any view of the universe and humanity's place in it; it is pluralist in principle; it is tolerant to all competing truth claims. His ideal secular (today we would say pluralist) society was neutral with respect to differing beliefs, competing truth claims, and diverse religious commitments. A secular society was a neutral zone void of ultimate commitments or foundational assumptions in which all these truth claims had equal and fair opportunity to express themselves in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.

It is this ideology that has shaped scholarship—in fact, the whole of our public life—in western culture. Indeed, it has been educational institutions that are the prime institutional carriers and transmitters of this belief. No set of ideas or beliefs exercises an enduring effect upon history unless they are embodied in institutional form. The secular, now pluralist, worldview has been concretely

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<sup>41</sup> Fowler, Stuart. 1975. *The Place of the Bible in the School*, New Zealand: Foundation for Christian Studies, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. 1989. Gospel and Culture—But Which Culture?, *Missionalia*, 17, 3 (November), 214. Newbigin's further comments are important for Christian scholarship: 'It calls for the consecrated labours of men and women who are in full command of the methods and skills of the various disciplines. At the most basic level there is a need for critical examination from a Christian standpoint of the reigning assumptions in epistemology (How do we know what we claim to know?) and in history (How do we understand the story of which we are parts?). At a second level it means probing the hidden assumptions behind our practice in economics, in education, in medicine, and in communication (the media). . . . It calls for the service of the best Christian scholarship.'

<sup>43</sup> Munby, Denys. 1963. *The Idea of a Secular Society and Its Significance for Christians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

embodied in all western institutions but, perhaps, none more so than the university. While there has been growing awareness of political struggles between varying schools this pluralistic, tolerant ideal remains.

This belief in a secular or pluralist society is an illusion however. The claim to religious neutrality is a myth, and a dangerous one at that, because it masks its own ultimate commitments. In fact, all human societies embody all-encompassing truth claims about the world that are based on ultimate commitments. These faith commitments are often below the level of conscious understanding yet they shape and form the whole of our social life. Western culture is not a secular society but a society that since the time of the Enlightenment has been shaped and formed by a deep religious faith in progress, human autonomy, scientific reason, technology, and social planning. While these idols are under attack these days, and a multitude of new spirits are rushing to fill the vacuum of the central core of culture that is being swept clean, the fact remains the same: Ultimate commitments lie at the foundation of our shared social life and shape every part of it. In contrast to Munby, all human societies including secular or pluralist societies are shaped in their entirety by a shared understanding of the universe and humanity's place in it.

The story that has shaped western culture for years is progress toward a society of truth, freedom, and material prosperity that is achieved by autonomous man through science and its application to technology and to social life—economics, politics, education—to create a more free and prosperous society. This vision is being transfigured in our postmodern context but it remains quite powerful in the whole process of globalization. Again it must be insisted this is far from the illusion of Munby who believed that a secular society is uncommitted to any view of the world and man's place in it. Western 'secular' society is shaped by a well-defined understanding of the world, of human nature, and of human's purpose. It is this story that functions both as a lens which enables us to see and interpret the world and as a compass that gives us normative direction in our lives. The question 'What am I to do?' is answered by my commitment to being part of the story which shapes western culture.

Scholarship is shaped at many points by the underlying *credo* of Western culture. One service worldview studies can render is to continually probe these assumptions clarifying their formative effect on the foundations of scholarship.

4. Worldview studies can explore ways Christian academic community can be faithful to the gospel in its scholarship while living at the intersection of the Biblical and the cultural stories.

The Christian community that wants to live faithfully to the gospel will not be an isolated ghetto that embodies a story that runs alongside the cultural story. Rather the Biblical story itself is clear that the Christian community will be very much a part of its culture. It is clear in first chapter of the Bible that God's intention for humanity was that cultural development was a communal endeavour. Human beings live together in a cultural community developing and caring for the creation. It is equally clear that Christ the Creator is also Christ the Redeemer, and as Lord claims all of cultural life. As the oft-quoted statement of Abraham Kuyper puts it: 'There is no thumb-width of the entire domain of our human life of which the Christ, the Sovereign over everything does not proclaim: 'It is mine!'<sup>44</sup> For these two reasons the Christian community must recognise its calling to be part of its cultural community.

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<sup>44</sup> "Geen duimbreed is er op heel 't erf van ons menselijk leven, waarvan de Christus, die àller Souverein is, niet roept: "Mijn!" (Quoted in Cornelis Veenhof, *In Kuyper's Lijn: Enkele Opmerkingen over den Invloed van Dr. A. Kuyper op de "Wijsbegeerte der wetsidee"*, Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1939, 43).

Trinity Western University as a Christian academic community will not seek to create, therefore, an academic ghetto in which we devise a new “Christian” scholarship from the ground up. Rather we seek to participate in the ongoing work of scholarship within our Western tradition but we seek to do so fully committed to the light of Scripture.

It is what Jesus spoke of when he prayed for his disciples that they would be ‘in’ the world but ‘not of’ it (John 17.13-19). That is, they would be part of the idolatrous Roman empire but not live out of their foundational beliefs. The obvious question presses itself: ‘How is that possible?’ Do we not have to set aside our Christian convictions if we are to participate in the ongoing tradition of Western scholarship? If Western scholarship is built on faith assumptions that are to some degree incompatible will not the Christian academic community find itself in an insoluble tension? If the Christian academic community believes that the Biblical story is ultimate but must share an academic task with colleagues who believe, in fact unconsciously assume, another story to be ultimate, is not partnership impossible?

Lesslie Newbigin speaks here of an ‘unbearable tension.’<sup>45</sup> I believe it is important to come to the point where we realize how sharp this tension really is, and embrace it. Hendrik Kraemer puts it well:

The deeper the consciousness of the tension and the urge to take this yoke upon itself are felt, the healthier the Church is. The more oblivious of this tension the Church is, the more well established and at home in this world it feels, the more it is in deadly danger of being the salt that has lost its savour.<sup>46</sup>

Yet the Christian church often has found itself comfortable within its culture. The thesis of H. Richard Niebuhr in *Gospel Against the World*<sup>47</sup> is quite insightful in this regard. In this little book with two other authors, he describes what takes place when the gospel and church are part of a culture for a long period of time. When a church is young and a minority its identity is defined by a critical encounter with culture; idolatry is recognised and engaged. This critical posture issues in a community with a distinctive identity shaped by the gospel. Gradually, a working arrangement with the powers and institutions of society develops as the gospel permeates more and more of culture. There is a lessening tension between the Christian community and its culture since the culture is not as pagan as it once was. The final state is one of corruption, says Niebuhr, where the church is domesticated and absorbed into the culture. This end result is one of cultural captivity, where the church is taken captive by the religious commitments of its culture.

As one seeks to wriggle free from this cultural captivity, when one senses this acute tension between incompatible religious beliefs, the question arises as to how one can live faithfully at the crossroads between these two different stories. How does one discern what is faithfulness to the gospel and what is cultural captivity? This is a highly complex matter, but I would like to make only a few brief comments. Missionaries and missiologists have been struggling with questions of faithfulness to the gospel in a pagan culture a lot longer and harder than anyone else in the church in the West. Today there is huge body of literature on contextualization, as it is called, that deals with this issue, and it is

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<sup>45</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. 1962. *Unfaith and Other Faiths*. Unpublished. First of a series of three addresses given under the theme ‘Christian Mission Now’ at Twelfth Annual Assembly of the Division of Foreign Missions, National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, 30 January – 2 February, 1962.

<sup>46</sup> Kraemer, Hendrik. 1956. *The Communication of the Christian Faith*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard, Wilhelm Pauck, and Francis Miller. 1935. *The Church Against the World*. Chicago and New York: Willet, Clark and Co.

of enormous importance in helping us with this problem. It would be hard to even summarize the most salient points of the discussion so I will offer a Biblical example of how I think we need to proceed, followed by some comments about Christian scholarship.

The Biblical example I would like to consider is the missionary communication of the gospel of John. Of John, Newbigin writes:

I suppose that the boldest and most brilliant essay in the communication of the gospel to a particular culture in all Christian history is the gospel according to John. Here the language and thought-forms of the Hellenistic world are so employed that Gnostics in all ages have thought that the book was written especially for them. And yet nowhere in Scripture is the absolute contradiction between the word of God and human culture stated with more terrible clarity.<sup>48</sup>

John freely uses the language and thought forms of classical religion and culture that form the world of his hearers—light and darkness, body and soul, heaven and earth, flesh and spirit, and more. Yet John uses this language and thought-forms in such a way as to confront them with a fundamental question and indeed a contradiction. John begins with the announcement ‘In the beginning was the *logos*.’ As he continues it becomes apparent that *logos* is not the impersonal law of rationality that permeates the universe giving it order but rather the man Jesus Christ. ‘The *logos* became *sarx*.’ John begins with their cultural categories. He identifies with the creational longing at the heart of classical culture for the source of order expressed in the term *logos*, but subverts, challenges, and contradicts the idolatrous understanding that had developed in the classical world. In this way John is both relevant and faithful: relevant because he uses familiar categories that express existential struggles and express true insight into God’s world, and yet faithful because he challenges with the gospel the idolatrous worldview that shapes those categories.

This approach to all cultural forms offers a way to deal with non-Christian scholarship as a Christian academic community at the crossroads. An expression I have come to appreciate is ‘the inner reformation of the sciences.’ Al Wolters describes this in the following way: ‘. . . we must begin with what is historically given. No one can start in history with a clean slate. . . . Reformation is working along the grain of history, respecting what is good in the tradition and bending it around to move in another direction.’<sup>49</sup> It has also been described in the following way: ‘Christian scholars should work in science for continuing reformation, changing science radically from within, pulling its roots out of its traditionally idolatrous soil and transplanting them in the soil of the gospel.’<sup>50</sup> Wolters suggests that the way theories and concepts can be reformed or subverted from within is by asking, what is the insight into the structure of creation and how has this insight become misdirected by the religious idolatry that shapes the broader tradition.<sup>51</sup> *The Cross and Our Calling*, the vision and identity statement of Redeemer University College, puts it this way: ‘Our participation in these two scholarly traditions [Western and Christian] compels us to discern the religious foundations and faith

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<sup>48</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie. 1986. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 53.

<sup>49</sup> Wolters, Albert M. 1975. *Our Place in the Philosophical Tradition*. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies Publication.

<sup>50</sup> Hart, Henk. 1988. Introduction: The Idea of an Inner Reformation of the Sciences, in *Social Science in Christian Perspective*, eds. Paul Marshall and Robert Vandervennen. Lanham: University Press of America.

<sup>51</sup> Wolters, Albert M. 1978. *Facing the Perplexing History of Philosophy*. Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 12-13.

commitments that shape all theoretical work, acknowledging with thanks the creational insights they confer while seeking to identify and to reject the idolatrous twisting that can disfigure them.<sup>52</sup>

Theories uprooted from idolatrous soil and replanted in the soil of the gospel, respecting the good in theories and bending it around from an idolatrous direction to move toward Christ, filling the insight or longing with new content from the gospel, appreciatively embracing the creational insight by redirecting it in the power of the gospel—all of these images offer a way to live at the crossroads.

### *Suffering and Prayer*

This will not be easy however. The Christian community will swim against the tide. Therefore, I close with a reminder of two themes from the New Testament. The first is suffering. The New Testament is clear: this redemptive era is one of fierce conflict with many casualties. A missionary encounter with the powers of our religious Western culture will be costly and may involve suffering. Paul states that ‘everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’ (2 Tim.3:12, NIV; cf. Acts 14:22). How close our understanding of mission is to the New Testament’s may perhaps be in part judged by the place which we accord to suffering in our understanding of the calling of the church.

The reason that suffering is closely tied to mission in this era is because faithfulness to the gospel of the kingdom will mean a missionary encounter with the idolatrous powers of our culture. Loyal allegiance to our kingdom mission will mean a clash of comprehensive stories. The gospel makes an absolute and exhaustive claim on the whole of our lives. The story that shapes our culture likewise is a comprehensive story which make totalitarian claims. There is some incompatibility between the gospel and idolatrous story of our culture. Every cultural story will seek to become not only the dominant but the exclusive story. If we as the church want to be faithful to our equally comprehensive story we will find ourselves faced with a choice: either accommodate ourselves to the cultural story as a minority community and modify the comprehensive claims of the gospel or remain faithful and experience some degree of conflict and suffering.

Ours is a mission under the cross. The good news may call forth opposition, conflict, and rejection (John 15:18-25). We announce and embody a victory that remains hidden until the final day. And so the embodiment of that victory often appears in what appears to the world as weakness, even foolishness. Yet the victory of the cross is assured in the resurrection. Until that resurrection life comes the church’s mission will remain one of suffering and conflict.

The second theme is that of prayer. I quoted Herman Dooyeweerd earlier when he spoke of secular science as demonic. In that same essay on secular science he offers us another important insight in ‘our vocation to war against the spirit of apostasy. . .’ That is we cannot ‘battle this spirit in our own power. The warfare to which I refer is one of faith, a struggle even with ourselves, in the power of the Holy Spirit, a struggle which finds its dynamic in a life of prayer.’<sup>53</sup> If I am correct in suggesting that our mission in the academy is, at the deepest level, a struggle of the spirits then prayer, indeed all the spiritual weapons—including prayer, the Scriptures, worship, meditation, and more—all the spiritual weapons the believer for spiritual warfare, will be essential equipment for the work of the academy. After all the God’s kingdom, including scholarship, is first of all the work of His Spirit.

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<sup>52</sup> *The Cross and Our Calling: The Identity and Vision of Redeemer University College*, Ancaster: Redeemer University College Communications and Media Relations Department, 2003, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Dooyeweerd, Herman. 1954 (English Translation). *The Secularization of Science*. Memphis, TN: Christian Studies Center, 4.