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Faculty Contribution

Christian Higher Education and Participation in the Redemptive Work of God

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Higher Education, especially in the West, has been shaped by the gospel and the Christians who have embraced it. In the early development of American colleges and universities, Christian higher education was nearly indistinguishable from higher education in general. This is despite the fact that the Enlightenment – what is often blamed for the secularization of American culture – was an important factor in the development of American colleges and universities. We know the anecdotal evidence well: Christian denominations founded educational institutions, modeled on English and European forebears, largely meant to train ministers to support the work of the church and train young people for other essential roles in society.

Things are obviously different now in 2019. The place of Christianity in higher education has changed, and what is commonly thought of as *Christian* higher education has necessarily diverged from the predominant strands of higher educational institutions in the United States, but less so in the United Kingdom. Although the factors are legion, this “parting of ways” is primarily a result of the secularization of academia and the way in which predominant academic culture interprets the American principle of the separation of church and state. So, what was once a confluence of the Christian life of the mind (to use a term from Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) with American higher education has now bifurcated into two camps with seemingly rare exception. In one camp are the institutions that do not profess a commitment to Christian doctrine; in the other camp are the institutions that do.

Those of us who have dedicated our professional careers to *Christian* higher education are acutely aware of the danger that any professing Christian institution faces. Broadly speaking, the danger is that the distinctively Christian commitments of an institution fade from the institutional identity. The result is that an institution, which at previous points in its history was distinctively Christian, now cultivates an institutional identity that is thoroughly secular, save the symbols and relics that are rarely expunged from institutional history (e.g., mottos, emblems, songs). The doctrine of Scripture is replaced with the dogma of culture-at-the-edge. We don’t know exactly how it happens – not likely as the result of a single decision or event in an institution’s history. Exchanging one institutional identity for another is probably the cumulative result of external forces and incremental changes over time. Just as the aging of our own faces goes unnoticed on a day-to-day basis but can be recognized by looking at photos from years past, so the transformation of an institution’s identity can only be recognized by looking at large swaths of its institutional history.

Missional Vigilance

Therefore, the tendency for significant change to happen so slowly that it usually goes unnoticed underscores the importance of missional vigilance – that is, intentional reflection on how stakeholders can actively work towards (rather than passively work under) the mission of a Christian college or university, understanding that the mission was wrought through prayer and

Scripture by faithful believers in generations past, who sought to ensure by the charting documents that the institution would not veer from its original identity in generations to come.

What should missional vigilance look like for Christian faculty at a distinctively Christian university? It seems to me that the starting point is to describe what it is about our work as faculty that is distinctively Christian. In other words, how does our work and our aims look decidedly different than the work of the faculty at non-confessional institutions? Why did any of us who love and worship the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – dedicate significant portions of our professional lives (not to mention a small fortune and years of training to acquire expertise in a domain) to the endeavor of Christian higher education?

In my experience, Christian colleagues typically express answers to those questions along these lines:

1. To understand and know the world we live in, and as we grow in that, understand more about the God we serve;
2. To engage in something we are passionate about that gives us a sense of doing what God has created us to do;
3. To express ourselves through our skills and work in such a way that it becomes, in some sense, an act of worship;
4. To shape the future by ministering to students, who come to us for an education, usually in the context of making big decisions about the trajectories of their lives.

It is true that many of us view our work – not just teaching and mentoring, but administration – as a ministry to students in some sense. We don't do this just to draw a paycheck, but we do it to deposit the treasure we have pursued into the hearts and minds of our students, thereby investing in the future.

In the remainder of this article, as an outworking of my own reflection on how to approach Christian higher education in a distinctively Christian way, and as an exercise in missional vigilance, I would like to offer another answer to the list above:

5. To develop students who become participants in the redemptive work of God in all spheres of society.

Writing the statement above at a place like Liberty University can seem trite – a platitude offered to legitimize our work in a theological way. But it is meant to be somewhat jarring. It is meant to prompt an understanding of ourselves, our disciplines, our students, and our aims that is unfamiliar and untamed by the jargon and common ideas of our evangelical, Christian circles. Let me explain.

With the phrase “to develop students who are participants in the redemptive work of God” I mean something different than (though not exclusive of) these things we do as Christian faculty: praying before class, integrating biblical principles and wisdom into assignments, offering devotionals, ministering to students, and sharing the gospel with them. I also mean something different about the way we teach our subject-matter than these things: helping students see weaknesses of unbiblical views in a knowledge domain; refuting anti-Christian arguments in our

disciplines; helping our students see the wisdom of God and the indelible marks of His creative work in the subjects we study. I also mean something different about the impact of our work in students' lives than these things: developing them into informed Christians, devoted Christians, and Christians who view their workplace as a platform to share the gospel.

As professors, all of these activities, teaching foci, and goals are important to our work. I don't intend to disparage them by specifying that I mean something else with this proposal – that a goal of our work is to develop students who become participants in the redemptive work of God in all spheres of society. All the items in the above paragraph are in the orbit of what I have in mind, but I believe they are secondary to it, not necessarily the essence of the idea itself. So what do I mean?

A Proposal: Developing Students who become Participants in the Redemptive Work of God

Regardless of the kinds of students a Christian university aims to produce (job-ready graduates, research-ready graduates, informed citizens, ministry-ready graduates, etc.), and regardless of the kind of curriculum a university emphasizes (liberal arts, industry-specific, STEM, etc.), and regardless of its delivery format (residential, online, hybrid, etc.), there must be orienting points for our work if we want to produce students who become participants in the redemptive work of God in all spheres of society. Our teaching, scholarship, and mentorship of students should be done with reference to these orienting points of redemptive-history:

1. *Looking backward*: the observable dysfunction and problems in the world are consequences of the original sin. Every knowledge domain and field of inquiry relates to the effects of sin in some way.
2. *Looking forward*: although we live in a world marred by sin, God's redemptive work will culminate in new creation – a new heavens and earth that exist apart from the effects of sin and constitute the home of the righteous.
3. *Living in-between*: despite the fact that we obviously do not yet enjoy the restored creation towards which history is moving, God's redemptive work is taking place now, and we enjoy aspects of the future new creation even now while living in a world that is marred by sin. God frequently involves His covenant people in His redemptive work, using them to point forward in various ways to the day when He fully and finally resolves the problem of sin and renews His creation.

Our task is to help students see how the knowledge domains in which we operate and the subjects we teach relate to these orienting points and have their significance framed by them. What does this mean for our work as Christian professors at a Christian university?¹

¹ Editor's Note: a short version of this article was published in *Faith and the Academy* (Spring 2020). It excluded the text from here to the concluding section of this full version due to space constraints (with permission from the author).

Looking Backward

We live in a world that is infected by the problem of sin and broken because of the original sin. There is a tendency in some evangelical circles to conceptualize the problem of sin somewhat narrowly as a moral problem (e.g., we do sinful things as defined by a holy God) and an eschatological problem (e.g., when I die, I will face a holy God; when God concludes history, He will judge sin).

Scripture, however, indicates that the problem of sin is more encompassing than this. We see this first in Genesis 2:16-17 when God warns, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (ESV). Death was the chief consequence of sin, though we don’t seem to think about death in this way. I suppose it’s reasonable and healthy that we have resigned ourselves to death’s inevitability, but that realism frequently eclipses the insistence of Scripture that *death is not normal*. Paul, in describing the final events of history, refers to death as the final enemy of God, which Christ will fully defeat during those future events: “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:24-26). So, death is both a consequence of sin and an enemy of God.

Notice that God says, “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). We often read over this without recognizing the implications: Adam and Eve did not drop dead on the same day they ate the fruit. They lived on and had children. Genesis 5:5 tells us that Adam lived 930 years, then died! Therefore, something more nuanced is meant by God’s statement. Although some might view the phrase “in the day” as metaphorical, it is probably not metaphorical. It seems likelier that we have anachronistically misinterpreted “death” as a singular event in an individual’s lifetime rather than a power that exerts its influence into all of creation, beginning with the original sin and extending throughout all of history. This seems to be what Paul has in mind while explaining the relationship between the original sin and death in his Letter to the Romans: “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17; see also the preceding verses, beginning in v. 12).

So, the reign of death began “in the day” when the first sin was committed. From a redemptive-historical perspective, the reign of death ends when Christ defeats this final enemy of his, as we saw in First Corinthians 15:24-26. Before then, the reign of death in a believer’s life ends with the cessation of their vital functions, when they physically die and they enter into heaven (though the moment of salvation represents a partial cessation of death’s reign in a believer’s life, and I suppose the argument could be made that death continues to reign until one experiences bodily resurrection). For the non-believer, death continues its reign beyond the moment of physical death and extends into the afterlife. This point is especially clear in Revelation, which distinguishes physical death from eternal punishment, which is referred to as “the second death” (see Rev 2:11, 20:14; 21:8). The main point to take away from this paragraph is that death is an

impersonal power that reigns in a fallen creation, not just a singular event at the end of one's embodied life. It is a consequence of sin and an enemy of God.

Understood in this way, we see that the reign of death and its effects are pervasive. Although it culminates in the moment our vital functions cease and one enters the afterlife, its reign in our bodies begins at the moment of conception. Our bodies are conceived with an "expiration" programmed into our fallen DNA; the physical effects of sin are genetic and cellular, ensuring that we fall apart as we age and eventually succumb to what we call death – the cessation of our vital functions. To live in a fallen creation is to be dying slowly, oppressed the malevolent reign of death.

(Bear with me on this death thing for another paragraph or two. I promise that things get more uplifting in the next sections!)

The impact of the original sin on God's 'good' creation is not only death, but also the dysfunction (or dis-ease) of the material world – the dissonance of pain and struggle in it, and its non-conformity to the original design of its Creator. Dysfunction seems to be enmeshed with death, but it more broadly encompasses the non-human world and the ways in which it is an inhospitable environment for humans as we interface with it. Thus, we read of agricultural dysfunction in Genesis 3:14-19. The land would yield its produce only with struggle and a measure of uncooperativeness, so cultivating it would not be easy. We also read of reproductive dysfunction. Analogously to the land, Eve's experience of childbirth would be a painful struggle that threatened the lives involved. With Cain and Abel, we read of social and relational dysfunction. Jealousy causes one brother to kill another. We read of Abraham and Lot considering whether the resources in a given place were sufficient to sustain them both. We read of famine and thirst. The need for resources drives many of the decisions that people make in the narratives of Scripture. The curses for sin we find in the early chapters of Genesis indeed play out in the remainder of Scripture, as we see that God's "good" creation is intractable and dysfunctional – lineage and provision are never a guarantee from the perspective of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the faith. Death, dysfunction, and violence are always there, threatening the stability and viability of God's creation, haunting us still today.

These realities – the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction in God's 'good' creation – help guide our academic agenda. Every knowledge domain and field of academic inquiry relates to the effects of sin in creation in some meaningful way. Our non-Christian counterparts in academia recognize many of these things as problems that need further awareness and research to mitigate, but neither the problems nor the solutions they offer are invested with any theological significance. For us, however, Scripture indicates that these aren't merely problems, but they are the consequence of sin that work against God's created design.

Therefore, our work as a Christian faculty, in part, is to take a *backward look* through the lenses of our academic discipline to the original sin and its effects. In doing so, Christian professors in the natural sciences are able to describe with expertise the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction at the biological level and in the meteorological phenomena that represent the hostility of the environment we inhabit this side of the fall. Christian professors in the social

sciences are able to describe with expertise the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction in the way we think, relate, and respond to our conditions. Christian professors in mathematics, physics, and engineering are able to describe with expertise the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction in the quantifiable phenomena of the universe and in the functional principles of our experience (it is interesting to wonder about things like gravity in a world without death). Christian professors in the humanities are able to describe with expertise the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction in the way that we construct and experience culture, in the art we produce, and in what we express with language.

The list could go on, but this should suffice to make the point that the subject-matter of every field is connected to the problem of sin because of the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction in a post-fall world. The connection can probably be identified by asking, “what problems does my field try to solve, and why do those problems exist in the first place, according to Scripture?” The work of Christian professors is, in part, to answer those questions well and communicate the answers to others in a compelling way. In doing so, we provide a theological point of orientation for our disciplines that helps our students understand why a class on this-or-that subject is important: it helps them make sense of reality in a thoroughly Christian way. Additionally (and more positively), by focusing on the pervasiveness of death and dysfunction, we can also emphasize the grace of God that is evident in the order, function, and life that remains in a fallen world, and that proclaims His attributes and glory (Rom 1:19-20).

Looking Forward

When we think about the phrase “the redemptive work of God” in evangelical circles, our minds rightly go to the work of Christ on the cross. Christ’s death and resurrection are indeed the linchpins of God’s plan of redemption, and faith in Christ alone is of course the only means by which we receive forgiveness for our sins and reconciliation with God. What we often seem to miss, however, is that God’s redemptive work encompasses more than just the redemption of sinful people. It involves the redemption of creation itself – the plane on which humans were designed to exist. Moreover, the redemption of sinful people and the redemption of fallen creation are bound up together in the climactic events of history. Christ’s work on the cross and his resurrection is Act 1 of his two-part redemptive work; Act 2 is his glorious return and defeat of God’s enemies, among which is death. It is difficult to find many places in the New Testament where Act 1 of Christ’s redemptive work is presented apart from the backdrop of Act 2.

Paul makes the point that our longing for the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection of the dead matches the longing of creation itself for renewal and liberation from its fallen material condition (he frames this as a tension between life and death in Romans 8:6):

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until

now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:18-23).

Thus, Paul closely relates our eventual bodily resurrection – “the redemption of our bodies” – with the eschatological liberation of creation – God setting it free from the corruption to which it is currently in bondage.

John’s visions make the point more forcefully that God’s redemptive work involves material creation:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:1-5).

Scripture therefore draws to a close with reverberating echoes of the opening chapters of Genesis. The redemptive work of God involves the comprehensive removal of sin’s effects from the people of God in the new creation that God will bring about as the home of righteousness (see also Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:10-13).

In light of this, it is not enough for us to *look backward* only – to only have the reign of death and dysfunction as an orienting point for our endeavor as Christian faculty. We must also *look forward*, as Scripture does, to the new creation and the obliteration of death and dysfunction from the plane of our existence as God’s creatures. Deep down inside, we all long for this eschatological “healing” whether we know it or not. This is most certainly the root of the unending pursuit of identity, freedom, beauty, power, fulfillment, and bliss that is on display in our society. Connecting these two points – the brokenness of creation and the inner longing for the healing of new creation – is a powerful way to help students orientate knowledge of any subject, what we experience and what we observe, to the teaching of Scripture.

Living In-Between

One of the most complex, but most explanatory, aspects of Christian theology is how Scripture defines our experience at this point in history. We, as the people of God, simultaneously *look backward* to the unresolved original sin and *forward* to its final solution. With our *look backward*, we see the reason for the pervasive death and dysfunction that reign in creation, but we also see remnants of the original “good” creation that God established. Despite the doom-and-gloom way that I have described the condition of the fallen creation, there are still aspects of this life that, in God’s graciousness, are good and reflect His original purpose and design.

Likewise, with our *look forward* in anticipation of the new creation, there are aspects of it that are accessible now; not everything about the new creation remains in the inaccessible future. God's graciousness has allowed us to experience tastes of that future even now. This is why Paul describes believers, who are living within a fallen creation, as new creations: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17; see also Gal 6:15; this sounds very similar to the language used in Rev 21:1-5). To be sure, the redemptive work of God in history is not merely His work of guiding history towards its conclusion of new creation, but of instantiating pieces of that future new creation in the present broken world – into the *in-between* that we now experience.

This is most apparent in the work of Christ. He came to give us life in the present, despite the reign of death in creation. This is why the concept of eternal life is so prominent and so nuanced in the Gospel of John. Jesus did not just mean "hope for life after death" with this concept of eternal life; he meant the undoing of the reign of death in the present age: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). With this statement, Jesus not only identifies himself as the one who reverses the effects of sin in creation, but he establishes that eternal life – a future hope – begins even now, despite the non-removal of physical death. He essentially says that eternal life is already available through him, but the effects of sin have not yet been fully eradicated. In this same narrative context, Jesus then proceeds to enact new creation in the present by bringing Lazarus back to life – a small scale instantiation of the resurrection of the dead (a future aspect of new creation) in the present fallen world, where death reigns.

This idea of Jesus instantiating aspects of new creation in the fallen world is probably at the heart of most of his miracles, and by extension, the miracles of his apostles: healing, exorcisms (which show a more personalized face to the generally impersonal reign of death and dysfunction), dominion over threatening natural elements, miraculous provision, and resurrections/resuscitations. It was as though new creation was breaking into the present age – into the *in-between* – through the ministry and work of Christ, all of it *pointing backward* to the original sin and *forward* to new creation. This in-breaking of new creation is probably synonymous with the nearness of the kingdom, often expressed by Christ through a call to "repent, for the kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9). When we respond to that invitation with faith, an often-overlooked miracle occurs, which is the work he does within us to transform our identity to reflect new creation: "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal 6:14-15). The point is that miracles are demonstrations and instantiations of new creation before the new creation actually arrives on God's timeline – foretastes of it.

The greatest example of new creation breaking into the fallen world ahead of schedule is the resurrection of Christ himself. He surrendered to the forces of death in this broken world so that we might have life. Yet, death had no hold on him, and he was resurrected from death and ascended to the right hand of the Father in glory. But, as we are reminded by his words in the

Gospel of John, he has not left us as orphans, and he has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. The indwelling Spirit unites us with Christ in such a way that, as we submit to the Spirit, our identity collapses into the identity of Christ; we are his body, the church, of which he is the head; we are his bride. This kind of close identification with Christ, participating with him and in his work, can be seen most clearly in some of Paul's statements:

- “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).
- “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27-28).
- “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).
- “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24).
- “... even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-7).

We could go on, but the point is that the Spirit unites us with Christ in such a way that we have been, in some sense, crucified with him (Gal 2:20); we live as an extension of his life, in some sense (Gal 3:27-28; Phil 1:21); our sufferings can represent, in some sense, the continuation of his own (Col 1:24); and we are, in some sense, raised with him and seated in the heavenlies with him (Eph 2:5-7). These aren't easy things to understand. Frankly, it probably makes most of us uncomfortable to view ourselves as being so closely aligned with Christ. After all, he is God, and he is completely holy. We, on the other hand, are obviously not. We must be careful to recognize that when we interpret verses like the above in Scripture, they are not meant to remove every distinction between people and Christ. Instead, they are designed to show the spiritual union we share with him, which compels us to live for him, knowing that our past, present, and future are bound up with him.

As his people who are united with him by the indwelling Spirit of God, we now have the opportunity to live in the *in-between* like he did during his ministry. Yes, God may sovereignly choose to use miracles to instantiate aspects of new creation in the fallen world (see Craig Keener's two-volume work, *Miracles*, for a meticulously-researched compilation of reported miracles from around the world). It is more probable, however, that he will choose to use things that could be classified as non-miraculous to do this.

An example will illustrate the point. Christ healed miraculously, instantiating new creation in the fallen world where death and dysfunction reign. We have no reason to think that anyone whom Christ healed – not even Lazarus, who was raised from the dead – was completely freed of the reign of death. Their bodies still gave way and they still died, even after experiencing a miracle of Christ. Healing, we know, can also be brought about through modern medicine. When a

Christian physician applies a medical treatment to a person, this is not any different, on the surface, than what a non-Christian physician does when applying the same treatment. However, when the Christian physician does so while *looking backward*, *looking forward*, and *living in-between*, that healing treatment can be understood as pushing back against the reign of death and dysfunction in this fallen world and as exhibiting, on a small scale and in a limited way, an aspect of new creation. The idea is that these orienting points for the work of a physician enable that knowledge domain and career to have redemptive significance – redemptive not in the sense of “salvific”, but redemptive in the sense of “restorative” – instantiating an aspect of the new creation now (healing in this case) on a small scale in a limited way. Providing medical care, therefore, is not just a platform to share the gospel; it is not simply an act of love and service for the patient; when done by a member of the body of Christ, each treatment can be a “new creation signpost” that points towards the future when God fully establishes the new creation for those who have been transformed by the work of Christ.²

Similarly, when a counselor helps someone navigate the psychological, relational, and social dysfunction in their lives, the resultant growth and restoration has more significance for Christians than it does for non-Christians. The counselor is instantiating an aspect of new creation now, repairing (on a small scale and in a limited way) the destruction of sin in the minds and relationships of people. That destruction will be repaired fully and finally in the new heavens and earth because of the work of Christ, but the Christian counselor anticipates that now. Every counseling session should be a “new creation signpost” pointing towards the future made possible by Christ when the effects of sin are felt no more.

Take the Christian artist or author, for example. When an artistic or literary production helps people understand their human experience by *looking backward and forward*, and it delivers true beauty, satisfaction, and enjoyment in the *in-between*, it instantiates the beauty, satisfaction, and enjoyment of new creation now (on a small scale and in a limited way). Art and literature, therefore, quite obviously have the ability to function as “new creation signposts” during the *in-between*.

What about the scientist, mathematician, engineer, or technologist? Beyond the unique awareness that Christians in these disciplines have for the remaining aspects of the “good” creation that, despite the reign of death and dysfunction, point towards the wise and orderly designs of the Creator, these knowledge domains and fields of study seem to be especially solution-oriented. When Christians in these disciplines conduct their work by *looking backward* and *looking forward* to the orienting points of redemptive history, there is the potential for solutions to ordinary problems to take on theological significance in the *in-between*. Solutions that mitigate the effects of death and dysfunction in the world can instantiate an aspect of new creation now (on a small scale and in a limited way).

Although these examples broadly capture how I see this applying to various fields, the truly meaningful applications of these orienting points – *looking backward*, *looking forward*, and *living in-between* – will come from Christian colleagues with expertise in these fields. So,

² I first encountered the metaphor of an eschatological signpost in the writings of N. T. Wright.

working this out comprehensively will necessarily be a collaborative effort of the body of Christ across the academic disciplines and professions, pursued as an act of missional vigilance.

The Christian University and the Redemptive Work of God

What does this mean for our work as Christian professors at a Christian university?

I am proposing that, as a faculty, we must each orient our disciplines and our teaching to the original sin, the new creation, and the work of God between that span of redemptive history. We do this as an act of missional vigilance, by *looking backward*, *looking forward*, and *living in-between*. When we realize that our work has the ability to instantiate aspects of new creation now, our work takes on a deeper significance.

When we train students to be “Champions for Christ,” we are training them to become participants in the redemptive work of God. By taking an intentional approach to this (i.e., orienting our disciplines and the subject-matter to redemptive history), we help our students to realize the opportunity that presents itself with the acquisition of learning and credentials. And I don’t think that many of them will realize this apart from our guidance. We aren’t just training them for thriving lives of obedience to God. We aren’t just training them to go into the workplace and share the gospel. In addition to these, we are also training them to be participants in the redemptive work of God, *who mitigate the reign of death and dysfunction in creation, and who instantiate aspects of new creation now* – “catalysts of redemptive change in all spheres of society,” as stated in the mission of the general education curriculum. This is a distinctively Christian approach to higher education, all of which is possible because of what God has done for us, and will do through us, in Christ for His glory.