

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION IN CHRIST AS THE GROUND FOR INTEGRATION OF FAITH, LEARNING AND VOCATION

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Introduction

The task of inter-relating the Christian faith with various academic disciplines and professions has been a conscious concern of the modern church for some time. In academic circles the task has most often been understood in terms of inter-relating philosophical ideas and presuppositions with Christian truth doctrinally formulated. In the professional realm the concern for discerning and exercising Christian ethics is often the focus of integration. Christians in various professions, sometimes in connection with a seminary, have addressed ethical issues and sometimes form professional associations for ongoing discussions.

What has been lacking, it seems to me, is a foundation substantial and clear enough to truly inform such a multidimensional task. Of course part of this is due to the fact of theological diversity within the church such that there is no one theological perspective upon which to formulate the shape of the inter-relations. Also, it seems to me that some theological frameworks are inherently weak for providing an adequate point of departure for such a task.

This paper is an attempt to propose a particular theological framework that nevertheless could have a broad appeal to many who have a vital Christian faith. Some initial attention will be given to consideration of the nature of the task of the inter-relation of Christian faith with academic and professional fields. I will also attempt to make some suggestions as to the potential and limitations of taking up such a challenge.

Integration refers to the Consideration of Aspects of Creation

I am not sure that full appreciation has been given to the fact that the key to the task of integration is a clear and in depth formulation of our doctrine of creation. This is the hinge doctrine for working out the inter-connections between Christian truth and other fields of academic or professional inquiry. In the academic fields, the sciences, humanities and the arts, we are concerned with the broad realm of our creaturely existence and with ourselves as creatures. The study of plasma physics or of sociology focus on differing aspects of our creaturely existence. The study of ethics has to do with a consideration of our creaturely activity. Without having a well-formulated understanding of the nature of our universe and natural environment, or of our being human, spelled out in a Christian framework, that is theologically, then there will be little hope for discovering how Christian faith inter-relates with these other disciplines. The inter-relations can't be worked out if the Christian aspect is so ill-defined; if there is no tight grasp of a Christian doctrine of Creation. In fact, the formulation of an integrated perspective on faith and academics or professional life properly falls under the category of the doctrine of creation itself. Furthermore, this task of integration itself is a human activity and as such is to be undertaken as an act of Christian obedience.

The key, then, for pursuing the integration of Christian faith and academic disciplines or professional life is having an adequate doctrine of creation. The following discussion then will seek to lay out such a doctrinal basis of creation with little further direct reference to the task of the integration of faith, learning and vocation. However the entire discussion aims to place this task on a proper theological foundation, so that integration is implicit at every point.

A Theology of Creation?

Now, perhaps some are already at the point of skepticism or despair. Is it possible for non-theologians to have such a well-developed doctrine? Is not an impossible level of sophistication being called for? And besides, will it really be that helpful? What theologians have had to offer has not always seemed to provide responses to questions that most people have had in this connection.

What I will attempt to demonstrate here is that what is theologically required of persons to go about the task of integration faithfully can be sufficiently grasped by most reflective persons because it flows out of what many will regard as the basics or essentials of their faith rather than from the esoteric fringes. I will admit from the start that what I propose will call for theological decision-making at a couple of crucial points when we must acknowledge some distinctions to be made. While I hope this essay will be helpful to all, I will not be disappointed if not all are willing to follow along the path I suggest. I am confident that many might benefit, however, from traveling along with me.

Creation in Christ

In, Through, For The Word

The first thing that must be made clear, if we are to pursue this task of integration faithfully, is that our understanding of creation must be determined by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Creation is the work of the Triune God from, through, and to Jesus Christ. The New Testament witness is quite emphatic and clear about this. The Word of God made flesh was the Word which spoke creation into existence (John 1). The breath that blew at creation (Gen. 1) was the same Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, which overshadowed Mary, descended upon Jesus at his baptism, in whose presence and strength he lived his life of obedience that culminated in the Cross, who he sent out into his disciples, who forms the church and is at work in our world.

This means that creation was the handiwork of Jesus Christ. It bears the marks of originating from Him. But Jesus Christ is not only the origin of creation, but also the means by which creation comes into being, the personal agency involved in the coming about and sustaining of creation. The unfolding of creation has the marks of Jesus Christ upon it.

But not only is Christ the origin and the agency, but also the destiny intended for creation. Creation is for the sake of Jesus Christ, for His glory. It was created according to His purposes as well. The totality of creation, source, course, and destiny, its past, present, and future are all accomplished according to Jesus Christ. No aspect of Creation can be fully understood apart from knowing that in every way it belongs to God through Jesus Christ. Creation bears the marks of Who Jesus Christ is. This is what we mean when we confess that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings.

By the one Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Now we must point out that as obvious as the New Testament witness is, what we are suggesting has not always been consistently applied. Sometimes the understanding of creation has been formulated in a chronological fashion, so that what is said, say in Genesis, is allowed to stand as a complete and foundational point of doctrine in and of itself, apart from taking into consideration what we come to know of creation's full character in Jesus Christ, the Word of God from the beginning. The result has been that truths articulated on the basis of the Genesis account have often been given a presuppositional status such that anything subsequently said, chronologically speaking, is interpreted strictly in terms of

what was formerly said. Thus an interpretation of the Genesis account, apart from Christ, has often carried far greater weight than the more essential information about the nature of creation which was obtained chronologically later but which was true from before the foundations of the world. ¹

In traditional formulations of Christian faith creation is linked to the statements about God the Father. Such formulations have been inadvertently led us to think about creation as the act of God the Father apart from Jesus Christ. The work of Christ is often understood exclusively in terms of the reconciling work of God. Thus the goodness of God at creation is understood as a different sort than the goodness of redemption. This sets us up for various kinds of confusion, not the least of which is the relationship of Father and Son to creation. Also, once two different goods are presupposed then they are often intermingled as equivalent alternatives or one is emphasized at the expense of the other. At the least the seemingly dual nature of good (created vs redeemed) remains inexplicable.

Another result has often been that post-Fall the original purpose for creation is obscured or rendered irrelevant. Concentration on redemption often overshadows any consideration of the pre-Fall purpose for creation even though the biblical record indicates those purposes and the fact that they were maintained, even if in a distorted form, after the fall (see Gen 3). Furthermore, in the theological discussions down through the ages it has been regularly acknowledged that the biblical revelation gives ample evidence that the one God acts as One, so that the One whole God is involved in whatever is done by this God whether creation, redemption or the perfection of creation. The alignment of a particular work of God with one or the other divine Persons is allowed by way of "appropriation." While such alignment is proper, it should not be taken in such a way that excludes, minimizes or dismisses the fact that God acts as One God, as a whole God, so that all the trinitarian Persons are involved in all of God's activities. The actions of God are Triune acts even if one person "takes the lead." What we are suggesting is not that creation be understood apart from our grasp of the Fatherhood of God, but that it not be considered apart from Jesus Christ either, as the New Testament indicates in linking the Word, Jesus Christ, with creation. This separation is the error which the Church has most often fallen into.² We will explore the implications of this in a further section.

Creation Ex Nihilo

This Latin phrase is the summary of much Christian wrestling with the relationship of God and Creation. Its most crucial aspect and one which is readily grasped (in theory at least) by Christians is that God is not to be identified with any aspect of creation. Our spirits are not God, our consciences, our reasoning,

¹ What this amounts to is that the order of knowing is given priority over the order of reality. Creation is an act of God through Jesus Christ, yet often certain truths regarding the nature of Creation are formulated without reference to Jesus Christ. Rather, the truth that is made known in Jesus Christ is made to fit into the interpretation of creation already formulated and made foundational on the basis of chronologically prior data. A similar phenomena occurred when most Jews of Jesus' day formulated their understanding of the Messiah and then attempted to see how Jesus might or might not fit their pre-understandings. Jesus' challenge to them was to call them to reinterpret their understandings of who this Messiah is on the basis of who he was. Those that negotiated this curve were his disciples, although even they had considerable trouble, e.g. Peter's confession, which although formally correct had no room at first for a suffering and rejected Messiah.

² The result of this error, perhaps mixed with others, has been an inadvertent Deism. Creation is then understood in terms of a merely transcendent God, distant, removed from Creation. From this perspective only the effects of God, left over from God's initial creating actions, are possibly discernable in the created sphere: in the order of the world and human life. God is basically absent, and could even now be dead, and is not to be considered an agent within the created order. Without taking into account that God created by the Word, the same Word by which God reconciled the world to himself, there is little available theologically to prevent our slipping back into an inadvertent Deism in our thinking about Creation. This is what occurred in the history of American higher education.

imagining, or willing or loving capacity, any human ability or potentiality scientific, artistic or even religious, not the present moment, not the future, no force or feeling, no culture, or institution, no book, no humanly formulated principle, or orderliness of nature or morality, nor the general course of history can be identified with God. God is other than the created stuff, seen and unseen (heaven and angels are created things decidedly distinct from God in the Bible). God is entirely other than the created universe. Creation is not an emanation or an extension of God at some remove. Creation has its own kind of existence which is upheld and maintained by God, i.e. is contingent upon God's goodness. But this connection is not ontological, does not make it a part or extension of the same being of God. Creation then did not come out of God as another form of God. Nor did it come out of something, not even something called "nothing", which co-exists with God on some kind of parallel plane of existence of a material nature.

God is Not Creation nor is Creation Divine

As Christians we are neither cosmological nor ontological dualists. There is only one original existence. God alone truly exists. Everything else exists derivatively by God's own good decision and power and purpose. God is not creation or any aspect of it. Evil, even more so, has no parallel kind of existence to God. The opposite of Satan is the Archangel Michael. Both are creatures of God. So even though we alone are no match for evil, we cannot faithfully give it a status of existing anything like God's existence, nor even as creation does. God's existence is absolutely unique. Only God exists in the way God exists.

Creation is not God, but it is good because created by God. It is his work. But its goodness is not inherent to it. It is and has been always dependent upon God for its goodness to be maintained. Goodness is not a package (substance) which is given to or put into something so that it can walk off with it in its pocket so to speak. If God were dead the creation would instantaneously disintegrate into an evil and self-destructive chaos and finally cease to be. This is crucial. A positive relationship between God and creation is absolutely necessary for creation to be/remain good. This relationship is maintained by the living God. With out God's personal agency, his own perpetual decision to maintain it, creation would disintegrate. Existence itself is a continuous gift of God.

While God is not creation, God can be present to and active within any aspect of Creation he may desire. God may be immanent to Creation by His Spirit. Yet God is not co-terminus with Creation and has a Triune life in distinction from, that is, transcendent over, Creation. Thus even though God is qualitatively distinct from Creation, by his own decision and action he is not separate from creation. God does not cease to be Creation's most radical Other. But as Other, he is for creation and therefore present to it as he pleases.

The radical differentiation between the uncreated God and his creation means that our relationship to God is absolutely unique, one of a kind. Thus only God is to be worshiped and nothing else within creation must be confused with God or be treated like God. God alone is God. God is identical with Himself and with nothing else. God is unique and is not a member of some class of beings or attributes equally applied to one or many other things. God is not even the superlative of the best of things which we know of in created existence. God is more than and even other than such things of our imaginations and projections, or sensations. God is not a super- or meta- something. God is God. "I am that I am."

No Idolatry: the Possibility of Distinguishing between Creation and God in the creaturely knowledge of God

Where, then, is the point of contact? How can God be known? How is it possible for us to get beyond merely projecting ourselves or something else onto God in our attempts to conceptualize (know) God? The answer to this is that we can't know God and cannot prevent ourselves from projecting and making God in our own image. We cannot do anything about it. We are trapped. However, God can and has done something about it from His side. He has provided a point of contact, an image of Himself, a place to go and know Him as God. The only time and space coincidence of God, ourselves and our world is Jesus Christ Himself. God has interpreted Himself (John 1:18) to us as God, as our God, in the person of Jesus Christ. We worship God **in** Jesus Christ and in no other way. We identify nothing else, and no one else with God. He is the only true and actual point of contact. He is the only thing with which we can absolutely identify the very presence, activity, mind, heart, and face of God.

God in Christ saves us from the otherwise absolute necessity that we be idolaters, merely creating God after our own or some other creaturely image.³ God can do for us what we cannot do. Only God knows God, only the Father knows the Son and the Son the Father. And only God can reveal God in a way that does not confuse some aspect of creation with God and yet which reaches us within creation. In Jesus God established a human and creaturely knowing of God which corresponds with Who God actually is. God has made himself known within creation in a way that distinguishes itself from all and every aspect of that creation. In this way we truly may worship God as God, in Jesus Christ.

Humanity: in the creaturely image of Jesus Christ. Spiritual for the sake of the natural

Jesus Christ then is the one true image of God given to us in time and space. Any talk of humanity in general being created in the image of God means our humanity is modeled after the humanity of Jesus. We were created in, according to, after the image of Jesus Christ who is the Image of God. We are the image of the Image.⁴ Thus when we understand the *imago Dei* in persons as some attribute or capacity of human existence (usually those which distinguish us from animals) we have barely touched on the truth referred to by *the image*.

The *image* refers to Jesus Christ who is the Son of God having taken on our human nature and condition to heal it and give it back to us. Jesus shows us what true humanity is in his resurrection and ascension. We were created to reflect (image) the humanity of the Son of God who became flesh. We are to conform to His image, not him to ours. His is the original humanity which gave shape to our initial creation. Christ takes on our humanity to heal and perfect it and show us what God has really intended it to be all along. In Christ we see that although creatureliness is not the same as God's being, that as other as God is, humanity is not alien to God. It arose out of the Word, it was assumed by the Word, it was the

³ The thinkers of the Enlightenment and turn of the century, Durkheim in sociology, Freud in psychology, Feuerbach in theology, Marx in political science, were not by any stretch of the imagination the first to notice that human beings are prone to create God after their own likeness and then deny that God was so. This is no modern insight. It is enshrined in the ancient Hebrew command to worship only God and to make no graven images or likenesses and to not take God's name in vain. The prohibition against making God into one's own image warns in language as strong as possible of this very human activity. But it also contains within it the hope and promise that God would see to it that humans would not always be enslaved to their own sinful propensities and limitations. This command and prohibition reserved a place for God Himself to provide his own image for us that we might not be enslaved to idolatry but might know in a creaturely way the true Triune God. God has interpreted God to us in sending and being his own image, Jesus Christ.

⁴ Here is a particularly crucial place where the fullness of the revelation must be allowed to play its part in Christian understanding. The book of Genesis does not have the final word about what it means for us and humans to be created after the image of God. It is not until we hear of the second Adam, of Christ, that we are renewed in His image that we come to fully understand what was contained in the Genesis passage. See Heb. 2:10; Col. 1:15 ff.; 3:10; Eph. 1:9; 3:4; Rom. 5:14 ff.; 8:29; I Cor. 2:7; 15:45 ff.; II Cor. 4:4; 5:16; Gal. 4:19; Jn 1:1-18; Jn. 17; I Jn. 1:1-4

intention of God to include our human existence (perfected and sanctified of course) within his own Triune existence. God intended from the beginning to create persons who would share in his Son's sonship. Thus Jesus is properly called the Son of God, and we too, by virtue of Christ's creating and reconciling work are called the children of God. It is because of our relationship with Jesus that we can properly say this of ourselves.

This indicates that we were created with an intention appropriate to creaturely human existence, namely for eternal life in the Triune life of God through Christ. We are created by God's determination to have us be his children sharing in his own Son's relationship to the Father in the Spirit, by our being united with Him and having his character at the essence of who we are in our very being. It means that God is determined to have Jesus Christ be brother to every one of us for fellowship, for eternal union and communion with God as those who truly belong to Him even as the Son belongs to the Father in the Spirit. God had a purpose for creation by virtue of creating it in, through, for, and to the Word, the Son of God, who became flesh for our sakes to draw us up in Him into eternal communion within the Triune life of God.

The Purpose/Place of Creation

Given a Good Purpose Beyond its Own Intrinsic Perfection

Creation then is not God. However it was created in a way which is open to God's purposes for it. We know in detail only of God's deepest intentions for humanity as it has its life within the non-human aspects of creation. The other dimensions may indeed have special purposes and places in the design of God, but these have not been made known to us in the same way or at the same depth. Presumably knowing the reality of other aspects of creation, from outside our own perspective, is not necessary. Thus, now speaking regarding specifically human being, we see that God created with good intentions and created a good environment for humanity to be drawn towards God's purposes for a fulfillment of fellowship and communion with God. Humankind was given a time and space to live out a relationship with God and within a created environment. Humankind was given a task to be done while in fellowship with God. Humankind was given a variety of relationships in which to live and move: with God, with the animals, with a spouse, with children, with an aim of filling and fulfilling. There is a direction, a development, a purpose and fulfillment to be realized in these relationships ordered by a relationship to God. The garden was not an ending place, a static place, but a beginning place; a good place from which to move out under the good guidance of God.

This fulfillment involves far more than a outworking of some potential intrinsic to the created order itself. The life of Adam and Eve called for a daily living in fellowship and trust in the living God who is not intrinsic to the creation. The goal, while pursued *within* a created environment, found its source, its norm and its fulfillment beyond anything intrinsic to it, potentially or actually. Creation was a good and appropriate environment in order to pursue a fulfillment far beyond it.

Admittedly, in the Genesis narrative only the barest outlines of this can be seen. The ultimate direction and dynamic of life as initially given by God can only be seen clearly in the light of the revelation in Jesus Christ. In Christ we have the revelation of God, the revelation of true humanity, which means the revelation of the fulfilled relationship of humanity with God and therefore with all other created things as well.

Has a Telos in Christ: eternal life beyond the Garden.

There in the garden was planted also the Tree of Life. Of this they did not eat. This tree, in the light of Christ, seems to stand for the future intentions of God for the fulfillment of human life worked out within the creaturely limits of time and space. Adam and Eve were to enter into the fullness of life. We come to see that this means the fullness of life *in Jesus Christ*, because they were created according to his Image. We see that this means eternal life with God in Christ beyond the bounds of time and space. We see this in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (who remains united with our humanity). It means that God intended not only to create humanity but to glorify it and bring it into a wonderful communion of life in the very presence of the Triune Life, life in Christ, in the Word through whom and to whom and for whom they were created. Jesus is the second Adam. He shows us and provides the way for us to come into this glorified life before God in perfect eternal worship.

The Fall Does Not Undo Or Negate Or Create An Alternative.

The Fall then signals our not only failing to pursue God's good purposes for us to move towards the fulfillment of our relationship with God as the image of Jesus Christ, but our turning and running in the opposite direction. It is the corruption of God's will, the denial, the rejection, the prideful distrust of God himself, the attempt to go another way moving out of right faithful relationship to the Creator. The sin of Adam and Eve was a rebellion out of distrust and self-pride in the hope of securing another fulfillment of their created being, of having a likeness to God other than the one provided for them in the Word, after the likeness of the eternal Son of God. It was an attempt to create a counter reality, a counter fulfillment (one in which they were in control) to what God intended for them. They failed to entrust themselves to God's goodness in creating them. They attempted to create *ex nihilo*. Out of nothing they attempted to create an alternative history of humanity in which it fulfilled itself.

But this, of course, is an impossibility. Humanity cannot create an alternative reality, especially one that nullifies the good will and eternal purpose of God grounded in His Word and the Triune life itself. Humans cannot change the purpose for which they were made and by which they are continually upheld in their very existence. The counter reality can have the status of no more than a deception, a lie, a counterfeit. We are not God nor gods who can create *ex nihilo*. It is our very attempt to do so which constitutes our being in sin.

Creation As Promise Of Fulfillment.

What can we say then of the created reality, our humanity and the environment which surrounds us? It has a God-given purpose which cannot be nullified, aborted, mutated into something else by acts of sinful rebellion or even benign neglect. God's creation in and through the Word means creation was indelibly marked, given a trajectory, a fulfillment in and through that Word. Humanity exists for its glorification by its being taken up into eternal communion with God in Christ. We were created by the Father and Son in the Spirit for eternal life as His children. We belong to Him that we might share in the Son's love of the Father and in receiving the Father's life-giving love for the Son in the Spirit. That which God has done in Jesus Christ cannot be undone. God is our God whether we acknowledge it or not. We have a purpose and a fulfillment created for us in Jesus Christ. We have an origin and a destiny graciously given to us in the Word. This was settled before the foundations of the world, in the Triune councils of God. This was to extend his goodness, union and communion with Him to creation and to perfect it, sanctify it for eternal life in his presence through the same Word. The inviolability and indelibility of God's determination to accomplish his perfecting will for creation is evident not only in the coming of Jesus Christ, but in the fact that creation and humanity have been maintained in fallen existence, deliberately,

moment by moment, in and through that same Word, and that we now live with the promise of His ultimate return and fulfillment.

Life In Jesus Christ: The Fulfillment

The creaturely aspects of our existence, the nature of our humanity, the nature of our environment were created good. God's purposes have not been nullified by the defiance of humanity. Consequently, creation as the handiwork of God, human and non-human, still bears the marks of this promise. The goodness of God's creation consists in the fact that it held promise, it was capable, through communion with God (not of itself), of fulfillment of life. In dependence upon God it had a future goodness beyond that intrinsically contained within it. God could bring about his purposes for humanity within this created environment in communion with humanity through the Word. Creation was and still is, by the good grace of God, a sign of promise.

The Saving Work Of Forgiveness

The Work of God in Christ is then a two-fold work. It is the rescue, the deliverance of creation human and non-human, from destruction, desecration, death, and the power of evil. Jesus Christ assumes our humanity and reconciles and rescues it, overcoming its sinful weakness and triumphing over the evil around it and to which it is helplessly subject. Dealing with sin, evil, and death is one aspect. He takes upon himself and within himself the righteous judgment of the Triune God against evil and the rebellious sinful humanity.

The Saving Work Of Fulfillment Of Creation

But a secondary saving act is also accomplished in Christ, that of preserving it and providing for its fulfillment. Through the gift of the Spirit he prepares it for its completion in the union and communion of eternal life with God in Christ. We are reborn for our inheritance, as the children of God, for an eternal sanctified life in the presence of God prepared for us in the Son by the Spirit. God in Christ provides for the fulfillment of creation promised in the act of God's creation in the beginning. Jesus is the second Adam who unites himself to us in a solidarity which far exceeds our relationship with the first Adam so that we might taste and enter into the fullness of life promised in the Tree of Life and in the original goodness of creation.

Of course we still await our actual fulfillment, our glorification, when Christ comes or we meet Him on the other side of human death. But we have our inheritance, we have the bond, the seal, the down payment, of the Spirit who will effect our transformation, beyond any potential inherent with us, so that we will not be obliterated, but rather will enjoy being in the holy presence and living in sanctified communion with God in Christ.

The Relationship of Creation and Redemption

Two Distinct Gracious Acts Of The One Triune God

What then is the relationship of the two acts of the Triune God in creation and reconciliation. They must be related inasmuch as they are both accomplished by one and the same God, and in fact, in and through one and the same Word who is called the second Adam.

1) Creation as Promise/Sign and Reconciliation as Restoration of the Promise/Sign

The fact of creation is not identical with God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ, in his incarnation and resurrection and ascension for us. Yet certainly reconciliation in Christ presupposes a first act of God which establishes creation and its purpose. These are two distinct workings of God, not to be confused or identified. The only unity of these two acts is the unity of the one God and cannot signify anything intrinsic to the activities themselves. One and the same God sovereignly works both by the counsels of his own Triune life. There is, as such, a unity of purpose and character in the two acts of God. We can say that they are both good: they give glory to God and are for the benefit of all creation. They are exercises of God's good Lordship over creation. Yet the one does not externally obligate God to the other. There is nothing about creation of itself, in itself, considered apart from God, that obligates God to reconcile and redeem that which He has created. This is especially true considering its rebellion and rejection of God's good purposes to pursue its own independent purpose and fulfillment.

It is only out of his sovereign faithfulness to Himself that He elects to reconcile that which He created and yet which has rejected its Creator. Our salvation is by the grace of God, that is according to the loving purposes established by the Father and Son in the Spirit which reflects the love of the Father and Son in the Spirit. It is a sovereignly free and loving act unconditioned, uncoerced but graciously given.⁵ Thus Creation and Reconciliation are both gracious acts of God to extend his goodness beyond his internal relations. The act of creation creates the external context full of promise appropriate to God's intention for its fulfillment. Reconciliation is God's second decision to pursue his original purpose for it and thereby to maintain his glory in the face of its rejection and to overcome every obstacle intervening between its present fallen condition and its fulfillment for sanctified communion with God. The work of creation is a work of gracious promise. The work of reconciliation is a work of renewal of the promise and provision for the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes.

2) Fulfillment: Life with God in Triune Communion. Knowing God in Himself as the Son knows the Father and the Spirit in a creaturely way.

We must add that there is a third gracious work of God, then. That is the actual fulfillment of our being in Christ and brought into the eternal presence of the Triune God. This is the work primarily associated with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is given to us in Christ but whose work is not completed until we reach the other side of our human death or Christ comes to end created history as we know it and inaugurate our history of life in the presence of God by Christ in the Spirit. This is the assumption of our spiritual bodies, our perfection, our completion, being clothed with God's holiness. This is certainly a fulfillment of our humanity, but it is a radical transformation as well which comes from without, from the non-created source of our living God's loving goodness. This involves a radical discontinuity, despite any continuity, with who we are in and of ourselves. It is our glorification. This too lies before us as God's third unconditional, loving and fellowship-creating grace which reflects the very inner life of God, Father Son and Spirit.

The Christian: one who participates in both

Who is the Christian then? We are those who participate in both spheres of God's activity and who anticipate the third even now. We exist along with all others in the creation who still have the marks of

⁵ In this sense creation too, is an act of grace. It did not arise out of any external necessity or internal need in the Triune life for some external reality. Creation itself is the free and loving and therefore good overflow of the Triune life of unconditional love of Father and Son in the Spirit. In creation the goodness of God was extended to that which was not God so that creation itself could also participate in same love as the Father and Son enjoyed in the Spirit. See Jn. 17.

promise maintained in it by the providential goodness of God's graciousness. We are just as much in the world as anyone else. We too are creaturely beings. We too experience the created world in much the same way as does anyone else. And, as far as creatures go, we are not exempt from any particular aspect of creaturely existence. We too discover and explore the same environment and live within the same sphere of consequences as those who do not know God in Jesus Christ. We too grow and learn, experience pain and anguish, run into our limitations, have to interpret the realities before us. We too, have to make decisions and suffer or enjoy the consequences of our actions and those of others. We too participate in the human context of culture: language, work, the arts, science, the complexities, joys and failures of human relationships. We too face death. God has not given us the option of not being in the world. By God's own choice we are not yet glorified. (John 17, I Cor. 4, Phil. 1).

But as Christians we also know to Whom we belong, our Creator in the Word. As such there is a light shining in our common darkness which tells us to look for signs of promise in the creation even though clouded over by sin and the possibility of being deceived by evil. In our dealings with creation and the human products of our creativity we have been given a norm, a standard, a pattern which can enable us to sort through all the conflicting data and theories and interpretations.

This is by no means an exact process yielding absolute results. It is one of approximations, of theologically informed educated guesses. What we can know with a certainty, the certainty that Christ himself is, the good purpose of God, the fulfillment of creation. The creation as promise will display the contours of this anticipated fulfillment. And yet, because it now embodies merely the promise of fulfillment, a fulfillment not intrinsic to it although appropriate to it, and all this under the cloud of sin and its deception, these shapes and patterns will have to be discerned as though in a blowing fog. Nevertheless, in Christ, in time and space in a creaturely way, we see embodied the actual fulfillment of the promise of creation and especially of our humanity: gracious loving communion of God with His children who bear in the very character of their being, their belonging to Him and having an inheritance of life in God. Here in Christ in particular and not in creation in general, can we see the promised reality realized. He is the first born of creation. The rest of creation lies in relative obscurity considered in and of itself. Christ alone sheds light on it.

In knowing the Word and acknowledging the Word of God, Christians also know the gracious work of reconciliation and anticipate the consummation of the working of God in their lives by the Spirit. We live in the hope of the reconciling and redeeming work of God. We live lives of worship by enjoying now the benefits of a personal communion with God and a life of being more and more drawn up into life with God, a life of being transformed into the image of Christ. We are those who can consciously and deliberately and even faithfully live in Christ's light, participating in God's creation but also in his work of bringing others to live according to the good news of the reconciling work of God, the grace of God in Jesus Christ and in hope of a fulfillment of this relationship by the same Spirit. We are those who are indwelt by the very Spirit of God at work within us announcing the good news so that others might enter into the same gracious relationship offered to them in Jesus Christ.

The Christian Life: A creaturely form for the sake of the spiritual life.

Now, remembering that God is not His creation and that God's working of creation is distinct from his act of reconciliation, yet not separate from it, just as a promise is not separate from its fulfillment, nor *vice versa*, we should see that there are two aspects of our being involved in the good workings of God. We may participate in the workings of God's good creation and also in the working of his acts of reconciliation. Correspondingly, in the two distinct spheres there will be distinct, but not unrelated, participations in the working of the one God.

To speak more concretely. To explore the natural universe or the nature of our humanity is not the same thing as knowing God in his self-revelation. Exploring the creation is to get to know the creative *works* of God. God is not identical with anything in creation except Jesus Christ and, as we know, Jesus Christ is not a creature made by God, not even a supreme one. Jesus is the Son of God incarnate who assumed our humanity for our sakes without ceasing to be the uncreated Son of God. Jesus alone is Immanuel, God with us. Jesus is the self-giving and self-revelation of God. God in person. One who comes to know the works of God has only come to know the works of God, not God himself (Jesus Christ) no more, but no less!

Our God is entirely content for us to explore our creaturely existence and to enjoy doing so. This is no threat, in and of itself, to God. He does not begrudge us enjoying our creaturely existence. It is a sign of his promise, of more to come! However, this exploration should then lead us on to discern its purpose, its fulfillment, its origin and source, its wholeness, its destiny, its Guide and Companion. Christians, in fact, ought to be the ones who enjoy creation, for what it actually is, more than any others, because in knowing the Word in, through and to whom it was made, they ought to be able to recognize in the foggiest of places the outlines of its being shaped for a further fulfillment, one not intrinsic to it! Christians, knowing the source and norm of human life in Jesus Christ should be able to make significant contributions to outlining the contours of the creaturely aspects of our human existence.

However, the most distinctive, unique and important role that Christians have to play does not lay in this arena. Christians are those who know Him in whom they have believed. They know Jesus Christ and where others can go to meet with and be in the presence of God. Christians have the Good News about the reconciling and revealing work of God. Christians have been given a gift of knowing the purpose and essence, the heart of human life which is the enjoyment of and participation in a gracious relationship as a beloved child of God on the way to a fulfillment that exceeds all human imagination. Christians alone consciously and purposefully can play the part of midwife in God's work of bringing many sons and daughter's to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Christians can, by their words and actions, reflect the saving purposes of God established in the Word from the foundations of the world, before creation ever came about! ("...he chose us in him before the foundations of the world...He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ..." Eph. 1). This is the best and most glorious thing which Christians have to offer. And all Christians can be involved in offering it. It involves our merely pointing to where persons can meet, be in the presence of Jesus Christ: in worship, in the fellowship and service of Christians acting and speaking in His name, in the Scriptures, and in prayer.

All Christians are called to be witnesses to the Word revealing and reconciling us to God, to Jesus Christ, to God himself, that others may know God as He is, know God personally, be in His presence and enjoy fellowship with him in worship. There is no escaping this tremendous privilege.

The relationship of this task and privilege to one's work may differ from one person to another. If one spends most of one's "employed time" exploring the created workings of God this too is witness, albeit an indirect one. It too may glorify God in a secondarily glorious (which is no mean thing!) way. In as much as this leads persons to enjoy God all the more, because of an appreciation of his creation, there is no conflict between the two tasks. However, if there are Christians hoping to escape the responsibility (and the joy and suffering) of making a primary witness to God in Jesus Christ, this is a serious error and will only jeopardize that person's peace and joy in their relationship to God and others.

Our involvement in the creaturely aspects of life exist for the sake of their fulfillment, and not *vice versa*. The direction is of crucial importance here. The goodness of the creaturely consists in its appropriateness

for God's working of reconciling and redeeming us. Our humanity will not be trashed, but it has been put to death so that it may be completed in Christ and made fit for eternal life in the presence of the Holy Triune God. The creaturely aspects of our life will eventually fall away or be taken up and transformed so that the gloriousness of our humanity may be made to dwell with God eternally. The creaturely sphere in which we now live is the *theatrum gloriae Dei*. It is the theater where the glory of God is now displayed. This is creation's meaning, its fulfillment. But it is not an ultimate one nor a permanent one. Our salvation is in our obedience to God himself, not to His created works. It is in knowing him, in Christ, not in contemplation of the footprints, the past evidences of his actions in time and space. Our salvation consists in our rejoicing in the coming of the kingdom, and in our transformation into Christ's likeness, and life in the presence of God, and not in our settling for an improved model of our creaturely existence and merely enjoying the works of God, but not God himself. Our salvation is reflected in the fact that God gave himself, in person, for our sake so that we might know eternal communion of being in His personal presence and giving and receiving from God through Christ in the Spirit. Our salvation consists in our wanting to depart and be with Christ, to go where he is, to be united with him in love. Our salvation is knowing Him as we are known, in seeing Him face to face and finding life overflowing.

The good creation then is a relative good, a good relative to the fulfillment of what God has in store for us. We may enjoy the created goodness in any way that acknowledges its relative goodness as a sign of promise for a much greater fulfillment.

A word about our participation in culture and our humanity.

There are some ways in which no human being can avoid participating in the created aspects of life. We all have to eat, breathe, inhabit bodies. Our creaturely existence requires, even if minimally, our being related to some human beings. Most of us also do something with our hands and feet and with non-human materials about us. Most persons experience some involvement in language (speaking and listening, mostly) and something of the aesthetic (in clothing, ritual, story and history) and even some bits of technology, and finally, in child begetting and rearing. However this participation cannot be confused with our essential humanity. An infant in a coma is fully human. Participation in culture involves the **expression** of our humanity and its spiritual condition. Such an infant cannot hardly express its humanity at all. Yet it exists by virtue of its actually being in relationship, first with God and secondly with others (mostly relating to it). The value of its life will be upheld by God's purposes being accomplished for it no matter what its earthly condition. It will one day enjoy full fellowship with God and with others. Its meaning and purpose in its earthly existence can be experienced and at least partially known if others will love it. In others' attempts to love it they will have to be transformed spiritually. To refuse to love it is to refuse one's own spiritual maturity and to deny the infant its earthly purpose. It is to bear false witness to God and to attempt to render this life meaningless. We have our meaning in life only for others. This is true of the Triune relations, and true for Jesus. If loved, this infant will get to rejoice in its contributing to the sanctifying purposes of God in another person's life. And of course this is no different qualitatively for what constitutes the ultimate value of everyone's human life. We exist on the stage of the theater of God's glory for the sake of the sanctification of others.

It is true that our interactions must be mediated through such a cultural medium. We have no way to express our humanity except in a cultural way. But this does not make the cultural means for interaction identical with our humanity. Our humanity is our being in relationship which is a dynamic gift given and sustained by God. It is constituted by his purposes for our eternal fellowship. It is not a possession or a potential, but an actual gift given by the decision and action of God through the Word. This cannot be taken away from any individual, even by premature death.

However, there is a narrower definition of involvement in culture which often plays a part for those involved in higher education. Education as we know it in the West certainly is a part of participating in the created aspects of life. However it is often glorified far beyond what it actually offers, especially by those involved in it. This is especially true among those who identify our humanity with perfecting our more refined human abilities, especially those that seem to differentiate us from the animals. However these abilities and potentials and human faculties do not constitute our humanity, as noted above. These ways of being different from the animals have little to do with our essential humanity. Along with the gift of our humanity, our being in living relationship with God and with others, we also happen to be given potentials, means, for expressing that humanity and its spiritual condition. The truth of our humanity may or may not be expressed and it may or may not be expressed well. It may be expressed in a great variety of ways or in a few ways. But the means for expression is not our humanity and the perfection of our ability to express it in certain ways is not equivalent to the sanctification of our humanity. It also provides a medium by which we can fellowship and communicate with other human beings even about our humanity and its spiritual condition. These abilities are a relatively good thing. They can be used well and can be perfected. But they are not our humanity. They are avenues for its expression and communication, no more and no less.

This becomes more obvious when we consider how our spiritual condition is independent of our abilities to express it. Participation in the aspect of culture we call higher education, is no more spiritual in and of itself than any other aspect of human creaturely existence. The true "spirituality" of these human activities is manifest in how they are used. They will be an expression of true spirituality if they are used for good as God has created and so defines good, that is, if they accomplish the love of God and neighbor. None of these refined potentials in and of themselves are intrinsically good so that their development is necessarily a movement towards our sanctified communion with God or so that they cannot be grossly perverted and misused. In fact the more refined potentials in general have the potential for far greater evil than do ordinary levels of human self-expression (e.g. designing atomic weapons compared to carpentry). Human potentials, the means for expressing our humanity, are ambiguous. Their spiritual quality undetermined. We can (mis)use them to express inhumanity. Of course this is as true of the unrefined human abilities as well. Perfected or unperfected, many or few, sophisticated or unsophisticated, our potentials and abilities, even those which are unique to persons, are not our humanity.⁶ Our humanity is the shape of our persons, it is where our spiritual condition is registered. It is the point where the Holy Spirit works with us and our spirits respond. It is who we are in our relations, first with God and then with others, not our abilities to express this reality.

One of the implications of this is that the development of our human creaturely potentials is not an obligation of our humanity. The essential value of our humanity is not dependent upon developing our ability to be professionals, or even to read or write, much less know philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, earn lots of money, wield earthly power, manage technology or mass media, play music, appreciate works of art, or use our leisure time well. The obligations of our humanity are moral (the quality of our interpersonal relations) and spiritual (the quality of our relationship with God by the Spirit).

⁶ In a consideration of Jesus, we can see that these things did not constitute his humanity either. He had no reputation for being a carpenter. He was not cultured in most ways we regard cultured. He did not even participate in much of his own culture. His art was his communication. But the point of his communication was Who he was not that he could communicate well. And what he wanted us to know essentially was the reality of our relationship with God established in and through the history of his relationship with his heavenly Father, before, during, and after his earthly appearance. In short, his essential concern was love for God and love for others through his love for us and our love for him. This constituted his humanity and ours.

They stand before any and every human being whether educated or "cultured" or not. Culture describes the various means that persons use to express their humanity. Education is the development of various means for expressing our humanity. The character of our humanity is not changed in the process of developing or even perfecting the means for expressing our humanity. The spiritual condition of our humanity will, however, be manifested in the utilization of these means.

Another consequence of this understanding of our humanity is that the essence and condition of our humanity is most directly and primarily manifest in our worship and secondarily and indirectly in the moral character of our relations with those about us. It is first about loving God and similarly to that, our loving of the neighbor. Nothing more nothing less. Jesus was a carpenter, Paul was a tentmaker, Peter was a fisherman, but this was not the essence of nor exercise of their essential humanity. Rather, it was their worship and obedience to God and love of neighbor that marked their life as a participation in their humanity⁷

Worship requires no special education for its expression. Worship may incorporate various means of expressing our relationship to God but it does not require it. If we express ourselves with certain means in our culture there is a way in which perhaps we are "required" to use these means to also worship. Otherwise we will be tempted to misunderstand and misuse these means for expressing our humanity to others on the horizontal plane. But these ways will only be an indirect witness to our human condition. Our essential humanity is our being in relationships with God by virtue of what he has done and is doing. Worship is not essentially what we do, but saying Amen to who God is in Christ. It is enjoying God's expression of himself in Jesus Christ.

Our humanity is the gift of God given to us in the fact that we come to exist by virtue of our relationship with God and with others and are given the gift of participating in those relationships in loving ways that mirror God's own loving and redeeming of creation. Our development as persons involves our moral and spiritual growth towards the fulfillment of our being in life-giving and therefore loving relationships with God and neighbors. This may or may not include the development of certain other human potentials. If they are included they will be taken up ultimately for the way they can be used by God to assist us in moving towards our moral and spiritual development or for their enabling us to express in indirect ways the moral and spiritual development we have entered into by God's grace.

Our involvement in the created aspects of our lives, especially the more refined ones, are warranted not by moral or spiritual obligation but by God's good permission! We may do so because He allows it, permits it, gives us the freedom to pursue it. There is no moral or spiritual obligation to realize or enter

⁷ Of course there are questions and complications here. If we have certain gifts and abilities or powers undoubtedly there are moral obligations for their use. "If you have the world's goods.." (I Jn. 3:17). Also this would of course include the deliberate withholding of certain possibilities one has from certain other persons. What I am primarily considering is intertwining of our essential humanity with the development of certain refined human and creaturely potentials so that the development and exercise of them achieves the status of moral obligation because without them persons are then prevented from being fully human. The implications of this line of reasoning for how we regard the mentally or physically impaired should be obvious. We must reject it, and as Christians we have every grounds for doing so. Speaking eternally, it is difficult to say if there will be development of art appreciation or musical ability. Certainly anything accomplished here in our creaturely sphere will be taken up and transformed and used to glorify God. That is, they will be appreciated as means to loving ends. The discontinuity will be so great that it would be speculative to say that indeed there will be such equivalents. Yet there can be no absolutely ruling this out. However, any such "cultural" activity, it seems to me, will not have the character of obligation or of true spirituality even in heaven. It would be much more like playing games than anything else.

into the utilization of the myriad ways we may express our humanity. They are merely additional ways for us to enjoy and express and participate in the humanity which we already have as a gift from God.

Being Embodied Signs/Witnesses

What needs to be recognized is that our lives are signs of the two gracious workings of God which must be distinguished, but should not be separated. We are never the ultimate reality, the source of life, identical with the workings of God. We remain witnesses, pointers to the reality to which we have access in Jesus Christ, present, active and known among us by the Spirit. Involvement in the explorations of the creaturely aspects of our being constitute *indirect* pointers to God Himself because the focus is on the results of the works of God in creation. Some aspects of created reality are more or less indirect witnesses than others. A consideration of the nature of the worship of human persons is less indirect than perhaps one focused on the life of microbes in sewage treatment. Someone's attempt to create a Sunday school curriculum may be more direct than attempting to develop a better deodorant. But most of our visible lives, even those of ministers, are involved in these indirect witnesses. Ministers' activities should by and large be the least indirect, but there is no guarantee. Preparing a sermon and the use of illustrations is a human task, but no less usable by the Spirit as a witness to Jesus Christ. We are most direct when we deliberately attempt to direct people into living communication with God in Jesus Christ: when we read and explain the scriptures to persons, when we name the Name of Christ, when we pray for and with persons, when we worship with others, when we care for the souls of or neighbors by serving in (usually) simple ways which demonstrate the love of Christ, when we say No to behavior or priorities which betray the truth of God in Christ, when we act on the basis of God's ultimate purposes for us to live eternally in his Triune fellowship.⁸

This is why we sense there is a difference in calling between the minister or missionary and the insurance agent. There is a difference in focus, one being a more direct witness the other less direct. But both can be unfaithful or faithful to their calling. But these callings will not essentially be evaluated by how direct or indirect their witness is but to whether in the final analysis it was used to point persons to the grace of God either in the created sphere of God's working or in the sphere of his revealing reconciling working.

This is also why there can be no escaping the joyful responsibility of bearing witness to Jesus Christ as the Spirit leads no matter what vocation one has. Since there is a differentiation and a connection we will always hope to name the name of Christ, we will always take up a vocation as an act of obedience to Christ, and we need never be ashamed of a vocation which "only" indirectly bears witness to God in Christ.

The Non-Christian

⁸ I am not interested in developing some criteria by which exactly to place every human activity on the direct-indirect witness continuum but rather to point out the continuum itself and the differentiation between more and less direct witnesses. Being a witness itself connotes some indirectness. A witness points to something other than itself. Some human activities and vocations point persons more or less directly to Jesus Christ. We could further explore this with some benefit. But it will suffice to note that directness and indirectness are not always easy to predict. Some talk about Jesus or even the Bible can be quite indirect or even reach the point of being unfaithful to the reality of who God in Christ is. Some things appearing quite indirect may actually be the most direct way to lead persons into the presence of God, e.g. prayer, or giving a cup of water. Despite these complexities, in general the more and less direct witness to Christ are usually apparent. But more than this, it will always be apparent to the believing person that God is never identical to creation or any aspect of it, but only with Jesus Christ. And yet, this God may be direct known, that is be present to us, Spirit to spirit.

What can we say of the non-Christian? This person is at least someone who has not yet acknowledged Jesus Christ, as made known in the Scriptures and worshiped in the Church throughout the ages, and as present by the Spirit, authenticating himself to us. They are persons who have not yet received or accepted a human witness to surrender themselves to the gracious living present reality of the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as their Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. They may also be someone who has or is resisting and rebelling against the very witness to their spirit by the Holy Spirit of God.

Nevertheless, the unbelieving person is fully human, maintained in their humanity against the invited or uninvited encroachment of sin and evil, the power of death and the destruction of their humanity. As such they live in the created sphere of life and experience the benefits of it as such. ("The rain falls on the just and the unjust...") The data of the created reality, including their own creaturely reality, is there for their exploration just as it is for the Christian. Their native abilities and human potentials may be greater than or less than that of others, including Christians. A given Christian will have no particular advantage over a given unbelieving person in their pursuit of knowing the truth about the creaturely phenomena contributing to a descriptive exploration of what lies before them. In this sense there is no particularly Christian way to boil an egg or solve an equation. It is a matter of human ability and acquired skill.⁹ Thus in the realm of a descriptive understanding of some aspect of created reality, including human actions and products, Christians would be wise to listen and be ready to learn. As fellow human beings we can each learn from the other many things. There will be mutual benefits.

There is another reason why unbelieving persons can know the "truth" (small "t") regarding descriptive aspects of created reality. This is because even in a fallen world, creation, as the handiwork of God, still has the marks of belonging to God. If sin and evil completely obscured this, the physical universe would be characterized by total chaos, complete incomprehensibility, having no regular describable features whatsoever. If individuals were completely given over to the deceit of evil they would engage in such meaningless chaotic behavior that they would end their lives accidentally or otherwise in a matter of moments either by violating their physical existence or their relationship to their environment through proud disregard of it or by engaging in mortal self-destructive behavior.

God graciously gives us time and space to come to acknowledge his Lordship over our lives. The created reality, open to our observation, has a character and objectivity, providentially maintained by God, which has the power to order and even correct our understanding of it. If so ordered by the nature of the reality itself, it will point ever so slightly and indirectly, but nevertheless positively, to the goodness of the working of God as our Creator. Investigation of the structure of DNA or the activity of sub-atomic particles should uncover certain aspects of that reality which are congruent with and contingent upon (but not equivalent to) the faithfulness of the God of Jesus Christ.

However, such explorations, in and of themselves, can never be conclusive or unambiguous. Such investigations will at most pose a kind of question, suggest an open door, indicate a gap, which might possibly be filled by the God of Jesus Christ, but not necessarily so. A far more vague, deistic type of god, or even an impersonal power might do just as well. Logical inference from effects to a cause can never be equivalent to the personal revelation of God himself in Jesus Christ. The product of a working of God cannot nearly contain/bear witness to the full reality present in a personal self-revelation and yet certainly there will be a congruence. Indirect marks of the goodness of God are present and open to our discernment within the creaturely realm but such marks can never be a substitute for a human witness to the self-revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. The unbelieving person will benefit most if he/she

⁹ As Lewis has suggested, being a Christian may indeed make one a better scientist than one would have been were he/she not a Christian. But this comparison is not necessarily valid between persons.

has access to both witnesses. Any coming to faith will be more a believing in the created realm *because* of a faith in Jesus Christ, rather than *visé versa*.

Even if one were persuaded of a God who made a good creation, this conclusion cannot require the inference of a reconciling or redeeming God having the loving and purposive character of Jesus Christ. Acts of grace cannot be logically inferred at all. God's grace is not predictable nor grounded in some characteristic in those to whom He is gracious. If it were, his actions would not be gracious but necessary and conditional. This is another way of affirming both the differentiation between God and his good creation and the connection. It points up the fact of our common humanity, upheld by God's providential grace, with all others, and our need for and responsibility to be faithful both to the witness of God's works in creation and, distinct from it, to the work of his self-revelation in his reconciling and redeeming self-giving in the person of Jesus Christ. The Christian will inevitably be called to bear witness in both spheres, but primarily to the grace of God in Christ.

It should be clear that, given this situation, no amount of investigation into our creaturely existence will inevitably lead to someone's coming into faith. One may learn of, appreciate, and even enjoy the external gifts of God but refuse to acknowledge, worship and serve God, the Giver, himself. In fact, it should be noted that the Enlightenment rise of Deism was a deliberate attempt to escape Christianity and any particular notion or revelation of God except an indirect one in creation. Mere theism today is more likely, even if not necessarily, an escape from Christian truth than it is a move towards worship of the One true God. It should also be noted that the Protestant liberal notions of a god in general and the equation of the truth of God with the truth of western civilization or the findings of science had within them the very seeds of secularization which we now see in full bloom. Once knowing God and knowing God's creation are identified, once love for neighbor and love for God are equated, once the findings in the created sphere gain equivalent status over the truth embodied in Jesus Christ, once we think we are more certain of earthly things and that earthly things are more real and accessible to us than God, then there's no reason to hold on to Jesus Christ, the Christian God, or even God at all.

The failure of liberal Protestantism, which dominated higher education in America, was its letting go of Jesus Christ for a generic approach to God. Religiosity, theism, is no bulwark against secularization in the modern world. It was the means by which the West was secularized. Some persons actually use the vocation of exploration and appreciation of the natural as a defense against worshipping God, perhaps arguing that no one "needs" anything more than the goodness of nature. Or some may idolize the natural or some aspect of it in order to fashion an alternative God. Some will insist on being satisfied with vague references to "the transcendent" suggested by the natural in order to avoid dealing with the particular concrete reality of a personal God. In the modern world theism and talk merely of a Creator is no defense against secularism, it is the favorite escape route of the modern person from the Christian God. We will serve no one faithfully if we speak of the Creator without direct reference to Jesus Christ. Our apologetics will get us nowhere if our line of approach is strictly through theism towards Christianity. The traffic is for the most part flowing the other way.¹⁰

¹⁰ I certainly do not want to deny exceptions. But culturally speaking what I am suggesting seems patently obvious. Otherwise, why is it that after hours of talking about "God" at the first mention of Jesus Christ the conversation grinds to a halt; we are accused of being self-righteous, exclusivistic, intolerant, and narrow-minded? Everyone can believe in the "mush-god". Those who reject the particularity of Jesus Christ do so because it is very inconvenient to deal with a God who "moves the furniture around when you're not looking." the only God there is is the particular God revealed in Jesus Christ with his particular character and particular eternal plan. And that plan is to unite all things in Christ! (Eph. 1:9).

God intends this goodness of his creation to get us to search for God himself (Acts 17:27), but those resisting the Spirit of God can use it otherwise, to their detriment. Discerning something of God in the natural is an inconclusive affair, even though it indirectly does point to its Creator and Redeemer. We should not grant it a status above that which God intends.

Creation in the Light of Revelation

Finally, it should be clear that creation can be appreciated best for what it is in the light of God's revelation and reconciliation. Knowing the name, face, and character of God personally present in Jesus Christ enables the believing person to better discern the character of the created sphere, because the deeper truth in Christ provides a norm, an origin and a destiny by which to fully interpret and understand not only the shape but the essential meaning of the creation. Knowing Christ enables the Christian to sort through alternative interpretations by means of a criterion. The unbelieving person will have to choose between what seem almost equally plausible interpretations or merely conflicting, competing ones. In any event the essential character of creaturely reality, its belonging, by way of origin and destiny, to the gracious God, will not be transparent to them.

For the Christian, the deeper truth in Christ sheds light on creation. The Christian believes in a secondary sort of way in creation and sees its value and meaning because of his/her faith in Jesus Christ. This primary faith leads to a greater appreciation for the creaturely aspects of it. Its glory is a reflected glory. To the unbelieving person this glory remains obscure. The Christian, if looking at creation as created by, through, and to Jesus Christ has a basis upon which to sort it out which comes from beyond the data.

The order of which ultimately sheds light on which, is crucial for understanding the relationship of created things and God's own self-revelation and action in Jesus Christ. Creation is to be finally interpreted in terms of Christ and not Christ in terms of what we discern, *a priori*, in creation. Christ is the "origin"-al, everything else reflects him and his mind or purposes. The reflections can never outshine the light itself. The copies are interpreted in terms of the original and not *vice versa*.¹¹ Even a generic view of God as Creator understood apart from the particulars of Jesus Christ will not do. It is Christ himself and our understanding of who He is as the Revealing, Reconciling and Creating Word that demands a unidirectional comparison to interpret the essential meaning even of created realities, especially our humanity in the light of its Creator and Redeemer.

The relationship of Christian and non-Christian in the realm of the exploration of the creaturely.

What can we expect then from the investigations of Christians and non-Christians in the creaturely sphere? There will be areas of agreement but also disagreement. In a kind of helical fashion their respective findings will approach and then diverge, except without such a regular pattern. The areas of agreement will arise unpredictably. The areas of disagreement also. Both will be able to learn from each other, but full accord will not be forthcoming. The Christian will be ill advised to accept any interpretation of the creaturely without question. There will always be some adjustment, some tension at some point, a polemic, in considering an approach not informed by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹¹ There are significant issues for our evangelism and apologetics here that demonstrate why we experience the limitations we do in certain approaches to explaining our faith to others, e.g. persons happy to talk about "god", the transcendent, life meaning, even heaven or salvation, but when Jesus is mentioned the conversation rapidly breaks down. It also explains why persons aren't and can't be argued into the kingdom on the basis of solving intellectual or even existential issues surrounding Christ. No amount of self-understanding in itself leads necessarily to understanding and trusting in God.

From a Christian's perspective the discoveries of others will not uncover the essential nature, the origin and destiny, meanings or moral nature of creaturely things, but rather the phenomena, the descriptive fruits of observation, the variety of potentials (good and evil) present at a given time. Whatever other inputs others provide, in terms of critiques, interpretations, even worldviews, etc., can certainly be suggestive, heuristic, and so useful for the Christian in articulating and refining his/her own understanding of the deeper truths of created things. But such suggestions will never take the role of critiquing the light of Jesus Christ, of providing a substitute norm, origin, destiny or source of meaning for creation.

The Christian may be of assistance to the non-believing person by sharing observations, offering descriptions of certain phenomena or potentials. They may also articulate something of the norm by which to interpret the data. This may assist others in making observations by their using (in ways not anticipated by the Christian) hints to guide them as to what possibly to look for. Even when there is agreement at a descriptive level, there may be significant disagreement between them at the interpretive level, especially at the level of an ultimate meaning.

We should expect that the Christian interpretation will do justice to the data and perhaps a bit more, in that, at minimum, it can also take into account Jesus Christ as well as everything else. That is, the Christian perspective should always prove to be the most comprehensive one. In this way the truth of Christianity is demonstrated not by the brightness of its own light but by the light Christ sheds on everything else.

We have now laid out the basic structure of a theology of creation set in relationship to God's actions of reconciliation and fulfillment so as to see both the connection and distinction among these three actions. We attempted to show both the limits and the potential of any investigation of creation either in an academic or professional context and either by Christian or non-Christian. Such a theology of creation required a distinction between knowledge of God by self revelation (which is the ground for Christian faith) and by means of the works of God (which primarily grounds a knowledge of creation which can then be subsequently integrated into a faith established on distinctive grounds. This was shown to have special implications for our understanding of the the nature of humanity But it also called for a proper ordered relations between the two, so that knowledge gained from creation by Christian or not could be brought fruitfully within the sphere of faith to contribute to a more comprehensive grasp and utilization of the knowledge of creation that comports with Christian faith, but also actually may give glory to the Creator whose purposes, although not intrinsic to creation, can nevertheless be signaled in it as a human witness to the promise of its fulfillment through Jesus Christ.

Summary

In summary then, the proper understanding of creation means that:

A. Implications for the distinct realities of God and his creation with only one identical point in common: Jesus Christ.

- 1) There is the necessity of dual responsibility of the Christian to bear faithful witness in both the creaturely and the redemptive spheres of life.
- 2) There can be no substitution or confusion of one witness for the other. Each has its own place, the creaturely ultimately dependent upon the revelational and redemptive. The knowledge of God in Christ, God's self giving and self-revelation offers a knowledge which only God himself by the Spirit can provide. We can explore the creation and even the phenomena of our creaturely being without or prior to a saving knowledge of God in Christ. This is evidence of the derivative goodness of creation.
- 3) There can be no avoidance of responsibility for the spiritual or redemptive witness directly to Jesus Christ and the hope to lead them into the presence of the living Lord and inter-act with him directly.

B. Implications for Integration in the Creaturely realm.

4) Integration of any cultural field does not mean coming to the place where understanding of the creation or human culture can be the equivalent to understanding the Word of God. Integration will mean an asymmetrical correlation of the creaturely with the revelational, the primacy given to the latter. There will always be a normative direction of understanding the creation in terms of Christ and not vice versa. The direction of interpretation is essentially unidirectional, from God in Christ to the creaturely phenomena. For integration to be a Christian enterprise it will always have to refer concretely to Jesus Christ especially in terms of its understanding of and exploration of creation. This will manifest the comprehensive power, the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation.

5) Partial understanding can be pursued to good effect independent of its source, norm and destiny in Christ. Christians may certainly learn and use information gained from non-Christian in the creaturely realm. Unbelieving persons can benefit both from Christian observational work and from their ultimate Christian interpretational scheme. The contributions of each at the descriptive level will have to be evaluated on a case by case basis. Being a Christian will be no substitute for skill and discipline. We can also say that Christians do not always have to present the ultimate grounds and conclusions regarding the creaturely reality. They can let their observations stand as a kind of parable, helpful in its own way and yet provocative, leaving an open door to the more ultimate concerns known only in Jesus Christ. The indirect Christian witness to God through the creaturely will have the character of a "God in the gap" approach.

6) However, Christians can never accept uncritically a normative interpretation of creaturely phenomena. The meaning and destiny of created reality is not intrinsic to it but is constituted by its actual relationship with God in Jesus Christ. A Christian will have a dia-polemic relation with all other interpretations. Thus the Christian position will always call into question any other attempt at a comprehensive interpretation of created reality. In doing so it will only be calling for human science to remain true to what is actually observed and not go beyond these bounds. It is only calling for humility. But this will often be rejected and misunderstood. Christians have no need to leave the sciences or humanities, but they should

expect to be faced with rejection on the basis of their call to others to make only those pronouncements strictly warranted by their researches. This may not be tolerated.

7) Pursuing the fulfillment of our abilities to express our human creaturely potential on the horizontal plane is a good thing, even if not ultimate. It is not morally or spiritually obligatory. For some persons the Spirit may use it to draw them towards Christ and prepare them for the revelational and redemptive witness. Others will use such knowledge and enjoyment of creation as the very means to escape God. To pursue creaturely fulfillment apart from a recognition of our true purpose and destiny is a dangerous thing even if permissible. It leaves one open to absolutizing some aspect of creaturely existence or to compartmentalize and relativize Christ's Lordship. Such well-developed human potentials will have no ultimate place in the kingdom unless offered to Jesus Christ for his sanctifying purposes and service in his kingdom. The pursuit of expressing our humanity in a variety of ways and at greater and greater levels of sophistication can never be substituted for the disciplines of spiritual formation for us or for the unbelieving person. They serve both as "roads into and out of Jerusalem" (C.S. Lewis). Interaction with the creaturely cannot be confused with a personal worshiping relationship with God in Christ, even though such activities can and must be offered up to God as our response to his grace.

C. Why people are not Christians

8) Two final observations. The only reason, ultimately, people are not Christians is because they resist the Spirit of God, not because they misconstrue being human, don't have enough evidence or understanding of themselves or some other aspect of our creaturely existence. One does not have to be educated in any special way to become a Christian or to be a faithful one. Certainly if one is educated, has some specialized knowledge not common to humanity, this will be taken up and transformed (brought through death to new life) in one's salvation. But such input or lack thereof cannot ultimately be an obstacle to or the means by which one comes to trust in God through Jesus Christ. If we are educated in some special way then our witness must necessarily involve that aspect of our experience, but this can never be taken to mean that we can be superior witnesses, or more spiritual persons or are more human on this basis. It means that if we have more ability to express ourselves, then Christ requires that we use what we have for his glory. Merely being human, a gift of God's creative grace, is sufficient for any human being to come to belief. It is sufficient and necessary only for our spirit to say Yes to the testimony of the Spirit of God that Jesus is Lord (I Cor. 2: 12-14).

Certainly for us to be involved in this wonderful event, which is God's delight, means we will use what ever means we have available to us to bear witness to God. And all these means will be creaturely ones, and therefore not absolutely necessary, not unambiguous, not infallible, not beyond misunderstanding and misuse, not beyond an entirely creaturely and reductive interpretation (eg. psychologically or socially accounted for). Prayer is the most "heightened" human activity that we can be involved in which affects others the at the spiritual level at the heart of their humanity, because its effects are mediated by the very Spirit of God speaking with that other person.

Even though our pointing to Jesus is a human activity, using words which come within a certain cultural framework, the Christian will not avoid being as direct a witness as possible when there is an opportunity, naming the Name of Jesus, directing people to the Scriptures, inviting people to pray and to come to worship and to join in Christian fellowship and service. The gospel is the power of God to salvation. We use human words, but ones not taught by human culture but transformed by the Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:10).

9) Consequently, this means the Christian will not demand that the indirect witness be the Gospel itself, or mimic the Gospel itself in the hopes of presenting Christ in a more common or palatable form. Our use of the creaturely avenues available to us to express ourselves and investigate other creaturely potentials bears witness to the goodness of the creation, of the creational works of God. They are faithful to the extent that this created goodness is made apparent. We can be content with them if they only bear witness to the beginning of the story and not its fulfillment; if they contain only promise, an open door, a gap. This witness has its relative place.

But no Christian can long be satisfied with merely the indirect witness to God's creation. We must announce the good news of its fulfillment and consummation in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. And as simple and direct as it is, as unsophisticated and easily comprehensible as it is, we will not be ashamed, for the Gospel of the real presence of the crucified One alive and living among us to be our Savior, Lord and God is the power of salvation, from the least to the greatest among us.

This it seems to me are some of the implications of a Christian doctrine of creation for the task of integration.

Scriptures for the Doctrine of Creation Relevant to the Task of Integration

Christ's Work in Creation

John 1:1 all things made through him

Heb. 2:10; for whom and by whom all things exist

Col. 1:16,17; in Him, through him, for him

Heb. 1:2 a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world.

I Cor. 8:6 for us there is one God, the Father, from who are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Eph 1: 4 he chose us in him before the foundation of the world

The Purposes of God for creation eternally and specifically linked to Christ.

Rom. 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

1Cor. 8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist

1Cor. 15:28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

Heb. 1:1 In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world....upholding the universe by his word of power

Heb. 2:10; for whom and by whom all things exist

Col. 1:16,17; in Him, through him, for him

18; first born from dead...to be preeminent in all things

Col. 1:20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

3:11 so that Christ is all and in all

Eph. 2:10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Eph 1:4 he chose us in him before the foundation of the world

Eph. 1:9-12 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

Eph. 1:22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church

Eph. 3:4 eternal purpose realized in Jesus Christ

Eph. 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus

Eph. 2:10 We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which god prepared beforehand

1 Cor. 2:7 We impart a secret, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.

Matt. 13: 35 Jesus utters what has been hidden since the foundations of the world.

1Pet. 4:11 ...so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen

Rev. 5:13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Rev. 7:9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands

Sonship, union and communion with Christ in the presence of the Triune life of God as our ultimate destiny, our glorification.

Rom. 8:38 nothing separates us from the love of God

2Cor. 5:1-8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

2Cor. 8:9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Eph 1: 4 he chose us in him before the foundation of the world

Eph. 1:10: Purpose sent for in Christ, a plan for fulness of time, to unite all things in Him

Phil 1:23 my desire is to depart and be with Christ

Col. 1: 20: to reconcile all things to himself

Eph. 2:22 in the Lord you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit

Eph. 3:19: that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Eph. 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Gal. 2:20 It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me

Gal. 4: 6,7. we are no longer slaves but sons, heirs

Rom 6:5 If united with him in death like his..united with him in a resurrection like his.

Rom. 8:15: it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are children, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ.

I Cor. 4:14 to raise us up with Jesus who brings us with you into his [God's] presence

I Cor 13:12 then we shall know him as we are known

John 17: 20ff. : that they may be one as thou art in me and I in thee, they also may be in us...that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one..that they may be with me where I am to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.... the love which thou has love me may be in them and I in them.

Col. 2:12 buried with him...raised with him

13 God made alive together with him.

1:27 Christ in you the hope of glory

2:10 you have come to fulness of life in him

Eph. 2:6 made us alive with him, raised us up with him, made us sit in heavenly places with him.

Rom. 6: 5 consider selves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

I Cor. 1:30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Heb. 10: 14 for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified

Col. 1:20 f If with Christ you died...if raised with Christ

Heb. 2: 14 Since therefore the children share in the flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death.

Phil 2: 6 who though he was in the form of God...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.. and being found in human form

The image in which we were created was according to Jesus Christ who is the one true image, a true son.

Eph. 4:22 new nature created after the likeness of God in true righteousness

5:1 be imitators of God as beloved children

Rom 8:29 to be conformed to the image of the Son

Rom. 5:14 Adam a type of the one who was to come

Rom. 8:15 receive spirit of sonship

I Cor. 15:45: First Adam became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

I Cor. 4:4 Christ who is the likeness of God

Gal. 4:19: until Christ be formed in you [little children].

1 John 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God

1 John 3:2 Beloved we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Heb. 1:3 He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature

The self-giving and self-revelation of God in Christ.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

1John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

I Cor. 5: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself

Lk. 10:22 No one knows the Father except the Son and the Son except the father and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

John 6:46 not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God, he has seen the Father.

Matt. 11: 27 no one knows the the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Titus 1:13,14 our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life

1 John 5:20. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children keep yourselves from idols.

John 14:7,9 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also, henceforth you know him and have seen him. He who has seen me has seen the Father

I Cor. 13:12 then we shall know him as we are known

Heb. 8:11 all shall know him

Gal. 1:4 who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

Gal. 4:9 but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God

Eph. 5:2, gave himself up for us

Eph. 5:2 gave himself up for her

Gal. 2: 20 who loved and gave himself for me

Rom. 8:31 for us...gave him up for us all

1Tim. 2:6 who gave himself a ransom for all — this was attested at the right time.

Titus 2:14 He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Our ultimate destiny: a sharing in Christ's sonship.

Heb. 2;10 Christ...bringing many sons to glory.

Heb. 2:11: he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Eph. 1: 5; destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ

Eph. 8:18 awaiting for adoption as sons.

Rom. 8:15: it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are children, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ.

Gal. 4: 6,7. we are no longer slaves but sons, heirs

Rom. 8:19, 24 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...For in this hope we were saved".

The uniqueness of knowing God in Christ as distinct from all other knowing.

I Cor. 2:7 God has revealed a secret, which God decreed

I Cor. 2:10 ff. God revealed to us through the Spirit. The spirit searches everything even the depths of God. spirit of man knows thought of man..no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God

I Cor. 2:12,13 We impart in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those possessed by the Spirit.

I Cor. 2: 14: the unspiritual man does not receive gifts of Spirit...they are folly, not able to understand because they are spiritually discerned.

John 6-15 I am bread, resurrection, shepherd, light, way, truth, life, living water, servant, vine.

Col. 2:2 to have riches of understanding and knowledge of the mystery of Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Rom. 8:15: it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirits that we are children, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ.

Matt. 16:16: Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Heb. 1:1 In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world.

John 14:7,9 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also, henceforth you know him and have seen him. He who has seen me has seen the Father

John 12:45 He who sees me sees him who sent me

The absolute differentiation of Creator and creature, Jesus Christ and others.

Col. 1:19 fullness of God pleased to dwell

I am from above you are from below

Rom. 1: 22 Exchanged the glory of immortal god for images resembling mortal man or or birds or animals or reptiles the creature for that of the Creator

Rom. 1:25 served the creature instead of the Creator

John 13:3 Jesus knowing he had come from God and was going to God

John 10:30 I and the Father are one

John 14: 11 I am in the Father and the Father in me

John 17:23 I in them and you in me, ... so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those .. may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

I Tim. 2:5 One God, one mediator...Jesus Christ.

The freedom to investigate the creaturely realm.

I Cor. 6 and 10 All things lawful not all things helpful

Titus 1:15 To the pure all things are pure

II Ptr. 1:5 Make every effort to nourish your faith with virtue, knowledge, ...

Phil. 4: 8. Whatsoever things are true, honorable, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, worthy of praise, think on these things.

2Cor. 10:5 and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.