

EDITED BY GAYLE D. BEEBE

LEADERSHIP

and the

LIBERAL

ARTS

*An Education to
Last a Lifetime*



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1

THE LIBERAL ARTS AND SCRIPTURE

TREMPER LONGMAN III

OUR SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE begins in the first two chapters with Tremper Longman and Telford Work, who explore how Scripture and theology ground the liberal arts in divine revelation. In this chapter Longman starts with a clear statement: “The study of Scripture stands at the heart of the Christian liberal arts and differentiates it from its secular counterpart.” He demonstrates that biblical Wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, invites readers to see all truth as God’s truth and to pursue understanding with humility. For Longman, the Bible provides not only the foundation for faith but also the lens for viewing every discipline. In this vein, he presents his thinking in three movements: revelation, worldview, and interpretation.

Drawing on Psalm 8 and Romans 1, Longman explains that God reveals himself in two books: the book of nature and the book of Scripture. Nature displays God’s glory while Scripture interprets that glory and leads us to salvation. As the Belgic Confession puts it, we know God “by two means”: the creation and “His holy and divine Word,” making science an ally of faith, not an enemy. Pope John Paul II’s observation that “science can purify religion, and religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes,” captures the harmony Longman seeks to restore.

Longman turns to Genesis 1–3 to show how Scripture shapes our fundamental worldview. These opening chapters represent God as both transcendent and immanent: Creator and sustainer. Humanity, made in God’s image, reflects his glory and exercises responsible dominion over creation. The text reveals his men and women as equal partners—“allies,” Longman suggests—called to care for the world.

Finally, a crucial section of Longman’s chapter addresses how to read Scripture within a liberal arts context. He argues that Christian colleges and



universities differ from secular institutions not simply by requiring Bible courses but by teaching students to interpret Scripture as the living Word of God rather than merely a historical artifact. This approach allows Scripture and the liberal arts to exist in mutual illumination. Science, history, and literature expand our understanding of the world Scripture describes, while Scripture gives moral and theological meaning to their discoveries. "The Bible forms our character and directs us toward God," he concludes. "For this reason, the study of Scripture, informed by all other disciplines, stands at the heart of a Christian liberal arts education."

The study of Scripture stands at the heart of the Christian liberal arts tradition and differentiates it from its secular counterpart. The Bible provides the foundation of all further study at a Christian college. Many people may consider this claim brash, hyperbolic, and a little self-serving coming from someone who taught Old Testament for more than two decades at Westmont College. But a moment's reflection on Scripture and the distinctive nature of a Christian education supports this claim and, I believe, makes it obvious.

GOD'S REVELATION

The Christian liberal arts look at the world through the prism of God's revelation, distinguishing it from secular study. Indeed, God reveals himself to his human creatures in many different ways that a liberal arts curriculum can examine. For example, according to the psalmist and to Paul, God declares himself through his creation (nature), the object of study in the sciences:

You have set your glory
in the heavens.
Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies
to silence the foe and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? (Psalm 8:1-4)

What humans know about God becomes plain to them because God has made it evident. Since the creation of the world, God clearly displays his invisible qualities—eternal power and divine nature—through what he has created, leaving people without excuse for their unbelief (Romans 1:19-20).

Indeed, theologians have spoken of God's two books of revelation: Scripture and nature. When interpreted correctly, they won't conflict. Consider this statement from the Belgic Confession, article 2:

We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

The idea that God speaks to us in nature as well as Scripture drives the following statement from Pope John Paul II: "Science can purify our religion; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes."¹ Science is the study of nature, and Christian religion finds its expression in Scripture. The first part of John Paul's statement implies that since God reveals himself in nature, science can refine our understanding of Scripture. But the Bible remains God's clearest revelation; apart from it, science is idolatrous.

A second mode of divine revelation occurs through other people and our own intuitions, reasoning, and conscience. We deduce this observation from our knowledge that God created us in his image. The creation story proclaims that humans possess the status of divine image bearers (Genesis 1:26-28), created from the dust of the ground and the breath of God (Genesis 2:7). The latter, obviously a figurative depiction of creating the first human, expresses the understanding that people, a part of the creation (dust), also have a special relationship with God (divine breath).² An analogy with royal statues in the ancient Near East helps explain the description of humans as the "image" and

¹Quoted in Connor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong* (Eerdmans, 2010), 284.

²For more on the genre of Genesis 1-11, see Tremper Longman III, *Confronting Old Testament Controversies: Pressing Questions About Evolution, Sexuality, History, and Violence* (Zondervan, 2019), 26-48.

“likeness” of God. Just as a king set up statues of himself in his kingdom to represent his power and authority, so God grants humans the status of representing him in the world. Accordingly, people reflect the glory of God like the moon reflects the light of the sun.

Humanity, though now fallen and sinful, can still reveal something of who God is. Men and women both (see Genesis 1:27) reflect God’s glory. For this reason, the Old Testament metaphors of God in relationship to his people often include anthropomorphic descriptions: king, father, mother, shepherd, warrior, a woman teacher.

God also reveals himself outside Scripture in other ways, such as tradition, experience, and dreams, with Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God (see below). But none of them match the direct, clear information in Scripture, the Word of God the church has affirmed as the canon—the standard of faith and practice—for many centuries. God will never speak in contradiction to his revelation in Scripture. It becomes a prism through which we understand God, ourselves, and our world.

As we recognize the central role God’s revelation in Scripture plays in the Christian liberal arts curriculum, we must be careful to remember that it fails to directly answer all the questions (see below for the sufficiency of Scripture). Far from it. But it shapes our way of looking at the world (worldview) and provides a lens through which we understand and critically interact with all other knowledge and ways of knowing.

One fundamental insight from Scripture shapes all our thinking by reminding us we’re creatures, not the center of the cosmos. That place belongs to our divine Creator, the triune God. The wisdom tradition of the Old Testament asserts that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom or knowledge (Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Rather than making us flee from God, this fear acknowledges our place in relationship to God.³ We need to know who God is to understand who we are and how we relate to the world around us.

WHO IS GOD, WHO ARE WE, AND WHAT ABOUT GOD’S WORLD? (GENESIS 1–3)

Consider how Genesis 1–3, the opening chapters of the Bible, shapes our self-perception beyond the revelation that God created us. My comments derive

³On fear of the Lord, see Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Baker, 2017).

from the interpretive approach described below. What we learn from these chapters we can know only through Scripture, and what we learn helps shape the worldview of students pursuing a liberal arts education.

From the creation story, we discover that God created the world and everything in it and that God himself exists apart from the creation. Thus we read that God is other and that he stays involved with his creation. He is both transcendent and immanent. That makes biblical religion theistic, not deistic or pantheistic.

Genesis 1–2 tells us that God is a person, not a force. He speaks creation into being and communicates with his human creatures. Since he created both men and women in his image (Genesis 1:27), we know that while God is a person, he is neither male nor female. Both men and women reflect who he is. In addition, biblical religion reveals only one God (monotheism), who is neither male nor female nor sexual. These revolutionary ideas contradict the original historical context of Genesis, as the neighboring religions (Canaanite, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hittite, etc.) portrayed male and female polytheistic gods who had sex and gave birth to divine children.

Genesis 1–2 informs us not only about God but about ourselves as his human creatures. Being bearers of the divine image confers dignity on all humans, contrasting with the ancient Near Eastern creation stories portraying humans as made of the clay of the ground and the blood of a demon god. The gods spit into this mixture, indicating their contempt for humans, whom they made for the purpose of digging irrigation ditches (e.g., the Babylonian creation stories *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*).⁴ Being created in God's image gives grounds for proper self-esteem as well as the imperative to treat all others with great respect no matter who they are.

In addition to explaining that we're created in the image of God, Genesis 1:28 commissions humanity to "subdue" and "rule over" the rest of creation. While some have wrongly read this as an invitation to exploitation, it actually calls us to care for creation. As those who reflect God, our benevolent King, we're to rule over the rest of creation with concern for its flourishing.

Genesis 1 and especially Genesis 2 also teach us that men and women are equals and allies in life together. The figurative depiction of creating the first woman from the man's side—not from his head or feet—demonstrates both

⁴Translation of these texts by Benjamin R. Foster may be found in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, ed. W. W. Hallo (Brill, 1997), 390-402, 450-51.

equality and mutuality (Genesis 2:21-22). She is a “suitable helper” for him (Genesis 2:20). Some wrongly read *helper* as implying subordination, but the Hebrew word (*‘ezer*) appears a number of times elsewhere in the Bible to refer to God as the helper of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalm 33:20; 89:18-19). Indeed, those contexts are typically military ones where God helps against Israel’s enemies. Since Adam had earlier been commanded to “guard” (a better translation of the verb *shamar* than “take care of”) the garden (Genesis 2:15), I suggest that that the word *‘ezer* should be translated “ally” rather than “helper” in Genesis 2:20.⁵

Surprisingly, God created image-bearing humans as morally innocent. Due to our own sin and the evil in the world, such knowledge could come only from divine revelation. The first humans’ innocence meant they had no shame (“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame,” Genesis 2:25).

We learn why we experience humanity, including ourselves, as sinful in Genesis 3. Like the creation account, the narrative of the first sin offers a figurative depiction of a historical event. The story clearly states that sin and death result from human choice, not the way God made us. God told Adam and Eve not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they choose to do so anyway. They asserted their moral autonomy with disastrous consequences. Paul will later say that this choice affected all subsequent generations (Romans 5:12-20). After all, Adam and Eve made a decision we would all make and do make, and their choice so disrupted God’s creation that it became impossible to keep from sinning.

This look at Genesis 1–3, although not an exhaustive interpretation, illustrates that Scripture tells us things about God, ourselves, and the rest of creation that we could know in no other way. Scripture shapes our thinking so fundamentally that it affects how we look at everything, including all subjects in the liberal arts curriculum. You’ll read more later in this chapter. First, I want to present another way Scripture shapes our thinking about ourselves in relationship to God: the context of our place in the history of redemption.

⁵For more on this and my other comments on Genesis, see Tremper Longman III, *Genesis: The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2014), 50-51, 53-54.

LEARNING WHERE WE FIT IN GOD'S REDEPTIVE STORY (CREATION-FALL-REDEMPTION-CONSUMMATION)

Teaching Scripture in a liberal arts curriculum also informs students where they fit into God's redemptive story. This also shapes how they view themselves in relationship to God and the world. The Bible has a plot—and plots, as Aristotle described, have beginnings, middles, and ends. Many see the Bible's plot as a drama with four main episodes: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. We've already reflected on the first two parts, narrated in the first three chapters of Genesis. Genesis 1–2 speaks of creation, explaining that we're God's creatures, created in his image, and more. Genesis 3 reveals that sin and death came into the world not because God made us that way but because we chose and choose to rebel against God.

The third episode of the drama, by far the longest (Genesis 4–Revelation 20), narrates God's acts of redemption. Rather than ending the human story or leaving humanity in the midst of sin and death, God passionately pursues reconciliation. At the end of Genesis 3, he extends a token of grace to the offending couple by providing clothes (Genesis 3:21). As later generations continue to sin, God keeps reaching out to them: the sign that protects Cain from violence (Genesis 4:15), the preservation of Noah and his family during the flood, and the maintenance of human communication through multiple languages in the aftermath of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9, see Genesis 10).

God's redemptive actions take a new and significant turn when he calls on Abraham to “go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you” and gives him the following promise: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3).

This call and the consequent promise make Abraham and his descendants special because “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,” not because of an exclusive relationship with God. The calling brings special responsibility that results in service to others and suffering, not special privileges.⁶

This promise, later called a covenant (Genesis 15:5; 17:2), extends from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob and his twelve sons. At the end of Genesis,

⁶A point well made in Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Abingdon, 2007).

the chosen family arrives in Egypt. After an unspecified number of years, the book of Exodus opens with Abraham's descendants, still in Egypt, being "so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). They also live under Egyptian control and exploitation.

The story of the exodus from Egypt and escape to the Promised Land constitutes the Old Testament's redemption event par excellence. The people of God transition from an extended family (and those who joined them) to a nation. Through Moses, God enters into a covenant with Israel, now composed of descendants of Israel but also foreigners (likely including many Canaanites), creating a "mixed multitude" (Exodus 12:38 KJV). From the beginning, relationship with God—not ethnicity—defined the people of God, as specified in the promise that God would bless "many nations" through Abraham and his descendants.

Unfortunately, the rest of the Old Testament tells a sad story of God's people filled with idolatry and sin. The book of Judges, for instance, describes the period after the conquest as a time of spiritual confusion, moral depravity, and political fragmentation. Kings who were supposed to lead the people to a better place in their relationship with God and with each other (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) too often turned against God and exploited the people.

Solomon, David's son, who started so well as the ideal wise and godly king, ended his life as an apostate. A division occurred between the northern tribes (Israel) and the southern tribe of Judah, where Davidic descendants continued to reign. In the book of Kings, no godly kings ruled in the north, and only two of David's descendants in the south, Hezekiah and Josiah, remained consistently faithful.

Though God sent prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel to call his people to faithfulness, they refused to honor him. God thus ended the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, when the Assyrians defeated and incorporated it into their expanding empire. Judah and its Davidic kings survived longer, but God turned it over to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and he took Jerusalem and exiled its leading citizens.

Even so, the story of God's people continued. The prophets announced judgment but also future restoration. Jeremiah, for instance, anticipated a future "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31), one more intimate, internal, and immediate than the old covenant. Daniel, Zechariah, and Malachi assured the

faithful remnant that despite living under the oppression of evil foreign nations, God remained in control and would win the final victory.

When the Persians defeated the Babylonians, they allowed the exiled Judeans to return to Jerusalem. Under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, they rebuilt the temple. Under Ezra, they restored the law of Moses. Under Nehemiah, they rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem.

Yet the Old Testament ends with God's people living under the power of a foreign nation. God continued to work. The New Testament authors proclaimed that the promised restoration finds its fulfillment in Jesus, the Christ (Greek for "Messiah" or "anointed one").

We encounter Jesus in the New Testament. Earlier I said that Scripture represents God's clearest revelation of himself to humanity—and Jesus, the Word, is also God's clearest revelation of himself to humanity. Jesus told his disciples, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made himself known" (John 1:18). The book of Hebrews says, "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. . . . The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:1-3). Without a doubt, Jesus, being both fully human and fully divine, reveals who God is. After he left earth, Jesus said, the Father would send "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit," who would "teach you all things and . . . remind you of everything I said to you" (John 14:26; also see John 15:26; 16:12-15).

Scripture claims to be the testimony of the Spirit to Christ (2 Timothy 3:15-16). The Spirit spoke through the human authors of the Bible, bearing witness in the New Testament to the redemptive acts of Jesus. The Gospels describe Jesus' life and ministry, while the rest of the New Testament recounts the spread of the new faith in Jesus (Acts) and provides theological reflection and ethical guidance in the light of Jesus' work. We encounter Christ, the clearest revelation of God, most pointedly in Scripture. Jesus himself told his disciples he appears throughout the entirety of the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament (Luke 24). Augustine aptly summarized, "The New is hidden in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New."⁷ A Christian liberal arts curriculum

⁷Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch* 2.73, in *Writings on the Old Testament*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard and Sean Doyle, *The Works of Saint Augustine* (New City, 2016), 125.

that affirms “Christ holds first place” (*Christus primatum tenens*; Westmont’s motto) will put Scripture at its center.

Genesis 1–2 reveals that God created everything, including humanity. When God granted his human creatures status as image bearers, they were morally innocent. We learn much about God, ourselves, and creation in his first act of Scripture. Genesis 3 presents the second episode by explaining how death and evil entered our experience: Human rebellion shattered the harmony of creation (see also Romans 8:18–25). But God immediately started his work of redemption and reconciliation. The Old Testament anticipates—and the New Testament describes and interprets—the climax of this redemption in Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. The third episode of God’s redemptive pursuit of reconciliation stretches from Genesis 4 to Revelation 20.

The presentation of Scripture in the Christian liberal arts helps students understand their participation in this story. They can commit their life to and find meaning in the Bible’s metanarrative. They learn that they’re God’s creatures: both created in his image and sinners who need Christ, the Redeemer. As Christians, they look back on the cross and find hope for the future.

Then comes the fourth and final episode in the story Scripture presents. The so-called apocalyptic books of the Bible (Daniel and Revelation) look forward to the consummation. In particular, Revelation 21–22 presents a figurative depiction of the future, when God will intervene and make everything new. These two final chapters of the Bible describe God’s restoration of all things broken by sin using the language of a new Jerusalem, a new creation, and a restored Eden. In fact, this restoration will surpass the real creation, as the future Eden will feature two trees of life (Revelation 22:2).

TEACHING SCRIPTURE AT A CHRISTIAN LIBERAL ARTS SCHOOL, NOT A SECULAR LIBERAL ARTS SCHOOL

How Christian liberal arts institutions such as Westmont and its sister schools teach Scripture differs significantly from the approach of secular universities and colleges. I make this personal observation as a graduate of a secular college (originally founded as a religious institution in the mid-nineteenth century) and on the basis of relationships and discussions with many colleagues and friends who teach at such schools.

I respect these colleagues deeply, and many of them profess faith. Nonetheless, their institutions approach the Bible not as the Word of God but as an

ancient book that should be studied like any other book. Some colleges address it with more suspicion than other books because of its religious nature. In the broader academy, scholars typically view the Bible through a historical-critical interpretation, a subject too complex to address here.⁸ Briefly, the historical-critical perspective adopts what it considers a neutral approach to the text that precludes the existence of God, a supernatural universe, and miracles. A Christian liberal arts institution, in contrast, considers the text from a position of faith.

While historical criticism remains the predominant approach in the scholarly and academic world, other viewpoints also contest it. Postmodern perspectives question the stability of the meaning of the biblical text—indeed, of any literary text. While these approaches questioning the possibility of meaning in a literary text have been waning since the late twentieth century, certain forms of ideological readings (feminist, queer, postcolonial, etc.) challenge the historical-critical paradigm.⁹ While I believe we can learn from these types of ideological approaches, they too differ radically from an interpretation based on belief that the Bible ultimately presents the Word of God to humanity.

If we believe the Bible is the Word of God and the canon of the church, then everything it affirms or teaches must be true.¹⁰ But we need to exercise caution because some confuse the truth of Scripture with the truth of their interpretations of Scripture. The teaching of Scripture must impart to students the responsibility of interpretation (hermeneutics).

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPRETATION

I consider teaching proper interpretation as important as acquainting students with the Bible's content. In my first class session, I always told my students that I hoped they'd leave the class as people who loved God—and therefore loved his Word—so much that they'd continue reading it throughout their life. Preparing to hear the voice of God in Scripture requires keeping some fundamental interpretive principles in mind.

⁸For those who are interested, see Tremper Longman III, "History and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Eerdmans, 2012), 96-121.

⁹See Tremper Longman III, *The Old Testament as Literature* (Baker Books, 2024).

¹⁰A statement affirmed by Westmont's statement of faith, which the faculty signs annually.

First, we must remember that the biblical authors wrote to contemporary audiences. For example, as its name signals, Paul wrote the book of Romans to the church at Rome. For us to get the most out of the book, we need to put ourselves in the place of the original audience. When we study it from this perspective, we may discover that things we think strange were easy for the original audience to understand. For instance, the description of Jesus riding a cloud in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 13:26; Revelation 1:7) refers to God riding a cloud in the Old Testament. The Romans would have immediately grasped this because storm gods were commonly depicted riding a cloud like a chariot. The Bible appropriates figurative language from its culture to make a point about God's power.¹¹

We'll get more out of Romans when we think of its original audience. But, of course, we also read the Bible today because we know God intended it for us as well.

A second fundamental principle of interpretation is recognizing the book's genre. The Bible includes a collection of books of different types. Speaking broadly, we have history, law, wisdom, prophecy, letters, and apocalyptic literature. Different genres trigger different expectations of how they communicate their intended message to the reader and therefore require different reading strategies.

Let's take the opening of the Song of Songs as an example:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—

your love is more delightful than wine.

Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;

your name is like perfume poured out.

No wonder the young women love you!

Take me away with you—let us hurry!

Let the king bring me into his chambers. (Song of Songs 1:2-4)

Most scholars today rightly understand the Song of Songs as an anthology of love poems, with the opening describing a woman expressing her desire to be intimate with a man.¹² In the Middle Ages—and still in some circles today—the song constitutes an allegory. The Jewish Targum to the Song (dated around the

¹¹Tremper Longman III, *Revelation Through Old Testament Eyes* (Kregel, 2022), 38-40.

¹²Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 2001).

ninth century AD) identified the man as God and the woman as Israel, with Israel asking God to take her into his bedroom (the Promised Land). In the Middle Ages, Christians saw the man as Jesus and the woman as the church or individual Christian, with the church appealing to Jesus for spiritual intimacy. Knowledge of the song's genre makes all the difference in interpretation.

Genre and an understanding of the original historical context of the books of the Bible therefore provide a key to proper interpretation, illustrating the importance of teaching this to students so they hear the voice of God. Other helpful principles exist as well.

Of course, all readers, whether they have a Christian liberal arts education or any education at all, can understand the most important teachings of Scripture. Protestant theologians have affirmed the Bible as perspicuous or clear in messages pertaining to our salvation. The seventeenth-century Westminster Confession of Faith puts it well:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

This beautifully balanced statement reflects what we have in Scripture. Today we can find examples of two extremes. Some believe that everything (or nearly everything) is perfectly clear in Scripture, and anyone who questions whether Genesis 1 teaches that God created everything in six twenty-four-hour days before resting on the seventh must not trust the Bible's authority. Others see no clear teachings and think everything in the Bible is up for grabs. The confession challenges both views by insisting that what we must believe for salvation (we're sinners and need a Savior, who is Jesus) is clear but also that not all things are "plain" or "clear unto all."

That means disagreements will arise about interpretation, and a Christian liberal arts course on Scripture will consider many of these. Who wrote the Pentateuch? Or Isaiah? When was Daniel written? Are evolution and the creation story compatible? What is the genre of Genesis 1–11? Was David a historical figure? Did the exodus happen, and did Jericho fall? How does archaeology relate to the Bible? What is ideological interpretation, and does it help or hinder our study of Scripture? How does Jesus relate to the Old Testament?

What evidence exists that the resurrection took place? How do we understand apocalyptic books such as Daniel and Revelation? The list goes on and on.

I believe the study of Scripture stands at the heart of the Christian liberal arts tradition. Scripture teaches us about God, ourselves, and our world in a way that informs all other disciplines. Consequently, Christian liberal arts institutions place great importance on professors in all fields integrating their discipline with their Christian faith.

Such integration poses challenges and requires a special commitment to individual specialties as well as a knowledge of Scripture and how one's faith shapes one's understanding. Most professors, including religious studies faculty such as myself, receive their graduate training at secular universities. Many religious studies scholars have also earned a seminary degree that hopefully shaped their Christian worldview, unlike most professors in the other disciplines. But most have thought deeply about their faith, and their work at a Christian liberal arts school encourages them to continue that process.

THE LIBERAL ARTS EXPANDS OUR KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMS OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

It is equally important to affirm that pursuing other disciplines with eyes of faith helps inform and sharpen our understanding of Scripture, which fails to answer all our questions. Yes, the Protestant tradition affirms not only the perspicuity of Scripture but its sufficiency as well. But we shouldn't misunderstand the sufficiency of Scripture to exclude other sources of knowledge. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Scripture is sufficient in matters of faith and godliness. When Scripture omits information, we can learn about creation and ourselves from sources such as the study of other academic disciplines.

Earlier I mentioned that God speaks to us not only through the Bible but also through nature, the subject of science. A proper understanding of the historical context and genre of Genesis 1-2 informs us that God created everything but not how God did so. We can turn to science to ask that question. Science can help us read the Bible through the conclusions of Galileo Galilei and others, as the Scriptures clearly don't teach cosmology with references to the sun rising and setting or the assertion that the earth won't be moved (Psalm 96:10; 104:5).

Other disciplines explore different areas and extend our knowledge beyond what Scripture teaches. History, for instance, not only remembers the past but

also reflects on the best way to do so. Anthropology studies human behavior at an individual level to better understand humanity as a whole. Sociology examines human behavior at a societal or cultural level. Literary studies ask how narratives and poems work and communicate with readers. These and the other disciplines, valuable in and of themselves, also aid us in understanding ourselves and our world and interpreting Scripture.

As the books of the Bible feature texts, narratives, and poems, literary studies can help us ask how they communicate to readers both ancient and modern. Anthropology, among other things, includes archaeology, which illuminates the biblical period in the ancient Near East that provides the cultural context of divine revelation. Sociology studies tribal life in ways that help us understand the dynamics of ancient Israel. Many more examples exist relating to the disciplines in a liberal arts curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Though select colleges preceded it (e.g., Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Cambridge, Oxford, the Sorbonne), the University of Berlin founded the modern Western university in 1809 according to the vision of Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt. Shaped by Enlightenment ideas, the university isolated the study of theology from other disciplines so that the faculty could pursue their scholarship based on human reason and a denial of the supernatural.¹³ These ideas eventually migrated to the historic colleges, and Berlin became the model of new universities.¹⁴ Today secular education inherits this modernist attitude, supplemented by the postmodern view that claiming to know the truth represents an assertion of power, with people constructing intellectual frameworks rather than discovering them.

Christian education accepts the modernist view that the critical function of reason is important to education but sees reason as a God-given gift rather than autonomous. While denying that truth exists and can be discovered, postmodernism nevertheless injects a healthy antidote to modernism's overconfident and overreaching attitude in the ability of autonomous reason to discover the truth of the universe, most blatantly seen in scientism.

¹³Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 25.

¹⁴In the US, Johns Hopkins University (1876) is a prime example of a school intentionally founded on the principles of a European research university.

While modernism encourages us to critique our interpretations and post-modernism encourages intellectual humility, Christian theology believes that God has spoken to us in Scripture as an act of self-disclosure that explains who he is, who we are, and the world that he created and into which he has placed us. Scripture situates us in God's great work of creation and redemption and points toward the consummation. It not only informs our thinking but also shapes our affections, stimulates our imagination, and directs our will. In other words, the Bible forms our character and directs us toward God. For these reasons, the study of Scripture, informed by all the other disciplines, stands at the heart of a Christian liberal arts education.



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