

New Mandates for Christian Scholarship

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Thank you very much for that introduction. I am delighted to know of CAN and its ongoing work, and I want to bring you all some warm greetings and expressions of solidarity from the various networks of Christian scholars and educators that I represent in the United States. It is wonderful to visit this part of England, which is the old home turf of some of my ancestors. Indeed my great-great-great grandparents, Sylvanus and Caroline Ridley, are buried in the village of Nutley, not far from here. But like my ancestors who left here, I want to head out for the far country today. This is an amazing time to be a Christian, an age in which our old categories and even the well-mapped boundary lines seem to be scrambled. And I intend to scramble them some more for you today. I want to argue something that on the face of it sounds rather outrageous: to be a faithful and indeed intellectually powerful Christian scholar in this era of world Christianity, you should become more the migrant and the missionary in your outlook and cultural stance.

Introduction: A Radically Changed Christian Presence

The lines of Christian mission in the world have changed radically over the past generation, and at the same time, the long reign of Western Christian Humanism as the predominant basis for Christian scholarship may be coming to a close. We are now living in an era in which Christianity is a world religion, with the majority of its adherents in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Jesus Christ is worshipped, the Bible is read, and the Gospel is preached in more languages and more places than any other religion worldwide. Rather than viewing our Western culture as the center of Christian adherence, out from which the faith radiates, we do better today to see it as the far and increasingly thin northern frontier of a religion found mostly in the global South and East. Christianity-and-culture questions such as those pondered for centuries in the West do not disappear in this new dispensation, but they arise with new salience and urgency in places where traditionally Christianity was not a large cultural factor. Christian thinkers are now challenged to ask not only what Jerusalem has to do with Athens, but also with Beijing, Bangalore, Banjul and Buenos Aires.

These are not exotic or distant issues for us today. The world is much more interactive than ever before, and the world's southern and eastern peoples are coming to live in the North Atlantic regions in unprecedented numbers. We obsess on the arrival of Muslims in the global North, but a very large percentage of the great South to North migration of our time are Christians. So world Christianity is not just out there, overseas. It is in the neighborhood. A Protestant congregation across the street from Calvin College lends its facilities on Sunday afternoons to Sudanese worshippers. My home church used to share its facilities on Saturdays with a Hispanic Adventist congregation. Down at the other end of our street is another church, which once housed the descendants of Dutch Reformed immigrants, and now serves a Korean congregation. In a doctoral seminar I taught not long ago, one of my students, of Indian ancestry, was a missionary to the U.S. from Suriname in South America. She is bringing the gospel to Michigan, planting an inner-city congregation. She represents the Church of the Nazarene, and she is a doctoral student at Calvin Seminary. Sort that out, if you can. These new facts have huge implications for how we conduct Christian scholarship and Christian intellectual life more generally.

Models for Christian Scholarship

I have dealt with these issues in a number of contexts, but given the theme of the conference today, I want to address a question in more institutional terms: what sort of model should undergird Christian higher learning today? Rather than posing this in traditional institutional terms, I want to ask, rather, what sort of place and posture in the larger culture should we assume in Christian scholarship and Christian higher education?

1. Overcoming sectarian intellectual disasters

Part of the complaint one often hears about Christian higher education, especially of the American evangelical liberal arts universities, is that they were originally the products of some radically sectarian and anti-worldly brands of Christianity. These movements, to put it bluntly, betrayed the broad Christian cultural vision that once animated the original idea of the university. These sectarians produced, instead, a much narrower sense of what it meant to live out a witness to the Gospel. To be fair, part of these radical evangelicals' protest was that the old Christian vision for society had lost its spiritual spine, so that it tended to bless whatever was the leading intellectual fashion, including some anti-Christian trends. The result, long-term, was the secularization of Euro-American higher education. So in the mid-twentieth century, and edging out into our own time, American evangelicals who have been devoted to the life of the mind have often lived under this cloud of

populist spiritual suspicion. Many of you have read the heartfelt exposition of this state of affairs, what Mark Noll called the "intellectual disaster of fundamentalism" in his provocative book, now twenty years old, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994).

So how do we overcome this disaster? What is the way back to a fully orbed "intellectual apostolate," as the Jesuits once called the Christian life of the mind? Mark Noll co-authored a fine little book that poses a set of answers that are very much in the tradition of C.S Lewis and the European Christian Humanist tradition. Its title is *The Future of Christian Learning: An Evangelical and Catholic Dialogue*.¹ Noll writes alongside his colleague at Notre Dame, James Turner, a distinguished Roman Catholic historian. They discuss, from their varying perspectives, the future of Christian learning and the nature of historical and other forms of scholarship. Noll and Turner explore both the recent convergences and the classic and enduring differences in evangelical and Catholic approaches to faith and history.

2. Reviving Christendom?

There is one idea that Noll propounds at the beginning of this dialogue, however, that grabs my attention. In order for evangelicals to get up to speed with Christian intellectual and cultural engagement, Noll says, they need to borrow some "Christendom" from the Catholics. "Christendom," he says, provides the context and the standpoints from which truly Christian scholarship can arise and build.

My friends, if that is true, then we are in deep trouble, because Christendom, as Ezra Pound once said of Western Civilization, is "an old dog, gone in the teeth." Whether she will revive to any extent is deeply doubtful. Christianity's future is out in the lands where it has not been pervasive in the past, and where its presence today, in the form of popular movements, is creating new religious dynamism and pluralism. World Christianity is not, at least in our time, forming the "next Christendom," regardless of Philip Jenkins' claims. It exists in many places as a minority faith.

I hope that my generous friend, Mark Noll, will forgive me for setting him up as a foil. He sets out in clear terms what has been more implicit in the Christian scholarly circles of our time: that much of our Christian scholarship seeks its basis and tries to draw its forward vision from European Christendom.

¹ Mark A. Noll and James Turner, *The Future of Christian Learning: An Evangelical and Catholic Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

Noll states his main premise thus: "Christian learning has flourished in the circumstances of a revived Christendom."

By Christendom, Noll says, "I mean a society in which the institutions of an inherited and respected visible Christian church provide the main ordering principles for education, culture, and much else; where government defers to the church for matters concerning family, personal morality, culture, and education; and where, in turn, the institutions and personnel of a Christian church provide legitimization for governments that carry out what are considered God-ordained tasks of preserving social stability and perpetuating the favored social position of the visible church." (31-32)

The United Kingdom preserves many of the vestiges of this sort of Christendom. The United States does a bit of that to, but more in informal ways than in the formal structures of society and government.

What Noll tells Turner that he most admires about the Catholic approach to Christian scholarship is that it works out of a church and university matrix in the United States that has "kept habits of comprehension, community, proprietorship, and universality that powerfully sustained the effects of Christendom even without its actual structure." (33)

So Noll concludes that "Christendom, however manifold its shortcomings, has historically proved to be a most propitious environment for the flourishing of Christian learning," but modern evangelicalism has inherited a deep distrust for both the pretensions of Christendom they saw being corrupted in old-line Protestantism and for the worldly learning that Christendom fostered. Therefore evangelicals need Catholics, Noll insists, with their broad and deep cultural legacy and their grand institutions of learning, some of the finest in America today. They have preserved, however imperfectly, a God-honoring place for the natural world and for reason, a proprietary sense of responsibility for the society they inhabit, an "acceptance of history and tradition as gifts from God," deep traditions of moral and legal reasoning, and a commitment to institutions that can connect and sustain communities over time (67).

This argument, which is rarely stated so clearly in evangelical scholarly circles, is indeed implicit in the outlook, scholarly habits and strategies for intellectual witness held by the majority of evangelical intellectuals. They recognize the scandal of the neglected and even disparaged intellectual apostolate among

evangelicals, and they yearn for Christian traditions that go deeper and engage more broadly. They yearn for a Christendom approach. In England they still have the ancient institutions of the Anglican Church. In the U.S., the Catholics fill that need.

In recent years there has been a sharp critique of this approach arising from Anabaptist circles principally and taken up powerfully by the Duke University theologian Stanley Hauerwas. He argues that Christendom's authoritarian ways and spiritually deadening potential outweigh its nobler legacy. That critique has in fact been given a fair amount of attention in colleges like Wheaton and Calvin, and it is the leading approach of some of our colleagues on the evangelical intellectual circuit. I don't feel led at this time to try to add to or detract from it. Rather, I want to offer another approach that while not attacking the Christendom ideal or approach head on, puts forward a rather different Christian scholarly vision and agenda, one that is more attuned to the situation Christianity currently inhabits.

3. Christian Scholarship Follows Christian Mission

Andrew Walls, the great Scots historian of missions and world Christianity, lays out a quite different vision of dynamic Christian scholarship.² He argues that Christian scholarship has been, throughout its history, as a product of mission, of Christian messengers in the ancient world who gave witness before there was Christendom, or those of more recent centuries who ranged out beyond the frontiers of Christendom and humbly interacted with rival seats of cultural, economic and political power.

So in contrast to Noll, who argues that "Christendom, however manifold its shortcomings, has historically proved to be a most propitious environment for the flourishing of Christian learning"(42-43), Walls insists that "Christian scholarship follows Christian mission and derives from Christian mission." (166) Walls narrates his way through many centuries of church history to show that "a lively concern for Christian living and Christian witness has repeatedly called scholarly activity into existence." Let us follow his narrative, just briefly.

Walls begins with the second century church and shows how the cultural crossing from messianic Judaism to the Hellenistic world broadened and deepened Christian theology. Christian thinkers made new discoveries about who Christ is when

² Walls deals with these themes in many recent essays, but see especially Andrew F. Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," in *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Rodney L. Peterson, with Nancy M. Rourke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 166-183.

"their deepest convictions about him were expressed in Greek." This cross-cultural mission to the Greeks took much thought; it meant exerting the scholarly virtues to effectively proclaim the gospel in a new culture. His chief model is Origen of Alexandria, who, Walls argues, invented textual criticism, systematic theology, and biblical commentary, using the existing Hellenic philosophical and scientific tools. Origen did this work under great duress; those that he taught, and he too, finally, suffered imprisonment and torture (166-67).

One of the results of this fresh Christian intellectual work was a revival of Greek philosophy, which had been growing "tired and given to recycling ideas." Christian thinkers, by contrast, cared about big ideas; they felt urgency for getting answers, and their example injected fresh vigor and importance into the field. When you could get hurt as a consequence of your arguments, philosophy was no longer just a cushy job for careerists. "Once more," says Walls, philosophy "became a liberating search for truth" (168).

Moving more quickly, Walls follows early Christian missionaries east into Mesopotamia, Iran, and China. This mission trail, he argues, "is a trail of libraries." Everywhere the Christian advocates went, they encountered new cultures. These encounters pushed them to translate old books and write new ones. In Ethiopia, the Christian missionaries' efforts led to literacy, an alphabet, and eventually a whole literature and tradition of Christian scholarship (168-69).

In the West, Walls points out, Christian missionaries engaged the cultural resources of Northern European tribes and developed a new kind of Christian thinking: history. Bede the Briton was an exemplar of this new medium of Christian reflection. Following him, theologians emerged who developed new Christian thinking about how Northerners' laws and customs engaged with Roman law and the Scriptures, and they developed new understandings, for example, of the Atonement. These were times of great turmoil and violence, which many thereafter called the Dark Ages, but they were also times of adventurous scholarship, using missionary structures, notably the monasteries, to develop some remarkable communities of learning (168-69). As you all well know, universities evolved out of the monasteries' schools.

Thereafter, Walls argues, Christianity in the West developed into Christendom. Christian values and orientation deeply influenced the ideas, customs, laws, art, and literature of the region. That is a wonderful legacy. But there was a negative effect too, from a world Christian perspective. European Christendom isolated western Christianity and cut it off from the rest of the world to the South and the

East, with all its cultural riches and challenges. The ages of European discovery and empire showed how inadequate Western knowledge had become. It was much too provincial; it provided no tools for communicating Christ on the cultural terms of other lands. But the gospel had to go into those cultural depths, which over centuries had formed the way people think and act (170).

Therefore, Walls reminds us, the modern missionary movement was forced to take the front lines of a major scholarly initiative. The Western academy had nothing useful to teach about vast realms of the world. Missionaries were on their own, and so they invented or otherwise opened up whole new fields of study. Walls makes a list, and I add to it, of the areas of modern scholarship that had their start among missionaries:

- comparative literature
- linguistics
- anthropology
- comparative religion
- tropical medicine
- non-western history, and
- "area studies" -- interdisciplinary inquiries into whole regional civilizations

Walls delights in refreshing our memory, saying that the "Western Academy in its present secular phase has forgotten where these things came from. They arose, or were made possible, by the desire that Christ should be known in other cultures" (170).

So, the history of Christianity, Walls concludes, shows that "searching, fundamental scholarship arises naturally out of the exercise of Christian mission and especially from its cross-cultural expression."

So here is the punchline, my friends and colleagues: Christian intellectuals do their best work when they cross boundaries, move out of their customary haunts, take risks, enter other worlds, and become vulnerable as basic learners, making their way as guests, on someone else's turf and terms. This is an incarnational, Jesus-following way of being a scholar, Walls suggests. The gospel itself, he reminds us, is about God the Son leaving his home in glory and humbly living on humans' terms (170).

This missionary way of Christian scholarship calls for patience and perseverance. Cross-cultural Christian diffusion and re-appropriation of ideas and culture takes

generations to accomplish, if Christ is going to grow deep, into the very roots of a culture's identity. "So periods of active mission," Walls argues, "need to be periods of active scholarship. The converse is also true: when the sense of mission is dulled or diverted, the death knell sounds for Christian scholarship" (171).

So there you have it: not Christendom as the basis for vital Christian scholarship, but mission outside of Christendom. I do not get the sense that Walls is anti-Christendom in any principled way; he celebrates the virtues of a culture that has been deeply shaped by Christian norms and inspired by Christian vision. But he sees the stultifying features nonetheless, especially the tendency toward an inward focus, and the complacency and corruption that come from the cooling off of missionary yearning to know Christ and make Christ known. Walls encourages Christian intellectuals to work toward the deeper cultural rooting of Christian faith, which may in time result in something like a Christendom. But I think he would suggest that this task has a perennial, generationally driven nature to it. Like the original evangelicals of Wesley's day, Walls would prefer a perennial missionary posture toward the culture, as yet needing conversion. Like the neo-orthodox critics of a generation past, he would point out the dangers of assuming the faith has arrived, of "immanentizing the eschaton." Indeed, Walls' definition of historic evangelicalism is "a religion of protest against a Christian society that is not Christian enough."³

Mark Noll mourns modern American evangelicals' loss of respect and inquisitiveness regarding God's creation, in both nature and human culture. He decries their loss of responsibility for their neighbors in society. He very much wants them to recover respect for reason, institutions, and tradition. Roman Catholics have retained more of these traits in America because of their proprietary role in establishing Western Christendom and their residual role in wanting to preserve it. But I think it is a mistake to focus on Christendom itself. It was too proprietary, too inward looking, too untypical of Christianity's enduring place and role in the world. Evangelicals' original instincts to challenge Christendom for its complacency and corruptions, and to push out to the "regions beyond," as they used to say, were indeed healthy instincts. And as Walls shows us, these outward impulses were conducive of exciting, original and creative scholarship.

4. Sickness in the Western Academy

³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 81.

Our times, indeed, push us toward this border-crossing and vulnerable, missionary approach to Christian intellectual witness. Several current conditions demand that approach. First of all, the Western academy is at a very far place from its Christendom roots. Walls pulls no punches here; "the Western academy is sick," he says, "as sick as the Greek academy was in the early days of Christianity." Our universities hardly even desire these days to be high-minded communities of truth-seekers, and the government certainly does not value that activity so highly, either. Higher education has been tragically reduced in its once broad and noble aims and purposes. It exists, say our politicians, to serve the economy. Walls is less polite about it. He says that universities are now the "pensioners of global capitalism." Even in theology, he finds that "the highest academic accolade is now to have received a fat research grant from outside sources. The purpose of the grant, or of the research it underwrites, becomes secondary."⁴

The earlier excitement in modern universities over major discoveries and new fields of inquiry seems to be giving way, Walls says, a trivial trade in novelties and careerist cynicism. Professors are choosing research topics based on their market value. Doctoral students chat cynically about how to pad their vitas with more publications. Government funders channel their reduced appropriations toward immediate payoffs for the national economy, and researchers increasingly depend on corporate funding. Medical researchers, Walls observes, get their funding "from drug companies, whose priorities are best served from the afflictions of the affluent world and foundations whose consciousness of suffering is also concentrated there. Yet the big killer diseases wreak their havoc ... across Africa and Asia." Walls tells of university colleagues seeking funding from biscuit manufacturers for "research in dunking cookies," and from tobacco companies for "an academic school of business ethics."⁵ He calls Christian scholars to cleanse scholarship of these polluting forces and reorient it according to a Christian vision to serve the present age.

Walls is not confident that Christian intellectuals in the North Atlantic region can effect the needed change. Ever the visionary, he wonders whether the renewal of the modern academy might not come from humbler sources, where the very poverty of institutional foundations might provoke fresher thinking, from the ground up. He advises his African colleagues to start with a more global South model, the Indian *ashram*, a spiritually devoted, small, sacrificial community of scholars, devoted to learning, with exacting standards and a stringent scholarly

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, "Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4:2 (December 2001): 47.

⁵ Walls, "Christian Scholarship in Africa," 47.

work ethic.⁶ Ever the realist, however, Walls is happy to see scholars and outposts in the North with missionary vision and commitment, whatever institutional arrangements they might make.

But if we are going to heed Walls' claim that "Christian scholarship follows Christian mission and derives from Christian mission," we need to ask where are the place where the Lord has "placed before you an open door" (Rev. 3:8), where the front lines of Christian action are in the world today. We have important missions to accomplish here in the North, but they may well prove to be rearguard actions. We do not want to be caught, as Walls puts it, like the British gunners at Singapore in World War II, with all their heavy artillery pointed in the wrong direction.

The direction changes because Christianity has undergone a seismic shift in its place and role in the world today. A century ago, 80 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America. Today, well over 60 percent of the world's Christians live in the rest of the world, the global South and East. Christianity has become a predominantly non-Western religion. The signs of our times clearly show this happening. There are 26 million baptized Anglicans in the United Kingdom today, but the churches struggle to get even a million out any given Sunday. Contrast that to Nigeria, where there are some 18 million Anglicans, and the churches are packed, some several times, on a Sunday. The world's most prominent public theologian today is an Argentinian pope. Africans and Asians are changing the shape and indeed the very identity of the worldwide Anglican communion. Missionary sending, which once meant the West sending its agents out to the rest, is being turned upside down in our day. Even though the United States is the world's largest sender of missionaries, it is also the world's largest receiver of missionaries. Not long ago a missionary couple lived down the block from me in Grand Rapids. Dr. Antonio and Wanda Rosario, Adventist missionaries from the Dominican Republic, helped to start six new congregations in Grand Rapids. Now the Rosarios have been sent to darkest Indianapolis to start and guide more churches.

Even with all these signs of the times, the dominant thought structures, cultural awareness and intellectual instincts of worldwide Christianity have not caught up. They really need to, because what happens in Africa, Asia and Latin America, according to Walls,

⁶ Andrew F. Walls, "Of Ivory Towers and Ashrams: Some Reflections on Theological Scholarship in Africa," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 3:1 (June 2000): 1-2.

"will determine what the Christianity of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries will be like. What happens in Europe, and even in North America, will matter less and less. It is Africans and Asians and Latin Americans who will be the representative Christians; those who represent the Christian norm, the Christian mainstream of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries.....the most significant Christian developments in theology, ...or ethical thinking, or the Christian impact on society, will be those that take place in the southern continents, not those that take place in the West. The development of theological and ethical thinking and action in Africa and Asia and Latin America will determine mainstream Christianity. Similar development in North America and Europe may be of mainly local importance."⁷

So we Christian intellectuals need a serious reorientation to the global South and East. Networks like CAN and outposts for American Christian intellectuals, like Calvin College and the University of Notre Dame need a serious reorientation, toward the global South and East. They need a missionary outlook and cultural posture, not a commanding view from inside a crumbling Christendom. While Walls speaks mostly to theologians, I think that there are serious implications for us in all of the arts and sciences as well. The church's main intellectual mission in the world today is thinking Christ into the entire cultural framework of Southern and Eastern countries. We need the same sort of deep investigations of society, culture and the natural world that the missionaries of the 19th and 20th centuries needed, but were forced to do mainly on their own.

So what might this mean for any plans you might have for building Christian intellectual agencies here in Great Britain?

First, let me hasten to say what it does not mean. It does not mean giving up on European cultural studies. Understanding gospel and culture questions in one's home realms has immediate relevance. These are our immediate contexts, and we should not engage in the sort of "going global" that makes us heedless to the world at our doorstep. But the world obviously comes to our doorsteps and changes our contexts too. We will come at British Literature or German history with different questions, perhaps, than we have asked before, prompted by Christianity's cross-cultural engagements, both here and elsewhere. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien

⁷ Walls, "Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church," 173.

provide some excellent examples of what might be done. They were concerned about the primal religions, with their old myths and runes, spirituality, magic and world views that animated pre-Christian Britain and other northern realms. They understood that gospel and culture questions started there, at the old roots of the culture, into which Christian faith and values were grafted. It gave them some sharp and often prophetic leverage on their present day, where some of the unresolved issues came roaring back, where an apparently rational, sane and scientific culture was resorting to "heathen mysticism" before their very eyes. It is fascinating also to see how Andrew Walls' own scholarship as a European-trained historian has pushed back in this direction toward Christianity's early years in Britain and Ireland. He asks new questions now because of the encounters he has studied in more recent Africa and Asia.

At the same time, we are learning that Christian cultural studies have a much broader, worldwide base, not only because of the present-day shifts in Christian presence worldwide, but because of a largely forgotten past. Philip Jenkins' book, *The Lost History of Christianity*⁸ surveys a thousand-year swath of Christianity in the Middle East, India, China and Africa; and suggests that these histories have at least as much to teach Christians today as those that we know, of Christianity to the north and west of Jerusalem. For understanding faith, culture, learning and living in the present and the past, our world is far too small.

So what do we do about it?

1. De-Center Christian Humanism. For a millennium, secular and religious scholars alike have assumed that European civilization and Christianity are fundamentally linked. Christian humanists have fought to preserve and uphold the insights of the Western Christian past, in the face of multiplied attacks. I applaud those efforts, but this strategy needs reforming. Christianity has become a predominantly non-western faith, and the western Christian heritage now looks much less central, standard and normative. For nearly two millennia, the main questions for Christian humanists have been Tertullian's: what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? I propose that now the same gospel-and-culture question needs to be pointed in different directions. I have colleagues in philosophy at Calvin who built their careers in Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but now they have read into Asian philosophy too, while engaging in dialogue with philosophers in China. There is much to do there, and some very eager conversation partners.

⁸ Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How It Died* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

2. Understand the Desecularization of the World

One of the more favored and fruitful contemporary strategies among Christian scholars, especially in the social sciences, is highlighting the “R Factor,” reasserting that religion is indeed a driver of human affairs. A cadre of evangelicals and Catholics in American political science used this strategy to build an influential religion and politics section within the American Political Science Association. There still are vast reaches of the academy, however, where scholars simply assume that religious dimensions of society and culture are determined by other, more elemental forces. Yet the more we focus on the global south and east, the less sustainable this paradigm seems. The grand expectation that modernization and globalization would lead to secularization is being proven false. Rising Christianity in the global south is globalization from below, part of the “desecularization of the world” that Peter Berger and others see happening today.

There is a huge agenda arising from these discoveries. All of the big ideas in modern social science—modernization, secularization, globalization, democracy, pluralism, human rights, and capitalism—are ripe for revision. The European pattern now appears to be an anomaly, and not the paradigm shaper we have made it to be. Christianity’s entry as a new social, political and economic factor, worldwide, needs careful attention. It is one of the greatest worldwide developments of our time. Christian scholars should take the lead in examining its impact and implications.

3. Change the Debates: From Unbelief to Rival Spiritualities

A third strategy for Christian scholarship, promoting theism, also has been a deeply contextualized western approach. It assumes the need to respond to the post-Enlightenment naturalism and skepticism of the “cultured despisers of religion,” as Schliermacher put it. The need continues because such views still prevail among western intellectuals and elites. We have seen an irruption in recent years of angry atheism. Going forward, however, Christian philosophers and theologians will need to argue for Christianity among competing religious claims. There is plenty of theism and spirituality around, and the privilege once granted to naturalism is no longer automatic. The more insistent questions now arise from rival revelations. I am just back from leading a study team in India, and nothing is more clearer there than this point. To focus so intently on secularity, European style, increasingly will be to put one’s main forces into a rearguard action. So Christian philosophers and theologians should give more attention to testing the coherence of Christianity over against other religious and ethical systems.

4. Serve the Present Age Better with Science

I am not enough of an expert in the philosophy or sociology of science to dwell much on what non-western approaches and contexts might do for the work of those of you engaged in mathematics and the natural sciences. What I do note, however, as a former provost, is how deeply tied your research is to its funding sources. In the U.S., whatever the NSF wants to fund, or whatever defense contractors or insurance companies or drug companies want funded, that's what gets researched. That is not overly cynical, I hope, and I am grateful for the long labors of my former congressman in particular, a former Calvin College physics professor, to keep the federal government invested in basic discovery. But as much as Christians delight in the truth for its own sake and in the handiwork of the Creator, who accepts our explorations as a praise offering, we of all people are eager to see scientific discovery and technological development bent to Kingdom purposes, for the sake of nature and humanity's flourishing, here and now.

What might that mean? An engineering colleague of mine at Calvin College is a former NASA scientist who left a project to develop balloons for testing the Martian atmosphere, a good and fine thing in and of itself, in order to take up questions of appropriate technology to improve the lives of poor people. Now he is helping a South African team develop sturdier and more energy efficient refrigerators for rural people in that land. Another Calvin College engineering professor, a hydrologist, has just founded an institute to study issues of supplying clean water to all the world's people. Christian scientists, imbued with a world Christian outlook, can invest themselves in work that will run against the main trends toward commercialization that so often corrupt academe, and restore some of the grand service ideals of the modern university. Why not make the institution you envisage an exemplary outpost of such vision and work?

Conclusion: Learning New Things about the Gospel

My friends, the rise of Christianity as a worldwide religion has huge implications for how we approach our scholarly tasks, and it will have huge implications for how we shape our common academic lives. Our heritage, our curriculum, our mental, cultural and spiritual habits all are deeply etched by the legacy of Western Christendom. There is much that is commendable about that legacy. But before our very eyes, the world is radically changing, and nowhere more than right here and in the USA. We obsess about the rising Muslim population, but every form of Christianity found in the world is in the global North now too. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I live, we have Ethiopian Orthodoxy, along with Vietnamese Catholics, Mexican and Guatemalan Pentecostals, Anglicans from the Sudan, Calvinists from Nigeria and Korea and Adventists from Honduras. What are we

going to do about this changed environment, as Christian scholars and as we dream of universities? How might we educate students for effective service in this rapidly changing situation, and how will we engage our students who are increasingly from these communities? What will it mean for your own research, teaching and service? These trends change everything. May we have the courage, grace, wit and energy to respond in faithfully creative ways.

This reorientation business is not easy, so to conclude: why should we be doing this?

- First, the health and integrity of our calling as a Christian community of learning depend on its having vital ties to God's mission in the world, and that mission has taken some dramatic turns.
- Second, and more importantly, so long as the history of redemption continues to unfold, we have much more to learn about the fullness of Christ, about the Gospel's full range and power, as it is accepted and communicated by ever wider ranges of humanity.

Every time the Gospel is translated into a different culture, Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh remind us, we learn new things about the Gospel. From the Jews came the truth of Jesus the Messiah; from the Greeks, Christ the cosmic Lord. To the Romans and northern Europeans, Jesus came as the justifier of the guilty; to African Americans, Jesus is the liberator of the captives. Who knows what new rich depths of the wisdom of God and new understandings of salvation in Jesus Christ await us in the Gospel's encounter with the cultures of the south and east? There may be sacrifices ahead if you reorient your work, but the joy of discovery and the delight of new fellowship will more than repay you. There are whole new horizons opening up, my friends. The range and scope of the Christian intellectual calling have never been greater.