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The Educational Task of Dordt University, 2019

Dordt University

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The Educational Task of Dordt University

Revised 2019

Preface

As an institution of higher education committed to the Reformed, Christian perspective, Dordt University equips students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

Under the supervision of the board of trustees, the Dordt faculty has written and adopted a statement of purpose describing how a **Reformed** confession of biblical faith impacts Christian higher education.

All who are associated with Dordt pledge to prayerfully pursue the purposes outlined

in this document as we engage together in educating God's covenant people for faithful service in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The first such statement, adopted in 1961, consisted of seventeen propositions to guide the development of the educational program. A more detailed statement was later formulated in 1968 titled *Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*. Between 1979 and 1996, *The Educational Task of Dordt University* was developed and adopted. In 2015, a committee was charged with updating the language of the document and renewing a commitment of ownership among a new generation of campus faculty and staff. In 2018, after three years of revision and renewal, the Board of Trustees approved *The Educational Task* in its current form. This document now serves as the biblically-based, confessional foundation for the entire academic enterprise of Dordt.

Introduction

This document sets forth the principles that direct Dordt University in performing its educational task.

Dordt was established and is sustained by a Reformed, Christian community dedicated to the meaningful expression of biblical principles in education. Those who first showed interest in founding a college in Northwest Iowa stated their vision in a 1937 report submitted by Classis Ostfriesland (now Classis Northcentral Iowa) of the Christian Reformed Church:

That Classis Ostfriesland invite Classis Pella, Minnesota, Orange City, and Sioux Center to join with us in working towards the organization, support and control of a Christian junior college in harmony with Reformed principles. The aim of such a junior college is to give young people an education that is Christian, not merely in the sense that devotional exercises are appended to the ordinary work of the college, but in the larger and deeper sense that all the class work, all the students' intellectual, emotional, and imaginative activities shall be permeated with the spirit and teaching of Christianity.

This foundational biblical perspective was further articulated in successive directional documents of Dordt:

In the training and development of the redeemed in Christ, the Holy Scriptures are basic, since they are indispensable to the proper realization of the individual's capacities and the proper fulfilling of his responsibilities. All education must be scripturally oriented. (*Educational Task of Dordt University*—Adopted in 1961, Proposition #9)

The covenant parent recognizes the school, formal education, as the second sphere vital to the fulfillment of his task. In agreement with his covenantal-kingdom philosophy, he demands an education for his child that is scripturally oriented. (*Scripturally-Oriented Higher Education*, 1968, p. 26)

This educational commitment, a key aspect of a Reformed worldview, determines Dordt's principles, purpose, and direction.

The educational task is the responsibility of the entire Dordt community. The faculty play a central role in defining and implementing it. Working under the supervision of the board of trustees, faculty and staff must remain sensitive to the religious perspective and insights of the supporting community. Applying their gifts of Christian scholarship, faculty must also lead the broader community to a growing understanding of the demands of a Reformed **world and life view**.

Chapter 1: Basis

At Dordt University, we confess that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, his infallible and authoritative revelation.

It reveals God's good **creation**, the radical **fall** into sin, the total **redemption** in Jesus Christ, and the **fullness** (shalom) of the kingdom in the age to come. The Bible reveals to us the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, who is the key to understanding the interpretation, meaning, and purpose of life. The Bible provides insight into the true nature of created reality and ultimately how all things must be judged in the light of its teaching. Therefore, at Dordt, we confess that the Bible provides the essential principles for a philosophy of Christian education.

The Bible reveals to us a loving and sovereign God; all things are under his control. Nothing can exist apart from him, and everything finds purpose in his glory.¹

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created all things.² The Son of God, the Word incarnate, was central in this work of creation. The Apostle John affirms that Christ is the Son of God, the Word, without whom nothing was made.³ Paul explains that through the Son the entire **cosmos** was brought into existence, has its meaning, and

will find its fulfillment.⁴ In the same context, Paul makes clear that God upholds and maintains the entire creation by his Son and through his Spirit.⁵ Therefore, the creation is an integrated and interrelated whole. It belongs to God⁶ and is under his sovereign rule;⁷ it is God's kingdom.⁸

There is rich diversity within creation. We confess with the Belgic Confession that God "created heaven and earth and all other creatures from nothing, when it seemed good to him, by his Word—that is to say, by his Son. He has given all creatures their being, form, and appearance, and their various functions for serving their creator."⁹

Within the whole of creation, only men and women are created in God's image. Human beings are in a **covenant** relationship with their creator and called to loving obedience.¹⁰ With hearts open to the will of God, we are called to serve the creator by fulfilling the mandate to subdue the creation.¹¹ That is, God places men and women in office and calls them to the task of kingdom work, enabling the flourishing and abundance of all creation.

1 Romans 11:36.
2 Revelation 4:11.
3 John 1:3.

4 Colossians 1:15-17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:5.
5 Colossians 1:17.
6 Exodus 9:29; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 24:1; Corinthians 10:26.
7 Psalm 103:19.
8 Psalm 22:28; Psalm 47; Psalm 103:19; Psalm 119:89-91; Psalm 145:10-21; Obadiah 1:21; Zechariah 14:16-21.
9 Belgic Confession, Article 12.
10 Proverbs 23:7; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34, 35; Luke 6:45; Mark 7:18-23; 2 Corinthians 9:7.
11 Genesis 1:26, 28.

However, by disobeying God, men and women fell into sin and violated their office, breaking the bond of covenantal fellowship. They closed their hearts to the will of God and exchanged true service to the creator for idolatrous worship of created things.¹² After the fall, people began to treat the creation not as the kingdom of God, but as an object of exploitation for their own purpose and glory. Having rejected the source of true fellowship and harmony, humanity subjected itself and the rest of creation to division and strife, misery and death.

God determined not to leave his creation in such rebellion and brokenness. In his grace,¹³ he promised to reclaim what had been deformed and distorted by sin. He fulfilled this loving promise in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Through faith in Christ, we are restored to covenant fellowship with God and enabled to live as joyful servants in his kingdom.

Christ redeemed not only humanity but the entire cosmos.¹⁴ Even though the effects of the fall continue, Christ has broken the dominion of Satan, rescued creation from the curse of sin, and now reigns as King over all.¹⁵ From this position of power, he **commissions** us as members of the new

humanity, to work toward the expression of his kingdom everywhere. As his agents of reconciliation, we are called to labor together as one body, fulfilling the **original mandate** according to the claims of Christ.

God continues to sustain all things through his Word and to require obedience of all his creatures.¹⁶ Our efforts to obey are hindered by an antithesis between the redeeming work of Christ and the old order of sin and rebellion. This conflict is at work in each human heart and within the world at large.

Those redeemed in the Son and filled with the Spirit are called to a newfound joy in obedient living. Although unbelievers may be given significant understanding of the created order, true insight requires the light of the Bible, a heart committed to Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Therefore, biblically-oriented learning is both a possibility and a necessity for the Christian community.

As an institution of higher education committed to the Reformed, Christian perspective, Dordt University equips students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

12 Romans 1:25.

13 Genesis 3:15.

14 John 1:29; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:9-10; Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 1:19-20; 1 John 2:2; Revelation 21:5.

15 Matthew 28:18.

16 See earlier in Chapter 1.

17 See earlier in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: Context

The nature of education must be understood in the context of God's mandate to steward the earth.¹

This mandate calls us to glorify God by unfolding creation's potential and participating in its flourishing. God uniquely equips humanity to fulfill this charge by creating us in his own image. This calling is renewed and reiterated with even greater authority by the risen Lord in the Great Commission. Furthermore, Christ himself anticipated the empowerment of this calling, gifting us with the Holy Spirit's presence in and through his church.

In its broadest sense, education is an essential response to the **cultural mandate**,² the **Great Commission**,³ and the Pentecost vision.⁴ Consequently, we must study, examine, and seek to understand God's design and will for creation, sharing wisdom across generations. At Dordt, we describe these efforts to understand and develop the creation in the term **serviceable insight**.

Education also relates to the performance of humanity's cultural task in another way. God instructs men and women to be fruitful and multiply. This inherently involves nurturing and training children to exercise insight.

Education, then, is an essential aspect of life itself, and in its broadest scope refers to all human efforts to gain and share insight, whether at the forefront of higher education, in the kindergarten classroom, or on a parent's lap. Education pervades all of life, and is operative in every human relationship. In marriage, it manifests itself in the deepening of understanding between husband and wife. In the home, the rearing of children is an educational activity. In the church, we are instructed in Scripture. In all other spheres, such as commerce, industry, arts, and media, creation's flourishing requires growing insight.

Throughout history, as humanity engaged in increasingly complex cultural activity, a differentiation of calling, tasks, and responsibilities occurred. At Dordt, we refer to these distinctions using the word office.

One of the results of such historical differentiation is the school: the sphere in which society formalized the educational task of gaining and sharing insight. However, this task is so great and complex that further differentiation within formalized education became necessary, resulting today in preschool, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. With each successive level of education, the understanding of reality is both broadened and deepened.

Within the Christian community, education is essential for understanding God's loving law, handiwork, and mission in the world. However, this task is complicated by the extensive and pervasive deformation

¹ See earlier in Chapter 1.

² Genesis 1:26-30; Genesis 2:15.

³ Matthew 28:18-20.

⁴ Acts 2:17-18.

brought about by sin and centuries of idolatry. This situation makes the work of Christian education both challenging and crucial.

As an institution of higher learning, Dordt is called to the task of Christian

higher education. We seek to equip our constituents with Christian insight, developing and implementing Christian learning that benefits students, alumni, and the broader Christian community.

Chapter 3: Structure

Participating in the educational task of Dordt University is to be understood as a calling.

When disciples of Christ hear and accept God's call to participate in the task of Dordt University, they occupy a variety of offices.¹ Due to a diversity of tasks, Dordt has historically recognized five kinds of office: board members are elected; professors, staff, and the president are appointed; and students enroll in the work of the educational community. However, it should be noted that there is not an exclusive identity of office with any one person, and that a person can occupy more than one office. Office-bearers, endowed with God-given competence and insight, are authorized to take part in the educational task of Dordt and should discharge the specific responsibilities of their office in a spirit of selfless obedience to God, fellow office-bearers, and the mission of the university.²

Participating in the work of developing and sharing insight is not merely an occupation or a means to gain financial security or self-esteem, but a task to which God calls us.³ When this sense of office consciousness is lost, we lose the essential meaning of our work. Therefore, Dordt University seeks to develop and foster an atmosphere where

all office-bearers can flourish in fulfilling the calling of their office.

The board's specific task is to oversee Dordt. Trusted people from the broader constituency are mandated to provide leadership and direction, upholding Dordt's biblical faithfulness, maintaining its **Reformational** character, and ensuring its academic excellence and overall health.

Faculty have the primary responsibility for developing and sharing insight. Through perspectival growth, teaching, research and scholarship, and service, they are called to carry out the central educational task of the university.

Students also share in the educational task. With the faculty, they form a community of scholars responsible for developing and sharing insight, from its theoretical beginnings to concrete applications.

The administrators and staff construct and maintain the learning environment within which the educational work of the university can grow and thrive.

A distinct office is occupied by the chief executive officer, the president, who is charged with overseeing, guiding, and directing the entire life of the institution. The president serves as the liaison between the board and constituency on the one hand, and the faculty, students, administration, and staff on the other.

These tasks compose the one, common

¹ Romans 12:6-8.

² Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4-5.

³ Psalm 8:6; Matthew 25:14-30.

educational calling which pervades every segment and activity of Dordt. Though these tasks are similar in their response to the one, all-encompassing educational calling, each office is unique and functions properly only when the others are appropriately recognized and allowed free expression.

Dordt promotes responsible use of office, providing an education that deepens the

insight of all its office-bearers. Therefore, ongoing development and growth must rank high on the institutional agenda. To ensure responsible and competent execution of all offices, the university community maintains effective programs of evaluation on all levels.

Chapter 4: Authority

All authority is given by God and is therefore always delegated and representative.¹

It is given to serve humanity and the whole of creation. At Dordt University, each office is associated with a specific kind of authority and must be exercised in servanthood.

The goal of authority within Dordt is to enable and encourage office-bearers to perform their tasks as fully and effectively as possible in response to the will of the Lord. This authority is not to be used to dominate or exercise presumed rights; rather it must be exercised to serve, facilitate, and edify.²

Every office-bearer has the responsibility to serve others, empowering them by ensuring their freedom to carry out their task and exercise their authority. A biblical understanding of authority requires a spirit of mutual responsibility and accountability before God.³

The board possesses the authority to make and implement wise, insightful decisions that affect the direction of the entire educational enterprise. Normally the board entrusts the day-to-day operation of Dordt to the other office-bearers. However, if the board detects a departure from Dordt's mission, it is called and authorized to act.

The faculty is called and authorized to exercise authority over the academic and curricular program. As educational office-bearers they must give evidence of possessing the requisite competence, insight, and expertise which enables and authorizes them to equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

Students exercise a meaningful but more limited authority. They are directly involved in the teaching and learning process, so their insight regarding instruction and the overall life of the university is deeply valued. As this insight develops, it results in increased authority, enabling them to evaluate whether the board, president, faculty, and staff are fulfilling their mandate.

The authority of administrators and staff is determined by their special task of organizing and facilitating the educational process. Their expertise lies in facilitating and cultivating academic, co-curricular, financial, operational, and public relations aspects of the university.

The office of university president includes a broad range of authority for overseeing, guiding, and directing the entire university. As the liaison between the board and the faculty and staff, the president speaks to the faculty and staff with the specific authority of the board; the president speaks to the board with the specific authority of the faculty and staff. The president is responsible

¹ Matthew 28:18; Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:22.

² 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:3-4.

³ 1 Peter 4:10-11.

to ensure that Dordt functions effectively and efficiently and is authorized to exercise both academic and administrative authority. All office-bearers on the campus, in the performance of their various functions, are accountable to the president, who in turn, is accountable to the board.

Authority on campus is exercised effectively and responsibly when all office-bearers carry out their tasks competently. Office-bearers endowed with educational authority at the curricular and academic heart of the college must show themselves competent in their research and teaching. The administrators and the staff must also be competent to supply an enabling context for the educational process. As leader of the entire institution, the president must have a special measure of experience and understanding.

The proper exercise of authority requires structured and open lines of

communication. Any concerned office-bearer may examine or question procedure, policy decisions, or the university's effectiveness in developing and sharing serviceable insight. Such concerns should not be regarded as failing to submit to authority but as an appropriate testing of the university's activities. However, such questioning should respect the authority of each office and be done in a spirit of communal love.

Dordt recognizes a distinction between arriving at a decision and implementing it. The decision-making process must involve those given the authority to implement a decision as well as those who will be impacted by it. Conflicts and disputes should not be resolved by coercion. Instead, conflict resolution should involve a spirit of love and mutual trust, prompted by the desire to advance Dordt's educational purposes.

Chapter 5: Content

The central educational task of Dordt University is to provide Christian insight on an advanced level.

To function effectively in a complex society, Christians require wisdom and understanding. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to spiritual discernment, critical thinking, and wise judgment. In our daily lives, we are continually confronted by the difficulties and problems of our age. National and international tensions enter our homes through the media, political and economic problems touch our everyday lives, and the power of technology and communications affects us all. Christians require an advanced level of insight to engage with these multi-dimensional challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, all callings require a deep knowledge and a broad range of skills.

This situation puts a particularly important responsibility on Christian institutions of higher learning, including Dordt. We are faced with the need to meet continually changing demands. We must not be satisfied with the transmission of abstractions; we must develop and share insight that enables Christians to serve Jesus faithfully. At Dordt, our educational task is to provide insight that is kingdom-oriented and genuinely Christian: serviceable insight. Such insight equips the Christian community to respond obediently to the central Scriptural command: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with

all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”¹

Serviceable insight is a lived-out expression of the Scriptural command to seek wisdom and understanding. The Bible teaches, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.”² Also, “Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore don’t be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”³ And again: “Who is wise among you? Let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.”⁴

Scripture admonishes us to seek wisdom and understanding so that we may be able to discern and follow the will of the Lord. Dordt takes this pursuit seriously, striving to provide and promote the kind of insight that will enable Christians to discern the will of the Lord in all areas of life. Serviceable insight inspires and empowers students, alumni, and the broader Christian community for kingdom citizenship. Dordt aims to develop and disciple kingdom citizens who are answering the demands of the cultural mandate and the Great Commission, equipping believers to

¹ Mark 12:30-31.

² Psalm 111:10.

³ Ephesians 5:15-17.

⁴ James 3:13; Proverbs 8; John 1:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

advance, in loving service, the claim of Christ over all areas of life.

Christian insight encompasses an understanding of the structure and working of God's created order, including theoretical knowledge and the practical ability and motivation to carry out one's task in loving obedience and service.

Dordt is called to provide multi-dimensional insight. The Dordt graduate must have theoretical understanding, practical ability and skill, and a passion to be biblically faithful in response to God's call to service. For this reason, theory, practice, and motivation are all integral to the implementation of God's will in everyday situations.

In principle, no legitimate profession, occupation, vocation, or station in life can be precluded from Dordt's educational concern. One goal of the college is to identify those occupational areas where serviceable insight is increasingly needed. Dordt must therefore continually examine the nature and scope of its curriculum and other activities in order to provide high quality learning experiences that are central to its mission and that address crucial needs in society. In this way Dordt, by remaining aware of the demands of the times, can carry out its educational task of providing leadership that is not only uniquely Christian, but also dynamic and relevant.

Chapter 6: Implementation

Central to the implementation of the educational task of Dordt University is the curriculum, the basic means for sharing serviceable insight.

The curriculum consists of organized fields of investigation that are reflective of an intentional creational order.

Within the curriculum, four coordinates guide our pursuit. They are: 1) Religious Orientation (Who owns the cosmos and who owns your heart?); 2) Creational Structure (How do things hold together?); 3) Creational Development (How do things unfold?); and 4) Contemporary Response (How are we called to respond?).¹

At Dordt, the dimensions of reality are examined to obtain an understanding of the underlying unity in diversity. We attempt to convey the perspective of an ordered creation continuously upheld by God's Word,² the cosmos in which people are placed and called to carry out their tasks. Dordt stresses the indispensability of biblical study and Christian philosophy to our understanding of the character and coherence of the created order.

Insight into the structure of creation is to be integrally linked to an investigation

of humanity's response to God's call to service. In the building of civilizations, God's image-bearers have been influenced by a variety of spirits. Dordt engages students in a broad study of history and of contemporary problems. The investigation of historical developments is designed to enable the student to recognize the various deformations that were the result of humanity's fall into sin, as well as the redeeming effect of Christ's reclaiming of creation. Such investigation equips students to discover and evaluate the religious response evident in every cultural expression. In addition, Dordt provides insight into crucial challenges and opportunities facing contemporary culture. Living in a global community, we continually encounter issues that require discernment and thoughtful engagement. Dordt implements a curriculum sufficiently flexible to address these challenges and opportunities as they arise. In our study of history and contemporary problems through a Reformed perspective, Dordt instills the ability to discern the spirits and to engage in redemptive transformation of cultural activity.

Lastly, Dordt seeks to provide insight into the nature and demands of various vocational and professional tasks. Dordt graduates must be equipped to carry out their tasks as kingdom citizens in a variety of vocations. As a result, majors and pre-professional programs form another essential component of the curriculum.

¹ For more information and elaboration, see the *Educational Framework*.

² Hebrews 1:3; 2 Peter 3:5.

While the various disciplines and programs, together with historical and contemporary studies, constitute the core of the curriculum, Dordt by no means neglects to teach the many skills required by graduates as they continue in their calling. Emphases are placed on analytic, communicative, artistic, and physical skills, as these are essential for effective Christian service. Other skills, as demanded by the nature of vocational tasks, are also included in the curricular offerings.

The curricular components, taught in an integral way, constitute the elements required by the student to attain genuine Christian insight and wisdom. For this reason, Dordt seeks to offer a curriculum conducive to contextual learning.

Truly serviceable insight involves theoretical comprehension, practical ability, and proper motivation. Further, Dordt's curriculum provides coherence, creativity, and interrelatedness within the unifying framework of a biblical perspective.

This integral curriculum is effectively implemented through excellence in teaching and scholarship. Faculty members are responsible for various components of

the curriculum. They ought to develop into a cohesive team of teachers and scholars, competent professionals who are interdependent in their concern for effective teaching within their area of academic specialization, and their responsibility to the overall development of serviceable insight.

Both the curricular and the co-curricular aspects of the college play essential roles in the implementation of the educational task, working toward the same goal, serviceable insight. Co-curricular activities are fundamentally grounded in the same educational objectives as curricular endeavors. Dordt seeks to provide a wide range of co-curricular opportunities to develop and enhance serviceable insight.

Dordt will have succeeded in its mission when it produces knowledgeable and skillful students desiring to carry out their calling and vocation in service and loving obedience. To this end, Dordt must cooperate closely with the church community and home to engender wisdom according to the mind of Christ.³

³ 1 Corinthians 2:15-16.

Chapter 7: Academic Freedom

Dordt University confesses that the source of true freedom is Jesus Christ. However, such freedom is not to be equated with Enlightenment philosophy.

Individual autonomy, the traditional idea of academic freedom, suggests that freedom knows no bounds. This view is not acceptable because all perceptions of academic freedom are based on worldviews that set parameters for the academic enterprise. Christ empowers us by his Spirit and directs us by his Word. He frees us to perform our academic task in a liberating way that enables us to respond obediently to his call to serve. The implementation of this calling includes an institutional commitment to academic freedom. Our Reformational view of academic freedom rests in part on the biblical concept of **sphere sovereignty**.

Dordt finds its God-given authority and responsibility within the distinct societal sphere of education. God gives each sphere its own unique integrity, authority, and task, while simultaneously holding each responsible to the other spheres within the broader kingdom of God. This makes each sphere both compelled and bounded by the calling it has received. Therefore, Dordt desires to fulfill its calling, while also cooperating with other non-academic spheres such as business, the church, the family, or government. In faithful response

to the cultural mandate and the Great Commission, Dordt boldly maintains that academic freedom is compelled and bounded by the Word of God and shaped by a Reformed worldview. Dordt must uphold academic freedom, promoting genuine Christian scholarship and teaching by the faculty as they explore and investigate.

Dordt actively promotes an environment of trust and mutual responsibility among office-bearers. Therefore, our understanding of academic freedom requires humility, cooperation, discernment, and rigorous engagement with one another. Disagreement need not necessarily imply error or be divisive. However, all parties must understand the nature and parameters of the statement of purpose, explicitly affirm The Educational Task of Dordt University, and agree to carry out their academic responsibilities within the framework articulated therein. If an academic freedom issue arises in which a faculty member appears to move away from the stated goals and purposes of the university, faculty, and communal evaluation of one's work should be sought and expected. If this informal and formal engagement has not produced a resolution, the faculty member should ultimately be prepared for re-evaluation of his or her contractual status with the board of trustees serving as the final authority.

Dordt faculty are called to explore, tend, and develop God's world by asking probing questions, formulating insights, wrestling with ideas, freely dialoguing with differing

perspectives, and living obediently, all while prophetically working toward shalom. This involves submitting to God’s Word as revealed in creation, embodied in the person of Jesus, expounded in the Scriptures, and applied through the ongoing work of the

Holy Spirit and his Church. In doing so, faculty participate in the Reformational tradition of *Semper Reformanda* – Reformed and always being Reformed, according to the Word of God.

Educational Task Glossary

Reformed

The Reformed tradition emerged out of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Its early representatives include John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Theodore Beza. Reformed theology emphasizes the authority and normativity of Scripture and doctrines such as justification by faith alone, the sovereignty of God, infant baptism, and the spiritual (i.e. non-physical) presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Multiple branches of the Reformed tradition now exist across the globe. Dordt University is closely associated (yet not exclusively so) with a Dutch strand of the Reformed tradition, which has historically emphasized the sovereignty of God over every aspect of life. It includes prominent thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Herman Dooyeweerd.

Classis

A classis is a governing body of the church that is composed of multiple congregations, usually in a defined geographical area. It is the intermediate body between individual congregations and the nationwide synod. The classis is analogous to a presbytery in other traditions.

Sphere

A sphere is a realm of human life that has its own distinctive calling, authority, and responsibility. God has ordered his creation such that each sphere of human life has its own task and arena of authority. Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and other Reformed thinkers have identified a number of these distinctive realms of life—including family, school, church, and the state.

World and Life View

A worldview is a person’s fundamental orientation to life and reality. It encompasses our most basic beliefs, moral principles, and desires. Often, our worldview is revealed not only by what we profess to believe, but by what we do—how we love (or fail to love) God, his creatures, and his creation. Worldview impacts not only our individual beliefs and practices but also shapes all aspects of society and culture.

Creation

Creation refers to God’s creative work, bringing all things into existence out of nothing, and continually unfolding and upholding it. God called his creation good, and made human beings to live and flourish in relationship with him, serving as stewards of all that has been entrusted to us.

Fall

The Fall refers to humanity’s sinful rebellion against God and his good ordering of creation. All aspects of human existence, including our relationships with God, neighbor, creation, and self are affected by this corruption of God’s created order. Yet, even amid the sinful corruptions of the Fall, God continues to sustain and govern all things according to his eternal providence.

Redemption

Redemption refers to God’s restoration of humanity through the saving work of Jesus Christ, including our relationships with God, neighbor, creation, and self. Redemption applies not only to the human soul, but to the whole human person. All of creation longs for God to set things right, reversing the effects of sin and restoring all that he has made.

Fullness

The fullness of the Kingdom is the consummation of God's redemptive plan for humanity and creation. In the present time, we enjoy a foretaste of God's coming Kingdom, but look forward to the peace and perfection of a future age.

Cosmos

The cosmos is the entirety of all that God has made. There is nothing in the universe that exists that was not created by God.

Covenant

A covenant is a mutual agreement that establishes a fellowship between parties. It is usually accompanied by specific terms and conditions, promising blessings to those who are faithful to the covenant, and specifying penalties for those who violate it. The redemptive covenant between God and humanity accomplishes the salvation of God's people. Through this covenantal relationship, we enjoy an intimate fellowship with our creator, and come to know his will for us.

Office

In any social context, certain individuals will have responsibility to care for the common good of the community. In family life, parents have responsibility to nourish, educate, and protect their children. In ecclesial life, pastors, elders, and deacons are called to minister to their congregation in various ways. We refer to these roles and responsibilities as "offices." At Dordt University, those who hold office (faculty, staff, president, student, or board of trustee) are granted authority to act on behalf of the community in specific ways. If officeholder acts against the common good of the community, authorized individuals may correct or even remove the individual from his or her office.

Commissions

All authority derives from God. As Christ's disciples, we are commissioned in his name to spread the knowledge of God through all the world. Doing so, we act as agents of reconciliation to every part of creation.

Original Mandate

See "Cultural Mandate."

Cultural Mandate

The cultural mandate refers to God's original command to Adam and Eve to serve as stewards of God's good creation, promoting the flourishing of humanity and the natural world (Genesis 1:28).

Great Commission

The Great Commission refers to Christ's command to his disciples to preach the gospel to every nation, making disciples and baptizing individuals in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:16-20).

Serviceable Insight

At Dordt University, education is about more than mere transmission of information or knowledge; it strives for transformation of the whole person. This transformation, wholly dependent on biblical wisdom, is cultivated in community and equips us to serve God and neighbor. We do not pursue wisdom simply for wisdom's sake or personal benefit; rather, we are seeking wisdom that enables us to better know, serve, and praise our Creator.

Reformational

A philosophical school of thought within the Reformed tradition that emphasizes the religious grounding of all areas of life. There is nothing that does not fall under the sovereignty of God. The primary proponents of reformational thought include Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk H.T. Vollenhoven.

Sphere Sovereignty

Sphere sovereignty is a philosophical idea that emerged out of the Dutch Calvinist tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. God has ordered his creation such that each sphere of human life (see "Sphere" above) has its own task and arena of authority and responsibility. Each sphere is directly under Divine rule and one sphere may not impinge on another's unique authority. Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, and other Reformed thinkers have identified a number of these distinctive realms of life—including family, school, church, and the state.¹

¹ Richard Mouw, *On Kuyper*



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