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# In Search of a Starting Point

## And a Method for Interdisciplinary Studies

### In the Context of Christian Theism

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by William D. Dennison

#### Preface

**A**lthough I received a Ph. D. in interdisciplinary studies (IDS), I have struggled to understand the concept of IDS. Generally, I can attribute this struggle to the following reasons: 1) my own Ph. D. program at Michigan State University; 2) the literature in the field, which produces a broad spectrum of definitions for IDS; and 3) the various conceptions of IDS among academicians. Teaching in an interdisciplinary department over the last twelve years, I have attempted to find my

way in the academic and scholarly discussion. This discussion has evoked my reflection, not only upon my graduate program at Michigan State University and the program in which I now teach but also upon a Biblical approach to IDS.

Scholarly literature on the subject has suggested that my degree in IDS from Michigan State University as well as the dominant focus of my current institution's program would be referenced by the experts as "multidisciplinary studies," *not* IDS. At Michigan State University, the program was designed to include three distinct fields of concentration that the student chose (I chose history, philosophy, and theology in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany). Even though the program had no inherent structure of integration within those concentrated studies, academicians called it *IDS*. When I accepted my current position in IDS, I discovered that like Michigan State University, this institution had designed its undergraduate IDS program around three distinct fields of concentrated studies, and that, except for a required final thesis paper, it too did not contain a mandatory integrative element. In light of this deficiency, a colleague and I made several adjustments to improve the program, though it is still far from ideal and remains under constant review and revision.

During my years of working with this program, I have noticed that as scholars in the field and academicians attempt to define IDS more clearly, they form their own conceptions of IDS in comparison with multidisciplinary studies, cross-disciplinary studies, and transdisciplinary studies. In my judgment, too many academicians are con-

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structuring programs that they title “interdisciplinary” without seriously reflecting upon the unique component that constitutes IDS: *integration*. Simply put, too many programs on college and university campuses are being referred to as IDS, when in reality, their constitutive element is multidisciplinary or crossdisciplinary or transdisciplinary.

As a result, the most troubling element for a Christian theist engaged in IDS is lack of integration as the starting point and method, despite the acknowledgement by IDS scholars that integration is the unique component of IDS. Rather, in the secular academic environment, integration is the result of a process: it is simply the product and goal of engaging in a societal project or investigating a classroom study-topic. In an academic world that has long rejected a Christian ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology, as well as the secular foundationalism of modernity, one is hard-pressed to find any secular academician in the field of IDS advocating a definitive starting point and methodology for IDS. In other words, secular scholars have abandoned the discussion of a metaphysical and epistemological foundation as the starting point and method for IDS. Instead, they view this field of study and its integrative component as a pragmatic process that begins by addressing specific issues or problems related to the cultural environment, then uses *various* methods and approaches to solve the problems. At this point, a Christian theist must ask, “Is such a study truly integrative if it does not have an ontological, integrative starting point, which also has the constitutive component of method?” To put it another way, the Christian theist must ask, “Without the God of the Bible as the author of integration within the creation, can there truly be IDS?”

It is obvious that the present academic environment surrounding IDS calls for the integration of approach and method provided and modeled by the triune God of Scripture. As we frame the discussion from a Christian theistic starting point and method, we must begin correctly in order to end correctly. We must lay a Biblical foundation before we construct the superstructure of our IDS programs and curriculum. This essay provides an argument for the starting point and method of IDS: Christian theism. If my thesis has credence, it will

serve as the basis of a curriculum that reflects this thesis. In other words, this is a work in progress; for now, a Christian theistic starting point and method must confront a world of confusion among IDS academicians.

### **A Proposal: Starting Point and Method**

Christian theists commonly begin with the creation and humanity’s bearing the image of God as the starting point for constructing a worldview, since to understand the progressive revelation of God in history, to understand the gospel, and to construct a holistic worldview, one must have a Biblical view of the cosmos and anthropology. In saying this, however, many Christian theists use empirical exegesis to unfold the progressive revelation of God. For example, according to the empirical hermeneutical model, Genesis 1 merely describes God’s sovereign activity as Creator as he brings natural phenomena into existence *ex nihilo* (out-of-nothing) in order to glorify his name, including the creation of male and female humans in his image. These same Christian theists believe that each story within the Biblical narrative must be interpreted primarily within the context of its own particular time and situation. However, even though God is truly active in every particular circumstance recorded in the Biblical text, the full dimension of God’s revelation is stifled if the interpretation is limited to the empirical context of the story itself.

As God reveals himself in history, we are told that mystery and God’s invisible nature shroud the providential work of his hand.<sup>1</sup> That providential work is the full-orbed benefit of redemption that is found in the coming person and work of Jesus Christ (Lk. 24:27, 44-47; Col. 1:15-19). In fact, the invisible God has known from the beginning what was hidden as a mystery to the creature throughout redemptive history. In other words, the Lord from the beginning has known and planned the end. This understanding of providence is crucial; it means that the end is always in view from the beginning. It means that the original creation and the image of God cannot be accurately viewed without knowledge of the final new creation and conformity to the image of Christ. Hence, as we now stand partially in the eschatological presence

of the triune God of the Bible (“already” and “not yet”), we must come to grips with the fact that the empirical activity of God from the beginning of time is subsumed in his final eschatological presence. Simply put, eschatology has been interwoven into the very fabric of God’s revelation from the beginning, including his act of creation. For example, one should never interpret God’s activity of overcoming the darkness with light on the first day of creation without seeing the eschatological light in Jesus Christ’s overcoming the darkness in the final creation. Furthermore, one cannot understand the seventh day in the original creation without understanding the final eschatological rest of God for his people. The future eschaton interprets the past: one understands the original creation in relationship to the future new creation. We start from the conclusion in order to understand the beginning; we start at the end in order to understand the present.

The eschatological character of revelation maintains this premise: one must start with God in order to end in the presence of God. Christ underlines this essential truth when he describes his own person in eschatological language: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, Beginning and End; the First and the Last” (Rev. 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8). Christ’s description of His very person conveys the book-ends within which the entire spectrum of Biblical revelation in history fits. The Bible begins with the triune eternal God outside of creation history, and it ends with God’s people inheriting his eternal presence outside of creation history. One must start in heaven in order to inherit heaven. This beginning and ending point also embodies the Biblical notion of grace: the God of grace is prerequisite to humanity’s inheriting grace. No sinner can receive the benefits of the Jesus Christ’s gospel without the sovereign intervention of God’s grace. God’s reconciliation of the sinner comes from God’s own nature of forgiveness, mercy, and love through Christ; this divine act of reconciliation in Christ defines grace. If God were not a being of grace, no sinner could be reconciled to the sovereign Creator, who is absolutely holy and righteous. In light of God’s revelation and redemption, the Christian theist must hold that the triune God of Biblical religion is the sole beginning and end; in

a subservient and joyful manner, sinful humanity must seek and find its beginning and ending in him.

Furthermore, we must see all things as having their beginning and their end in God’s creative and redemptive activity. If this view accurately portrays the Biblical teaching about the person of God, then IDS must be grounded in the ontological existence of the triune God of Scripture. Simply put, the pre-existence of the ontological and metaphysical reality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the *given* for the Christian interdisciplinarian operating within created history. As the triune God creates and condescends to involve himself in the realm of the provisional and temporal by his own volition, humanity, as the image of God, is placed immediately in an integrative relationship with all created things (Gen. 1:26-31).

Christian disciplinarians, for the sake of establishing the legitimate basis for their isolated discipline, can overlook this initial appearance of human beings on the sixth day in the Biblical text. Captured by the empirical sequence of the text, these disciplinarians may wish to argue that the sequence of God’s creative activity legitimizes the priority of differentiation of the disciplines within the encyclopedia of the sciences. For example, they may wish to point to the disciplines of mathematics and astronomy on days one and four; the disciplines of biology, horticulture, ornithology, and oceanography on day five; and the disciplines of zoology and anthropology on day six. For them, the creation order from day one through day six may suggest a pattern of differentiation to integration, or a pattern of parts (particulars) to whole (universal). Although the progressive and empirical sequence of God’s creative activity must be maintained in accordance with the Biblical text (Gen. 1:1-2:3; WCF IV:1), the eschatological character of revelation displayed in the original creation must also be incorporated.

As we move in the Biblical text from the events of the first day to the events of the sixth day, differentiation is consummated in the creation of male and female human beings, who alone receive the imprint of God’s image. From the creation of light on the first day through the creation of cattle, creeping things, and beasts on the sixth day, all

God's activity moves toward the prime creature in the creation—male and female human beings. In other words, the future creation of humans (day six) shapes the past (days one through five), or the end shapes the beginning. The eschatological dimension of this pattern should be noted. As the sole being to be designated prophet, priest, and king in God's creation, man is placed in the creation last ("the last shall be first") in order to exercise his office over all God has made. But from where did Adam's pattern for office come? The

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blueprint comes from Christ: the mystery of the eschatological Christ is revealed in the first Adam. Simply put, the Last Adam serves as the model for the creation of the First Adam.

The Adam in the original creation is the microcosm of the image of Christ, and he was given the unique privilege of being a responsible agent of the offices of Christ in the original creation—prophet, priest, and king.<sup>2</sup> When created, man was placed immediately in the context of exercising his office. Keeping the distinction between the creature and the Creator in view, we see that Adam is created in the image of God, whereas Christ is the very image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26 & Col. 1:15; see also Gen. 5:1-3). Adam's creation in the image of God is a creaturely and finite replica of Christ as image of God. Herein, we must think of Christ's central position within the Godhead; as Christ is the image of the invisible God, all things were created by

and for him, whether in heaven or on earth (Col. 1:15-16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2; Jn. 1:3). As the Christ is the Creator, all things exist and hold together by the word of his power (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

Although the First Adam does not occupy such a sovereign status, he does occupy the unique position, as the image of Christ, of being a temporal creator unlike any other creature God has made and by knowing that all things were created *for* him. Hence, just as Christ has dominion over the whole (universal) and all things are under his headship, so the creaturely replica of the image of Christ, the First Adam, was created to have dominion over the whole (universal), and all things are under his headship.

This picture of the Last and First Adam has an interesting component: it places the reader of the Biblical text into the antithetical spectrum of secular religion as recorded within the bounds of the Biblical narrative. The religious polytheisms of the nations are antithetical to the eschatological picture of Christ's sovereign Lordship over all things. Specifically, Christ's reign is not limited to a certain spectrum of jurisdiction, nor does his reign begin and end over particular domains, as do the reigns of the Roman and Greek deities. Rather, Christ's exhaustive and infinite wisdom creates, understands, interprets, and maintains the coherent wholeness of all things. This Biblical view of Christ's sovereign position as Creator underscores the *comprehensive* and *coherent* nature of his person and task as he brought all things into existence.

The Biblical view of anthropology follows the same line of thought. Even though the First Adam is limited as creature when he appears on the scene, he is placed in a comprehensive and coherent creation and, because of that creation, he resembles the posture of the Last Adam (cf. Gen. 1:26-28 & Col. 1:15-19). As the finite replica of the image of Christ, the First Adam has dependent and analogical wisdom that includes the ability to understand, interpret, and rule the coherent wholeness of the creation in which he was immediately placed. This integrative wholeness defines the context of the first male and female human beings (Gen. 1:26-30). With integration as the *given*, the First Adam enters into differentiation (Gen. 2:20). This constitutive relationship between integration and dif-

ferentiation cannot be overstressed.

As sin enters the creation, humanity will struggle with an organic perception and understanding of the creation because sinners worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Rebellious humanity will start with differentiation in order to construct with its autonomous mind an explanation for the chance world in which it lives (in the history of philosophy, this problem of understanding is commonly referred to as the “one and the many” problem). Perhaps, Descartes’ method in the *Meditations* (1641) serves as a fine example of the process. Starting within the world of differentiation, Descartes begins by questioning his reliance upon the senses (experience) and moves from there to question his reliance upon reason (mathematics). By applying skepticism to his own arguments, he concludes that both avenues fail as the foundation for science. The only point that remains is that he is the one who is thinking about these things, i.e., that he cannot deny that he is a being who thinks (consciousness of his own mind is real). He has now moved from differentiation to the Archimedean starting point for science—the one universal principle on which reality is constructed. From this point, Descartes reconstructs the rational world of mathematics that now enables him to reconstruct his reliance upon the senses—his world of experience (the world of differentiation within a coherent cosmos). Descartes’ *Meditations* gives the pattern of the natural man: he will begin with differentiation (the many) as he presses to uncover the one principle that explains the meaning and purpose of life. From that one principle (the one), he will construct the components of differentiation into a coherent and comprehensive whole (the one in the many).

Hence, just as the state of coherence, inherent in the eschatological Christ, critiques the secular religious polytheisms exposed within the bounds of the Biblical text, so the portrait of the first Adam’s immediate state of coherence critiques a fallen humanity, who always start with differentiation in order to attempt to find meaning in the creation. As we see in Descartes, fallen humanity will move from differentiation to isolate something within the cosmos as its religious or Archimedean starting point in order to understand, interpret, and

rule over the coherent wholeness of the creation.

We have already encountered suggestions for that starting point in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, e.g. human consciousness, rationality, experience, logic, language, utility, and diversity. Each of these proposals, however, had difficulty constructing a truly coherent and organic worldview that brought all the disciplines of science under one umbrella.<sup>3</sup> As we noted earlier, those working in the human sciences isolated the method of understanding from the method of explanation in the natural sciences. This method of understanding could not present a coherent starting point across the entire encyclopedia of the sciences. On the other hand, the nineteenth-century positivists attempted to control both the natural and human sciences on the basis of the tyranny of deterministic rational laws in the natural world. The positivists found resistance to their view of reason by those in the human sciences who wished to stress the relative freedom of the human being. As a result, modernity found itself in the midst of the dialectical tension between nature and freedom: how can humans be free in the midst of a world of deterministic natural laws? The natural sciences and their allies stressed natural law with respect to freedom, whereas the human sciences stressed human freedom with respect to natural law. In this tension, the positivists also failed to unite the entire register of the sciences under the Archimedean point of rationality.

In reaction to the state of affairs between the human and natural sciences were those who wished to unify both fields under a rubric that would preserve the freedom of the human and yet contain the rigor of the scientific method produced in the natural sciences. In this context, the Marburg neo-Kantians suggested pure logic: Weber recommended causal laws of behavior, and Dewey presented the utility of mind and experience. Later, others such as Husserl suggested a view of consciousness in which objects are givens; Heidegger recommended *Dasein* (being-there); Sartre presented the transcendental ego; and Habermas offered language and linguistics as the underlying principle.<sup>4</sup>

Serious questions remain, however, whether these attempts at synthesis have actually brought



together the two branches of science. As these thinkers worked on the coattails of the human sciences, many disciplinarians have had difficulty applying the suggestions of these thinkers across all the disciplines of the natural sciences. To arrive, in this confused state, at a coherent and organic starting point that unites all the sciences, we should not be surprised that post-structuralism and post-modernity have won the day for many within academia, especially for those constructing some type of interdisciplinary curricula.

In contrast to fallen humanity's futile assertion that differentiation is a means to coherence, *the eschatological, Christocentric view of creation holds that differentiation is constitutive of coherence*. As the divine agent bringing everything into existence, Christ operates on the basis of the coherent plan of God (Col. 1:15-16); specifically, the parts are always constitutive of the whole in the metaphysical reality of God's creative act. Even as Adam names the cattle, birds, and the beasts (differentiation), he is operating within the *given* of a coherent world (Gen. 2:20; 2:7-8). Since humanity is in union with our federal head (Adam, as he is a finite replica of the eschatological Christ), we must begin with the understanding that the creation is *given* as an integrative unity to humanity.

As secular interdisciplinarians struggle with the formulation and meaning of integration as applied to IDS, the Christian theist knows that integration is already a *given*—the term integration is synonymous with the term coherence! Specifically, if we are addressing the field of academic curricula, then the integrative given of all things is the presupposition as well as the realistic foundation on which to begin. Just as the problem of “the one and the many” is resolved in the one God and three persons of Biblical Christianity, so its application to the creation must be resolved in the organic unity of all things in Christ. From that unity, one differentiates the particulars in the creation.<sup>5</sup> For Christian academicians, the whole is the *given*, as one proceeds to the particular disciplines within the curricula; moreover, the particular disciplines are to be viewed as constitutive of the whole.

This Biblical motif provides insight and assistance for the field of IDS. Presently, so-called IDS projects often get trapped in a maze of controversy

over whether the exercise is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, crossdisciplinary, pluridisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary. The Christian interdisciplinarian alone has a proper framework in which to operate: this academician knows and understands that the *given* is the coherent integration of God's revelation as displayed in the creation of all things. Hence, all projects or exercises that end up multidisciplinary, crossdisciplinary, pluridisciplinary, transdisciplinary can now be correctly viewed as being constitutive of the interdisciplinary. For this reason, such exercises should be viewed as proper components of the interdisciplinary enterprise.

Since the starting point of IDS is the ontological Trinitarian God as found in Scripture and as centered upon the self-attesting Christ, the method of IDS is grounded in the creative and providential activity of the eschatological Christ. Method is therefore bracketed by the eschatologi-

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cal structure of God's sovereign plan: the end defines the beginning, and the beginning defines the end. Specifically, all facts must be interpreted and understood within the scope of God's sovereign plan for the cosmos.<sup>6</sup> At the core of that plan is the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus Christ. Method, therefore, entails and is built upon the manner by which one interprets and understands the facts.

Obviously, there are many options here. In the

tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas, one can begin with the general acknowledgement of the facts, then proceed to make a distinction between a divine being and created things. Such a method will claim neutrality with respect to the facts; then, as one proceeds to distinguish between a divine being and created things, the general and autonomous observation of the first step will shape the view of the supernatural and the natural. For example, as I observe the general facts that surround me, I may conclude that these facts only need the explanation for motion; from that perspective, all that is needed to interpret the facts before me is a being who explains motion. Hence, Aristotle's "unmoved mover" is the only deity needed to explain the cause of motion. On the other hand, modern rationalism and empiricism may begin by maintaining that all facts must be interpreted only within the domain of what the mind can experience. As these strict rationalists and empiricists observe the general facts that surround us, they may conclude that there are inherent rational and empirical laws of nature that explain the world in which we live and that there is no necessity for a supernatural being at all in order to interpret our cosmos. In both cases, the starting point of the human subject in relation to the object limits the procedure of method. In fact, the human mind will begin as the absolute; it will begin without an acknowledged dependency upon the Creator. Even if the student of God's creation comes to a view of dependency later, the student's view will be tainted and haunted by that so-called neutral starting point, which will deter the understanding. For this very reason, the secular interdisciplinarian, who always begins with facts in general, is ever shaped by numerous methodological suggestions that will never provide a stable and solid organic view for IDS.

In contrast, the Christian interdisciplinarian must approach method with a Biblical view of epistemology. Since method involves an understanding and interpretation of the facts, it necessarily entails a manner of knowing the facts. How do knowing, understanding, and interpreting take place? To answer this question, we must return to our starting point. Simply put, we can not understand and interpret the facts correctly within their proper framework unless we start with the author

and finisher of those facts—Jesus Christ. Since the author and finisher of the facts and framework is Christ, Christ's eschatological status is essential to the method of IDS. As the eternal Son of God is now exalted, the veil concerning the mystery of God's plan is removed to the point that we now see dimly into that incredible diagram (II Cor. 3-5; I Cor. 13). Indeed, the progressive revelation in Scripture now affirms that all things were created by Christ, through him, and for him and that without Christ, nothing was created that has been created (Col. 1:15-16; John. 1:3; Rom. 11:36; Rev. 5:8-14). Moreover, Christ's work of redemption is at the heart of God's plan for humanity and creation (Rev. 5:6).<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, Van Til calls a "Christian epistemology a *revelational epistemology*."<sup>8</sup> Any person who wishes to remove, forget, or ignore Christ as the starting point is, in effect, eliminating the creation itself since there can be no cosmos without Christ.

As the Christian academician views starting point, method, and epistemology in a correlative relationship, he or she must begin with the author of the facts in order to know, understand, and interpret the facts. Specifically, God knows *analytically*, whereas humans know *analogically*. Keeping in mind the Creator-creature distinction, we understand that Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Godhead, has a complete self-conscious knowledge of himself as knower of all things *analytically*; i.e., he has complete comprehensive and coherent knowledge of himself and everything he has created. Christ has a self-conscious knowledge of all the facts as they are organically constituted in the coherent, integrated universe that he brought into being. In Christ's own epistemological self-consciousness, subject and object have their proper interrelationship while at the same time maintaining their distinctive identity. Moreover, facts are never abstract for Christ. Even though he knows comprehensively and exhaustively all the components of the facts—he knows the parts as well as the whole—he never sees the facts abstractly in separation from the sovereign plan and their purpose in respect to his eternal rule and glory.<sup>9</sup>

Christ's analytical knowledge has a profound application for IDS. Instead of arguing for whether integration can be attained or whether there is



a method that can produce integration or whether there is an objective principle that can collect the facts into an integrative whole, the Christian interdisciplinary contends that all things are *given* in the state of integration on the basis of Christ's analytical knowledge. Specifically, in Christ, the facts are *given* in the condition of integration, where theory and practice are fused; for this reason, humans immediately find themselves within the coherent universe as a whole.

As creatures, our knowledge, like that of the First Adam, is *analogical*, i.e. it is knowledge that is dependent upon the coherence of God's knowledge of himself and God's knowledge of the creation. In order for humans to know the facts in the way God intended them to be understood and interpreted, our knowledge of the facts must *correspond* to God's knowledge, i.e. it must be analogous to God's knowledge of himself and the creation. Since all facts are determined by and are original with God, humans must freely subordinate their minds to the thoughts of God's knowledge in order to have true knowledge. While for God, coherence comes first, for the creature, correspondence has the priority.

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But how do coherence and correspondence function in the creature? As we keep in mind the fact that God placed the first Adam in a limited yet coherent state of integrative life, we can say that the coherence that shaped his initial thinking corresponds to God's coherence. In making this

observation, we should not think that humans possess or can possess comprehensive knowledge, nor should we think that the failure to acquire comprehensive knowledge translates into a failure to have true knowledge of the facts.<sup>10</sup> As long as human knowledge corresponds to God's knowledge, it is true knowledge.

We can call this bond of knowledge between the Creator and the creature a covenantal epistemology. To remain faithful to this covenantal bond, the Christian academician needs to begin with a commitment to the coherent knowledge of God; from that posture, he or she needs to submit humbly to thinking God's thoughts in correspondence to his or her own thoughts. For this reason, our analogical knowledge is integrative from the beginning; simply put, the creature's knowledge has a microcosmic resemblance to the macrocosmic knowledge of the Creator.

But how do we know whether our knowledge corresponds with God's knowledge? Because of Adam's fall into sin, humans have only one way of knowing whether their knowledge corresponds to the knowledge the Creator. Human knowledge must be based upon an infallible source of true knowledge in a sinful world. God has given that source; it is his inscripturated Word (II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:19-21; cf. also WCF I:1). The Biblical canon is God's own infallible commentary on his activity in revelational history. In other words, the Bible is God's infallible *interpretation* of his works in the space-time continuum. As God reveals himself in history, the creature is able to pierce God's self-knowledge—the creature is given a glance into God's rationality. In this light, as stated previously, the Christian theist must begin with the “self-at-testing Christ of Scripture,” which not only testifies to the person of Christ but also testifies that the entire canon of progressive revelation testifies to Jesus Christ (Lk. 24:27, 44-47).

If we believe in Christ as the beginning and end of creation, our epistemology must submit to the propositions found in Scripture, conditioned by the revelatory activity of God in history. Hence, when persons conform their understanding of factuality and their interpretation of factuality to Biblical revelation, their knowledge corresponds to God's knowledge. To conform oneself to the truth

of Biblical revelation is to conform oneself to the Holy Spirit, who not only is the author of Scripture but also writes the truth of God and God's universe upon one's inner spirit (I Cor. 2:10-13).

As the Apostle Paul clearly asserts, persons given to secularization will never receive a world interpreted by God's Word and the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:14).<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Christian theists conform their entire worldview to the parameters of Biblical revelation.<sup>12</sup> If Christian theists live faithfully within these bounds, they operate within an epistemological self-consciousness that will not compromise or surrender Christ to the domain of secularism—a domain that attacks Christ's eschatological exaltation, which consummates all things and which from the beginning intrudes into the creation.

A thorough conviction of the truth of Biblical revelation is imperative if the Christian interdisciplinarian is to interweave starting point, method, and epistemology. The Bible provides a concrete example of the interdisciplinarian in the post-fall era: it is Solomon. Solomon's early reign gives us two pictures that provide insight into the Creator-creature distinction as well as God's plan in revelational-history: 1) Solomon as a portrait of Christ's eschatological position, and 2) Solomon as a creature who is dependent upon the Lord. By means of God's revelatory typology, we see the Creator-creature come together in the one paradigm of Solomon.

On the one hand, in temporal Israel Solomon portrays the eschatological reign of Christ given by Paul to the Colossian church (1:15-19). Like Christ, who will reign in wisdom, knowledge, understanding, justice, and peace from a heavenly and glorious temple (Rev. 21:1-27), Solomon reigns in wisdom, knowledge, understanding, justice, and peace over Israel and the nations from his glorious temporal temple (I Kings 7:1; 8:10-13, 28-30). As he pursues knowledge humbly, he receives wisdom that resembles the coherent and self-contained wisdom of God himself (I Kings 3:4-15). Solomon's special wisdom from God appears coherent and comprehensive, exceeding that of any king or queen or other human upon the earth (I Kings 4:29-31). The fame of his wisdom is so great that servants of kings as well as kings and queens cannot resist

his penetrating, divine insights (I Kings 4:34-5:1; 10:1-13; cf. Solomon to Psalm 2 and its messianic implications). Moreover, like the Lord's wisdom, his wisdom embodies the essential ingredients needed to judge justly between what is good and evil (I Kings 3:4-15; cf. Isa. 9:6-7 and its messianic implications). Solomon's wisdom, reflecting the creative activity of God, also includes an encyclopedic knowledge of the creation (I Kings 4:33; cf. Gen. 1:20-25). Thus, in the early reign of Solomon, the eschatological reign of Christ and his kingdom is prophetically foreshadowed in the splendor and glory of God's presence. Such wisdom and knowledge start in a state of coherence and integration as they address various issues and categories of differentiation.

On the other hand, Solomon is a clear representative of the creature: he is one who is truly dependent upon God's wisdom for his own wisdom. He realizes that he is standing in the presence of the Lord, who has coherent knowledge of himself and all things—God's knowledge is analytical (I Kings 3:6-9). Solomon does not deceive himself: he knows that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). Simply put, his desire is to have the type of wisdom that *corresponds* to God's wisdom; he wants to live in compliance with God's knowledge (I Kings 3:6-15; Prov. 2:1-9). In this condition, he lives in the *given*, i.e. the integrative coherence of God's creation, where theory and practice are fused. For our purposes, it can be said that Solomon is an interdisciplinarian; for him, the whole and the parts are constitutive of one another.

In examining the early reign of Solomon, the Christian academician can easily infer the starting point and method for IDS. Like Solomon, we begin with God's analytical knowledge of himself and the creation. Such knowledge is coherent, comprehensive, creative, and original within the ontological personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like Solomon, the Christian academician has the sole desire to participate, in creaturely and limited fashion, in the analytical knowledge of God as revealed to the creature. In this way, the Christian academician willingly submits to a limited, coherent knowledge of God and the world as that knowledge corresponds to God's knowledge.

As we proceed, we must keep in mind that in the construct of IDS, starting point, method, and epistemology are inseparable from each other. Like Solomon, the Christian academician begins with God's analytical knowledge and a commitment to wisdom that is analogous to God's understanding. He or she realizes that this starting point is foundational for understanding and interpreting God, humans, and creation.

At this point, however, the procedure is not complete. Acting in covenantal faithfulness, one can know if one's knowledge corresponds to God's knowledge only through the revelation of his Word. For this reason, God's revealing himself in his Word is also foundational to method; one cannot know the truth about God, humans, and the creation without it. In Solomon's life the revelation of God's Word has profound redemptive-historical significance that relates seriously to our subject matter. The Word of the Lord comes to Solomon in the event of God's imparting his own wisdom to him—an event that must not be viewed as entirely subjective but that has objective authenticity in the future eschatological event of Christ's rule and dominion. The wisdom given to Solomon in order that he might confirm a kingdom of peace, in which godly righteousness and justice reign, foreshadows the wisdom of Christ, who will reign in his final kingdom of peace by his own righteousness and justice. Through the event of God's revelation of himself to Solomon, this particular type of Christ views all things through the microscope of eschatology: since God's revelation to Solomon incorporates the spectrum of God's plan for the creation, it has as its core ingredient the gospel that is grounded and consummated in Christ. In my judgment, Solomon's commentary about life in this world, as found in the book of Ecclesiastes, only makes sense from this eschatological perspective. Herein, a view of epistemology from a Biblical perspective is never separated from the sovereign redemptive-historical plan of God as centered in Christ. God reveals the plan in the events of his activity, and he is gracious to provide commentary on those revelatory events in his Word. For Solomon, this two-fold revelation was the method by which he understood the world around him. I would suggest that it is imperative that Christian

academicians follow the same path.

After all, in the early years of Solomon, we are in the midst of a divine wisdom that is set over against the wisdom of this secular world; Solomon does not compromise or surrender the revelatory activity of the infallible Word of God to secularism (antithesis). Furthermore, if we can view Solomon as an interdisciplinarian, we note that his knowledge of the whole (integration) and the parts (differentiation) is shaped by a self-conscious epistemology devoted to knowing, understanding,

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In this worldview, all secular suggestions to construct IDS upon a foundation other than the God of the Bible will fail to truly provide integration. The best that has been done is what the various paradigms of secularism have suggested to us. Beginning in a world of abstraction and reduction, some have proposed that IDS must begin upon the foundation of *Verständnis*, in which empathy and assimilation are the mode of methodological procedure. In order not to be trapped in the world of the human psyche, others have endorsed *Erklärung*, in which all disciplines can be united in an interdisciplinary manner by means of rational

natural laws. In the hope of bringing a synthesis to the two previous suggestions, many in the twentieth century expected that pragmatic utility and structuralist models, based upon logic, mind, and human experience, would usher a truly interdisciplinary curricula into the inner fabric of academia. Instead, the secular route of IDS has found itself in continual crisis and confusion as the post-structuralists and postmodernists have invaded their turf and challenged their presuppositions.

Solomon, as should be the case with us, would find the current state of affairs for the construction of IDS foolishness and absolute vanity. Instead, like Solomon, the Christian theist has the advantage of entering into the discussion about IDS with the whole and parts already given, understood, and interpreted by the ontological Trinity as revealed in the full corpus of His being and activity in His very Word.

## Epilogue

In my judgment, a proper Biblical epistemology provides the foundation that truly addresses and corrects the antagonistic atmosphere between the academic disciplines over the last two hundred years. Indeed, academia has been infected not only with the remains of the continuing battle between the human and natural sciences but also with the enduring battles that rage between isolated disciplines. Whether one is a Christian or secular academician, the tendency has been to stress differentiation at the expense of coherence. The passion of disciplinarians is to guard the sanctity of their own isolated discipline without registering upon their own epistemological self-consciousness the constitutive relationship of differentiation and coherence. The result of such an unBiblical starting point seems to be apparent; the arena of academia is characterized by selfishness, pride, and power that often forfeit any conception of coherence and unity in the curricula unless it serves their own disciplinary interests. In this world of egotism, the Christian theist must recognize that human sinfulness is a monumental barrier for a true liberal arts education; realistically, its ideal of maintaining unity within diversity finds itself in constant conflict and resistance. The Scripture provides the directive to break this barrier; through the Spirit

of Christ, the Christian academician must seek to deny self for the sake of living by Biblical principles that exalt the truth of Christ and not self (Mt. 16:24-28; Jn. 15:9-17; Phil. 2:1-11; I Peter 3:18-22). In looking to Christ's own teaching as well as Christ's own example, we return to the starting point—the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, who has coherent knowledge of himself and the creation. In a Biblical epistemology, coherence and differentiation are constitutive of each other. The creation is *given* with the whole and the parts in place. *To begin with the whole at the expense of the parts is to transform Christian theism into idealism. To begin with the parts at the expense of the whole is to transform Christian theism into atomism.* In the search for unity within the academy, it seems that the later—atomism—characterizes and paralyzes the professional relationship between the disciplines.

In recognizing the constitutive relationship between the whole and the parts, special care must be exercised not to fall into the realm of superiority and power of an interdisciplinary curriculum over against a disciplinary curriculum, even one that is oriented towards liberal arts. The Christian interdisciplinarian must not claim that his or her field is superior to the other disciplines. Specifically, the model is in place: the Lord presents us with a world already in a state of integration as he also presents the parts of that integration. For this reason, the Christian interdisciplinarian needs to maintain an integrative relationship with the other disciplines. Perhaps, more importantly, administration and faculty need to allow themselves to be challenged by this epistemological model so that the selfishness that characterizes the isolated disciplines will dissolve into an integrative curricula that reflects the self-conscious activity of the Creator. Any Christian educator who fails to acknowledge and live within such an integrative model is merely a product of post-Enlightenment idealism or atomism.

Furthermore, the secular world of modernity, pragmatism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism must not dictate the curricula of a Christian interdisciplinarian. Instead, the eschatological Christ serves as method; working within the parameters of our analogical understanding of Christ's analytical knowledge, we are to distinguish with his wisdom between what is true and what is

false. Herein, remaining faithful to our Christian starting point, method, and epistemological self-consciousness is crucial as any course is constructed and taught. This point is important, not because we want to suggest that courses in environmental studies or feminist studies are out of line with a Christian view of IDS but because we want to suggest that when such courses are offered, they are offered under the dominance of Biblical covenantal presuppositions that are radically antithetical to those of the secular world.

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Indeed, much work remains for the Christian theist engaged in the field of IDS. If my starting point and method has any warrant, an IDS curriculum needs to be constructed on the consistent principles of this covenantal foundation. Although such a monumental task remains (i.e. constructing an IDS curriculum), it is not my purpose here. Rather, my interest here is prolegomena; we need to begin correctly in order to end correctly. Even so, as Christian interdisciplinarians begin constructing courses and curricula whose foundation is antithetical to secular academia, I suggest the following definition for interdisciplinarity for the

Christian theist: *it is the integrative or constitutive given of the data of creation in coherence and differentiation as it corresponds to the analytical knowledge of the ontological trinity centered in Christ. Moreover, a Christian view of IDS begins with this picture of integration and constructs a curriculum within the epistemological self-consciousness of the historical-revelation, in which the sovereign plan of God is disclosed through His Word as the eschatological end shapes the beginning as well as the entire execution of God's activity. Herein, the Christian academician seeks to know, understand, and interpret God, the world, and humanity in covenant conformity to God's truth as found in his Word.* With this definition before the Christian interdisciplinarian, it is essential to see its interdisciplinary core in order to abstain from other hybrids such as multidisciplinary, crossdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or pluridisciplinary.

I close with an extraordinary passage in Scripture that supports, in my estimation, the starting point I have presented here. As we have already noted, Solomon's wisdom points us to the eschatological wisdom of Christ. As the Queen of Sheba partakes of Solomon's wisdom, she is shrouded in the image of Christ's final glory: his wisdom, the glory-temple, and the glorious feast of the king (I Kings 10:4-6; II Chron. 9:3-4; cf. Rev. 21: 1-27). As she participates in this environment, Scripture makes an astonishing statement: "there was no more spirit in her" (I Kings 10:5d; II Chron. 9:4f). Sheba was confronted with wisdom in which "there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her" (I Kings 10:3b; II Chron. 9:2b). As she was faced and overcome with such wisdom, she had "no more spirit in her." In my judgment, this is a clear picture of the relationship between the Creator and creature concerning the wisdom of all things. Solomon is representative of the analytical wisdom of Christ in this Biblical narrative, and Sheba is a representative of the analogical knowledge of the creature. As Christian academicians we have our identity with Sheba; we have no choice but to claim no spirit of knowledge within ourselves if we truly seek to be overwhelmed with the wisdom of Christ. The true Christian academicians *will lose themselves* in the everlasting Christ of wisdom and glory.



## Notes

1. E.g. “mystery:” Mt. 13:11; Rom. 16:25-27; I Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 1:7-10; 3:1-12; 5:32; 6:17-20; Col. 1:24-27; 2:1-3; 4:2-4; I Tim. 3:15-16; Rev. 10:7; cf. also II Cor. 3:1-5:8 and WCF VIII:8; “invisible:” Rom. 1:18-25; Col. 1:15-19; I Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:23-29.
2. See the excellent discussion of the offices of Christ and how Christ’s offices are united to the believer in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Q. & A. 31 & 32; cf. also WCF VIII:1; LC: Q. & A. 42-45; SC: Q. & A. 23-26. Cornelius Van Til underlines the offices of the image of God in man’s organic relationship to the world: “Next to noting that man was created in God’s image it must be observed that man was organically related to the universe about him. Man was to be prophet, priest, and king under God in this created world. The vicissitudes of the world to a large extent depend upon the deeds of man. As a prophet man was to interpret this world after God, as a priest man was to dedicate this world to God, and as a king he was to rule over it for God. In opposition to this all non-Christian theories hold that the vicissitudes of man and the universe about him are only accidentally and incidentally related” (*Christian Apologetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. William Edgar [Phillipsburg NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003], 41).
3. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), in his inaugural address as Professor of Didactic and Exegetical Theology for the Theologische School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, provided a penetrating analysis of the coherence problem for secular empirical modernity (delivered on September 4, 1888): “Sin and empiricism that in a sinful manner views the creature apart from the God, cannot bring about the true unity/integration of life. They may centralize facts and data around a core concept—achieving an organic whole they cannot. Precisely because they are continually turned outward, they lose themselves in the multiplicity [of] phenomena, in the sheer quantity of things and they get lost in the labyrinth of the world, wrenched away from God and no longer an organic whole. This process also begins to move beyond life to have an impact on science. Here also are innumerable spheres standing side by side, without mutual connectedness, and who[ever] wants to have an overview of science as a whole, must be satisfied with a sheer arithmetical listing of the individual disciplines. He can melt them together into a skeleton, but it lacks the spirit of life—a body it does not receive. Empiricism is lethal for all [theological] encyclopedia. It has no eye for the whole, but remains stuck in the individual pieces. He who is a theologian at heart confesses by contrast that no discipline can stand by itself, independent of the others, especially not independent of theology, and come out well. On this point theology is in agreement with philosophy, in that it must claim a central standpoint” (“The Prospects of American Theology,” trans. Ed M. van der Maas, *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 20, no. 1 [May 2005]: 22-23).
4. See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960); Martin Heidegger’s, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962); Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (French version 1936-37; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, n.d.); and Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; cf. also Christina LaFont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, trans. José Medina (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).
5. Cornelius Van Til put the one and many problem this way: “The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian philosophy will appear to be a basic difference so soon as we attempt to take the first step in answering the One-and-Many question from the Christian point of view. In answering this question of the One-and-Many we find it necessary to distinguish between the Eternal One-and-Many and the temporal one and many. Non-Christian philosophers on the other hand find it unnecessary to make this distinction. We find this necessary of course because our conception of God as the triune God stands at the center of our thinking. We may express this thought philosophically by saying that for us the eternal one and many form a self-complete unity. God is absolute personality and therefore absolute individuality. He exists necessarily. He has no non-being over against himself in comparison with which he defines himself; he is internally self-defined” (*The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), 25; cf. also his *Christian Apologetics*, 25).
6. Van Til made the point clearly: “...God’s knowledge of the facts comes first. God knows or interprets the facts before they are facts. *It is God’s plan, God’s comprehensive interpretation of the facts that makes the facts what they are.*” Later he continues: “It is this plan of God that makes all created facts to be what they are” (*Christian Apologetics*, 27, 33).
7. A criticism could be issued here; one could say that I am being Christocentric at the expense of being theocentric. On the surface, that criticism would seem to be fair, but it is not my intent to diminish the positions of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The directive is upon the Son because the focus of the Father and Spirit’s work in revelational-history is upon the Son. The intertrinitarian activity with respect to

the starting point and method of IDS is a study for another time.

8. *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 *In Defense of the Faith* (n.p.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), 1.
9. Furthermore, Van Til writes: "It is not that we are merely brought into existence by God, but our meaning also depends upon God. Our meaning cannot be realized except through the course of history. God created man in order that man should realize a certain end, that is, the glory of God, and thus God should reach his own end" (*The Defense of the Faith*, 40). One should note the eschatological dimension of Van Til's statement here.
10. Van Til provides an excellent description of our condition: "Accordingly, our coherence will never be completely inclusive in the way that God's coherence is completely inclusive. Our coherence will be no more than an analogy of the coherence of God. Yet because it is based upon God's coherence it will be true knowledge. Our coherence can constantly grow in comprehensiveness but it cannot grow in truthfulness. Those that have the least knowledge have true knowledge just as well as those that have the greatest knowledge, if only their knowledge is truly

analogical, i.e., based upon the knowledge that God has of himself and of the world" (*Christian Epistemology*, 200).

11. Along these lines, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. has a fine discussion of the I Corinthians 2 passage (see his "Some Epistemological Reflections on I Cor. 2:2-16," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 [Spring 1995]: 103-124; cf. also William D. Dennison, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics* [Lanham: University Press of America, 1985; Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000], 55-85).
12. For the sake of clarification, Van Til made this important observation; "The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. And *it speaks of everything*. We do not mean that it speaks of football games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or indirectly. It tells us not only of the Christ and his work but it also tells us who God is and whence the universe has come. It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history. Moreover, the information on these subjects is woven into an inextricable whole" (*The Defense of the Faith*, 8).