



The **FRUIT** *of the* **SPIRIT**

A Conversation About the Core

Union University Winter Workshop
January 29, 2019

EXCELLENCE-DRIVEN

CHRIST-CENTERED

PEOPLE-FOCUSED

FUTURE-DIRECTED



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Winter Workshop Agenda

8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Refreshments and Fellowship
8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	Devotions (Dr. Bill Thierfelder, Dr. Sharon Evans)
8:45 – 9:30 a.m.	Presentation of a New Initiative (President Oliver)
9:30 – 9:50 a.m.	Break
9:50 – 10:30 a.m.	Core Conversation I (Moderated by Provost Netland) What Should a Core Education Achieve? Why Does the Core Need to be Revised?
10:30 – 10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m. – 12:00 noon	Core Conversation II (Moderated by Provost Netland) Questions about Content, Structure, and Size of the Core

Recently, Union University formed a Core Review Committee to consider revising the general core curriculum. It has been at least 45 years since the last extensive revision and since that time Union has significantly increased the number of faculty, students, and academic programs and this makes for a more diverse conversation about what do we want our students to know and to do or what type of person do we want them to become. As Union goes forward in considering the core, Bill Thierfelder, a biologist, reflects on Colossians 1:15 – 20.

Colossians 1:15 - 20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Through serving on the Core Committee, I've learned that some of us tend to be philosophers, and others pragmatists. It can be hard to understand each other, but we on the committee have found that these difficult waters can be navigated with patience, humility, and trust in Christ and in each other. As we go forward in considering the core, each of us will need to hold onto these attitudes, no matter which way we lean, because we need each other as different but essential parts of the body of Christ.

In order to be productive in this effort, I believe we must keep our eyes on Christ and on how our mission as a Christian liberal arts institution derives from him and serves to advance his kingdom. I would like to suggest that this passage provides a fitting basis for this mission.

As I read Colossians, including this passage, I was struck by the totality of Christ's reign that is described here.

As "the firstborn of all creation," Christ is pre-eminent in that creation.

He is pre-eminent in that all things were created by him. If a person studies something visible, birds or bugs, DNA or protein, planets or machines, he studies something made by Christ. If she studies something invisible or conceptual, an essay or an economy, a government or a mind, a society or a theology, she studies something made by Christ.

Just as importantly, all these things were created for him. If we want to serve Christ and to teach our students to present their work to Him as an offering, they must have this foundation: that Christ created what they are doing and studying for himself.

Thirdly, Christ is pre-eminent because in him all things hold together. In him cells and stars, thoughts and families, churches and universities hold together. Here is the antidote both to a materialistic worldview and to the despair of our own efforts apart from Christ.

As the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, Christ is to be pre-eminent in everything, including everything we study, practice, and teach. In an astonishing finale, God here says that he is pleased to reconcile all these things that he created to himself in Christ and through his blood. The reconciliation of the

entire creation is so bound up with our redemption in Christ, that Paul says in Romans that creation must await our full revelation as sons of God before it will be free from futility.

Later in his letter, Paul urges the Colossians not to be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, but to walk in Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is a firm foundation in Christ that will keep our students from captivity to vanity and deceit.

None of us on the faculty wants Union to devolve over time into a mere vocational prep school, indistinguishable from any other. If we are to avoid this, we must remember what Colossians says. Are we not called to glorify Christ in everything we do, and to help our students bring every thought captive to him? If we are to do that, we must help them see that their thoughts about what they are learning matter. They matter because everything they are studying was created by and for the pre-eminent Christ, and holds together in him. This is a foundation for loving Christ with our minds. It is a firm foundation for a Christian liberal arts education, and provides an eternal purpose for what we are doing here, now, today.

Let us approach this task by putting on, as Paul says, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. And let us be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor is not in vain.