

INTRODUCING AN INTEGRATIVE THEOLOGY OF
TRANSCENDENCE, CREATION, IMMANENCE AND HUMAN AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Introducing an Integrative Theology of Transcendence, Creation, Immanence and Human Agency

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An integrative theology of transcendence, creation, and immanence addresses the determinative dilemma of both theology and science. Without slipping into nihilism, I propose one may integrate the world one knows with the God one knows enabling faith to develop and to deepen. Today many congregants and nonaffiliated community members live with the conundrum of determinism due to scientific and theological perspectives that may lead to postmodern nihilism. Examining this issue in a small city dominated by the presence of a major university highlights this quandary. Congregants need a worldview that enables them to integrate faith and academic life. This project combines a theology of transcendence, creation, and immanence with emerging views of science to offer an integrative theology. An additional benefit of this integrative theology is how it describes real human agency and underscores the importance of Christian spirituality. I invite congregants to assess this theology for integrating faith and life.

This project proposes an integrative theology of transcendence, creation and immanence as a synthesizing worldview. The recent discoveries of chaotic systems, emergent phenomena, and complex adaptive systems may describe how God can be immanent and active yet undetected. The project emphasizes the foundational importance of Christian spirituality as a relational guide in a complex world. If congregants value this project as offering a perspective that relieves inconstancies that cause dissonance, the project will achieve its goal. If this integrative theology enables congregants to embrace and delve more deeply into the spirituality of their Christian faith, then this integrative theology will be worth further development.

Content Reader: Dr. Tony Jones

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Toward an Integrated Theology

A worldview encompasses how one sees one's "self," God, and the physical world. Yet, views of God, or common theological perspectives, constantly clash with views of creation, the scientific perspectives on the physical world. These multiple contradictions may be perplexing. Though differing in many ways, both the theological and scientific views often offer deterministic visions suggesting human agency is illusory. That people hold these views with vigor creates conflicts and quandaries for thoughtful people as they try to find meaning and peace of mind. To exacerbate these difficulties, the postmodern option may lead to assuming nothing matters, and to acquiescing to nihilism.¹ This ministry project proposes an integrative theological perspective is possible that enables one to see beyond the opacity of the determinative quandaries without slipping into nihilism. One can integrate the world one knows with the God one knows to enable faith to develop and to deepen.

Reassessing Transcendence

This project claims reflecting on the transcendence of God helps overcome the deterministic trajectories of theology. I will examine how transcendence is important in both the nature of human agency and God's immanence in creation. A coherent theological language that respects both God's transcendent nature and God's creative

¹ This perspective is described in Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 162-164.

agency requires the transcendent God be truly other than creation.² A truly transcendent God's immanence is not limited. A corollary is that a truly transcendent God with unrestricted agency will be free to create causative agents within creation. Thus, God's creative agency is neither constrained nor required to determine all that happens in creation moment by moment. God's creative agency is distinct from the ongoing ever-changing creation. This freedom of God's agency permits God to create beings with real agency. This project will examine scriptural passages that support this view of agency - that human agency is real.

Reassessing the Scientific Paradigm

An emerging appreciation in science for random phenomena, chaos, emergent phenomena and adaptive complex systems offers new possibilities for assessing human agency from a scientific point of view. The discovery of chaotic systems and the difficulties with predictions as well as sensitivity to initial system conditions introduce cracks in deterministic paradigms. Recent recognition of patterns and systems emerging in unpredictable ways in conjunction with the formation of complex adaptive systems adds another layer of unpredictability. In addition to limits to prediction, suggestions that complex adaptive systems show downward causation indicate that the reductionist, deterministic, scientific paradigm needs to change.³ A new appreciation for humans as

² Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, ex libris ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 72.

³ Nancy C. Murphy, *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion*, (St Edmund's College, Cambridge, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 107-113.

complex adaptive systems is forming. Moreover, humans as systems do not necessarily act in predetermined ways, hence, real human agency is possible. Integrating these into a theological perspective offers disciples of Christ an opportunity to engage faith with science without perpetuating a conflicted relationship and decreasing compartmentalization of faith and science. In the face of an oppositional stance from the scientific community, this project offers the integration of Christian belief and experience with scientific perspectives reducing intellectual barriers to Christian faith.

The Ministry Need

While this integrative theological perspective may be widely useful in today's society, this new perspective is particularly valuable in a college community. This project will focus on one such a community (Moscow, Idaho) and particularly the ministry of one church in that community, First Presbyterian. With the presence of Idaho's premier university, the University of Idaho, a land-grant university and neighboring Washington State University, the academy deeply influences the culture of the community. Consequently, the conflict between science and faith is readily apparent; students relate tales of an environment hostile to faith in their experience at the university. Faculty members similarly report a lack of faith perspective among their colleagues and at times overt hostility or ridicule to any mention of faith or a faith perspective.⁴ As a result, a retired faculty member tells of trying to compartmentalize faith and academic work.⁵

⁴ Personal Communication, Fall 2014.

⁵ Personal Communication, Spring 2008.

Moscow is a small community, with many rural and first-generation college students attending the university. Even with this small community influence, the general apathy, or even hostility, toward Christian faith is quite evident. The integrative theology of this project is designed to encourage students in their academic and faith pursuits, to give support to faculty and staff by integrating scientific thought into a coherent theological perspective, and to reduce the either/or conflict many community members may experience between faith and science.

Without a conceptual framework to ameliorate the conflict between dominant intellectual and scientific views and traditional theological perspectives, this conflict disrupts the expression of one's faith. This disruption may cause hesitancy about what to believe and how to embrace one's faith. This hesitancy can impair one's desire for, and experience of, faith. Questions arise about the veracity of a living faith and the value of expressions of faith such as worship, prayer, and scripture study. An integrative theology that undergirds these spiritual practices will prove valuable.

Theological Responses that Exacerbate the Problem

Some theological perspectives confront this conflict between science and faith with a combative approach that assumes priority to their particular theological perspective. The arrogance, hubris, and contradictions some theological stances exhibit alienate many thoughtful people. An individual caught between the academic paradigms and the traditional theological perspectives may be perplexed as to how to integrate spirituality and a living faith into their lives. Furthermore, each perspective can look as if

the fate to which one has come is determined so that the choice between the two perspectives has no logical necessity.

A Theological Response that Integrates

This conundrum needs a solution. With the advent of new insights into chaotic systems that have high sensitivity to initial conditions, one begins to see a scientific perspective in which the activities of individuals may have real consequence. Random phenomena driving real world events, is inimical to most theological thought and adds a generally accepted but rarely questioned dynamic to systems analysis. The stochastic component of reality undermines determinism. Recent observations of emergent phenomena suggest that unpredictable systems and patterns may form. Emergent systems exhibit characteristics not predictable from the rules governing component parts. These emergent systems are not easily reducible, and reducibility is a key component of deterministic thinking. Moreover, an increasing awareness of adaptive complex systems is evident. These systems function in ways not reducible to the rules that govern the component parts. Systems that function in this way influence the activity or nature of the component parts. This lack of reducibility and imputed downward causation exposes a need for a new paradigm.

The project will describe how this new assessment of complex adaptive systems offers an overlap with a theological vision of creation in which there are real actors, with real agency, who really affect the world in which they live. While this project will not equate this new perspective with a traditional theology of the human soul, the chasm

between views is not nearly as evident. One with a faith perspective may notice a congruence with the concept of human agency from a scientific perspective. I will develop this more fully in later chapters.

Theological and Practical Consequences

The discovery of chaos, emergence, and adaptive complex systems also influences theological descriptions of the nature of creation and the creator. The concept of transcendence and its importance in theological language suggests creation as other than God and God as other than creation.⁶ This reconnection to the otherness of God means God is not limited to engaging with creation as a force or any other particular function within creation. Transcendence allows God to create a world that is not directly reflective of the nature of the creator. The biblical story suggests creation has form and function given by God. In addition, if one assumes that we can see that form and function, one may use the discoveries of science to describe the form and function of creation. That the world has form and functions that may not describe God allows for this use of chaos, emergence, and complex systems as well as the rest of the scientific discoveries of physics and the other sciences. Indeed, stochasticity, bounded chaos, emergent phenomena, and complex adaptive systems of creation give a delightful description of a world in which God's immanence is real and active without denying human agency nor overpower the mortal with the divine presence. However, this

⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 84.

description of creation highlights the limits of human vision and our need for a predictive capacity that is beyond our capabilities to create. This integrative theology invites one to view the biblical narrative and Christian spiritual practices as offering revelatory insights and direction, encouraging re-evaluation of the importance of faith-based interaction with scripture and Christian spirituality.

A Ministry Trajectory

The real test of the value of this integrative theology of God, creation, and human agency is in the ministry setting. To this end, I will invite the congregants and associated community of First Presbyterian Church of Moscow, Idaho, to engage this theology in multiple ways. I will present these concepts in succinct ways through an initial series of sermons. A congregational retreat will follow this introduction. The retreat of self-selecting attendees will delve further into the theological perspective and its relationship to their faith and their lives. In a subsequent year, the theological perspective will expand into a series of sermons first on transcendence, second on creation, and finally on immanence and human agency. Sermons provide an outline and invite the participant to delve deeper into the topic. With the sporadic attendance in today's church, most will not experience a coherent series. To help extend the scope of understanding I plan to form small groups to discuss this theological perspective. I will also offer another retreat for a self-selecting group from the congregation. Once I have taken these steps, I will reassess

this project. If I observe less cognitive dissonance and notice more appreciation for the immanence of God, I will find real value in continuing this project.

Project Content

This project entails first elucidating the need for an integrative theology of God, creation, and human agency. To suggest an appropriate theological approach, this project focuses theological concerns around the concepts of transcendence, creation, immanence and human agency. In particular, the project addresses a theologically consistent approach to agency of both creature and Creator. In conjunction with the theological assessment, the project reviews movements within scientific thought that coincide with theological conclusions. This enables a new level of integration. The integrative approach of this project will not argue for complete congruence with the new paradigm arising in science. Even the possibility that the views need not be in conflict is a perspective worth offering to a highly educated congregation in a university community. After offering the new perspective, this project will assess how this integrative theology may be helpful and encouraging to faith and spirituality. From this assessment, I will explore new insights and further ministry initiatives

CHAPTER 1
THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors

The ministry context for exploring an integrative theology is Moscow, Idaho, a small city in the panhandle of northern Idaho. Looking at this particular situation and circumstance will influence the need and shape of this ministry project. From the outset, the general description of a relatively small, rural city in the Western United States may bring certain cultural and demographic expectations to mind.

The problems of the rural West have traditionally emphasized economic difficulties, and in many parts of the region low incomes, a stagnant private sector, and outmigration remain serious challenges. ... Historically, the economy of much of the rural West has depended largely on extractive industries, and to a significant degree, it still does. ... The word “community” suggests a commonality of thought and purpose that is seldom present. People are divided on issues even if they have lived together for a long time—sometimes *because* they have lived together a long time. ... They divide on the basis of class, race, religion, and economic interest. In many cases, communities are divided by ideology, with each side upholding a different American ideal.¹

¹ David Danbom, “Closing Remarks to the Conference on the Rural West” Conference on the Rural West, Stanford University, 2012, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/ruralwest/cgi-bin/drupal/conference2012/closing-remarks-david-danbom> (accessed on September 14, 2014).

Regionally this description fits; these trends do influence the character of the Moscow community. However, Moscow also runs counter to some of these trends due to the presence of Idaho's land-grant and primary research university, the University of Idaho (UI), and the close proximity of another major land-grant university, Washington State University (WSU), in neighboring Pullman, Washington.

The region is sparsely populated and mainly rural. In 2010, the population of the region was 174,023 according to the US Census Bureau. The majority of the population is white with a small but strong Native American community. The majority of people live in one of 50 incorporated communities. Located at the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers, the City of Lewiston is the region's largest community and retail hub (population 31,894) and home to Lewis and Clark State College. The region's second and third largest communities, Pullman, WA and Moscow, ID, are home to WSU and the UI, with populations of 29,799 and 23,800, respectively. Most other communities range in population between 100 and 7,000.²

The population of Moscow has grown 11 percent in the decade preceding 2010. This growth is counter to trends in the rural west, and is associated with the presence and growth of the University of Idaho. Although Moscow continues to grow, the Great Recession of 2007 slowed the growth perceptibly. University of Idaho's challenges to institutional vitality and viability will influence the economic future and the social demography of the community. Presently, twenty- to twenty-nine-year-olds are 35.8 percent of the population in Moscow while nationally this age range is 13.6 percent of the

² Manheim Solutions Inc. in, partnership with Watson Regional, and Economic Network, "Feasibility Study: Latah County Food Innovation and Resource Center," 2013, <http://www.latahedc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Latah-County-FIRC-Feasibility-Study-Report-Reduced-Size.pdf>, (accessed September 14, 2014).

general population.³ This demonstrates the influence of the university on the population demographics of Moscow.

While the university changes the age demographic, Moscow is only slightly higher in ethnic diversity than the state of Idaho and is predominately white (88.2 percent to 90.9 percent depending on how ethnicity is measured).⁴ This lack of ethnic diversity reduces the influence of trends in ethnic diversity influencing the nation as whole.⁵ While ethnic diversity is low, the level of educational attainment for members of this community is high. In the Moscow community, 53.9 percent have completed a bachelor's degree while only 8.7 percent of Idahoans and 13.9 percent nationally have completed a bachelor's degree and 8 percent of the Moscow community members have a doctorate compared to 0.5 percent nationally.⁶ These two facts, low ethnic diversity and high levels of educational attainment, demonstrate some of the ways Moscow deviates from some national demographic trends.

³ Lindsay M. Howden and Julie A. Meyer, "Age and Sex Composition: 2010: 2010 Census Briefs," (2011), <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>, (accessed September 14, 2014).

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, County Business Patterns, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits, Census of Governments," U.S. Department of Commerce, quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/16/1654550.html, (accessed September 20, 2015).

⁵ Michael Cooper, "Census Officials, Citing Increasing Diversity, Say U.S. Will Be a 'Plurality Nation'," New York Times December 13, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/us/us-will-have-no-ethnic-majority-census-finds.html?_r=0, (accessed September 5, 2014).

⁶ Areavibes.com, "Moscow, ID Education - Colleges & Universities," AreaVibes Inc., <http://www.areavibes.com/moscow-id/education/>, (accessed September 14, 2014).

Until the Great Recession hit in 2007, Moscow enjoyed very low unemployment (under 3.0 percent). Due to the Great Recession, the unemployment has peaked at near 7.5 percent in 2010 and has slowly fallen to 6.0 percent in 2014.⁷ This change in economic opportunity for a range of workers may be seeping into the consciousness of the community and the self-image it maintains. Local groups like the League of Women Voters have stepped up programs and offered a report on poverty in the Moscow region.⁸ Also, a robust conservative libertarian identity influences community cohesion and safety net issues.

The University continues to be a dominating economic force in the community. The Economic Plan of the City of Moscow Development Strategy states “The University of Idaho employees 39% of all workers in Latah County. ... UI’s Dr. Jon Miller and his team of researchers estimated that in 2006, the direct and indirect ‘multiplier’ effects of the University of Idaho accounted for 52.6 percent of all jobs and 53.9 percent of all earnings in Moscow.”⁹ Moreover, this report does not take into account the effect of Washington State University eight miles away. A number of faculty members at WSU live in Moscow and commute to work. The direct, indirect and multiplier effects of WSU

⁷ Onboard Informatics, “Unemployment by Year, Moscow, ID,” Advameg Inc., <http://www.city-data.com/city/Moscow-Idaho.html>, (accessed September 14, 2014).

⁸ League of Women Voters, "A Study of Poverty in Latah County, Idaho in 2012" (2012).

⁹ City of Moscow, “Economic Plan of the City of Moscow Development Strategy,” <http://www.ci.moscow.id.us> City of Moscow, 2008, (accessed September 14, 2014).

must be significant. The community would not exist as is without these two institutions of higher learning.

While the economic terrain is dependent on the presence of the present climate at the university, the geographical terrain formed centuries ago. A wide expanse of large rolling hills often compared to dunes is the distinctive geologic feature of this region generally called the Palouse. The Palouse loess was windblown fine silt particles that collected in the dune-like shapes evident today. Monocrops of wheat, lentils, or other dry legumes now cover the Palouse hills. Moscow lies near the eastern edge of the Palouse and is not far from the northern pine forests of the northern Rocky Mountains. Both the rhythms of rural farm life and the presence of nearby forested mountain wilderness are backdrops to the idyllic self-perception Moscow residents often express. This landscape also is a physical differentiator and societal insulator for the residents of Moscow.

Moscow's Religious Context

The data suggest what one on-line comment describes, “Honestly, my wife and I have both remarked how Moscow feels like a town out of an eighties sitcom. It’s the kind of place where you talk to your neighbors while your kids jump in a pile of leaves.”¹⁰ Many residents feel this sense of reverie about the nature of their community. The city motto is “The Heart of the Arts,” reflecting the expectation that residents of the community are not restricted to the nitty-gritty necessities of maintaining life but are

¹⁰ Tom Moscow ID, “A newcomer's perspective,” Best Places to Live & Retire, Homes for Sale, http://www.bestplaces.net/backfence/viewcomment.aspx?id=5619C0FC-EE68-46D4-8EFA-59D5AFB27C7D&city=Moscow_ID&p=51654550, (accessed October 2, 2014).

unencumbered by the anxieties of life and have the freedom to be creative. This positive view of life in Moscow may reflect the isolation from the trends and changes elsewhere in the United States.

Interestingly, from 1929 through 1948, a mail-order religion arose in Moscow called Psychiana, a “New Thought” denomination. Frank Robinson, founder and charismatic head of Psychiana, based this religion on his personal communication with God and concepts such as affirmations, positive thinking, self-help and mental healing. While it was operational, Robinson became an influential employer in the Moscow community. The religion seems to have died with the death of its founder.¹¹ The insular location of Moscow may influence the growth of other distinctive religious groups.

In recent years, a conservative Reformed group encompassing the congregations of Christ Church and sister church Trinity Reformed as well as New Saint Andrews College developed in Moscow. Local pastor and author Douglas Wilson supported by his father, Jim Wilson, leads this conservative movement. In Moscow, Doug Wilson and his followers are known for a conservative religious ideology and a number of institutional projects, including a publishing operation (Canon Press), a “classically” Christian primary and secondary school (Logos), a magazine (Credenda/Agenda), a three-year ministerial training program (Greyfriars Hall), a private accredited college (New Saint Andrews), and a campus ministry (Collegiate Reformed Fellowship). A New York Times Magazine article, describes the theological perspective at New Saint Andrews (N.S.A.):

¹¹ Keith C. Peterson, *Psychiana*, (Moscow, ID: Latah County Historical Society, 1991).

The phrases that N.S.A. students are trained to use — like “Christian worldview” and “presuppositions” — are the tag lines of the theological tradition that partly inspired their college. In the early 20th century, a Dutch theologian named Cornelius Van Til introduced a kind of theology called presuppositionalism. He argued that no assumptions are neutral and that the human mind can comprehend reality only if proceeding from the truth of biblical revelation. In other words, it is impossible for Christians to reason with non-Christians. Presuppositionalism is a strangely postmodern theory that denies the possibility of objectivity — though it does not deny the existence of truth, which belongs to Christians alone.¹²

These two disparate movements have some influence over the cultural landscape in which First Presbyterian developed as a church. Many other denominations also are present in the community as presented in Figure 1 and are distributed theologically as in Figure 2 below. One conclusion drawn from these figures is that in spite of all the religious expressions available to the residents, currently less than one-third of Moscow residents consider themselves religious.

Figure 1. Religious adherents in Moscow, Idaho¹³

Religion	Moscow, ID	United States
Percent Religious	29.54%	48.78%
Catholic	6.47%	19.43%
LDS	8.63%	2.03%
Baptist	1.00%	9.30%
Episcopalian	0.35%	0.63%
Pentecostal	0.80%	1.87%
Lutheran	2.95%	2.33%

¹² Molly Worthen, “Onward Christian Scholars,” *New York Times Magazine* September 30, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/magazine/30-Christian-t.html>, (accessed September 20, 2014).

¹³ “Religion in Moscow, Idaho,” *Sperling's Best Places*, <http://www.bestplaces.net/religion/city/idaho/moscow>, (accessed September 14, 2014).

Methodist	1.52%	3.93%
Presbyterian	1.00%	1.63%
Other Christian	5.82%	5.51%
Jewish	0.00%	0.73%
Eastern	0.19%	0.53%
Islam	0.83%	0.84%

Figure 2. Congregational Adherents in Latah County, Idaho¹⁴

Latah County 2010		
Evangelical Protestant	2,522	6.8%
Mainline Protestant	2,233	6.0%
Catholic	2,408	6.5%
other (includes LDS)	3,840	10.3%
Unclaimed	26,241	70.5%

While one may count over twenty different Christian congregations within the city limits of Moscow, their reach is limited. First Presbyterian Church has seen arise in membership from the time of its founding to a high point in the 1960s when it reached an apex of 554 members. Since that time, the membership has eroded such that today the congregation has a technical membership of 225 with about half of that number attending worship on any particular Sunday. If First Presbyterian Church is any indication, general church affiliation was likely much higher mid-twentieth century. Then, even with the increase in the number of non-denominational churches and the

¹⁴ Clifford Grammich, Kirk Hadaway, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley and Richard H. Taylor, "County Membership Report: Latah County, Idaho," The Association of Religion Data Archives, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/16/rcms2010_16057_county_name_2010.asp, (accessed August 8, 2014).

founding of the Christ Church/New St. Andrews cohort, the number of adherents has decreased to the present. Indeed, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies study confirms this stating:

The population of Latah County, Idaho was 28,749 in 1980. The adherent totals of the religious groups listed above [Figure 2] (9,348) included 32.5% of the total population in 1980. The population of Latah County, Idaho was 37,244 in 2010; the adherent totals of the religious groups listed above [Figure 2] (11,003) included 29.5% of the total population in 2010.¹⁵

This data documents the decline in the percentage of the population in the Moscow area affiliated with any congregation.

A parallel move away from religious influence in higher education nationally occurred during late twentieth and early Twenty-First Century. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy Bass in reviewing George Marsden's book note, "The estrangement between academy and church recounted in *The Soul of the American University* has implications not only for the position of religion within the university, but also for the position of intellectual life within the church."¹⁶ Much of the estrangement between religious life and the academy consists of a bifurcation in perspectives; neither perspective considers the other valid. One offshoot of the academy locally is *Darwin on the Palouse*, a free annual event to celebrate humanity, science, and rational thought. Topics in a 2014 *Darwin on the Palouse* conference included "90 Years of Fighting Creationism: From the Science

¹⁵ Grammich, et al., "County Membership Report: Latah County, Idaho."

¹⁶ Mark R Schwehn, and Dorothy C. Bass, *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006).

League of America to NCS” and “Animals that Shouldn’t Exist According to Intelligent Design.” The forum is actively promoting and celebrating science and reason in contradistinction to religion. With 618 people “liking” the Darwin on the Palouse Facebook page, this group has more supporters than most of the individual churches in the area.¹⁷

First Presbyterian Church resides in a community dominated by the university’s presence; many of its members are also members of the academy. Nearly 70 percent of members at First Presbyterian Church have a bachelor’s degree or higher. This is a characteristic of the church and further defines the nature of the church and its ministry. The position of intellectual life within the church is a real consideration for the mission and ministry of this church. Conflict between worldviews must influence the cultural and intellectual lives of the congregants.

The Congregational Terrain

First Presbyterian Church has maintained an active congregation for over 135 years. Early residents founded the church shortly after Moscow’s incorporation as a town, and the congregation once held a prominent place in the community. Many of the leading citizens of Moscow attended the church. The turbulent years of the 1960s and 1970s

¹⁷ “Darwin on the Palouse” <https://www.facebook.com/DarwinOnThePalouse>, (accessed September 17, 2014). See also: Palouse Coalition of Reason, “Darwin on the Palouse,” <http://darwinonthealouse.org/>, (accessed September 17, 2015). and Palouse Coalition of Reason, “Shine the Light of Reason,” United Coalition of Reason, <http://unitedcor.org/palouse/page/home>, (accessed September 17, 2014).

resulted a major decline in membership, a slow attrition has continued. This is consistent with the decline in membership within the national denomination as well.

According to the church's mission statement, "First Presbyterian Church of Moscow strives to be a welcoming, caring family of faith, called to love the Lord and our neighbors. We are growing in Jesus Christ through worship, teaching, fellowship, and service to others."¹⁸ Church leadership identifies goals of growing church participation and membership. To accomplish this goal, assessing and addressing the context is important. The academic context influences how the congregation may address its desire to fulfill its mission and to grow as a community of faith.

Pastoral leadership at the church has a history of turnover and in later years troubles with mental and health issues. Important to the life of a faith community, church leadership involves:

(1) Helping your congregation gain a realistic understanding of its particular situation and circumstances; (2) assisting members to develop a vision for their corporate life that is faithful to their best understanding of God and God's purpose for this congregation in this time and place; and (3) helping them embody that vision in their congregation's corporate life.¹⁹

The short tenures of many pastors strained each of these elements of leadership. This ministry project is to design an approach (an integrated theology) for a pastor with a longer tenure (approximately ten years) to help this congregation understand the

¹⁸ "First Presbyterian Church Plan", 2014.

¹⁹ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 192.

intellectual milieu in which it exists. Further, this ministry project speaks into that milieu with an understanding of God and God's purpose that engages reason and the intellect as well as addresses the estrangement found between the church and university.

Demographically, the church membership is bifurcated between those under forty and those over fifty. This generational divide may also play in the cultural perspective of the congregation. Congregants on either side of this divide may also experience the role of church and religious belief in society differently. The era of American Christendom is concluding and in some sections of the country may be past. Anthony Robinson writes about this "sea change" and suggests one result is that, "We can no longer assume that people are Christian by virtue of growing up ... in North America. Increasingly today, faith is chosen rather than inherited."²⁰ The rate of change and sense of stability in the world is drastically different for those on opposite sides of this generational divide. Predictions of the future and characterizing generations have become difficult. *McLeans* magazine in a recent report on generation Z, those born after 1995 states, "Many of our [consultant Sparks & Honey client companies] are struggling with planning for the future in a world defined by chaos, volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity, and change."²¹ This analysis describes the future as less stable.

²⁰ Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 27.

²¹ Anne Kingston, "Get ready for Generation Z: They're smarter than Boomers, and way more ambitious than the Millennials," *McLeans*. <http://www.macleans.ca/society/life/get-ready-for-generation-z/>. (accessed July 15, 2014).

The church must address its estrangement from the academy and the changing formative experiences of younger generations. Without a theological perspective, that speaks both to this experience of change and to a reasonable way to encompass academic discoveries and paradigms in relationship to the divine, recognizing the value of faith and participating in faith communities will be more difficult. This project is designed to empower the congregation with a theological vision, which addresses the intellectual concerns and experiential realities.

Growing Spirituality: Room for Improvement

First Presbyterian Church of Moscow sits in a certain geographic and sociocultural space just as the church resides in a theological tradition. Arising out of the Reformation and particularly Geneva reformer, John Calvin, the Reformed tradition is a confessional tradition. Historically the Reformed tradition emphasizes confessing what one believes about God, human nature, and human destiny. While Trinitarian and recognizing intellectually that the Holy Spirit nurtures one's faith, theologically and ecclesiastically, the tradition sidelines the Holy Spirit. The confessional stance emphasizing the intellectual foundations of belief undergirds the negative reaction to emotionalism (associated with the Spirit). An early split in Presbyterianism within the colonies of the New World (1741) created a new side versus old side division. "Old side members of the denomination were alarmed by what they called 'enthusiasm' as well as

‘censoriousness’ and ‘itineracy’.”²² Reacting negatively to religious experience associated with the Holy Spirit seems foundational in the Presbyterian wing of the American Reformed tradition.

The Presbyterian tradition throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in keeping with its Reformed theological underpinnings, continued to look askance at emotionalism. “One reason for this particular characteristic in our churches is our emphasis on the intellect or mental aspects of religious life. . . . Unfortunately, our stress on the intellect has meant a suspicion of the emotions. ..But sometimes, in our focus on the mind, we forget the heart.”²³ Moreover, spirituality has generally sounded too much like emotionalism – too full of feelings that direct thought and action. Thus, the Reformed tradition with its embrace of intellect, knowledge and reason as ways to the truth is suspicious of experiential spirituality.²⁴ This focus may also leave its adherents susceptible to dominate intellectual paradigms.

One may wonder if this tradition is an influencing factor in First Presbyterian Church of Moscow in the Twenty First Century. According to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey taken by First Presbyterian Church of Moscow’s worshipping congregation in 2008, the congregation is significantly lower in factors associated with a “Growing Spirituality” and “Meaningful Worship” than other churches across the nation taking the

²² James H Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 49.

²³ Ted V. Foot and P. Alex Thomburg, *Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide for Youth and Other Confused Presbyterians* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000), 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

same survey in 2008.²⁵ The survey design is biased toward particular ways a church engages its congregation. High involvement in particular experiences defines the meaningfulness of worship for the congregation. Yet, the survey may not fully capture the nature of this congregation. In both the Reformed tradition and university setting, personal experience is downplayed and intellectual assent and knowledge promoted. Such a bias may influence how the congregation answered the survey. For example, the question about whether one “always or usually experiences God’s presence in services” may seem suspect and out of step with the Reformed tradition. A question about right belief would perhaps make more sense in this tradition. One might conclude the low score on this question (65 percent locally versus 77 percent nationally) should be expected in this tradition.²⁶

The survey’s focus is on how the institution influences the individuals and their experience of faith, but what role the worldviews of the present context play in the worshipping congregation is not addressed. If one expects one’s relationship to God to be an intellectual understanding, then questions about experiential events will be low due to a mistrust of experience. Within the academy, the experiential and emotional sides of life are not trusted to produce accurate and real knowledge. If it is not a rational argument

²⁵ U.S. Congregational Life Survey, “First Presbyterian Church, Moscow, Idaho U.S. Congregational Life Survey,” (2008).

²⁶ U.S. Congregational Life Survey, “First Presbyterian Church, Moscow, Idaho U.S. Congregational Life Survey,” (2008).

base on empirical evidence, the science-based academic view suggests no valuable knowledge is produced.

Effects of High Levels of Educational Attainment

In examining the strengths at First Presbyterian Church of Moscow (FPC), the church analysis team noted how many in the FPC congregation had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the average congregation. FPC requested further analysis from the U.S. Congregations Survey Team to see if congregations with many people with college degrees answer the survey differently than congregations with fewer members with college or advanced degrees. The subsequent analysis showed that, the responses of the churches that have a higher number of attendees with a college degree or higher tended to be less positive. In the congregation of FPC, 71 percent of worshippers possess a college or advanced degree. The data shows that the congregations with a higher number of attendees with a college degree or advanced degrees answer the survey differently and FPC answers mirror that trend. Indeed this set of data suggests that many of the strengths and weakness of FPC as congregation were not significantly different from other congregations with a high percentage of attendees with a bachelor's degree or higher.

This effect of higher educational attainment may suggest that congregants are more critical and expect more intellectual rigor than congregations expect with fewer attendees with high level of educational attainment. Another factor maybe the worldview attendees with a high level of educational attainment bring to bear on their life of faith. Indeed, one retired college professor in the congregation suggests that he

compartmentalizes between his religious life of faith and his academic career. One may wonder if this attempt at compartmentalization truly works and how many are unwilling to accept the disjunction and dissonance between the life of faith and the life of the mind.

First Presbyterian, a church within intellectual academic tradition and Reformed theological tradition, both of which look askance at emotions, may find it challenging to embrace a Christian spirituality that integrates an experiential component in one's relationship to the divine. The congregational survey suggests the congregation's uncertainty about experiential spirituality. The cultural support for this spirituality is undermined due to a lack of conceptual architecture for a revelatory, immanent God. Certainly, the community, situated in an intellectual milieu that does not hold any consistent view of the divine, often seems split between those that have deep commitments to, or deep distrust of, what Christianity represents to them. One may surmise that many, maybe even most, residents of the community lie somewhere between these extremes, and may be confused about what to think about ultimate things. This may lead to cognitive dissonance due to feelings of awe and otherness and inadequate ways to explain these experiences.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Reformed Tradition

The Reformed tradition claims John Calvin as its founder and guiding light and provides the theological foundations of Presbyterianism. God’s sovereignty and unhindered agency constitute a central theme of Reformed theology. John Calvin claims, “not that which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events.”¹ Using a statement such as this, theologians often suggest Calvin’s view of the consequence of God’s sovereignty is that God directly causes all that happens. This view of sovereignty is developed further in the Reformed tradition and stated in the Belgic Confession of Reformed Protestants (1561) namely, that divine providence

affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly

¹ William C. Placher, “Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence,” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 97.

Father, who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under his power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust.²

This early confession defines the sovereignty and providence with great clarity. The Westminster Confession (1646) elucidates a view of God as creator and the nature of providence:

God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.³

The Presbyterian Church considers itself a confessional church in which the Westminster Confession plays a central role as the founding confession. The legacy of this confession remains with the denomination and its particular churches.

Contemporary Reformed theologians are aware of the difficulties the theology of sovereignty presents. The high view of sovereignty influences the contours of Reformed theology's views on predestination, creation, providence, evil, and human agency. One recent interpreter of the tradition, theologian Shirley Guthrie, attempts to address these issues for the contemporary reader. Guthrie does note, "A biblical-Christian faith

² Placher, "Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence," 97.

³ Westminster Assembly, "Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 126.

emphasizes both the sovereign power of a ‘transcendent’ God *over* all created reality and the nearness of an ‘immanent’ God *in* and *for* all of created reality.”⁴

However, Guthrie recognizes that traditional views of sovereignty are problematic:

On the one hand if we believe in the plan and work of a sovereign God in the history of the world and in our own lives, we seem to be forced to deny the significance of human decisions and actions. What meaning can human freedom have if God determines everything that happens? On the other hand, if we insist on the freedom of human beings to choose and determine their own destiny, we are forced to deny the sovereignty of God. What significance can a plan and a purpose of God have if what God can do depends on what we will do? The sovereignty of God or human freedom – that seems to be the choice we have to make.⁵

First, Guthrie claims sovereignty offers assurance, or the Westminster confession term “consolation,” of a determined end. This claim comes most clearly from Guthrie’s discussion of predestination that he describes as an issue of salvation. His theology of God and creation does not directly posit a providence that determines all actions as the confessions suggest. Guthrie rejects predestination as a way of personal self-assurance and dismissal of others. However, his attempt to suggest that predestination is about a communal assurance instead of individual assurance does not solve the issues surrounding predestination.⁶ To retain, and perhaps rehabilitate the doctrine of predestination, he claims assurance that God ordains a way for humans to escape

⁴ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine: Revised Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 153. (Emphasis in the original)

⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 134-141.

identity-limiting influences. These influences included personal habits, social constructs, cultural expectations and the like. God's preordained path through Christ negates those influences that make us do what we do not want to do.

While unhealthy systems and problematic personal psychological patterns may trap a person in real ways, some argue that having personal, social, and psychological patterns embedded in socio-cultural systems is what it means to be human.⁷ Guthrie's attempt to show the human capable of truly becoming who God made them to be, to grow into their full potential as a child of God, is laudable. He uses the word freedom to describe this end though he never fully defines the concept of freedom. However nuanced, the argument that predestination offers this freedom is strained. The role of human agency is suspect especially in the relationship with God. This fear of choice as part of the salvific process seems to be fear of the Pelagian heresy.⁸ Certainly Christian faith holds that following Christ is freeing and transformative and that this is God's plan. However to attempt to redefine predestination as the characteristic of God's sovereignty which is the path to human freedom seems convoluted.

Reiterating many problems that interfere with understanding faith in a sovereign God, Guthrie suggests that, in the end, one must simply have faith. In addition, this faith

⁷ For example many of the chapters in Nancey C. Murphy and Christopher C. Knight, ed. *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 126-131.

is not only in the grace of God but also in the doctrines of Reformed Christianity developed over the last 500 or so years. The reasoning is circular and blames human thought for attending too closely to these problems. Guthrie has a laudable end in sight, namely the freedom one knows in Christ that allows one to know a fullness of life this faith entails and enables. In the end, however, the reader does not have a clear vision of how faith and life work together to help them to face a new day and which invites them into a deeper relationship with Christ. As he writes, “As long as we think theoretically and abstractly about this problem there is no solution to it.”⁹ Yet, one may expect that theoretical and abstract thinking would help explicate Christian doctrine.

The Other: The Theology of Transcendence

The Language of Transcendence

One entry point into this conundrum of God’s sovereignty and human agency is to delve into the nature of God as transcendent and the nature of God’s agency. Kathryn Tanner addresses this issue in her book, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*. Tanner argues that the transcendental nature of God is central to the coherence in theological discourse.¹⁰ Tanner offers two assumptions: one, God is transcendent as is historically consistent within Christian theology, and two, God has unimpeded creative agency, a high view of God’s sovereignty. These assumptions arise from the premise that God created all that exists.

⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 132.

¹⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 173, 312.

What Kathryn Tanner offers is a careful reasoning about transcendence and God's agency as theological positions. Though using a functional linguistic approach to identifying rules of theological discourse, her argument elucidates the distinction between God and creation. Tanner's argues if God is transcendent (other than creation) then God "cannot be identified with any part or the whole" of that which God creates. Rather, "God is present to the world in the relation whereby God and the world are distinguished since in that relation the world rests in the entirety of its being upon God." The alternative is to talk about God as a force within creation. Yet, to "talk of God as creator in terms of natural process either reduces God's transcendence or restricts the range of God's direct creative influence."¹¹

While Tanner's goal is to "ensure the coherence of Christian doctrine," she also helps describe the logical consequences of this radical transcendence. She describes how theology trips over the Pelagian controversy: "talk of sovereignty approaches an advocacy of divine tyranny. ...[And thus] Christian talk that maintains both sorts of claims becomes incoherent."¹² Her answer to this incoherence is a strict adherence to the radical transcendence of God and a real unrestricted agency for God. She claims this logically allows God to create non-divine beings with their own powers and operations with productive creative causality. However, she notes, one must be careful not to lose sight of "God's direct establishment of every aspect of created efficacy."¹³ Tanner

¹¹ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 62, 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, 121-122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

claims “two different orders of efficacy become evident: along a ‘horizontal’ plane, an order of created causes and effects; along a ‘vertical’ plane, the order whereby God founds the former.”¹⁴

This distinction is helpful, for conversation about God’s creating and sustaining all that exists is a different conversation than one about understanding the horizontal plane, the nature of life within creation. This project does not address arguments about the vertical order of causation and is willing to assume the theological position that God is creator of all that is.¹⁵ Accepting a vertical order of creation and the transcendence of God has real implications as to the nature of creation, the role of faith and the role of immanence. Tanner writes, “The very difference between God and the world [transcendence] ensures God’s presence to the world as its constantly accompanying condition [immanence] and to say that in this unity of presence the difference remains.”¹⁶ As noted, the very difference between God and creation, God’s transcendence, the role as creator and sustaining power, are necessary conditions to God’s presence. This presence is not of a restricted variety that would be the case if either God were a force within, or component of, creation, as then God would not be

¹⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 89-90.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67. Beside Tanner’s discussion David Bentley Hart is strong voice describing and defending the reality of the vertical aspect of creation see his books: David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), And David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 67.

truly transcendent nor have an unrestricted agency. If one accepts the transcendence of God, then Tanner's work provides insight into the logical outcome of this theological tenet and describes difficulties with theological language and concepts that do not maintain the transcendence of God.

What Has Become of Transcendence

Kathryn Tanner suggests our language about transcendence became confused over time. William C. Placher agrees with Tanner in his book, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*.¹⁷ Placher argues that the concept of transcendence has eroded. This erosion of the concept led to in his words:

Explaining God's difference from created things by saying that God was transcendent (distant, unaffected) in contrast to immanent (close, engaged.) Rather than explaining how all categories break down when applied to God, they set the stage for talking about transcendence as one of the definable properties God possesses – a quality we could understand and that many writers today could then come to find deeply unattractive. In that sense, transcendence got domesticated and theology suffered as a result.¹⁸

Placher elucidates the views of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin on transcendence. He states Aquinas approach:

[He] offered not a metaphysical system that would place God within our understanding of the world and specify the meaning of the limitations of our language about God, but metalinguistic rules that remind us of the limitations of our language about God and thereby make it clear that we cannot place God within the world we can understand.¹⁹

¹⁷ William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

Placher argues that Aquinas' view that God's self-revelation is essential has disappeared in more contemporary views of transcendence that so often idealize human efforts in defining who or what God is.²⁰

Placher claims that Luther also struggled with a legitimate problem of perspective. Indeed, Luther claims one does not have a God's eye view. One is unable to see how things fit together as God does. God is outside of creation; God has a transcendent nature, not a human nature. Thus, we confront the mystery and uncertainty of God even in the revelation of God in Christ.²¹

Placher describes John Calvin's approach as traversing the biblical terrain via practical need and accommodating human capacities. Even when proposing the theoretical concept of predestination, Placher claims the reason is biblical antecedents. He suggests Calvin's goal is practical results in the affections and actions of believers according to their ability to understand. Calvin recognized the limits of such a concept: "We have to acknowledge the limits of our understanding and seek to trust a God whose nature lies beyond our understanding."²² Placher's point in looking at these three historic theological figures from different traditions is to note that all three would agree that

²⁰ Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 32-36.

²¹ Ibid., 37-51.

²² Ibid., 64.

faith, as Calvin writes, “consists of assurance rather than comprehension” of a transcendent God.²³

Placher identifies the seventeenth century as the epoch in which the modern turn toward domesticating transcendence occurred.

When most seventeenth-century theologians tried to talk about “God,” therefore, of course they got it wrong. Whether reflecting about the action of God in creation or the interplay of divine grace and human freedom, they were trying to domesticate God’s transcendence into the categories of human understanding. Absent a triune God they had only human efforts to account for our internal appropriation of faith, and only human categories for our understanding of who God is. And therefore, they lost God’s transcendence.²⁴

Placher believes we continue to live with this heritage and its errors. The endeavor of contemporary thinkers continues this trend in defining God in categories of human understanding.

Langdon Gilkey, Placher claims, is prototypical in his struggle to understand how God acts within creation due to understanding God only in contrast with creation and simply as a force acting upon creation. Placher argues that God “is the normal course of things.”²⁵ It seems that Placher conflates the vertical and horizontal nature of creation. God as creator and sustainer of creation in the vertical sense does not mean God defines every action in the horizontal sense. What Placher claims is a post

²³ Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

seventeenth-century way of understanding creation as “running itself” warrants further attention.²⁶

When Placher notes Gilkey’s struggle with how, if, and when God may interfere, he raises a central issue of this project and what it means for God to be immanent and involved without short-circuiting the agency of creatures and the horizontal nature of creation through overpowering actions of divine will. If God does not determine every action directly nor only act with miraculous jaw-dropping power, one may wonder whether a coherent and cohesive view that encompasses God’s continued actions, work, and leading on the horizontal plane is possible.

Placher reminds the reader of the meaning of God’s transcendence in that “we can know the transcendent God not as an object within our intellectual grasp but only as a self-revealing subject, and even our knowledge of the divine self-revelation must be God’s doing.”²⁷ His argument on the loss of perspective on transcendence is useful. Placher only touches on the consequences of a radical view of transcendence and what issues this raises for the life of faith. How does a transcendent God interact with creation? Does the transcendence of God mean one must surrender hard horizontal issues to the mystery of God’s agency thus causing intractable issues for our human intellect? These remain unanswered questions.

²⁶ Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, 190.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

Creation at the Intersection of Science and Theology

Understanding Creation

What Tanner identifies as the horizontal aspect of creation, the world in which one lives on a daily basis, matters in understanding an integrative theology. Generally, the scientific viewpoint within academic disciplines predominate thinking about this realm. In this project, the local university represents this approach well. Science-based descriptions of the origins and nature of the biological and physical world interact with theological conceptualizations of God and God's relations to this world. Using the word "creation" highlights the theological perspective involved. The book *Creation: Law and Probability* is a compilation of essays assessing the interplay between science and theology and identifies implications resulting from the study of stochasticity, complexity, and chaos theory.²⁸ This book offers exciting new possibilities and insights that may revitalize the connection between science and theology.

Creation: Law and Probability notes an historic interplay between science and theology. While theological understandings encouraged the development of science through a belief in the consistency of creation, the relationship degenerated into a competition over how to explain the nature of creation. This strained the relationship between the two approaches to knowledge, thus between rational thought and belief. Both approaches to understanding the world in which humans live have limits as to what

²⁸ Fraser Watts, ed. *Creation: Law and Probability* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

they are able to explain. For theists, explanations once attributed to God were now described by science. Science developed greater predictive capacity in the physical realm than did a theistic perspective. The science/mathematical perspective does not address the origin and existence of natural laws, nor whether these consistencies are intrinsic laws or are simply correlations that have worked so far. Further issues of existence, consciousness, and life itself remain unexplainable within the present scientific framework. However, both scientific and theological claim to describe reality. A continuing rivalry over which faction, the scientist or the theologian, has greater insights into the nature of reality, including whether God is a necessary component of the explanation, has developed. The authors' of *Creation: Law and Probability* offer valuable insights for understanding creation as God's handiwork through the work of science, rather than in opposition to it.²⁹

The prevalence of random or chance events is one generally accepted component of reality assumed in the academic and scientific perspective. Several authors identify randomness as a possible source of change. Furthermore, interplay between randomness and its context may be important. The recent study of self-organizing systems identifies some systems that depend on the complex interactions due to the aggregation of random actions. Often these random events occur within relatively simple constraints.³⁰ This interplay of random actions with constraints opens new possibilities in understanding the

²⁹ Watts, *Law and Probability*, 58.

³⁰ Wesley J. Wildman, "From Law and Chance in Nature to Ultimate Reality," in *Creation: Law and Probability*, ed. Fraser N. Watts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 165.

nature of creation and suggests, “the interplay between law and chance appears to be a precondition of novelty and life.”³¹

The authors in *Creation: Law and Probability* suggest that we live in a world that is not just the sum of its constituent parts. They describe a world in which the organization of constituent parts enable systems, even systems within systems. They identify a historical complexification that has occurred in some systems. They go so far as to nominate, “a law that explains the steady tendency toward self-organization and complexification during cosmic history” as the Fourth Thermodynamic Law.³²

These authors argue that biological systems and their reactivity to their environment have particular value in understanding complex systems. This reactivity and its relationship to consciousness in the human system are worth further investigation. Historically, biological systems were thought to conform to deterministic mechanisms dependent on the constituent parts of the system. This paradigm suggests human life is devoid of any real agency. However, with the recognition of systemic effects and feedback loops, scientific data now suggest that there can be top-down causation. The system can influence both its own function and influence other systems around it. New recognition of systemic activity of neural networks that have reflective influence suggest human agency is a real possibility. Nancey Murphy argues for a “set

³¹ Wildman, “From Law and Chance in Nature to Ultimate Reality,” 158.

³² Niels Henrik Gergersen, “Laws of Physics, Principles of Self-Organization, and Natural Capacities: On Explaining a Self-Organizing World,” in *Creation: Law and Probability*, ed. Fraser Watts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 89.

of cognitive capacities that together create the capacity for free action.”³³ Downward causation may be a description of creative agency in the horizontal direction.

John Polkinghorne suggests that our world is not static but “an unfolding improvisation rather than a fixed score.”³⁴ The authors in *Creation: Law and Probability* argue God has created a world in which novelty and life, human agency and consequential actions, constitute reality and influence the ongoing nature of creation. God has created agency and actions that God does not directly control each moment of their existence. This may offer a description of creation in which an immanent God may walk with, guide, and call, and perhaps at times influence the outcomes of events without disrupting the entire system or being constantly the causal agent for all that happens.

Rethinking Reductionism

Since a congregation’s perceptive heritage is not purely theological nor even predominantly faith-based, an integrative theology must examine the oft-suggested predominance of a scientific worldview. In *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology, and Religion*, the concept of human identity is the vehicle used to address new ideas at this intersection. The book identifies a central tenet:

A common view in physics is that bottom-up causation is all there is: micro-forces determine what happens at the lower levels and thereby are the foundation

³³ Nancey C. Murphy, “Creation: Law and Probability,” in *Creation: Law and Probability*, ed. Fraser N. Watts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 136.

³⁴ John Polkinghorne, “Afterword, Some Further Reflections,” in *Creation: Law and Probability*, ed. Fraser N. Watts, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 192.

of higher-level activity. Electrons attract protons at the bottom level, and this is the basic causal mechanism at work, causing everything else all the way up: this is all there is. ... Strong reductionists tell us that this is the only kind of causality there is.³⁵

This statement notes both the lack of room for human agency as a higher order causal force and the operational determinism that suggests that all causes are reducible to constituent parts and the laws governing them. This constitutes the scientific paradigm of the modern era. Today, however, this paradigm is in question. One of the main goals of the book is to notice new perspectives such as emergent systems, non-linear or chaotic systems, and complex adaptive systems that form cracks in the older paradigm and may reduce its role to a simple characteristic of particular systems.

A new perspective called *emergentism* “states that new properties emerge as you go from level to level [of complexity], and an attempt to explain these properties in terms of lower level alone will end in failure.”³⁶ Nancey Murphy in her chapter, “Reductionism and Emergence: A Critical Perspective,” notes that if causal reductionism is false then “the causal powers of such an object are not determined solely by the physical properties of its constituents and the laws of physics, but also by the organization of those constituents within the composite.”³⁷ She claims the emergence of

³⁵ George F. R. Ellis, “Fundamentalism in Science, Theology, and the Academy,” in *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology, and Religion* eds. Nancey C. Murphy and Christopher C. Knight, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 85.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁷ Nancey C. Murphy, “Reductionism and Emergence: A Critical Perspective,” in *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology, and Religion* eds. Nancey C. Murphy and Christopher C. Knight, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 107.

complex adaptive systems is “about the topology of causality.”³⁸ Causality itself is central to an ontological epistemology. “What criterion do we have for deciding whether or not something exists? A common answer is that it is something we have to reckon with in our causal accounts of the world. So causal reducibility (or nonreducibility) may be the best criterion we have for ontological reducibility (or nonreducibility) of all sorts.”³⁹ How one views causality offers avenue to understanding the nature of creation.

Murphy describes levels of causal activity within complex adaptive systems and addresses systemic influence on constituent parts. She suggests that “concepts of boundary conditions, structures, information, feedback, and downward causation” demonstrate complex wholes are more than aggregates.⁴⁰ The picture she paints of adaptive complex systems demonstrates that these concepts support the contention that “higher-level systems exercise downward influences (or constraints) on their own components” and systems interact with other systems according to mechanism of influence that are not simply described through physical laws.⁴¹ Murphy then claims this picture denies that human identity is limited to neural biology or merely the physical workings of the brain. The new paradigm of emergent complex adaptive systems begins to address problems of mental causation, moral responsibility and free will.⁴² Human

³⁸ Murphy, “Reductionism and Emergence,” 113.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*

agency, the ability of the human to act with a conscious act of will, is not limited due to reductionist determinism and is not simply a mechanistic interplay of physical laws. As a complex adaptive system, the human influences the component parts and interacts with other systems that are also not determined solely by the laws governing constituent parts.

Other authors in *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion* explore how the self as an emergent system is embedded in multiple complex systems and is not independent of the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which the self exists. Owen Thomas identifies the main purpose of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy as overcoming the idea that "looks upon the self or soul as an autonomous, rational, invisible, inner reality essentially independent of the body, the community and culture."⁴³ The final chapters of the book reflect on examples of the interconnection of one's body and consciousness with one's community and culture in creating personal identity. The final chapters suggest human identity is formed in relationship and defined by relationships including one's physical and cultural contexts.

God in the World: Theology of Immanence

A Relational God

Terence E. Fretheim in *God and World in the Old Testament* offers a "relational model of creation" based on an analysis focused on Old Testament biblical texts. He

⁴³ Ellis, "Fundamentalism in Science, Theology, and the Academy."136. also see Owen C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," *The Journal of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2000).

states, “To claim that God created the world and all that exists is a matter of faith, such a claim is grounded fundamentally in God’s self-revelation (see Heb 11:3) and is not the result of scientific investigation. At this level the opening chapters of Genesis are a confession of faith.”⁴⁴

Fretheim notes a moving God, a wind or breath hover over the deep in this first act of creation. He identifies that this hovering as, “an ever changing velocity and direction.”⁴⁵ In other words, the first description in the Biblical text describes God as both dynamic and in relationship to the deep/waters. What the deep/waters represent is a matter of some debate. Fretheim offers two ways exegetes normally understand what the deep represents. The first and historical interpretation is as “the forces of chaos, a threatening or evil force.”⁴⁶ The second perspective is that the term simply means “ocean.” Fretheim takes a productive middle path interpreting the “deep” as a concept that retains a sense of chaos. Noting the text does not indicate anything evil, he does not assume this chaos is evil. Rather, “this [interpretation] regarding ‘chaos’ could profitably relate Genesis 1:2 to recent developments in physics, namely ‘chaos theory’.”⁴⁷ This allows for an interpretation that at the origination of all things our dynamic God moves over a sea of possibility.

⁴⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 44.

Another way one may portray this sea of possibility is unbounded chaos. God puts bounds on the chaos and shapes relationships. The first relationship was light and darkness. One might wonder if this is an initial bounding of energy and its absence. Does God use this energy to create form and substance? Form and substance is the stuff of creation differentiated from pure energy through the way energy is bound in relationships. Stated differently, chaotic drive enables a real dynamism in creation yet the laws of physics create boundaries to containing this chaos.

Fretheim notes that often God as creator is related to God as sovereign.⁴⁸ This relationship bears directly on the concerns about a transcendent God that is creator and the continuing nature of the relationship between God and that creation. He quotes John Macquarrie's reflection namely that creation is

Not so much an exercise of power as rather an exercise of love and generosity, an act of self-limitation and even of self-humiliation on the part of God. His love and generosity lead him to share existence with his creatures....He commits himself to it and takes responsibility for it, though at the same time he commits a share of the responsibility to the creatures.⁴⁹

Fretheim suggests an attentive reading of Old Testament texts paint a complex picture of creation.

All creatures, of course, are *deeply dependent* upon God for their existence and continuing life. At the same time, God has freely chosen to establish an *interdependent* relationship with creation, with respect to origins and continuation and with overlapping spheres of responsibility. Indeed, God has freely chosen to be *dependent* upon human and nonhuman in the furtherance of God's purposes in the world.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 46.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 270. (Emphasis in original)

Fretheim directs his readers to Michael Welker's perspective on Genesis 1-2. Welker describes how in these first two chapters of the Bible the creature's own agency is a "constitutive element in the process of creation... in harmony with God's action."⁵¹ Then echoing the thought of writers in *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology, and Religion*, now from a biblical rather than science based perspective, Fretheim suggests, "the nature of interrelationships among the creatures is also important: while being relatively independent, they are dependent on the other creatures and interdependent among themselves."⁵² He claims creation is comprehensively relational.

Fretheim develops this relational model of creation, creature with Creator, Creator, through self-limitation, with creature, and creature (or elements of creation) with other creatures (or elements of creation) throughout the book. He suggests this relational model rests on a dynamic, chaotic, element to creation. Pointing to God's speech to Job, Fretheim describes the "chaotic elements of earth's becoming."⁵³ Absent from much theological and biblical scholarship is any appreciation of the dynamic nature of creation and what role stochasticity may play. In contrast, Fretheim states: "In the midst of Job's turmoil and loss, the issue of trust in the fundamental orders of creation, however marked by randomness, will be important. ... In the face of

⁵¹ Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). 64.

⁵² Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 270.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 282.

experienced chaos in one's life, there is considerable value to an orienting vision that claims coherence, reliability, and graciousness for God's good creation."⁵⁴ In the midst of dynamic creation the acts of relational creatures have real effects due to God's gift of agency and God's own self-limitation in relation to Creation. Fretheim's analysis is valuable and suggests a human "can enhance or inhibit the vocation to which it has been called."⁵⁵ The decisions and actions one takes matter.

An Ecological Theology

Jürgen Moltmann in *God and Creation* reassesses creation theology and doctrine. His concern is that human society is in danger of real environmental and societal catastrophe unless human societies radically reverse present trends. He writes about the need for a reorientation to a new worldview that humankind may "succeed in finding an alternative way of living and dealing with other living things and with nature."⁵⁶ To this end, he believes we need a new theological doctrine of creation. Assuming human agency, he notes our context require us to reassess and re-evaluate the problem of transcendence, immanence, and creation in order to identify a way of thinking that will enable humankind to deal with the existential crises of human life.

When the machine is taken as model of the world, the underlying premise is an unbroken chain of causality, which determines every event in the world. The laws of nature are eternal laws, which regulate all happening.... Consequently

⁵⁴ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 282.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 20-21.

chance events are merely subjective impressions based on laws, which are not yet comprehended.⁵⁷

Moltmann believes this the prevalent worldview needs to be replaced.

Moltmann in *God and Creation* suggests one recent attempt to counteract the mechanistic view is “differentiated panentheism” yet he dismisses this approach as “not capable of linking God’s immanence in the world with his transcendence in relation to it.”⁵⁸ Moltmann suggests that the logical outcome is that God’s creative influence must be undifferentiated from creation, infusing the finite with the infinite and in every moment opening the created “to God and his future.”⁵⁹ This may sound as if he is confusing the horizontal with the vertical nature of God’s agency. Yet, his analysis of creation notes, “parts always give rise to a whole – that is to say, to a new structure and a new organizational principle.”⁶⁰ He notices the creation of complex adaptive systems. In addition, these systems are interrelated – “webs of communication of the open life systems. ... Through their growing interdependence richer and richer possibilities are opened up.”⁶¹ Within this creation characterized by complex adaptive systems, Moltmann suggests that “it is therefore impossible to think of this world-transcendence of God unless we think simultaneously of his world-immanence; it is equally impossible

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 315.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 101, 103.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

to conceive of God's evolutive immanence in the world without his world transcendence."⁶² He clearly states the necessity of transcendence for immanence.

Differentiation between God and creation remains difficult and the tendency is to see God as a function within creation. Creation becomes "a dynamic web of interconnected process. The Spirit preserves, differentiates, and binds things together. The Spirit preserves and leads thing and their communities beyond themselves."⁶³ However, as Tanner notes when God becomes a natural process within creation this restricts either "God's transcendence or the range of God's direct creative influence".⁶⁴ Moltmann attempts to mitigate these limits by using Trinitarian language so that only the Spirit is restricted yet this approach mixes vertical and horizontal plains of existence.

It is clear that the issue both Tanner and Moltmann are addressing is that conundrum of divine agency in relation to human agency. Moltmann recognizes that God's interplay with creation must allow for human liberty and sees this in the metaphor of play.

The creation of the world has the character of play, which gives God delight and human beings joy... Play as the symbol of the world includes the creative role of 'chance'; for it understands chance as the event of something new- something underivable and undeducible from anything that already exists – something to which a living being adapts itself playfully and which he copes with through the free play of his energies.⁶⁵

⁶² Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 206.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁴ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, 72.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 311-12.

Humankind, Moltmann suggests, struggles with this invitation to play and turns to domination instead.

This messianic fellowship with Christ is counter to this drive to dominate and instead invites followers of Christ to be children of God. Neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, “this messianism was consistently the messianism of the child: ‘Unless you turn and become like a children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ ... The very images used for the fellowship of Jesus, the ‘child’ of God, are no longer images of fatherhood and motherhood; they are images of brotherhood, sisterhood, and friendship.”⁶⁶

Thus, Moltmann argues the world is full of interrelated webs of influence. In this world, creatures are invited to play with future possibilities arising out of chance events. Since this is the case, all the children of God, humankind, needs to “transition to an ecological world view... bound up with new egalitarian forms of society, in which patriarchal rule is ended and co-operative communities are built up.”⁶⁷ An ecological worldview acknowledges the interdependent nature of systems and creatures within creation. Due to this interdependence, Moltmann suggests God invites humans to play as children dependent on and confident in the Creator. Humans act trusting God will bring about a future in which the play becomes harmonious and joy filled. Presently our play does not recognize our childlike dependence on God nor our interdependence with creation and other creatures. This is a vision of hope in the midst of struggle and a call to

⁶⁶ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 319.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.

“replace the modern mechanistic world picture” with its one-sided patriarchal power structure.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 320. For another perspective on why transcendence need not support patriarchal, hierarchical power structures see Rosemary Radford Reuther “Re-evaluating the Body in Eco-Feminism,” *Concilium: International Journal for Theology*, No. 2 (2002), 41-49.

CHAPTER 3

INTEGRATIVE THEOLOGY

Key Theological Components of an Integrative Theology

The view one holds about the nature of God delineates how one is able to envision God acting. If God is simply another element of creation, this deity would be quite constricted. If, as Christian theology has historically understood, God is transcendent, the agency of God would seem unrestricted. This historically consistent view of a transcendent, creator God answers Leibniz's question why there is something rather than nothing and is then the reason for all that exists.¹ This reason for existence as we know it is beyond, or other than, the existence we know. Accepting this view of God does lead to difficulty describing a transcendent God. The human conception of reality is reasonably limited to the components of reality one experiences. The human condition is embedded in space, materiality and time. The human experience recognizes concepts of energy and information (or regularities i.e. the laws of physics). Human descriptions of God tend toward describing God in these terms. So the power of God, the location of

¹ John Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 71.

God (in heaven or everywhere or distant), the substance of God, and one could continue to offer characterizing descriptions like these contingent on our experience. One may note God's interaction with creation may be spoken of in these terms because that is how humans perceive the interaction. Whether we are truly describing God is questionable. Transcendence then suggests that God is beyond our conception, definition and control.

Transcendence, Immanence and the Agency of God

Transcendence does not mean God is distant. Describing a transcendent God in spatial terms seems *a priori* untenable. Often humans describe their experience of God not in terms of distance but either as localized or as infused in or bathing all of creation. Scripture often notes God's availability to humans in localized terms – walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8), in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-6), a voice from the clouds (Matt. 17:5), etc. The promise is that the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, will be given Jesus' disciples (John 14:26). This ineffable, imperceptible presence of God cannot be identified with any one place (John 3:8) and assumed to occupy a particular space. While likely a reason humankind has difficulty with the Spirit, the non-spatial nature of the Holy Spirit is consistent with the transcendence of God and suggests God is not part of creation but in relationship with creation. This non-spatial nature of God enables God's presence in accordance with the human inability to perceive God yet does not preclude, and may offer a description of, God's immanence. Accordingly immanence then is not "in" or "of" or "outside" of creation. Our descriptions of where God "is" simply break down.

Our best description may be that God is in relationship with creation and the creatures with in creation.

Knowing this otherness of God and God's creative effort, creation, suggest the agency of God is likely absolute in relation to existence and especially to creation as humans know it. Saying this however does not require that God determines all that happens in creation as internally experienced and as creation functions. Indeed, this high view of God's agency includes divine creative freedom. If God has creative freedom, then God is able to bring into existence a creation that functions with a certain agency, and even independence, from the creator. Describing what happens between the Creator and creation after creation requires descriptive language. The metaphor of relationship based in the human conceptions of relationship, suggests the need for existentially distinct entities.² Relationship is the interaction, dependence and independence of two entities. The transcendence of God then suggests the immanence and agency of God may be beyond our understanding yet evident in human experience. Furthermore, the way creation functions need not be predetermined according to God's immanence or agency.

Dynamic Nature of Creation

Creation is a term that describes the existence humans experience and God initiated. Implicit in the term's sense of beginning one hears the suggestion that something comes after that beginning. This is consistent with the human experience of a

² Note that not only must we use the human concept to relationship to talk about the interaction between God and creation; we must use the concept of time as well – before and after creation for example is a time sequence in our experience.

creation that is not static and has internally caused variation. Traditionally determinism is a view that either God completely shapes all events in creation or that the laws of physics cause the component parts of our physical world to take shape and dictate all that subsequently happens. Human experience of change, variation, and causality as well as the views of self as causal agent chaffs against this determinism of the either theological or physical varieties. If one accepts a transcendent God that can shape a horizontal dynamic creation while maintaining a vertical agency, then determinism is not a theological necessity. If one accepts that complex systems exhibit downward causation, traditional physical determinism no longer is the rule either.

Since determinism need not rule, one may begin to explore the dynamic nature creation. Stochasticity has become so common today it acts as background noise in most investigations of how anything works. Perhaps because of the ubiquity of stochasticity, few seem to question why stochasticity is present. A couple of observations of stochasticity are in order. First, the stochasticity of the natural order indicates a variation that precludes a completely stable, unchanging system, as if variation were designed into the system. A second interesting observation is that this built in variation would mask ways God might cause changes within creation – e.g. is an event a coincidence or ordained? Finally, a certain randomness within creation assures the dynamic nature of creation. Theologically, randomness may suggest something (such as the dynamic nature of life) about the experience God creates for God's creatures.

The existence of chaotic systems dawning in the explanatory imagination of humans reveals another component of the dynamic nature of creation. Chaotic systems show sensitive to initial conditions, do not exhibit predictable patterns (even if governed

by a simple set of equations), and are bounded, that is, have conditions beyond which the system never extends. The weather one experiences daily is one of these systems and is the reason weather is hard to predict. These systems create variation without predictable patterns yet within limits. The limitations on chaotic systems, its boundaries, restrict these systems such that they do not descend in to pure randomness nor dissipate and disappear.³

Both stochasticity and chaotic systems describe a dynamic mechanism with in creation. Recent identification of the role complex systems play provides another component of the dynamic nature of creation. Complex systems are systems that in their complex nature shape the operational environment of their component parts and interact with the environment in which they exist differently than their component parts could or would. The appreciation of complex systems also reveals that top down influence is a reality.⁴ This revolutionary description of complex systems is paradigm shift for science. The building block, mechanistic world of modernism is no longer sufficient in and of itself and one is no longer able to state everything is determined according to some initial conditions.

Emergent systems or patterns are associated and sometimes identified with complex systems. Emergence is the unexpected appearance of patterns, characteristics, and/or systemic actions one is unable to predict from component constituents. This

³ I describe the limits as a boundary however instead of thinking of boundaries as hard edges, the idea that the system has an attractor that keeps the system in a specified range of overall predictability is often used. See Lenny Smith, *Chaos: A Very Short Introduction* [e-book] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 5.

⁴ Murphy, "Reductionism and Emergence," 108-109.

unexpected form, structure and function suggest something about the nature of the universe that humans do not understand and cannot necessarily foresee. Once present in the human experience, one often has hard time noting this property. The wetness of water is easily identified characteristic though may not be so easily predicted from the properties of the water molecule. The aggregate has properties the individual components do not have. Both this familiarity with the figurative sea in which we swim and the inability to predict when and how these properties emerge may give us pause in the modern hubris of predictability, knowledge, and control humans often expect to have over our environment and our lives.

Human Agency and the Kaleidoscopic Creation

In this the dynamic, at times unpredictable yet bounded place in which humans exist. Having a dynamic component to creation may influence how one views humanity. The human being is a complex adaptive system that is not only changed by its environment but changes its environment. Theologically we may call this agency, the ability to make decisions that actually influence even cause change in this dynamic environment. Human agency is not the same as freewill. While tangentially related, freewill is a concept that suggests the human is without constraint in use of their decision-making ability and that human decisions determine the outcomes of one's life. This description of the concept sets freewill at an extreme end of a spectrum with freewill on one end and determinism on the other. The distinction between freewill and agency then is that while human decisions have real and important effects individually they are rarely completely determinative of outcomes. The complex set of relationships,

dependencies and interdependencies of creation and influence human agency. The life, actions, decisions and influences create a context in which the human exist. This web of interactions holds the human life in constant relationship to one's one history and the historical/societal context in which one lives. One may recognize systemic relationships, stochastic and chaotic influences, and determinative boundaries that constrain and enable human agency.

Creation becomes an ever-changing kaleidoscope. One may wonder if this is dynamic, ever changing creation is beautiful in the eye of the Beholder. Perhaps this change produces the beauty, adventure, and interest (as opposed to the boredom of the static) to the creature as well as the creator. Though speculative, this view is consistent with a good God that in some way enjoys the relationship with creation. Whatever view God may have of a dynamic creation, the idea that we do have a dynamic creation does describe the present conception of the nature of the world in which humans live.

Coping with Change

The belief that God created consistent, rational, causal relationships gave rise to and influenced the development of science. The success of science as a discipline belies the reality of these relationships. As is often the case, as humans looked ever more closely at the nature of our existence, concepts have changed often in radical ways. Ways of describing interactions at one spatial scale do not always work at larger (or smaller) scales. Again a paradigm shift is occurring that recognizes macro-system influences that are not predictable from the component parts of the systems. Emergence suggests form and function occurs in unpredictable ways. Once an emergent phenomena

is experienced, then the next time one may predict the phenomena (unless the system has a chaotic component to it). The point here is that in the life of the creature, particularly humans that have agency, that is can make decisions that will influence the nature of the world around them. And, human knowledge, power, and predictions are limited. Some of this limitation may be insurmountable. Stochasticity and chaotic systems may limit the human ability to predict precise outcomes, and at times, long term consequences of particular actions. As emergent systems become identifiable, one may wonder what “emergent properties” humans cannot identify or have not yet identified. Describing the world in this way suggests a really difficulty for casual agents that make decisions, consciously or not. Stated differently, recognizing there are limitations of human rationality and agency, coping with and controlling change becomes more problematic.

If one accepts God is the creator, that God is the reason why there is something rather than nothing, and that this God is transcendent, yet in relationship with creation and the creatures, the self-revelation of God is of great value. First, this self-revelation enables humans to be in relationship with this God and to stand in wonder before this possibility. Second, if one accepts the central narrative of the Christian faith, God not only is self-revelatory, this God reveals a way of life that leads to life. Humans have attempted, and have at times believed, they could define and predict the future as well as explain the past without reliance on God. Humans seem to hold on to this high view of human knowledge even when this causes a struggle with how to find meaning in the present. The theological perspective addresses this need for meaning and deals with limits to predictability. Though humans often reject the idea that help is needed, the

recognition that humans have limits is evident today. Thus, an integrative theology suggests that for humans to live well in the midst of uncertainty, complexity, and unseen emergent phenomena connection to the divine offered in God's self-revelation is essential. This divine self-revelation includes the offer to show us the way to navigate life that leads to life and, as such, is invaluable.

However difficult it is for the human race to accept fallibility, limits and mortality, one's daily experience affirms this reality. More recently, the study of stochasticity, chaos, complexity, and emergence affirms this experience of human limitation. In this context, the hubris of scientific rationality which suggests we can know all the answers is clearly excessively ambitious and untenable. As hard as it may be for some to turn from this elevation of human intellect, the context suggests we must look for what is beyond us. This is the realm of Christian spirituality. If one is willing to accept the reality of God, and that this transcendent God is self-revelatory and that God is willing to engage with humans to guide, encourage and redeem, then turning to this God in an act of faith and listening to and/or for the revelatory word is valuable. The practice of doing this is spirituality. That this God worked through a particular self-revelation and offered to engage humanity with God's salvific path in Jesus of Nazareth is Christian. Acknowledging Jesus as God's self-revelation that conditions, enables, and leads then offers contours to Christian spirituality. To suggest humans live in a context in which we are lost without outside help is theologically consistent with Christian tradition. That God offers the human the opportunity to turn to the creator and be given direction that enables life is also theologically consistent. That God indeed sent God's Son to make life and life abundant possible is a central tenet of biblical faith. To

continue to progress through life as a follower of Jesus and continue to experience the work of the Spirit, the ongoing revelatory offerings of God, is congruent with the history of Christian experience.

Thus, an integrative theology recognizes the human condition as seen both biblically and scientifically. In this condition, the human must decide nothing matters or looking for help from beyond and recognizing that help is forth coming. Whether humans want to listen to the help that is give is another matter, for it does deny a certain human arrogance, may interfere with some (if not all) of our self-selected or societally driven lifestyles, and leads to worship of God rather than self or other totems of power. Christian spirituality according to an integrative theology is a key component of interaction with the divine and foundational for living in a way that enables life to unfold in a healthy, life-enhancing manner in the midst of all our uncertainty.

Scriptural Influence: An Interpretive Dance

Christian spirituality develops through a faith that recognizes God's self-revelation. The Presbyterian tradition understands scripture as central to this self-revelation and believes scripture is the unique and authoritative word of God.⁵ The phrase 'word of God' suggests that in scripture, the reader will find God's self-revelation, and God's relationship, to very human people. This is to say that the Presbyterian tradition recognizes the importance of scripture and that while God uses

⁵ "Confession of 1967" *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions* (Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2014), Section 9.27, http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc2014.pdf (accessed March 10, 2015).

and sanctions the written word, comprehending and understanding scripture takes effort, interpretive work, and spiritual guidance. As with the world in which humans live, the scripture is dynamic and available for the edification of the reader and as an avenue by which God speaks into the reader's life. An integrative theology must not only be consistent with scripture, the theology must help elucidate scripture. Scripture must also illuminate such a theology. This central form of revelation must be central to an integrative theology that highlights the value of revelation.

God: Transcendent Creator

Scripture clearly suggests God is creator. Though theological consternation may be evident over exactly how, when, and other such questions, these are secondary issues. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth..." (Gen 1:1) begins an ode to God's creative power and identifies the cause of all that is, namely, God. Integrative theology maintains this as a foundational tenet in agreement with scripture. And, not only did God create, this creative power is not limited to "In the beginning." The two Genesis stories of creation suggest that God's creative act even at the beginning is across a span of time from our point of view. God is not limited to a once and only effort. In Isaiah, the prophetic voice suggests God can create "a new heavens and new earth" (Isaiah 65:17). Isaiah again identifies God as continuing to create as the prophets voice notes, "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for behold I create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight" (Isaiah 65:18).

Scripture often assumes rather than names the creative power of God. God is identified as causing things to happen whether manna in the desert, or the movement of

nations states, or changes in climate (such as droughts). While humans today rarely express events as relating to the power of God at work, the scripture suggest God has the power to shape events that effect and change the course of history and the lives of individual human persons. The interaction of systems are now thought to be governed by simple physical laws yet in the noise of particular events even slight changes can lead to drastically different results. This reality leaves plenty of room for God to act in a manner that would not be noticed. The central revelation of Christian faith does suggest God works in and through the natural operations of weather, national relations, and interpersonal experiences however need not always do so. In Luke 12:1-4, Jesus suggested that neither being victim of human violence nor physical calamity is necessarily God directed punishment toward those that died. In the first incident of human tragedy, Jesus identifies how Herod acts as the human agency causing the tragedy. In the second instance, Jesus notes the accidental (or chance) happenings.

God's response in chapter 38 of the biblical book of Job is an ode to God's intimate acquaintance with a dynamic creation. This chapter describes how God set limits and boundaries within which an incredibly powerful, dynamic and beautiful creation flows through time. This description is consistent with the stochastic, chaotic, complex nature of a dynamic creation evident today. In many locations, scripture expresses awe at the vibrant handiwork of God. Humans live in a dynamic, not completely predictable context, and this is consistent with the biblical view of creation.

Human: Lower than God

In the biblical narrative God challenges Job at the beginning of chapter 38 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding?” These questions continue to challenge humans’ confidence in their own knowledge. This integrative theology suggests that the scope of human knowledge today when approached with an open mind answers this question of understanding in way consistent with Job’s answer. Job espouses, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3). Stochasticity, chaos, complexity, and emergence - all of these concepts suggest our knowledge is partial and some things look to be truly beyond human ability to know. As in Job, these ways of describing the world suggest humility and honesty about human limitations is in order.

Human Agency

If humans live within creation subject to real limitations, where does human agency fit? As noted above Jesus allows Pilates agency to cause violence, pain and suffering and Jesus does not blame the victims for what happens to them (Luke 12:1-4). From the Garden of Eden through most of the early narrative scripture describe God’s relationship to humans making decisions and acting on them for good and, it seems most often, for ill. Several times the humans are asked, “Why did you do what you have done?” Adam and Eve - why did you eat the fruit you were directed not to eat (Genesis 3:11)? Cain - why did you kill Abel (Genesis 4:10)? This theme of humans using their agency in ways contrary to God’s direction begins in Genesis and continues through to Revelation.

One might choose multiple examples in scripture where God is asking Israel or particular individuals to choose to follow God's direction and allow God to be the One that can show humans the way. Often the human actors in the narrative decide, to their detriment, to trust their own thought and insights. One often noted example of choice comes from Joshua 24:15. Joshua asks the people that follow his leadership to "choose this day whom you will serve." He goes on to suggest their choice will have real consequence especially if they decide to serve God and then do not. The subsequent narrative and the prophetic voice seem to hinge on this decision.

Biblical prophets ask time after time for God's people to return to the Lord (I Sam. 7:3, Jeremiah 3:14, Joel 2:12, Amos 4:10, Zechariah 1:3, etc.). The call to return to the God of your ancestors and the living God does not seem to be merely rhetorical. The call to return assumes the possibility that human decisions have real consequences, and this is human agency. The arc of scripture is much more difficult to interpret if one assumes God determines all that happens. The New Testament no less than the Old Testament, presents moments of choice.

In preparing the way for Jesus, John the Baptist invites people to repent, to turn from their sin and turn toward God (Mark 1:1-8). This is an invitation to make a decision and act on it. This suggests people can make and act on decisions. Human agency is required. Jesus tells the rich ruler to sell all he has and follow him. He does not. Jesus seems to have given the rich ruler a choice, and allowed him to use his agency, his decision making power to determine his course of action. The text suggests the rich young ruler's decision is not helpful. Yet Jesus did not use force on him, rather he respect his decision (Luke 18:18-25).

Jesus, in what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), invites those who listen into a way of life. Again, the implication is that humans are capable of making a decision based on what they hear and then may decide for a life of discipleship. This discourse also suggests that human actions have consequences. In 2 Peter 3:3, “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” John 10:10 suggests the incarnation is, in part, about offering humans abundant life. This theme describes a change for the better to one’s life during one’s life. These passages all infer human agency.

The New Testament’s central theme is to offer people the choice of turning to God. As the angel on the hillside with the shepherds exclaims, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:8). This is more than a birth announcement. The announcement is describing the import of the birth. The New Testament may be summed up as a presentation of the Good News. The point is that the biblical narrative invites the reader to make choice, to embrace this Good News, receive new life, and follow Christ. Each of these requires human volition. And, the ability to decide and act on that decision in a way that has real consequences defines of human agency.

God’s Immanence

While ascribing to human agency, scripture recognizes God as beyond our thoughts (Psalm 40, 92, 139). As in Job 38 and throughout the rest of Job, human knowledge is partial. God sees in ways humans cannot. Indeed, the Bible articulates a message that, at least in part, entreats humans to listen and learn from God. What one

does has consequence. Another way to think about scripture is God's coming along side humans, inviting them to enter a relationship as exemplified in concepts like covenant and righteousness. The incarnation and the gift of the Spirit are examples of God with God's people. Jesus suggests the immanence of God in Matthew 6:6 "But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Immanence is consistent with a biblical perspective and is a view that clarifies passages such as the one above.

A Biblically Integrative Theology

As noted above, an integrative theology must not only be consistent with scripture, the theology must help elucidate scripture. Scripture must also illuminate such a theology. Scripture may be read in light of the transcendence of God and the awe and wonder of scripture is consistent and makes sense from this viewpoint. Further, the horizontal aspect of creation as dynamic with agents that influence the flow of events is also consistent. The decisions of these agents lead to actions that have real consequences. This is consistent with scripture and as viewpoint enables the interpretation of scripture. God's immanence as the transcendent other, the divine agent present but not identified as a component creation, is consistent with scripture and allows for rational *and* inspirational interpretation of scripture. Both the congruence with scripture and the ability to elucidate and interpret scripture are evident in this formulation of an integrative theology. This is not a claim that integrative theology full captures what is ontologically the case rather that it is a helpful point of view to integrate

the scientific view and the life of faith in relationship to scripture and the human need for revelation.

Reformed Always Reforming

Present theological thought builds on a rich history of debates and confessions. Through the history of the church, the faithful have felt the need to express theological perspectives and confessional statements due to changed circumstance. The theological and confessional history of the Presbyterian Church exemplifies this trajectory through history. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lists thirteen confessions in its constitution. Authors of the confessions penned these creeds in a particular time and place and wrote in relation to events and concerns in that time and place. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expanded the number of guiding confessions beyond the Westminster Confession in the Twentieth Century. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) decided to do this to better represent historical theological tradition and to provide examples of statements of belief responding to particular historical contexts. Furthermore, the “creeds and confession have only a provisional, temporary, relative authority (and are therefore subject to revision and correction).”⁶ The Presbyterian branch of the Reformed tradition believes reform continues especially in relationship to new social, cultural and

⁶ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1999), 29.

intellectual contexts. This continued change is often summed up in the phrase reformed always reforming.⁷

Residing within a theological tradition offers the advantage of foundational perspectives on which to build or with which one may wrestle in a new context. One need not create *ex nihilo* a theological perspective. This project is using the foundational belief within the Reformed Tradition that the transcendent God is sovereign and creator. These foundational understandings have changed over time in reaction to the modern worldview. A scientific view that creation is mechanistic and determined as well as the incredible rise of confidence in the human intellectual ability challenged cherished beliefs. One theological reaction of the Reformed Tradition seems to be: If the universe is controlled and deterministic, it is not the laws of physics but a divine sovereign that makes everything happen. “Calvinists believe the Lord foreordains all things. ...As Dr. R.C. Sproul has said, ‘There is no maverick molecule if God is sovereign.’ If He cannot control the tiniest bits of the universe, then we cannot trust Him to keep His word.”⁸ No other causal agent nor any other set of laws or mechanisms here, God’s foreordains everything. This leaves one in a quandary: of what use are choice and decisions as represented in scripture? While theologians often nuance this deterministic view, determinism remains a popular way to understand sovereignty.

⁷ The original phrase is *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda, Secundum Verbum Dei* which translated is: “The Church reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God” as noted in Harry Hassel, *Presbyterians: People of the Middle Way*, (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1996), 60.

⁸ “God’s Sovereignty,” Ligonier Ministries, Available at <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/gods-sovereignty/> (Accessed on February 25, 2015).

In contrast to this idea that God is a better mechanism than any other, and the irrational fear of human agency as a concept that dethrones God, integrative theology notes options do exist. These options do not seem to be part of the way Reformed theologians wrestle with this restrictive definition of sovereignty and instead struggle to nuance the doctrine in to the foundations of freedom. For example, Shirley Guthrie suggests, “We find our true humanity as we live in right relationship with God and with people. Are we free to choose to do that?”⁹ Guthrie answers his own question in the negative. He sees us as pawns to psychological, social and cultural forces that determine who we are. Guthrie’s modern worldview leads him to posit that a variety of influences, even laws, of behavior may control human action. These kinds of forces may sometimes trap individuals in particular contexts and limit self-expression. However, Guthrie seems to define salvation as becoming free from psychosocial determinism in a relationship to God. However, is the relationship with God a less deterministic point of view? Guthrie proposes that human freedom is knowing that God brings everything to fruition in a glorious victory over evil. The role the human has is uncertain and nearly disregarded. Here Guthrie continues the Reformed theological struggle with sovereignty and agency as well as maintaining the difficulty dealing with predominate secular deterministic views of the nature of human life.¹⁰

With the advantage of the changing paradigm in science today, the determinist rut no longer need trap one in a struggle with determinism. The integrative theology of this project builds on the transcendence and sovereignty of God. This theology uses the

⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 178.

¹⁰ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 132-136.

new emerging ideas of science to suggest an alternative point of view. This is consistent with the work of a theology within the Reformed tradition. As new contexts arise, theological work responds and incorporates this new information into a richer and deeper theological perspective.

Integrative Theology in Context

While a church may sit within a particular theological tradition, one may wonder today if this tradition is a prominent social force in the lives of congregants. Individuals and congregations have distinctive perceptions of themselves and the world in which they live and move. Communities come up with “characteristic explanations for why things happen as they do.”¹¹ Postmodern thought describes a web of narratives that shapes the nature of one’s life. Cultural anthropology also points to “culture as fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations.”¹² Adult learning theory offers “meaning perspectives.”¹³ Each of these points to how humans hold or exist within a particular perspective or worldview. These worldviews are expressed in particular narratives or as a set of assumptions about the

¹¹ Nancy T. Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation,” in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T et al Ammerman (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 85.

¹² Clifford. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

¹³ Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 19.

about the nature of the world in which one lives. This worldview informs, guides, and constrains the ways one lives life.¹⁴

The worldview or paradigm of the academic context follows a particular framework: 1. Reductionism or reducing the problem to its constituent parts as means of understanding.¹⁵ 2. Determinism, which is another way of saying that casual consequences are due to material and energetic interactions according to underlying physical properties.¹⁶ 3. Mechanistic analysis, the whole functions according to the way the parts interact to make the whole.¹⁷ By extension, if knowing what the parts are doing informs the observer as to what the whole is doing, then the whole is a mechanistic combination of the parts. This framework both creates and supports the importance of the human capacity to explicate the nature of creation. This high view of human intellectual ability is clearly a narrative of the community in which the Moscow congregation resides. One congregant described the academic approach as a “critical thinker not willing to believe blindly” thus, the intellectual ability of the individual is held in high regard.¹⁸ The approach to understanding suggests that critical thinking has led to the present paradigm and this paradigm works.

¹⁴ James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 122.

¹⁵ Terrance W. Deacon, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 10.

¹⁶ Deacon, *Incomplete Nature*, 27, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30, 82.

¹⁸ Personal communication. 2013.

When critical thinking results in a new perspective change occurs. And, when thought is embedded in a context with such strong social norms those norms can be deeply define reality for a group of people and thus are resistant to any change.¹⁹ Writing about how change occurs, Dave Elder-Vass claims, “the social power that tends to encourage us to conform to any given social norm is in fact an emergent causal power of a specific social entity, a specific group of a people: a normative circle. . . . Such groups produce the social power of the group as a whole to affect the beliefs and dispositions – and thus the behavior – of their members.”²⁰ To introduce an alternative worldview such as the integrative theology of this project, the normative circle is an impressive obstacle.

The Palouse Coalition of Reason, made up of atheist, freethought, and humanist groups working together in the Pullman, Washington, and Moscow, Idaho, area, sponsors “Darwin on the Palouse, a free event to celebrate humanity, science and rational thought.”²¹ This event demonstrates the bifurcated context for a church that resides in a community with a portion of the population holding strong theological beliefs and another portion of the local population that reacts strongly to any theological perspective and believes that humanism, science and rational thought are better alternatives. Thus, the context has two normative circles that do not seem to have much overlap. To address this divide, this integrative theology offers a framework that

¹⁹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²⁰ Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20.

²¹ “Darwin on the Palouse,” Palouse Coalition of Reason, <http://darwinonthepalouse.org/>, (accessed September 17, 2014).

includes the critical thinking of science and rational approaches in a theological point of view.

The integrative theology incorporates the work of critical thinkers of science and does not require one to believe blindly. Using the discoveries of science and rational thought, one may see the framework that integrative theology offers simply suggests one way of seeing the nature of the world in which humans live with a level of coherence often lacking. Jim Holt in *Why Does the World Exist?* finds, “philosophy, like theology before it, [has] so far failed to come up with the goods,” that is, to give the answer to the question in his book’s title.²² This is representative of a popular approach to theology – simply assuming it has failed. In such a cultural climate in which a theological solution to real world problems is *a priori* disregarded, cultural baggage exists and is a barrier to even considering such an approach.

This project does not expect to convince those ideologically set on finding a “self-subsuming principle of reality” which denies the possibility of a transcendent God.²³ Rather this project is for those with an openness of mind and heart not willing to believe the tenets of one faith or another – science or religion- without some vision of the possible. Or, to state this differently, this project opens the door to a worldview that allows for and even encourages trust in a transcendent God that does not pit religious belief against the discoveries of how the world in which we live and move operates. Just as it must enable a useful reading of scripture, the integrative theology must offer

²² Jim Holt, *Why Does the World Exist: An Existential Detective Story* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 136-137.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136.

coherence in the scientific paradigm as well. This is a key value in for a congregation in the academic context.

PART THREE
MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 4
STRATEGIES FOR DESIRED OUTCOMES

The Ministry Challenge of Offering an Integrative Theology

As described in the end of Chapter 2, the present context for First Presbyterian Church though geographically isolated and nostalgic for earlier times, does contend with the Twenty-First Century worldview of academia as well as society at large. George Marsden notes that after World War II “the academy was defined as a scientific enterprise.”¹ Scientific method and academic progress in understanding the world has a definite approach. As noted above, this method involves observation reducing the problem to parts of a mechanistic whole that determines how it works. This framework suggests that rational thought and observation leading to descriptive models or hypotheses, and subsequently testing these models/ hypotheses enables one to discovery of the way the mechanism works. If one accepts this approach as realistic, then new observations prompting rational thought that produces new models would easily modify

¹ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 366.

and change earlier views of operational models. Thomas Kuhn's analysis of change in the scientific community argues that change is not so straightforward. Kuhn quotes Max Plank as saying, "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."² The well-developed adult worldviews are not easily changed, challenged, or transformed. Normative circles do exist. The ministry challenge in offering an integrative theology to a congregation steeped in scientific and academic modes of thinking is breaking through the normative circle that has formed.

The ministry challenge does not end with difficulties in new ways of think. The distinction between theological and scientific metaphysical assumptions is a barrier. The academy has embraced modes of thinking based on a scientific paradigm and an atheological worldview. The academy seems to have assimilated one branch of process philosophy where, "For secular, atheological processists evolution typifies the creative workings of a self-sustaining nature that dispenses with the services of God."³ George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to the Establishment of Nonbelief* writes, "Enlightenment thinkers had indeed debunked the Christian superstitions of their predecessors: yet they themselves had equally naïve faith that in a universe governed only by the laws of nature human reason would be able to

² Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 150.

³ Process Philosophy, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Fall 2009 Edition, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/process-philosophy/#2>, (accessed February 12, 2015).

find meaning beyond what themselves constructed.”⁴ In a community dominated by this academic context that dispenses with the services of God, the ministry challenge is to offer an approach a “critical thinker not blindly believing” may take pause and reconsider. The hope is that through an integrative theology one may wonder if dispensing with the services of God, indeed dispensing with God, is an unreasonable, and is perhaps a reckless, approach to life.

This integrative theology incorporates the incipient descriptions of a stochastic, chaotic, complex nature moving beyond the mechanistic, bottom up paradigm of the past. One of the first movements of this integrative theology is to recognize that the scientific paradigm is in flux. This change may itself be problematic for those steeped in the more traditional scientific perspective. Many of the components of this new paradigm are already embedded in the scientific endeavor. For example, randomness and other stochastic phenomena have become an expected component of everything from quantum physics to the social sciences. That these phenomena exist seems to be simply accepted as a necessary evil for one finds little explanation of why or even how this basic element of the natural world comes about or persists. A perspective that incorporates this fundamental observation in a theological perspective binds the two perspectives – science and faith - together.

The integrative theological approach looks at the world as a place that not only allows for God, it also points to a God in relationship with God’s creation. The

⁴ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 372.

integrative approach does not attempt to overpower all other arguments, but more in the tradition of scripture, offers an invitation to avail oneself of a God that comes to humanity in its need. As an approach of invitation, a vision of what is possible, an integrative theology is a paradigm shift away from definitive theological ontology and recognizes the provisional nature of any confession or theology.⁵ As a contextual theological expression of faith, it is provisional and more pragmatic than dogmatic. So both in approach and as a theological description, it may translate entrenched theological positions into more cogent Twenty-First Century language. Not everyone will agree with this translation and this becomes a ministry challenge. The ministry challenge from a faith perspective is reforming a theological vision that maintains God's sovereignty and transcendence in relationship to God's creation and promoting the agency God enables within deeply socially embedded, relational creatures, namely humans.

This integrative theology also encompasses the stochastic nature of creation which both enables God to engage undetected with creation, and offers new challenges with which human agency may engage. Again not everyone will agree. Note this response to a request to think about God and probability/randomness: "Now human beings will never have complete information so there will always be that which appears random to us...but randomness isn't an intrinsic property of the universe. Randomness is

⁵ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 43.

simply a manifestation of our own ignorance.”⁶ Comments like this describe a deep-seated distaste for randomness as an intrinsic property of the universe. This distaste is a barrier to a theology that suggests stochasticity is an intrinsic component of creation and that God uses this component in God’s relation to humans. Integrative theology challenges the hubris of traditional perspectives particularly the inordinate faith in the human’s breadth and depth of knowledge.⁷ At the limits of human knowledge, in a world with a stochastic component, the possibility of One beyond our limited perspectives becomes a ray of hope.

Embracing the Need

An underlying assumption of this project is that some congregants are experiencing a struggle between holding a faith perspective and a scientific/academic perspective. When “logical relations between cognitive elements of one’s view” are inconsistent causing conflict between what is true and false, one contends with cognitive dissonance.⁸ The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes concern, even real anxiety, arise (“elicits an aversive state of arousal (i.e., dissonance)”) when two ways of thinking are in conflict even contradictory. According to this theory, “this produces a desire to

⁶ Stu Pidasso, “Randomness/probability and God” <http://forumserver.twoplustwo.com/137/religion-god-theology/randomness-probability-god-1168839/>, (accessed February 14, 2015).

⁷ For one clear expression of this see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 374.

⁸ Bertram Gawronski, “Back to the Future of Dissonance Theory: Cognitive Consistency as a Core Motive,” *Social Cognition* 30 Issue 6 (2012), 653.

reduce the underlying inconsistency and to maintain a state of consonance.”⁹ Holding two conflicting views, a faith perspective and a science/ academic perspective, must bring some level of cognitive dissonance. Research suggests that dissonance can result in attitude and behavior changes in individuals. An individual experiencing cognitive dissonance attempts to mitigate the discomfort with derivative behaviors and ways of thinking which influences one’s life. Not all strategies are productive. Attempts to compartmentalize and/or bolster one perspective over the other may occur simply as a strategy to reduce the anxiety of dissonance.¹⁰

Bertram Gawronski notes that dissonance does create ego defense mechanisms that, he suggests, are due to the core human motive to achieve cognitive consistency.¹¹ In this more positive approach to human need for a consistent perspective, he identifies a strong motivational component to the human desire. This desire is to find consistency for “cognitive consistency represents a core motive underlying thinking and reasoning.”¹² Gawronski continues in this line of thinking to advise “inconsistency serves as an epistemic cue for errors in one's system of beliefs.”¹³ While this may address one’s psychological need, care must be taken with the insinuation that human knowledge will

⁹ Gawronski, “Back to the Future of Dissonance Theory”, 653.

¹⁰ Yousaf, Omar and Gobet, Fernand, The Emotional and Attitudinal Consequences of Religious Hypocrisy: Experimental Evidence Using a Cognitive Dissonance Paradigm, *Journal of Social Psychology* 153 Issue 6, (2013,) 667-686.

¹¹ Gawronski, “Back to the Future of Dissonance Theory”, 653.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

ever become fully consistent or that psychological need necessarily addresses ontology, the essential characteristics of being and of all that exists. If one maintains the partial nature of human knowledge and recognizes inconsistency as truly just an “epistemic cue”, then this cue may lead to trajectories that have greater consistency. One will need to assess these trajectories according to some criteria. Simply assuaging the anxiety of dissonance is not enough. Using the idea of consistency is helpful. This criteria leads beyond compartmentalization and simply bolstering of one cognitive perspective over another. When two perspectives are in conflict, holding them in dissonance in spite of the pressure to choose one over the other until discovering a consistent, encompassing approach is valuable.

The cognitive inconsistency between faith and science/academia serves as an epistemic cue for errors in present systems of belief that require a reassessment of their complete validity and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, as cognitive dissonance surely is present in this particular ministry setting, and a cognitive and emotional need for consistency is a human characteristic, a ministry need is present. If this integrative theology addresses this disaffection not only rationally but also mitigating a problem of cognitive dissonance in a beneficial manner, then the integration may be valuable. Certainly the possibility that this conflict limits person’s inclination to engage with faith, or limits the faith one holds, suggests persons may not reap the full benefit of faith and the wonder of a relationship with God in Christ. Thus, the ministry challenge is, with one integrative theology, to address how the nature of the world in which causal agents exist coalesces with a sovereign, transcendent, engaged, God without resorting to

determinism. The value of integration is that one need no longer be trapped in cognitive dissonance. Instead one may be freed to attend to both faith and science without the nagging baggage of a dismissive perspective and its resulting dissonance.

A Rise in the Value of Spirituality

An ancillary, though valuable, implication of the integrative theology is particularly noticeable in relationship to spirituality. Identifying both limits to human knowledge and offering a rational description of a transcendent yet immanent God points to the value of a connection with this God. From the theological perspective, human knowledge of a transcendent God is dependent on God's self-revelation. In the prevalent view today, the world consists of mechanistic constituent parts with no whole with which to communicate nor is there an entity to have agency. This view has no room for spirituality. Living with in a stochastic, chaotic, system-influenced world, not only makes room for God to interact but creates a space for the transcendent's presence. This integrative theology describes how spirituality is consistent with the world as presently known.

When and if this integration of theology and science/academics occurs, the hesitancy toward faith may mitigate. Concomitantly, the opportunity to engage in Christian spirituality may increase. This integration has the potential to afford psychic healing and lead to spiritual health. In holistic perspective, this means that an integrated theology may lead to human wellness as well as a deeper, more meaningful faith. Furthermore, accepting limits to human knowledge due to the nature of reality, e.g. stochasticity and

chaotic systems, while simultaneously envisioning God as present, provides a rational model for Christian spirituality.

Engaging the Congregation and University

In a congregation and academic community in which the self-perspective is generally that each one is a “critical thinker not blindly believing,” critical thinking is important.¹⁴ Integrative theology invites critical thinking. This invitation is not only to move beyond blind belief in theology but also about moving beyond the predominate reductive, mechanistic worldview. With this two pronged approach, one can start with the changing paradigm in science that must incorporate chaotic and adaptive complex systems and acknowledge the intrinsic nature of stochasticity in the fabric of creation. These are new perceptions of the universe in which humans reside. Adding these new perspectives to the foundational question about existence, opens a door for theological conversation. Indeed, the recognition that science (and thus academia) is unable to answer Leibniz question, “why is there something rather than nothing?” is a first step toward theological exploration.¹⁵ Furthermore, why existence has consistent laws of action, causation and reaction, remains beyond the realm of scientific inquiry.¹⁶ If one is to think critically about these issues, no consistent non-transcendent, materialistic cause is readily available, and may be categorically unavailable. Certainly, predictability has

¹⁴ Congregant Talking About Faith, Personal Communication, 2013

¹⁵ Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology*, 71.

¹⁶ Alister McGrath. *The Science of God: An Introduction to Scientific Theology*. (New York: T&T Clark International. 2004), 95.

its limitations due to stochasticity and non-linear chaotic systems. That emergent systems appear without prediction while maintaining a consistency with the nature of the constituent parts and that these systems may have downward causation, further complicates the explanatory power of a reductive, mechanistic science.¹⁷

The second prong of this approach re-engages with the transcendent, creative nature of God as first cause and thus sovereign power in creation. Acknowledging the horizontal and vertical nature of creation, offers a perspective on the causal interactions on the horizontal axis. Recognizing God's transcendence and human dependent on God's self-revelation, scripture rises in importance. That scripture points both to God as acting within creation and in relationship with creatures (particularly humans), identifies God's immanence. Stochasticity and chaos may conceal the interactivity of God with creation. Acknowledging the self-revelation of God in Christ and seeing Christ as the one that brings grace to humans in need offers further reason to assume that God is immanent and active. The promise of the Holy Spirit and subsequent description and dependence on the action of this person of the Trinity bolsters the idea of an active, immanent God. That God often invites humans to change their minds, encourages humans to redirect their focus, and invites them to follow the way of Christ,

¹⁷ For more on descriptions of systems that have downward causation see George F.R. Ellis. *The Casual Universe: On the Nature of Causality in Complex Systems*. May 17, 2012. Copernicus Center of Interdisciplinary Studies. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEhTkF3eG8Q> (accessed January 25, 2015)

since God treats humans as causal agents - beings that can determine a course of action and take it however conditioned it may be.¹⁸

Thus, offering integrative theology addresses this self-perception as a causal agent and engages with the role of critical thinking as a well. Perhaps the resistance to changing perspectives interacts with the need for consistency and that a paradigm change may involve its own period of cognitive dissonance. Yet, to be a critical thinker one may not deny a perspective based on the fear of change nor simply the satisfaction of present strategies for the resolution of dissonance. Albert Einstein did not like the idea that “God is playing at dice” and he used this as an epistemic cue that continued to shape his work until he died.¹⁹ However, as much as Einstein disliked the idea, he continued to use his critical thinking to address the issue rather than simply deny its implications.

Renewed Conversation

The ministry expectation in presenting an integrated theology is simply that a conversation about faith need not conflict and may even undergird the academic endeavor. Offering an integrated theology is an invitation to re-examine the thought that “religious viewpoints [are antiscientific] and socially disruptive,” and that, “A unified and universal science would provide an objective basis for a unified society.”²⁰ As noted

¹⁸ Human agency is in part the human’s ability to stop and think and that using this ability causes different results. For one description of this see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.)

¹⁹ “Albert Einstein: Modern Quantum Theory” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Einstein#Modern_quantum_theory, (accessed February 15, 2015).

²⁰ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 429.

above, even a unified and universal science that acknowledges stochasticity, chaos, and complex systems is most probably unable to have the predictive capacity implied in the belief science provides an objective basis for a unified society. Objectivity has come under greater scrutiny in recent years. The focus here is on the how the intrinsic nature of creation may not enable the rational predictability often implied in the idea of objectivity.

Anti-theological writers such as Richard Dawkins have claimed that the scientific perspective offers better values, purpose, and meaning.²¹ Yet, a close look at this claim suggests it is unfounded.²² “If one starts with the purely naturalistic, mechanistic worldviews that usually define the permissible limits of academic inquiry, then postmodernist skepticism about both normative science and moral claims seems ...to be the most consistent conclusion,” writes George Marsden.²³ This conclusion is a descent in to nihilism, while nihilistic postmodernists sometimes suggest nihilism as positive conclusion; in reality, nihilism denies any narrative of values, purpose and meaning or even any real world consistency.²⁴

In the present, one need not assume the reductionistic, mechanistic, worldview. Emergent, adaptive, and/or chaotic systems as well as an intrinsic stochasticity identify limits to normative science. Our epistemic approach, spurred on by the epistemic cue of

²¹ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 374.

²² Hart, *Atheist Delusions*.

²³ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 440.

²⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 162-164.

dissonance, must expand our ontological constructs, the way we model the nature of the world in which we live. As one engages with this broader perspective, a greater whole such as God, is not ruled out but becomes more reasonable. This is without addressing the moral vacuity and paucity of meaning and purpose a reductionistic, mechanistic, model of our existence offers. This project offers a point of conversation that ventures beyond the diametrically opposed models of reality or worldviews that deny the existence of one another.

Theologically, one need not assume that the understanding science offers of horizontal reality, the way our world works, is in conflict with a transcendent creator God that is also immanent. Rather, one may notice the nascent rational view of the world suggests avenues for God's unseen but active presence. One needs to take care not to identify possibility with reality. However, the possibility does make room for conversation and does not remain bound to traditional battle lines and distinctions. Presently, the divide is often depicted as completely contradictory views. This project brings an integrated theology that spans this divide and suggest that the divide is likely false due to partial knowledge and simple rivalry over ontological visions. Offering this integrated theology is an effort to advocate a conversation that has become difficult in the last two hundred years. Furthermore, for those with faith who also are members of the academia, the integrated theology advocated here may address the cognitive dissonance that interferes with fully participating in an open, interactive faith.

CHAPTER 5
ACTION PLAN AND EVALUATIVE COMPONENTS

Components of Delivering an Integrative Theology

The broad ministry challenge of this project is re-forming of a theological vision and introducing this vision in a particular church. This vision is of an integrative theology that maintains God’s sovereignty and transcendence in relationship to God’s creation, promotes the active relationship God enables with God’s creatures, namely humans, and reduces the barriers between theology and science/academics. A goal of this ministry project is mitigating the dissonance that may result in hesitancy, even hostility, toward faith. In the particular context of First Presbyterian Church of Moscow, the ministry challenge is introducing and encouraging congregants to engage with this integrative theology. Congregants live in a changed cultural landscape. This landscape includes the detraditionalization occurring in Christian churches and “normative forces for shaping identity” that are culturally conditioned.¹ In *The Third Way*, Anthony

¹ Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation,” 29.

Robinson reminds the reader that the church today is no longer in Christendom.²

According to Ammerman, the “theology you develop must be able to illumine members own experience and connect them to ... themes that will be the source and stuff of theological reflection.”³ Revealing implicit theologies will help identify areas that cause a struggle understanding faith due to inconsistency in views of the world in which one lives and prevalent faith perspectives.

For a theology to be of value for the members of the church, it must engage with their present theological perspectives. Acknowledging present perspectives will determine how the reshaped integrative theology addresses present needs. The congregants may discover the dissonance that exists between traditional formulations of the theologies they presently hold and the culture with in which they reside. For many this dissonance may not be consciously identified. Naming the present conflict between contemporary faith perspectives and the views of society, science and traditional theology is important. This is consistent with adult learning theory. Adult learning theory emphasizes the need to reflect on one’s assumptions in a process of transformational learning.⁴ This project includes surfacing implicit theological perspectives and the conflict between these and the atmosphere of the academy and perhaps society in general in order to reflect upon them.

² Robinson, *The Third Way*, 19-26.

³ Ammerman, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation," 29.

⁴ Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 18.

The next step is to describe the deficits in the dominant science paradigm. This approach acknowledges the paradigm bending new ideas and recognizes that the paradigm is shifting. This step involves identifying how dependent the culturally dominant scientific perspective is on a mechanistic, reductionistic, approach. As has been explained above this involves noting the intrinsic nature of stochasticity, the identification of chaotic systems, the implications of complex adaptive systems and emergent phenomena offer a new view of scientific view of the natural world. This new view enables the possibility of greater dialogue with a theological perspective especially as that view incorporates these explanatory components.

The third move is to examine the implications of implicit theologies and to assess the nature of transcendence. Recognizing the otherness of God raises the question of God's immanence. Paying attention to the biblical witness requires acknowledging God as a creator that does not abandon creation but remains in relationship with it. The biblical witness describes the creatures, humans, as having agency within a dynamic creation. This description fits with the newly developing scientific paradigm. An integrated theology is consistent with the creative nature and power of God with vertical sovereignty yet enable horizontal dynamic system in which human decisions matter and highlights the importance of human agency.

Inviting the congregation to assess this integrative theology as it addresses the concerns of their faith as well as showing consistency with nascent paradigm developing within the academy engages members in this re-formed theology. Assessing the integrated theology through discourse enables the participants to see if the contours of

this integrative theology will begin to address areas of dissonance and form a consistent perspective. Further, assessment may open the congregants to reassess the presence and movement of God in their lives. Faith need not conflict with critical thinking and they need not feel forced to choose one worldview, Christian faith or science.

The final step is to invite congregants and others to see this integrative theology as consistent whole that provides a worldview in which science and faith need not be compartmentalized and offers a vision of a God present but unseen. When examined as a whole, the integrated theology invites the use of observation and the recognition of limits. While limits may be in part the extent of present knowledge, one also confronts stochasticity, chaos and system influences which suggest life may never be predictable. This means humans may need to acknowledge limits to their knowledge and most probably limits to their ability to know. If we have truly random events, chaotic systems and emergent systems, then exact prediction is likely impossible. The question rises as to where humanity may turn for the knowledge need to live life. An integrated theology encourages one to recognize a knowledge that comes through faith from God and relayed across time in scripture and Christian spirituality.

Offering this integrated theology to the congregation encourages one to take seriously the self-revelation of God. If God is truly a transcendent, then humans would have no overt way to approach or know such a God. Yet, the self-revelation of God as noted in scripture invites one to notice God's presence and action. The central moment of God's self-revelation comes in the life, teaching, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The understanding of Christ as incarnate, both human and divine,

presents a clarion call to notice God as present, engaged, and active. While not ignoring atonement, one may over emphasize this removal of the sin barrier, and miss how the central theme of New Testament scripture is teaching God's children about loving one another and loving God (The Greatest Commandment – Matthew 22:37-38, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27-28). The scriptural witness to Jesus is a call to follow him as Christ, to become his disciple, and to live into the way of life Jesus teaches. This way is not just a prescription and a set of rules. This way includes entry into a community of faith in relationship with God, a community of people formed in a new covenant with their God (2 Corinthians 3:4-6). An integrated theology highlights the immanence of God, about which scripture describes as life in the Spirit (for example, 1 Peter 4:6). Presenting this integrated theology to the congregation is then in part an invitation to life in the Spirit. Recognizing that historically followers of Christ have heard this invitation and identified practices that may help guide and encourage life in the Spirit is a corollary that opens the congregation to a rich set of resources.

Transformative Learning

The shift of paradigm or the transformation of one's worldview does not just happen but requires a disorienting dilemma. Often the dissonance between faith and other worldviews develops without overt disorienting dilemmas or the dilemma occurs unexpectedly during a crisis. This project is focused on bring to the surface the disorienting dilemma between faith and science and then offering a way forward through

this dilemma. The issue becomes not only one of rational thought for transformational learning involves one's emotions.⁵

Transformational learning theory suggest humans maintain schemes of meaning added together to form a meaning perspective.⁶ These schemes of meaning are particular beliefs, feelings, values, and attitudes. Schemes of meaning cluster together to form a meaning perspective and this meaning perspective adults use to make sense of the world. A person does not change his or her meaning perspective easily.⁷ This project suggests that the scientific paradigm likely shapes the present meaning perspective for many in First Presbyterian Church and in the Moscow community. Beliefs about the way the world works form worldviews. If, for example, one denies randomness is intrinsic, then a stochastic component is a missing from one's worldview. Without randomness, one may hold a mechanistic worldview more easily. This worldview leads to valuing the straightforward way a mechanistic, reductionistic world works. This dominate view offers reduced complexity. This reduction in complexity fosters an attitude of confidence in human understanding of how the world works.

A dilemma arises when the world does not fit these meaning schemes.

Confronting the conundrum that science cannot answer why there is something rather

⁵ John M. Dirkx, "The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Adult Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. Issue 120 (Winter 2008), Wiley InterScience at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ace.311/pdf>, (Accessed February 12, 2015).

⁶ Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 18.

⁷ John J. Sherlock "Learning at the Top: An Investigation of Nonprofit CEOs' Learning Experiences" 2002 AHRD Conference, Symposium 26. Honolulu, Hawaii, February 27 - March 3, 2002, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED474231.pdf>, (Accessed March 5, 2015).

than nothing reveals this dilemma. As one encounters the complexity, chaos, and emergence evident in the world, this dilemma develops across the spectrum of ways humans form this scientific meaning scheme. Further, the encounter with the numinous, finding meaning in faith, and finding through faith another epistemic avenue conflicts with the purely mechanistic, reductionistic worldview. Dissonance occurs. This dissonance provides the psychic pressure toward resolving the inconsistencies.

Theories of adult learning transformation acknowledge the specific cultural context matter. The culture of the academy heavily influences the congregation in Moscow. Learning theory suggest that perspective transformation occurs when individuals “critically reflect on the premises of their beliefs as part of the process to validate, modify, or transform them.”⁸ Reflection goes beyond noticing what one feels, thinks, and believes and includes assessing the underlying assumptions. This approach is consistent with “thinking slow” and getting beyond automatic patterns and assumptions.

Reflection consists of noticing and assessing and rational discourse is the basis of this reflective approach.⁹ Creating avenues for discussion allows individuals to achieve mutual understanding through active participation. It is important that this participation allow “objective weighing of evidence and assessing cogency of supporting arguments.”¹⁰ Others have noted the difficulty with focus on rationality and objectivity.

⁸ Sherlock, “Learning at the Top.”

⁹ Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation*, 22-26

¹⁰ Sherlock “Learning at the Top.”

John Dirkx extends this thought suggesting that the last twenty years of research shows we use “our emotions in an active process of knowing, suggesting a positive and “intelligent” role for them in our lives and, in particular, in adult learning.”¹¹ Dirkx assertion is consistent with the role of dissonance as a motivation for change or for behavioral (including rational processes) that reduce the dissonance. I will design an introduction and discussion of an integrated theology that will allow for the nature of adult learning and perspective transformation.

Step Wise Introduction of an Integrative Theology

Implementation of this ministry initiative will reside first within the congregation after which the concepts may be offered to the wider community. The implementation outline includes, introductory set of sermons, self-selecting participants of a day and half retreat, a longer set of sermons guiding the congregation through the theological perspective, and another retreat and small group discussions begin the dissemination and discussion needed to introduce this integrated theology. Over time, the integrated theology may lead to further a sermon series and small group discussion series introducing spiritual health and spirituality as concomitant with this faith perspective and a living, growing faith. One avenue of offering this theology beyond the congregation would be a forum offered at the local campus ministry associated with the church.

¹¹ Dirkx, “The Meaning and Role of Emotions in Adult Learning,” 14.

Following Easter, and concluding in synchrony with the first retreat, I offered a four-week sermon series. This sermon series I designed to raise awareness and to touch upon the dilemma of changing paradigms and conflicting worldviews. The first sermon in the series titled “Beyond Us,” dealt with God as transcendent source of all that is. The second sermon titled “Creation,” delved described God’s creation as an interplay of randomness/chaos and boundaries where individual and group decisions matter. The third sermon titled “Beside Us,” extricated the idea that God is not far off, comes to us in Jesus, and in the Spirit. The sermon states that God is here, present, aware of us, and our needs, and this is evident in scripture, in Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The final sermon in the series titled “What Difference Does It Make?” and noted in Psalm 25:12b that God “will teach them the way that they should choose.” This concluding look at the integrated theology offers encouragement to listen to an immanent God who leads to new life. These sermons present a brief introduction to the challenge of an integrated theology and present a challenge to the preacher to be brief. The sermons are a first salvo, an introduction to this integrative theology as a meaning perspective and barely addressing the concomitant meaning schemes.

When this sermon series concluded, I offered a retreat enabling critical reflection on one’s beliefs and time to reflect on an integrative theology. I titled the retreat “God. Creation. You.” Recognizing many congregants live in Moscow in part because of the access to, and beauty of, untrammled nature nearby, the theme highlighted creation. Some attendees began calling it the “creation retreat.” The retreatants congregated at a small retreat center twenty minutes from town. The retreat created a logical flow from

present perspective through each element of an integrated theological perspective over the course of an evening and most of a day.

The evening began with introducing the main topic and using an attitude matrix to assess initial perspectives on the topic (Appendix A). This step concluding with group discussion. I followed this discussion with an initial conversation to help define and illuminate transcendence. Next, I invited participants to engage in hands on activities - stargazing and looking at pond water in a microscope. These activities are designed to help participants think of the vast complexity and magnitude of creation. Looking at the magnitude of the created order was to encourage a sense of wonder at the created order and to highlight how beyond the human perspective transcendence must be. This concluded the first evening.

The next day began with an introduction to the nature of creation with an emphasis on the stochastic nature of creation. Several congregants presented research dependent on the use of statistical methods. Just before lunch, I led a discussion about the connections between Creator and creation in its random, chaotic, complex systems and individual and group volition. Participants played a game of chaos and boundaries—tossing one or two balls around a small group with no given order. We debriefed the game and noticed the rise of order in the groups that was helpful in keeping the balls moving. The morning session concluded with scriptural references to connections between Creator and chaotic/bounded creation. During the lunch break, I encouraged participants to enjoy the natural setting of the retreat center through hikes and other outdoor activities. After lunch, I offered an introduction to the concept of immanence

and the role and value of the presence of God. The participants received a reading of a short story suggesting the consequences of an immanent God. The retreat concluded with a discussion of the consequences of this integrative theology. The retreat used an interplay with the context (the retreat center and the natural world around it), reflection through presentations, instruments like the life the attitude matrix, and discourse and discussion about assumptions and cultural assimilated views to engage retreatants with an integrative theology. Creating a community of learners involved emotive learning as well as rational thought. (See Appendix C for annotated outline of this retreat.)

Twenty people participated in the retreat. Participants offered their responses to the attitude matrix and responses were consistent with my initial assumptions (Appendix B). Participants suggested science views God as an untestable hypothesis. Thus, science is either neutral about God or sees God as a projection of human biological processes and socio-cultural constructs and general assumes that God does not exist. The participants opined that society in general often acts confused, apathetic, and assumes God is personal matter of faith and thinking about God is distant from societal concerns. The contrast is with the religious perspective. In the religious perspective, God is source of creation and the powerful, benevolent force involved in the world offering inspiration and guiding moral action. The responses identified the disjunction that this project presumes results in a disorienting dilemma and the concomitant dissonance. Following the initiation of this project, I will assess the responses and concerns in order to create another series of sermons and study opportunities.

Offering Aesthetic Invitations to Understanding

Though the academic community holds rational thought and argument as the central method of acquiring knowledge, in recent years, many recognize that rational approaches based in observation of physical phenomena have limitations. Accordingly presenting this integrated theology includes interactive and aesthetic means of addressing the concerns. Notice within the initial retreat, activities include interactive activities such as stargazing, the use of microscopes and games enabled active learning not simply passive listening. Involving congregants with specific knowledge in sharing their knowledge is in part about hearing from one's community members not simply the pastor. A relational bond increases attentiveness. The participants in the retreat played a simple game of tossing single then multiple balls around a small group and noticed the boundedness, chaos, and order that ensued and how each component was or was not helpful. A bed sheet suspend in the room created a barrier to participant's visual space. The simple bed sheet represented the barriers participants may have in seeing fully an immanent God that is transcendent yet near. This simple metaphor identified how easily a reality may be just beyond our ability to perceive yet be present.

Using the retreat experience and participants responses, I will adjust next steps. I will plan a second series of sermons, and again including an aesthetic component is planned. Along with each sermon, a series of images will be projected to engage the congregation's aesthetic learning. This component is valuable for:

Aesthetic knowing can be characterized along two axes. First, immediate qualities of engaging in an artistic experience include physiological (senses—touch, feel, hear, smell, etc.—related to perception and attention) and cognitive (feelings and understandings) responses to works of art. Beyond the immediate associations of artistic engagement, a second layer of associations with that engagement emerges: Repeated introductions to artistic novelty are believed to cause the producer of the artwork or the viewer to wrestle with that novelty. In turn, the act of considering new ideas may lead to open-mindedness and attitudes that are accepting towards diversity of thought and cultural expression.¹²

Thus adding the aesthetic component allows congregants to wrestle with the novelty offered with in this integrated theology.

Testing the Waters: Adjusting to Focus Group Reports

This first retreat tested assumptions and encouraged the introduction of an integrated theology. Through this retreat, a focus on participants’ perspectives on the creator as an indicator of attitudes across sectors of thought and belief is noticeable. The governing board (ten members present) of the First Presbyterian Church participated in a retreat that addressed the same set of questions about attitudes about the creator. These results echo the answers at the creation retreat. Both groups, while noticing society is not monolithic, suggest the culture/society in which we live either is apathetic about God and ignores the whole issue or simply makes religion a personal belief. Some noted the struggle with religion as a force for particular (generally negative) political actions. Others suggest society is atheological but does embrace a vague spirituality.

¹² Jennifer Katz-Buonincontro. “How Might Aesthetic Knowing Relate To Leadership? A Review of the Literature,” *International Journal of Education & the Arts*. Available from <http://www.ijea.org/v12sil/>, accessed January 10, 2015, 3.

Both the retreatants and the leadership note that science varies from direct opposition to any creator to neutral about the possibility and works around this possibility by simply assuming God is not an influencing force within creation. Some suggest that science finds religion (as a belief in God) a social construct and that science has usurped religion's place in explaining the way the world works. In contrast, religious persons do not separate religion and science and believe in God as creator present in and through creation. Some noted that some place religion over science creating a disbelief in science. Further participants suggest that a belief in God is an embattled and silenced perspective in the culture around them.

These assessments suggest the need for both the reassessment of the assumptions of science and of the hubris of having all the answers. These assessments offer further impetus for offering an integrated theology that addresses a conceptualization of the horizontal and vertical nature of creation. Offering an integrating meaning perspective such as this integrative theology rises in value as the stories of congregants and faculty express the divide that is present and the dissonance that forms. The faith community may become reactive and defensive. However encountering the grace of God in Christ is transformative, and a reactive and defensive posture from the faith community does not help potential disciples find their way to Christ and nor help present disciples grow in Christ. Thinking together and working through struggles is one way the Christian fellowship encourages its members in faith and life. Helping each other through the dissonance is important if the community of faith is to overcome the barrier of a dismissive paradigm, unsupportive social context and personal internal dissonance.

Ignoring real struggles with a dismissive approach or reactionary fear will not free disciples to live more deeply within the kingdom of God.

Testing the Reception: Assessing Value to the Congregation

After the first set of sermons, the creation retreat, and the governing body discussion, I offered a survey to the congregation as whole. The results are consistent with earlier analyses. One respondent is typical: “As to the creator, society is relatively indifferent. Extremes affirm and deny the creator. Those in the middle of these extremes are busy living in the now with [out much focus] toward the future.” And science “generally [has a] negative [view of God]. Somehow [science] does not see the need for a first uncaused cause.” Finally “many religious folk are so convinced about their particular world view and their version of God that they cannot fathom or even allow that they might not have all the answers.”¹³ While this is only one response of the twenty-five congregants that took the survey, the entire set of responses characterizes the need to which an integrated theology responds and shows similarity to other respondents. The particular respondent’s view of religious people highlights how the dissonance between traditional religious and theological perspectives are evident. This response suggests the religious/theological perspective offered in the faith community has not addressed the dissonance felt. The response may suggest that a reactive

¹³ Congregational Survey via Survey Monkey- 3/2014 results in Appendix D.

calcification of theological views are a deterrent to growing in faith or even remaining in the faith.

Another cue to the continued need for conversation and an integrated theology is that eighteen of the twenty-five respondents see God as an integral part of creation. While this was a forced choice question, the nature of God's transcendence is evident. Further conversation about transcendence, immanence, and the nature of creation may be useful. Is God part of creation as the force that sustains existence? Or, as a presence? Or, as horizontal reason for the way things happen? If one sees God as a part of creation that determines how things happen, concerns over agency and evil become more intractable. Thus, further discussions around the integrated theology are warranted.

Further plans include a twelve-week series of sermons spanning Lent concluding with Easter. Lent is a time for reflection and self-assessment. I will use this time in the church year to focus on assumptions and struggles with a life that does not conform to the predominate worldview. The series will start with attending to the wonder of God. Then I will address our struggles with creation, e.g. chaos, uncertainty, and boundaries. I will conclude with God as immanent most notably in Christ. Following these sermons a series of discussion will be offered and another retreat for those that could not make the first one. If these sermons and other activities continue to show promise in reframing the conflict often felt between science/academia and faith and if I find in the discussions the immanence of God gives a perspective on spirituality that is helpful, this framework will continue to undergird sermons and discussions with in the church. A sermons and

discussion series around healthy spirituality will also be planned based in this integrative theology.

One opportunity to reach beyond the church is to have a forum discussing this integrated theology on the university campus with students at the local ecumenical campus ministry. This series of forums would help in assessing the value of the integrated theology. The forums would also disseminate the ideas beyond the walls of our church. I will assess other avenues for ministry upon completion of these next steps. The process so far indicates that this integrative theology is a consistent whole that provides a world view in which science and faith need not be compartmentalized and the offers a vision of a God present and active but unseen. Efforts to address this ministry challenge show initial promise and continues be worth pursuing and shows promise for the congregation in Moscow, Idaho.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Ministry Summary

Born out of the ministry need in a particular congregation, First Presbyterian Church, this project introduces an integrated theology into this same context. Moscow, Idaho, a small rural community in which the university presence dominates, illustrates the ambiguities of Twenty-First Century life in the Northwestern United States. While the community appreciates, even idealizes, the historical influences evident in the community, strong societal forces place the community in maelstrom of contemporary life. Of particular interest to this project is the division between two worldviews. In brief, the traditional theological/faith perspective and the academic/scientific worldview both have historical roots in a deterministic worldview due to views of God or due to the nature of physical existence. Indeed this shared deterministic view of the world is a root cause of the conflict between the two views and a view that denies human agency.

First Presbyterian Church in Moscow, Idaho, sits on the fault line between the two views. Persons involved in both in the academy and the church must straddle this divide. The rational inconsistency of conflicting worldviews is problematic. Neither worldview adequately address the lack of human agency and role within its particular paradigm. The restrictions of determinism and its inability to address moral efficacy undergird the need for a new, more consistent perspective. The historical roots of First Presbyterian Church are in the Reformed tradition. The confessional history of this tradition invites adherents to respond to the context in which they live. Furthermore,

traditional perspectives such as the importance of God's sovereignty and creative power offer foundational theological wells from which to draw new water.

Theological Background

Theologian Shirley Guthrie address the new context in which Reformed theology exists, explicates the value of faith and how it opens adherents to life but does not offer a consistent theology that explicates the conflictual nature of determinism.¹ Theologians like Kathryn Tanner², William Placher³, and Jurgen Moltmann⁴ encourage the reassessment of God's transcendence. Reassessing transcendence allows one to reassess the nature of creation. The helpful distinction Tanner notes between the vertical and horizontal nature of existence and the unhindered creativity of God allows for the nature of creation to be dynamic and have internal causation. Fretheim's biblical analysis highlights scriptures' description of the relational nature of God's interaction with humankind.⁵ Moltmann encourages this examination of the nature of creation and values the interconnectivity inviting one to think systemically and ecologically.

Moltmann's writings invite a reassessment of the role of scientific thought. A variety of theologians and others are doing just that. Nancey Murphy and her collaborators' leadership in this endeavor points to the historic roots of science in

¹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*.

² Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*.

³ Placher, "Is God in Charge?"

⁴ Moltmann, *God in Creation*.

⁵ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*

theological thought and notes changing views on reductionism and mechanistic metaphors.⁶ Through Murphy and others, the point one toward changes in the view of the workings of the natural world. The rise of the importance of complex adaptive systems and emergence, the stochastic nature of many events, and the nonlinear nature of chaotic systems change traditional views of scientific knowledge. When one examines influences causing this change in views, a new view that integrates views of God and views of how the world works become available.

New Contours

This project describes one approach to this new set of contours in an integrated theology. This integrated theology claims the sovereignty and transcendence of God are important concepts and are what enable the function and form of creation. This integrated theology contends that the horizontal nature of creation, a dynamic realm in which humans exist, is not simply a mechanistic combination of constituent parts. Due to the recent recognition of the intrinsic nature of stochasticity, chaotic systems, adaptive complex systems, and emergent phenomena the paradigm is changing. The introduction of real downward causation in complex adaptive systems denies a foundational component of the previous scientific paradigm. With limits imposed due to randomness and chaos, predictability's limits show. The recognition of emergent phenomena adds an element of the unexplained and, perhaps, the unexplainable. While not conflicting with

⁶ Murphy, "Reductionism and Emergence"; also see Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology*, and McGrath. *The Science of God*.

physical laws as presently understood, the recognition of these phenomena suggest the nature of our world has contours humans may not be able to explain or has not yet identified.

The uncertainty evident in these new ways of thinking may be unsettling as they challenge the previous scientific paradigm. Theologically, this set of new ideas and the intrinsic limitations on human knowledge do put God in a different light. The uncertainty intrinsic to this new perspective removes barriers to God's presence enabling a vision of God active and accompanying without being overtly obvious. This uncertainty gives room for a theology of immanence. Immanence is evident in the relational description of God's interaction with humankind in scripture. This theology is imminently biblical. Furthermore, acknowledging human limitations highlights the need for divine revelation for encouragement and guidance in the midst of uncertainty. Another way of saying this is that Christian spirituality is essential for living life fully. Thus, the integrated theology is consistent with nascent scientific thought and is a theological perspective consistent with Reformed thought and the biblical witness.

Project Implementation

The ministry context out of which this integrated theology was born continues to create a ministry challenge. While the divide between faith and science/academic perspectives creates inconsistencies and thus a psychological dissonance, change is difficult. Using this dissonance as an epistemic cue and appealing to the critical thinking valued in academic community, I introduced this integrated theology to the congregation

in Moscow, Idaho. In the process, I tested the assumed dissonance and inconsistency through surveys and small group discussions. The conflict with the scientific perspective was evident and the survey takers describe the predominance of an atheological perspective in society in general as well. My assumptions and George Marsden's conclusions are evident in the experience of congregants in Moscow; clear incentive for the conversation this integrated theological may produce is evident. Initial conversations prompted using sermons, retreat settings, and small group conversations encouraged further use of this integrated theology.

I also introduced an aesthetic component in the initial description of this integrated theology to encourage a full range of human experience with this theology. Adult learning theory suggests that through the continued reflection and assessment of assumptions and perspectives leads to transformational learning. With both the belief in the work of the Spirit and the nature of transformational learning, I will continue to assess the value of the integrate theology to this ministry context. Recently, one congregant has used the tenets of this integrated theology in a small group theological discussion to enhance the discussion.⁷ Further observation will need to occur to assess whether this integrated theology advances the conversation in the academic setting and whether this perspective does address the dissonance congregants surely do experience.

Another challenge will be moving beyond the walls of the church and introducing this integrative theology in ways that engage the wider community. A first

⁷ Personal Communication, February 2015.

step will be to introduce the theology to interested students at the campus ministry associated with First Presbyterian Church of Moscow. Moving beyond ministry venues and engaging faculty and student in new ways will be important. This will address the question as to whether this integrated theology is an avenue for renewed conversation with the academy. The assumption of this project is that this integrated theology has components that will intrigue critical thinking, academically minded persons.

Implications for the Wider Church

The intersection of the analyses such as George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* and the survey results from a local church in rural university town in Idaho confirm real worldview issues do influence the lives of congregants.⁸ While many congregants may have come to some terms with the conflict, one may wonder if this conflict has an impact on the drop in church affiliations in a much broader swath of society as well. When the culture turns away from support for faith and becomes anything from apathetic to hostile toward Christian religion, congregants must have a certain courage and a strong faith to continue. This may change the tenor of church membership and change the nature of faith communities. If however, this conflict between views makes entry into faith less likely, retention of those with marginal faith difficult, and indeed, creates a barrier to grace, the very people Christ directs his followers to serve will not be served.

⁸ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*.

Furthermore, if societal and academic views influence the worldviews of members of the faith community through denying the possibility of an active, immanent God, then members find they are limiting their ability to see God at work. As a result, they may be limiting possibilities such as experiential spirituality, and thus, these views may reduce full participation in the abundant life faith offers. Indeed if offered faith perspective's do not meaningfully address the conflict of worldviews, in moments of discouragement, leaving the faith community becomes all the easier. Faith communities often either have an uneasy relationship to the scientific perspective or see it as a rival. Few theologies truly incorporate the scientific perspective in meaningful ways. This integrated theology has intriguing possibility. A wider discussion and audience would help address whether this integrated theology would be valuable to the larger faith community.

Value for a Wider Audience

If First Presbyterian Church of Moscow is a microcosm of viewpoints evident in society at larger, particularly in academic places (or self-style intellectual circles), then this integrated approach may have value beyond the church. This approach invites one to think about the nature of our present paradigms. Particularly, this integrated theology leads one to examine the reigning scientific paradigm and recognizes changes are occurring. This change does not so much deny scientific method so much as the assumptions of mechanistic, deterministic bottom up science. While this perspective has a grip on the popular imagination and has become a faith among some scientists, a new

perspective that shows the inadequacies is emerging.⁹ Integrating these challenging ideas to create a more consistent view of the world needs to happen.

Disabusing people with in the United States of an outdated, misused theology is important. What Shirley Guthrie calls a speculative Reformed theology of sovereignty is tied to past abuses and may undergird the fractious nature of Reformed faith communities and society in general. Reformed theology often seems to define the sovereign God to be an arbitrary, despotic, power determining every event. While this definition may have supported societal power structures and it left many wondering how the love and grace of God disappeared.¹⁰ This project offers an alternative vision of a sovereign creator God. This vision of God that does not dominate deflates the justification for mimicking a despotic God with controlling, arbitrary human rulers. The presence, care, and guidance of God is for all people not just the elect or a ruler. With a God that enters into relationship (of play?¹¹), such as the covenants of the Old and New Testaments, and a savior that defines discipleship as choosing servanthood, this integrated theology describes human agency. When human beings have agency, the meaning and propose of human life is more easily identified. This theological position offers an alternative vision for human use of power. The powerful One comes along side rather than dominating and controlling and works through agreements (covenants) not

⁹ Deacon, *Incomplete Nature*, 57.

¹⁰ Reuther “Re-evaluating the Body in Eco-Feminism”.

¹¹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 206.

edicts. Furthermore, the creation is an interactive system in which each component can play important, sometimes vital, roles. And, this systemic nature of creation, where the parts work in relationship is mirrored in human life. Scriptural foundations give further support to the importance of human relationships with creation, with each other and with God.

Philosophical Challenges – Nihilism and Logical Positivism

The intellectual embrace of mechanistic and deterministic ontology has consequences. This ontological perspective has led to the development of a philosophical perspective that attempts to build reality from observation using rational thought (Logical Positivism). Mirroring what many think science has done, analytical philosophy attempts to define the nature of human reality. As Ludwig Wittgenstein did, one may attempt to see the world as logical problem to be solved.¹² Many continue to follow his lead though he himself recognized that the attempt leaves one empty handed or willing to enter into mysticism. This integrated theology rejects the hubris of complete understanding and follows Wittgenstein's lead and extending beyond his written work accepts the need for the other, the divine's guidance in experiencing and living in reality.¹³

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc. 1922). 23.

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Major Works: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Translated by C.K. Ogden. (New York: HarperPerennial, 2009), 80.

The second powerful strand of philosophical thought also influenced by the mechanistic metaphor as it removes the need for the divine and suggests no teleological purpose, is postmodernism. Following logically the premise that all works simply as a mechanism with no God, the result is nihilism. While describing controlling narratives but finding nothing intrinsic in any of these narratives to which one can ascribe, leaves the human with no meaning or purpose. Without a definition of what is good, or any other moral characteristic of culture, the rational result is nihilism.¹⁴ While touted as freeing, the only real freedom it gives is from the very thing humans most want: meaning, purpose and value. If however, creation has a Creator and that Creator cares, covenants, and cooperates with humans, the premises of nihilism evaporate. The nihilist rationale loses support and falls flat.

This integrative theology is a useful plausibility structure with which to view the world in which humans live. This project does not attempt to assess the ontological and metaphysical implications nor the range of philosophical thought that may influence or be influenced by this way of thinking. What is clear is that this integrated theology has philosophical as well as sociological implications. The focus of this project is mainly on the personal dissonance of predominate deterministic worldviews. Yet philosophical positions undergird, and provide the foundational thought leading to, today's popular conception of the world in which humans live. This integrated theology challenges many of these popular conceptions.

¹⁴ Deacon, *Incomplete Nature*. and Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

Limits of This Challenge

The central rationale for this work on an integrated theology arises out of the conflict between science/academics and a faith perspective in today's society and a need for a consistent worldview that allows for both. And, as important and influential as the conflict has been, in the rapidly changing world of the Twenty-First Century, one may wonder how central this conflict is to life in the present culture. Some may even argue that the conflict is passé. People today have moved on. While the conflict is still present in Moscow, Idaho, what about the global market for ideas? Indeed, even in the way the question is framed, one may note another incredibly influential defining metaphor, the market.

In the vacuum of purpose and meaning the scientific mechanistic, determinist paradigm creates, humans will look for the meaning in life elsewhere. In the secret video of Mitt Romney's campaign speech, a questioner suggests the new creed and belief about where humans will find satisfaction. He proposes that one be "proud of your wealth. That's what we all aspire to be — we kill ourselves, we don't work a nine to five. We're away from our families five days a week. I'm away from my four girls five days a week and my wife. Why not stick up for yourself and say, "Why is it bad to be, to aspire to be wealthy and successful? You know, why is it bad to kill yourself?"¹⁵ This search for meaning has not stopped but predominate paradigms of science and theology

¹⁵ David Corn, "Full Secret Video of Private Romney Fundraiser" (Mother Jones and the Foundation for National Progress. 2012), <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/watch-full-secret-video-private-romney-fundraiser>, (accessed on March 28, 2015).

have not satisfied the consumer, and other paradigms offer the promise of satisfaction or solace.

Reiterating the Value of an Integrative Theology

Just as humankind looks for consistency between our beliefs, so too, humans look for meaning, purpose and to know one's value in the world. In recent years, narratives describing the nature of the world in which humans live have come up short. For years the deterministic, mechanistic view of the world reigned. Through its ascendancy, it enabled humankind to exert a certain measure of control over their environment. This physical control has not addressed the lack of meaning, purpose and values that attends this control.¹⁶ Furthermore, this worldview has not enable humankind to eradicate war nor is it clear that its technological approach is sustainable. Removing the divine, is akin to removing the wonder, over estimating the interpretative power of human beings, often includes denying meaning, purpose and an intrinsic value in human life.

With the emergence of cracks or actual falsification of major elements of the underlying assumptions of the predominate worldview, now is an opportune time to reassess. Recognizing that theology has often either accepted the predominate worldview or rejected it with a replacement theology that in many ways mirrors that which it replaces. Without this rivalry and conflict about whether natural laws or God

¹⁶ Alister McGrath, *Surprised by Meaning: Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 115.

determines all that happens, this integrative theology reveals a false dichotomy. When one questions the need for everything to be determined and begins to recognize new insights in to old problems new possibilities are produced. One may begin to assess these new insights. In this project, I have listen to both the thoughts of theologians and of researchers. As the researchers suggest the world is full of stochasticity, chaotic, and adaptive systems, I offer of adaptive systemic solution to old problems.

The grace God gives through Christ is for those who are lost. The arrogance of human positions and the resulting cognitive dissonance offer real clues that one is lost. Some of those with humility and faith who acknowledge the nature and work of God have noticed the uncertainty and mystery of our world in spite of the overarching paradigms, theological or scientific. Indeed, most of the theological perspectives offered in this project are not new. Many faith filled, spirit attuned, persons know God is transcendent and immanent and values human action, particularly a life of love. However, difficult to explain this certainty has been in the face of deterministic, mechanistic, reductionistic paradigm, faith persists.

This integrated theology suggests we do confront an unknown that will remain ever unknown. However, from the beyond, that realm that transcends our knowledge, reality, and experience, comes a message of hope. For that One beyond offers a relationship based in grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). This grace is the unmitigated choice to care for the valued creature in spite of, or even because of, the blindness to its own limitations. Through denying the transcendent and going its own way, the creature

becomes lost, and the self-centered, coveting nature of the creature becomes evident (Ephesians 2:3).

This project addresses both the meaning draining nature of determinism and the realization that the alternative is to face a future that is open, dynamic, and not completely predictable. For decisions, consequent actions, and reflection on these actions to be meaningful, the one making these decisions, actions and reflections must have influence, real agency. While an integrative theology does not embrace free will where choices unmitigated by context or history, the choice each person makes at each junction in his or her life, has real consequence determining the path forward and the nature of the world in which all live. This integrated theology suggests humans have real agency yet cannot fully predict the consequences of their actions. Yet, the consequences are real. This is the human conundrum and predicament.

Christian spirituality addresses this conundrum. However, what it requires is that one pays attention to the guidance God gives. This is not limited to mysticism, nor does it ignore it. This spirituality includes the incarnation of the Word, the witness of the scripture, the experience of the faithful over time, and the continued moving of the Holy Spirit in the present. These are simply the way Christian faith has acknowledged God speaking into human life for centuries.

Integrated theology offers a perspective that identifies real human agency, acknowledges the limits to predictability, and offers a vision of a revelatory, immanent though transcendent, creator God, thus describing an alternative perspective to many of the prominent paradigms today. This vision acknowledges science and its discoveries as

real and appropriate within creation, however, notes its limitations. These limitations are due to its own discoveries of system complexity, stochasticity, and chaos. At the same time, this integrated approach notes a created dynamic natural world that is God's creative work. Rather than God decide the outcome of each event, God initiates a dynamic movement within the created order through time.

Humans live in this dynamic creation. God enables human choice enacted to be one force that does influence the events in this movement, the flow of history as it shapes each next present moment. In this integrated theology, God invites humans to listen to God's guidance so this movement, this dynamic existence, is full and lives up to the potential God enabled. God created a world in which humans are not forced to live up to that potential nor do they. Too often the movement seems to be in a very different direction. The choice is ours.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

World View Matrix

WorldView or Attitude of				
	<i>Society</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Religious Folk</i>	<i>You</i>
<i>about Creator/Deities</i>				
<i>about Creation /Nature</i>				
<i>about Human's place in Creation</i>				

Appendix B

Worldview Matrix Responses from Retreatants for Views about God

	<i>Society</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Religious Folk</i>	<i>You</i>
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Varies greatly	Non-overlapping domains	Increasingly skeptical	matter of faith Unknowable
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Apathy, can't offend by showing any belief	Darwin, evolution, big bang	Temporary home	God's hand made all wonders
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	mostly the opiate of the masses - religious right forces attention	Prepresentations of cultures - humanist, big bang originator?	Creator of all the earth/ animistic?	Mystery/ Gods creation abounds with (rest?)
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Indifferent	Objective	Believe creator made all things	Creator is the center of all things and works in ways I don't understand
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Maybe someone created	Science as creator	The creator made it all	It grounds me
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	distant	Myth	the sole creator	One triune God/Creator
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Someone that exists but is not really relevant anymore	Not applicable or testable in the world	A higher-being that is much greater than us.	A higher-being that is present and relevant in my life.

<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Doesn't exist	Doesn't exist	Does exist	Does exist
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>				The reality of the Divine is too big for me to really comprehend.
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Confused	Unnecessary	Benevolent	Real
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Valued	Neutral	Crucial	Learning
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Doesn't give much thought	Various theories not attributed to a Deity	God is our creator	God created and is still involved
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Perhaps half of all society accepts the idea of a creator	Scientist tend to work around religion and don't include idea of deity	Believe in a deity of one sort or another	God is the spirit of goodness in all things
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Possible, not probable, respect, not interactive		involved in human life	one God involved
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	There is a creator	no divine creator	Creator	God Created
<i>View about Creator/Deity</i>	Apathetic about and tend toward at least ignoring	From direct opposition (science as creator) to neutral to denial or at least working around	Believe in a Creator	Real creator but often a mystery or too big to understand.

APPENDIX C

God. Creation. You.
April 26-27, 2013, Lael Retreat Center
Retreat Outline

Friday Evening

6:45 pm Arrival, Settle in

7:00 pm Evening Sessions

Provide a mixer at registration so folks are introducing themselves to one another and then offer a short blessing of the weekend activities.

- World Views of God – Retreatants fill out attitude matrix about views of God.
 - Purpose –
 - Help retreatants notice views of the Creator – including one’s own views.
 - Introduce the topic of the retreat
 - Begin to think about the variation in views
 - Group activity - Discuss these views using a white board to help identify traditional/stereotypical vies of God and creation.
- “Scope” of Reality
 - Activity including Star gazing with telescope and looking at pond water through a microscope
 - Looking at the amazing scales (scope) of nature – and how amazing a creator would be – beyond the microscopic or macroscopic universe
- Mystery of God
 - Noting how we can scarcely taking the height, depth and breadth of the creation
 - Wonder at the Creator – introduce Transcendence – the otherness of God as one outside of creation yet able to create all that is

9:00 pm Wrap Up, Campfire

Saturday

8:00 am Breakfast

9:00 am Morning Sessions

- Nature of Creation – how well do we pay attention to the nature of creation. Introduce morning presentations from those that are paying attention.
- Statistical Nature of Our World –presentations from
 - **Celeste Brown**, Ph.D., *Evolutionary Biologist*
 - **Lisa Shipley**, Ph.D., *Wildlife Ecologist*
 - **Chris Williams**, Ph.D., *Statistical Science*

- Bounded Chaos and Complex Adaptive Systems
 - Break into groups of about five and toss a ball around the circle
 - Add another – give little instruction other than to toss the ball around
 - Notice the chaos begins is bounded by the circle, and that systemic patterns may develop
 - Use this simple exercise to talk about chaos, randomness, and complexity and how volition effects the actions of the group
- Scripture, Bounded Chaos, and You - Introduce Scriptural support for human volition/agency and choice.

11:30 am Personal Reflection

12:00 pm Lunch

12:30 pm Afternoon Sessions

- Where is God? Introduce the concept of immanence – use the hanging sheet as an example of how one can be close but unseen.
- Relationship of God to Creation – Scriptural notes on God’s relationship to creation and creature
Historical Reflection on Encounter – Individual reflection on encounter with the divine.
- Noticing the Divine – Story of hearing a nudge and the consequences of not following it.
- Discussion of possible consequences of God that is present and in relationship to persons with real agency.
- Brief discussion of the overall weekend

3:00 pm Wrap up with worship

S P E A K E R S

Celeste Brown, Ph.D., *Evolutionary Biologist*

Lisa Shipley, Ph.D., *Wildlife Ecologist*

Chris Williams, Ph.D., *Statistical Science*

Norman Fowler, Pastor, *Moscow First Presbyterian*

Appendix D

Congregational Response

Responses to the Following Prompt: Please briefly give your assessment of the worldview or attitude about CREATION/NATURE held by each group and your own.

Society	Science	Religious Folk	You
Mankind rules over nature and mankind can change nature.	World was not created, nature not created but evolution. Physical world created by big bang.	Creation and nature created to serve mankind. Mankind rules over the nature.	Nature created by God for man, who is called to be good stewards over nature.
a split between those who view it has beautiful and precious, worthy of good stewardship, while others view it as something to be exploited and used to further human progress and from which to extract wealth.	a great respect for creation	For the most part, an awe and reverence for creation/nature-- wanting to be good stewards of what God has given us.	same as above

Disappointed that there is not better recognition of a creator & its creation		Most disappointed that such learned individuals lack the understanding of the need of a first existential uncaused cause. Infinite regression of finite matter is absurd.		Pleased that faith is harmonious with science.		Same as religious folk
						The creator made an amazing universe that must be held in reverence.
Something to be used or enjoyed		Something to be managed and controlled		God's work, perhaps taken for granted		A gift from God, evidence of his awesomeness
I would say 75% believes in Creationism.		I would say 30% believe in Creationism.		I would say 97% believe in Creationism.		100% believe in Creationism.
"Drill, baby, drill"; Dominion over nature and for our immediate use		Nature is resilient, composed of complex relationships, and will persist beyond humans. Humans are separate from nature.		Nature is God's Creation, and we are stewards to care for it, but we also have more pressing ethical demands than the environment.		Creation is the holy extension of God's unknowable plan.

Nature is wonderful and used for human pleasure.		Nature is a delicate balance to be managed carefully.		Nature is created by God and thus respected.		Nature is created by God and needs to be more carefully preserved/managed.
The world around us, people included, all interacting and impacting each other and nature.		A universe of systems, interacting		God's or a spirit's gift, therefore a venue for the Creator to reveal himself		God's handiwork, of which we are to be stewards and co-caretakers, with God, and in the image of God we too can create natural settings that glorify God
The world was created for humankind		The forces of nature are constantly changing.		God is present in every aspect of nature, from plants and people to sunsets, mountains, and all that exists in the oceans.		God created our world and expects us to be good stewards of it.
A confused combination of a physical universe that must have been created, yet originates in a Big Bang, with life that has evolved pretty much as Darwin indicated.		Dominant viewpoint is that nature is a product of the physical laws of the universe and the natural laws of biological survival. Awe of nature also dominates.		Influenced both by their understanding of science and their scriptural understanding of God's Creation		Ditto religious folk, also with awe of nature.

Varied...some worship nature and place themselves equal to or lower than creation, others tend to not give a rip and pollute and destroy the creation. A huge continuum.		More scientists who do not believe in a God are doing scientific study on creation/nature and finding a link to a/the Creator. Others are very agnostic, and treat nature as their equal...we are just a part of the animal kingdom.	Sadly, a continuum from those who worship nature/creation to those who sense they are a part of creation to those who lord it over creation.	I am created special by the creator, and am responsible before God to care for the creation. The creation/nature points in every way to its Creator.
Non-committal		Inconsistent	Creation is by intelligent design	Creation by intelligent design using multiple facets
maybe creation happened, but nature operates independently		creation is a myth, nature operates according to its own laws	God created nature and established & sustains its operation	God created nature and established & sustains its operation
For man's use		Nature/Creation can be understood through science	Similar to society, with some thankfulness thrown in	A reflection of the beauty of God and his love
Society - tries to control nature		Science - tries to discount or research and justify everything	religious folk - are believers that all things created and nature are gifts from God	I'm a true believer that all things created and nature are Gifts from God, and managed by God

Many have experienced the wonder and awe of the natural world and sometimes struggle to understand it.		A healthy respect for both nature and creation - inspired by the intricacies of the natural world and motivated to study and understand it.		Most attribute the beauty and wonder of nature to the Creator. Ironically, many do not act in a way to preserve and honor it.		the natural world is an amazing, beautiful, delicate creation that we should all do our part to preserve. the creator has given us this gift, grounded in science to enjoy and care for.
Conservationists are more and more using terms from the Bible to explain their principles of saving the earth.		The more research scientists do, the more stunned they are to learn there may be a God		They are still the moral compass for mankind.		God created nature and man. We must do our best to assure that both are saved by God's grace.
Many these days hold that the "ecosystems" are more valuable than human life		This group also varies depending on whether they are evolutionists or special creationists		I think this group is similar to the above "science" category		God created man and put him in charge of the earth (nature) and made him steward over it; hence, God meant for man to take care of the earth
Caught up in evolution with or without God		Lean more to evolution with or without God		Confused about how God created		Believe God created just as the Bible describes
Think about it every now and then but easily distracted		Curious about the whole thing, but often imprisoned by the parts		Constrained by "faith"...threatened by science		Amazed

see above		see above		see above		I find it interesting that after centuries of Science, and finally arriving at the state of Modern Physics, that our physicists have finally concluded that the Universe started as nothing, and in an instant everything that ever was or shall be was suddenly evident as a Big Bang. Just like in Genesis.
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