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## Statement on Faith and Learning

I believe that God has called and equipped me to serve Him as a college professor.

From an early age, my parents fostered within me a sincere love of learning, and because my father was an ordained minister, I was richly blessed in the religious instruction that I received. Throughout my childhood, I had opportunity to engage in moral and theological discussions with him (as well as with the rest of my family), which helped me to grow in faith and in knowledge of the scriptures. In addition, I received my primary education from Christian schools, which provided me a firm foundation for my secondary and post-secondary education through continual affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge.

Since then, I have continued in seeking to love the Lord with my all my heart, soul, and mind, and to live a life worthy of His calling. Through daily scripture reading and prayer, I have seen within myself evidence of God's sanctifying work, and as my faith has grown, it has profoundly influenced both my teaching and my research.

Teaching, as both a calling and a gift, was evident in me since the beginning of my formal education. Then, as now, I found enjoyment in attempting to make sense of the world around me (especially its political and social structures) and in helping others to do likewise. Nevertheless, it was not always clear to me that college-level teaching was to be my full-time vocation. I had difficulty discerning God's will for my life and did not fully comprehend the manner and extent to which my academic and spiritual gifts would be used in service to others. My recognition of these biblical truths and their application to my life came only gradually, as God worked through the demonstrated humility and faithful encouragement of my professors.

Humility, as it was demonstrated to me, is not only a spiritual discipline, a turning away from the selfishness and conceitedness of our sinful natures; it is also a practice that can enhance teaching effectiveness. Practicing humility in teaching means being aware of my own flaws and limitations and thus being patient with my students and mindful of their potential, despite their shortcomings. It also means recognizing the possibility that my students might have something to teach me as well and that sometimes I might err in grading their work. As an advisor, it means

acknowledging that my students bear God's image and thus I should value their interests as well as my own, being generous in the time that I devote to them and working with them faithfully and cheerfully as they struggle to identify and develop the gifts God has given them.

Through humility, the love of Christ shines through us, and just as Christ's humility gives us encouragement, so too our own humility can give others encouragement. As a professor, therefore, I seek continually to build my students up and to be aware of the impact that my words can have on them – both in what I say and how I say it. However, I must be careful not to confuse encouragement with leniency or indulgence. My words and actions, though intended to build my students up, should not implicitly promote idleness or complacency in them, for it would be a perversion of true encouragement for me to accept work from them that is significantly less than what they are capable of achieving. To do so would be a false demonstration of humility, based on the presumption that my students' innate abilities are far inferior to my own. The resulting grade inflation would do nothing to help my students recognize and develop their gifts.

Practicing encouragement means showing gentleness in helping students to overcome frustration and confusion in their coursework. As a professor, I strive not to exasperate my students but rather to motivate them by combining gentle correction with helpful guidance while striving to be scrupulously fair in my grading. Failing in this, my students may come to resent me or even to fear me, hiding from me rather than seeking my help and performing their assignments grudgingly. By working diligently and cheerfully, however, together we can bring glory to God by making faithful use of the gifts He has given us. Diligence for both my students and me means not being satisfied with mediocrity or succumbing to the temptations of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. For me it also means providing my students with timely, clear, and thorough feedback on their assignments and making myself available to them outside of class, in addition to providing them with well-ordered syllabi, thoughtfully constructed assignments, and carefully prepared lectures – and redoubling my efforts when I fall short.

Admittedly, as I would imagine is typical of most college faculty, diligence comes more easily to me than either humility or gentleness does. Nevertheless, as I strive to put each of these disciplines into practice, I am thankful to have been blessed with wonderful past examples, whose teaching methods I appreciate more each year. As my undergraduate mentor, Ross M. Lence, concluded: “No one perhaps is more aware of the best teachers than teachers themselves.”

In my courses, I emphasize both theory and history, whereby I hope to demonstrate to my students that they are part of an ongoing conversation among successive generations of educated people. Throughout the semester and beyond, I hope that they may be able to join in and ultimately contribute to that conversation, developing an ever-deepening understanding of the world in which they live while becoming effective agents of redemption and renewal within it. I strive therefore to provide students with opportunities to grapple with current issues and events as well as historical cases, using the theoretical concepts and historical background provided by the course readings and lectures to help them make sense of the world around them.

What makes the study of international politics exciting to me (and hopefully to my students as well) is that the world – quite literally – is our laboratory, with each day producing new data to be analyzed. International events present opportunities to test and refine existing theoretical models and to see both the lingering effects of the Fall and the ongoing Providence of God. The study of scripture can help us to discern what is good and evil within the structure of the international system, while the study of international relations theory can help us to discern the broad patterns that underlay international interactions. As Christian scholars, therefore, we are able to grapple not only with the world as it is, but also the world as it ought to be, and to apply our minds with humility and diligence to understanding and addressing its needs.

Although my teaching focuses on international politics broadly defined, my scholarly research focuses primarily on the use of force and restraint of force within the international system – a system characterized by widespread uncertainty resulting from the absence of centralized power and authority and the presence of human sinfulness. Destructive capabilities exacerbate this uncertainty, leading to misperception, mistrust, and outright aggression. As a consequence, the history of international relations has been characterized by recurrent warfare and violence, as well as repeated attempts to establish international peace, order, and justice – reflecting both our sinful nature and God’s abiding grace.

My published research focuses on the effectiveness of such attempts, examining international organizations and law as means of establishing and maintaining international order by creating rules for state interaction and restraining the actions of powerful states. Having examined countless ill-conceived plans and misplaced hopes for peace, order, and justice, I often am tempted, along with Thucydides, to dismiss such hopes as “prop[s] of the desperate.” But despite humankind’s many failings and the evils we observe each day, I continue to place my hope in a sovereign God who rules over all nations, even when his ways remain hidden. It is this hope that encourages me to seek ever deeper understanding of what might be achieved internationally, despite the limits of our humanity, the effects of our sinfulness, and the anarchic structure of the international system. It also encourages me to work diligently in my capacity as an international relations professor and pre-law advisor to train and mentor the citizens, scholars, and leaders of tomorrow, confident that God will use their talents and abilities to accomplish his divine purposes.