



A STATEMENT ON HUMAN FLOURISHING

Preamble

Every human being longs for the good life. Ancient and medieval philosophers often equated the good life with personal happiness and the cultivation of both private and public virtue. Today, we often speak of the good life in terms of human flourishing. Every worldview imparts a particular vision of human flourishing. This is true of the biblical worldview.

The Bible presents us with a grand narrative that has rightly been called the true story of the whole world. The biblical narrative progresses along four key plot points: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. God created all things for his glory as the divine Creator-King, including humans, who alone are created in his divine image. Tragically, all of God's good creation has been corrupted by the sin of the first humans and their natural descendants, resulting in an ongoing cycle of rebellion, brokenness, and disorder in the face of God's just rule. But God so loved his world, and especially his image-bearers, that he sent his eternal Son to become a man. Jesus has accomplished redemption through his sinless life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, triumphant ascension, and ongoing intercession. All who renounce their sin and look to Jesus alone as their King and Savior experience the benefits of this redemption as God forgives their sin, adopts them as his spiritual children, empowers them for kingdom ministry, and gives them eternal life. One day, Jesus will return to earth to consummate his eternal kingdom, fully completing his work of redemption and restoring all of creation to its original intended glory—including all those who believe in him.

The biblical vision of human flourishing is redemptive. God's mission is to advance his kingdom and ultimately redeem the entire created order through the saving work of Jesus Christ. He calls all Christians to participate in his mission by using their gifts, talents, and opportunities to draw the spiritually lost to the kingdom through gospel proclamation, to serve other people through acts of mercy and justice, and to glorify him through everyday faithfulness in every sphere of life. In fulfilling this calling, we obey the original Creation Mandate, the ongoing Great Commandment, and the renewed Great Commission, we bless those around us (even unbelievers), and our actions bear eternal fruit that will continue into the new creation.

In our present cultural context, this biblical vision of human flourishing is challenged by threats to three truths that are taught in Scripture and confirmed in the best of the Christian intellectual tradition: the dignity of every human being, a proper understanding of human sexuality and marriage, and religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all people. This statement clarifies North Greenville University's position on these three values. It also calls our University community to faithfulness in a time of compromise, for the glory of God and the sake of authentic human flourishing.

Human Dignity

God created human beings in his divine image, and as such, they represent the pinnacle of his creation. As bearers of God's image, men and women engage in rational thought, experience emotions, enjoy relationship with one another and with God, and exercise dominion as God's vice-regents on earth. While the introduction of sin into creation has defaced God's image in humanity, the divine image has not been entirely lost. As the Second Adam, Jesus is the perfect image of the invisible God, and all those who are united with him through faith experience the restoration of the divine image in their lives as they are conformed gradually to the image of Christ.

Because all humans bear and reflect God's image, all human life carries with it an inherent dignity. How we treat one another matters because every individual is worthy of the dignity that comes with being a divine image bearer. This is why love of God and love of others are so closely connected in both the Old and New Testaments, with orthodoxy *and* orthopraxy being inseparable to the Christian faith. Spiritual growth and holy living, therefore, are primary exhortations even in the context of an academic community.

Human dignity, then, and righteousness are closely aligned, with many applications for human flourishing. For example, human life begins at conception and is intended to last until death through ordinary causes; thus, both abortion and euthanasia represent murderous attacks upon human dignity. Other attacks on human dignity include acts of violence and oppression, verbal denigrations of the value of others, and any other actions that treat some individuals as less than the divine image bearers they are. Sin itself transgresses against the divine image, marring its original perfection and interfering with our intimate relationship with God.

A key component of human dignity is the inherent value of work, which predated the entrance of sin into human history and glorifies God as evidence of his common grace. Men and women who are physically and mentally able have the right and responsibility to work in the vocations to which they are called and, when those vocations entail employment, to receive just compensation for their labor. Earthly governments should honor the dignity of work by protecting free markets, providing social services that enable the able unemployed to return to the workforce, and promoting economic policies that contribute to human flourishing.

Genesis 1:26-28; 9:6; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13-16; Proverbs 6:6-11; 12:24; Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 6:25-26; 22:35-40; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 1:15; 3:17, 23-24; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11; James 3:8-10

Recommended Resources:

- [The Baptist Faith and Message](#) (2000), Article III: Man
- [“On Affirming the Full Dignity of Every Human Being,”](#) a resolution adopted by the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention
- [Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience](#) (2009)
- [Guiding Principles](#) of the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics
- [Core Principles](#) of the Acton Institute

Human Sexuality and Marriage

God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, in his divine image as male and female. The divinely ordained differences between the sexes, including biological distinctions, are not accidental to our human

nature, but reflect God's design in human creation. God intends for the sexes to complement each other. One's sex cannot be changed, even if physical and hormonal alterations are made to the body. All self-understanding of human identity should be defined by Scripture, which offers a trustworthy account of human nature, including sexuality. Though the fall has led to numerous disordered understandings of sexuality, such views never lead to authentic human flourishing.

Marriage is a creational ordinance and a gift from God that traces its origin to the intimate companionship of Adam and Eve. Marriage unites one man and one woman in a covenantal commitment that is intended to last until the natural death of one or the other spouse, though Scripture provides the boundaries for when the marriage covenant can be dissolved virtuously. Other relational arrangements are not marriages in the biblical sense of that term. Marriage is a portrait of the union between Christ and his church, and thus reflects the gospel. It is only within the context of the marriage covenant, biblically defined, that sexual acts are permissible as an expression of marital intimacy and a means of human procreation. All other sexual acts are sinful distortions of God's good gift to his human creatures.

The proper Christian response to unbiblical views of sexuality and marriage includes compassion on individuals who are confused or struggling, clarity in promoting biblical perspectives in every sphere (including within the sciences), and courage in defending the truth against attacks from rival worldviews. Furthermore, Christians in the United States have the constitutionally guaranteed right to affirm and commend a biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage, regardless of how these concepts might be redefined by courts or legislatures, or articulated differently by others in a pluralistic culture.

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 7; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Recommended Resources:

- [The Baptist Faith and Message](#) (2000), Article XVIII: The Family
- ["On Sexuality and Personal Identity,"](#) a resolution adopted by the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention
- [The Nashville Statement](#) (2017)
- [Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience](#) (2009)

Religious Liberty and Freedom of Conscience

Religious liberty, along with freedom of conscience, is essential to a Christian understanding of human flourishing. Religious liberty has been a Baptist distinctive from the movement's inception. As a Baptist institution, North Greenville University has a deep commitment to the value of this principle, particularly because of the heritage of South Carolina Baptists. All people are free to believe whatever they wish about ultimate matters and live in accordance with those beliefs in both their private lives and the public square. Governing authorities have no authority to define or constrain religious belief, but rather have the constitutional obligation to protect religious liberty for all.

Religious liberty does not imply that all views are equally correct. The goal of religious liberty is the pursuit of truth, which is inseparable from the best definitions of higher education. In the Christian tradition, the pursuit of truth is a gospel issue. God reveals himself to and through his creation truthfully, and the confrontation of the individual by truth is an existential moment that has eternal consequences. Because

the University rejects the postmodern notion that truth is subjective and that objective truth is a construct rather than a metaphysical reality, it is important that the institution make clear that it has beliefs that are embraced corporately.

Just as individuals have religious liberty, institutions enjoy this privilege as well. Indeed, as a 501(c)3 organization that is incorporated, North Greenville University is legally a “person,” an organization that has been embodied (the literal meaning of “incorporated”). The University has the obligation under its accreditation standards to define, articulate, and embody its mission and identity. As such, the University enjoys religious liberty to operate and educate in accordance with the conscience it has been given by its sponsoring denomination, as operationalized by the University’s leadership. This means that the University has a clear responsibility to articulate the sources of authority to which it submits, the beliefs it espouses, and the expectations that it holds out for members of the community (faculty, staff, and students).

Religious liberty does not have absolute conformity as its goal, but rather champions the articulation of belief in order to provide clarity via coherence, in the support of a vibrant, trusting community. Faculty and staff who join the community in an employment relationship are expected to work, teach, and live as colleagues who support the University’s identity and beliefs. Employees who are unable to support these beliefs should exercise their liberty of conscience with integrity by relocating to a community that better matches their personal convictions. Students who attend the University are expected to explore and reflect on the institution’s identity and beliefs as they willingly agree to live in conformity to community standards.

John 8:32, John 14:6, Psalm 34: 8, Daniel 1

Recommended Resources

- Baptist Faith & Message 2000, Articles XII, XV, & XVII
<http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>
- The Manhattan Declaration <https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/>
- Academic Freedom and Christian Higher Education (CCCU) <https://www.cccu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CCCU-Statement-on-Academic-Freedom.pdf>
- Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure (AAUP)
<https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>

This statement was adopted unanimously by the Board of Trustees on June 23, 2020.