

A graphic consisting of ten stylized, white, classical-style pillars arranged in two rows of five, set against a dark blue background.

# THE TEN PILLARS

An orange semi-circular shape with a white sunburst pattern radiating from its center.

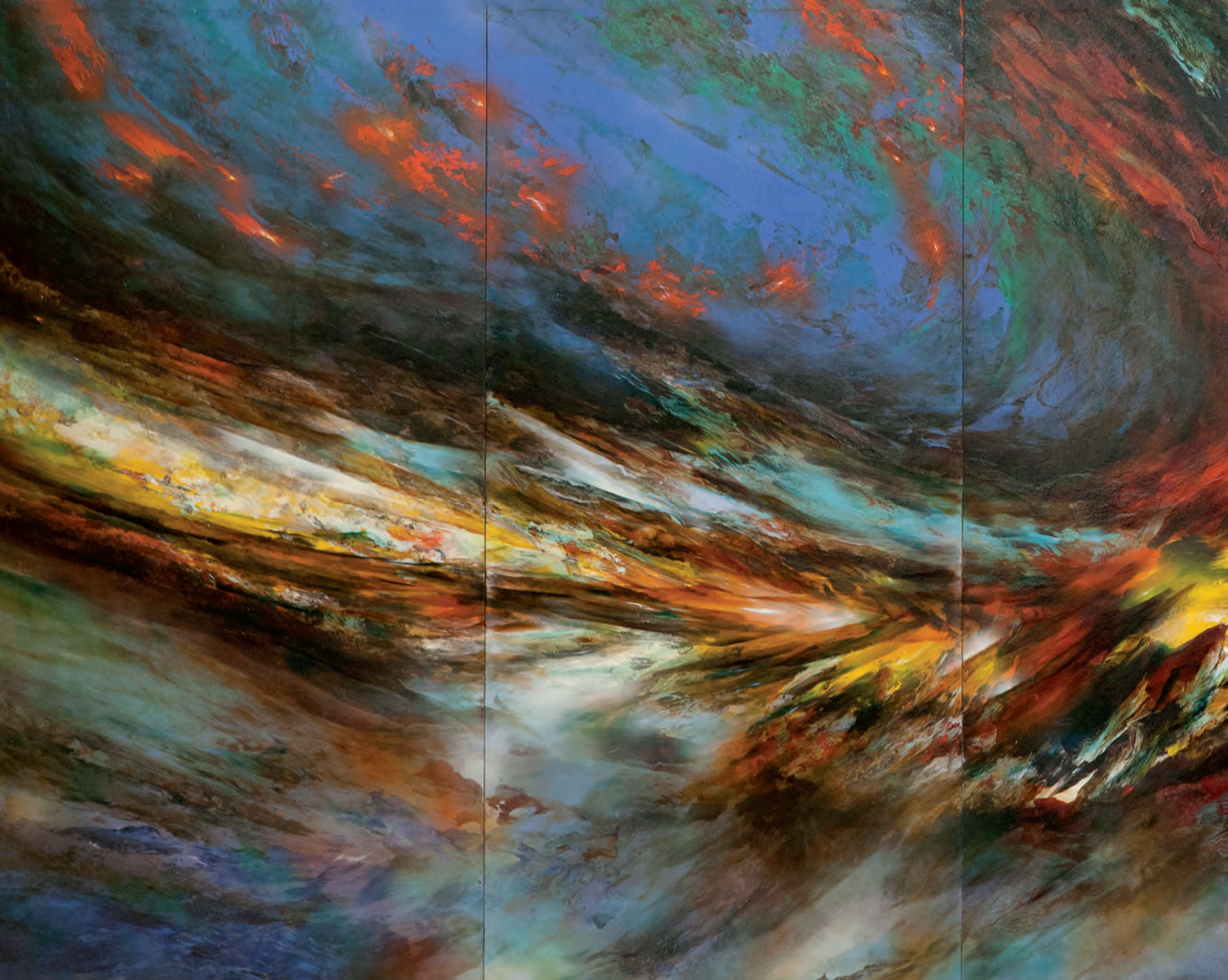
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# HBU CORE CONVICTIONS

**H**ouston Baptist University has a history of affirming these particular ways of thinking and living, which we hereby describe as Ten Pillars. These convictions are an essential part of the traditional beliefs and commitments of the University. They are set forth here to bring to mind the ten physical pillars that are now iconic on our campus and thus represent the durable historical and theological commitments that undergird our practices and enable us to translate our worldview, Preamble, and mission into academic programs, curricular structures, and habits of the mind and heart. HBU confesses and takes shelter under these Ten Pillars.







## PILLAR I

*God, the Creator of a*

# GOOD AND KNOWABLE WORLD

The world was created and is sustained by God the Father and through Jesus Christ his Son. It reflects his presence and power and is good, orderly, and can be known. Human beings, male and female, are made in God's image and given responsibilities to preserve, protect, and order God's creation. The world and God's ways constitute the arena and object of our academic goals for learning and teaching.







*Abstract artist Leonard Nierman's painting, titled, "The Creation," on display in McNair Hall in The Morris Cultural Arts Center at Houston Baptist University.*



## PILLAR II

### *A Plan of* **RESTORATION**

The world is fallen and, because of human rebellion, under a condition of chaos and brokenness, but God's plan of rescue, effected through the history of Israel and the nations and culminating through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, is one whereby God will unify all who trust in Christ and will one day restore the entire creation—heaven and earth, nations, peoples, and ethnicities—through him.







*HBU student participates in Hurricane Harvey service project.*



## PILLAR III

### *The Importance of* **HUMAN AGENCY**

God acts through the processes of history, and, as disorderly and chaotic as the world is, his work can still be done in it. Human beings, and especially his followers, are God's agents of restoration and possess certain capacities of will, talent, and giftedness. We are thus made to do his work in the world, and we attain to our greatest flourishing when we are submissive to his plans and purposes as revealed in Christ and Scripture.





Death could not hold you do



## PILLAR IV

### *A Renewed* **PEOPLE**

Through Christ and the Spirit, the church was created as the people of God who fulfill the promises made to Abraham. It is comprised of men and women from all segments of human societies and of whatever racial, ethnic, economic, national, or religious origin who confess allegiance to Christ and follow him as agents of God, empowered by the Spirit to worship, encourage, and teach one another to carry out God's restorative plans in the world. The church therefore labors with persistence to reflect now the love of God, whose purpose is the restorative summing up, the reunification, of all things in Christ. The church accomplishes its mandated mission, directed to all nations and peoples, by acts of healing, charity, service, teaching the gospel, and worshipping the Father, in the power of the Spirit, through Jesus Christ the Lord. The church does its work in a broken world and in anticipation of the return of Christ, who will raise the dead, judge the earth, and heal the nations, having subjected all things to himself.



*HBU's "Refuge" leads faculty/students in worship at IGNITE conference.*





## PILLAR V

# *A Mandate to Understand* **THE WORLD**

The Christian university as an arm of the church participates in God's plan of rescue and does so in the sphere of long-term commitments, not immediate activism. As a university, we patiently trust God's working in history and confess that this is his world and he will accomplish his merciful intentions for it, however difficult they are to discern. God's purposes involve his use of all things good and evil and frequently require decades, centuries, and even millennia in their outworking. We nonetheless believe that his world and his ways are discernible and that, in spite of our own fallen state, we may make progress in knowledge. However, even with the ability to know, we now know only in part and must humbly examine our assumptions, methods, and conclusions, realizing that we are often mistaken, while awaiting the restoration of all things, when we will understand more fully the ways of God.

Our task is to understand all that we can of the world and his ways in it. We research, we teach, and we reflect upon the Creator, his world, and the peoples in it. We think about its origins and nature, its peoples and their histories. We study and analyze human beings, their social and political thought and behavior, their languages, philosophies, governments, and literature, and their beliefs and failures. We work for more than technological proficiency and professional expertise, as instrumental as these practices are. We preserve and retain the traditional arts of freedom—the liberal arts—to understand our purpose as humans, to build social structures of civility and justice, and to experience the liberty that enables us to be agents of order and peace, fulfilling God's purposes in the world. These tasks we do in an environment of faithful tolerance and intellectual freedom.





## *Learning and Teaching as* **DISCIPLESHIP**

We believe that all forms of instruction, whether by teaching, counseling, performance, coaching, training, or research, are best done not only by reading and lecturing but by a kind of practicing discipleship. Professors and counselors are intended to be academic and professional leaders, well trained in their fields, knowledgeable experts who are able to teach. We also affirm that the transmission of knowledge occurs through human interaction and example, is empowered by relational engagement, and aims toward accountable and disciplined learning that produces transformed behavior and thinking. “The life of the mind” is not the cultivation of thinking and reflection in isolation. Those valuable disciplines of deep work and thought flourish in community and are intended to engender synthesis, communication, apprenticed learning, and constructive, purposeful behavior aimed at fulfilling God’s mission for the world. Work therefore is a divinely mandated expression of what it means to be truly human. It is an expression of vocation, and whether compensated or voluntary, it is an act of worship, stewardship, and obedience.





## PILLAR VII

### LIFE,

### *Humanness, Gender, and Marriage*

God created man and woman in his image and commissioned them as stewards and managers of his good creation. Life is therefore a purpose-driven gift of God, and we affirm the dignity of all people and the goodness of life from conception forward.

Marriage is a lifelong union of one man and one woman who are committed to each other in loving intimacy and constitutes the beginning of human community in service to God. We therefore believe in male and female genders as a gift of God reflected biologically in the genetic differences that are specific to an individual even before birth. Though the fallenness of this world and the curse of mortal corruption under which it exists can produce emotional confusion in individuals, we believe that gender identity is not self-determined or discontinuous with the bodies with which we were conceived and born.

We believe that full humanness was lost in the Fall, but incarnate in Jesus Christ, who is the very image of God. We believe that in Jesus, God has revealed the full humanity to which we are called and into which we will be transformed when we receive a resurrection body like Christ's. We believe in forgiveness through Christ, the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and the moral necessity to pursue even now the purity, blamelessness, and holiness that will accompany our restored humanity when God re-creates heaven and earth at the return of Christ.

We therefore believe the promised restoration of true humanness at the return of Christ stands in contradiction to all human efforts to create human beings in the image and likeness of artificial technologies, as in for example the practices of transhumanism as it aims toward a post humanist world.

We believe that living according to God's creational intent is central to purity and holiness, whereas violating God's laws, ways, and wisdom leads to the corruption of our humanness and, finally, death. The only remedy for such moral and physical corruption is the redeeming and re-creating power of God through Jesus Christ.







*Rendering of The Morris Family Center for Law & Liberty Complex  
which is currently under construction and slated to open July 2022.*



## PILLAR VIII

### Governmental INSTITUTIONS

We believe in governmental institutions as established by God for the purpose of justice and human flourishing. We believe in the necessity of accountability in social life, as determined by just and fair structures of government, while also insisting that the freedoms of conscience, speech, and religious liberty in all matters of faith, practice, and belief must be maintained and supported. We seek always to honor the just and necessary constraints of a civil society and will work within the social contract to fulfill our responsibilities, though always subordinating all social and political demands to our loyalty to God and his will.





## PILLAR IX

### *The Christian* **UNIVERSITY**

We believe that a Christian university is a particular kind of university but it also shares certain historic functions common to all universities properly so called: a respect for the conscience of others, a love of learning, and the provision of an environment conducive to listening, debate, and the preservation, discovery, synthesis, and dissemination of knowledge. These functions represent intrinsic goods worth preserving, defending, and enabling to flourish.

The Christian university also exists at the interface between the church as God's imperfect but representative people and the world in its brokenness. We will therefore seek to translate the cultural, world-shaping mandates embedded in our Christian worldview as far as possible into the traditional structures of higher education, while also seeking to adapt and transform those structures in ways that are faithful to the pursuit of truth in every sphere of reality and that enable us efficiently to accomplish our purpose and mission as a Christian university, redeeming and re-creating power of God through Jesus Christ.

*HBU faculty/staff attend service in HBU's Belin Chapel located in the Morris Cultural Arts Center.*





## *The Mystery of* **UNITY IN CHRIST**

The restoration of the world involves, at its deepest levels, the reversal of human alienation from God, from other people, and from the creation. The rebellion of the human heart against God and the consequent corruption of the creation permeate the personal, social, and physical structures of human existence. Human societies embody these patterns of brokenness and are divided, racist, greedy, lustful, violent, and perverse, reflecting an idolatrous will to power. But these evidences of human pride have been denounced in Christ, the crucified and resurrected Son of God, who has conquered the powers of darkness, inaugurated the reign of God, and established his church, a community that, though itself still broken, best exemplifies in its Lord and the effects of the Spirit the beginning of a new creation, the restoration of all things. All peoples in Christ are united to one another, freed from the enslaving forces of lust, materialism, class, race, and power. Christ is reversing the prideful consequences of the Tower of Babel and creating a new people, his body, who no longer reflect the status distinctions of nations and ethnicities, slave and free, male and female, educated and foolish, Jew and Gentile. The walls of division that separate the human family are broken down in Christ, who thus establishes the true peace of God. This peace from oneness, a mystery begun in Christ and worked toward by the church, will be fully revealed at the return of Christ, when “the glory of God will fill the earth like the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14; cf. Isaiah 11:9; John 12:20-32; Ephesians 2:1-3:21; Philippians 3:20-21).





## EPILOGUE

Like every confession of enduring convictions, this one, too, has emerged from a particular historical context. This vision document for Houston Baptist University grows out of listening sessions and information gathered over the last several years, but these words are being written during the COVID-19 crisis, whose end we have yet to foresee. The pandemic has changed much of how we manage and deliver the content of higher education and affects greatly our ability to project trends for the future. In addition to the virus-related social and economic turmoil and the subsequent conditions of rapid change that it has generated and under which all of us operate—whether in higher education or other enterprises—this document is being composed on the heels of the most divisive, rancorous, and bitterly fought national elections since the reelection of Abraham Lincoln in 1864. The United States is experiencing a cultural divide of significant proportions; one even hears use of the word “secession.” This social chasm did not suddenly occur. We are reminded more than ever that politics is downstream from culture and that

the divisions we are now experiencing, though no doubt exacerbated by the recent election cycle, have a longer history, going back many decades at least. We didn’t get to this point of national crisis overnight, and it will not be repaired with a series of court decisions or legislative maneuvers.

All of us, in our families, work environments, professional associations, voluntary societies, and political organizations, must consider and reflect upon the roots of these chaotic days and look for deeper sources of renewal whereby some modicum of peace and unity can be achieved. We must undertake painstaking and patient efforts at considering the things that truly matter. Political structures, parties, and leaders have great influence, but unity and renewal will not happen through new laws, suppression, censorship, or political mandate; nor do we require or want superficially contrived methods of uniformity. Rather, we need at a minimum good faith discussions of honest differences within contexts of mutual respect and freedom. These are long-term projects.





We are not utopians. These problems are deeply embedded within the human situation, individually and socially; but we also believe that universities, though they too have contributed to our social ills, can provide (as can the family, houses of worship, and other voluntary societies) a context for approaching these age-old problems of human brokenness. Universities by their very nature and historical disposition are well situated to undertake this kind of long-term work by recommitting themselves as models and laboratories of freedom, thus reflecting the human capacity to tolerate vigorous differences. American universities must preserve and in some cases restore their historic practices of protecting and exercising the freedoms of conscience and speech. These historic behaviors and commitments can begin to renew the role

of education, including university education, in our culture. Honoring these values will engender and in some cases restore public respect for the university and its mission. The university must, by conversation, reflection, research, writing, and teaching, exemplify those unifying commitments that can draw us together into a just and tolerant society, modeling what it means to be truly human.

Houston Baptist University endeavors to be just such a university—founded and framed by the convictions of these Ten Pillars, animated and sustained by our central confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. By God’s grace, we will be a place of stable shelter where wisdom may flourish even as the winds blow and the nations rage.

<sup>1</sup> Some phrases and themes borrowed from “The Ten Pillars: Faith and Reason in a Great City,” Houston Baptist University, amended August 2016, <https://hbu.edu/about-hbu/the-ten-pillars/>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, “The Christian University: Eleven Theses,” *First Things*, January 1996, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/01/the-christian-university-eleven-theses>.

<sup>3</sup> Analogy borrowed from N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 463. See also N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), Ch. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The word *worldview*, if narrowly understood, would privilege the notion of viewing or looking. However, we include in our use of the word other senses (physical and intuitive) and ways of knowing (individual or communal), such as listening to music or touching material objects, to enable the gathering and assimilation of data.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller summary of the biblical narrative and its implications, see *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Ch. 7.