

# **BAYLOR UNIVERSITY**

## **FOUR GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES**

### **General Education Assessment Committee**

**October 2018**

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The four general education outcomes below have been developed by the university's General Education Assessment Committee to provide guidance for all of the university's schools/colleges as they review, assess, and make determinations regarding general education coursework within their respective units. Since the beginning of its consideration of general education outcomes during the 2007-2008 academic year, the Office of the Provost and the General Education Assessment Committee have divided the moral and intellectual education for all undergraduate students into four categories: Christian Perspective, Critical Thinking, Civic Engagement, and Communication. These outcomes, also known as the "Four Cs," were first published by the General Education Assessment Committee in spring 2008. During the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic years, the Committee expanded on the brief descriptions from 2008 to provide the university's schools/colleges with additional guidance and to provide a more complete foundation for assessment.

These fuller statements, included below, have now been endorsed at the Provost level as an official expression of the general education outcomes for the university. The Committee and the Office of the Provost offer these descriptions as guidance for the various schools/colleges as they follow the university's standard curriculum review process (through curriculum committees within the various academic units) to make determinations regarding general education requirements. These statements also are intended as guidance to all Baylor faculty members—especially those who teach general education courses—as they seek to provide the richest possible educational experience for all students.

The members of the General Education Assessment Committee stand ready to discuss the four outcomes with any colleagues who would like to explore them further.

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### **Christian Perspective**

"Baylor University remains a place where the Lordship of Jesus Christ is embraced, studied, and celebrated. We love God with our heart, so we are compelled to care for one another and to address the challenges of our hurting world. We love God with our soul, so we are called to worship Him and to serve Him in building His church. We love God with our mind, so we are called to instruction, research, scholarship, and creative endeavors that truth may be discovered and disseminated, beauty revealed, and goodness honored" (*Pro Futuris*).

## I

Growing out of deeply rooted convictions such as these, Baylor's general education curriculum necessarily includes a Christian perspective. By introducing students to the narrative of the Christian scriptures, to the convictions, experiences, and lessons of the church through history, and to the claims of God's call upon our lives here and now, we prepare students to realize their highest vocation as human beings.

The signal elements of Christian perspective originate in the grand biblical narrative that encompasses God's creation of the cosmos, the calamity of the fall, the calling of Israel as God's chosen people, the faithfulness and failures of its kings and prophets and poets, the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth, together with his ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection from death, the birth of the Church through the Holy Spirit, its ongoing life as the body of Christ, and the expected consummation of God's work in the world. Christian perspective finds further enrichment in a heritage of sin and salvation, which encompasses the formation of the Christian church and its traditions, the expansion of the church and development of the Christian intellectual tradition during the Middle Ages, the age of Reform (both Catholic and Protestant), and finally the rise of modernity with its challenges to Christian faith, both positive and negative.

The foregoing narrative meets us in the here and now, not in a state of completion, but as an unfolding account of God's redemptive work in the world. We are called to position our own narrative within it. In a fallen world, we must seriously regard the forces of injustice, despair, and ignorance that threaten our undoing. We participate in the sin of the world when our purposes are askew from God's purposes, thereby distorting the image of God in which we were created and subjecting the rest of creation to corruption. We thus inhabit a world in perennial need of mercy, redemption, and renewal. God overcomes our calamity through the act of singular grace in which the word of God becomes flesh, confronts the world's fallenness, perfects the image of God in humanity, and bears the consequences of our sin in order to save us. With this singular grace come singular exhortations: "Love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "love your neighbor as yourself."

## II

The life and teaching of Christ impress upon us the importance of all-encompassing commitment in Christian life. As we embrace our charge to glorify God in all that we say and do, what is the role of Christian perspective for participation in university life?

First, Christian perspective provides a frame of reference for understanding. God is the absolute reality and source of all being. Creation is good and is endowed with truth, beauty, and purpose. Christian perspective thus invests the human pursuit of understanding with confidence that there is truth to be understood, even as it acknowledges that we see truth with imperfect clarity. Each discipline in the diverse academic spectrum focuses on some aspect of the complex reality in which we live and makes a distinctive contribution to our understanding of the whole. Any judgment on the collective significance offered by these diverse insights presumes a unifying perspective on the world, its most fundamental realities, the principles by which they are organized, and the purposes breathing life into the whole. From such Christian perspective, all aspects of creation are seen as

having their origin in God and participating jointly in the goodness of creation. When set in this context, our diverse insights cohere and make their profoundest contribution to human understanding and flourishing.

Second, the thoughtful development of Christian perspective helps us engage in morally laden practices that form our characters and minds. Every virtue, brought under Christ's Lordship, becomes weighted with particular significance. The meaning of such virtues of character as justice, courage, temperance, humility, magnanimity, and generosity is understood most fully in the light of Christ. Likewise, the import of such intellectual virtues as wisdom, prudence, understanding, knowledge, and art becomes most evident when they are properly oriented toward delight in God. Out of the richness of Christian perspective we embrace and explore, we prepare ourselves to realize our highest creaturely possibilities as persons whose source and end are held in the providential care of the triune God.

Third, such carefully cultivated Christian perspective seeks to align the higher goals we have for our work with God's purposes. The potential of a scholarly method to discern truth, to reveal beauty, or to honor goodness may be independent of the perspective of the person who implements it. Indeed such independence may be built into the method precisely because the nature of the subject requires it. But independence in method does not entail indifference to the ends toward which it is directed. Christian perspective incorporates such methods into pursuits that seek ultimately to honor God. We are called to be stewards of the good creation, to discern truth and seek wisdom, to uncover and celebrate beauty, to bring succor to a world in need, to serve the common good of society, and to tend responsibly to the necessities of this life – all in a way that honors God and the goodness of God's creation.

Finally, Christian perspective enables an understanding of life as vocation that aspires to glorify and serve God. A sense of vocation begins with a broad view of the grand purposes for creation revealed in the Christian narrative and is further cultivated through reflection on how those purposes manifest themselves in our particular life circumstances. Such a perspective enables us to regard as meaningful our goals and life choices as we respond to the summons to participate in the unfolding narrative of creation and redemption according to God's purposes.

### III

When students learn what it means to love God with their minds, their educational experience will help them strive to understand how these broad purposes play out in the particularities of their own lives. Such an experience begins with a thoughtful introduction to Christian scripture and heritage, which provides the foundation into which such an understanding may be anchored. We must also engage our students at points of greater personal and intellectual maturity in thinking about the breadth and depth of Christian perspective as it relates to their disciplines, their lives, their callings, and the complexities of the world in which they live.

Baylor's mission and identity call for a Christian perspective that is intellectually, morally, and spiritually bold. It is ambitious to imagine that in four years of education we can cultivate in students a Christian perspective adequate to honor the inestimable grandeur and glory of the triune God, the complexities of human life, and the demands of a mysterious and often dangerous world.

Nonetheless, we set forth in summary fashion here an ideal that is demanding enough to call forth the best effort and highest order of stewardship of which we are capable.

## **Critical Thinking**

“Because we believe that all truth is open to human inquiry, Baylor University supports academic programs, within and across disciplines, which encourage the vigorous and open pursuit of truth by all the methods of scholarship . . . that add to the sum of human knowledge and that apply knowledge to the technological, scientific, and cultural advancement of society” (*Pro Futuris*).

### **I**

Built upon indefatigable commitment to seek truth, Baylor’s general education curriculum emphasizes critical thinking. Indeed, excellence in critical thinking fulfills one central aspect of our human potential. This is because critical thinking involves developing good judgment and understanding that lead, finally, to wisdom. The cultivation of wisdom is an ambitious goal, and it calls for a curriculum that both confronts students with deep and abiding questions as well as equips them with the critical and creative thinking skills to address them: questions about our nature, aspirations, failings, and hopes. For this one needs methods of investigation and persuasion that are truth conducive. In short, Baylor aims to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for the pursuit of wisdom and the transformation such pursuit yields.

Yet critical thinking possesses ordinary, daily utility too. In our private and public lives, problems must be understood, solutions sought, and decisions made. Critical thinking helps one navigate ethical dilemmas in the workplace, community, or family; make informed decisions in matters momentous and mundane; cope with the challenges of twenty-first-century life in a contested global context; and respond wisely and well to God’s call through Christ. Critical thinking thus has intrinsic value in its expression of our highest human possibilities and instrumental value in its usefulness for good personal, professional, and public decisions.

### **II**

Practices of good reasoning lie at the heart of critical thinking. Good reasoning can involve mastery of discipline-specific vocabulary and techniques. However, a few basic concepts undergird strong critical thinking skills: argument, evidence, inference, deduction, induction, fallacy, validity, reliability, and soundness. Competent critical thinkers proficiently identify and evaluate the implicit and explicit reasons underlying conclusions. They also willingly consider alternative, competing, or conflicting perspectives, and they show openness to adjusting conclusions when faced with new and compelling evidence. A related skill is the ability to ask pertinent, probing questions that prompt better arguments, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Baylor seeks more, however, than merely teaching the concepts of sound critical thinking and helping students practice good reasoning skills. Beyond acquaintance with concepts and techniques, Baylor’s students also need excellence of character and mind to embody critical thinking at its best. At stake are intellectual virtues like integrity (attending to details and not

taking short cuts), courage (willingness to make personal sacrifices in the pursuit of truth), curiosity (a commitment to being inquisitive in the pursuit of noble aims), fair-mindedness (giving fair hearing to opposing views), honesty (a commitment to truth, both as a means and end), humility (willingness, even eagerness, to be corrected in the pursuit of truth), and tenacity (a commitment to the truth that does not give up easily).

As students grow proficient in the concepts, skills, attributes of character that define good critical thinkers, they correlatively will exhibit clarity, logic, breadth, and depth in their work. Whether writing or speaking, they will support claims with evidence, provide arguments for their theses, identify and present multiple perspectives, and draw warranted conclusions. Moreover, by striving for excellence in thought, they also will continuously seek to improve the quality of their thinking. The desire to think deeply and well about a particular issue often opens up broader understanding and hopefully even wisdom.

Indeed, for these reasons critical thinking integrally supports the other core competencies. As there is a harmony of faith and reason, a *Christian perspective* deems critical thinking not only as possible, but essential. Effective *communication* requires critical thinking, for authoritative pronouncements without reasons are opaque and passionate appeals without critical acumen are demagogic. Finally, success in critical thinking is essential to responsible *civic engagement*, for it enables understanding of the issues confronting our neighborhoods, churches, cities, and countries; informs reasonable decisions at the ballot box; and helps us see the limits of our own perspectives by understanding the strengths of others' perspectives, just as it helps us explain and defend our positions to others. In sum, critical thinking expresses a rational nature given to us by God, facilitates constructive communication between those with different perspectives and the discovery of common ground, and supports the shared deliberation and communication essential to civic engagement in a pluralistic, democratic society.

### III

*Pro Futuris* reminds us that Baylor strives to extend the range of discovered truth while integrating it with revealed truth, holding together “the value of an intellectually informed faith and a religiously informed education.” In addition, Baylor strives “to develop responsible citizens, educated leaders, dedicated scholars, and skilled professionals who are sensitive to the needs of a pluralistic culture.” Critical thinking is essential for achieving these noble ends.

The importance of critical thinking for Baylor students is especially great as they embark on lives of leadership and service. The discipline that critical thinking imparts to one's encounter with a complex environment, the check it supplies on hasty or ill-informed judgments about unfamiliar circumstances, and the encouragement it gives to evidence and logic over bias or unfounded assumptions—all these qualities of critical thinking commend it as a core competency for all of our students.

Excellence in critical thinking constitutes an indispensable element for a transformational education in which “academic excellence and life-changing experiences ignite leadership potential that increases our students' desire for wisdom, understanding of calling, and preparation for service in a diverse and interconnected global society.”

## Civic Engagement

“... our Christian faith, in conjunction with our expertise and resources, inspires a desire to address systemic problems facing our community, both local and global, and renews our dedication to improvement of self and service to others. . . . These might be residents of nearby neighborhoods with economic needs or members of a marginalized group in another hemisphere” (*Pro Futuris*).

### I

Across Baylor’s storied history stretches an abiding devotion to serving others. From its founding in 1845 to its twenty-first-century present, Baylor has proclaimed itself *Pro Ecclesia*, *Pro Texana*. Consider President Samuel Palmer Brooks’ reminder to Baylor graduates of 1907: “You can do little for your country if you are ignorant of its needs or careless of its good name, or heedless of its calls, or leave to others the performance of civil duties. Education fits for service.” In an even higher rhetorical register, President Pat Neff wrote, “You had as well try to take the blush of beauty from the matchless morning, or the brilliant blue from the bending skies as to separate a man’s civil obligations from his Christian duty.” In a longstanding, principled way, then, Baylor has striven to “offer our distinctive knowledge . . . to address systemic problems in our community and throughout the world,” integrating “service into the fabric of campus life, grounded in a Christian understanding of hospitality that motivates humble service to all even as we remain faithful to our distinctive commitments” (*Pro Futuris*).

### II

“Civic” derives from the Latin term *civis*, pertaining to a citizen. It invokes a venerable tradition of responsibility to and for others. Citizens bind themselves in solidarity with others to the good of the whole, expressed in a willingness to dedicate themselves to it and make sacrifices for it. *Christian* citizens understand such sacrificial dedication under the aegis of Christ’s call to love our neighbors as ourselves. “Engagement” derives from the French root *engager*, meaning to pledge oneself to do something. An engagement brings one from abstract or general intentions to a concrete promise, one made with definite intentions and particular responsibilities.

Civic engagement at Baylor embraces the meaning of each term in relation to two types of community, both of which promote human excellence. Because Baylor is *Pro Ecclesia*, we want students to see how civic engagement flourishes in the context of religious freedom and unhindered dialogue on matters of religious conscience, conviction, and faith. Because Baylor is *Pro Texana*, we want students to accomplish great things through civic engagement undertaken as “responsible citizens, educated leaders, dedicated scholars, and skilled professionals.”

Within that frame of reference, three key convictions concerning God and state, the rule of law, and the cultivation of character guide Baylor’s understanding of civic engagement.

First, insofar as the “City of God” differs in purpose, character, and importance from the “City of Man,” tension or even conflict can arise in civic engagement. Christians prize freedom of conscience knowing that every earthly community is subject to moral evaluation and subordinate

to God. As we “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” religious faith may call for civil disobedience just as it motivates civic commitment.

Second, civic engagement depends on the rule of law. A proper framework of law based in justice provides a common currency of citizenship. It allows us to live and work together in spite of our differences. It moderates our most selfish passions, supplies a framework for common political engagement, and helps provide us with a common identity. We thus do well to promote the rule of law, ensure its just application, and improve it for the benefit of all.

Third, good character matters for praiseworthy civic engagement. For this reason we challenge students to develop their finest qualities: mature wisdom to judge in complex circumstances where the common good lies; devotion to justice and honorable conduct; courage to face hardships; generosity toward those who are less fortunate; and willingness to learn from open and mutually respectful debate. Civic engagement also includes an appreciation for the beauty that can enrich the public weal in any number of settings, from the concert hall to the art gallery to the natural world. Virtue, President George Washington tells us, “is a necessary spring of popular government.” Well-ordered communities form good characters, while people of high character safeguard the shared wellbeing of their communities.

### III

Civic engagement—properly conceived, thoroughly taught, and thoughtfully experienced—contributes to the project of liberal education. Guided by the vision cast above, Baylor encourages students to pursue a deeper and richer life in community. Just and morally aware communities encompass others, liberating students from unwise fixations on self. By recognizing community challenges that have confronted other people in different places and times, we free students from the tyranny of the immediate. Drawing together those with whom they feel strong bonds, students learn freedom from pride, envy, greed, and other vices that impair community. So it is that Baylor invites students into four contexts for civic engagement.

*Campus.* Civic engagement, as a commitment, discipline, and activity, should begin within our own campus community. For one thing, courses in varied academic disciplines help students learn to understand, value, and practice civic engagement. For another thing, Baylor offers innumerable co-curricular opportunities to become better informed about topics, issues, or events that shape the world in which they live, including scholarly lectures, conversations with public intellectuals and political leaders, as well as literary festivals, art exhibitions, theatrical productions, musical concerts, and recitals.

*City and County.* *Pro Futuris* commits us to “extend the campus in time and space to embrace our entire community in relationships of caring and mutual benefit.” Baylor has a long history of local engagement activities ranging from service projects to performances to classroom field experiences. Faculty and students sustain many close relationships with churches, service organizations, and educational entities, whether in Waco or in their hometowns.

*State and National.* Another commitment of *Pro Futuris* recognizes that inasmuch as we have moral obligations to our communities, Baylor “supports academic programs that recognize the

importance of human institutions, promote an understanding of and responsible participation in economic and social systems, foster citizenship, enhance community, and encourage service.” Baylor’s required course on American constitutional principles and other academic offerings address this commitment well. To those we proudly commend internship experiences in Waco, Austin, and Washington, DC, along with ROTC programs that prepare students for military service. We also encourage informed civic engagement through knowledgeable participation in political activities.

*Global.* Baylor has a long history of global mission and study abroad experiences. Immersion in another culture powerfully enlarges students’ sense of community engagement. Even right here on campus, many elements of the curriculum introduce students to the rich language and literature, contemporary political life, and effect on our own national community of cultures around the world. Whether at home or abroad, Baylor cultivates students that understand what President Brooks grasped in 1914: “our work here at Baylor has been in vain if you have not caught the spirit of world change, of world growth, of world need, of world service, of world comradeship. . . . All this is not for self but service.”

In all these ways civic engagement constitutes a crowning achievement of a robust liberal arts education at Baylor. Built on the foundation of Christian perspective, critical thinking, and communication, civic engagement outwardly manifests an inward formation of mind, heart, and soul intended by the curriculum and co-curriculum. Drawing on both faith and reason, the individual virtues of human beings of high character, and the just institutions of free communities, civic engagement helps fulfill Baylor’s bold mission: “to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.”

## **Communication**

“All of these pursuits must be . . . coupled with scrupulous care for the development of competencies [students] will need to succeed and flourish in the 21st century” (*Pro Futuris*).

### **I**

Communication undergirds all other core competencies of Baylor’s general education. Apart from the meaningful use of signs—whether in thought, speech, writing, figures, gestures, or art—neither understanding nor learning is possible. Furthermore, moving from rudimentary skills of communication to advanced proficiency enables growing mastery of such competencies as Christian perspective, critical thinking, and civic engagement.

Consider the profound relation between communication and *Christian perspective*. St. John writes in his gospel that “in the beginning was the λόγος.” Before anything else, the eternal Word of God was. Through God’s self-communication—in the beginning, the Word made flesh, and other revelatory words—we learn the highest possibilities of our humanly uttered words. To adapt a familiar Bible verse, “We speak because he first spoke to us” (1 Jn 4:19).



Another deep relationship arises between communication and *critical thinking*. We confidently believe that human speech matters, that words can truthfully grasp genuine realities, and that good reasoning sheds light on the pattern of the cosmos. Indeed, the Divine Word's first words of creation bring light to the world, both physically and spiritually (Gn 1:3). Because we are made in the likeness and image of God, sound critical thinking, good reasoning, and well-wrought words can illumine through a power shared with us by God.

Not least of all, when we communicate well—to ourselves in thought or with others in spoken and written words—we participate in a divinely blessed world in which we are not alone, but are with God, with God's good creation, and with one another. Herein lies the richest sources of solidarity with others and life-giving *civic engagement*. Put simply, communication makes possible communion with family, friends, neighbors, fellow citizens, strangers, and God.

Yet before we communicate well, we first encounter the limits of our words. As infants, we utter sounds and make gestures that communicate imperfectly. Our cries communicate—sometimes adequately and sometimes abjectly—our desires for nourishment, relief, or tender communion with father and mother. Often enough, senescence returns us to inarticulacy and the possibilities of isolation and vulnerability. Indeed, even at the height of human excellence, failures of communication remind us of our limits and our aspirations to understand and to be understood.

## II

A curriculum that fosters the skills of writing and speaking does not merely lessen impediments to communication. It extends our possibilities for good, true, and beautiful communication. Sound, honest, and artful expression is therefore essential to key goals in *Pro Futuris*: transformational education, compelling scholarship, and informed engagement.

What is communication and what are its exemplary characteristics? Communication is the transmission and reception of beliefs, convictions, feelings, ideas, information, narratives, perceptions, or other exchanges between one human and another. All these are conveyed through *signs*, whether by speech, writing, gesture, or performing arts.

Outstanding oral and written communication combine qualities of substance and style. Historically, sustained reflection on those qualities began with the fifth-century Greek rhetoricians and sophists. Aristotle subsequently described three principal modes of persuasive communication: *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. With varied emphases and alternative terms, the communication arts still emphasize the importance of authorial character, confidence, image, and voice, all elements of *ethos*. They commend the centrality of *logos*, with its arguments, reasons, evidences, and conclusions. And *pathos*, affective appeal to an audience's sense, feeling, and passion, continues to play a key role in artful communication.

Two special forms of communication in the university—academic writing and speaking—require purposefulness, organization, logical integrity, supporting examples and evidence, and clear conclusions. Good communication depends upon those attributes, yet they are insufficient for excellence. Truly outstanding communication involves sound *diction*; it uses the right words to convey the intended meaning. Exemplary communication is marked by proper *syntax*; particular

words are well connected to others. Excellent communication is, with some exceptions, characterized by *conciseness*; even lengthy works or speeches ideally demonstrate economical expression, using the words needed for the occasion and no more. Great communication unfolds with *elegance*; it exemplifies beauty, cadence, decorum, proportion, and where needed artful repetition. Moreover, the finest communication shows attention to *tone*; it maximizes the rhetorical possibilities of mood, emphasis, and the like in relation to the intended audience. Preparing students to recognize and utilize these substantive and stylistic qualities is important.

Indeed, we seek far more than acquainting students with communication theories or refining their skills as writers and speakers. Masterful communication helps students realize their human potential. The truth of this claim becomes apparent through further reflection on the relation of communication to other general education outcomes. Apart from communication—God’s self-disclosure to us in the Word which was in the beginning, the words of Jesus during his earthly ministry, the gospel writers’ proclamation, and the ongoing witness of Christ’s church handed on to us—we could have no *Christian perspective*. Likewise, the bare prospect of communication is required for *critical thinking*; the best critical thinking realizes its full perfection when well communicated. In the absence of speech, writing, and performance—wherein we remember our past, share our present, and frame future aspirations, and whereby we volunteer reasons, venture rebuttals, and seek common ground—we could have no *civic engagement*. With good justification, Baylor’s general education lifts high good communication.

### III

Liberal education frees us from the limitations of our ignorance and ineptitude, and it frees us for human fulfillment of the highest sort. Learning to communicate well features prominently in such an education. That is, when students speak artfully, write effectively, or communicate admirably through fine art or in a second language, they enlarge their capacity to understand truth, delight in beauty, and pursue good. Not only do they grow thereby toward their potential, but their excellent communication benefits others and amplifies our shared human culture. So, as our students go forth into the world, their personal fulfillment depends on having learned the art of communication. Clearly at stake as well is their success as professionals, and also their contributions to flourishing civic, cultural, ecclesial, and familial life.

Indeed, Baylor’s mission of *Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana* along with its strategic vision *Pro Futuris* bring focus to our efforts to teach students how to communicate well. Our students move into the world as emissaries of our mission and vision. In a world created by the Word of God, and in a human history touched by the Word made flesh, our alumni proclaim the living λόγος of St. John’s gospel; they announce good news in the mission field, medicine, education, business, art, law, and other callings. For the church and the world, they must learn to present their own words through speech, writing, gesture, and art, bearing witness to the Word with beauty, clarity, and sensitivity.

Our aspirations call for a commensurately ambitious pedagogy. In large lecture classes, labs, art studios, recitation sessions, and co-curricular life, students hone their ability to craft a message or create it spontaneously; to receive messages accurately and intently through attentive reading, listening, and looking; and effectively to adapt, modify or enhance the thoughts they are trying to

convey in wide-ranging media. Communication is not a one-way action, but an interaction and, at its best, a mutual participation and sharing—indeed, a communion.

These are lofty goals—spreading the light, spreading the Word “even unto the end of the world.” Teaching the art of communication necessarily figures prominently in our educational mission, a mission sustained by the promise of the Lord: “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:11).