

FAITHFUL LIVES

Christian Reflections on the World – Faithful Education



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The mission of College of the Ozarks is to provide the advantages of a Christian education for youth of both sexes, especially those found worthy, but who are without sufficient means to procure such training.

Faithful Lives: Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective.

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From the Editors:

Wisdom Cries Out in the Quad

Standing in line to receive her freshly screen-printed orientation shirt, Wisdom knew she had come to the right place. She had heard about universities like this—top-ranked scholars in every discipline, deep commitments to student learning, and pretty decent dorms as well. Wisdom had gone to college, and she could sense things were going to change.

As the months passed, Wisdom regularly attended her new classes, where she learned that science and faith are entirely incompatible and that truth is simply a social construct which has no connection to reality. In fact, she was told absolute truth is merely a smokescreen for power-plays put together by those who want to be in charge. Even her philosophy class seemed not to like her, much less love her.

By the end of the semester, Wisdom was reeling with confusion. What had happened? Her visions of the academy seemed fleeting, and her class instruction like grasping at the wind. Instead of finding coherence and understanding in her new institution, she found herself standing in the spitting snow one December day before finals, looking up at the bell tower. In that moment all of her frustration slowly built up to a scream that seemed to ring out through all creation . . . “WHERE AM I?”

Indeed, where is wisdom in today’s institutions of higher learning? Unfortunately, the concept of wisdom is hardly more celebrated and championed in Christian classrooms than in government supported universities, but it should be. The Bible’s wisdom tradition reflects a coherent, integrated, and faith-filled view of the created world. Daniel Estes writes, “In Proverbs, wisdom (*hokmā*) is skill in living as Yahweh intends, and often it is connected with understanding and knowledge. As in the rest of the Old Testament, wisdom has been embedded by Yahweh in his world, so it embraces all of life” (*Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 221-222). Grounded in

the fear of the Lord, growing in wisdom is increasing in our understanding of the world God created and our ability to live faithfully in accordance with what he has commanded.

For these reasons, wisdom breaks down our commonly held sacred/secular divides and biblically motivates Christians to pursue knowledge, truth, beauty, and goodness wherever they may be found in God's good creation. In the essays included in this issue of *Faithful Lives*, our contributors have wrestled with how to faithfully educate in the Christian college classroom. While different perspectives with regard to different fields of study are evident, there remains a unified focus and vision for seeing students' lives transformed through faith, knowledge, and applied skills. In the world of Christian higher education, where institutions are longing for definitions, demonstrations, and concepts of integration, wisdom cries out in the quad . . . "HERE I AM!"

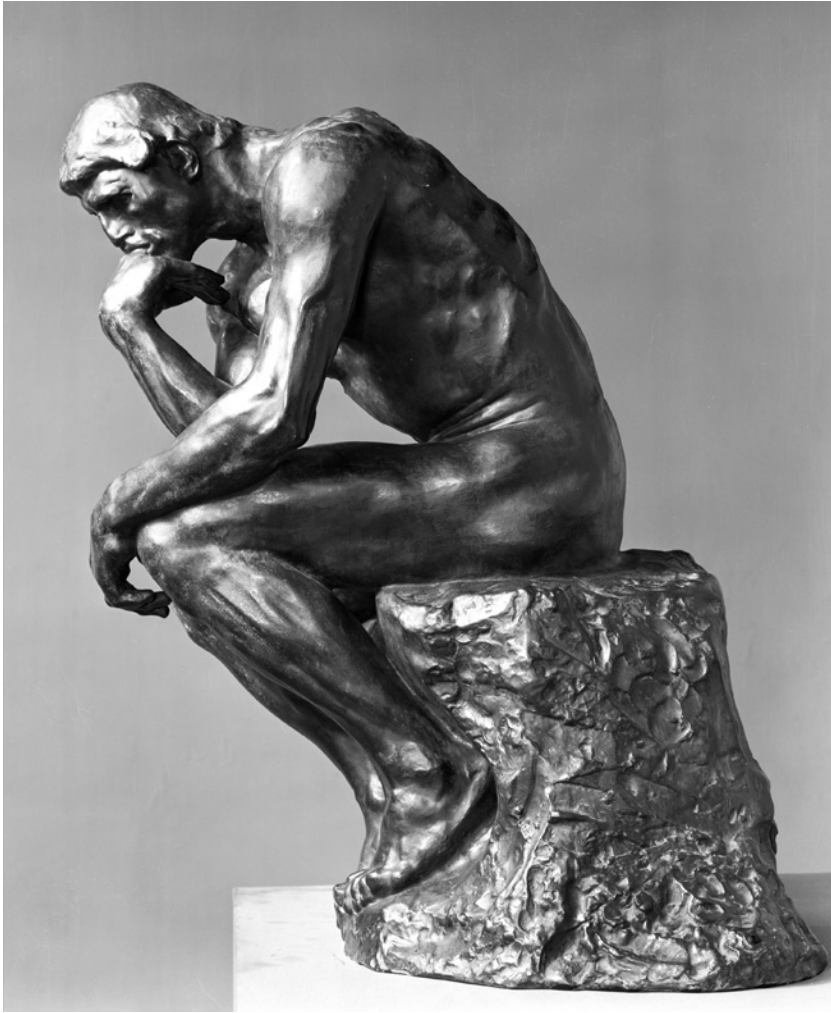
Soli Deo Gloria

William R. Osborne

FAITHFUL LIVES



Essays



The Thinker

Auguste Rodin

bronze

modelled 1888, cast.1910

If I were to ask you to conjure up an image of Auguste Rodin's, *The Thinker*, I believe that you would envision the colossal, bronze figure of a seated man (naked) resting his chin upon the back of his hand. Perhaps you first saw this impressive figure outside of the majestic *Pantheon* on a trip to Paris. Perhaps while in Kansas City, you noticed the brooding figure of *The Thinker* prominently displayed outside of the Nelson Atkins Museum. I believe that I was first introduced to Rodin's *The Thinker* as a child one Saturday morning as I watched a cartoon cat be thrown into a vat of concrete. As the cat emerged, the quick-setting concrete formed him into *The Thinker*. Thank you, Looney Tunes® for bringing my life into direct contact with art.

What is less known about *The Thinker* is that the colossal bronze that we have come to know is a later enlargement of Rodin's more modest (70mm) figure known as *The Poet*. *The Poet* sits upon the tympanum of another famous Rodin sculpture, *The Gates of Hell*.¹ This figure actually represents the Italian author Dante, whose Inferno was the source from which Rodin drew his inspiration for the *Gates*.

As I rehearse my thoughts on *The Thinker*, which I usually visit at least once per year, I am reminded of how sad I am for the seated figure. His deep musings seem to bring little satisfaction to him as he passes the years in thought. The historical context that this figure was originally Dante pondering the inferno of hell explains the mood. Without the historical context, however, the figure becomes a universal personification, one that lacks the specificity of identity but morphs into an "everyman" figure that one can identify with. As I view *The Thinker*, I am reminded that knowledge without purpose leads to a life of dissatisfaction. True knowledge of the world and the satisfaction of knowing it comes only through knowing the person and source of this world's creation.

— Richard Cummings

¹ <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/thinker>
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The Epistemological Vocation of the Christian University

Paul Kaak*

“We will never encourage bright and talented students to fear God and serve him in humility until we put aside piety that is sentimental and man-centered and bend all of our mental gifts to understand the riches of the Christian faith that we profess.”

—Nathan Hatch¹

Faithful education requires clarity about what education is and what the educator’s faith is directed toward. If the focus is *Christian* education then that idea needs to be made particularly clear. When Christian colleges and universities ascend to this difficult definitional task, they can properly direct their institution’s faithfulness, even as they support instructors seeking a meaningful match between their respective disciplines and the vocation of Christian higher education.

Colleges and universities are unique among the spheres of society. They engage undergraduates, graduate students, and doctoral students for a short period of time in concentrated study. This privileged space in a person’s life is focused on learning and, for most, learning about

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¹ Nathan Hatch. “Evangelical Colleges and the Challenge of Christian Thinking” in *The Reformed Journal*, September 1985, 15.

something specific. In truth, there is no other time in life like the years intentionally and intensely invested in pursuing a degree.

When families, or individuals, choose a Christian education they do not always know what that means. For some it simply means that their 18-year old will be in a Christian “environment,” protected from non-Christian influences and ideas. Others think a faith-based education is equated with chapel attendance, mission trips, and discipleship groups. Some attend a Christian school because they want the Bible/Theology classes that come with the package, expecting reinforcement of family convictions and youth group teachings. For others, within and without the institution, moral formation, perhaps highlighting issues in Christian ethics, or mentoring relationships, meets their expectations.

For some, this faithful education is primarily viewed as job preparation (which it is, of course, in most professional programs). However, for others university is thought to provide a Christian welcome into “the life of the mind” which is grounded in general coursework purportedly intended to groom liberally educated human beings.

In his helpful comments on institutional intelligence, university president Gordon Smith argues that “missional clarity is about a distinctive sense of the vocation of the institution: a deep and nuanced understanding of what this organization is called to do, at this time and place, within this economic, social, political demographic.” Christian universities need to move past the “ambiguity and uncertainty about their actual purpose or vocation.”² While each of the proposals noted above makes a valuable, and potentially adaptable, offering to the discussion of the vocation of the Christian university recommended here, they are still unfocused. To sharpen courses, academic programs, even marketing and faculty development, missional clarity is key. In the brilliant words of educational philosopher Neil Postman: *The school that has no end will come to an end.*³

² Gordon Smith, *Institutional Intelligence: How to Build an Effective Organization* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2017), 19.

³ Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

Our Epistemological Vocation

I propose that faithful education, institutionally and in the work of individual faculty (to whom this essay is primarily addressed) is a broadly epistemological one. During these few, special years, students need to be deeply engaged, focused, and developing themselves in the business of *knowing*. Students are investing time and money in learning that leads to *knowing* and their faculty are seasoned knowers who facilitate knowledge acquisition. Because the larger society knows that schools are “the institutions most affiliated with knowledge and learning,”⁴ Christian universities must live up to this basic perception. Faithfulness to that task keeps the public promise regarding the brand called “school”.

But Christian universities have an added dimension that is consistent with, while also magnifying, this brand promise. Along with the knowledge acquisition promised by any school, Christian universities must incorporate (but not exchange) meaningful discourse between inherited knowledge and the knowledge of the Christian faith. This is complex and crucial work that seemed so instinctive to our forebears. In preparing to expose the evangelical spirit as complicit in the anti-intellectual impulse of the American mind, historian Richard Hostadter notes that “the founding fathers of colonial education [in places like Harvard College] . . . intended their ministers to be educated side by side and in the same liberal curriculum with other civic leaders.”⁵ In early America it did not matter whether students were being prepared for service inside or outside religious settings, they received the same integrated education. In America today, however, the vocation of the faith-based university appears fractured. Stanley Hauerwas says “In truth, we must say that as Christians we have not thought hard about what intellectual difference Christian convictions might make for what is considered knowledge. As a result, our universities and colleges increasingly look like any other.”⁶ Faithfulness requires that we revive this task in earnest.⁷

⁴ Adam Hill, “Here’s How Higher Education Dies,” in *The Atlantic*, June 5, 2018, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/06/heres-how-higher-education-dies/561995/>.

⁵ Richard Hostadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 55, 60.

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living In Between* (Brazos Press, 1988), 239.

⁷ In his book *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, historian George Marsden hopefully notes “in the past generation, evangelicalism has been experiencing an intellectual renaissance notable especially for the cohort of excellent younger scholars.” (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 177.

My friend and colleague, APU philosophy professor Steve Wilkens says *Many believe that the Christian university offers a narrower perspective, a narrower education. But actually, we offer a bigger education.* Wilkens is describing a robust education that integrates Christian knowledge, understanding, and wisdom with the best content of an excellent traditional curriculum, preparing students with what they need to faithfully engage their vocational roles. Of such an education Richard Hughes explains “As Christians, we are committed to a highly particularistic tradition. Yet, as scholars, we are also committed to a radical search for truth that simultaneously embraces particularity and ambiguity, knowing and not knowing, affirmation and investigation. We are called to honor our Christian faith, but we are also called to take seriously the diversity of perspectives that abound in the modern academy. It is not our job to trump those perspectives with our Christian convictions. Instead, we are called to engage those perspectives, really engage them, and bring them into dialogue with the Christian faith.”⁸

Like other schools, our work is *knowing* (my title means to use the philosophic moniker “epistemological” broadly, with apologies to colleagues who are true-blue epistemologists). Our particular work as Christian schools is to reasonably and discerningly incorporate the vast and impressive knowledge of our faith into our learning environments while also appropriating forms of *knowing* that are peculiarly Christian.⁹

To build my case, I will offer comments on how faculty embedment in academic disciplines offers opportunities and challenges to the vocational task I am proposing. I follow this with a word about the priority of integrated knowledge after which I present illustrations of the instructor’s task and by raising questions about educational expectations. Finally, I will zero in on a simple paradigm, a faith-informed “trivium” of sorts, for Christian educators to consider as they design courses for the “bigger education” that Wilkens advocates.

⁸ Richard Hughes, *The Vocation of the Christian Scholar: How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), xvii, xviii.

⁹ In the original outline of this paper I had planned to discuss some of these forms, for example, the praxis model found in the literature of Practical Theology, embodiment-incarnational pedagogy, contemplative reading, service learning, etc. Space limitations require me to discuss forms such as these at another time.

Faithful Engagement in the Christian University's Epistemological Calling

The Pros and Cons of Academic Disciplines

The “we” Nathan Hatch is referring to in the epigram are Christian university professors who are contained in, and also trapped by,¹⁰ their respective academic disciplines. The emergence of academic disciplines¹¹ has aided in the efficiency of research through their narrowed focus in the advancement of knowledge. Bounded, as they are, by distinct language, particular topics, methodologies, and objectives, academic disciplines provide a rationale for both internal loyalty and the systematic exclusion of other regions of reality. In the university, faculty membership, requirements for a degree, and individual courses, can all be clearly defined and directed because of disciplines. If there were no such parameters, it would be hard to clearly articulate what a student received when they have finished their time at the university.

However, there is another side to the efficiency advantage. Because disciplines are turf that is brazenly protected, they are, at least in terms of perception, protected from outsiders whose ignorance is inadmissible or, worse yet, whose presumption may adulterate disciplinary purity. As a result, most faculty outside a discipline know [or believe] they cannot infiltrate academic areas that are not theirs. If they do not have formal training, let's say, in Bible, Theology, or History, they assume they are not welcome to engage these subjects. In my experience, most faculty are further convinced that they *are incapable* of interacting with

¹⁰ Elizabeth Hall notes “Every discipline has a set of epistemological assumptions and methodological practices that govern the practice of the discipline. . . . Many of these assumptions and commitments are in conflict with Christian beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Consequently, in some disciplines, Christian scholars have challenged the very rules by which the disciplinary game is played, noting the presence of these pre-theoretical commitments and suggesting alternatives consistent with Christian commitments.” (“Structuring the Scholarly Imagination: Strategies for Christian Engagement with the Disciplines” in *Christian Scholarship in the Twenty First Century: Prospects and Perils* (ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steve L. Porter, & Gregg A. Ten Elshof, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 105,106.

¹¹ See Stephen Toulmin, *Return to Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), esp. chapters 3 & 9 and Jerome Kagan, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

these subjects.¹² Yet “the pursuit of wisdom, sacramentally envisioned through the lens of an integrative habit of mind, rethinks the connection between religious and other forms of inquiry. The aim here is to reflect on and decipher how insights from various fields of knowledge . . . hang together in light of one another.”¹³ What is perceived as an incapacity, needs to become a strength, first for university faculty and, consequently, in their classrooms and their scholarship.

The Cons and Pros of the Theological Disciplines

Christian schools (and others) rightly recognize Biblical Studies, Theology (perhaps divided into Systematics, Historical, and Practical Theology), and Church/Christian History as disciplines in their own right. Defined degrees, assigned numbers in the Library of Congress, and a myriad of academic journals in these areas reinforce their identity as distinct areas of knowledge. It is – in part – because they have been specialized, however, that connective knowledge is difficult to procure and deliver. That these are disciplines, in and of themselves, sends the message that Christian knowledge is distinct from so-called “non-Christian” knowledge. Along similar lines that denote Sunday mornings at church is *the place* to learn the Bible (from *the man*), while the rest of the week is for real-world learning, the Christian university’s separation of Theological knowledge from the knowledge of Sociology, Literature, and Nursing communicates an erroneous message about the nature of reality, as well as the knowledge of reality. Inadvertently, even our believing students become dualists while the public contributions of our intellectual work are unimaginative and unconvincing.

In describing this problem, I do not mean to villainize these areas of Christian religious study. In fact, I am very grateful for these particular disciplines. In a way that is similar to the cloistered work of prayer engaged in by monks and nuns, the PhD in one of the Christian knowledge disciplines is pursuing “a way of paying attention to God, and to

¹² One hopeful indication that this can be stoutly overcome can be found in Oliver D. Crisp, Gavin D’Costa, Mervin Davies, & Peter Hampson (Eds.) *Christianity and the Disciplines: The Transformation of the University* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹³ Frederick D. Aquino, *The Integrative Habit of Mind* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 28.

everything else in its ‘God-relatedness.’”¹⁴ This is honorable work and necessary for the work of all Christian faculty being argued for in this paper. By investing their efforts in this way they have (for 2000+ years) been providing ways to make sense of God, his world, and his work in the world. As stewards of transdisciplinary knowledge, these are the scholars who have provided, and are working to provide, faith-focused scholarship. Thank God for them, for they are ambassadors, partners, and inter-locutors in the unique task of Christian education.

The Priority of Integrated Knowing in the Christian University

In spite of the challenges wrought by institutional design, values, and culture, *knowing* remains the main work of the university. It should be noted, furthermore, that this is an inclusive idea. Understanding and pursuing *knowing* links myriad themes, topics, practices, and methods within the broad family of epistemological aims. Suffice it to say that if *knowing* is the “end” of Christian education, then university educators must avoid being distracted by other worthy foci. In his book *The Idea of a Christian Society*, T.S. Eliot cautions that “The purpose of a Christian education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians: a system which aimed too rigidly at this end alone would become only obscurantists. . . . A Christian education would primarily train people to be able to think in Christian categories.”¹⁵

It may surprise some readers (as it surprises me to say so) that Stanley Fish famously argues for something like what I am promoting. Fish is not interested in Writing instructors getting political, striving for the moral development of their students, watching movies, or navel gazing. Fish expects those students to learn writing from an instructor whose job is, simply, to teach writing. University professors are to introduce students to new knowledge and equip students to go further with that knowledge when the course is done.¹⁶ I do not think he is wrong (students should

¹⁴ Charles M. Wood and Ellen Blue, *Attentive to God: Thinking Theologically in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 3.

¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 22.

¹⁶ Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12, 13.

get a solid education for the course they are in and for the program they are aiming to complete), but his discipline-bounded worldview keeps him from recognizing that knowledge of writing is related to larger creational truths that are relevant to the work of good and bad writing. In fact, in the *The Idea of a University* John Henry Newman suggests this is true for any area of study: “Admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable. How can we investigate any part of any order of Knowledge, and stop short of that which enters into every order? All true principles run over with it, all phenomena converge to it; it is truly the First and Last.”¹⁷

To all educators Fish says “Do Your Job” and “Don’t Try to Do Someone Else’s Job.” If Christian teachers did this, accompanied by the ontological conviction that all reality—and knowledge of it—is unified in Christ,¹⁸ a truly unique and vitally important feat would be achieved in society and in the lives of students. Some worry that such a focus diminishes the fullness of Christian life. “If we ask questions about knowledge and knowing,” inquires Locke Bowman, “Does this mean that we neglect affective matters? Does it mean that we cease to care about feelings and relationships, about openness to all the pains and joys of being human? Not at all! It is unfortunate that rigid dichotomies should have arisen between the affective and the cognitive.”¹⁹ Done well, faith-informed *knowing* can make direct and indirect contributions toward well-being and spiritual development.²⁰ And thankfully, many of our universities have an amazing, intelligent, and huge-hearted team of student life professionals who partner with us in the vital developmental challenges and opportunities that the persons we teach experience.

A note is important here, which will be further developed later. What kind of *knowing* are we most interested in? As Fish reminds us,

¹⁷ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University* (ed. Frank M. Turner; New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996), 29. Fish (p. 15) adds Newman to his “side.”

¹⁸ Colossians 1:15-17; See Newman, *The Idea of the University*, 45.

¹⁹ Locke E. Bowman, Jr., *Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls & Minds* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 1.

²⁰ Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), President of Magdalen College, Oxford said “It is true that thoughts and affections are the mutual causes of each other, as it is written, ‘While I was musing, the fire burned’ (Psa 39:3)—the thoughts are the bellows that kindle and inflame the affections. And then when they are inflamed, they cause thoughts to boil.” From Thomas Goodwin, *The Vanity of Thoughts*, (Chapel Library: 1999), 12 accessed July 12, 2018, <https://www.chapellibrary.org/files/6513/7643/3398/voth.pdf>.

developing disciplinary knowledge, and training in relevant skills, is both our institutional and ethical obligation. But, as Newman notes above, we cannot leave it there. Philosopher-Educator Alfred North Whitehead warns of what he calls “‘inert ideas’ – that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being . . . thrown into fresh combinations.”²¹ Newman expects university students to be “properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things.”²² In fact, he adds, “a truly great intellect . . . is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has insight into the influence of all these on another; without which there is no whole, and no centre.”²³ With Whitehead, Newman suggests that such an intellect “possesses the knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations”²⁴ and, concludes Newman, “knowledge, not merely considered as acquirement, but as philosophy.”²⁵ I can’t be sure, but I take Newman to be suggesting that knowing truths and their combinations is a structural necessity for those who would love wisdom.

The Instructor’s Task: Illustrations and Expectations

In the call to equip students to make these kinds of connections, however, only so much can be done in any given class or course. Forty-five semester hours puts limits on content, as long as a university is designed around disciplines, majors, and immersive preparation for particular professions. As already intimated, the *knowing* of the Christian university involves making theological-biblical connections because our view of reality “admits a God.” As *ordinary theologians* (if not **professional theologians**) “our hope of attaining to a genuine integration will rest on the assumption that the world itself, as a single created

²¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), 13.

²² Newman, *The Idea of the University*, 8.

²³ Ibid., 98.

²⁴ This correlates with what Jonathan Kvanvig defines as *understanding*. See his “Understanding” in *The Epistemology of Theology* (ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 175-189.

²⁵ Newman, *The Idea of the University*, 98.

reality, manifests an overall coherence and integration between its various aspects.”²⁶ Because ours is a bigger standpoint and thus a bigger education, we draw on the extensive scholarship—the manifestations of reason—of our faith tradition(s). We certainly will not always agree with Athanasius, Abelard, Theresa of Avila, and Aquinas, but their commentary on our shared story provides faith-informed assessments to our disciplinary knowledge resulting in practical wisdom related to the sacred work to which our graduates are called.

Let me illustrate: Reason does not require faith to recognize that the earth is an orb. Such knowledge is publically available to any human. But understanding that a Creator made the earth-orb involves faith. The former belief requires nothing of the believer, but the latter belief, with its concomitant understanding of a Creator who has acted and spoken, entails a response. If there is a Maker then we must determine not if, but how we will love him, obey him, worship him, think about him, and act on his behalf in the world. Professors are typically committed to their discipline’s many the-earth-is-round pronouncements. These truths can be distributed to students, (à la Stanley Fish) with passion (which, of course, adds to the potential for student learning). The Christian professor, however, has more to say, and in doing so, confesses that she does not stand alone. Knowing that James Houston testifies *I Believe in the Creator*, the science educator invites Houston’s insights into the learning.²⁷ Music theory professors will distinguish between *ritardando* and *rigenuto* with their young composers; the Christian music professor may also discuss the social power of music in light of Boethius’ (ad 477-524) insights on the soul-transforming effect of music as found in his *De institutione musica*.

Interest in such things implies a prior faith-commitment on the part of the educator, something that professors in Christian universities are typically expected to have. But being aware that not every student may share this commitment, the Christian professor may want to adjust her expectations and her instructional disposition. While aiming to renew students’ minds, expecting faith-informed learning to be transformative for every learner may be to expect too much. Sneaking faith-informed insights in one’s teaching or, alternatively, to pronounce them

²⁶ Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1995), 104.

²⁷ James Houston, *I Believe in the Creator* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Press, 1995).

in a sermonic way, may lead to resentment among some students and disappointment in the faculty member. The prudent teacher will seek to integrate relevant Christian wisdom, but not merely as a gratuitous “add-on” to the “real” content. Rather, it will be introduced in a way that resonates with the academic context and the particular academic content. James Houston contributes in the science class (or the art class), Boethius in the music education class. Perhaps the courageous work of Nancy Eiesland²⁸ will bring insight for Disability Studies students, while St. Francis²⁹ and Pope Francis³⁰ might weigh in during an environmental ethics class. As Hughes notes, the point is not to use the work of scholars like these as a religious club, trumping other perspectives. Rather, these people—thinking in theologically informed ways—help Christian professors to broaden the conversation in their respective areas of study. Students without a faith, with a different kind of faith, or a faith that is still taking shape will benefit from relevant inclusion of reasonable academic materials, informed by one or more Christian faith traditions, presented by an enthusiastic instructor whose credible commitment is to guide student efforts to deliberate well toward their own convictions.

Faith Informed Disciplinary Knowing: Aims and Approaches

Because the university and the Christian faith are often identified as being in pursuit of the same thing, *veritas* (or, truth), the rise of Christian universities has been logical. But claiming possession of truth can be a problem.³¹ To “have” the truth may cause a subtle foreclosure on learning. Natural curiosity loses steam, intellectual effort seems point-

²⁸ Nancy Eiesland. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

²⁹ Ilia Delio. *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World* (The Franciscan Heritage Series, Vol. 2 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2003).

³⁰ Pope Francis. *Laudato Si – On Care for our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).

³¹ Provocative, perhaps, is Jonathan Kvanvig’s suggestion that “there is a plurality of epistemic values and goals, and that though truth is an important epistemic goal, it has no claim to being the primary such value or goal.” Jonathan Kvanvig, “Truth is not the Primary Epistemic Goal,” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, (ed. Matthias Steup & Ernest Sosa; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 286.

less, and healthy debate around different perspectives, even Christian perspectives, may seem an exercise in futility. *Pursuing* the truth, via a widened view of *knowing*, gives our vocation an additional dimension.

2 Peter 1:5-8 suggests that knowledge (*gnosis*) is a virtue, that along with goodness, brotherly love, godliness, self-control, and love, should be added to faith. Yet “it is not a goal in and of itself . . . [Rather, when it is] divorced from faith and virtue, knowledge might be detrimental.” Therefore, what virtuous learners “do with the knowledge imparted to them is decisive. In the present context [of 2 Peter] *gnosis* signifies a practical manifestation or application of what is known to be true.”³² To grow in knowledge—across a variety of university courses—that increases faith and contributes toward good character requires particular kinds of effort. A number of epistemic tools, therefore, are called for: discernment, practical reason, worldview frameworks, reflective judgment, critical thinking, intellectual humility, and other classic intellectual virtues. These are tools that university professors can offer students who are acquiring a growing body of knowledge in their pursuit of truth.

However, the goal is not to teach *about* these things. Rather, the instructor is called to (1) demonstrate how he has used these tool(s) in his own pursuit of faith-informed understanding and, consequently, informed obedience and (2) provide scaffolding for students so they can practice using these tools in course-related learning. The instructor’s job is to guide students to foster intellectual virtue and critical capacities in working toward a connected view, or an integrative habit of mind.³³

While utilizing the specialized methods, metrics, and meanings of their discipline, disciplinary experts must avoid the reductionist, absolutist, dogmatism that often comes with thinking that fails to take into account the integrated nature of reality and of knowledge. Aquino frequently notes Newman’s call for training the intellect: “. . . teachers and researchers who cultivate a connected view within themselves become adept at (1) grasping how various pieces of data fit together in light of one another, (2) discerning what others have failed to perceive

³² J. Daryl Charles, “The Language and Logic of Virtue in 2 Peter 1:5-7” in *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 8 (1998), 67. Jesus makes a similar point at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. (See Matthew 7:24-27.)

³³ Frederick D. Aquino, *The Integrative Habit of Mind* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012). Here too the Christian faith makes a vital contribution. As St. Paul teaches, “knowledge puffs up” (1 Corinthians 8:1). The virtue of intellectual humility then becomes a vital partner to knowing (See Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007]).

and understand, and (3) rendering a skillful application of these insights to a particular context.”³⁴ Perhaps three English words from the Bible’s wisdom literature can sum up the Christian educator’s task over the duration of a semester-long course³⁵:

- As educators, we identify and organize the requisite **knowledge** needed to provide foundations for further learning.
- As experts in a field of study, we design student learning to create connected **understanding** of key curricular issues.
- As Christian disciples, we incorporate the **wisdom** found within our faith tradition(s)³⁶ and guide students to shape practical wisdom to relevant disciplinary issues, professional practices and situations, and the virtuous life.

In this way, “the pursuit of wisdom, sacramentally envisioned through the lens of an integrative habit of mind, rethinks the connection between religious and other forms of inquiry.”³⁷ Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, drawn from interlocutors in both the discipline and the faith, as well as from those working at their intersection “are crucial to the pursuit of informed judgment. They are especially important for equipping people as much as possible to acquire truth and to see beyond their own perspective, thereby making the crucial connections among diverse ideas and resources.”³⁸ To make wisdom, which is practical, dynamic, situational, and context specific, the end goal—rather than tidy truth—invites humility, intellectual agility, and the opportunity to make a difference beyond merely giving the right answers on the exam.

³⁴ Aquino, 73, 74.

³⁵ Readers may note some resemblance to the ancient Trivium which includes Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. A more recent similarity can be found in Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

³⁶ All Christian educators know that the Christian faith holds together by means of the Triune God as described in the Bible. Yet that faith is expressed kaleidoscopically, through multiple traditions, or streams that have emerged over time and across many cultures. Savvy educators will find reasons and ways to introduce students to integrative Christian wisdom from various streams, not just their own.

³⁷ Aquino, *The Integrative Habit of Mind*, 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

Conclusion

Fulfilling our epistemological vocation is the essence of faithful education. With all that we could do, this is what we must do. But the mature believer knows that faithfulness to God just might be accompanied by hidden rewards.

Researcher Daniel Pink calls the kind of *knowing* I've been focusing on "Symphony." He describes this as "the ability to put together the pieces. It is the capacity to synthesize rather than to analyze; to see relationships between seemingly unrelated fields; to detect broad patterns rather than to deliver specific answers; and to invent something new by combining elements nobody else thought to pair." This capacity, says Pink, "is fast becoming the killer app in business."³⁹ Perhaps by focusing on *knowing*—integrated *knowing* in which disciplinary knowledge and the wisdom of the Christian faith encounter one another—engaging dialogues will lead to wisdom that prepares our students to make a difference in their vocations. In this way, we'd be continuing the legacy of early Christ-followers. Yale historian Robert Wilken describes their profound contribution: "Christian thinking," he says, "while working within patterns of thought and concepts rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being."⁴⁰ Perhaps, again, this will be one reward that results from being faithful to the distinct vocation of the Christian university.

³⁹ Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: Riverhead Books: 2006), 130, 140.

⁴⁰ Robert Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2003), xvii.



Wisdom

Unknown

tempera, gold leaf, silver leaf, ink on parchment

ca. 1170s

This folio from the *Stammheim Missal* depicts the personification of Wisdom dressed in white at the center of the page. Her arms reach up to support the arc of heaven as she gazes upward upon God the Creator. She is flanked on either side by King David and the Patriarch Abraham. From each hand God presents a scroll of prophecy to each man. The prophecies concern their offspring. The scroll presented to David contains the Latin text of Psalm 132:11, "Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne" (KJV). The scroll presented to Abraham prophesies how all nations will be blessed through his offspring. Below Wisdom, is the figure of the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Below Zechariah in an arc that visually echoes the arc of heaven above is the Patriarch Jacob. All the figures and prophecies, when considered as a whole, provide insight into God's promise of salvation, which existed even before Creation.

— Richard Cummings

Teaching to Touch the Heart

Daniel J. Estes*

For thirty-four years, I have been a college professor, but the first day of each semester still keeps me awake the night before. As I prepare to meet my new students for the first time, I have a roster of names and a set of photos, but I really have no idea who these young men and women are. More importantly, I cannot foresee who they will become over the course of the semester we will have together.

As I compose my learning objectives for the course, I try to envision and to define what I would like to see in the lives of my students by the time they complete the semester. In the cognitive domain, I state what I want them to know as I communicate information to their minds. In the psychomotor domain, I define the skills I want them to develop, as I equip them to learn and to serve. In addition, in the affective domain I state the values I want to see cultivated in their lives.

The Challenge of Teaching to the Heart

Through my years of teaching, I have found that it is relatively easy to teach in the cognitive and the psychomotor domains, and knowledge and skills are readily measured and easily assessed. It is in the affective domain, in the area of values and feelings, where teaching is a

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good deal more challenging, and assessment is much more difficult. As I recall my own education, the affective domain was rarely mentioned and usually ignored in the courses I took, but I am becoming increasingly convinced that teaching to touch the heart is really at the heart of teaching. In particular, for education that is Christian, it is essential, not optional.

If learning begins with the heart, then teaching must be directed to the heart. That sounds reasonable as an abstract notion, but how does it work in concrete terms? We know how to tell the head the knowledge it needs to understand, we know how to train the hands to perform the skills that are requisite, but how do we touch the heart? Only rarely may we have had a teacher who touched our hearts, which gives us little personal experience from which to draw. Classes on pedagogy seldom address how to teach in the affective domain, so we may have to invent innovative strategies. We may wonder if it is worth the effort, because it is hard to measure, and it may not factor into faculty performance reviews. I contend, however, that teaching to touch the heart can be done, and it must be done, if we are to be truly Christian in our teaching.

Lessons from Proverbs

The book of Proverbs, and in particular Proverbs 1-9, has been seminal in the development of my philosophy of teaching and learning. Over twenty years ago, the first book I wrote was entitled *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*. I wrote this early in my teaching career, and when I recently read through it again I was struck by how deeply the implicit philosophy of education in this portion of God's word has come to shape how I teach my students. In Proverbs, the goal of education is not just to transmit a body of facts, or to teach skill in having a successful life, but it is to develop in the learner the kind of character that reveres the Lord. In reality, the emphasis in Proverbs is a call to greater maturity as a godly individual. Key to this endeavor is the heart (the Hebrew word *leb*), which represents the total person, including the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Learning must begin with the heart, for as Prov 4:23 states, from the heart flow the springs of life.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about the affective domain as it indicates the role of the learner in the teaching-learning process. The

learner must have a positive predisposition so that he or she can receive wisdom (cf. Prov 2:1; 4:20; 8:10, 30-32). In addition to receiving wisdom, the learner must respond with obedience to the wisdom that it is taught (cf. Prov 6:20-21; 7:1-3) and avoid the enticements of folly (cf. Prov 4:14-15; 5:7-8). The learner must also value wisdom by loving and treasuring it enough to seek it diligently (cf. Prov 2:3-4; 3:18; 4:4-8). When teaching truly touches the heart, the learner assimilates wisdom as his or her consistent value system (cf. Prov 3:3; 4:20-27) that is integrated in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning, or essential component, of wisdom (Prov 9:10). In pedagogical terms, Proverbs challenges the learner at every level of objective in the affective domain, ultimately forming the learner into a wise person who lives consistently according to the value system embedded in reverence for the Lord. This is more than just *knowing* God's truth, or even *doing* it; it is *becoming* a person who embodies godly wisdom.

Strategies in Teaching to the Heart

As I have attempted to be intentional about teaching to touch the hearts of my students, I have developed several strategies that I have found helpful. I offer them to you, not because they are the only or the best way of teaching in the affective domain, but as suggestions of approaches that may prompt you to think of creative ways by which you can touch the hearts of your students. What I do works in my courses in Bible and theology, but I think they can also be replicated and adapted in other disciplines taught in Christian colleges and universities.

Students Must Open Their Hearts

To touch a student's heart, that heart must be opened. It is sad, but nevertheless a fact, that many of our students bring with them to our classes experiences that cause them to be guarded and even cynical. They are not open to receive teaching, and they are resistant to their teachers. There can be many reasons for their reticence, but as long as their hearts are closed they will not be able to learn as they could and should.

Over the past several years, on the first day of class I have asked all my students to write a letter introducing themselves to me. I encourage

them to think of the two of us talking over a cup of coffee, and what they would say to me in that context about the past experiences that have shaped their lives, their interests and passions, and their goals and dreams for the future. I tell them that each day I will read a few of these letters and pray over them, and I reassure them that I will never share their letters with anyone else. I just want to know them, so that I can teach them more effectively. Then throughout the semester, every time I read and pray over a student's letter, I send him or her a brief email saying that I am praying, and I share a word of encouragement from a verse from the Bible. As I have done this, I have been amazed at how my students have opened their hearts to me, telling me about struggles they have and challenges they are facing. I often will follow up with them in brief conversations before or after class, and I also tell them that they are welcome to come to my study anytime without an appointment if they want to talk. Through these means, I have seen my students open their hearts to me, and more importantly to the Lord, so that they are ready to receive what he wants to do in their hearts.

Professors Must Open Their Hearts

I have also learned that I need to model an open heart before them, and that means I must take the risk of disclosing my own heart to them. The apostle Paul provided an excellent example of this in Eph 6:18-20, when he challenged the Ephesians to pray for him. He shared his own need for boldness in proclaiming the gospel, with the clear implication that he was tempted, and perhaps even prone, to shrink from opportunities to speak openly about Christ. When reading the narratives in the book of Acts, who would have guessed that Paul had this kind of struggle? By disclosing his heart, including his weaknesses, Paul modeled for his readers the affective dimension of his commitment to Christ.

Similarly, as I teach I try to communicate my own heart to my students. That includes both the joy I have in the Lord and the areas in which I struggle. As I have walked with God for nearly sixty years, I have increasingly learned to delight in him, but I am also well aware of the many ways in which he is continuing to probe and to refine areas of my life. It is reassuring for my students to know that I have wrestled with many of the things they are now facing, and that in those areas my heart for God has been developed. It is also important for them to realize that

developing a heart for God does not all happen within a semester, but it is a lifelong commitment to becoming complete in Christ (Col 1:28). By sharing aspects of my spiritual journey, I endeavor to inspire them to grow in Christ over the long haul of their lives, as I have.

Challenging the Heart

Throughout the semester I try to keep a focus upon challenging the hearts of my students. It is all too easy, both for the teacher and for the students, to default to what is familiar and to fail to venture into what is unfamiliar. In education, what is familiar are the cognitive and the psychomotor objectives, and what is unfamiliar are the affective objectives. My students have been acculturated by their past educational experiences to focus on acquiring knowledge and skills, but they have not often been challenged in the area of their hearts. In my lesson plans I include affective objectives for each day's class. In addition, when I converse with students before and after class I make a point to inquire about their heart response to what we have been learning. Even when I grade papers, I often will write a comment pointing out how what the student has written can be reflected in attitudes and values. It takes an effort, to be sure, to take the time to do this, but it is essential if I want my students to keep their focus on their heart and its commitments.

Probing the Heart in Learning

It is also crucial to engage the heart in the learning activities within the course, both in assignments and in classroom discussions. For example, when I teach in the book of Psalms, I will often ask the students to take a few minutes to write answers to two questions: What principle does this psalm teach me about God? How does the picture used in this psalm to teach about God make me feel? The first question requires a cognitive response that presents a fact about God. The second question calls for an affective response that touches the heart and draws it toward God. I use the questions in tandem, because together they help the student to distinguish between knowing that and feeling like, the difference between the cognitive and the affective domains of learning.

Within the limits of a semester-long course it is not possible for a student to achieve the ultimate goal of a heart that is fully committed to God's wisdom, but a teacher should seek to encourage a trajectory

that is moving in that direction. To get a sense of how my students have progressed over the time I have been teaching them, in one of my courses I include the following question on the final exam: Over the course of this semester, how have you changed in your values, your commitments, and your responsiveness to the Lord? This question compels the students to search their heart, to evaluate how they have grown over the semester, not in what they know or what they can do (those are measured by other means), but in their hearts. As I read their replies, so many times I have paused to thank the Lord for what he has been doing in them, often behind the scenes and beneath the surface, as he has been changing their hearts in the direction of Christlikeness. When I see that happening, I thank God for giving me the privilege of being a spiritual midwife assisting their hearts to know and to enjoy the Lord in a fresh way.

A while ago, I ran into one of my former students at a professional conference. It had been twenty years since she was in my class, and after graduating she went on to seminary and then to doctoral studies. Now she is teaching Bible and theology at another Christian college. When scholars meet, the typical question they ask is “What are you working on?” In effect, this standard question inquires about what the person knows or is doing. My student, however, was startled when I asked her a different question: “Who are you becoming?” This is a question about the heart, a question that is rarely asked, and yet the question that most needs to be asked. What our students know is important, as is what they are able to do. But of paramount significance, however, is who they are becoming, because in teaching the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

Recommended Resources

Daniel J. Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 4. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

The book of Proverbs has a high concentration of material pertaining to education, and it is therefore a rich mine for Christian teachers as they develop their philosophy and praxis of education.

Norman E. Gronlund. *Stating Objectives for Classroom Instruction*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

Early in my teaching career, a friend gave me a copy of Gronlund, and I found it very helpful in stating learning objectives for my courses. In particular, his treatment of writing objectives in the affective domain shows how to teach to touch the heart.

Robert L. Saucy. *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013.

This book draws together insight gained over fifty years of teaching. Its primary subject is spiritual formation, but it has broader relevance to teaching to the heart in other disciplines as well.



The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters

Francisco Goya
etching, aquatint
1799

The most famous etching from his *Los Caprichos* series, Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* distills his views of late 18th century humanity into a single, ominous visual. Goya feared that if the application of human reason were to continue to decline or become neglected altogether (as he believed he was witnessing in his homeland, Spain), the dark aspects of humanity would become dominant in society. Unfortunately, Goya would live to witness the monsters that he feared as Napoleon's army occupied Spain and committed unspeakable atrocities against the Spanish people.

— Richard Cummings

Assuming a Posture of Care: The Role of Composition in Christian Formation

Paige Ray*

I have observed that many first-year composition students lack awareness of the reader. When writing, they function as if in monologue, assuming that writing is primarily a mode of self-expression. This approach hinders students in that they are unable to pattern and develop their ideas in a way that anticipates the needs of the reader and gages a hypothetical response.

Having instructed adolescent students for the past twelve years, I see an interesting link between students' tendencies toward monological self-expression and the heavy influence of an era of hyper-individualism. Under this influence, students learn to effectively brand and cultivate their own identity. However, they lack a sense of reciprocity toward the communities that have formed that identity.

Even Christian students, though interwoven with the community of believers, have not entirely escaped the effects of a culture that prizes the self. This poses a particular challenge for the Christian college as it seeks to form students of Christian character who are other-centered, living in God's design for us to be relational. Ultimately, we want students to move away from a monological approach to life that prizes

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self-expression above all else, and into a dialogical approach that attends to the needs of surrounding communities.

I find that college composition can help develop in students an awareness of our relational design. In composition courses, student writers inevitably encounter the dialogical implications of language, and hopefully become more sensitive to the person at the receiving end of that dialogue. This shift away from self-expression toward an ethic of care for others prepares students to respond well as Christians in the necessary dialogues of their everyday lives, whatever the mode or medium.

The Problem of Hyper-Individualism

Typically, if freshmen composition students gravitate toward a particular genre of writing, they tend to be drawn toward the personal narrative. This is fitting because, as Robert Jensen articulates in “How the World Lost its Story,” it is the human tendency to find identity, purpose, and coherence in the context of a larger story, a narrative identity. Before the era of postmodernism, the supposition of the modern West, as Jensen puts it, was “that an omniscient historian could write a *universal* history, and . . . this is so because the universe with inclusion of our lives is in fact a story written by a sort of omnipotent novelist.”¹ However, postmodernism rejects the authority or existence of any one, universal story. Thus, the human compulsion to orient the self in the context of a narrative is in conflict with the postmodern loss of the concept Jensen identifies as “the narratable world.” Young students exist in a culture that rejects the concept of a coherent narrative, yet they still seek narrative identity.

The implicit danger in this tension is that as individuals seek narrative identity in a culture that rejects a common sense of meaning, they develop an inward focus solely on the self: Who am I? How does this or that occurrence affect *me*? It is a development that pushes us further into the dangers of hyper-individualism. In such a self-centered environment, young minds often fail to connect and engage meaningfully with a community, to be other-centered.

This phenomenon is quite visible through the growing presence

¹ Robert W. Jensen, “How the World Lost its Story,” *First Things* (2010), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story>, accessed July 11, 2016.

of social media in an era which lauds authenticity, but excels in the production of the manufactured ‘selfie,’ an ultimate irony. While social media can offer platforms for emerging communities and for sharing life in meaningful ways, many young participants fail to engage with those communities, merely seeking self-worth in the form of ‘likes’ and passing comments. Do such exchanges on Instagram and other sites constitute a meaningful dialogue? Or do they simply feed the one-way narrative of self? If so, we are experiencing dysfunction, for we are designed to live in relationship and called to engage with community.

Dialogue, Community, and the Need for Reciprocity

The question follows, what are students missing if they fail to engage in dialogue? I would argue that because we are designed to live in relationship and community, failure to engage in dialogue hinders the individual from living in the fullness of human experience, including what Steven Garber calls the “coherent life.” In *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, Steven Garber suggests that a coherent life, one that integrates belief with behavior, necessarily stems from community.² And even though Christian students embrace a common journey toward Christ-likeness, as products of the culture’s hyper-individualism, they still struggle to navigate the larger social environment; they feel a disconnect. This isolation can be linked to language patterns and usage.

The researchers of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, identify “the language of the isolated self” as endemic to this generation. They explain that “There are truths we do not see when we adopt the language of radical individualism. [For] we find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning”.³ Many students recognize the formative nature of community and appreciate the communities that have taught them to work, love, and learn. But the bigger challenge is to revive in students a sense of

² Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 157.

³ Cited in *Ibid.*, 159.

responsibility toward those communities and others—this requires that we help students shift away from the language of the isolated self and toward the use of reciprocal, formative, and intentional dialogue.

Ultimately, what we do in higher education must not stop at forming authentic individuals. The Christian liberal arts institution cannot leave students focused inwardly. It is not enough to say to our students, be good, be redeemed, live in the freedom of Christ, surround yourself with a great community that pours into your cultivation. We must discuss the implications of being good, redeemed, and free that reach outward. As an institution, we help students ground themselves in the truth of the Living God; we coach them to think carefully through philosophy, theology, and other disciplines. But we hope, above all, that those students will not exist as insular beings, holding the truth passively within themselves, for communal relationships are indeed reciprocal and are inherent to a holistic Christian worldview. The Christian college can teach students that Christ, as the Living Word, was in his earthly life in constant dialogue both with his Heavenly Father and with those around him. In fact, if students come to know God fully and live accordingly, this knowledge will compel students to serve and interact with the people he has created.

Towards a Posture of Care

How then, do we call students out of themselves, and cultivate in them an awareness of others and an intrinsic desire to participate in community in meaningful ways? The curriculum and assignments of a composition course will not cure the predicament of Western society's hyper-individualism. And likely, most teachers of composition do not claim that those who pass freshman composition have learned to perfectly understand their place in the cosmos and are now engaging in ideal and responsible dialogue with their respective communities. However, the hope is that learning to write challenges each student to be conscious of the power of language, the necessity of dialogue, and the existence of the reader, and furthermore, that the student will eventually assume a posture of care towards others: the presumed reader, listener, and community. This posture provides an ultimate coherence in the life of the individual.

The Dialogical Nature of Language

Coaching students in this direction begins with an understanding of language, its function and design. In *The Message in the Bottle*, Walker Percy identifies the essential nature of man with man's capacity for language. He affectionately recognizes man as "Homo loquens, Homo symbolificus, man the speaking animal, man the symbol-monger" (30).⁴ Similarly, Charles Taylor, philosopher and professor emeritus at McGill University, refers to man simply as the "language animal."⁵

Pausing to consider the function of language, we might conclude that it is an instrument for expression used for simply communicating information. But Taylor argues that language is not simply an instrument; rather, it is constitutive of our ability to understand our own existence, to articulate and share our human experience, and to "build ourselves landscapes of meaning."⁶ Through language, we orient ourselves in the world and establish footings for relationships and dialogue with others.

These landscapes of meaning are complex, for the power of language does not end in a two-year-old's ability to point at an item on the floor and identify it as "book." As she acquires language, a toddler can conceive of experiences like fear, affection, delight, and surprise, identify their sources, and successfully communicate these complexities. Moreover, my students can conceivably articulate an effective argument by choosing nuanced and precise words. The end result, namely dialogue, is miraculous. Percy addresses the dialogical phenomenon directly: "How does it happen that you can talk and I can understand you? Or, how does it happen that you can write a book and I can read it?"⁷

Humans, through God's design of the capacity for language, are meant to be awake and aware, able to make sense and meaning of experience. Thus, it is the gift of language that ushers us into a fuller consciousness, the *imago Dei*. Language gives us the ability to recognize our selves apart from the environment, to orient ourselves within that environment, to identify the common ground of meaning from which

⁴ Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954), 30.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016).

⁶ Ibid., 332.

⁷ Percy, *The Message in the Bottle*, 33.

we can communicate with others, and to enter what Charles Taylor calls the “shared consciousness of the world.”⁸

I wonder whether students new to the study of composition are aware of this “shared consciousness” created through language. As mentioned before, many composition students seem to perceive the essay as a form of monological self-expression: “This is what I have to offer on the subject.” They construe their thoughts and reflections as best they can, feed their final copies into the machine of the institution, and hope for a particular grade. However, students, and perhaps many individuals forget that by our very presence and use of language, we have a voice in the world.

Taylor clarifies that

[T]he linguistic capacity . . . sustains a shared consciousness of the world, within which individuals differentiate themselves by becoming particular voices in an ongoing conversation. This shared understanding develops a place for monological speech and writing, but this option is available for us only because we are inducted into speech as conversation.”⁹

The student’s ability to communicate at all, points to his or her place in and participation with the larger cosmos. Furthermore, Taylor’s discussion proposes that language gives testament to the relational and social nature of human existence—and we see evidence of this. As instructors hoping to communicate truth to our students, we must first establish a common ideological ground where we can meet them. As members of families, friendships, and various structures of society, we rely on a common plane of understanding. As Christians, it is within the Body of Christ, the church community, we find our shared identity and foundation that roots us all in the biblical narrative.

Consequently, language is not simply an instrument; rather, it is constitutive of our ability to understand our own existence, and to articulate and share our human experience.¹⁰ Acknowledging its power and function, how do we as Christians better understand God’s purpose in giving us the gift of language, the ability to engage with Him and others?

⁸ Taylor, *The Language Animal*, 333.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich: Argo Books, 1970), 121.

The God of Language

In an effort to use language well and in the image of the God, we look to His revealed Word in the Scriptures. As Eugene H. Peterson explains, “Our interaction with God begins with God speaking the first word. Before it ever occurs to us to speak to or even think of God, God speaks to us.”¹¹ In another of his works, *Eat this Book*, Peterson addresses God’s revelatory word:

We call [the Bible] ‘revelation,’ God revealing himself and his ways to us, not so much telling us something, but *showing* himself. . . . In other words, this is not an impersonal authority, an assemblage of facts or truths. . . . This is revelation, personally revealed—letting us in on something, telling us person to person what it means to live our lives as men and women created in the image of God.¹²

While God’s revelation to us is a one-way event revealing his own divine initiative to be known; it is ultimately an invitation. Through his Word to us, God invites us to understand our existence and roles in the context of his universal narrative. Through the use of language, God meets us on common ground (that is, divine accommodation) in order to affect us.

God chose the linguistic dimension with purpose and with love, in the ultimate posture of care. And because of that love, God’s Word and revelation is not cold, hard, informational fact. It creates relationship, invites response, and works in us. Peterson defines the formative nature of God’s word and of language in general:

In our readings of [the Bible] we come to realize that what we need is not primarily informational, telling us things about God and ourselves, but formational, shaping us into our true being. It is the very nature of language to form rather than inform. When language is persona, which it is at its best, it reveals; and revelation is always formative—we don’t know more, we

¹¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell it Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in the His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 149.

¹² Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 24.

become more. Our best users of language, poets and lovers and children and saints, use words to *make*—make intimacies, make character, make beauty, make goodness, make truth.¹³

God uses language to refine us and form in us beauty, goodness, and truth. And undoubtedly, we use language best when we use it to reveal these elements and help form them in others.

The Word Became Flesh

God's most pointed and poignant revelation to us was in the physical presence of his Holy Son (Heb 1:1-4). And in turning to study Christ, who used language perfectly and operated perfectly within the context of dialogue, we encounter his identity as the Word of God. George W. Stroup notes that, "Revelation, for Christians, is always the revelation of God's Word and that Word can never be separated from the narrative history of Jesus Christ, because it is only in relation to Christian narrative that the Word has its power to engraft the identities of individuals and communities into Jesus Christ."¹⁴ So, how did and does Christ, through the revelation of his earthly life, engraft individuals and communities into God's truth?

In passage after passage, we hear the voices of those who encounter Jesus on his journey in Luke's Gospel.¹⁵ The man who proclaims, "I will follow you wherever you go" (Luke 9:57). The expert in the law who challenges Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). The woman in the crowd who calls out, "'Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.'" (Luke 11:27). The ten lepers who cry out in chorus, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us" (Luke 17:13). The crippled woman to whom Jesus spoke first: "When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God" (Luke 13:12-13). Jesus always responds "using the circumstances of their lives as his text."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., 23-24.

¹⁴ George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1944), 244.

¹⁵ Peterson, *Tell It Slant*, 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Through the intentional use of language, Jesus assumes a posture of care and enters into the narratives of the lives of individuals. Of course, as the perfect, knowing interlocutor, his responses are sometimes soft and full of mercy, and at other times they are hard and full of rebuke. But always, they are wholly restorative to those who will meet him on the redemptive ground of God's ultimate revelation: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.

Implications for Instruction and Formation

In summary, because God has designed us to exist in the linguistic dimension, we study how God uses language and find that He intentionally engages us in dialogue that reveals truth, restores us, and redeems us. Understanding God's use of language has great implications for the work of the Christian college: we are ushering each student into the history of ideas. Every discipline calls students to see and walk the varying topography of the landscape of meaning, meaning that has been constructed through humanity's long conversation. And, as we help them gain sure footing, grounded in the Christian narrative and worldview, we invite them to realize their own voices and contribute to the dialogue. Our students can enter this dialogue and contribute most effectively if they understand the power of language and can wield it as responsible speakers and writers. Essentially, we are guiding them out of habits of self-interest and allowing them to view the world through the broader lens of the Christian narrative so they may be compelled to see and respond to others.

Because this formative process necessarily occurs in the linguistic dimension, teaching students to use language well is key. On several occasions in composition class, I have explained to my students that as writers, and as human beings operating in the currency of words, we are living in the image of God, the God who spoke us into creation and sent his Word to live among us. And I invite them to ask this question: how do we use language, God's gift, in alignment with his truth and revelation, and in a posture of care, in each and every occasion?

Composition and Coherence

So, in the composition classroom of a Christian college, students encounter an interesting tension. They have grown up in an era of hyper-individualism and self-importance. Yet, as Christians they are called to use language to speak and write meaningfully in response to their communities and society. I want to acknowledge that some young Christians, despite cultural influence, are conscious and careful of their behavior in the linguistic dimension. Some students do live a patterned posture of care toward those they encounter on a daily basis, even on social media. But students are also called to effectively contribute to urgent conversations of political and cultural concern, as well as relevant, often secularized conversations within their chosen professions. For students to have effective voices requires training toward a mastery of language, writing, and communication across the curriculum so that they can speak as Christians with authority into a variety of contexts.

This authority sounds lofty, and for first-year composition students in the throes of grammar and rhetoric, it might sound unattainable. However, even the small and tedious discipline of the five-paragraph essay can begin the necessary training, calling students out of themselves and away from common misconceptions of the value of writing.

In his discussion of college writing, Chris Kearns identifies the typical student approaches toward writing: the belief that the end of writing is mere self-expression, that it is simply a means to a grade or degree, or that it is valuable only as an “instrumental tool” with which to embellish portfolios and resumes. He identifies these approaches as problematic in that they are “fundamentally monological.”¹⁷ This monological perception of writing is arguably most evident in college students who view “writing as an extension and declaration of the self”; such students “exemplify what Charles Taylor calls ‘expressivist youth culture.’”¹⁸ This undergraduate perspective fails to recognize the dialogue implicit in college writing. The writer must be aware of his own consciousness as well as that of the reader.

Though his analysis of college writing is not necessarily rooted in a Christian worldview, Kearns does address the ethic of care in writing,

¹⁷ Chris Kearns, “The Recursive Character of College Writing,” in *Emerging Voices of Undergraduate Writers: A Study of the Phenomenon of Writing Changes During the College Years* (Ann Arbor: Proquest Information and Learning Company, 2008), 347.

¹⁸ Ibid.

declaring that care for the reader is the necessary “intellectual virtue” that allows a writer to “break free of the bewitchment of self-concern.”¹⁹

In the effective teaching of composition, we hold students accountable to the dialogical relationship. We require students to assume the role of both writer and reader. Ideally, as students revisit their writing again and again, they begin to perceive, in consideration of another’s consciousness, any inaccuracies, imprecisions, or inconsistencies in their prose and make the needed changes to accommodate and care for their perceived reader.

As a Christian college, this is the coherence that we want to form in our students, helping them to integrate the Christian narrative that informs their consciousness, the Christian purposes of communication, and the Christian constitution of their character. Educating students toward such an integrated life will enable them to offer, as God does, words that speak to the circumstances of precise moments in time and space, and that speak into the larger cosmic narrative. The recursive nature of writing can form in college students a coherence that comes through in their essays as well as in their approach to dialogue in general, a coherence that reflects their sanctification as they seek to reveal truth, restore others, and participate in God’s redemptive work.

Recommended Resources

Kearns, Chris. “The Recursive Character of College Writing.”

Emerging Voices of Undergraduate Writers: A Study of the Phenomenon of Writing Changes During the College Years. Ann Arbor: Proquest Information and Learning Company, 2008.

Jenson, Robert W. “How the World Lost its Story.” *First Things*. (2010). <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story>, accessed 11 July 2016.

Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954.

Taylor, Charles. *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid., 349-50.



The Wisdom of the Universe

Christi Belcourt
acrylic on canvas
2014

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and the branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. — Isaiah 11:1-2 (ESV)

The paintings of Christi Belcourt, who is descended from an aboriginal people (Métis) of Canada, bemoan the manmade hurts and lost beauty inflicted upon this planet out of a lack of care or lack of wisdom. Her paintings, however, proclaim a vision of flourishing out of loss. She believes in the ability of humanity to act with their gifted wisdom to heal the hurts of the earth and bring wholeness and flourishing.

As the above passage from Isaiah pointed us to Jesus Christ. We are reminded in Revelation that the desolation and brokenness of this world is not our true destiny. What is now will end, and a new, restored heaven and a new, restored earth will be part of our promised inheritance. I often tell my art students that when they shape the gifted materials of this world into reflections of the truth, goodness and beauty of God, what they are really doing is proclaiming the restored age to come, when all things will be renewed in the life-giving presence of God.

— Richard Cummings

Cultivating a Biblical Perspective on Creation Care: Faithful Education in Agriculture

John Daniel Anderson*

Agriculture links man to creation—and, by extension, to the Creator—in a more intimate fashion than nearly any other human endeavor. For most of human history, this connection was a shared experience for nearly all people since producing food occupied the time and energies of the vast majority of the population. Since the advent of the industrial revolution, though, the proportion of people directly involved in agricultural production has been more-or-less steadily declining. Now, particularly in the developed world, only a relative handful of people have any direct connection to the created world through agriculture.¹

As fewer and fewer people have a direct hand in agricultural production, questions about agricultural practices are multiplied. While modern agriculture is undoubtedly productive, modern practices are increasingly inscrutable to those outside the industry. What appears

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¹ For example, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2016 (most recent year available) agricultural production employed 2.352 million workers out of a total of 156.064 million employees for the entire U.S. economy – that is, agricultural production accounted for only about 1.5% of U.S. employment. Data online at <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/employment-by-major-industry-sector.htm>, accessed July 16, 2018.

clear to all, from the farm manager immersed in the day-to-day business of farming to the urban consumer remote from that business, is that modern agricultural production bears little resemblance to the historic archetype of the farm, at least as envisioned by the typical consumer. In fact, modern farming is about as far removed from farming's romanticized history as modern communication is from the Pony Express.

Given the rapid revolution in agricultural production,² a Christian observer is obliged to reevaluate exactly what it means to participate in the industry in a God-honoring way. And the Christian educator is obliged to carefully consider what it means to faithfully educate the next generation of agriculturalists. Addressing these issues fairly and honestly requires not merely a firm grasp of technical issues but also an appreciation for the role of agriculture in the created order.

Agriculture and the Cultural Mandate

Genesis 1:28 is often referred to as the Cultural Mandate. Here, mankind is given a role in God's creative process: an opportunity to participate with God by "subduing" the earth as His "image-bearing co-regents."³ Exactly what this mandate entails for humanity in relation to the rest of the created order has been the subject of much study and debate.

Viewed through a contemporary lens, terms like "subdue" and "have dominion over" in the Cultural Mandate are easily misinterpreted, carrying connotations of exploitation if not outright abuse; however, what emerges from the considerable scholarship on the Cultural Mandate is a balanced view of mankind's exercise of dominion over nature through responsible stewardship as an integral aspect of reflecting the image of God.⁴ For example, Anthony Hoekema connects the Hebrew terms in Genesis 1:28 to a command "to serve" and "to care for" God's creation, noting that "Adam, in other words, was not

² The most dramatic changes in agriculture since mankind first domesticated the major plant and animal species have arguably taken place over the span of just the last two generations as increasingly sophisticated mechanization, chemical inputs, genetic modification, and information technology have transformed commercial agricultural production practices.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 24.

⁴ McGrath summarizes the general view of mankind's role in creation as "an affirmation of responsibility and accountability towards the world in which we live" (emphasis in original, see Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics* [Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012], 46).

only told to rule over nature; he was also told to cultivate and care for that portion of the earth in which he had been placed.”⁵ Agriculture is thus rightly seen as a God-ordained activity through which humanity can obediently live out God’s instruction and reflect His character and His glory.

Of course, along with every aspect of creation, the practice of agriculture was affected by humanity’s fall into sin. With the fall, the image of God in mankind was fundamentally marred.⁶ Every activity of mankind is therefore subject to corruption because of the fall, and this also has implications for the practice of agriculture. Hoekema powerfully describes the implications of sin for mankind’s relationship to the rest of creation:

Instead of ruling the earth in obedience to God, man now uses the earth and its resources for his own selfish purposes. Having forgotten that he was given dominion over the earth in order to glorify God and to benefit his fellowmen [*sic*], man now exercises this dominion in sinful ways. He exploits natural resources without regard for the future: stripping forests without reforestation, growing crops without crop rotation, failing to take measures to prevent soil erosion. His factories pollute rivers and lakes, and his chimneys pollute the air—and nobody seems to care.⁷

Hoekema’s assessment is clearly hyperbolic. In many times and places, people have cared very much about soil erosion or deforestation or pollution. At present, many people care passionately about eliminating environmental pollution while not acknowledging even the existence of a transcendent Creator, much less their role as His image bearers. But Hoekema is surely correct in noting that in all times and places, mankind faces a grave temptation to be exploitative, to destructively manipulate the created order for his own (mostly short-term) gain. Those who work in the field of agriculture are by no means exempt from this temptation. In fact, because of their intimate familiarity with the natural world, they may well experience this temptation most acutely.

⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 79-80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

Faithful Education in Agriculture

If we accept that agriculture is a God-ordained means for mankind to reflect His image and, further, that in the practice of agriculture in our fallen condition, mankind is prone to dominion with exploitation rather than dominion through responsible stewardship, this ought to have significant implications for faithfully educating students in the academic discipline of agriculture. Students will need more than strictly a knowledge-based approach to the subject if they are to flourish in the field of agriculture, and not just as practitioners of a discipline but as disciples of our Lord.

Faithful education in this context will likely resemble what Gary Newton calls “heart-deep teaching”: teaching whose goal is to influence the whole person by affecting “the deepest part of the person.”⁸ The desired effect here is that students would receive, as an integral part of their education, an understanding of their role in creation and a conviction to fulfill that role in a God-honoring way.

Steven Garber is particularly concerned with this notion of establishing an enduring connection between belief and practice, and he notes that in contemporary American culture, it has become “incredibly difficult for Christian students to form a life that integrally connects their personal and public worlds.”⁹ He finds that those who successfully do so have three things in common: 1) a worldview sufficient for the challenges of the modern world, 2) an influential teacher/mentor who modeled that worldview to them, and 3) deep friendships with others with whom they shared both a worldview and a common life.¹⁰ Clearly, each of these critical characteristics of people who live with integrity are within the purview of a Christian college experience.

Garber’s three critical factors strongly imply that education equipping a student to live with integrity in his or her field (a good working definition of faithful education) is a relatively long process. Worldviews, mentor/mentee relationships, and deep friendships take time (and work) to develop. In this sense, the type of faithful education described by Garber is consonant with the disciple-making education described

⁸ Gary C. Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching: Engaging Students for Transformed Lives* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), Kindle Android version, Location 510.

⁹ Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness* (Rev. ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 102.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 124.

by James Smith. In Smith's view, education relies on what he calls "cultural liturgies" that form the whole person rather than just inform the intellect. In Smith's description,

[E]ducation is not something that traffics primarily in abstract, disembodied ideas; rather, education is a holistic endeavor that involves the whole person, including our bodies, in a process of formation that aims our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world. . . . This is why educational strategies that traffic only in ideas often fail to actually educate; that is, they fail to form people.¹¹

Following the philosophy of Augustine, Smith contends that people are not primarily rational beings but primarily lovers: that is, "the most fundamental way that we intend [purposely interact with] the world is love."¹² Education, and particularly Christian education, is about shaping a student's ultimate loves—which Smith links to the Aristotelian notion of *telos*, a fundamental goal or purpose—not, primarily at least, about conveying data and information from teacher to student.

Ultimately, then, faithful education is about more than knowledge. It is about faithful practice intended to carry students beyond the academy grounds and into life. In this connection with orthopraxy, faithful education is linked with our role as God's image bearers outlined earlier. C. Stephen Evans touches on this point in discussing the commitments of Christian scholars in terms that evoke the Cultural Mandate:

Christians can and should participate in our common human and cultural endeavors. . . . Without trying to play God or think that the kingdom of God can be achieved on earth through human means, we Christians must not withdraw from our common human cultural endeavors, but must strive to engage with those areas of cultural action and transform them.¹³

¹¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), Location 609.

¹² Ibid, location 810.

¹³ C. Stephen Evans, "The Calling of the Christian Scholar-Teacher," in *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation*, eds. Douglas V. Henry and Bob R. Agee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 28-29.

Agriculture is clearly one “area of cultural action” (to borrow Evans’s terminology) that connects organically to mankind’s image-bearing function. What would it mean, then, for faithful education to “transform” the practice of agriculture by those students who have been faithfully educated? In what sense might agriculture need to be transformed? In light of numerous present controversies related to stewardship and modern agricultural practice, these are important and timely questions.

Faithful Education in Action and Modern Agricultural Practices

Critiques of modern agricultural production methods are abundant in number and comprehensive in scope. A recent report of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) includes a representative itemization of complaints:

Today’s food and farming systems have succeeded in supplying large volumes of foods to global markets, but are generating negative outcomes on multiple fronts: widespread degradation of land, water and ecosystems; high GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions; biodiversity losses; persistent hunger and micro-nutrient deficiencies alongside the rapid rise of obesity and diet-related diseases; and livelihood stresses for farmers around the world.¹⁴

While the IPES-Food critique focuses on the environmental and community impacts of agricultural practices, others have expressed concern over the animal welfare outcomes associated with modern, large-scale livestock production systems. For example, Anomaly proposes policy interventions aimed at curbing “morally repugnant” practices in modern animal production.¹⁵ The key point is that, whereas

¹⁴ IPES-Food, *From Uniformity to Diversity: A Paradigm Shift from Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems*, eds. Emile A. Frison and Nick Jacobs (International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, 2016), 3.

¹⁵ Jonathan Anomaly, “What’s Wrong with Factory Farming?” *Public Health Ethics* 8, 3 (2015): 250.

in the past agricultural production practices were seldom questioned by the broader public, strong denunciations of widely employed commercial practices have become commonplace today.

Not surprisingly, proponents of modern agricultural practices have pushed back against attacks on these practices. Norwood and Lusk provocatively pose the following thought experiment, which is broadly illustrative of the dominant view in commercial agriculture:

Does the idea that food may come from a business with hired labor and a mechanized, streamlined production system make eating dinner less appealing? Do you think food produced on factory farms is less safe, less tasty, less nutritious, or less humane? Before answering, consider this thought experiment. Do you prefer that your medicine be made in a modern, sophisticated factory environment, or do you prefer buying from a married couple who drive to the city once a week to sell their homemade medicine?¹⁶

This thought experiment effectively highlights a marked inconsistency in how consumers view food relative to other contemporary necessary and discretionary consumer items (think not only medicine but also telephones, for instance).

Through this process of point and counterpoint, discussion of stewardship issues in agriculture typically devolves into a stalemate, with each side encamped on its own moral high ground. The new traditionalists decry the supposed environmental, animal welfare, and community impacts of industrial agriculture. Commercial agriculture advocates extol the considerable virtues of technology (readily recognized and accepted in other contexts) and the promise of abundant food for a growing world. In this polemical context, Wendell Berry thoughtfully stakes out a seldom-occupied middle ground: “Agriculture must mediate between nature and the human community, with ties and obligations in both directions. To farm well requires an elaborate courtesy toward all creatures.”¹⁷

¹⁶ F. Bailey Norwood and Jayson L. Lusk, *Compassion by the Pound: the Economics of Farm Animal Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

¹⁷ Wendell Berry, “Renewing Husbandry,” *Crop Science* 45 (2005): 1103-06.

Berry's insight—that agriculture takes place within a complex web of interconnecting relationships linking individuals, communities, the environment, and animals—points to the value of Christ-centered education in agriculture. Questions about the economic, social, and moral acceptability of specific agricultural practices are generally difficult to answer definitively. Therefore, students who have been faithfully educated should possess not only the technical expertise to evaluate complex positions, but also the moral sense and sensibility to productively engage such difficult questions.

Consider, for the sake of discussion, the case of a new swine housing system offering improved productivity, superior animal health outcomes, and reduced fossil fuel use but that also increases waste management challenges, reduces air quality in the surrounding area, and potentially puts neighboring smaller-scale producers out of business. In this case, even the basic question of whether or not the system offers economic advantages is difficult enough to answer definitively, requiring at least some subjective assignments of value over which much disagreement is likely. The question of the morality of the system is far more challenging still. Students whose education is grounded in an understanding of the obligations of Christian stewardship in all its complexity (for example, with respect to the land, to animals, to our fellow man) will be much better equipped to engage challenges such as this. Others who are not so grounded will, more than likely, revert to a superficial evaluation of the more tractable technical and economic aspects of the problem, leaving important issues unaddressed and exacerbating exactly the kind of running controversies that are so prevalent in the industry already.

It is tempting to reduce questions like the one in the preceding example to a simple good/bad binary. However, generally speaking, it is more productive to address moral questions related to production agriculture in terms of the positive obligations on believers who operate within this particular marketplace. This, incidentally, would also seem to be a vitally important dimension of Evans's call for faithfully educated students to engage with and transform an area of cultural action.

In terms of positive action to transform the practice of agriculture, an obvious starting point would be for Christians to stand at the forefront of developing industrial agricultural practices—or alternatives to such practices—that reflect the kind of thoughtful, intentional,

responsible stewardship to which we are clearly called.¹⁸ Christian agriculturalists who are actively seeking to live out their faith in the practice of agriculture would seem to have an important role here, being particularly well-equipped not only to grapple seriously with the moral dimension of these issues, bringing relevant expertise competently to bear on specific problems and also (hopefully) serving as honest brokers between contending parties (that is, in a broad generality, traditional versus commercial agriculturalists).

An additional obligation on Christians engaged in agriculture is to engage seriously in agricultural development internationally. If we in affluent countries, enjoying the benefits of highly modern commercial agriculture, are truly concerned about feeding and clothing the world's growing population, as well as following the way of Jesus, an obvious response would be to invest resources, including the necessary human capital, to assist the poorest countries of the world in developing their own sustainable, self-sufficient agricultural industries. By contrast, the response of ramping up our own production so as to capture a larger share of anticipated market growth is less obviously motivated by genuine Christian compassion.

Christians who take seriously their role as the image bearers of God ought to acknowledge that industrial-scale agricultural practices really may be morally problematic. A desire (even a sincerely held one) to "feed the world" thirty years hence does not provide license to manage animals in ways that are exploitative or inherently cruel, to compromise environmental quality, or to impose other negative externalities on surrounding communities. Serious, probing questions about the ethical dimensions of modern agricultural production systems should not be met with knee-jerk defensiveness but with a sincere willingness to dialog on the basis of shared concern that our production systems are genuinely humane, environmentally responsible, and just for all community members. It must be noted here that this dialog will also require Christians who are skeptical of industrial-scale agricultural practices to be

¹⁸ Unfortunately, concern with stewardship of the natural world is now primarily associated with non-Christian (even anti-Christian) worldviews. Poplin identifies and describes three different non-Christian worldviews: pantheism, secular humanism, and material naturalism. Elements of all three of these views are discernable in the modern environmental movement, from reverence for earth as mother (pantheism) to the scientism of global warming activists (material naturalism) to the utopianism of the more aggressive environmental quality advocates (secular humanism). See Mary Poplin, *Is Reality Secular? Testing the Assumptions of Four Global Worldviews* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2014), 28-29.

willing to presume both good will and good intentions on the part of their fellow believers who are engaged in such practices.

On all sides, we should recognize that we have had, in relative terms, little time to develop our theology of creation care to address an industrial mode of life—and specifically industrial modes of agricultural production. This important theological work is taking place now, and we need new generations of faithfully educated students prepared and equipped to make key contributions to this work.

Conclusion

Christian teachers and scholars are fortunate to have a long and productive history of intellectual engagement from which to draw inspiration and encouragement.¹⁹ Faithful education within this venerable tradition involves not simply transmitting academic content to students but actively engaging in the formation of the whole student, equipping students to live with integrity as professionals in their chosen fields.

Within the field of agriculture, faithful education in the Christian tradition will involve grounding education in a clear understanding of mankind's unique responsibility within creation as God's image bearers. Moreover, it will impress upon students that the practice of agriculture in any form demands consideration of innate issues of stewardship and dominion and related concerns of exploitation in light of mankind's fallen condition. Finally, it will engage students in the kind of prolonged hands-on immersion in actual agricultural practice that will confront them with the imperative for responsible stewardship within the relatively safe environment of their educational experience, thereby equipping them to navigate stewardship issues with integrity in their professional lives.

As controversies related to traditional versus industrial agricultural practices increase, a faithful and thoughtful Christian witness has much to offer within the various agricultural professions. Much is at stake. For example, a failure to address and humbly seek to rectify exploitative tendencies in modern agricultural practices will represent a failure to properly image the love, mercy, and faithfulness of the Godhead. On

¹⁹ Dockery and George offer a concise summary of the origins and development of the Christian intellectual tradition, (David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking, A Student's Guide* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012]).

the other hand, an improperly motivated rejection of modern, efficient agricultural practices similarly evinces a lack of concern for those at the margins of society who most experience material want. In either case, the Christian witness may be compromised by unreflective action (or inaction). Christians involved in the field of agriculture should be particularly well-equipped to navigate these complex issues with both professional competence and personal integrity, serving God and their fellow man well.

Recommended Resources

Wendell Berry. *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1977.

Jayson Lusk. *The Food Police: A Well-Fed Manifesto about the Politics of Your Plate*. New York: Crown Forum, 2013.

James K. A. Smith. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, 2016.



The Judgement of Solomon

William Blake

tempera on copper

1799-1800

As a young king, Solomon asked for wisdom from God instead of riches. God granted his request and Solomon has been considered through the ages to be the wisest person who has ever lived. His wisdom was tested early on as king as he was called upon to judge between two women who each claimed to be the rightful mother of the same baby. In what seems to be a brutal judgement to cut the baby in half and give each mother one portion, Solomon actually applies his wisdom to discern the truth. The false mother accepts the judgement, but the true mother immediately begs for the child to be given to the other woman so that the baby would live. Through his shrewd judgement, Solomon is able to perceive the love that the true mother has for her child, and the child is quickly reunited with her.

In his tempera painting on the subject, British poet and painter William Blake captures the moment of Solomon's gruesome pronouncement. The false mother at the right of the painting is in the process of handing the child over to the executioner, but the child's true mother leaps to rescue the life of the baby by pleading to have the child given to the other woman. On his throne at center, Solomon with his left hand stays the executioner and with his right hand points to the true mother.

— Richard Cummings

Teaching to the “Controversy”

Barbara Fennell*

As a Christian who is a science educator, I have often been confronted by the general misconception of a great dichotomy between science and faith. I have endured more than one well-meaning sermon (or Sunday School lesson) that seeks to enlighten Christians about the evils of science. I have suffered through more than one conversation with colleagues (or lectures from professors) that relegated a belief in God to the realm of the unsophisticated and uneducated. However, in my struggle/journey of faith and education over the years, I have found much less “either-or” and much more “both-and” when it comes to my personal understanding of faith and the principles of science.

Physics and Faith

As a college student who was always seeking a challenge, I changed my major from computer science (I mean, where was that field going anyways, and besides, who wants to spend hours in front of a computer monitor each day?) to physics at the end of my freshman year of college. It was also during this same period of time that I began to experience something like a personal revolution about what it means to be a Christian. My parents were (and are!) good people, and we attended church regularly, but Christianity did not seem to permeate my life the way it

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did the lives of others whom I met. During my freshman year I came to a crisis of faith: had my experience with Christ only been lived vicariously as an outgrowth of my involvement with church, or did I have a real relationship with Christ? Wrestling with these questions, along with those prompted by my new physics major fused together my thoughts about faith and science. And the two have been intertwined ever since.

I share my experience as a college student because it shaped my desire to be a college educator. Prior to graduate school, I never imagined myself in education in any capacity. However, through a teaching assistantship I discovered a desire to encourage students in their struggles and also a God-given ability to teach. I am a naturally shy, reserved person, but in the classroom I felt empowered in a way that no other activity had ever made me feel. I may not be a gifted instructor, but I do experience the giftedness of the Holy Spirit when I teach. This call has shaped the decisions and direction of my life and ultimately brought me to College of the Ozarks. So when I am asked about how my faith affects my teaching, it is difficult to separate the two as I feel that my teaching is a gift of God and also my calling. Without this calling I can assure you that I would not submit myself to standing in front of a group of students. Without this calling I would be unable to teach when students seem uninterested. Without this calling I would definitely look for another line of work!

False Perceptions

When people ask what I do, I tell them that I teach, and of course, the natural follow-up question is: "What do you teach?" My answer almost always elicits a grimace and/or confusion. Many people have a fear of physics and many Christians assume that studying science is a non-Christian activity. I find myself having to explain that not all Christians feel that science is anti-biblical and that not all scientists are anti-God.

As I have reflected on these encounters through the lens of faithful education, I have found a good countering scenario. Many (if not most) Christians want to distance themselves from actions of particular extremist groups who claim to be Christian, yet act in ways that do not represent Christ (for example, picketing the funerals of soldiers or children killed in tornados). However, many of these same people are perfectly willing to accept that the views of a few anti-Christian

scientists represent the views of the entire scientific community and the scientific worldview.

I know that I cannot change every person’s view of this “conflict,” but I can enlighten my students as to the harm such false perceptions can produce. I want to equip my students with the best tools for exploring the divisive debate.

The (Ever-evolving) Plan

As a science educator, I see two reasons to address the perceived dichotomy between science and Christianity: first, in my opinion, this dichotomy is greatly exaggerated by both sides and has caused much damage; second, teaching as a whole person is more beneficial to my students and to me, as well as being pleasing to God. Good teaching does not come from perfect technique but from the identity and integrity of the teacher. I believe integrity can be maintained in the science classroom by exploring the claims of the scientific worldview.

Science is—by its own definition—agnostic, not atheistic. Science cannot prove the existence of God, but by its own bounds it cannot disprove the existence of God. I believe that an understanding of the nature of science helps remove the dichotomy of the ‘science verses religion’ debate. Science looks for an explanation and a cause for the universe and its processes; Christians know the cause but do not always understand the processes.

If science could arrive at a definitive proof of God, then there would be no need for faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please God”¹, however faith is necessary for the Christian *and for the scientist*. God’s ways are high above our ways, so science seeks to find understanding (God gave us a spirit of curiosity!), but there are mysteries which are too great for us to know. Intellectually honest scientists (believers or not) will readily admit that science is the process of attaining knowledge about the universe, but that all of the universe and its processes may not be known. Science simply seeks to provide the best explanation for the existing evidence.

The disciple of science assumes several basic premises. First, objective reality exists; that is, we do not live in our minds, but objects are real

¹ Hebrews 11:6

and their properties can be measured. Second, the universe is knowable and its operation is predictive and predictable. This is probably the point of departure for most people between science and Christianity. Science claims that all is knowable, while a Christian is willing to concede that there are things in the universe with no possible explanation from a human perspective. For the scientist, a miraculous cause is an invitation to further study. The scientist will continue to strive to make accurate predictions and perform experiments to provide a body of knowledge.

Additionally, an understanding of the nature of science (NOS) is imperative not just to those pursuing scientific literacy but also to every believer in Christ. Science does not claim to be truth—some scientist may claim this, but they are speaking from their own personal biases, not as ambassadors for science. I agree with the charge of many national science organizations in their advocacy for explicit NOS instruction. For fear of offending a few, the National Science Teachers Association has struck a hard blow on the wedge that exists between science and religion: “Science, along with its methods, explanations and generalizations, must be the sole focus of instruction in science classes to the exclusion of all non-scientific or pseudoscientific methods, explanations, generalizations and products.”² The implication is that it is better to be a disingenuous Christian than to be, in their opinion, a disingenuous scientist.

Although there are many ideas about what constitutes NOS, there are several generally agreed upon ideas that will serve the believer well in evaluating scientific claims. These include tentativeness, subjectivity, and presuppositions.

The Tentativeness of Science

While scientific knowledge can be durable it is also open to change, in the form of both major and minor revisions, when sufficient evidence is presented. Take the oft quoted example of a stationary Earth. Prior to the seventeenth-century observations of the sky, both during the day and during the night, backed up the idea that the earth was fixed in space and stationary on its axis. However, upon collection of more data this idea has been revised; the earth spins on its own axis and revolves around the sun. Science can (and does) change. Christians need to know

² National Science Teachers Association. (July, 2000). “NSTA Position Statement: The Nature of Science”. <http://www.nsta.org/about/positions/natureofscience.aspx>

that although some scientists may advocate an eternal view of science, science is tentative—new information shapes and may ultimately overthrow the current theories.

Science does not make a claim for absolute truth. Every scientific theory seeks to be the best explanation possible, but when evidence contradicts or offers refinement, the theory will be adapted. This does not mean that science is not durable, just that it can and does change. The phenomenon that is being explained does not change, but the *explanation* does. Consider Newtonian mechanics which was the prevailing theory for more than two hundred years. The conclusions of Newton’s theories could not explain *all* of the observations of celestial and atomic phenomena, so scientists set out to find a better way of explaining—quantum mechanics and relativity.

In the majority of science classrooms students are left with the impression that scientific knowledge is absolute. Emphasizing the tentative nature of science when teaching physics allows students to be discerning in their acceptance of scientific theory. Students can realize that the scientific evidence supports a particular view, but when better information is available, scientists will revise the theory. This will continue to happen—science is durable, but it is also tentative. To be fair, new information through modern discoveries has also affected how Christians interpret the Bible. As better, older, and more complete manuscripts become available, the translations of Scripture that are available improve. However, these recent discoveries that improve our understanding of the biblical text, do not mean we should throw our hands in the air crying that we can’t know anything about the Bible anymore. The interpretation of Scripture may be modified and change over time, but the Word of God still exists and remains the object of study for the Christian community.

The Subjectivity of Science

Scientists are generally regarded as objective and Christians as subjective—the former dealing in facts and the latter in religious beliefs. However, no human being can be completely objective—opinion, culture, and knowledge impact how we process all the information we encounter. Scientists as a group are often regarded as impervious to human failings with the implication that they are completely objective in their work. Intellectually honest people (both scientists and Chris-

tians) are aware of their biases and realize that these may lead them to faulty assumptions. Bias is inevitable, but it is not evil—it just needs to be acknowledged. Just as Christians must study the entirety of Scripture to hope to glean meaning from individual passages, the scientist must look at the theory and the facts and interpret new data in light of what is known.

Experimentation is a hallmark of science. When students perform a physics lab exercise, they are exploring the subjectivity of science. Although these students have been given some structure and have a general idea of what *should* happen, the experiment does not always go as planned. Students then must use their knowledge of the theory and their own interpretations of data to make conclusions. I have had more than one student become frustrated and ask what the answer is supposed to be, but I have to tell them that I do not know—I may be able to guide them, but they must interpret their own data. The idea that there is one true answer is a fallacy in physics. There are “best” approximations, but there is always error. At this point I try to make students aware that while any interpretation will be subjective, the phenomenon is not. When scientists experiment they also manipulate. Subjectivity always enters into interpretation—in both science and religion.

The Presuppositions of Science

Lest we dismiss the implications of subjectivity in experimentation from the physics student who is a novice, recall that all interpretation relies on the prior knowledge on which that interpretation is based. For example, physicists up until the mid-1900s went back and forth on the nature of light. Experiments were done to prove the wave nature of light; since these were set up with this intent then the success of the experiment was in proving the wave nature. However, other equally valid experiments were designed to prove the particle nature of light; these were also successful. At the time, these scientists were unaware that the experimental setup was determining the outcome and that light could not be categorized as wave-only or as particle-only. Light has properties of both and is therefore something that neither theory can completely explain. There was no interpretation error, but there was a problem that resulted from the presuppositions held by the scientists.

One of the premier examples of an overt presupposition is one of Bohr’s postulates. In the realm of classical mechanics, a body needs to

be constantly supplied with energy to maintain a stable orbit around another body. In describing the nature of the atom, Bohr made the assumption that electrons in stable orbits do not radiate. Although this was the observed phenomenon, it did not fit with Newtonian mechanics—a presupposition had to be made to align the observation with the theory. Without this “rule” the planetary model of the atom could not work. What Bohr did not know at the time was that he need not have forced the postulate since the non-radiating orbit of the electron is perfectly acceptable in quantum mechanics. Sometimes postulates must be stated without reasoning in order to advance science.

Some scientists will dismiss Christian teachings because of the emphasis on faith; however, the basis of science is assumption, which is not far removed from the “faith” which is used to condemn the Christian. When both sides approach the schism with intellectual integrity, the schism narrows significantly. Christians are routinely maligned for having to accept a set of presuppositions to support their worldview; while, on the other hand, scientists (and the general population) are generally less likely to admit that science also rests on a set of presuppositions. Acknowledging these can help the Christian have an appropriate view of science and can help the scientist have an appropriate view of Christianity.

The (Never-ending) Struggle

Because of the deep-rooted nature of the ‘science versus religion’ debate, there are many Christian students who believe that accepting certain physical science ideas (such as The Big Bang Theory) is tantamount to rejecting salvation. Far too many students reject scientific ideas without investigating them because that is what they have been told to do. Although some of my students may feel this way, I advocate that Christians (as well as scientists!) should admit that although there are limitations to science it should not be rejected outright. The Christian worldview can encompass both the *meaning* of the origin of the universe and the science which seeks to explain the *process* of that origin.

Science is not just a body of knowledge, but also the process by which that knowledge is obtained. As such it faces limitations that are not always dwelt upon. If my students are to be wholly educated it is my responsibility to directly raise questions and ideas that help students

understand the nature of science—that it is a human endeavor fraught with assumptions, interpretation, and subjectivity, yet it is incredibly worthwhile and powerfully predictive. Explicitly addressing some of these limitations and the hermeneutics of science equips my students with the best opportunity for understanding and application. This kind of opportunity asks students to employ higher reasoning skills—not just regurgitate memorized facts. College should be a time of investigating numerous points of view with much emphasis on the process of learning as opposed to an emphasis only on the product—a diploma.

A Christian worldview can explain the supernatural and science seeks to explain the natural. However, a Christian worldview also provides the foundational presuppositions for the scientific exploration of the natural. In questions of origin and ethics, science often comments on the method whereas Christianity provides the purpose. There is indeed overlap. Science cannot explain God (and I for one am glad of that fact!), but God is the author of science. Rejecting outright evidence that science has gathered is dismissing the opportunity to grasp at the hem of the robe of God. In fact the psalmist in Psalm 19 reminds us that the heavens declare His glory! The natural world reveals something of God’s glory and as Christians we should take that revelation seriously—even if it means studying physics.

Recommended Resources

- John A. Bloom. *The Natural Sciences: A Student’s Guide*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015.
- Alister E. McGrath. *Science & Religion: An Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000.
- Denis Alexander. *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Nancy Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton. *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1994.
- Richard F. Carlson, ed. *Science & Christianity: Four Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.

“Doing” History Well: Faithful Education in History

Joe Western*

“Christianity is a religion of historians,” observed the twentieth-century French historian Marc Bloch.¹ Not only do Christians rely on historical books and participate in ritual developed over time, but “the destiny of humankind, placed between the Fall and the Judgment, appears to its eyes as a long adventure, of which each life, each individual pilgrimage, is in its turn a reflection. It is in time and, therefore, in history that the great drama of Sin and Redemption, the central axis of all Christian thought, is unfolded.”²

The discipline of history is foundational to the Christian faith. Time provides the backdrop for the activity of God inside His creation, and it provides a framework in which human beings, the pinnacle of that creation, live out their lives as receivers of that gracious activity. The chronological passage of time is so essential to the human experience that it is right to say that every person is a historian. That is, all people think about things that have happened before the ever-passing present and use that knowledge to shape their interactions with the world around them.

While postmodern approaches to historical study have called into question the ability of historians to know anything firm about the past,

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¹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 4.

² Ibid.

“Christianity has always displayed an innate tendency toward historical realism, in large part because it depends upon events that believers—in their creeds, their liturgies, their dogmatics, their preaching, their prayers—assert really happened. Moreover, Christian practice is predicated on the tacit assumption that these past events can be known reliably today and can provide meaning for present life.”³ While much that has happened over the course of time has been lost to the present-day historian, the faithful historian asserts that some measure of truth is knowable about the past. When I attempt to learn about the past, I am confronted with many difficulties of evidence, bias, and interpretation, but historical study is a quest for truth.

Yet in this reflection, I don’t want to discuss what historians do or how they do it, which are subjects treated thoroughly elsewhere. On this topic, it will be enough here to note that the study of history encompasses both the framework of the past: the names, dates, and events of historical study, as well as the capacity for making sense of that framework and using that knowledge to inform present day understandings of who we are and where we fit into the world both spatially and chronologically (and therefore spiritually). The capacity for making sense of that framework is called historical thinking, a basic component of the process of making sense of the world, and it is this aspect of historical study that I wish to make my central focus.

Similarly, in thinking about what it means to faithfully teach students in the discipline of history, I don’t wish to reflect on the broader question of what it means to teach effectively. Entire fields of study grapple with this question. Instead, I want to explore why “doing” history well is important for the Christian and perhaps more importantly, what I hope that developing the skill of historical thinking in my students “does” to them.

The Value of Historical Study

Rod Dreher writes in *The Benedict Option*, “Every educational model presupposes an anthropology: an idea of what a human being is.”⁴ The

³ Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 78.

⁴ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 147.

notion of what it means to be human not only informs one’s self-understanding, it underlays how and why we learn. Thus, as Richard Hughes reflects, as a Christian scholar, “it becomes my task—my very first task—to awaken [my students] to their humanness, with all that entails.”⁵ When we study history, we come to better understand what it means to be human, and as we do so we come to see the Biblical doctrine of human nature played out in specific examples of the shared human experience. As we simultaneously come to deepen our understanding of who we are as well as the world around us, our relationship with God, though clearly delineated in God’s revelation to us, crystallizes even more clearly. This then prepares us to live lives of repentance, receive forgiveness through Christ, and serve our neighbors in the many places God puts us with humility and empathy.

Our lives unfold across both space and time. The nineteenth-century theologian and writer G. K. Chesterton writes about the significance of this fact when he discusses the value of tradition in the human experience. He notes that “Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. . . Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.”⁶ His observation applies not only to ceremony, ritual, rules, and norms, but also to history more broadly and helps us to think about the importance of studying the past. Dreher notes, “The deeper our roots in the past, the more secure our anchor against the swift currents of liquid modernity.”⁷

The sixteenth-century reformer Martin Luther notes the practical value to be gained by studying history and other liberal arts. He writes that if children were taught:

the languages, the other arts, and history, they would hear the happenings and the sayings of all the world, and learn how it fared with various cities, estates, kingdoms, princes, men, and women; thus they could in a short time set before them-

⁵ Richard T. Hughes, *The Vocation of a Christian Scholar: How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 82.

⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Nashville: Sam Torode Book Arts, 2008), 43.

⁷ Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 152.

selves, as in a mirror, the character, life, counsels and purposes, success and failure of the whole world from the beginning. As a result of this knowledge, they could form their own opinions and adapt themselves to the course of this outward life in the fear of God, draw from history the knowledge and understanding of what should be sought and what avoided in this outward life, and become able also by this standard to assist and direct others. But the training which is undertaken at home, apart from such schools, attempts to make us wise through our own experience. Before that comes to pass we shall be dead a hundred times over and shall have acted inconsiderately all our life; for much time is needed to acquire one's own experience.⁸

History gifts us with collected wisdom, and its study serves those in the present. "Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past," C.S. Lewis cautions. "People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes."⁹ That is why he advocates the need "to keep the clean sea-breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds."¹⁰

In addition to looking to the past to acquire the wisdom of the ages, another and perhaps more fulfilling reason for cultivating historical thinking is that the study of the human past helps people better understand their own identities and consequently their relationships to God. Scott Ashmon describes the relationship between faith and learning as an "inseparable complementarity where Christian theology and each discipline are connected and useful to the other. This occurs by Christian theology and each discipline confidently and humbly dialoguing, questioning, critiquing, and informing each other as is appropriate to their spheres of knowledge so that they mutually benefit each other."¹¹

⁸ Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools (1524)", in *The Works of Martin Luther* (Albany, OR: Books for the Ages, 1997), 91.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, Introduction to *On the Incarnation* by Athanasius (Pantianos Press, 2017), 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Scott Ashmon, "The Purpose of a Christian University: A Lutheran Vision," in *The Idea and Practice of a Christian University: A Lutheran Approach*, ed. Scott Ashmon (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 27. For Ashmon's critique of two alternative conceptual models of this relationship, see pages 21-27.

Historical Study and Theological Formation

One example of this interaction involves contemplating Martin Luther’s understanding of what makes a theologian. While Luther speaks here about an individual’s own theological formation, I believe that his insights in this matter provide a helpful way to see the significant relationship between historical study and the Christian life of faith. In his reading of Psalm 119, Luther identified three “rules” provided by David for how to become a good theologian: prayer, meditation, and trial or suffering.¹² Luther did not refer here only to *professional theologians* but identified the model the psalmwriter presented for *anyone* to properly think about and relate to God.¹³ Luther gives the first place to prayer. He writes, “Although [David] well knew and daily heard and read the text of Moses and other books besides, still he wants to lay hold of the real teacher of Scriptures himself, so that he may not seize upon them pell-mell with his reason and become his own teacher.”¹⁴ Thus the Christian is to engage with God directly, “that He through his dear Son may give you His Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding.”¹⁵

Secondly, Luther writes that the theologian should constantly compare his thoughts and prayers with the text of Scriptures itself, “reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them.”¹⁶ Thus not only does one appeal directly to God as dear children ask their dear fathers, but he then turns to the place where God reveals Himself, proclaiming both God’s perfect will through the law, and also the Gospel, which accomplishes in the sinner what it proclaims: forgiveness and redemption.

Luther’s third rule is trial or suffering, which he calls “the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how

¹² Martin Luther, “Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings, 1539” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 34:285-287.

¹³ That is, in the same way that every person is a historian, every person is also a theologian.

¹⁴ Luther, “Preface,” 287.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

comforting God's word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."¹⁷ For Luther, it is in the experience of daily life, in which the Christian experiences the front lines of spiritual warfare, that flesh and blood humans come to appreciate and treasure the promises of God and come to understand their necessity and their comfort. Thus, one comes to both understand and experience the loving mercy of God through prayer, meditation on God's Word, and the challenge of living in a fallen world.

Although Luther's comments described an individual's theological formation, I think there is an application for the collective human experience. Studying the past aggregates the lived experiences of previous generations. Through this lens, we come to better understand expressions of truth, beauty, goodness, faith, hope, and love. So too do we understand their absence or their opposites: evil, brokenness, disbelief, selfishness, and falsehood. Ronald Wells captures this well when he notes that as we study history, we see confirmation that "every person and society experiences life-as-lived, which is always different—sometimes markedly different—from life-as-hoped for. The 'is' always falls short of the 'ought.' This is part and parcel of the human condition."¹⁸ The stories of lived experiences, even if they are not our own, can exemplify scriptural concepts in relatable ways.

A person cannot think about God without considering his or her own place in relationship with God. We must, therefore, consider our identity when we consider our theology. We are created by a loving God who breaks into His creation to restore a right relationship with His children, who can't get out of their own way in their rebellion against Him. Our theology informs our identity: we are who God describes us to be.

As we consider this, we naturally find that our identity is shaped both by who we are created to be and by our lived experiences. In this way, each of us is unique from all other people, knit together in our mothers' wombs in a way that is different from anyone else who has ever lived. At the same time, as we live out the lives God has set before us, we find that we do not live in isolation. Our stories weave together with those of others. These other stories both *shape* who we are and give us external perspective that helps us to *understand* who we are. Just as one example, we can consider the ways that our parents have influenced our stories,

¹⁷ Ibid. Luther uses the German word *Anfechtung*, which is often equated with the Latin *tentatio* or "temptation." "Struggle" or "trial" is a more faithful rendering of Luther's idea.

¹⁸ Ronald A. Wells, *History Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1989), 12.

helping both to shape and to discover our identities. When we project this insight back over even a few generations, we quickly see how the past shapes our contexts.

Medieval historian, Marcus Bull, highlights the role of history in identity formation. “That is why amnesia and dementia can strike us as so unsettling: encountering someone suffering from severe memory impairment not only elicits sympathy for the distressing condition, but it prompts reflections on the extent to which personal identity and social interaction hinge on something as apparently banal and taken for granted as the ability to remember.”¹⁹ The past shapes who we are and how we understand ourselves.

This is, in part, Luther’s third point. Living in the physical – and fallen – world shapes how we understand who we are and how we experience our relationship with God. We are not alone in this – we are human. All people share the experience of being created and of living in a physical world. In this sense, being human gives us a common story with others. We can’t escape our createdness or eliminate its ability to shape how we see ourselves. We can only seek to better understand it and live in it so that we come to better appreciate who we are and where we fit in, and in doing so, come to better understand and experience God’s loving and merciful work to make us His children. The central moment of history brings these tensions of eternal truth and temporal experience into singularity. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of immortal God in Christ acts as the summation of history and the point of departure for making sense of it.

We thus live in a tension as we understand our own identities. On one hand we are who God says that we are: His beloved, blood-bought children. Yet on the other hand, we experience this reality in a physical, fallen world in which our stories interact with other people, which shapes how we see ourselves. To dismiss the former is to fail to see the significance of who we are by grounding it in an absolute and cosmic sense. To deny the latter is to fail to ground our created selves in the daily earthly reality of where God placed us.

This, then, is where historical thinking comes into play. If our identity comes both from who God says we are united to Him through Christ, and also from people that He places in a created world to live in community, and if in this world who we are is influenced both by how

¹⁹ Marcus Bull, *Thinking Medieval: An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 99.

we are created and by our interactions with others who shape our identity and give us perspective to understand it, then understanding that world better is a core part of understanding who we are. This, in turn, helps us to better understand our relationship to our Creator. A knowledge of the world should have as its aim to make us better theologians.

Historical Perspective

Historical study informs our identity by providing an expanded perspective. Using a vivid metaphor, historian John Lewis Gaddis explores the perspective gained through historical thinking by comparing it to the process of growing up. He writes, “We are born, each of us, with such self-centeredness that only the fact of being babies, and therefore cute, saves us. Growing up is largely a matter of growing out of that condition: we soak in impressions, and as we do so we dethrone ourselves—or at least most of us do—from our original position at the center of the universe.”²⁰ He writes that as people grow up, they face hurdles and challenges that they encounter and overcome. As they do so, they are constantly faced with new ones. It is this tension between mastery and humility that prompts greater understanding of who they are, and who they are not. This principle works throughout time as well and underlies the capacity of the perspective gained from historical thinking to help individuals curb innate self-centeredness.

Sam Wineberg highlights this same benefit to historical thinking:

For the narcissist sees the world—both the past and the present—in his own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born. History educates (“leads outward” in the Latin) in the deepest sense. Of the subjects in the secular curriculum, it is the best at teaching those virtues once reserved for theology—humility in the face of limited ability to know, and awe in the face of the expanse of human history.²¹

²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5-6.

²¹ Sam Wineberg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 24.

Of course, theology should not abandon this task of teaching such virtues, but rather see historical study as an indispensable companion in this respect. Understanding the past thus helps to develop an understanding of the world that does not have the individual at its center. Rather, it supports the Biblical notion that, to use Gaddis’ word, “dethrones” the individual from his or her place at the center where sinful human presumption attempts to place its throne.

Taught well, learning history should catalyze the mind, introducing students to new places, new people, and new ideas. In this sense, the discipline is perfectly suited for the sort of education that Richard Hughes believes makes a difference in students’ lives. “It is my job,” he says, “to inspire wonder, to awaken imagination, to stimulate creativity, and to provide an atmosphere that supports them as, together, we ask questions about meaning and good and evil, about God and life and death.”²²

Doing history well demands discipline and honesty. Historian John Fea notes, “people of the past cannot defend themselves. They are at the mercy of the historian” and so faithful historians “must relinquish power and avoid the temptation to use the powerless—those in the past who are at the mercy of us, the interpreters—to serve selfish ends, whether they be religious, political, or cultural.”²³ He continues, “Doing history will require ‘intellectual hospitality’ or the willingness to engage the ideas of the people from the past with humility.”²⁴ As historical thinking prompts students to consider the world from the perspective of other people from the past, it trains them to consider perspectives different than their own in the present. Importantly, this intellectual charity does not need to encourage acceptance of all other perspectives, it merely trains the student to acknowledge and seek to understand them on their own terms.

In these ways, as I train students in responsible and skilled historical study, I do not only build a framework of knowledge that helps my students to understand the world in which they live, but I also aim to cultivate in them the Christian virtues of humility and empathy that lead them to respect the inherent dignity of humanity and to respect others’

²² Hughes, *Vocation*, 76.

²³ John Fea, *Why Study History?: Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 131.

²⁴ Ibid.

ideas. In doing so, I attempt to model a passionate love for the responsible pursuit of historical truth so that they see reason and intellect as good gifts from God.²⁵ Students should utilize them in their engagement with the world “so that they can serve their neighbors and nature, be excellent and faithful leaders in the church and society, and promote temporal peace and life while proclaiming eternal peace and life in Christ.”²⁶

Historians do not have to teach Christian history to accomplish this, or even provide a uniquely Christian interpretation of events.²⁷ When speaking of the power of story, N.T. Wright notes that “Christians believe that all human life is itself a gift of God and, however much it may be distorted, a reflection of God. Thus even stories written by writers who are explicitly atheist—indeed, writers whose words were intended to mock or dismiss God—have a strange knack of making crucial points about what it means to be human.”²⁸ If this is true for constructed stories, it must also be true for the lived stories of the human past.

The Gift of a Widened Perspective

The job of the history instructor, then, is to help students become better historians. In becoming a better historian, a person hopefully becomes both a better citizen and friend, as well as a better theologian.²⁹ Because time is inseparable from the human experience, I can accomplish these tasks simply by teaching history well. “Our vocations are means of showing love by giving our neighbor what he really needs. This is accom-

²⁵ See Bret Taylor, “The Vocation of a Professor: Tensions and Tightropes Between Two Kingdoms” in *The Idea and Practice of a Christian University: A Lutheran Approach*, ed. Scott Ashmon (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 117.

²⁶ Ashmon, “Purpose,” 20.

²⁷ Arthur Holmes notes that Christian education “shuns tacked-on moralizing and applications, stale and superficial approaches that fail to penetrate the basic intellectual issues” (*The Idea of a Christian College* [rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987], 7).

²⁸ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 265.

²⁹ Steven Garber paraphrases Augustine’s response to a student, in which Augustine asks the student about the purpose of his education, “He is asking the young student, ‘What is the point of your life? How are your studies of Cicero contributing to your end as a human being, particularly your end as a young Christian?’” (See *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior* [rev. ed.; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007], 150). In essence, Augustine is asking how the young man’s studies are helping him to be a better theologian.

plished by honest, trustworthy work of high quality, not by shoddy work adorned with superficial piety.”³⁰

Prayerfully, as they consider what it means to be human, these theologians gather in repentance around the means of grace, as eternal God continues to break into time to deliver His gifts, which themselves are anchored to a specific historical time and place: the cross. From there, the Holy Spirit directs them outward so that the good gift of education enables them to “harness the liberation of the mind not just for the good ends of pursuing truth, personal joy, and benefit, but ultimately for the highest end of serving the neighbor in the name of Christ.”³¹

A well-trained faithful historian is not simply one who is fascinated by old things. Instead, a well-trained faithful historian is one who cares deeply about his or her relationship with God and who lives to serve others in the present and in the future. The historian Marc Bloch, whose reflections on the historical nature of Christianity began this essay, remembered a trip he took with the twentieth-century Belgian historian Henri Pirenne:

I had gone with Henri Pirenne to Stockholm; we had scarcely arrived, when he said to me: “What shall we go to see first? It seems as though there is a new city hall here. Let’s start there.” Then, as if to ward off my surprise, he added, “If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore, I love life.” This faculty of understanding the living is, in truth, the master quality of the historian.³²

Seen in each of these ways, all human history broadens and deepens our view of what it means to be human and how each individual life exemplifies that and yet expresses it uniquely. History itself becomes a sermon that convicts us of human sinfulness and prepares us to consider our own individual brokenness. This discovery drives us back to the gospel message and propels us to serve our neighbors. In the end, it is

³⁰ Angus Menuge, “Vocation,” in *The Lutheran Difference: An Explanation and Comparison of Christian Beliefs*, ed. Edward Englebrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010) 481. Gene Edward Veith adds that “When God blesses us, He almost always does it through other people” (*God at Work* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2002], 14). This is the Christian doctrine of vocation.

³¹ Ashmon, “Purpose,” 17.

³² Bloch, *Historian’s Craft*, 36.

my hope that students might come to better understand that against the vast backdrop of history, filled with many “great” men and women (and even more people that the history books have forgotten), it is a truly miraculous thing to realize that the God who creates all life, governs and sustains it, redeems it with His own precious blood to reconcile it to Himself, and creates and sustains faith has chosen to give all that as a free gift to. . . .*them*.³³

Recommended Resources

John Fea. *Why Study History: Reflecting on the Importance of the Past*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

John Lewis Gaddis. *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

The Idea and Practice of a Christian University: A Lutheran Approach. Edited by Scott Ashmon. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015.

Gene Edward Veith. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

³³ This is what Martin Marty describes when he writes about the goal of Christian Education. He writes, “However, only Christian higher education is committed to what Christians mean by Vocation. They mean lives that find their coherence in Christ, ‘in whom everything holds together.’ [Students] learn that each of them is distinctively marked, irreplaceable, in God’s scheme of things, and that they are not merely integers among the thrones and principalities and authorities.” Martin E. Marty, “The Church and Christian Higher Education in the New Millennium” in *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation*, eds. Douglas V. Henry and Bob R. Agee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

Truth, Excellence, & Service: The Christian and the Study of Music

Clara C. Christian*

How does a music career look different for a Christian? Christian professional musicians and music students face challenges such as how to handle marketing, competition, self-image, self-expression, and hours of practice in a Christian way. Arthur Holmes in *The Idea of a Christian College* claims, “Especially in performance areas and in the disciplined development of skills . . . the *attitude* of the teacher or student is the initial and perhaps most salient point of contact with the Christian faith.”¹ Focusing on our attitude towards music making means that the Christian educator has the opportunity to model and equip students with a heart for truth, excellence, and service.

I remember years ago listening to a radio talk show in which a Christian novelist talked about Christians as being some of the greatest literary critics and writers, and he attributed it to the fact that Christians read! They read their Bible, carefully analyzing each and every word, and they listen to sermons where they critique the message they are hearing to see how it aligns with what they’ve read. Does this search for truth also impact the way we approach the study of music? Do we have the courage and commitment to pursue excellence? Can we pursue excellence and serve others at the same time?

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¹ Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 47. Emphasis added.

A music professor teaching at a Christian liberal arts college is equipping music students for a variety of vocations: church musician, music educator, performer, or possibly a combination of all three! The church musician must learn to pursue their craft with seriousness and seek to offer God personal excellence, leading other Christians in offering worship which represents a high level of musicianship and honors God with mind, talent, and ability. Psalm 33 says the musician is not only to worship with the right attitude, but they must also play skillfully. “Praise the LORD with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy” (Psalm 33:2-3). The music educator has the opportunity to provide leadership and inspiration for young students for whom a good foundation can leave an impact that lasts a lifetime. And the performer has been given perhaps the greatest challenge of all, tying together the highest possible level of achievement (God’s command at Creation) with service for others.

Our Cultural Mandate

God commanded Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden not only to be fruitful and multiply, but also to subdue the earth (Genesis 1: 27-28). “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” God’s command to subdue the earth encompasses both the practical and the aesthetic: to plant seeds and hunt game to fulfill their daily needs, but also to *understand* the earth—to bring it under dominion, just as Adam gave names to all the animals, and to pursue a deeper knowledge of what God has created for us to enjoy in order to better others or ourselves. God made us in His image, which means we have the desire to be creative. And when we create like Him—reflecting His purpose, values, care, and order—then we too see that what we create is “good.”

As God’s image bearers, we have complex abilities of hearing, speech, and profound sensitivities that compel us toward singing and making music. While not all musical performance is created equal, the human impulse to “make a joyful noise” is certainly universal. Music is foundational to mankind’s response to God in the Scriptures, as highlighted throughout

the Psalms. Philosopher Peter Kreeft notes that it is no coincidence that God, man, and music are so intimately connected in the Bible. He writes:

Music is not ornamented poetry, and poetry is not ornamented prose. Prose is not the original language; it is poetry made practical. Even poetry is not the original language; it is music made speakable, it is the words of music separate from their music. In the beginning was music.²

Learning and growing in our understanding of this majestic and musical world should be a lifelong pursuit and should be both a joy and something we feel a responsibility to pursue.

A Christian music career should be distinct in that we reflect a commitment to our work, study, *and* our faith. Cornelius Plantinga says that “Christians (as images of God) therefore reject both the materialist reduction of our status and (the) humanist exaggeration of it.”³ The Christian’s career and calling will always differ from the non-believer’s, for the Christian’s focus is not self, but God. This does not mean that the Christian cannot be competitive, or that they cannot excel in their work. But their purpose is to “glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Confession, Question 1),⁴ and glorifying God means serving Him and serving others *with excellence*. So the cultural mandate from the garden of Eden gives learning and study its value, it calls Christians to shape culture, and it provides us with our main motivation to strive for excellence: *imago Dei, gloria Deo!*

The impact of the cultural mandate given long ago in the garden of Eden is presently witnessed in the music world in several ways. Sacred vocal music represents a long tradition of excellence, including the first notation of music and the earliest organization of chamber singers dating back to before the 800s. For generations, the monastic communities in the Catholic church devoted themselves to preserving and creating music along with visual art. In this way, they were committed to a high level of scholarship, musical excellence, and culture-shaping.

² Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 162.

³ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 41.

⁴ Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (ed. G. I Williamson; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 3.

Through the centuries, sacred choral music has brought Scripture and biblical truth into secular performance spaces, even to the present time. Classical composers, who may or may not have been true believers, wrote and continue to write music with words taken from Scripture or from literature or poetry with Christian themes. This is one of the ways we see God's truth emerging in the broader culture, as even an agnostic or an atheist cannot help being moved by a Bach cantata or Brahms' *A German Requiem*. Alfred N. Whitehead suggests that early modern science developed because of the encouragement given to it in the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages.⁵ Similarly, the early development of classical music is attributed to the church. Holmes states: "It therefore takes reverence and love for God to motivate us adequately toward aesthetic values like beauty and creativity. All beauty is from God no matter where it is found,"⁶ and certainly this view shaped the musical world from ad 800-1600.

Aside from the specific genres of church music and large scale sacred choral works, the bulk of the compositional output within the classical or "art music" tradition is either instrumental music without texts or secular vocal music; and the composers who wrote, or are writing, these works may not exhibit any interest in spiritual things. But "Augustine proposed that *all* human discovery should be viewed in the light of the incarnation and biblical revelation, not merely those discoveries that were produced by believers."⁷ While certain composers from the classical tradition, such as J. S. Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, or Johannes Brahms, were intentional about honoring God with their music, they are not the only composers to whom God endowed talent, ability, and opportunity.

The Pursuit of Excellence

The Christian music student, whether listening to a concert, taking a class, or studying music with a professional goal in mind, must be ready to challenge himself with the truth about what excellence is. This pursuit of truth and excellence takes several forms; it means studying the great composers of the past and present, understanding more about how to

⁵ Cited in Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 54.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gene C. Fant, Jr., *The Liberal Arts: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2012), 36.

listen (which often falls under the discipline of music theory), and being prepared to reach a higher level of skill in performance. Music is so often considered merely a means of psychological therapy, emotional release, or social connection, whether in churches, schools, or mainstream secular environments; and it can be all of those things, too! However, the Christian music student is called to pursue the truths found in music that represent excellence on a deeper level, in a fuller way.

Plantinga points out with great insight into our modern culture, “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”⁸ David W. Rushton says it comes down to learning to listen.

We need to contemplate (i.e. think about) what we see and hear if we are to more fully grasp the essence of a musical work. Also, a more active and thoughtful approach to listening will eventually help us become more discriminating, enabling us to distinguish varying levels of quality and make more informed value judgments about the worth of a particular piece.⁹

Excellence is defined by a standard of performance and composition that incorporates a wide framework of knowledge—both historically and theoretically. And such a perspective takes openness, engagement, research, and focus.

What drives non-Christians to study and perform music at such a high level, with so much detail? Why do non-Christians frequently excel at music more than Christians? Why is music in the church often at such a low level? For the unbelieving professional musician or artist, music is so deep, so fascinating, so endless with possibilities, it becomes their god. They understand the need for intellectual curiosity and devotion to their art, and they value competition as a way to improve themselves and get ahead of others. They are often very much in touch with themselves and their own need to fill a spiritual or emotional void, only they fill it with music. For, “Even when these thinkers reject God, they recognize that the world is out of joint and that human beings, too, are

⁸ Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, 126.

⁹ David W. Rushton, “A Christian Perspective on Music,” in *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy* (ed. Deane Downey and Stanley Porter; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 327.

“alienated,” or “divided.”¹⁰ They are searching for the Truth, but even as they achieve such a high level of excellence, fame, and success, there still comes the question: where does beauty originate? In ourselves? Why does it have value? And why does it matter to us? Douglas Yeo, bass trombonist with the Boston symphony orchestra, said: “It is God alone who bestows on composers the mysterious gift of composition and on performers the unspeakable gift of interpretation.”¹¹

The Pursuit of Truth

In addition to facing the challenging fact that many of the world’s greatest achievements and highest levels of excellence are found among composers and professionals that may scoff at God, the study of music presents a second difficult question for the Christian liberal arts student: what is truth in music? Is it defined by order? Or by beauty and aesthetics? Are certain styles of music ungodly? Phil. 4:8 contains the well-known directive from Paul about what we should study, that is, what our minds should dwell on: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” How do Christian students apply this to music in which they like the style, but the music may have questionable lyrics (such as hip-hop, rap, or other pop music)? On the other hand, how does the Christian student respond to contemporary classical music which may not have any images, lyrics, or vulgar associations, but on an aesthetic level, sounds ugly to him?

At College of the Ozarks, I faced this question of aesthetics from the outset, as most of my students come from backgrounds where they have not been exposed to much classical music at all, and what they have been exposed to did not include 20th-century or 21st-century composers. During my recent visit to Strasbourg, France, for the international SaxOpen World Congress and Festival, I listened to dozens of inspiring performances of new music; however, one piece stood out to me as *not truthful*. It did not represent excellence, and in sum, was

¹⁰ Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, 48.

¹¹ Rushton, “A Christian Perspective on Music,” 328.

aesthetically offensive. But, it was not strange sounds, harmonic dissonance, or extended techniques that shaped my assessment. Instead, the visual component of the performance was overbearing, which included blinding flashes of light and disturbing images, along with the extremely loud amplification of the music. In the quest for truth, goodness, and beauty in musical performance, examples such as this are easily identifiable as outliers.

On the other hand, there is a fine line when acoustic (non-amplified) classical music with more dissonance than a student is accustomed to becomes something the student disrespects, refuses to consider, or simply writes off as not “Christian” or not worthy of study. It becomes especially difficult to expose students to the history of classical music through the 20th century, or music of the past two decades. When a student doesn’t understand music, they immediately label it as lacking truth, excellence, or beauty. A performer or an audience member who has learned the advanced harmonic language (through listening to hundreds of new music performances) may hear beauty and even enjoy such music, like the 12-tone compositions of Schoenberg, Webern, or Berg. So the student’s perception should not be the guiding factor in what is “good” or “truthful.” He must recognize that there is a much larger framework for measuring truth than merely his own aesthetic values.

So how do we measure the truthfulness of a performance or piece? By its beauty, or by its ability to represent excellence and value in some other way? Plantinga says “created things,” whether composers, compositions, or performers, are sometimes mysterious, but that does not mean they lack aesthetic value. “Created things—and their parts and processes—are unique and sometimes mysterious, but because they have come from the wisdom of God, they are also purposive and, in principle, intelligible.”¹² Rushton talks about the fact that we can distort the arts if we “attempt to use a work of art rather than recognize that its beauty (even its abstraction) and craftsmanship are their own reason for being.” He suggests that “the more abstract the art, the more it takes its reason for being from the innate creativity which infects every human being.”¹³ We must evaluate the use of the work of art, its purpose, its level of artistic excellence, and its aesthetic value. Looking

¹² Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*, 35.

¹³ Rushton, “A Christian Perspective on Music,” 328.

back at Philippians, we ask what is true, noble, and just—not just what is lovely to us in the moment.

Discovering truth is closely tied to the pursuit of excellence. “Truth . . . is a liberating experience that enlarges horizons, deepens insight, sharpens the mind, exposes new areas of inquiry, and sensitizes our ability to appreciate the good and the beautiful as well as the true.”¹⁴ For a student, this means listening to music which is accepted as reputable and of high value (it has stood the test of time and is respected by performers and academics the world over), even when that music may not be immediately “likable.” It also means taking the extra time to practice and perfect music which a student may value and enjoy, but doesn’t want to have to spend too much time practicing. Recognizing that there is always another level to achieve when studying classical music can be discouraging for students at first; but, it is truly thrilling that even a lifetime of study still doesn’t reach the limit of what can be discovered, even within the literature for a single instrument, such as the piano.

A Lifelong Vocation

For the Christian educator, searching for excellence, expanding students’ horizons, and exposing them to a deeper, fuller, and more detailed musical world, is only the start. The liberal arts education is preparing the student for their vocation—the truth a student learns is needed in order to more effectively evangelize and serve to a fuller capacity. What a great responsibility we have as Christians to represent music in the proper light, whether as teachers or performers! Gene Fant says, “Imagination is a deeply human trait that derives its abilities from the mind of God,”¹⁵ and Rushton: “artistic productivity is . . . a human response to God’s creativity.”¹⁶

At College of the Ozarks, there is an especially clear focus on vocation in addition to education, and truly the two go hand in hand. If I look back on my education, it was an experience, and my experiences have been an education. I have seen many students, mostly not

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Fant, *The Liberal Arts*, 83.

¹⁶ Rushton, “A Christian Perspective on Music,” 325.

at C of O, who may have knowledge and a thorough education, but don't know how to apply it in their vocations. Or, if they do, they may not know how to apply it in a holistic, spiritual sense. At the same time, I fully concur with Holmes that the curiosity and love for learning fostered by a liberal arts education helps a student always try to achieve more in their vocation, taking it to the next level. And while experience is crucial, the role of an educator brings insight to experience; a Christian professor is devoted to helping their student along, literally serving the student while also providing an example of how to serve.

In music performance, experience is perhaps even more crucial than in many other disciplines. Practicing the piano is active; it involves the experience of feeling the topography of the keys and keeping your eyes moving on the page at the right speed, and through it all, training the ear. Performing must also be practiced, as it is a different skill from what is developed in a practice room; it involves knowing how to deal with nerves, how to connect with audience members, and how to take the skills honed while alone and use them to serve others. This is part of the reason why as a teacher I must keep performing, as it reminds me of how to face the challenges of daily practice and performance stress, and it also allows me to lead by example.

I must work regularly with my students on how to handle performance anxiety, which often is linked to an inaccurate view of self, of competition, or of the music being performed. Having an attitude of service towards God and others and a proper view of self does not make performance anxiety disappear, but it does aid in putting it in perspective and gradually minimizing it. Providing students with practical experience playing in environments where they are not competing or showing off, but humbly providing a service, is part of the process. And, like expanding listening skills and working to understand new harmonic language, it takes repetition.

The Imprint of God

Ultimately, my role as a faithful educator is to expose students to the imprint of God throughout the music world, which is perhaps a particularly exciting and fulfilling field for the Christian. My greatest passion and where I have the most extensive background is as a classically trained performing artist, specializing in piano music which is not overtly Chris-

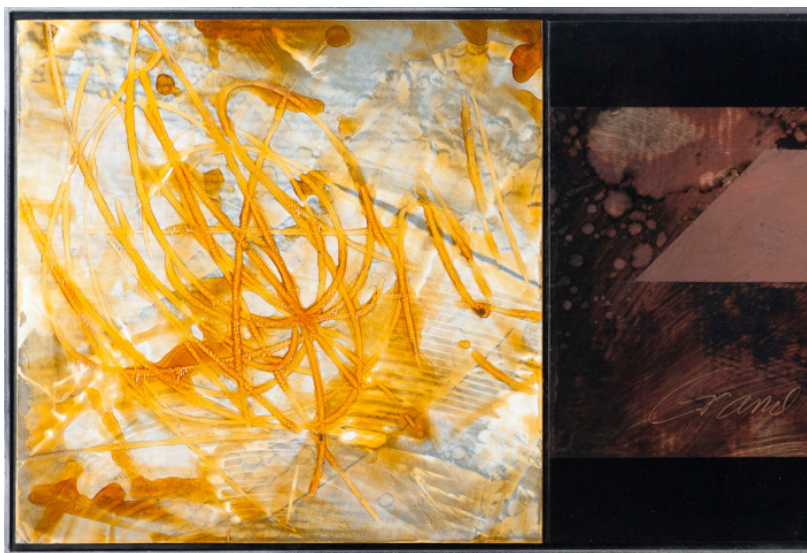
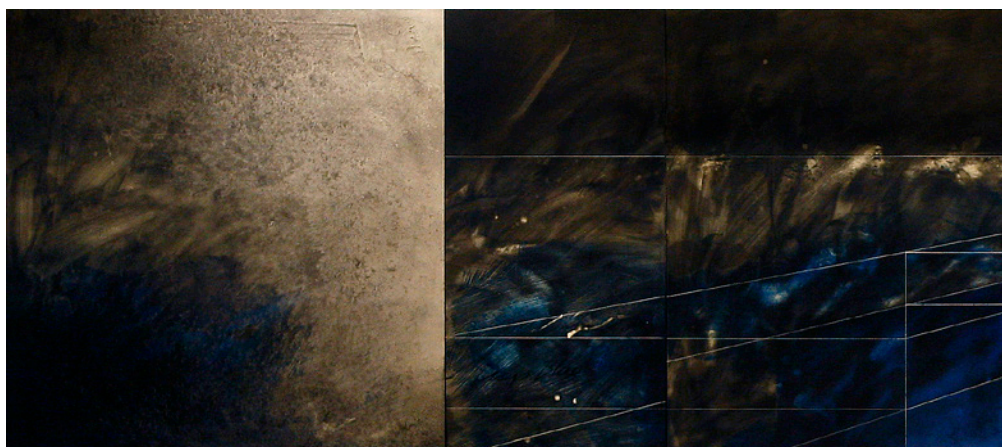
tian, and could be labeled “secular.” But it is such a varied, rich world of beauty and aesthetic value, and provides many opportunities to serve. “For all human sin has done to distort the scene, this world is still God’s creation, of value to both God and human beings . . . the secular is not itself evil; in fact, in God’s world, it too is sacred.”¹⁷ My goal for my students is that they will make a practice of continuing to learn on their own throughout their lives, working on new music and always finding opportunities to give live performances, no matter how small the setting.

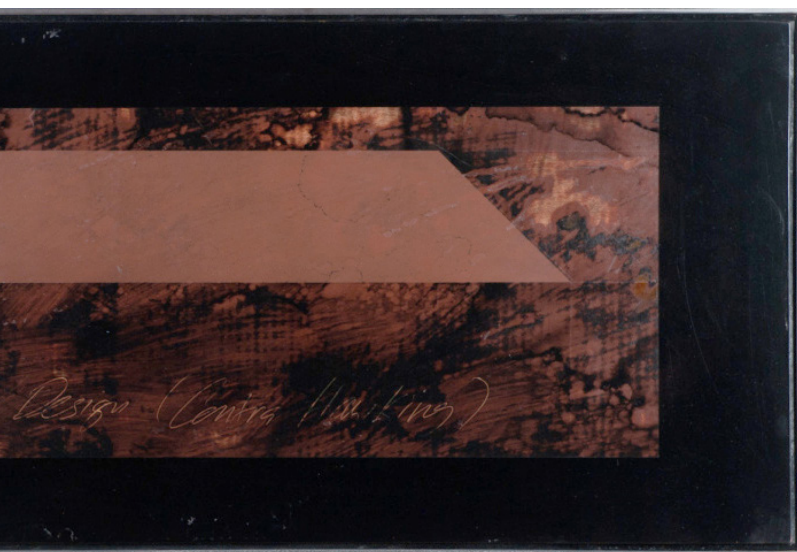
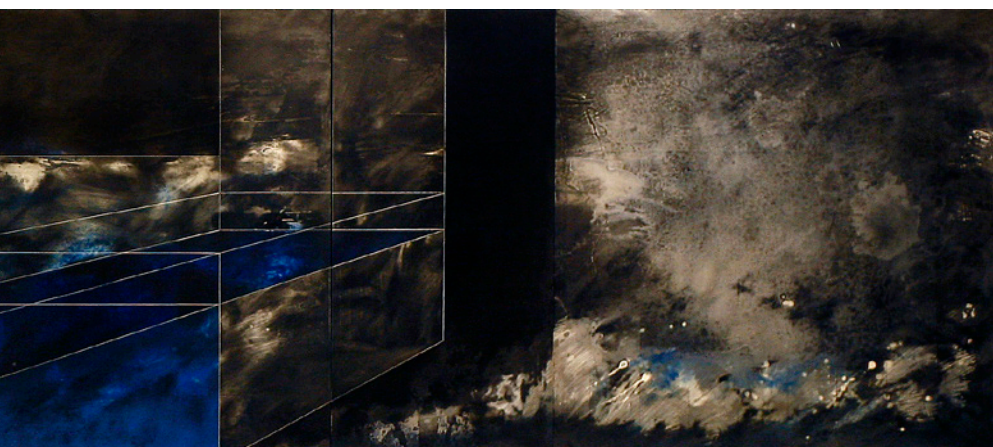
Students who have the opportunity to study music history and literature learn to expand their knowledge base and become better equipped to engage their culture and evangelize others. I have presented hard questions to my students like “is this bad music because I don’t like it, or should I appeal to a different mode of value than my personal aesthetic judgments?” I also strive to explain to both my music history students and my piano students that they cannot truthfully serve God as good stewards of their gifts if they don’t work to develop, change, and grow. The process of pushing themselves toward excellence means that they are honoring God, and by serving God, they serve other people, even though other people may not always recognize or even welcome musical excellence. When this pushing and growth happens, both teacher and student step into a much larger role set forth at creation for each of them as image bearers of the Creator, who by the way seems to be rather fond of music.

¹⁷ Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 15.

Recommended Resources

- Turner, Steve. *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Downey, Deane E.D. and Stanley E. Porter. *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009.
- Best, Harold. *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003.
- Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr. *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002.
- Kavanaugh, Patrick. *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.





Deep Blue

Cameron Anderson

enamel, shellac, graphite, china marker on steel panel

2014

Deep Blue, from Cameron Anderson's series, *Approaching the Mystery: Red, Yellow, Blue*, is one of three large-scale triptych paintings that visually explores the mystery of the triune God. Anderson attaches Deep Blue to the person of the Holy Spirit. At 15' long x 3' tall the painting gives the viewer ample surface to explore from a distance, but the piece also invites one to come closer. Interestingly, the immensity of the painting does not ominously discourage access to the viewer; rather, the grand scale metaphorically becomes a gratuitous offering of itself. Chaos is ordered through the imposition of grids and geometric drawings, but this ordering is not imposed against the chaos. The ordering of the surface of Deep Blue transforms the disorder of the chaos as if it were a natural progression from itself.

When I view this piece, I am reminded of God's mysterious introduction of the person of the Holy Spirit to us in the text of Genesis 1:2, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (ESV). The Spirit was present and active in the creation of the world, and he is still present and active in the recreation of that world and its redeemed humans into the image of Christ.

— Richard Cummings

Image use courtesy of the artist

Photo courtesy of Richard Cummings

Grand Design (Contra Hawking)

Cameron Anderson

enamel, shellac, graphite, china marker on steel panel

2010

I made this painting in 2010 in the early stages of my preparation to teach Genesis 1-3 at a week-long summer retreat in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 2011. I was responding to the claim of preeminent physicist Stephen Hawking that there is no personal God behind the design of the universe. Hence my title *Grand Design (Contra Hawking)*. In a metaphorical way, my painting seeks to capture the energy of God's Spirit filling the void and then ordering the universe.

— Cameron Anderson

Beauty & Elegance: Faithfully Educating in the Field of Mathematics

Al Dixon*

Reflecting on faithful education, I am reminded of Christ's message to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12, NIV). Too often we see a very different dynamic, especially in the academy. As academicians we are sometimes viciously competitive, petty, uncaring, and generally caught up in a whirlwind of politics and personal achievement. This attitude is not only directed at our colleagues, but bleeds over into the classroom where students are intimidated, sometimes ridiculed, and often berated for their lack of knowledge and personal achievement. A wall is built between the student and professor promoting an *us-versus-them* attitude in which knowledge is a commodity distributed from above and absorbed by those lucky few who so choose. Education is no longer a collaborative effort in which both the student and professor search for truths in an atmosphere of cooperation and collegiality.

Faculty are afraid and hesitant to approach students as children of God, spiritual persons, and brethren of the faith. While our hesitancy is understandable—those barriers that prevent it are comfortable, easily maintained, and provide a modicum of security—it seems that Christian faculty are called to do more.

* Al Dixon, PhD presently serves as Professor of Mathematics at College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri.

Faculty and Student Dynamics: Orchestrated Through Love

Just as Christ called his disciples to a new intimacy before his crucifixion, transforming them from servants (John 13:13), into friends (John 15:15), and finally into brethren (John 20:17), we too, as Christians, are called to a new intimacy with our colleagues and students.

As Christian faculty we are responsible for treating students as Christ treated those around him. We are to show understanding, caring, approachability, concern, and acceptance. This attitude does not mean a decrease in intellectual standards or a complacency of academic achievement, rather it should be an attempt to separate academic performance from individual worth. Students should understand that failure in the classroom does not translate into failure as a human being.

I am reminded of a sociologist teaching at the college level, who after a particularly bad class performance on a written exam in one of his introductory courses responded by writing on each failing student's paper "How can I help you learn this material better?" Such concern and understanding should be consistently echoed.

To be an effective Christian witness to our profession, and our students who have been entrusted into our care, we should: a) believe that Christianity makes a difference in the lives of any who accept Jesus Christ; b) love those around us, realizing they are eternal beings who will exist long after temporal things have passed away; c) understand that those within our influence belong, first of all, to Christ; d) be so filled with the Holy Spirit that our inner radiance and joy is impossible to mask; e) understand that all we do and say will impact the future of the souls of many; and f) have an inviting, warm, and compassionate demeanor that is worthy of being placed on a lamp stand.

In short, both student and professor have a responsibility and commitment that should be examined daily and it is only through the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that both are able to maintain the proper interpersonal dynamic.

Academic Excellence: A Dim Reflection of God's Glory

A faithful education does not exclude strong academic excellence. In fact, one might argue that it requires it. It does suggest an underlying motivation consistent with Christian ideals. Included in that motivation is a desire that students reach their moral and intellectual potential. This development can come from multiple sources including the traditional liberal arts curriculum. C. S. Lewis explains the relationship between Christianity and the arts and sciences this way:

When it [Christianity] tells you to feed the hungry it does not give you lessons in cookery. When it tells you to read the Scriptures it does not give you lessons in Hebrew and Greek, or even in English grammar. It was never intended to replace or supersede the ordinary human arts and sciences: it is rather a director which will set them all to the right jobs, and a source of energy which will give them all new life, if only they will put themselves at its disposal.”¹

With these sentiments firmly in mind we should maintain a strong sense of academic excellence both in our individual pursuits as well as in the expectations we have for our students. We should be willing to teach additional classes when requested by students, create classroom materials that encourage active student participation, and demonstrate a willingness to spend significant out of class time to aid students in their intellectual pursuits. While the world might argue that such actions can be found in secular institutions and hence have no place in an essay on faithful education, I would argue that it is a question of purpose and motivation. Our motivation should parallel what we find in 1 Corinthians 10, as well as on the cafeteria wall at College of the Ozarks, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NIV). And certainly the apostle’s words “whatever you do” provide enough breadth to include even mathematics.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 82-83.

Mathematics: Part of God's Truth

Currently the field of mathematics is experiencing a debate over whether it is a system of arithmetic rules that have been observed to be true or an independent logical system whose discovered truths are universal given the underlying assumptions (or axioms). My answer to both is yes. Historically mathematics was developed as a set of observed truths that were written down, learned, and used. These rules allow us to numerically describe the world in a systematic and unambiguous way. The ability to describe and predict behavior of physical systems earned it the moniker of *the language of the sciences*. Eventually the process itself was used to develop models of other unique but existent systems that operated using a slightly different set of axioms. Still later, as a rational exercise of intellectual curiosity, it was decided to create an independent, logically consistent set of axioms and then to discover, given this new set, what conclusions would necessarily follow.

If one views mathematics as equivalent to arithmetic it would be easy to believe that worldviews are irrelevant. But as a system of argumentation there is an underlying assumption that rationality is something to be trusted. Lewis argues that, "In order to think we must claim for our own reasoning a validity which is not credible if our own thought is merely a function of our brain, and our brains a by-product of irrational physical processes."² Close examination of this argument excludes all worldviews that deny the existence of the supernatural. In particular, if thought is simply the result of a system of physical processes that evolved randomly over time then there is no reason to necessarily believe it to be valid.

Not originating with Lewis we find similar arguments by Thomas Aquinas who concludes, "Therefore natural agents, which operate on lower levels, appropriately cause preliminary dispositions and forms, whereas the supreme agent, God, causes the ultimate form, which is the rational soul."³ Aquinas is so confident of this conclusion that he continues to elaborate on its characteristics by saying, "However, we are not to imagine that the rational soul is derived from the substance of God, as some have erroneously thought. We demonstrated above that God is simple and indivisible. Therefore He does not join the

² C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 27.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas' Shorter Summa* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), 96.

rational soul to a body as though He had first severed it from His own substance.”⁴

This connection between rationality, argumentation, and a Christian worldview needs to be repeatedly articulated in the classroom. Paul Erdős, a contemporary and extremely prolific mathematician went so far as to phrase it like this: “I’m always saying that the SF [Erdős’s name for God] has this transfinite Book—transfinite being a concept in mathematics that is larger than infinite—that contains the best proofs of all mathematical theorems, proofs that are elegant and perfect.”⁵ Erdős was so consistent in this belief that all knew if he came up to you and said, “It’s straight from the Book,”⁶ he was paying you the ultimate compliment.

In his book *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, Stratford Caldecott records a series of sentiments by esteemed thinkers, highlighting the sense of transcendence which mathematics conveys:⁷

Werner Heisenberg writes ‘[T]he smallest units of matter are not physical objects in the ordinary sense; they are forms and ideas which can be expressed unambiguously only in mathematical language.’

Heinrich Hertz, the German physicist who demonstrated the existence of electromagnetic radiation . . . comments: ‘One cannot escape the feeling that these mathematical formulae have an independent existence and an intelligence of their own, that they are wiser than we are, wiser even than their discoverers, that we get more out of them than we originally put into them’

Michael S. Schneider writes: ‘Numbers are a map of the beautiful order of the universe, the plan by which the divine Architect transformed undifferentiated Chaos into orderly Cosmos.’

⁴ Ibid. 96.

⁵ Paul Hoffman, “The Man Who Loves Only Numbers.” *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1987): 66.

⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁷ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 54.

Such sentiments need to be unashamedly and consistently shared with students, because hidden within this system of argumentation and mathematical modeling are glimpses of beauty and elegant simplicity.

Perhaps one might wonder what beauty and elegance have to do with faithful education, especially mathematics. In response, I echo the sentiments of Jonathan Edwards who believed that God is “infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all beauty to be found throughout the whole creation is but a reflection of the diffused beams of that being, who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory.”⁸ While the words beauty and elegance might seem strange to the uninitiated when applied to technical theorems, I believe, with proper explanation, they can be seen as appropriately descriptive.

Others have gone even further. The mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan believed that his mathematical insights were the product of revelation from God. He said, “[A]n equation for me has no meaning, unless it represents a thought of God.”⁹ While I have never experienced special divine mathematical revelations, I do sense divine structure and inspiration in certain results within the field and desire to convey those to students. The apostle Paul writes that God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom 1:20). Therefore, mathematical equations may not be given to us supernaturally, but they may still reveal aspects of God.

Mathematics: A Picture of God’s Beauty

Recent sub-disciplines of mathematics have sprung from the classics in the form of Chaos, Fractals, and Dynamics. These disciplines use classical complex variables and contemporary computing capabilities to more closely approximate physical objects and dynamical systems. There are practical applications in many imaging and prediction models including: cancer recognition, battlefield hardware observation, as well as natural systems simulation. The images generated by their algorithms have returned a new appreciation of the beauty that can

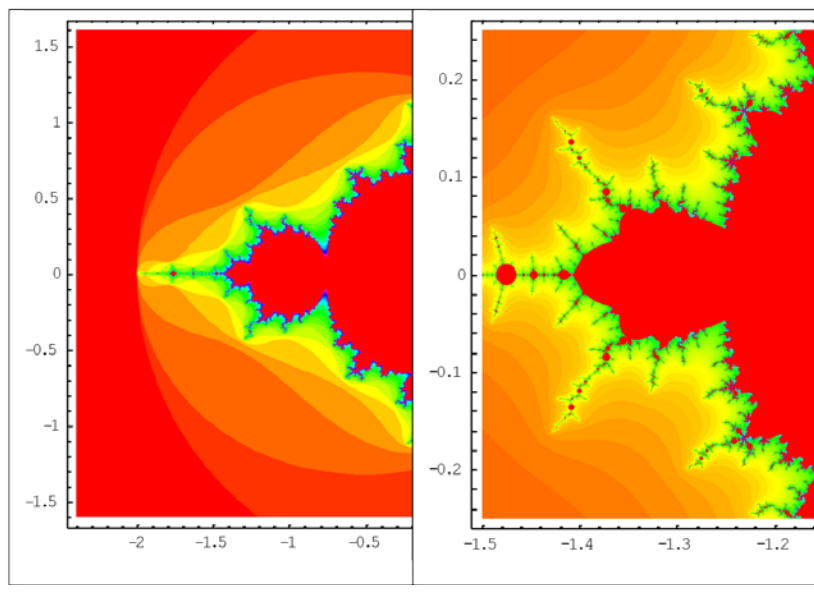
⁸ Cited in James Bradley and Russell Howell, *Mathematics Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), 157.

⁹ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Brazos Press, 2009), 55.

spring from what appears to be simple, if not trivial, computer code and equations. This area of study has heeded the words of American mathematicians Phillip J. Davis and Reuben Hersh, who warned:

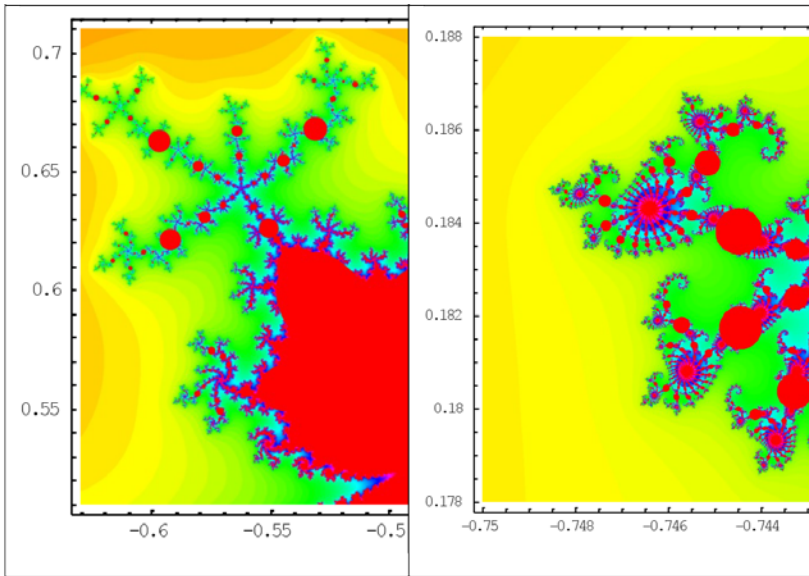
Blindness to the aesthetic element in mathematics is widespread and can account for a feeling that mathematics is dry as dust, as exciting as a telephone book, as remote as the laws of infangthief of fifteenth century Scotland. Contrariwise, appreciation of this element makes the subject live in a wonderful manner and burn as no other creation of the human mind seems to do.¹⁰

The following images were created using algorithms and parameters similar to the ones suggested in the book on fractals by Robert Devaney.¹¹ They are of a Mandlebrot set. The successive magnifications demonstrate the complexity of its structure. Its nature is surprising when you consider that it was generated by iterating on the polynomial.



¹⁰ H. -O. Peitgen and P. H. Richter, *The Beauty of Fractals: Images of Complex Dynamical Systems* (Berlin: Springer, 1986), 21.

¹¹ Robert L. Devaney, *Chaos, Fractals, and Dynamics Computer experiments in Mathematics* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990).



This infinite complexity generated by such elegant simplicity serves as a dim shadow of how God was able to create such an amazingly complex world based upon his deep and abiding truths.

Elegance in mathematics is best demonstrated in theorems simply stated, cleverly argued, and that result in surprising, if not even counter-intuitive, results. One such theorem requires a rudimentary knowledge of algebra and produces a result that many students find astonishing. I often present the result in my lower division classes to reinforce the idea that mathematics is elegantly true and sometimes surprising. It is included below as an example of elegant mathematical argumentation (as well as the personal conviction that it is a shame to write a paper on mathematics that doesn't include at least one theorem).

Theorem: $\overline{.99} = 1$

Proof: Let $n = \overline{.99}$. Then $10n = 9.\overline{99}$.

Subtracting the first equation from the second gives us
 $10n - n = 9.\overline{99} - \overline{.99}$.

Simplification yields $9n = 9$.

Finally, division of both sides by 9 gives us the intended conclusion, namely, $n = 1$.

Q.E.D.

This result was so counterintuitive to one student that he exclaimed in a loud voice, “Boy I sure am glad you are not involved with getting us to the moon!”

Conclusion

If one wishes to foster an educational environment in which Christianity flourishes and students of Christ-like character are produced, they should heed the warnings of Lewis when he said:

No generation can bequeath to its successor what it has not got. You may frame the syllabus as you please. But when you have planned and reported *ad nauseam*, if we are sceptical we shall teach only scepticism to our pupils, if fools only folly, if vulgar only vulgarity, if saints sanctity, if heroes heroism. . . . Nothing which was not in the teachers can flow from them into the pupils.¹²

Put simply, it takes teachers filled with awe and wonder at the beauty of God’s creative genius in mathematics to produce students who marvel at the elegance of a good theorem. In sum, it is only teachers *with* Christ-like character who produce students *of* Christ-like character.

Thus, a way to provide a quality faithful education is through faith-filled faculty, exceptional in their discipline and dedicated to seeing their students reach their full potential. Each day I am encouraged that such an education is possible by those professionals I am privileged to meet who view their professional life as a calling.

¹² C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 116.

Recommended Resources

Bradley, James and Russell Howell. *Mathematics: Through the Eyes of Faith*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Caldecott, Stratford. *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009.

Devaney, Robert L. *Chaos, Fractals, and Dynamics: Computer Experiments in Mathematics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990.

Peitgen, H.-O. and P.H. Richter. *The Beauty of Fractals: Images of Complex Dynamical Systems*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1986.

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*Reviews &
Resources*

Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age

by Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Alleman, and Todd Ream.
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.
385 pp. US \$40.00, hardcover.

Perry Glanzer, Nathan Alleman, and Todd Ream open their challenging new book by observing that by many measures—money, prestige, and power—America’s universities appear very successful. However, a growing number of voices are proclaiming a crisis at the heart of these institutions of higher learning, a fragmentation of identity and purpose that has given rise to what Clark Kerr has called the *multiversity*. Unfortunately, Christian colleges and universities are not immune to the same forces of disintegration that have assailed the secular academy. The authors suggest that in their efforts to gain the whole world, universities have lost their souls. The aim of this volume is “to explore what it means for the soul of the university to be saved” (p. 5).

Obviously, an institution such as a college or university does not actually have a soul, but in using such language the book’s authors are drawing on a powerful (and biblical) metaphor. As David Smith and Susan Felch have recently reminded us in *Teaching and Christian Imagination* (2016), the metaphors we use to frame our experience can have profound consequences. Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream explain that by “soul” they mean the “university’s core identity, story, and mission” (p. 13). The loss of such a soul has given rise to the fragmentation that has become a defining feature of contemporary higher education.

In Part One, Building the University (Chapters 1-5), the authors argue that the roots of the crisis lie deep in the past. Indeed, the “problem had its origins in the structure of the first universities and later the early American colleges” (p. 7). As such, their diagnosis is grounded in a sweeping survey of higher education in the West since the twelfth century. When Europe’s first universities were founded,

education was essentially a monopoly of the Catholic Church, which “created a special place in the curriculum for something they called the discipline and faculty of theology” (p. 24). Indeed, theology was “the queen of the sciences” or, in the architectural metaphor favored at the time, the pinnacle or upper room of the educational structure.

The implications of this separation of theology from other disciplines, implied by the dominant metaphor, were not apparent in the medieval period. However, with the religious divisions that resulted from the Reformation, and the growing confidence in human reason in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, theology ceased to serve as either foundation or pinnacle of the academic palace. Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream conclude, “after marginalizing theology . . . [universities] could not find an overarching narrative or structure that could embrace theological diversity or even a common vision of moral formation and inquiry,” despite efforts to do so on the basis of “various secular sagas” (pp. 79, 109).

In Part Two, *The Fragmentation of the Multiversity* (Chapters 6-11), the authors explore various manifestations of the fragmentation that the loss of a unifying and animating soul have produced, with chapters focused on professors, curriculum, students, administrators, athletics, and online and for-profit higher education. Without a core identity, story, and mission to inform their work, faculty pursue ever more specialized research and cease to see their role as educating the whole student. Without agreement about what it means to be truly educated, the curriculum becomes merely a buffet from which students choose courses that seem most appealing. In the ever-expanding realm of the cocurricular, there is a focus on “the intersection of parts with no overall sense of what a flourishing human being is” (pp. 152-153). At many schools, athletics have become a substitute, an idolatrous religion, the only thing that seems to unite the various segments of the academic community.

In Part Three, *Restoring the Soul of the University* (Chapters 12-16), Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream assert that Christian institutions of higher learning must “do more than adopt the latest responses to the fragmentation of the university” (p. 219). Instead, in order to address the problems identified in the earlier sections of the book, they argue we must find new ways to allow theology to “nourish the soul of the university” (p. 227). They note that theology is unique among all the disciplines in that it is the only one that can legitimately worship what it studies, God.

Although they acknowledge that academic theologians have a vital role to play, they also argue that “theology, when properly understood, cannot rest easily within the confines of a singular faculty” but should be “a transdisciplinary endeavor,” the lifeblood of the university body rather than merely a room in the academic structure (pp. 229-230).

One of the great strengths of the book is the unity of vision and voice that its three authors have managed to maintain. Readers may find some of the authors’ concrete proposals problematic or impractical. For example, they suggest that universities “could hire a separate theologian who would work in partnership with one of four general areas—sciences, social sciences, humanities, and professions” (pp. 233). However, Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream offer many helpful ideas and concepts, such as their discussion of the “liberating arts” or the “greenhouse community,” that should inform the efforts of individual Christian institutions of higher education to restore the soul of the university.

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Why Study: Exploring the Face of God in the Academy

by Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Singapore.
North Bridge Centre, Singapore: FES, 2017.
159 pp. US \$7.30, softcover.

Why Study: Exploring the Face of God in the Academy sets for itself the noble and necessary goal of providing Christian students entering university a resource for negotiating the sometimes fraught relationship between academics and faith. The contributors are all Christians who have negotiated this relationship successfully at academia's highest levels and most secular settings. But, as the preface to the book clearly asserts, the contributors' "brilliance and academic qualifications . . . are neither the focus of this book nor as [*sic*] interesting in and of themselves" (p. 6). Rather, the purpose of the book is to present "*their journey* in encountering the different facets of the 'Face of God' in their research, studies, and practices" (p. 6; my emphasis). Written in an informal, personal register, *Why Study* favors discipleship over theological and philosophical inquiry, offering young Christian students the wisdom of those who have found a productive intersection between academics and faith.

Among this volume's most noteworthy qualities is the range of perspectives it offers to a young and "uninitiated" audience. *Why Study* speaks specifically to the incoming freshman who has not yet necessarily discovered her passions and vocation, and who is preparing to embark on the explorative process of a general education curriculum. In the second through the eleventh chapters, ten different scholars offer their perspectives on the ways that their faith has informed their work in humanities (literature and history), STEM (biology, and physics), and pre-professional (business, education, engineering, law, medicine, and social work) subjects. Each of these scholars boasts impressive credentials that demonstrate acutely, if implicitly, the dissemination of Christian faith throughout the academy.

Despite the impressive qualifications of the contributors, the volume takes very seriously its commitment to a novice audience. Thus, the chapters eschew jargon and complicated lines of inquiry that require a firm, discipline-specific theoretical foundation. Instead, the contributors focus on personal anecdotes and simple, if overly general, definitions to introduce their perspectives. The best chapters tend to follow a pattern of defining the field at its “lowest common denominator,” identifying “big picture” points of intersection between the field and Christian faith, and then offering suggestions about negotiating these points of intersection drawn from the contributor’s experience (see, for example, Joy L. K. Pachuau’s chapter on history). Very little in this book is likely to challenge, and certainly nothing is likely to intimidate, even the most nervous teenaged reader.

But this focus on accessibility is ultimately the book’s downfall. Indeed, the book is often so focused on avoiding intimidating intellectualism that it fails to address any essential point of connection between academic disciplines and Christian faith at all. Many of the contributors discuss almost exclusively only very specific, mission-oriented expressions of Christian faith within their specific fields, leaving students who find themselves drawn to more conventional professional outlets with little to glean (the chapters on education and engineering are particularly guilty on this account). In the chapter on education, for example, Ruth Wong discusses her own experience teaching underprepared, impoverished students, but offers nothing to the student who might find herself teaching in a wealthy, college preparatory setting and whose students are no less in need of being “[trained] up. . . in the way [they] should go” so that “when [they are] old [they] will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Furthermore, many of the chapters are so focused on narrating the contributors’ own experiences of negotiating their fields as Christians that they fail to turn to a productive examination of the broader implications of their experiences within their fields. In these cases, the academic field is little more than a backdrop for the contributor’s own faith journey, and the chapters present a single, very specific way of being a Christian within the field rather than a perspective on the intersection of faith and the academic discipline as a whole (see, for example, the chapters on education, literature, social work, and, to a lesser extent, physics). Even those chapters that do address more essential points of intersection between Christian faith and a particular academic field rarely move beyond assertions *that* the field is augmented

by faith into explanations and examples of *how* it is so augmented. While these shortcomings are problematic for incoming freshman looking to this volume for practical guidance on how faith might intersect with the academy, they completely undermine the volume's secondary purpose of offering "value to university students who are more senior, as well as Christian academics and practitioners" (p. 5).

In the end, *Why Study: Exploring the Face of God in the Academy* fails to meet the lofty goals that it sets for itself. A student who reads this book may become convinced that it is possible to be a Christian at the highest levels of the academy (for she has ten different examples of people who have done so), and she will certainly have benefitted from the very personal, and sometimes quite vulnerable, discipleship of the contributors. These are both certainly valuable accomplishments in their own right. But a reader of this book is not likely to feel significantly more informed about how *her own* faith might inform her studies in her own experience and on the terms that her own faith journey dictates. She will have found reasons why others study, and how they are living their lives in the academy as the hands and feet of Jesus. But the avenues by which the academy might lead her closer to the fixed expression of the face of God are illuminated for her by this volume only in as much as seeing a little more of the body might continue to direct her toward the head.

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Eschatological Discipleship: Leading Christians to Understand Their Historical And Cultural Context.

By Trevin K. Wax. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2018,
269 pp. US \$29.99, softcover.

In his introduction, Wax begins with a question, writing as he does about how discipleship in the church must always and everywhere remain cognizant of the prevailing context and culture. His question is this, “Is it possible that evangelical Christians have simultaneously amplified and reduced the importance of eschatology?” One of his primary concerns is to help his reader understand that eschatology is not relegated to merely thinking about the end of the world. For Wax, eschatology flows through all of redemptive history and God’s people are obligated to understand the time in which they live.

Wax’s overarching concern is that Christians either so amplify the end times that they are “no earthly good” or that they so reduce their focus on the end times that their discipleship remains individualistic with no ultimate or Kingdom perspective. To help with this problem, Wax encourages his readers throughout this book that discipleship and eschatology are inseparable. In other words, for Wax, discipleship must be done in the context of the “already and not yet,” but primarily in an understanding of our current time and culture and always with an eye to the future hope of cosmic renewal.

Wax seeks to help the church better position itself and its discipleship endeavors by asking the usual questions to ascertain a Christian worldview: Where did all this come from? What is the purpose of life? Why is this place so messed up? How can it all be fixed? However, building on the work of Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, Wax suggests adding a fifth foundational question: “What time is it?” Wax states that he hopes . . .

[T]o show the importance of asking the question “What time is it” in order to understand a worldview properly and then illustrate the importance of this question for missiology by countering the prevailing rival eschatologies of our current cultural moment in order to display our unique identity as kingdom citizens (p. 3).

The book’s structure is neatly divided into four parts. In Part 1 (chapter one) he defines four key terms to help his reader understand what is meant by the phrase eschatological discipleship. These words are discipleship, worldview, eschatology, and wisdom. In Part 2 (chapters 2-4) he focuses on the biblical foundation for seeing an eschatological aspect to forming disciples. He uses examples from the Old Testament, connections to the New Testament and Jesus’ teachings, and then considers select teachings from the Pauline letters. With Part 3 (chapters 5-8) he shows how a Christian answer to the worldview question, “What time is it?” necessarily encounters rival eschatologies in North America in the twenty-first century. He considers three such rivals: the Enlightenment, the Sexual Revolution, and Consumerism. In Part 4 (the final chapter) he surveys three conceptions of discipleship currently used in the North American church: evangelistic reproduction, personal piety, and gospel-centered motivation.

In the final segment of his book Wax takes a look at three discipleship models currently used in the church and compares them to his understanding of eschatological discipleship. The three are: discipleships conceived merely as disciples making disciples (evangelical reproduction), the adoption of spiritual disciplines (personal piety or spiritual transformation), and discipleship that is gospel centered in its motivation. He then highlights what he believes are the strengths and weaknesses of each compared to his concept of eschatological discipleship.

Wax provides a helpful resource as he writes from a 30,000-foot perspective on a topic that the church needs to revisit. He helpfully clarifies the issue by seeing discipleship from three perspectives, though all overlap (personal, collective, and cosmic). He does believe that discipleship must be personal and individual and it must be done in the context of the church along with an understanding of the age and time in which we live and it must be done always with the future of Christ’s kingdom hope of cosmic renewal in view. It seems, though, that he overstates his case. In the end he comes across heavy on the cosmic

end of the spectrum and minimizes personal discipleship. He critiques Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp (p. 213) for their use of the gospel as motivation for holiness, stating that their use of the “indicative and imperative” and their focus on grace as the power and motivator of Christ-likeness focuses only on the personal aspect of sanctification and minimizes the cosmic aspect as well as the role of the Holy Spirit. Having read and used much of Lane’s and Tripp’s work, it seems Wax has not read them closely or carefully enough.

Another point of concern is that his use and treatment of the Old Testament to make his point seems thin. He does not mention the larger covenants (Adamic, Noahic, Davidic, etc.) He mentions the Abrahamic covenant, but only as an example that Abraham was willing to move to another land to do what God has called him to do. He does mention other parts of the Old Testament (Joseph, Promised Land, Joshua, etc.) but only in passing. He does not develop his thoughts around any of them.

Wax’s concern for the church is that its discipleship always keeps an eye to the future hope of Christ’s second return and that the church does not minimize the cosmic scope of sanctification over the personal or even the collective. However, he never mentions the overarching *reason* for eschatological discipleship—the restoration of God’s glorious image of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty back into the created order that God may thereby be glorified. Highlighting God’s glorious triune nature as both the cause and reason for salvation, restoration, and sanctification would bolster this work significantly. It needs a larger *telos* than merely the church being aware of the times and conducting discipleship accordingly.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of his book is Part 3 where he provides an accurate and helpful analysis of rival eschatologies and how they challenge the church today. He argues that holding to a more eschatological approach to discipleship better equips the church to stand against both those rivals and winsomely engage those in the culture who find themselves awash in human autonomy, sexual fulfillment, and chasing the wind of progress and wealth.

Wax’s work makes an obvious point: the church must be about the business of holiness always and everywhere as it thoughtfully considers the time and culture in which it finds itself. Wax provides a helpful but somewhat obvious reminder. Granted perhaps many in the church do forget the need to always connect these two components, though

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it seems Wax could have accomplished his goal in a briefer format. However, the previously stated concerns aside, I recommend this book as a solid reminder of the absolute necessity of discipleship in the church and Christian community at all times.

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The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation

by Rod Dreher. New York, NY: Sentinel, 2017.
272 pp. US \$15.00, hardcover.

You don't have to look very far today to find pessimistic assessments of contemporary America, but one of the most widely discussed of the last year, Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option*, takes a particularly negative view. Indeed, his subtitle is "A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation." Dreher writes, "By God's mercy, the faith may continue to flourish in the Global South and China, but barring a dramatic reversal of current trends, it will all but disappear entirely from Europe and North America" (p. 8). He concludes that American Christians have officially lost the culture wars that began fifty years ago and that if evangelicals believe that there is still some silent majority out there that affirms their values, they are deluding themselves.

Dreher's first chapter is called "The Great Flood" and it draws on two metaphors that both echo stories from the Old Testament: the flood that engulfed the world in Noah's day and the Jews' experience of exile in Babylon. He also introduces the historic figure Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543), the founder of western monasticism, who inspired Dreher's title. Some reviewers have been very critical of Dreher's book, finding both his assessment of the contemporary situation and his proposed solutions too extreme, even radical. Ironically, Dreher would agree, arguing that "believers [must begin] thinking and acting radically" (p. 15). Our English word *radical* come from the Latin *radix*, which means "root," and Dreher believes our current crisis has deep roots in the Western past and that to address these challenges we will need to regain a rootedness in the resources of two thousand years of Christian tradition.

Chapter Two, "The Roots of the Crisis," draws on the scholarship of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) and discusses the gradual decline of

religion in the face of secularization. Dreher identifies “five landmarks over seven centuries that have rocked Western civilization and stripped it of its ancestral faith” (p. 22). The significance of this analysis is that it belies the common Christian idea that if we could simply rewind the clock a few decades or, more problematically, retake the White House, we could restore a lost Christian America. Dreher argues our situation is far more like that of Benedict in the sixth century as the Roman Empire collapsed around him and he left Rome to establish his monastic community.

Dreher is not arguing that we should all become monks or take vows of celibacy and poverty, as some of his critics seem to believe. Instead, in the remaining chapters of the book, he considers such diverse issues and spheres as politics, the church, community, education, work, sex, and technology, and the lessons we could learn from Benedict and from church history more generally. For the purposes of this review, I would like to address what he has to say regarding two of these topics: politics and the church.

Chapter Four is entitled “A New Kind of Christian Politics.” Dreher begins with the assertion, “The Benedict Option calls for a radical new way of doing politics, a hands-on localism . . . [and an] antipolitical politics” (p. 78). For a brief window from the 1970s until the early twenty-first century, the Church and the Republican Party seemed to be aligned in their aims but if that was ever true, it is true no longer. Although he argues that “Christians cannot afford to vacate the public sphere entirely” and that we must work to defend “religious liberty,” the answer is not politics as often conceived (pp. 82, 84). In his words, “No administration in Washington, no matter how ostensibly pro-Christian, is capable of stopping cultural trends towards desacralization and fragmentation that have been building for centuries” (p. 81).

However, if we broaden our definition of politics “to include culture, we find that opportunities for action and service are boundless” (p. 91). Dreher notes that even though Benedict’s *Rule* says nothing about politics, secular government, or laws, it is still highly political. Politics, related to the Greek *polis*, is all about human flourishing, and Christianity has a lot to say about that topic. Dreher concludes, “If we hope for our faith to change the world one day, we have to start locally. . . . with the individual heart and spread from there to the family, the church community, the neighborhood, and onward” (p. 95).

Chapter Five, entitled “A Church for All Seasons,” focuses on the challenges that face the local church, which Dreher believes has danger-

ously assimilated to the surrounding culture. He notes that *culture* comes from the Latin *cultus*, which means “worship.” Dreher argues that we need to be much more aware of the impact of secular cultural liturgies, a concept he borrows from James Smith, while cultivating more robust Christian liturgies of our own. In Dreher’s words, “By rediscovering the past, recovering liturgical worship and asceticism, centering our lives on the church community, and tightening church discipline, we will, by God’s grace, again become the peculiar people we should always have been” (p. 102).

Here evangelicals potentially have much to learn from the Christian past and from a spectrum of other Christian traditions. It is important to remember that worship is “primarily formative, not expressive” (p. 112). Dreher talks, for example, about the value of liturgical worship (*Book of Common Prayer*), the Christian calendar (Lent, Christmas, etc.), sacramentalism, and even asceticism. He concludes, “Benedict Option churches will find ways within their own traditions to take on practices, liturgical and otherwise, for the sake of deepening their commitment to Christ by building a thick Christian culture” (p. 121).

Many readers will likely disagree with Dreher’s diagnosis of and his prescription for the cultural and religious ills that threaten the contemporary American church. However, having read and debated the book with both students and faculty here at College of the Ozarks, I can confidently say that *The Benedict Option* will provoke the kinds of discussions in which Christians today desperately need to engage.

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Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis

by Craig A Carter. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.
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In this work Craig Carter seeks to highlight how the instincts of methodological naturalism are often deeply ingrained in the hermeneutical processes of modern interpreters across the theological spectrum, resulting in a deep uneasiness with, if not an outright rejection of, the premodern interpretive practices represented in the Great Tradition of the church. Carter believes that such modern instincts often lead interpreters of various persuasions to let “modernity decide which methods of biblical interpretation are allowable for theology” (p. 5, n. 4), which cannot sustain proper engagement with Scripture. Instead, interpreters should root their interpretive practices in inspired revelation and in the theological metaphysics and spiritual exegesis represented in the Great Tradition.

Carter suggests that modern methods go awry when embracing a single-meaning theory of interpreting Scripture. If all Scripture is truly God-breathed, interpreters must not interpret the Bible like any other book but must leave room for both human and divine authorial intent that may not be coextensive. The reality of divine authorial intent may provide “layers of meaning” in the text that extend beyond the intent of the original author, although this broader meaning never stands against the human author’s original intent.

The general reading practices of the New Testament authors and of theologians of the Great Tradition up to the Enlightenment arise from a foundation of trust in the supernatural inspiration of Scripture and of a culture of Nicene-style theological metaphysics. Carter argues that such reading practices, when understood properly, actually accord with the

nature of Scripture and of God's revelatory acts and ought not to bring embarrassment to modern interpreters. Premodern exegetical practices are generally more faithful to Scripture itself than modern ones. This helps explain why early interpreters produced faithful creedal formulations that have united Christians for two millennia across geographical, ethnic, cultural, and denominational lines. The modern interpretive context, however, often persists in the uneasy view that early Christians produced the right doctrines from sorely inadequate methods.

Whatever one thinks of Carter's conclusions, this book merits reading by scholars, pastors, and students for a few reasons. First, evangelicals have generally neglected to become familiar with the theological trajectories and interpretive practices of premodern theologians, particularly those of the early Christian fathers but even of Reformation Christians, and Carter rightly strives to persuade readers to address this neglect and sketches some of the characteristics of premodern reading practices. Carter works through the examples of Ambrose of Milan, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Augustine, Origen, Calvin, and others to clarify their habits of spiritual exegesis. If the Spirit has truly guided the church's engagement with Scripture throughout her history, we should expect to benefit from the Spirit's work during premodern centuries.

As Michael Allen and Scott Swain have recently argued in their book *Reformed Catholicity*, perhaps modern interpreters have too readily treated the history of the church's interpretive practices like Deists or Donatists, operating as if the Spirit of God left interpreters to their own limited resources or as if too many supposed imperfections exist in their practices, freeing us to cast their work aside. Carter argues that such inclinations have been detrimental to modern engagement with Scripture. Moreover, regardless of the conclusions we draw about the methods and results of premodern interpreters, modern interpreters should expect to have blind spots characteristic of our own age in areas we do not anticipate and to discover correctives, as C. S. Lewis suggests, by keeping "the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds." Carter's project helps open the windows to that breeze.

Second, related to the first point, Carter's book provides insight into the metaphysical assumptions of premodern, modern, and post-modern interpreters that can help readers better understand some of the driving forces behind Christian reading practices throughout the centuries. Carter's descriptions help readers understand that no Christian interprets Scripture in a vacuum or with a blank slate. This under-

standing can help interpreters recognize and come to grips with their own necessarily contextual metaphysical assumptions that come to bear on their engagement with Scripture. Such awareness can make Christian readers more humble and properly self-reflective as they seek to interpret what God has revealed. Carter argues that a pro-Nicene culture and what he calls a “Christian Platonist” metaphysical posture, which denies a naturalist conception of the universe and Scripture, enable readers to interpret Scripture in accordance with Scripture’s own theological trajectories.

Third, Carter’s book presses readers to think more deeply about how they view the unified message of Scripture and how various portions of the Bible focus on and find fulfillment in Jesus Christ. These pursuits are surely among the most important pursuits of all Bible interpreters, as exemplified by Jesus himself (e.g., Luke 24:25–27) and the early apostolic evangelists (e.g., Acts 17:2–3). Carter raises significant questions about how Christ is presented in all of Scripture and draws our attention to the manner in which New Testament writers and premodern Christian thinkers understood biblical texts as pointing to Christ. Again, even if one disagrees with some or many of Carter’s conclusions, Christian scholars and pastors must think deeply about the issues Carter addresses and the history of Christian engagement with these issues. Carter’s work will help clarify one’s understanding of these significant issues.

Chapters 3 and 4 on the theological metaphysics of the Great Tradition and the history of biblical interpretation might strain the patience of some readers in places due to the philosophical nature of the discussion. However, such readers could still profit from the book by skipping those chapters and focusing on Carter’s discussions of the nature of Scripture and the reading practices of premodern exegetes. Overall the book provides a learned and thoughtful—and often provocative—defense of turning a critical eye to modern interpretive sensibilities and absorbing the metaphysical, theological, and exegetical sensibilities of the Great Tradition. This may be the finest defense of interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition from an evangelical perspective among various similar works that have recently appeared.

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