

VOLUME 15  
NUMBER 2

# *INTÉGRITÉ*

FALL 2016



PUBLISHED SEMIANNUALLY BY  
**MISSOURI BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**  
Saint Louis, Missouri 63141

[www.mobap.edu/integrite](http://www.mobap.edu/integrite)

A FAITH & LEARNING JOURNAL

# ***Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal***

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*Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal* (ISSN 1547-0474 and 1547-0873) is published in spring and fall by the Faith & Learning Committee and the Humanities Division of Missouri Baptist University, One College Park Dr., St. Louis, Missouri 63141. Published both online <<http://www.mobap.edu/integrite/>> and in print copy, the journal examines historical, philosophical, theological, cultural, and pedagogical issues related to the integration of Christian faith and higher learning. All submissions are critically reviewed for content and substance by the editor and the editorial review board; in some cases, scholars in specific fields are invited to evaluate manuscripts. The opinions expressed by individual writers in this journal are not necessarily endorsed by the editor, editorial board, or Missouri Baptist University. *Intégrité* (pronounced *IN tay gri tay*) is a French word translated into English as “totality,” “integrity,” “honesty,” “uprightness,” or “integration.” In his doctrine of the Christian life, John Calvin considered “*intégrité*” as whole-hearted or integrated commitment to God. A Christian with such a commitment aims for single-minded devotion in Christ. Publication of the print edition of *Intégrité* has been made possible by funding from Missouri Baptist University.

**SUBMISSIONS:** Submissions of scholarly articles, short essays, review articles, book reviews, and poems are welcome. Send your work as an e-mail attachment (Microsoft Word format) to the editor, John J. Han, at [hanjn@mobap.edu](mailto:hanjn@mobap.edu). We accept submissions all year round. For detailed submission guidelines, see the last two pages of this journal.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS & BOOKS FOR REVIEW:** *Intégrité* subscriptions, renewals, address changes, and books for review should be mailed to John J. Han, Editor of *Intégrité*, Missouri Baptist University, One College Park Dr., St. Louis, Missouri 63141. Phone: (314) 392-2311/Fax: (314) 434-7596. Subscription rates: Individuals \$10 per year; institutions \$20 per year. An additional shipping fee (\$5-15 per year) is charged for international subscription.

**INDEXING:** *Intégrité* is listed in the Southern Baptist Periodical Index.

Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2016

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## **Participating with God: Christians Teaching in Secular Contexts**

**Kathleen W. Mays and Patrick E. Mays**

### **Introduction**

What can we learn from the Christian professor who says, “There are echoes of God in any field or discipline,” or “I seek to bring students one step closer to redemption,” or “I cannot not integrate?” These comments and others like them are what we uncovered recently in our field research among Christian professors teaching cross-culturally in secular universities. Our intention with this research was to look more at the integrated mindset and less at specific classroom behaviors.

### **Background and Purpose**

This research draws on works that explore worldview and education from a Christian perspective. We stand on the contributions of scholars in the area of faith integration (Dockery, 2012; Harris, 2004; Hasker, 1992; Marsden, 1998; Plantinga, 2002). We also rely on those who have clarified Christian worldview concepts (Naugle, 2002; Smith, 2009), explored Christian higher education purposes (Holmes, 1987), offered styles of faith integration (Chewning, 2001), and categorized methods of faith integration (Roller, 2013). Scholars continue to grapple with the “what, why, and how” of faith integration, often describing it as a gap that needs to be addressed. A common assumption is that, due to the fall, our faith and disciplines have become disconnected and must be restored to their intended fullness. While we agree with this “it’s broken and we need to fix it” approach to faith integration, we find our greatest resonance with Glanzer (2008). He encourages Christian professors to imitate God by being creative and redemptive in their scholarship, “engaging in the unfolding of creation by participating in the creational work of God” (Glanzer, 2008, p. 44).

In light of this, we find the work of Dallas Willard helpful. Willard sees the Christ-formed life revealing clear purpose for one’s place in the world. It is a recognition of one’s nature as an “unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe” (Willard, 2006, p. 20), who is disconnected from God, creation, others, and self by sin (Bartholomew & Goheen, 2004), yet restored to God’s intentions through Christ and living creatively in this world. As professors restored to wholeness, seeing one’s academic field in view of God’s ongoing work in His creation is a full engagement with the world in search for

God's truth. The professor, then, can use his or her academic field to experience God more fully, to understand one's self as God does, to see others as God sees them, and to restore creation to its fullness.

Willard speaks of a process in which Jesus changes one's perspective, becoming the ultimate "in-former," through whom one is reformed with new "insides" (2006, p. 21). The need, then, is to transform one's heart, the center of character and choice, into one willing to embrace the revolution of Jesus in bringing God's kingdom to every aspect of human life (Willard, 2012). For the Christian professor, it means that we communicate much more than the content of our academic fields; we speak with our lives, which is the overflow of our hearts (Matt. 12:34). A professor's personal grounding in the transforming life of Jesus comes through individual and corporate spiritual disciplines in such a way that one's spiritual vitality permeates every facet of the teaching-learning process (Willard, 1998). In summary, the act and the art of the integration of faith and learning for Christian professors is to be mindful practitioners of the reality of God's rule in one's life and in the world (Willard, 1997).

Thus, our purpose in this research was to discover, through interviews and extended observation, how Christian professors in cross-cultural contexts are living integrated lives and teaching with a view towards participating with God's ongoing redemption of creation. In this paper, we describe our methodology and findings of this qualitative study. We offer practical ways for Christian professors to consider using those findings. And we end with some suggestions for further study.

## **Methodology**

This two-phase project was designed as a qualitative research study using face to face interviews and on-site observation. Interviewees were selected based on the fact that they are committed Christians, teaching at the university level, and living cross-culturally. The authors requested participation from the interviewees based on acquaintances with the authors of this research. Thus, it was a convenience sample. For Phase 1, we interviewed fifteen professors across eleven academic disciplines who teach in secular universities in eleven different countries (outside the United States). Interviewees represented a broad range of academic disciplines and were teaching in varied locations across Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. These face to face interviews were conducted during sessions of a conference we were all attending in July 2013 in the United States. Interviewees responded to questions categorized around purpose, perspective, and practice. Representative questions included: (1) How does your academic field reveal God's truth?; (2) What does your transformation in Christ teach you about being a teacher?; and (3) What methodologies and practices that you employ in and outside the classroom most exemplify God's purposes for you and your students? It should be noted and emphasized that all of these professors were teaching in secular universities, with a wide range of tolerance (from none to a great deal) for discussions about religious belief on campus. All of these

professors were teaching cross-culturally, adding layers of interest, potential stress, and possible misunderstanding. The Phase 1 interviews were quite revealing, even inspiring, especially in demonstrating what the professors believe to be true about their faith, their disciplines, and how they might teach in their non-Christian environment. We considered how to probe more deeply and planned Phase 2.

For Phase 2, we went to the professors' locations. While on sabbatical in spring 2016, we interviewed twenty professors across twelve academic disciplines who teach in secular universities in seven different countries in Latin America, Europe, and Central Asia. We spent several days, up to a week, with each professor in the country where they live and teach. Again, the academic disciplines and geographic locations of the professors were quite diverse. We conducted further face to face interviews and spent informal time with each professor observing their daily lives. Four questions during Phase 2 were (1) Please describe how God is revealed in your discipline; (2) Conversely, how does your faith in God inform your understanding of your discipline?; (3) How does your discipline help you see God at work in the world?; and (4) Removing any overtly Christian content or behaviors in class (such as praying or devotionals in class), what determines your effectiveness or success in the classroom as a Christian professor? These are thought provoking questions for most academics. Time was allowed for processing and thinking, and professors often responded over several days.

The interviews and conversations were enlightening, but equally important for our project was the time we spent with each professor observing them in the classroom, with students, during activities outside of class, with their families and church involvement, and in various settings in their communities. Our aim was to observe as much of their regular life as possible. During all of these activities and interactions, we paid attention to and attempted to document even the seemingly minor details.

As we completed our time in each geographic location, we reviewed our notes together to confirm our understanding of the responses before moving on to the next location. Once we completed all of the on-site visits, we both re-read all the notes to solidify themes.

## **Results and Discussions**

Phase 1 consisted of face-to-face interviews in the United States, and Phase 2 consisted of face-to-face interviews and extended on-site observations. Participants, academic disciplines and country locations are summarized in Table 1. We were pleased to find a variety of perspectives based on the many disciplines and contexts represented. In spite of this variety, three consistent themes emerged from the interviews and observations.

**Table 1**  
**Interviewees, Disciplines, and Geographic Locations**

| <b>PHASE</b> | <b># of Professors</b> | <b>Academic Disciplines</b>                                                                                                                                              | <b>Countries</b>                                                                                            |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1            | 15                     | Biology, Communication, English, Environmental Science, Education, Engineering, Music, Philosophy, Physics, Plant Genetics, Theology                                     | Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Czech Republic, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mexico, Nigeria, Uganda |
| 2            | 20                     | Business, Communication, Cultural Studies, Engineering, Environmental Science, History, Leisure/Recreation, Political Science, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology, Theology | Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Mexico, Russia                                    |

### **Theme 1: God's truth is in the academic discipline**

Every professor indicated that he or she sees God clearly in and through the discipline. As Glanzer (2008) notes, research in various fields is conducted and validated in different ways. We found that even though they arrive at truth in different ways, there is agreement that each discipline reveals something important about God. And even with disciplinary distinctions, the interviewees indicated that the reality of God exists “in the subject matter.” The discipline itself holds truth. As many reminded us, all truth is God's truth, and He has placed His stamp of truth in the subject matter. Indeed, He created all things, including the discipline. The responsibility of the Christian academic is to know the truth in one's discipline, to know that God is the source of that truth, and that by seeking what is real there, one is seeking God Himself. As one professor stated, “There are echoes of God in every discipline.”

The analysis of the interview data reveals four characteristics of God that these academics experience while studying, teaching, and researching in their disciplines. More specifically, interviewees explained that their discipline reveals a God who is just, creative, communicative, true and beautiful.

**Just.** Knowing that God is a just God means that the justice we pursue, build, and communicate to others reflects God's character. That is, we can further God's kingdom by building justice into our structures, policies, and organizations. One business professor expressed that he communicates the "wisdom of Jesus" in the classroom through his discipline and understanding of justice. He further indicated that the richness of God's justice far exceeds humanity's limited perception of justice. Another professor, in the area of communication, emphasized seeing her discipline's potential for "bringing forth God's redemption" by dealing with injustices in the world in issues like gender relations and social discourse. Across the disciplines studied, professors expressed the steady presence of God as one who is just.

**Creative.** As a creative designer, God made the earth with systems and sub-systems where His design is evident. One professor explained, "How I view God and his creation are nuanced and concretized views of the human condition that often show humanity's incredible resilience, creativity, and beauty while also detailing its derangement, delusion, and depravity." So, it is crucial, another professor indicated, that we follow God's lead by "designing systems that are functional, aesthetic, economically viable, and sustainable." Another professor stated, "God's systems are the best." As we mature and take on God's character (Willard, 1997; Willard, 2012), we too can become godly creators. Moreover, since these systems are interrelated, all of our work, play, and rest become expressions of God's creativity. One professor speaks of his discipline, leisure and recreation, as one that "starts as a whole and is not dichotomized." So, his teaching and research begin with that assumption of wholeness rather than a "pieces and parts" analysis. His desire is to help others see a whole God who works (creates), plays, and rests.

**Communicative.** As a communicator, God reveals Himself through His Word, as the Word made flesh. One professor stated, "The idea of the Word becoming flesh, the incarnation, suggests that words have possibilities." We encountered that sentiment from the several literature professors interviewed. Yes, words have possibilities, especially words about the Word. Another professor explained that communication is about the whole person and speaks to "personhood and identity." She continued by saying that it is "rich and complex" and also "open." This openness of communication brings the potential for meaningful relationships with God and others. "Communication is the way I see the world. I see God through communication," she said.

**True and Beautiful.** While the professors, as expected, spoke of truth, it often was tied to experiencing God's beauty. We look to God's Word for truth and beauty. However, professors also can find truth and beauty in the stories of literature, in the function of engineering levers and pulleys, in the intricacies of a biological cell, in the consideration of postmodern art, and in the strength needed for a bolt to hold together two pieces of steel. Indeed, professors' lives are faith stories which demonstrate the truth, beauty, and reality of God. One professor of

plant genetics summed it up well, “God enjoys beauty. It’s not just about function.” Life becomes true and beautiful, like God, when lived according to His design and rhythms.

## **Theme 2: The truth in the academic discipline can lead to God**

Just as various academic disciplines reveal important truths about the character of God, scholars find various ways to express that truth. The powerful implication is that the truth of God within the discipline can draw people toward God, even when they are not seeking Him. For the Christian academic, this represents great possibility and responsibility. His or her job becomes peeling back the layers of evidence and helping students see the truth that lives there. The potential exists, then, to bring students closer to God through academic endeavors. As one professor stated, “The Christian professor has goals, outcomes, perspectives, philosophical content, and attitude. I have all of that to work with to express God’s truth.” This is good news for the professor teaching in a secular context where students often need a pathway to believe that God even exists.

***Making students ready.*** The interviewees were unanimous in their belief that their discipline can make students ready for the reality of God. Offering fresh or different ideas is not new in higher education, but many students have not yet had the opportunity to seriously consider the truths of God in academic subject matter. One philosophy professor said that his goal is to help students see relationships between God, theology, human beings, and art “without dismissing them out of hand because of previous institutional biases, whether about the Church, secularism, or communism.” These professors are often preparing the soil, sometimes planting, but rarely harvesting. One professor said he is “just chipping up rock to maybe start plowing and sowing.” So, professors often spoke delightedly about students taking that initial step towards God. Indeed, that first step may simply be the result of a gentle challenge to ungodly assumptions the students sometimes bring to class.

***Emphasizing people impact.*** We discovered that Christian professors in secular, cross-cultural contexts are able to suggest new perspectives by keeping their teaching people-centered. Our research revealed professors who taught the content of their discipline with an eye on how it affected everyday life. As one business professor began, “It’s about people.” He went to application right away when he discussed teaching and mentoring students in areas of ethics, negotiation, and international affairs. “It’s about the treatment of people, employees, staff, customers and other members of society.”

Several Christian scholars we interviewed advanced these notions through scholarly research and writing. One professor contributed to a textbook on sustainable management, emphasizing the dignity of humanity. Another professor accentuated the geo-political implications of decisions made by leaders, including intended and unintended consequences that affect people today and for

years to come. Also, one interviewee has found secular publishing opportunities in his field even though the content of his writing hints at spiritual and godly things.

***Making it personal.*** To a great extent, we observed Christian professors intentionally seeking ways to make their teaching have significant impact in students' lives. One professor made it personal by asking students to reflect on their own experiences with recreation and play to "tap into their own needs" for contemplation and to possibly allow space for God to show Himself. Another professor described how students' desires to protect the environment bring opportunities to discuss the reality of a creator God. An interest in the environment hints at the existence of God, and as one philosophy professor explained, proper "creation care" can draw one to the Creator. Several professors noted that students' participating in humanitarian causes often leads to a "softening of the heart" towards other people and their living conditions. This awareness can prepare students to glimpse the kingdom of God.

***Encouraging participation.*** In many academic disciplines, the related profession offers opportunities to participate in God's ongoing redemption of creation. The several engineering professors we interviewed present a compelling case. One engineering professor insisted he is not "just teaching engineering." He is offering students the chance to contribute to systems that matter in everyday lives. That is, by emphasizing "functionality, economic viability, aesthetics and sustainability," the students are prepared to design roads, buildings, and bridges more in line with the Creator's design. Likewise, professional codes, which are respected documents of the professional community, often express human worth, the excellence demanded of the profession, and the source (even Divine) of strength and inspiration (National Society of Professional Engineers, 2016). For non-Christians, being "good" at one's profession allows participation in co-creation and redemption with God at some level, even if they are (temporarily) unaware (Willard, 1997).

### **Theme 3: Effectiveness is sustained by an integrated life**

We found a consistent message about the significance of shared experience or the ministry of presence (Nouwen, 1975) with students and the community. This may be one of the more demanding ways that professors are bringing their students along the path to God. Professors we interviewed diligently attempted to demonstrate God's relational character by establishing relationships with their students that relied on open communication. This was often a difficult task in cultural and educational contexts that did not support it. One philosophy professor expressed it like this:

Education is more about formation than information. How I am (or not) shaped and formed by Christ will in turn shape how I seek

to form students. Who I am comes through in what I say and do both in and outside the classroom. Education is about both character and content. Students and colleagues (especially in a cross-cultural environment where your motives and actions are being scrutinized on a daily basis) are quite perceptive and know whether you care about them or not. So my life in Christ is crucial to my teaching. I don't see them as separate but as intimately related.

For Christian professors, this approach to relationships is rooted in their commitment to God and their desire to live it out holistically, supported by consistent faith disciplines of prayer and worship. Professors who are steeped in Scripture and attuned to the Holy Spirit through their own spiritual disciplines are prepared to speak the words when opportunities arose (Willard, 1998).

***Putting faith into words and action.*** We heard stories of professors self-identifying as Christians and stories of student challenges in the classroom where the professors were able to express calmly their faith in an authentic way that was disarming to the unbeliever. Professors were not only articulate about their faith. They were also active in service, finding a broad range of activities that demonstrated the uniqueness and giftedness of the professor. Professors discussed, and we observed them, serving local needs at a Salvation Army orphanage, in a Roma neighborhood, and among Syrian refugees, giving students the chance to hear about and see real ministry, even when not identifying it as distinct Christian behavior.

***Extending invitations.*** Professors demonstrated invitational lives to their students. When the moment was ripe within the context of student-teacher relationships, the Christian professors we studied extended invitations to social activities—pizza parties, ski outings, book clubs. Professors frequently encouraged students to join them in the kinds of community ministry activities mentioned above. Students, even non-Christian students, seemed motivated and appreciative to participate in these endeavors in spite of the Christian intent. For those students seriously seeking deeper spiritual understanding, professors extended invitations to a Bible study or a church service. There, students witnessed first-hand the prayer, worship, and study that provided the support necessary for the truthful academic life. In other words, these kind of opportunities revealed to the students that the content of Christianity the professor had expressed in the classroom and conversations was sustained by devotional action.

The ministry of presence is demanding, yet it is so simple. Spend time with people. In this research, we found Christian professors living committed, whole, intentional, non-dichotomized, faith-first lives. Such lives open the pathways to belief in God.

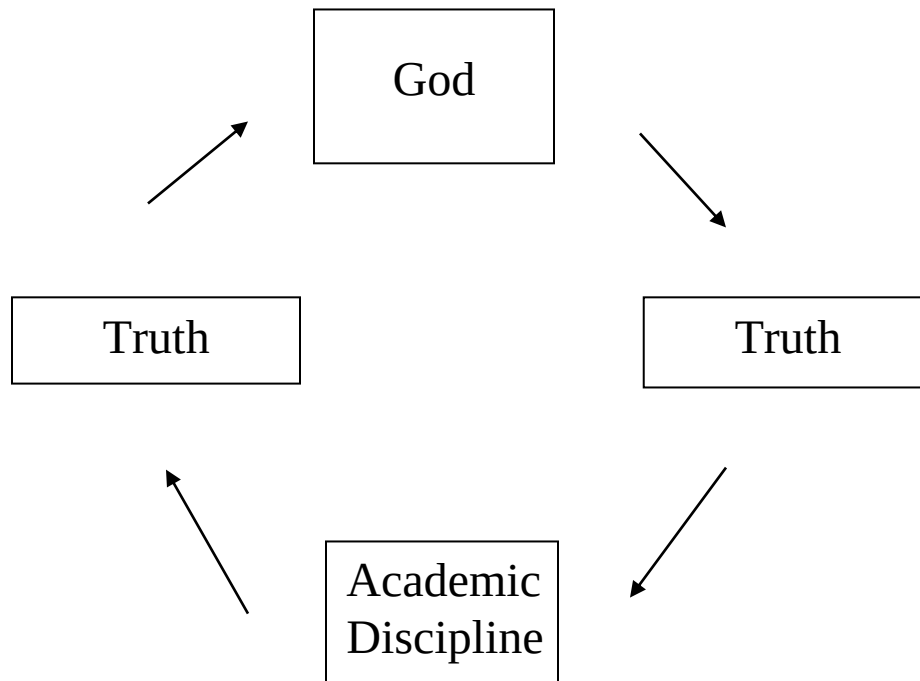
## Summary of Themes

Even with the broad range of disciplines and geographic locations of this project's interviewees, we found the three themes described above to be quite consistent. The Christian professors we interviewed are drawn to their academic discipline, where they experience God's truth. In their teaching, they desire to express appropriately these truths of God to their students even when harnessed by the realities of their secular institutions. The effectiveness of this enterprise is sustained by professors who demonstrate their integrated life holistically, both in and out of the classroom as they engage students.

## Implications and Further Research

We believe that the findings of this research reveal an emerging dynamic that has several practical implications for Christian professors. With the following diagram, we hope to capture the essence of the three themes found in this research. While the diagram is somewhat theoretical in nature, we believe there are practical ways that Christian professors can use these ideas.

### God's Truth In and Through the Discipline



The first two themes of this research —“The truth of God is in the academic discipline” and “The academic discipline can lead to God”— highlight

the nature of academic missionary teaching in a secular institution. The professors interviewed are committed to discovering those truths and are intentional in helping students engage those truths.

The diagram can be understood by starting at the top and moving in a clockwise direction. The first half of the circle (clockwise) begins with God who made the universe, including all disciplinary knowledge. He creates the discipline and His truth is in it. The Christian professor generally starts with personal belief in God and then studies the academic discipline with the understanding that God is revealing Himself in that discipline. Through careful academic study, the Christian professor finds God there and thus gains the fullest understanding possible of the discipline.

The second half of the circle (continuing clockwise) leads with the academic discipline which reveals the truth of God, though many students may be unaware of it. The Christian professor realizes that the starting point for most students, especially non-Christians, will be the discipline itself. So, meeting students where they are is the Christian professor's task. He or she helps students see disciplinary truth, which can lead to belief in God. This is how Christian academics share in God's creation and redemption. Simply put, the Christian professor begins with God and understands the academic discipline through that lens while the non-Christian student begins with the academic discipline and might discover God within it.

The third theme, "Effectiveness is sustained by an integrated life," makes the first two themes possible. Teaching truth is much more than transferring content. It is about lives lived. As Christian professors, we are offering our lives as a holistic view of God, the world, and our place in it.

### **Practical Implications**

Several practical implications begin to emerge from this simple diagram. First, Christian professors who desire to understand their academic and God's revelation within it are well-served by studying the historical development of their discipline. Often, this kind of historical research reveals the existence of Christian, or at least theistic, foundational underpinnings within a discipline. Additionally, Christian professors can seek out current scholars and practitioners who espouse a Christian, theistic, or, perhaps, even humanistic worldview that can be used to support Christian values. These twin research endeavors (historical and current) will help the Christian professor cultivate one's own interpretive lens, helping both the professor and students make spiritual connections.

Second, professors can follow the example of the interviewees in this study who often were intentional in discovering God's character by actively searching for real life examples of justice, creativity, communication, truth and beauty within their discipline, knowing that it is a concrete way to express God's character in the classroom.

Third, well-researched and carefully crafted examples lend evidence that every academic discipline is ultimately about the person, both at the individual

and societal level. So, Christian professors have a delightful opportunity to bring a heightened sense of human dignity in the teaching and application of the discipline.

Fourth, Christian professors also have the opportunity to express appropriate human esteem in the way they conduct the class and interact with students. In the development and execution of course policies that are both gracious and just and through the development of relationships with and among students, Christian professors have many hours of direct contact in which to exhibit hospitality and human worth. Practically speaking, this means opening up one's life to students in appropriate ways through involvement and interest in and beyond the classroom, demonstrating a whole approach to life that students can learn from and emulate.

Finally, we believe Christian professors need to self-identify as Christians to their students. We observed several instances of this behavior in our research. Even in the most secular of educational institutions and limited circumstances, Christian professors can find suitable ways to indicate one's allegiance. It need not be a dramatic testimony. Indeed, the best examples we witnessed were in natural responses to questions about issues and values within the discipline or discussion of one's life and family. Christian self-identification by professors puts in full relief one's content and conduct for the students.

Academics working cross-culturally in secular institutions may readily find applications for their situations. We hope they will be encouraged to begin or continue the intentional study and delivery of their discipline with these results in mind. Professors working in secular institutions in the United States may also learn from these examples on integration in which institutional support often works against Christian belief. And, finally, professors working in Christian universities may well find that their attempts at faith integration can go deeper with a more holistic approach.

### **Further Research**

We believe there are several ways that this research could be extended. Our first interest would be to develop the diagram above into a full-fledged, working model. While our purpose here was primarily to report the findings from the field research, we believe there is great potential in developing this into a robust model with theoretical and practical dimensions. Along those lines then, the model could be presented and tested among professors in specific contexts, such as secular universities or Christian universities in the United States.

Second, the four Godly characteristics discovered in this research (just, creative, communicative, true and beautiful) could be explored further among professors within particular disciplines or families of disciplines. For example, investigating the intersection of truth and beauty would offer Christian scholars a particular line of epistemological inquiry that could find resonance in the broader academic world.

Third, the model could be expanded to include effective pedagogical techniques. For example, one could merge with the model some of the integration

methods offered by Roller (2013) and others to find appropriate means for one's own discipline and classroom.

Fourth, one could go deeper in connecting Willard's ideas on discipleship with faith integration concepts. Discipleship that flows from a clear vision of God's creation and an intention to become like Christ, Willard asserts, must result in concrete day-to-day *practices* done "in His name" (2006, pp. 21-22). Likewise, integration of faith and learning that flows from God's purpose as viewed from a Christ-transformed perspective results in effective methodologies for the classroom and beyond. This result occurs because "it is what we are that determines what we ought to do" (Willard, 2013). So, one could explore these relationships between faith integration, God's purposes, and one's teaching practice.

## Conclusion

What can we learn from Christian professors teaching in secular universities? When the support structures of the Christian institution are removed, can one still be an integrated scholar? The results from this study suggest a strong, inspiring "yes." We found Christian professors who recognize that God's truth is already in the discipline and that a holistic expression of the discipline can place students on a path towards personal belief in God. We found Christian professors actively doing, often under difficult circumstances, what many of us talk about doing. We found them participating in God's creative, redemptive work through their teaching and scholarship.

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## **Flannery O'Connor and Mutual Forbearance**

**Joy H. Austin**

In the Southern literary landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, staunch Roman Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor continually addressed the "central mystery" of the Christian faith, stating that the "general conception of man" is primarily theological and labeling her South as "Christ-haunted" (*Mystery* 44). In a world in which religion and matters of the spirit remained paramount, racial disharmony was one of O'Connor's concerns. In a 1963 interview, she stated that a society divided 50/50 requires "considerable grace for the two races to live together" and that "the South has to evolve a way of life in which the two races can live together in mutual forbearance" (qtd. in Walters 135). In several of her stories, racial issues function in O'Connor's definition of reality; however, beyond the parameters of race, Flannery O'Connor's fiction examines human relationships of all types and addresses the extent to which plain, simple folks in their spiritual journeys confront the benchmark of "mutual forbearance." Not one ever to shy away from confrontation, Flannery O'Connor, who grew up in a racially charged South, in no subtle way illustrates the extent to which people—both black and white in color—connect and/or disconnect. Having met with varied interpretations and critiques regarding matters of race, O'Connor's short stories reveal that she was, either directly or indirectly, addressing something very serious about the inherent problem of race relations. Despite what some have said, her stories confirm that Flannery O'Connor had a sharp eye for injustice, prejudice, feelings of white superiority, and the importance of "mutual forbearance."

During her years of growing up in the South of sit-ins and protests and other types of flagrant discrimination, Flannery O'Connor no doubt witnessed racism in its many forms. In fact, in her letters she mentions Ku Klux Klan meetings and "poor colored people in jails" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 592). In an article entitled "The Truth about Flannery O'Connor's Religious and Racial Beliefs," the author even raises the question of whether O'Connor was a "secret segregationist" or a "closet racist" (Hilldrup). Hilldrup bases his question on some of O'Connor's highly candid, unpolitically correct language in her letters as she sometimes referred to black misbehavior on her mother's farm. Growing up in the Jim Crow South, O'Connor was inundated with the realities of black/white conflict, even though she was no social activist.

In regard to the racial stance presented in her fiction, some have argued that O'Connor presents no view of the need for equality. Stanley Edgar Hyman says that on the race question, O'Connor "maintained a consistent public silence"

(41), arguing that her fiction does not reflect the racial problems of her time. The argument has been further made that Flannery O'Connor's fiction ignores the unfair racial conditions in her mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century South. Melvin Williams, in an article entitled "Black and White: A Study of Flannery O'Connor," raises the question of whether O'Connor could have been "blind to the separate-yet-unequal status" she assigned to her black characters (132). Not the first to assess O'Connor in this way, Williams is convinced that O'Connor used black characters as "catalysts" only, to set about "white reaction" and has labeled her as only "an attacker of spiritual blindness" (132).

Certainly in many stories O'Connor does not address the seriousness of inequality between the two races, including black characters as staples of the environment, the landscape, as she works her spiritually driven message. Even in these, however, O'Connor's vision is tuned in to the racial divide. In fact, stories like "A View of the Woods," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "Parker's Back," and "The Displaced Person" all house black characters only as part of the backdrop. Sometimes, though, racial statements, even in stories not overtly concerned with race, come across loudly and clearly. The primary message of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" may not speak to racial disharmony, but the in-need-of-grace grandmother's narrow-mindedness, insensitivity, and shallow world view are emphasized to readers when she refers to a poverty-stricken black child standing on a broken-down porch as a "little pickaninny," adding, "If I could paint, I'd paint that picture" (119).

Yes, many of Flannery O'Connor's stories simply reveal a world of racial division yet show discrimination and intolerance in only minor ways. However, a close look at her stories, from beginning to end, reveals more. O'Connor was *not* oblivious to the racial landscape of her South but recognized the widespread racism in her society, a place in which people of color were often treated with neither respect nor love. She shouts to her readers comprehensive messages about human frailties and human possibilities, about the need for connection, for unity, for love.

"The Geranium" is Flannery O'Connor's first published short story. At the core of this story, which was part of her master's thesis, resides racial prejudice, disharmony. Old Dudley, transplanted from the South to his daughter's New York City apartment, connects to his old South through the bedraggled geranium he views across the way. Although Dudley remembers his black servant Rabie fondly, there is nothing close to a feeling of equality in his musings. In fact, old Dudley's deep-seated racial hatred surfaces when he learns that a black man is living in the apartment next door to his daughter: "'You ain't been raised that way!' he'd said thundery-like. 'You ain't been raised to live tight with niggers that think they're just as good as you.... If you think I want anything to do with them, you're crazy'" (9). When old Dudley falls down the apartment steps, though, it is the black man who helps him up, who leads him to the daughter's apartment, who pats him on the back and wishes him well.

Dudley's reaction is so extreme, so horrific, that we readers see the depth of his hateful, mean, prejudiced spirit: "His throat was going to pop on account of a nigger—a damn nigger that patted him on the back and called him 'old-timer.'"

Him that knew such as that couldn't be. Him that had come from a good place. A good place. A place where such as that couldn't be" (13). Dudley's consequent throwing himself off the ledge, in part because the man across the way has destroyed the geranium that Dudley gazes on each day, is an action that reveals his deep though bizarre attachment to a past that was NOT "a good place." Mutual forbearance shown here—hardly—but mutual forbearance is much needed in this place.

In O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge," race defines reality. Mrs. Chestny, the mother of Julian, just feels superior—not evil, but narrow, shortsighted, a woman who would not "ride the bus at night since they had been integrated" (405). Her egotistical son, one who, O'Connor says, is depressed and who sees himself as a martyr, rejoices when an angry-looking black woman sits close to his mother on the bus—a black woman with a hat identical to his mother's hat. When Mrs. Chestny reaches out to the black woman's little boy to give him a "bright new penny," the insulted black mother, with a "face frozen with frustrated rage" (418), explodes "like a piece of machinery" (418) and clobbers the white mother with a pocketbook, shouting, "He don't take nobody's pennies!" (418).

Even though the shortsighted white son delights in the lesson he thinks should transform his mother's condescending nature, we readers know that O'Connor has not completed the lesson. Instead, she has shown us that two women, two people, with identical hats, do not show "mutual forbearance." Neither feels anything close to kinship with the other. Any epiphany we hope the story is leading to is just postponed. And both—black and white—are guilty of not seeing human connections. Two women—two sons—two hats—equal maybe but divided certainly. This story bears testimony to O'Connor's words and her comment that ". . . both races have to work it out the hard way" (qtd. in Walters 135). The races here, though, work nothing out. O'Connor evidently captures the racial landscape of the South she lived in—a place wanting in mutual forbearance.

Later, in the story "The Artificial Nigger," O'Connor confronts this concept of mutual forbearance by depicting more intense disdain for the opposite race, at least from the white perspective. Mr. Head, who asks his grandson Nelson early in the story, "Have you ever. . . seen me lost?" (250), is truly a lost man. As he and Nelson prepare for their trip to the big city, Atlanta, one of the first comments Mr. Head makes is that the city is "full of niggers" (252), also noting that Nelson has never seen "one" since there hasn't "been a nigger in this country since we run that one out twelve years ago" (252). Afraid of anything, it seems, outside his own norm, especially fearful of the black race, Mr. Head defines the people on the train first by color to such a degree that Nelson, O'Connor states, hated the "coffee-colored" man "with a fierce raw fresh hate" (255-256). Both grandfather and grandson try to escape from the African-Americans they "continued to see everywhere" (260).

When the "lostness" becomes literal in the story and Mr. Head denies even knowing his grandson, it is a statue of an "artificial nigger" that becomes, implies the author, the vehicle of the "great mystery" (269). O'Connor writes, "They could feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy" (269) as the

arrogant grandfather and Nelson view the “artificial nigger.” However, as Mr. Head appears to accept the “action of grace” (269) that has touched him, he still makes a superior-minded, prejudicial remark: “They ain’t got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one” (269). Mr. Head may recognize his “true depravity” (269), but his epiphany leads to only partial revelation: the problem of his denial of his grandson. And the story ends with no resolution to the depravity in Mr. Head’s heart in reference to how he views people of another color.

In the story “Revelation,” it is the superior-minded Ruby Turpin who, perhaps of all O’Connor’s characters, exhibits the most abundant racial intolerance and narrow-mindedness. In the too-small doctor’s waiting room, Mrs. Turpin judges everything: the nurse’s hair is disgusting, the ugly fat girl’s acne is pitiful, the “white-trashy” (491) mother is wearing bedroom slippers, and the room is filled with “white-trashy” people who are “worse than niggers any day” (490). This woman’s nighttime fantasies focus on two groups of people: “niggers” and “white-trash.” She thinks much about how “most colored people” (491) assume their place at the bottom of her imaginary hierarchy. Mrs. Turpin is the woman who continually contemplates her place in the world and celebrates herself as the epitome of whiteness and criticizes blacks for wanting to “be right up there with the white folks” (493).

Mrs. Turpin’s waiting room experience becomes a blend of her own judgment and that of others. She loudly explains to someone how she and Claud found “enough niggers” to pick their cotton, but explains that, because of their laziness, she “butters ’em up” because “you got to love em if you want em to work for you” (494). To the “white-trash” woman who says all “niggers” should be sent “back to Africa,” Mrs. Turpin quips, “There’s a heap of things worse than a nigger” (498). Her husband Claud labels interracial married blacks as “white-faced niggers” and says they’re the ones who “want to improve their color” (496).

After the acne-faced Mary Grace hurls the book entitled *Human Development* and strikes Mrs. Turpin above the eye, right at the moment when Mrs. Turpin, in deep gratitude, exalts Jesus about making her life *just right*, Ruby Turpin, referred to by her assaulter as “an old wart hog” (500) from hell, returns home to experience her pig parlor epiphany. It is here where her new visionary heavenly procession includes, surprisingly, “bands of black niggers—in white robes—actually IN FRONT of people “like her and Claud” (508), as bands of “souls climbing upward” (508).

Has Mrs. Turpin, because of being walloped by *human development*, transformed into someone who sees blacks and whites as equals—in character, in intelligence, in human character? Probably not. Has Mrs. Turpin made a change, even if only a temporary one? Probably so. Has Ruby Turpin reached an understanding of “mutual forbearance”? We do not know, as we see no real interaction between her and the black race—because “mutual” means more than *one*. But at least the possibility of clearer vision exists through this story; at least Ruby Turpin becomes more mindful. Maybe she knows—and at least we readers know for certain—that the narrow, self-righteous white world that Ruby Turpin has pridefully resided in is no real world at all. At least O’Connor implies fairly

strongly to her readers here that the possibility of change in attitude has arrived. . . or is at least coming.

O'Connor's last published story, "Judgement Day," reeks of race and the ridiculous. Interestingly, this story, which we believe to be the last story O'Connor wrote before her death, parallels in subject matter her first published story ("The Geranium"). As revealed through a mixed bag of present reality and past flashbacks, old Tanner is a product of stereotypical racial ideas and inner deep feelings of friendship and love for his Southern black friend Coleman. Living in New York City now, taken by his daughter from his Georgia home when he got sick, Tanner finds that in New York City racial hatred is prevalent. He hears a conversation between his "Yankee" son-in-law and his daughter in which the daughter says, "It takes brains to work a real nigger. You got to know how to handle them" (532). Tanner remembers first meeting Coleman, a big black man who comes to be the closest friend Tanner has ever had, though Tanner always has kept that racial barrier between them, calling Coleman "preacher" and always remembering to keep "niggers" under control by carrying a knife.

O'Connor writes that when Tanner and Coleman met, Tanner saw in himself and in Coleman both "clownishness and captivity" (539), as if both were the common lot of each man. However, O'Connor writes, "The vision failed him before he could decipher it" (539). With actions like telling Coleman that he must always treat Tanner "like he was white" and thoughts like it would be okay if he needed to kill Coleman because he wouldn't "go to hell for killing a nigger" (539), Tanner is the product of a society in which there is not—nor should there be—50/50 treatment between blacks and whites, a society in which the vision has failed.

When Tanner sees in the New York apartment building a big black man move next door, he secretly wants to connect with him on his own terms. When he calls this black man "preacher" and tells him he knows he wishes he could be back in south Alabama, the black man angrily retorts that he is not from south Alabama—but from New York City—and that he is *not* a preacher, but an actor. When Tanner still greets him as "preacher" the next day, the black man slams Tanner against the wall and knocks him through the open door of Tanner's daughter's apartment. Later Tanner accepts blame not for repeatedly insulting the black man, but for "trying to be friendly with that nigger" (547).

Tanner possesses no awareness of the real problem here—his superior, arrogant, demeaning attitude that, for once in his life, the black race has met with forceful action. To Tanner the black man remains only a "nigger actor" (548). When Tanner falls and lands upside down on the flight of stairs as he attempts to escape his daughter's apartment to go "home," this same black man walks up, and Tanner calls out to "preacher" to help him! This black man, very different from the companion parallel "The Geranium,"—exhibits no compassion—he cynically smirks that the "judgement day" has come all right, and stuffs Tanner through the banister spindles and leaves him to die. And *this* story is the last word, via fiction, that Flannery O'Connor has on that noble "mutual forbearance" ideal.

So what are we supposed to think? If these five stories reflect the reality of racial situations in the South during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, then what is

O'Connor up to? On the one hand, it seems that although she may espouse noble ideas about how the two races must co-exist, her stories only skirt around the issues—they “flirt” with the issues, actually, by presenting the problems but by not resolving them. Her stories, even those that swim deeply in racial waters, do not espouse clear ideas about how these dark racial problems should be remedied. In fact, there is not, in any of these five stories, any long-term commitment or powerful statement proving this ideal of 50/50 “mutual forbearance.” There is no “good place” or racial harmony; it may appear as though the “vision” fails before we readers can “decipher it.”

One conclusion we may draw is that maybe O'Connor does not really *care* about racial harmony in her characters' journeys toward or away from grace. After all, in none of these five stories spanning her writing career does O'Connor offer solutions or substantive change. In “Revelation” O'Connor comes the closest to offering resolution, but even in this story the seeming insight is not tested, as we never know whether Ruby Turpin has truly transformed. From the early “The Geranium” to the late “Judgement Day,” nothing is worked out, no epiphany is complete, no black / white relationships are healed.

However, we must not forget that in each of these stories at least one character is jolted by his or her narrow-minded bigotry. Perhaps the real meaning goes deeper than race, too. Flannery O'Connor called herself “no disbeliever in spiritual purpose and no vague believer” and identified herself as one who saw “from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy” (*Mystery* 32). She affirmed, also, her sharp eye for “the grotesque, the perverse, and for the unacceptable” (33). To O'Connor, racial discrimination and high-mindedness were just wrong. In her stories, again and again, she has given us strained relations, bitter feelings, and violent actions in portraying the dark souls of those who hate. Her last story, very similar to her first story in subject matter, illustrates the ultimate catastrophe when issues between the races are not resolved.

So maybe the conclusion we must draw is *bigger* than only a surface reading of her stories might suggest. If we look closely at each of the stories, we see that the racial issues are part of a larger, *human* problem, a weakness or sickness that often impedes individuals on their journeys toward grace. A problem that begins as racial transforms into a human problem that actually cries out for mutual forbearance, for harmony between the races and, more importantly, among human beings. As we learn from Faulkner, whose eternal “verities” (“William”) are absent in so many of his stories, often the absence of something is the crying out for it. Flannery O'Connor indeed proclaims the need for ALL people to treat each other with tolerance, with respect, with decency. And perhaps she stands ready to throw that book of *Human Development* at us all when we transgress.

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## **Christianity and Literature: The Attraction, the Ambivalence, and the Tension<sup>1</sup>**

**John J. Han**

### **Introduction**

An important interdisciplinary study within the humanities addresses the intersection of Christian faith and literature. Numerous undergraduate courses, graduate programs, academic societies, and journals are devoted to the relationship between Christian faith and literature. Most institutions of higher learning offer English Bible or The Bible as Literature as a humanities course for undergraduate students. Students at Kansas State University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can take English Bible as an elective undergraduate course. Penn State University offers a similar undergraduate English course, entitled The Bible as Literature, in which “students [...] examine the language, thought, images, and structures of the book that has arguably proved the central text of Western literature. Students [...] also actively explore the ways in which the Bible has shaped the literature of English-speaking cultures [...]” (“J ST”).

Examples of graduate programs in Christianity and literature include Baylor University’s Ph.D. program in English Literature with a concentration in Religion, Oxford University’s Master of Philosophy in Theology (MPhil) in Theology and Literature, and the University of Glasgow’s Ph.D. in Literature, Theology, and the Arts program which is run by the university’s Centre for the Study of Literature, Theology, and the Arts. These and many other institutions teach their students the crucial connection between Christian faith and the arts, which include literature.

Many academic societies are also dedicated to the study of Christianity and literature. The Society of Biblical Literature, founded in 1888 for biblical scholarship, is mainly for theologians but also attracts literary scholars. The Conference on Christianity & Literature is an equally well-known academic society that draws literary scholars from both Christian and secular institutions of higher learning. The organization identifies itself as

an interdisciplinary society dedicated to exploring the relationships between Christianity and literature. Organized formally in 1956, CCL is dedicated to both scholarly excellence and collegial exchange and includes hundreds of members from a variety of academic institutions and religious traditions from the United States, Canada, and more than a dozen other countries. (“Conference”)

In addition to publishing a peer-reviewed quarterly journal, *Christianity and Literature*, CCL published in 2012 *Imago Dei*, a collection of the best poems that had appeared in the journal.

Numerous academic and creative journals explore the relationship between faith and literature. *Christianity and Literature*, mentioned above, is well-known among Christian scholars and poets, but there are many others. *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, a prestigious journal published by Marquette University, is one of them. It periodically publishes “special issues” which focus on a variety of authors and topics, such as Gabriel Marcel, Graham Greene, René Girard, Literature and Martyrdom, Polish Literature, and Family Values Literature. *Religion & Literature*, published by the University of Notre Dame, is an equally esteemed journal that offers “a forum for discussion of the relations between two crucial human concerns, the religious impulse and the literary forms of any era, place, or language.” Three other examples of academic and/or creative journals are Brigham Young University’s *Belief and Literature*, Missouri Baptist University’s *Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal*, and the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor’s *Windhover: A Journal of Christian Literature*.

Christianity and literature is an area of study pursued mostly by literary scholars with Christian concerns, but also by theologians and ministers of the faith. Considering the widespread interest in the relationship between Christianity and literature, this essay examines how the two areas converge in four categories: (1) biblical literature, (2) Christian imaginative literature written along theological, doctrinal, or dogmatic lines, (3) mainstream (or secular) literature that has significant Christian elements in it, and (4) mainstream (or secular) literature that addresses Christian faith from a doctrinally unorthodox or a philosophically hostile perspective.

### **Category #1: Biblical Literature**

As part of Christian literature, the Bible constitutes a single category. A collection of texts written by multiple authors, it encompasses numerous literary genres (historical narrative, the Law, wisdom, psalms, prophecy, apocalypse, Gospel, parable, epistle, etc.) and literary techniques (accommodative language, allusion, ellipsis, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, metaphor, paradox, parallelism, prolepsis, puns, sarcasm, simile, symbolism, etc.).

In his essay “The Bible as Literature” (2014), Leland Ryken—a long-time English professor at Wheaton College—points out that the Bible is primarily “a work of literature,” not “a piece of doctrinal exposition”; in its format, the Bible is “a collection of varied literary genres written by multiple authors over the span of many centuries. In its details, too, the Bible is a literary book. Most of it is embodied in the genres of narrative, poetry, letters, and visionary writing. Dozens of smaller genres accumulate under those big rubrics” (Ryken). Robert Alter’s *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), Leland Ryken’s *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (1984), John B. Gabel and others’ *The Bible as Literature: An*

*Introduction* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2005), and numerous other books approach the Bible as literature, and many of those books were written by literary scholars, not by biblical scholars.

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter notes that literary art plays an important role in shaping biblical Hebrew narrative. According to him, the stories in the Hebrew Bible are literary expressions with unmistakable spiritual meanings:

[T]he Hebrew writers manifestly took delight in the artful limning of [the] lifelike characters and actions, and so they created an unexhausted source of delight for a hundred generations of readers. But that pleasure of imaginative play is deeply interfused with a sense of great spiritual urgency. The biblical writers fashion their personages with a complicated, sometimes alluring, often fiercely insistent individuality because it is in the stubbornness of human individuality that each man and woman encounters God or ignores Him, responds to or resists Him. Subsequent religious tradition has by and large encouraged us to take the Bible seriously rather than to enjoy it, but the paradoxical truth of the matter may well be that by learning to enjoy the biblical stories more fully as stories, we shall also come to see more clearly what they mean to tell us about God, man, and the perilously momentous realm of history. (189)

In other words, Alter tells us that enjoying biblical narrative and learning from the narrative are not mutually exclusive.

In their excellent book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2014), Douglas Stuart and Gordon D. Fee emphasize the importance of interpreting Scripture properly. The Bible is not a simplistic collection of dos and don'ts as commanded by God from beyond the sky. It is a collection of writings of diverse genres and forms that need to be understood in a cultural context. Stuart and Fee draw attention to two particular aspects of Scripture:

1. One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that, in order to communicate his word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses. To interpret properly the "then and there" of the biblical texts, one must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but one also needs to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms (genres).

[...]

2. In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances, over a 1,500-year period, God's Word was

expressed in the vocabulary and thought patterns of those persons and conditioned by the culture of those times and circumstances. That is to say, God's word to us was first of all God's word to them. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in language they could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time, and sometimes in thought. (26-27)

As a collection of various literary genres and types, Scripture is open to a variety of critical approaches. At least eleven critical tools are available to biblical scholars as they analyze Scripture: textual criticism (lower criticism), source criticism (higher criticism), form criticism and tradition history, redaction criticism, canonical criticism, rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, psychological criticism, socio-scientific criticism, postmodernist criticism, and feminist exegesis ("Biblical Criticism"). These approaches are already widely used by secular literary scholars (actually, many of them originated in secular literary criticism) and can generate a discussion that is both interesting and intriguing. In particular, postmodern criticism—which includes deconstruction, postcolonialism, and reader response criticism—can yield interpretations that seem far-fetched but fascinating. For example, deconstructionists examine how a text self-destructs—how a supposedly coherent narrative turns out to be incoherent or self-contradictory, thereby nullifying the author's intended meaning. Deconstructionists do not feel the need to find the meaning of a text; their aim is only to find the lack of "a stable identifiable meaning" in a text (Guerin et al. 377).

In his article "Deconstruction and the Bible," David Penchansky explains several deconstructive ways to read the Bible, one of which is suspicious reading. He writes,

A deconstructionist reads against the grain. Every text has a master narrative, a point of view that tends to dominate and thus steer the reading in a certain direction. Deconstruction suspects methods that promise a complete understanding. It identifies that master narrative and works to undermine it. When institutions explain and justify themselves, their witness is self-serving. So, in the Book of Joshua, deconstruction would elevate the Canaanites. In Judges, it speaks for Delilah, and in 1 and 2 Kings for Jezebel. In the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3), the master narrative portrays God as righteous and kind. The deconstructionist highlights the truth-telling serpent. (Penchansky)

Like other critical approaches, deconstruction has its own shortcomings, such as "its seeming lack of seriousness about reading literature," its promotion of "philosophical and professional nihilism," its dogmatic attitude, and its predictable conclusions in literary analysis (Guerin et al. 378-79). Nevertheless,

the approach allows the reader to consider Scripture from an unconventional angle.

## **Category #2: Devotional or Confessional Christian Literature**

Texts that belong to Category #2 are explicitly Christian imaginative literature and tend to be devotional or confessional. This type of literature—poetry, fiction, drama, and nonfiction—embodies Christian teachings, reflects a Christian worldview, and represents the faith in a positive way. Some texts are explicitly doctrinal, but others subtly uphold the teachings of the church.

Some explicitly Christian imaginative texts are fiction and drama. Well-known Christian fiction includes John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and *The Holy War* (1682), Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880), and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic fiction. The full title of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*. This vividly fictional tale of the spiritual journey of Christian from the City of Destruction (disbelief and damnation) to the Celestial City (salvation and glory) is one of the most significant works of religious English literature and has been translated into more than 200 languages, including Japanese and Korean. *The Holy War* portrays the spiritual warfare between Shaddai (the Almighty God) and Diabolus (the deceiver; Satan) over Mansoul (man's soul). *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* is the story of Judah Ben-Hur, a Jewish prince who becomes enslaved under a false accusation during the time of Roman occupation of Jerusalem. An equally important component of the novel is the Crucifixion of Christ and the event's impact on Ben-Hur's conversion to Christianity. Finally, *Left Behind* series embodies a Christian dispensationalist view of End Times. Published between 1995 and 2007, it was enormously popular among some Christian circles in the United States.

Since the nineteenth century, a number of novels featuring Jesus have been published. Many Jesus novels fundamentally retell the Gospel story of Jesus without deviating from Christian orthodoxy. Fulton Oursler's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1949) is a prime example. While faithfully following the biblical accounts of Christ's life, the author adds lines of dialogue and colorful descriptions of characters and settings for the sake of vividness. Along the same lines, Wangerin's *Jesus: A Novel* (2005) retells the biblical story of Jesus of Nazareth, portraying him as a gentle revolutionary who turns the world upside down.

A more recent type of orthodox Jesus fiction embellishes the Gospel story with pious details derived from extra-biblical sources. Anne Rice, a vampire novelist-turned-Christian writer, declares that writing Christian fiction is her newly found vocation and that her readers will find “no watering down of the gospels” and “no modern twists” in *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005) and its sequel, *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana* (2008). Yet, in *Christ the Lord*, she recounts the life of Jesus by adding legendary episodes involving Christ's early

childhood. For example, a seven-year-old Jesus fatally knocks down a village boy and then resurrects him, an event not found in Scripture.

Explicitly Christian drama includes medieval morality plays, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (first performed in 1935), and *Heaven's Gates, Hell's Flames* (directed by a team from Reality Outreach Ministries, based in Canada). Category #2 also includes many poems and nonfiction composed by authors who consider writing an act of worship. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, George Herbert's *The Temple*, and T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets are well-known Christian poems.

Among classic Christian nonfiction books are *The Dialogue* by St. Catherine of Siena, *Revelations aka Showing of Love* by St. Julian of Norwich, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross, C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, Oswald Chambers's *My Utmost for His Highest*, G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, and J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*. Many of these Christian nonfiction books are devotionals or works of Christian living literature written for spiritual edification and formation.

A prominent subgenre of Christian nonfiction is spiritual autobiography—a subgenre of non-fiction prose that dominated Protestant writing during the seventeenth century, particularly in England, particularly that of dissenters. A well-known seventeenth-century Christian nonfiction book written in English is John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). The narrative follows the believer from a state of damnation to a state of grace.

However, St. Augustine's *Confessions* (written in Latin AD 397-400) is the first spiritual autobiography in Western literature. The book is unique in that the author addresses God Himself, not human readers. In other words, he did not write this book to impress his readers or to beautify his past. He penned this book to record his wrongdoings, to explain how human nature is inherently sinful, and to describe the ways in which God turned his life around. In the book, he confesses all of his youthful sins, such as theft, sexual immorality, worldly ambitions, and spiritual wanderings. Then, he explains how one day he miraculously heard God's voice and converted to Catholic faith.

Augustine was born in Thagaste (present-day Souk-Ahras, Algeria, in North Africa). According to *Confessions*, Augustine's mother, St. Monica, was a devout Christian who labored untiringly for her son's conversion, and his father was a pagan (later converted to Christianity). As a child, he was schooled in Latin literature and later went to Carthage to study rhetoric. By the age of twenty he turned away from his Christian upbringing. He was repelled by its codes of behavior, but he never completely renounced it. As a young man, Augustine indulged in carnal pleasures.

Augustine also pursued worldly success and was attracted to several non-Christian movements. For nine years, from 373 until 382, he adhered to Manichaeism, a Persian dualistic philosophy then widely current in the Western Roman Empire. With its fundamental principle of conflict between good and evil and its claim of a rational interpretation of Scripture, Manichaeism at first seemed to Augustine to correspond to experience and to furnish the most plausible hypothesis upon which to construct a philosophical and ethical system.

Moreover, its moral code was not unpleasantly strict; Augustine later recorded in his *Confessions*: “Give me chastity and continence, but not just now.” Disillusioned by the impossibility of reconciling certain contradictory Manichaeist doctrines, Augustine abandoned this philosophy and turned to skepticism. Some friends in Milan encouraged him to read the works of the Greek philosophers called neoplatonists. These writings and the sermons of Saint Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, helped him overcome the intellectual obstacles to accepting Christianity. In 386, Augustine decided to devote himself to the faith, and Ambrose baptized him the next year.

In addition to *Confessions*, Augustine is also known for *The City of God*, a theological book that explains how God is in control of human history and why Romans of his day should not be discouraged by the fall of the Roman Empire. According to Augustine, human history is a conflict between the City of God and the City of Man. The City of Man appears to win temporarily (as exemplified by the fall of Rome), but the City of God eventually triumphs. The two cities are figurative terms: The City of God is inhabited by believers whose hope is in heaven, whereas the City of Man is inhabited by those who despise God and pursue worldly pleasures.

In some cases, Christian themes can be embedded into a literary text that does not openly advocate a Christian worldview. Implicitly Christian imaginative literature that covertly conveys Christian truths includes J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicle of Narnia*, a series of seven high fantasy novels by C. S. Lewis. Some of these covertly Christian texts tend to be taught in a special-topic course, such as Fantasy Literature which may include texts by Tolkien and Lewis.

### **Category #3: Mainstream or Secular Literature That Addresses Christian Themes**

Unlike the first two categories, texts in Category #3 are thematically multi-dimensional, and their artistic complexity contributes to broader audience appeal. The texts are open to various levels of interpretation, one of which is Christian, and the author’s stance on faith matters can be ironic or paradoxical. Some authors may be committed Christians. Flannery O’Connor—the author of *Wise Blood*, *The Violent Bear It Away*, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, and other works of fiction—is an example. In *Wise Blood* (1952), O’Connor traces the strange career of a religious fanatic, a twenty-four-year-old war veteran, who attempts to found a church *without salvation*. Hazel Motes, the main character, holds that sin is imaginary, redemption is unnecessary, and therefore there is no need for Christ. As a preacher of the “Church Without Christ,” Motes meets a number of outcasts and social misfits. They include Asa Hawks, a fake evangelist claiming to have blinded himself out of religious commitment; Hawks’s daughter Sabbath Lily, who seduces and then deserts Motes; Hoover Shoats (alias Onnie Jay Holy), Motes’s religious rival; Solace Layfield, Motes’s “twin” figure and Hoover Shoats’s partner; and Enoch Emery, a zoo gatekeeper and worshipper of

the museum mummy. At the end of the novel, Motes experiences a moment of revelation, blinds himself, and performs various acts of self-torture. After being exposed to inclement weather for two days, he is picked up by law enforcement and clubbed into silence. He dies on the trip to his landlady's house.

Other authors may consider themselves writers who happen to be Christian or who struggle with their own faith. Graham Greene, the author of *The Power and the Glory* (1940), is a case in point. In his novel, Greene focuses on an unnamed clergyman who conducts his priestly duties in the communist-controlled province of Tabasco, Mexico, in the 1930s. The protagonist—a drunkard (hence the nickname “the whiskey priest”) and adulterer—is chased by an atheist police lieutenant who, ironically, leads a puritanical lifestyle. Despite his frequent urge to flee, the priest remains in the province, secretly saying Mass and hearing confessions, though sometimes unwillingly. Other characters in the novel include Padre José, a renegade priest who is now married; a poor mestizo; James Calver, the “gringo” bank robber and murderer wanted in the United States; and Maria and Brigitta, the whiskey priest's ex-lover and their illegitimate daughter, respectively. One day, the priest encounters the mestizo, who recognizes him, befriends him, and plots to betray him for the reward money. Finally, as the priest is about to leave for the city of Las Casas, where religious freedom is guaranteed, the mestizo arrives with a note from Calver, who allegedly wishes to confess before he dies. While speaking with Calver, the whiskey priest is captured and later executed by the police lieutenant. Immediately after his death, a new priest arrives in Tabasco.

Some non-Western writers profess Christian faith or grew up in a Christian home and write much about Christian faith, but their texts may be open to postcolonial interpretations. Shusaku Endo's (1923-96) fiction reflects the lifelong inner conflict about his seemingly odd status as a Japanese man who is also Catholic. The seeming incompatibility between traditional Japanese culture and Christian faith, which forms the foundation of European culture, constitutes a main theme in his well-known Catholic novels *Silence* (1966), *Kiku's Prayer* (1982), and *Deep River* (1993). Similar to his other Catholic novels, Endo's *Foreign Studies* (1965) evidences that Endo was preoccupied with the tension that arises when Christianity meets Japanese culture, which is rooted in Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, and other Eastern religions and philosophies. The volume is a collection of three interconnected stories, all of which deal with cross-cultural issues more directly than do the novels mentioned above. The first story, “A Summer in Rouen,” is set in the mid-twentieth century. It concerns a young Japanese Catholic's traumatic experience during his stay in France as a study-abroad student. Initially, the main character, Kudo, is excited about being chosen to go to France at the invitation of a Catholic church, whose parishioners volunteer to cover all of his expenses, including room and board. Once he arrives in France, however, Kudo's excitement turns into bewilderment and then into frustration. The mission-minded priest and his parishioners have good intentions for him, but they constantly burden him with the “great expectations” of him to spread the Gospel once he returns to Japan. Kudo is also baffled by a sense of cultural superiority exhibited by the French. The priest, who wears “a

condescending smile” (14), wants him to experience “a true Christian home” at a parishioner’s residence. His host family also provides some insensitive comments about his native culture. When he says that Japanese doors are made of paper, the family wonders why Japanese do not use glass doors. He is also told that when he returns to Japan, he should take a fork because it is more “useful” than chopsticks (23).

The second story, “Araki Thomas,” is more a historical narrative than a short story. The title character is an early figure in the history of Japanese Catholicism, the first Japanese student at the Vatican in the early seventeenth century. He was one of the Japanese intellectuals of the day who embraced Catholicism as a new “vogue.” The Vatican expected him to complete his ecclesiastical training, return to his native country, and preach the Gospel. As the only Japanese studying in Europe at that time, Araki was both respected and loved by believers. Like Kudo, however, he feels overwhelmed by the Church’s high expectations of him as a Japanese convert. As the time approached him for his return to Japan, he became concerned about his safety. During his study abroad, persecution of Japanese Catholics had become more severe, and by the time he returned to Japan, approximately 100 believers had been executed.<sup>2</sup> Despite his eerie intimations, he had no choice but to return to Japan. After all, he was a Catholic leader in a position to exemplify the faith he had embraced. Soon after his arrival in his native land, Araki was captured. Then, after a brief torture, he apostatized. Thus, his name became synonymous with religious cowardice. Near the end of the story, the narrator conjectures that Araki might have screamed at the mission-minded Europeans, “That’s enough! Leave me alone! Don’t try and force your ideas on the Japanese!” (49).

Times have changed, and unlike what Endo portrays in his stories, most Westerners are more sensitive to cultural differences. Yet, his stories show that when two cultures meet, tensions will inevitably arise. *Foreign Studies* is an excellent resource for understanding potential conflicts that result from cultural encounters. The book also vividly portrays the distress many international students face—cultural, emotional, and psychological—when they come to a completely different culture. Some people adapt well to the new environment, but others feel out of place and depressed. This is a must-read text for those who interact with international students, such as admissions counselors, instructors, and international student advisors. Those who wish to go to the mission fields in Asia or another non-Western continent will also find this book highly instructive. It will be an eye-opening experience to read Endo’s book.

#### **Category #4: Literature Written from a Religiously Unorthodox Viewpoint**

Writers and poets who belong to Category #4 are either religiously unorthodox or openly antagonistic toward Christianity. Many texts in this category re-interpret biblical accounts from various critical perspectives, such as cultural anthropology and higher criticism. William Blake’s visionary poem “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” defies the orthodox Christian notion of good and

evil. Lord Byron's one-act play "Cain" (1821) reinterprets the Old Testament narrative about Cain and Abel from Cain's perspective, discarding the orthodox interpretation in Hebrews 11:4 ("By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead." NIV).

Twentieth-century English novels that belong to Category #4 include D. H. Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* (1931), Robert Graves's *King Jesus* (1946), and José Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), each of which offers a creative understanding of the Gospel story of Jesus. This type of fiction offers neither a devotional paraphrase of the Gospel story nor a humanistic transfiguration of Jesus in a modern setting. Rather, it raises questions on the validity of the biblical narratives of Jesus and strives to reinterpret them in light of insights from cultural anthropology, comparative religion, and psychology. Novelists who write this type of fiction undermine the role of the biblical author and the inerrancy and historicity of biblical accounts. Rather, they focus more on what might have happened rather than what the Bible says happened; they use biblical themes, images, and patterns to undermine organized religion, parody the Gospels, and deny the deity of Christ.

In *The Man Who Escaped* (originally published in 1929 as *The Escaped Cock*), Lawrence transforms the story of Christ into a story of paganism. Jesus appears as an incarnation of Osiris, the Egyptian king and judge of the underworld and husband and brother of the priestess Isis. Jesus dies a redemptive death for all humanity and then comes back from the dead—in the same way Osiris dies and resurrects for a renewed fertility of nature—this time to live as a man of flesh and blood. Then he goes to Egypt, where he encounters the priestess of the goddess Isis and enters into a redemptive sexual union with her, thereby impregnating her. In *The Man Who Escaped*, Jesus appears as a disillusioned messiah who finds meaning in this world, not in the other world. The earthly life is more real than the afterlife, and the fleshly desire is more important than spiritual fulfillment. Redemption comes from sexual union, not from spiritual pursuit. After his return from the tomb, in which he is buried alive, Jesus feels cheated by God the Father, who apparently did not want him to enjoy the sweetness of sexual life. The novel reflects the author's preoccupation with the life-force as he finds in the natural world; the sexual impulse is presented as the solution for all existential problems.

While Lawrence portrays Jesus as a pagan god, Robert Graves completely divests Jesus of his divine nature in his historical novel *King Jesus*. *King Jesus* is written from the perspective of a Roman official named Agabus, who opens his first chapter "Simpletons" with the following words:

I, Agabus the Decapolitan, began this work at Alexandria in the ninth year of the Emperor Domitian and completed it at Rome in the thirteenth year of the same. It is the history of the wonder-worker Jesus, rightful heir-at-law to the dominions of Herod, King of the Jews, who in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the Governor-General of Judaea. (3)

In Agabus's view, Jesus is not God who incarnated himself into human flesh; rather, he is an extraordinary human being who considered himself a Jew and whom some Jews considered their military messiah. According to traditional Jewish thought, it is blasphemous to equate a man to God. Through "patient and discreet inquiry" (7), Agabus theorizes that the birth of Jesus and his parentage were fabricated by zealous Christians.

Like Lawrence and Graves, the Portuguese novelist José Saramago reconfigures the biblical story of Christ's life in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*. One of the most prominent features of the novel is its rejection of miracles. Based on the assumption that miracles never happen in life, the author explains the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life in scientific terms. Angels do appear in Saramago's account, but they appear in human forms such as beggars and King Herod's soldiers. In the novel, Christ appears as a man with human frailties. He and the prostitute Mary Magdalene are lifelong lovers. Saramago also offers a new version of the story of Jesus and the fig tree he curses. In the Bible, Jesus miraculously causes the tree to wither. In Saramago's version, he does curse the tree, which withers, but he does not know how to revive it. Further, after his curse, Mary Magdalene scolds him for his supposedly foolish act, and he feels ashamed of himself.

As Northrop Frye notes in *The Great Code*, biblical imagery and narrative have set up an imaginative framework—which he calls "a mythological universe—for Western literature" (xi). The story of Jesus especially serves as an unfailing source of literary imagination in the West. Perhaps no other figure in the world has appealed to Western writers as much as Christ has done. His life story involves dramatic and suspenseful events and situations, such as Judas's betrayal of Jesus, the physical suffering of Jesus, his agonizing prayer at Gethsemane, his redemptive death on the Cross, Judas's suicide, and Christ's resurrection.

Based on their attitude toward Christianity, however, novelists approach the Gospel story of Jesus differently. Orthodox Christian writers accept the authority of Scripture, offering details that add piety, devotion, and vividness. Evangelical and Pentecostal publishers tend to publish their works. Writers who do not accept Jesus as God-man tend to retell the biblical accounts of Jesus, borrowing insights from historical criticism (higher criticism), cultural anthropology, and modern psychology. They tend to read Scripture as a cultural text that needs to be contextualized and humanized. *The Man Who Died*, *King Jesus*, and *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* demonstrate not only the popular, enduring appeal of the person of Jesus to imaginative writers but also the impact of modern, secular scholarship on the way the Bible is understood. These three novels are among the precursors of Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (2003) and other novels that rewrite the Gospel story of Christ by using extra-biblical scholarship and creative imagination.

The three novels also show that modern Christianity as an institution—certainly with the help of Western democracy—has provided novelists with artistic freedom to portray Christ in various ways. Depending on how they view

the Gospels, the authors are bothered by Jesus, puzzled by him, or touched by him. By denying the deity of Christ, they cause uproar among some orthodox Christians, but they have the freedom to rewrite the Bible in whatever way they deem plausible. This freedom of expression is contrasted with what happened when Salman Rushdie—the Indian-born British novelist—went into hiding several years under threat of death for publishing his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

## Conclusions

The four categories of Christian literature examined above show that literature is sometimes supportive of Christian faith, other times equivocal, still other times antagonistic. Considering that Christianity is a foundation of Western culture and that the Christian worldview is increasingly adopted by non-Western countries, types of literature in Categories #1 and #2 deserve much critical attention. However, literary scholars are likely more attracted to imaginative literature that belongs to Categories #3 and #4, because it provides a more panoramic view of human struggles with spirituality.

Some believers may frown upon works in Category #4 for their unorthodox religious views. However, history is always revisited; revisionism is inevitable whether or not it has a grain of truth in it. Those who are intellectually and doctrinally equipped to handle books that are clearly out of line with traditional Christian circles may find them interesting to read. After all, we cannot suppress unorthodox views, and reading such books may reveal loopholes in subversive texts and thereby strengthen one's faith rather than weakening it. Some Christians are afraid of postmodernism, the current intellectual movement that puts emphasis on "local" rather than "universal." Christianity is losing its status as a globally relevant religion applicable to all races and all ethnicities. This is not necessarily a deplorable phenomenon; instead, it offers an opportunity for Christianity to compete confidently with other religious traditions in what U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas called "the marketplace of ideas" in his concurring opinion in *United States v. Rumely*, 345 U.S. 41, 56 [1953].

God uses human language to communicate with his people; accordingly, Christianity and literature are not antithetical but complementary. After all, God created the universe through his Word, and Jesus was a master storyteller who knew how to address his audiences by using various literary techniques. Based on the idea that literature should always serve a spiritual purpose, many Puritans disliked imaginative texts supposedly written for entertainment, especially drama and fiction. Yet, all literary texts—religious, irreligious, and antireligious—reveal human conditions and ultimately point to Christ as the answer to all existential problems of life.

Extensive reading—of not only spiritual books but also of the books that are seemingly hostile to Christianity—is important for those who pursue ministry. In the words of Eugene H. Peterson, "Spiritual reading, for most of us, requires either the recovery or acquisition of skills not in current repute: leisurely,

repetitive, reflective reading. [...] It is a way of reading that shapes the heart at the same time that it informs the intellect, sucking out the marrow-nourishment from the bone-words” (x). In the meantime, intellectually and spiritually equipped Christians will benefit from reading the works that raise questions about orthodox Christian faith, because those questions are the kind of questions discussed in the secular academy. Reading in itself does not hurt; reading without thinking does hurt. After all, it was God who said in Isaiah 1:18, “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD” (NIV).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This essay was originally delivered as part of the Eminent Overseas Scholar Lecture Series, College of Theology and United Graduate School of Theology, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, May 2016.

<sup>2</sup> According to Fr. Roger Landry, an estimated 35,000 Japanese Catholics died as martyrs between 1597 and 1639. See his 2008 article “The Martyrs of Japan,” which is available online.

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### For Further Reading

**Note:** A number of books deal with the relationship between Christianity and literature. Most of the resources listed below come from my personal library and thus are not necessarily representative of the scholarship.

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## Thoughts and Reflections

### Baptist Identity and the Baptist University<sup>1</sup>

Matthew C. Easter

Today I focus on the question of “What is a Baptist, and (more precisely) what does it mean to be a Baptist university?” It is not easy to nail down what exactly it means to be a Baptist. Baptists are a diverse group, but there are at least five distinctives that define all Baptists. To be sure, other Christian groups may share one or more of these distinctives, but when put together, these five distinctives give a good picture of what makes a Baptist.

The unifying theme behind all five distinctives is a commitment to the worth and responsibility of every individual. Some have called this idea “soul competency” (famously Mullins). Soul competency means every individual human being is responsible to God and is responsible to respond as God calls him or her to respond. Baptists insist that faith cannot be forced, because forced religion is really no religion at all. But people often fail to understand that this freedom to respond to God is rightly exercised only when we are in community with other followers of Jesus. To be responsible to God is not “every man for himself.” Soul competency does not mean that I can do whatever I want, because I am free. No, anyone who wishes to find true freedom will ultimately find it when they are bound into a shared life with others seeking to follow Jesus. On this point I am deeply indebted to the work of Baptist thinkers like Curtis Freeman and James William McClendon. For Freeman, McClendon, and other authors of a document often called the “Baptist Manifesto,” freedom is found in “faithful and communal discipleship” (Broadway). This commitment to the competency of every soul within this “faithful and communal discipleship” undergirds the five distinctives we address today.

First, Baptists are defined by a commitment to Scripture. Baptists look to the Bible as the primary guide for faith and practice, the ultimate source of truth. For example, when I read the Bible, I begin with the assumption that if my opinion and God’s word differs, then I am the one who is wrong. If the Bible and I disagree, then the Bible is right and I am wrong. But I recognize that I am biased, just like all humans. I know that I will find what I am looking for and will find a way to justify myself. I also recognize that I am not perfect and not an infallible interpreter of reality. If you are honest with yourself, you know that you are not perfect either. So, how can anyone know whether their understanding of the Bible is right or not? This is the power of community. Committing oneself to

a community of others following Jesus and reading Scripture together helps illuminate blind spots in the search for truth.

How this relates to our identity as a Baptist university should be rather clear. You are here at Missouri Baptist University to learn in each of your areas of interest, but I also believe that God has uniquely placed you here so that you can respond to him. It is through reading Scripture – and especially through reading Scripture with others – that you will hear the voice of the God who is calling you to respond. The assumption behind education is that you are looking outside of yourself. When you sign up for a class, you are admitting that you do not know everything and that you need the assistance of another to help you in your search for truth (this includes both your professor and your classmates). So, read Scripture together.

Second, Baptists practice believers' baptism, which is to say that Baptists baptize people after they make a decision to follow Jesus. Baptists do not baptize babies, and the early Baptists faced a lot of problems because of this. Baptists were literally murdered because they refused to baptize babies. In England (where Baptists mostly got their start), Baptists used to be called child abusers because they would not baptize infants. In some cultures, this reputation continues. Recently when I was on a mission trip in Belarus, the Belarusians told me that they were taught that Baptists eat their children!

Why do Baptists practice believers' baptism? On the one hand, Baptists believe this is what Scripture teaches. At the same time, though, the Baptist theology of believers' baptism speaks to the commitment that everyone must respond to God. Infants are not in a position to make informed decisions, and Baptists want to allow each individual the space to respond to God in his or her own timing. To be sure, a Baptist parent would pray for her child, take this child to church, and give this child every possible opportunity to respond to God, but the Baptist commitment to soul competency means a Baptist parent would not try to force a child to believe. This is why Baptists baptize believers. Baptists want to allow every individual to respond to God's call in his or her own timing, but then after they do, to follow Jesus in baptism and join the community of other baptized followers of Jesus.

How does this relate to being a Baptist university? Well, I admit I have heard some muttering from certain students that chapel shoves religion down students' throats. I have heard that some students think that the Old Testament and New Testament courses are the university's way of coercing students into being Christians. As a Baptist university, especially knowing our commitment as Baptists to soul competency, I can tell you that this is far from the truth! As a Baptist university, we would be horrified by the thought of imposing religion on a student. Instead of imposing religion on you, we are exposing you to religion. When you sit in chapel, I am not trying to shove religion down your throat. No, I am giving you an opportunity to encounter the God who has changed my life and the lives of billions of people for two thousand years. This is not coercion, but education. What you choose to do with this education is between you and God. You are responsible for your own response to God, and this community is here to help you as you make this response.

Third, Baptists believe in the “priesthood of the believer.” Every believer is a “priest,” meaning that every follower of Jesus has a right to approach God in prayer. On the one hand, this means that people do not need to go through a priest or through any other means to have a relationship with God. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, people have direct access to God. On the other hand, this also means that each individual has a responsibility as a priest to pray for friends, classmates, and co-workers.

As students, you may not realize this, but the staff and faculty at MBU are praying continuously. We pray for you as students. If you are in one of my classes, you hear me pray for you every class period, but I am praying for you outside of class, too. Your other teachers are doing the same, and we are praying for each other, too. I get multiple emails a week with prayer requests for co-workers here at MBU. So we are praying for one another, even as we are also praying for you. And I know many of you are doing the same. You are praying for each other, and by doing so you are embodying this Baptist distinctive of “the priesthood of the believer” by taking your friends’ concerns to God on their behalf.

Fourth, Baptists cooperate for mission. Baptists believe God has called us to share the good news of Jesus to everyone, and Baptists cooperate with one another to make this happen. Here at MBU, I have been thrilled to hear some of your stories of mission trips you have taken to share the good news about Jesus. If you have not gone on a mission trip, I encourage you to do so.

Finally, Baptists are committed to religious liberty. The earliest Baptists knew they were the underdogs. The earliest Baptists were not the ones in power, but were being killed for their beliefs. So, the earliest Baptists had good reason to push for religious liberty. Significantly, though, the earliest Baptists were committed to religious liberty for everyone, including those with whom they disagreed. Some of the strongest voices for the separation of Church and State in American history were Baptists. For example, the Baptist evangelist John Leland pushed hard for religious liberty in Virginia. Leland was known for being a bit eccentric, but highly effective. During his twenty-five years of ministry in Virginia, Leland preached over 3,000 sermons and baptized nearly 1,300 people (McBeth, 273-275). He worked to improve the lives of slaves, and pushed for emancipation. In 1791, Leland published a major work on religious liberty called *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*. He argued three basic points: (1) the rights of conscience are not subject either to government permission or restriction; (2) the establishment of religion by secular laws always damages religion; and (3) when the government makes laws for religion, they actually have their own interests in mind instead of pure motives. Leland became friends with James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. He was so excited when Jefferson (who was a champion for the Separation of Church and State) was elected president that he and his town sent Jefferson a gift. The gift was a block of cheese made from the milk of every cow in the town! It was four feet wide and fifteen inches thick, and weighed over 1,200 pounds! The block of cheese was so heavy that it could not ride on a wagon, so they put it on a sled (it was winter), and Leland took it on a three-week, 500-mile trip to give it to Jefferson in Washington, D.C. Funny

enough, this was one of the events in history that made Baptists famous. Needless to say, Leland was an advocate for the separation of Church and State.

This commitment to religious liberty is central to life as a Baptist university. Baptists want justice for all, and so, at their best, Baptists make sure that every voice is heard, that every person is valued, and that no one falls through the cracks. This justice for all happens when Baptists keep the tension in mind that I mentioned at the beginning: we are free individuals, but true freedom is found when we are bound to one another. As members of this university, we are involved in one another's lives. We are bound together: you need each other, I need you, and you need me. If one of us is struggling, then we all are struggling. If one of us succeeds, then we all succeed. It is as if we were running a race, but none of us cross the finish line until we all cross it together. At its core, then, to be a Baptist university is about community. We are individuals making free choices, but we are bound together.

Many of you are already living out this virtue. You are showing what it looks like to be a Baptist university. But let us imagine together: "What does a Baptist university look like?" It looks like a group of students at a grocery store in Oakville, ringing a bell for the poor in the freezing cold weather. It looks like a freshman student inviting someone sitting alone to join her group of friends in the cafeteria. It looks like every professor's open door. It looks like the men's and women's basketball teams giving up their Sunday afternoon for charity. It looks like over 100 students, staff, and faculty joining hands in prayer for racial reconciliation and together crying out for justice. It looks like a group of students inviting their professor to join them for lunch. It looks like a future biologist, a future elementary school teacher, and a future psychologist working until 11 p.m. as housekeepers to make sure you have a clean place to learn in the morning. It looks like a women's volleyball team, who handled not only victory but defeat on national television with the utmost class. It looks like a Facebook message sent by one student to the rest of the class the night before a Greek quiz, to make sure everyone does well. It looks like leaving a comfortable backrow seat in a classroom to sit beside someone who forgot their textbook at home. It looks like every student who takes extra-good notes so they can share them with their classmate in need. This, my friends, is what it means to be a Baptist university: it is about the daily decision to support one another. It is about community. We are not in competition with one another, because when one of us succeeds, we all succeed.

When you support one another, love one another, and pray for one another, people notice. Do not forget that part of our distinctives as a Baptist university is to cooperate for missions. When you live in community in the ways you are doing, this is a witness to the world. When you treat one another with justice, at that moment you are truly, as Jesus hopes us to be, "a light to the world" (Matthew 5:16). Let us all join together and let us commit to support one another, putting one another's interests above our own. As you do, people will notice, and this is how you will truly *Shine On*.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> This speech was delivered at chapel for Missouri Baptist University, St. Louis, MO, 4 February 2016. Undergraduate students comprised the bulk of the audience, and so the tone and content of this speech reflects my attempt to speak theologically to a group of students with little or no background knowledge of the topic at hand. I thank Dr. Alton Lacey, the President of MBU, for the invitation to speak on this topic.

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## Book Reviews

**Byron, John, and Joel N. Lohr, eds. *I (Still) Believe: Leading Bible Scholars Share Their Stories of Faith and Scholarship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 256 pages, \$17.00**

**Reviewed by Matthew C. Easter**

In his 1984 book *Exegetical Fallacies*, D. A. Carson describes the phenomenon of “distanciation,” the necessary step in academic study where a biblical scholar must “first of all grasp the nature and degree of the differences that separate our understanding from the understanding of the text” before he or she can “profitably fuse our horizon of understanding with the horizon of understanding of the text” (Carson 21). Done properly, the academic studying Scripture will first distance himself or herself from the biblical text, and only after this practice ask the integrative question, “What does this mean for the Church, for me, and for the community?” Carson warns that those biblical scholars who fail to do the hard work of integrating their faith with their academic pursuit “invite spiritual shipwreck” (Carson 22). Here lies the value of *I (Still) Believe: Leading Bible Scholars Share Their Stories of Faith and Scholarship*. The editors’ dedication page is telling: “For all who have struggled, wrestled, been discouraged, lamented, lost hope, wanted to give up, wondered if it all made sense, but still believe...” (5).

The scholars featured in *I (Still) Believe* represent a diverse range of theological and ecclesiological commitments, and account for some of the top academics in the field: Richard Bauckham (St. Andrews), Walter Brueggemann (Columbia Theological Seminary), Ellen Davis (Duke Divinity School), James D. G. Dunn (Durham), Gordon Fee (Regent College), Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Baylor), John Goldingay (Fuller Theological Seminary), Donald Hagner (Fuller Theological Seminary), Morna Hooker (Cambridge), Edith Mary Humphrey (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), Andrew Lincoln (Gloucestershire), Scot McKnight (Northern Seminary), J. Ramsey Michaels (Missouri State), Patrick Miller (Princeton Theological Seminary), Walter Moberly (Durham), Katharine Doob Sakenfield (Princeton Theological Seminary), Phyllis Trible (Union Theological Seminary), and Bruce Waltke (Regent College). Each of the chapters read more like an autobiography than an apologetic for Christianity (except, perhaps, for Waltke’s chapter), which fits the editors’ desires for the project: “We wanted to hear their life stories – why they entered the field, why they do what they do, what makes them tick. We wanted to learn about their struggles, their

pains, their sorrows, but also their joys, reasons for hope, and what brought them fulfillment in life” (11).

Some of the authors describe crises of faith. Hagner, for instance, became an agnostic through the study of philosophy (106). Dunn details his struggle with the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible. The question that struck Dunn was, “What if 2 Peter was not written by Peter? What follows from that?” (57) He previously would have considered the question itself a dangerous step onto a slippery slope, but as he has since discovered, “To make faith depend on minor matters of detail ... was likely to prove disastrous when some detail proved to be questionable” (58).

Others narrate no such crisis of faith. Bauckham, for instance, recognizes the phenomenon of “distanciation” that Carson mentions: “It can seem that the more carefully one understands how a text spoke to its original historical context the less it speaks to us” (27). However, he claims never to have struggled with his faith. Instead, he writes, “Because I have always loved God and my life over the years has developed on that basis, I find life without God almost unimaginable ... I have been through some dark periods in my life, but they have not threatened my faith. Quite the opposite – they have made me feel more deeply my need of God” (23). Similarly, Brueggemann writes, “I am a committed Christian who has not doubted the main claims of church faith, though I fully appreciate that it is its practices that constitute the main claims of the church, and not its intellectual, doctrinal, or hermeneutical efforts” (36). Gaventa likewise experienced “no crisis of faith, no rude awakening to historical study, no traumatic loss and reclamation of confidence” (85). Reflecting on this, she writes, “I had no way of understanding at the time how much that gentle passage into historical criticism depended on my professors. They did not coddle the faith I had received by stepping around hard questions, but they also did not try to destroy it with vigorous assaults. Instead, they invited me (invited all of us) into the world of critical reflection and appreciation” (85).

Many of the authors relate a sense of “calling” to teach. For example, Fee writes,

I was sharing with a good friend on the faculty how much I enjoyed teaching, so much so that “my teeth ached” even thinking about doing it full time. And in one of those truly special moments, he looked at me and said, “Gordon, just because you *want* to do it, does not mean that God is against it!” As I began to wrap my mind around the concept, I thought, of course, this too could be a calling of sorts. (74, emphasis his)

Fee understands the life of the scholar in spiritual terms: “In prayer, and in repentance, I committed before my Lord that if opportunity were to arise, I would by God’s gracious beneficence try to pursue excellence in scholarship and remain passionate in my walk with God” (74). Similarly, Hagner explains, “For me, biblical scholarship is a form of service to God. I am therefore called to pursue it with all the excellence I am capable of, and I am under obligation to represent it

in the world of public dialogue, using the best historical-critical tools available, in the best way I can” (116). So also Miller sees the “enterprise of teaching and scholarship” as “a manifestation of my call to the ministry” (193).

*I (Still) Believe* gives readers a glimpse into the life of academia. The scholars name a number of professors who guided them along the way, such as Brevard Childs, William Barclay, C. F. D. Moule, J. Louis Martyn, George Ladd, and others. In nearly every case, the acclaim given to these scholars transcended their academic prowess, but spoke to their mentoring guidance of their students. Another benefit of the book is hearing scholars explain what they understand to be the significance of their academic work. It is a joy to read the accounts from each scholar as they walk through their major academic publications and explain what prompted these works and how they judge them to be significant in academia and the Church. Dunn’s and McKnight’s treatments of this topic are particularly enjoyable.

The authors gift readers with the collective wisdom of experience. Brueggemann closes his chapter with five pieces of advice: (1) remain open to new ideas; (2) read widely and deeply; (3) alter your conversation partners regularly; (4) remember that others have previously struggled with the same issues; and (5) remember the presence of the Spirit in the Scriptural text and the interpretive community (41-42). McKnight encourages readers to keep a focus on teaching *students*: “I learned something about teaching when I was a young teacher for which I am most grateful: that I was not teaching subjects to students, which makes me a talking head, but teaching students about a subject” (166). Davis reminds her readers to remain open to fresh readings of Scripture: “[C]ritical reading entails in the first instance an awareness that there is more than one legitimate way to approach and derive meaning from the text ... there is no such thing as a once-and-for-all reading of the text” (47). Hooker urges readers not to shy away from honest academic inquiry: “[T]rue faith is trust in *God*, and genuine trust in him can withstand the challenges that honest exploration brings. Honest exploration may seem at times to shake the foundations on which we stand – but true faith cannot be destroyed, since it is not our own, but depends on Christ, who is himself faithful” (127, emphasis hers). The book is similarly filled with words of warning. For instance, Goldingay warns, “As theologians we are human beings. Our theological insight can be in God’s service but it may as likely be in our service. Biblical study is not the objective affair we may pretend” (98).

I recommend *I (Still) Believe* to students, pastors, and scholars of any field. The heartfelt accounts of thinking theologically through suffering push the reader to think theologically in new ways (Goldingay’s, Humphrey’s, and Moberly’s chapters stand out particularly here). At other times I found myself reflecting on my own calling to the ministry of teaching, drawn to pray for the students in my care. *I (Still) Believe* tantalizes readers with a “behind-the-scenes” look at giants in the field of biblical studies and may also prove an encouragement to those struggling with faith or vocational purpose.

**Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016. 210 pages, \$19.99**

**Reviewed by Julie Ooms**

James K. A. Smith's brief book *You Are What You Love* may pose a challenge to university and college educators and their students alike, and not because it is a particularly difficult read; in fact, the book is very readable. Its challenge lies in its thesis. Educators and students, whose daily work revolves around thinking and intellectual matters, will find in this book an argument against viewing human beings as primarily "*thinking things*" (3) and assuming that "the 'heart' of the person"—and thus the seat of our selfhood and the source of our faith—"is the mind" (3). Smith calls this false definition of humans "*thinking-thingism*"; it is, he claims, a result of modernism (and Descartes in particular), not of Christianity. This "*thinking-thingism*" distorts the way we see ourselves, our purposes, and our worship. Therefore, rather than defining humans as thinking things above all, Smith argues that we must focus on the heart "as the fulcrum of [our] most fundamental longings," longings that shape the habits that make us who we are (8). We are, as his title states, what we love, and we form habits that allow us to gain what we desire. Smith argues that, by viewing human beings as creatures of desire and habit, rather than primarily as thinking-things, we will be better able to "calibrate our hearts" (19)—to shape our desires, habits, and our thoughts to follow Christ.

Smith supports this thesis through a series of theoretical and practical chapters. His second chapter, following the first in which he lays out his thesis, focuses on what Smith calls an "uncomfortable realization: you might not love what you think" (27). This chapter's purpose is to help readers recognize that our loves, and thus our habits, are unconscious—we do not deliberately think about them and decide to follow them; they just are. However, we must work to recognize them, because they may show that we worship differently than we think. Smith proposes that we define such unconscious habits, particularly those that produce either virtue or vice in us, as liturgies, because they guide our worship, whether that worship is of God or of some other *telos*. "'Liturgy'...is a shorthand term for those rituals that are loaded with an ultimate Story about who we are and what we're for," Smith writes (46). Once we identify these "rival liturgies" (Smith's extended example in this chapter is the liturgy of consumerism, centered on the temple of the shopping mall), we are better able to recognize the hold they have on our hearts, and work to train ourselves out of the habits that keep that hold firm.

The third chapter digs more deeply into this task of "rehabituating our hungers" (57) to follow Christ rather than another *telos* or ultimate end. Smith argues that "our sanctification—the process of becoming holy and Christlike—is more like a Weight Watchers program than listening to a book on tape" (65), meaning that it must involve a transformation of habit rather than the consumption of better information. This idea leads him to the conclusion that it is

not primarily doctrine but worship, and the liturgical habits formed therein, that are at the heart of discipleship (68). His fourth chapter puts flesh on the theoretical bones of the third, reaching into the past and charting the narrative arc of a traditional Christian worship whose liturgical moves “[fuel] our imaginations with a biblical picture of a world that...is ‘charged with the grandeur of God’” rather than bound to an earthly *telos* (94). Such a traditional Christian liturgy is one that rehabilitates us toward God, he argues. Smith advises readers to closely examine the liturgies of their own churches and to ask tough questions of churches whose services focus on entertainment, emotional experience, or on “thinking-thingism” rather than on the narrative arc of Gathering, Listening, Communing, and Sending (96). Provocatively, Smith suggests that churches that have broken with this narrative arc, perhaps in favor of a sermon-focused service, have engaged in a process of “excarnation—of disembodiment of the Christian faith, turning it into a ‘heady’ affair that could be boiled down to a message and grasped with the mind,” reducing Christianity to “something for brains-on-a-stick” (101). Rather, Smith argues, worship should be *incarnational*, profoundly embodied in a way that shapes our habits and our hearts, not just our minds.

The latter chapters, from chapter five on, of this short book apply Smith’s ideas to not just worship but to other habits of human life. Chapter five, “Guard Your Heart,” focuses on the liturgies of the home, in which he is critical of two malformed liturgies in particular: how Christians practice weddings and how they practice family life. First, he criticizes a Christian culture of marriage that adopts worldly liturgies rather than biblical ones, in that it emphasizes a romantic, self-involved “‘coupling’ of two star-crossed lovers” (120) who stare at each other rather than at their community as they marry. Instead, Smith argues, Christians should present a “countercultural, biblical vision... [such as the one] in an Orthodox wedding rite” (121) that puts the Triune God at the center of the ceremony and embeds the couple’s story “within the sweeping Story of salvation history,” a story far larger than themselves and their own individual love (123). Of our liturgies of home and family, Smith is similarly critical of the effects of individualism. Smith notes that narratives of family life that focus on families as individual, self-sustaining units are twisted and result in alienating the family from the church community as well as forcing the family to bear a weight it was not designed to bear alone. The biblical counter-liturgy to this individualistic one is baptism, because its promises show that “love and its obligations traverse the boundaries of ‘private residences’ and ‘nuclear families’ because they initiate us into a household that is bigger than that which is under the roof of our house” (117). Family life becomes the life not of the individual family unit, but of the church.

Smith’s final two chapters are perhaps those most practically applicable to university and college educators and scholar-teachers. These chapters, with their focus on education and vocation, are framed with Stanley Hauerwas’s statement that “all education, whether acknowledged or not, is moral formation” (139). Throughout these chapters, Smith gives suggestions for how educators and parents can educate their students, children, and themselves in ways that *form* them as habitual creatures rather than *informing* them as “thinking-things.” His

examples include a revised view of youth ministry that discards attempts to make things “cool” or entertaining and encourages a return to historic practices of worship instead (148); they also include an exhortation to teachers to form themselves along with their students: “If I hope to invite students into a formative educational project, then I, too, need to relinquish any myth of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency and recognize that my own formation is never final” (161). Through training and education that reforms our habits after Christ, Smith argues, we become creatures who are enabled to embark on their mission “image, unfold, and occupy” the world as God’s image-bearers entrusted with the care and development of His creation, because our habits have formed us to love what He loves.

This book’s thesis is challenging and engaging; its argument is well-organized and supported with an effective mix of personal, popular, and expert examples. Smith’s thesis is in keeping with arguments he has made in other works; his rejection of various aspects of modernism is echoed in other books like *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* and *Who’s Afraid of Relativism?*, and his discussion of education is reminiscent of the essays collected in *Teaching and Christian Practice*. These similarities to other pedagogically-inclined books lead me to recommend *You Are What You Love* to teachers and to their students in particular.

*You Are What You Love* is not a work of scholarship whose primary usefulness will be to other scholars whose work deals with similar topics. This hardly diminishes its value. Rather, it is best used as a pedagogical text for the Christian university or college classroom, or even for a church group book study. Some of its ideas will prove challenging, especially for the student or teacher whose church’s worship does not resemble the narrative structure Smith so prizes as he criticizes others, and especially for the reader whose emphasis on doctrine differs from Smith’s. Such a challenge is worthwhile, in my view, as it will force students and their teachers alike to confront their own habits and, after examining them, to decide how and whether to continue in or re-shape those habits.

This book would be a fine addition to a course syllabus in any subject, though it may be more organically integrated into a theology or other humanities course. It demands that students and educators examine the *why* and *how* of their learning—how it will *form* them—before they consider the *what*—how the course will *inform* them. If our intentions as educators are to form our students as people of virtuous habits whose work will not merely be economically advantageous, but a way they image God in the world, raising questions like those raised in this book will be a significant part of and aid to our teaching.

**Graham, Gordon, ed. *The Kuyper Center Review, Vol. 5: Church and Academy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 149 pages, \$24.00**

**Reviewed by Julie Ooms**

This short collection of nine essays is, as its title indicates, the fifth in a series of collections published annually. Each focuses on an issue in public life that Reformed theology, and Abraham Kuyper's brand of Reformed theology in particular, can be applied to and viewed through. The essays in this volume, edited by Gordon Graham of Princeton Theological Seminary, are introduced by Graham's brief editorial note; Graham is also the author of the final essay, a fairly summative article entitled "Abraham Kuyper and the Idea of a Christian Scholar." Between the editorial note and the final article are eight other essays, each exploring a different facet of Kuyper's ideas about the relationship between the church and the academy. Essays range from H. Russel Botman's "collage" of what he calls "*kairos* moments" in his article "Dread, Hope, and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage," to Javier A. Garcia's application of Kuyper's thought to that of other thinkers in "The Pulpit, the Lectern, and the Sickbed: Comparing Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Herman Bavinck on Church and Academy." Other essays consider the demands on church and academy by Modernity (Marinus de Jong) and in the twenty-first century (Ad de Bruijne).

In addition to their focus on Kuyper's ideas and their relationship to the Church and the academy, it should be noted that this collection assumes that focus with an eye toward the academy in the Netherlands amidst that nation's increasing secularization since Kuyper's time. In his editorial note, Graham states that as "the Netherlands can no longer be plausibly described as a Christian country," it follows that "the role of theology within the university cannot be what Kuyper thought it could and must be" (viii). Thus, Graham, the collection's contributors, and readers are left with questions: "Do these changes mean that Kuyper's vision, and the thinking that underlay it, have nothing to say to a world so greatly altered from the one for which he framed them?" (viii).

The essays in this volume engage such questions in a number of ways. The first essay, and the only one Graham summarizes in detail in his editorial note, is the late Hayman Russel Botman's "Dread, Hope, and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage." This article's significance in the volume stems not only from its subject but from its origins as a lecture Botman gave upon receipt of the Abraham Kuyper Prize in 2013. Botman, a black South African scholar and minister, organizes his article around what he calls "*kairos* moments," or, he writes (borrowing from Paul Tillich), "'fulfilled moment[s], the moment of time approaching us as fate and decision' and 'a moment of history...pregnant with a new understanding of the meaning of history and life'" (1). In his own life, Botman views these *kairos* moments as significant occasions that were "accompanied by some sort of theological reflection" (1-2); they have also often been characterized by fear and dread (4). One such *kairos* moment, for example, was the dread he and other members of his congregation faced when confronting

the policy of apartheid in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in South Africa, a political policy that began with “full-scale biblical justification of...church policy” dividing black from white and which was justified in part “through a deliberate distortion of the theological tradition of Abraham Kuyper” and even his own ideas (5). This dread led, eventually, to theological reflection—reflection that result in the pursuit, if not the full accomplishment, of justice with the adopted of the Confession of Belhar in 1982 (6). This *kairos* moment, one of several Botman traces throughout his essay, offers what Botman calls both “biblical and contextual hope”—hope that finds a source in scripture but that also branches out into the particular difficulties of a given historical, political, social, or cultural context; for Botman, these all begin in Africa (8-9). While Botman’s lecture does not often explicitly mention Kuyper, much less explicitly organize itself around Kuyper’s ideas, it does conclude with a connection back to the Abraham Kuyper Prize that prompted its writing, drawing attention to the author’s past and continued work in theology and public life (25).

This first, rather personal article is followed by a series of more standard academic articles addressing concerns connected to church and the academy. Some work explicitly with Kuyper’s ideas, while others are tangentially related and connected more to the volume’s theme than to Kuyper himself. In the latter category is Marinus de Jong’s essay “The Heart of the Academy: Herman Bavinck in Debate with Modernity on the Academy, Theology, and the Church,” in which de Jong, as he states in blunt Dutch fashion in his first sentence, discusses “a debate between two Dutch theologians on a pair of related issues: the justification of the existence of the Christian academy, and theology’s place in the academy” (62). Though, as I mentioned above, de Jong’s essay does not discuss Kuyperian thought explicitly, its conclusion is worthy of discussion among Christians in the academy in the Netherlands and elsewhere. De Jong’s overall conclusion is that science and theology—the former often given over wholly to the academy (and driven from public life and the church), and the latter often situated only in the church—should both be integrated into a holistic Christian life of the heart and of the mind.

While de Jong’s article deals with ideas related to Kuyperian thought but not directly concerned with it, others, such as Ad de Bruijne’s, explicitly apply Kuyper’s ideas to church, academy, or both. In “Not without the Church as Institute: The Relevance of Abraham Kuyper’s Ecclesiology for the Christian Public and Theological Responsibilities in the Twenty-First Century,” de Bruijne addresses the question of how Christians, primarily in the West, “should respond to a situation in which the Christian tradition is no longer dominant,” concluding finally that “the church in its institutional dimension is indispensable to Christian public action, and that this institutionality is liturgically determined” (76). De Bruijne uses Kuyper’s concept of the church as a “colony of heaven,” which has “a vocation in, as Kuyper says, a foreign earthly country” (79) to support his thesis and to argue against other theological models for how the church should engage with the public sphere. He closes with some slight revision of Kuyper’s ideas for the present post-Christian age, arguing that “organic Christian life...will

appear to be possible only because of this liturgical and therefore institutional center” (88).

Despite the fact that some of its articles do not require a thorough knowledge of Kuyperian thought, and despite the fact that this is a well-focused and well-organized collection of equally well-organized articles, this volume is likely most useful to scholars and thinkers whose work is either connected in some way to Kuyper, or whose institutions are connected in some way to Kuyperian ideas about education and the academy. The collection also, and unsurprisingly, is heavily focused on Dutch theologians, thinkers, and concerns, as well as (in the case of Botman’s article) on the continued impact of Dutch colonization in parts of the world like South Africa. Therefore, as noted above, scholars and teachers at American institutions in the Dutch Reformed tradition and its heirs will not only find the ideas in this volume most useful, but will also be fluent enough in that tradition’s basic tenets to grasp its ideas without requiring large amounts of further study.

Despite this potential limitedness, however, the questions raised in this volume of essays are incredibly significant ones for the church and the academy, and the faith-based college or university, in America as we grow gradually more aware that we live in an increasingly post-Christian world. The questions each essay in this volume considers are questions we must all ask of ourselves, and questions that we must work, study, and act in order to answer. Though I would not recommend this collection of essays as a starting point on the road to addressing such questions, it is a worthy resource for more in-depth study, and can itself help the reader find new and robust theological resources to engage and impact a challenging cultural landscape.

**Smith, David I., and Susan M. Felch. *Teaching and Christian Imagination*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 256 pages, \$22.00**

**Reviewed by Cordell P. Schulten**

I first encountered Professors Smith and Felch at an academic conference hosted by Baylor University's Institute for Faith and Learning in the spring of 2004. The theme of that conference, as I recall, was "Christianity and the Soul of the University." Each of the presenters addressed a variety of perspectives on Christian faith as the foundation for intellectual community. I was attracted to Smith and Felch's talk because they proposed to engage the dynamic of classroom teaching, in and of itself, as opposed to a particular discipline's subject matter viewed through a Christian lens. My own interest in faith and learning integration was focused more, at that time, on its limitations rather than its ever-expanding content. The presentation I heard both challenged and prepared me for the most rewarding and fruitful academic experience of my teaching career. I did not know it then, but I would soon be departing for a summer's visiting professorship in Korea that would in turn lead to a five-year stint of teaching American law at an Asian university.

Smith and Felch's presentation at Baylor, those twelve years past, expressed in seminal form what they have now emerged in their recent work, *Teaching and Christian Imagination*. For the Christ-following teacher and for the student as well, especially if he/she also is a Christ-follower, Smith and Felch show how the teaching and learning experience may be greatly enriched by envisioning this deeply human activity as a continuing pilgrimage, or a cultivation of a garden or yet even a construction a living space. By their earlier presentations, they had readied me to value and learn from Eastern traditions (mainly Confucian) of teaching and learning while trying to incorporate Western traditions (mainly Socratic) into the instruction of American law within an Asian context of professor/student relationships, pedagogies and learning expectations and outcomes.

Now as I reflect upon my teaching and learning experiences in Asia through the images presented by Smith and Felch, I have an even deeper appreciation for many ways in which these metaphors enhance the thoughtfulness by which one called to teach may continue to endeavor to assist in the learning of those placed within his sphere of care. Drawing upon both literary and historical examples, Smith and Felch provide to the teacher ways of imagining the learning experience that place all participants in a mutually responsible and thereby mutually beneficial relationship with one another. One of its best expressions within the pilgrimage motif is viewing teaching itself, as Bernard of Clairvaux did, as breaking bread.

The setting is a 12<sup>th</sup> century sermon, the first of a long and famous series of sermons that Bernard composed on the Song of Songs.... He invites his learners to share an image of teaching and learning

as breaking bread and practicing hospitality.... ‘Be ready then,’ he urges, ‘to feed on bread rather than milk...bread that is splendid and delicious, the bread of the book called *The Song of Songs*’.... The brief biblical allusion not only points to the need to fit teaching to the capacities of the learner, but also implies that the learner’s capacities are not merely cognitive but spiritual.... Learning important things is more than processing information; it put to the test our capacity to grapple with wisdom, our ability to bring our very selves to our learning. (Smith and Felch 72)

Teaching will involve, then, not only the choice of the appropriate menu but also the arrangement and presentation of appetizers, entrees and desserts in such a way as to satisfy the one hungry for wisdom while yet leaving him desiring more. The teacher must not merely draw from the host’s provisions, but he must become a host himself who calls more pilgrims to dine at an even larger, more hospitable table.

The second image Smith and Felch focus upon to illumine greater insights into the nature and methods of the teaching and learning experience is the contrasting image of a garden and a wilderness. Teaching as the cultivation of both ideas and whole human persons finds many ready parallels in the arena of horticulture. The notion of wilderness, however, is both stark and challenging at the same time. The authors contend that the Scriptures are replete with depictions of personal formation, learning and growth taking place, in some cases to a much greater depth and authenticity, within the setting of a wilderness rather than the more flourishing accommodations of a garden. For example, Jesus “was himself ‘driven by the Spirit into the wilderness,’ the Judean desert, at the beginning of his public ministry, there to be tempted and formed. And he repeatedly took his close disciples ‘away to a lonely place’ as part of their formation” (118).

When applying this imagined setting to the realities confronting the conscientious practitioner, Smith and Felch ask, “How should a teacher respond when, despite the best intentions and noblest visions, the classroom is not a lush place of growth but an arid wasteland?” (119) Drawing upon Jesus’ instruction on personal private prayer, they join in with their fellow teachers and learners to remind us that

[w]e are invited to focus on grateful pleasure, on the sustenance found in the good gifts [i.e., daily bread] we find before us. We are invited to live faithfully in hope that the dry place can become fruitful and God can provide in the wilderness. We could learn these things in a lush garden, but we usually don’t. The garden of delight is a vision of redemption not yet fully worked out in the world; it calls for hope and trust when we see more desert than roses, not for sentimentality and complacency. (119)

With these and other challenges founded upon the images of journey and pilgrimage, as well as gardens and wildernesses, Smith and Felch inspire fresh

engagement with both the obstacles and opportunities for teaching and learning that each one called to this service encounters within the day-to-day realities of academy.

The third and final motif suggested by the authors is that of buildings and walls. In this section of their work, they turn, in a fashion similar to their approaches with the previous two images, to examples from both Scripture and architecture in history and literature. They guide us through preparation of blueprints, to beginnings of construction with the laying of solid foundations, forward to the raising of walls and climbing of steps, each with its several and varied pictures of the teaching and learning experience. I found, though, the most intriguing of the building metaphors to be their use of a labyrinth that is often found in the floors of medieval cathedrals. The labyrinth was a contemplative constructive providing a special pathway designed to enhance contemplation and reflection. Unlike a maze, the labyrinth has only one path that will lead the walker through from its beginning to end—a fairly long journey within a limited amount of space. This was the unique contribution of the labyrinth to personal and spiritual formation.

Smith and Felch apply this imagery to the student's learning experience as a means of both encouragement to continue the pursuit and assurance that there is indeed an end to which she is progressing:

Often you seem to be back-tracking; often you seem lost. From where you are standing at any given moment, you cannot see exactly how the path will take you to the center of the labyrinth. But if you persevere, if you stay inside the labyrinth and refuse the temptations of abandoning the path or stepping outside the lines to look for a shortcut, eventually you will arrive at the center. (185)

Smith and Felch's use of imagination to depict the multitude of experiences along the way of teaching that engenders learning is both artful and pragmatic. They have produced a broad array of portraits that are at once beautifully descriptive and at the same time immensely helpful to their fellow teachers—whether we be in the early stages of our pilgrimage along this wondrously rugged road or whether we are gently caring for long cultivated roses. I benefitted greatly from my first hearing of my colleagues Smith and Felch at that Baylor conference years ago, and now, you and I will continue to be even more enriched and challenged by this their masterful contribution to the art and artistry of teaching Christianly.

**Mouw, Richard J. *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 80 pages, \$10.00**

**Reviewed by Jessica Wohlschlaeger**

When my older brother saw the book *Called to the Life of the Mind: Some Advice for Evangelical Scholars* by Richard Mouw, he said that the text looked like one of those new age “hippie” books that would give vague advice about the journey to discovering truth and lasting peace. We laughed, but his comment only confirmed my initial fears. Originally, I was wary to read this text, thinking it would be like many others that purported amazing and thought provoking theories that would revolutionize and solidify the role of Christians and/or Christianity in academic scholarship. Oftentimes these same theories would remain just that: theoretical, unpracticed, and unexplained fantastical ideas that could never be applied to real life. Fortunately, as I delved into this text, I quickly realized and wholeheartedly acknowledge that my fears were, thankfully, unfounded.

Mouw addresses a multitude of topics including but not limited to anti-intellectualism, the role of the Christian scholar, the value of scholarship, the community between church and academics, the lonely nature of an academic, and research and writing as an act of worship. Despite this impressive array of topics, his text is a mere seventy-two pages (seventy-four if we count the Endnotes), which someone could easily read in a single afternoon. However, the ideas that Mouw addresses are familiar yet thought provoking, requiring further reflection to understand how these concepts can be applied to academia as well as to our own personal lives.

When speaking of academics, people love to share the exciting and successful parts such as publications, teaching, research, new ideas, conferences, and guest speaking. However, a darker side exists to the scholar’s life of which few wish to speak: “the frequent encounter with loneliness” (47). Mouw does not shy away from this topic but acknowledges this surprising aspect of academia. He writes,

But there are also those lonely moments that only a serious scholar can understand: spending hours trying to solve an intellectual puzzle or to find the right sentence to start off a chapter. Worrying about how to be kind in reviewing a book that you think is pretty bad. Losing two days of complicated work when your computer crashes. Lying awake at night thinking about what a student said in an evaluation of your teaching. (Mouw 48)

He describes the various worries that can alienate others because they may not understand these concerns and how they can continually plague the scholar. When a student negatively reacts on an evaluation, others will say that the

professor needs to “shrug it off” or “let it go.” However, those phrases are easier said than done because teachers are always thinking of how to improve a lesson and how to reach students in the most effective way. When scholars spend hours delving into “an intellectual puzzle,” others may not understand the obsession and struggle that accompanies the process of working through a complex and multifaceted issue, and it can be these misunderstandings that may lead to the scholar feeling alone. The author’s ability to briefly address this issue allows the audience to understand that even though they may feel lonely, they are not alone.

While Mouw explains and provides examples of how this loneliness can occur, he, fortunately, also gives a solution to lessen this feeling of isolation. His answer: community within the academy (both secular and Christian colleges/universities) and within the church body. He gently reminds and encourages the audience that God gives everyone unique gifts to further the Kingdom of God. He acknowledges, “Not everyone is called to cultivate the life of the mind in a disciplined manner. Some servants are fitted for different things. Certainly that was true of Mother Teresa. Our job as intellectuals is not to disdain her calling, but to respect her gifts...” (10). Mouw astutely points out that sometimes, in Christianity, we acquire this elitist mentality, and we create a hierarchy of service. Unfortunately, he does not give many examples to support this claim, but he explains the concepts well, which allows the audience to see these potential elitist tendencies in their own lives. For example, almost everyone has encountered people who may perceive that pastors are more important than the greeters in church or the people who volunteer in the nursery, who may be more crucial than a scholar who specializes in Christian literature, who may be more imperative than a Christian whose focus is history. This “order” is man-made and not honoring to God as it isolates each person and may cause people to work against each other or cause others to refuse certain acts of service that are a necessary part to the growth of God’s Kingdom because these people may feel “too good” for that type of work. While Mouw does not necessarily reference the image of the body of Christ (the many parts working together for a common goal), this imagery is clearly present as he encourages Christians to embrace and use our different gifts and talents to glorify God as well as to create a larger Christian community, which includes *all* types of gifts (service, edification, prayer, prophesy, hospitality, leadership, etc) including intellectualism:

...it is important—crucially so—that the Christian community have some people who are cultivating the intellectual disciplines...I am glad that [Mother Teresa] could serve, and draw strength from, a larger Christian community that supports the intellectual enterprise. Engaging in serious scholarship is not a prerequisite for an individual’s serving the Lord effectively, but the overall patterns of an effective Christian service will not be very healthy unless there is communal support from and for good teachers and scholars. (10-11)

In order to have a healthy and thriving Christian community, scholarship must support service, and service must support scholarship. Both of these elements are equally necessary for God's glory in the community of Christ. Scholarship allows people to see a small part of God's nature, how He works, His creations, and His designs for life. Mouw shows the audience the importance of these roles in the community, but he often allows the readers to use their own imagination and experiences to determine the application of this idea. For example, people can determine that Biblical and historical scholars help us better understand certain cultural, biographical, and ancient aspects of the life and times before and after Jesus' life. For instance, in John 4:1-42, Jesus meets with a Samaritan woman at the well, and the New International Version of the Bible reads, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4.9). Then, Jesus and this unnamed woman have a conversation about living water and everlasting life. Without additional in-depth study, we can understand the main point of this story: Jesus is the key to everlasting life, and anyone can accept his offer. However, when scholars research this time and era, they can offer further insight into this anecdote. The Bible mentions how Jews and Samaritans do not "associate" with each other, but it does not convey the depths of this non-association. Samaritans and Jews passionately hated each other, so when Jesus, a Jew, stops and asks for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman, his actions would be considered shocking. Additionally, scholars can prove that this woman was an outcast as she was drawing her water during the middle of the day when no one was around. She goes to the well during one of the hottest parts of the day to avoid people because she was ostracized for her way of life: the five previous husbands and the current man who is not her husband. The fact that Jesus speaks to her and shares the message of salvation with her is an amazing act of compassion. These additional details do not change the "heart" of this story, but they enhance our understanding of Christ's love by allowing us to see that the gospel of Christ is for everyone including our enemies and the outcasts of society. It would have been helpful for Mouw to give concrete examples, like the one listed above, illustrating the working relationship between scholarship and service, but the audience can generally piece together his meaning.

When we reflect further on Mouw's thoughts, we can see that he widens the definition of Christian community. Because he does not define the parameters of this new community, the audience is left with their own perceptions of what this new group entails. For example, my perception after careful consideration is that Biblical scholars are not the only type of people who can further our understanding of God; other scholars, who are Christians, in other lines of research also help. For example, scientists who study human anatomy or neurologists who study the brain allow Christians to understand, appreciate, and be in awe of the intricate nature of how God created a functioning human being. The fact that the human brain can be badly damaged but still allow a person to function normally, most likely after some sort of therapy, is nothing short of a miracle. For me as well as others, hard sciences can be easier to identify how they help our understanding of God because they are studying God's creations in-depths, which allows us to see how He chose to create and sustain a living being.

However, Christian literature professors can also enhance our understanding of God's nature. Reading Christian books by Christian authors will certainly render a Biblical perspective and understanding; however, even secular stories written by nonreligious and/or religious authors can also give us insight into Christ and His creations. For example, Suzanne Collins, author of *The Hunger Games* Trilogy, is Roman Catholic, but her stories lack any concept of God or religion. Despite this lack of Christian message, Christians can still find truth in this fictional tale: concepts like love and sacrifice are not exclusive to Christianity. People can be good and have morals without knowing Christ. By knowing and understanding this information, Christians can build better relationships with "good" people to show them that no man is good, and we all need Jesus to rescue us. With further reflection, we can continue this concept of community that Mouw starts but fails to clearly define: history helps us see God's role in the past, music gives us another avenue for worship, art allows us to capture God's creation, psychology allows us to understand how God created the human mind, and business gives an opportunity to lead a group as God leads His children. The list is endless.

Without a clear answer of what this new community looks like, Mouw seems to advocate that *all* types of scholarship, even if they are not directly related to Christianity or Christ, allow us to have a deeper understanding of God and His nature. Now the question for the audience becomes, "Why is scholarship necessary to service?" Mouw acknowledges these working parts and describes their importance, but he leaves this connection to the readers. When I began thinking about this relationship and how it would work in real life, my thoughts turned towards doctors. In medicine, there seem to be two types of doctors: those who study/research and those who practice. The doctors who study and conduct research strive to learn more about their subject matter while those who practice are actually performing surgery or healing people. The research conducted by the scholars allows the doctors who are performing the services to perform their duties with confidence as well as to provide new techniques to enhance the healing process. Both sets of doctors are passionate about their subject matter and helping people; however, they help in different, yet meaningful ways. Similarly, scholarship and service for Christ also share this same type of connection. Christian scholars, whose passion is inquiry, research and strive to learn more about God, His nature, and His creations while Christians whose emphasis is to serve focus on sharing and applying the concepts of God, His nature, and His creations to others. This scholarship enhances our understanding of Christ, which encourages us, and others, to serve God more and to serve him wholeheartedly. These acts of service inspire scholars to discover more about God's vast nature. Despite their seemingly different "jobs," both sets of Christians serve God in unique, yet significant ways. Everyone is called to serve, but we use our gifts in different ways to glorify God. While Mouw himself does not delve as deeply into explaining the different roles of the academy (scholarship) and the church (service), he is clear in his assertion that these two groups can and should be working together as we all move towards the same goal of furthering God's Kingdom. By expanding the definition of a Christian community, we will find

encouragement from many others, and we can know that we are not alone in our mission for Christ.

Mouw encourages the audience to embrace a larger community of Christians to alleviate this feeling of loneliness that can occur within the academy. However, he does not stop there. He also encourages those readers, who may have lost their passion or have become burdened from stress, by reminding them that their academic work and research has meaning and purpose: “It is a good thing simply to cultivate insights into the deep patterns of God’s creation—and doing it as people who have been called to love what God has created” (18). He reminds us that the act of critical thinking and questioning leads to further truths that can encourage the scholar as well as others in their walk with God; he identifies this entire process as an act of showing God how much we love Him. He reiterates that “Christian teaching and scholarship should aim at the ultimate goal of getting clearer in our hearts and minds about the basic issues of life in order more effectively to promote the cause of God’s Kingdom” (52). Here again, this line reiterates the interconnected relationship that scholarship and service share: one cannot thrive without the other. These reminders allow the audience to understand that the scholar’s work does not disappear into an abyss where it has no meaning and makes no difference. Their work encourages others to serve God, and it can deepen our understanding of Christ and His love for all people.

Once Mouw has reiterated the important purpose of analysis and research, he also recaptures the spirit of the adventure that lies ahead for scholars:

But I have also thought much about how the stepping-into-the-unknown imagery captures something important to intellectual inquiry in particular. The scholarly life is an ongoing series of steps into the unknown. Every time we pick up a new book to read, or choose a new topic to write about for an essay assignment, or map out a new research project, or agree to take or teach a new course, we are taking some steps into uncharted territory. In our intellectual pursuits we are regularly stepping out on new adventures. (Mouw 47)

Mouw attempts to reignite the burdened scholars’ heart and mind by reminding them of their purpose as well as how each work, research project, book, assignment, or new course is a step in a new, exciting, and unique direction. Even though the practice of research, writing, editing, and publishing might be the same process from one project to the next, the content, the thoughts, and the impact will be different. Mouw reminds the audience that stepping out into the unknown can be scary, dangerous, and even exhilarating; however, the scholar can rest easy knowing that God already knows the outcome of the adventure, and in this knowledge, we can be comforted (26).

When I first saw Mouw’s book, I cannot really articulate why I was hesitant to read it, but I am thankful that I overcame that ridiculous notion. After a particularly rough year of teaching at the university, his words were like a balm to my soul as he reminded me why I chose to pursue a career in higher learning.

As a scholar, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that we are making a difference in the lives of others because our effect on the world may not be as visible as the effect of others who are serving Christ in more traditional ways. However, scholars, and the work they do, help the world to see Jesus by discovering the truths about the nature of God and His creation. Mouw's text is a wonderful encouragement for those struggling to define their role as a Christian scholar or to discover their God-given purpose in the academic world.

**Kirk, Patty. *The Easy Burden of Pleasing God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013. 208 pages, \$15.00**

**Reviewed by Jessica Wohlschlaeger**

Is there such a thing as an “easy burden”? Most people would say no. How can any burden be easy? By definition, a burden is something that is heavy, an inconvenience, or a trouble, and often, it mightily weighs on a person’s heart. Anything that is described as an “easy burden” seems to be facetious. However, that description is part of Patty Kirk’s book *The Easy Burden of Pleasing God*. In this text, she explores how oftentimes people will make themselves miserable trying to please God and live a perfect Christian life. While seemingly a complicated idea, Kirk clearly illustrates that making God happy should be an easy and pleasurable task just as Jesus says in Matthew 28:30: “For my yolk is easy and my burden is light.”

The cover art of the text cleverly matches Kirk’s “answer” of discovering what makes loving God an easy burden: simplicity, rest, and focus on God’s presence among other things. The image on the cover is minimalistic including the title, two small branches, and a single bird with muted colors of yellows, reds, blues, and browns. The reader’s eye is drawn to the bird as it contains the only variety of colors in the image, and it pops against the light grey background. The simplicity of the cover art encourages the audience to slow down and simplify their lives in a world bombarded by constant activity. By trying to alleviate the busyness of life, the audience can then learn to identify and appreciate God’s presence. While the author of the book does not always have a say in the cover art, Kirk clearly had input and creatively chose an image that would subtly reinforce her main ideas about slowing down and simplicity.

Throughout the entire text, Kirk is fully aware of her audience, and she is thoughtful to address any of their possible concerns. Multiple times, she briefly pauses to either explain a concept, clarify a possible confusion, or alleviate any potential concern or misunderstanding. For example, in the Preface as she describes the purpose of this book, she says:

However, I do not want to give anyone the mistaken idea that I am prescribing certain behaviors or that I think a Christian is someone who struggles through the business of faith in exactly the same way I do. I am saying, in fact, the opposite... Do not wed yourself to what I write or try to mimic my behaviors. Rather let my stories, struggles, and research inspire you to come up with your own way of taking Jesus at his word.... (Kirk 13-14)

Kirk’s honest acknowledgment about the content of her book allows the audience to feel comfortable with her ideas and the text itself; they know they are reading to find encouragement for their own walk with Christ, not a judgement about why they are not “good enough” nor a “how to” guide that guarantees a closer

relationship with Christ in ten steps or less. Even if parts of the text come across as a specific model to Christianity, she clearly states the book's purpose: to encourage the readers to find their own meaning and application as they read through the pages of her text. These personal discoveries, inspired by Kirk's writing and her own individual journey, will carry more weight than anything the author could point out because these revelations are revealed by Christ. The author's acknowledgement and care of the readers' possible concerns allow Christ to speak directly to the audience because she is serious in her intentions of helping them learn more about God.

In addition to her clear intentions about helping the audience, Kirk also allows them to feel comfortable and open-minded while reading her text. Her tone and writing style are both open and honest as she shares personal details about her life. In fact, the audience cannot help but feel like Kirk is a close friend after reading her book. When Kirk speaks about "loving the poor in spirit," she acknowledges that everyone has been "poor in spirit at one time or another. I know I have. Multiple times" (185). She admits a weakness in her life, which is difficult to do, especially to strangers. However, her willingness to not only admit this idea but follow up with a specific example of a time when she was hard to love allows the audience to search their own hearts for times when they were hard to love, too. The audience is only willing to do this inner reflection because Kirk starts first with her own life. In this case, she specifically explains one example of being difficult to love that stems from circumstances outside of her control. She shares that in college, she was sexually assaulted, which left her with a "mental illness that sometimes lands [her] in a strange state of combative self-isolation that taxes [her] loved ones" (Kirk 185). When she finds herself in this isolated state, she admits that she knows it is difficult to be around her. Kirk's admissions of these truths allow the audience to see an intimate piece of her life, and in turn, they feel more comfortable to reflect upon their own uncomfortable truths.

Fortunately, Kirk does not push the audience to think of their struggles (whether inside or outside of their control) to feel like a failure. She encourages them to use their struggles to make a change and to find God's work in it. For example, when she writes about her mental illness, she acknowledges how she realized that "miserable people are no fun to be with" (Kirk 186). Kirk has been on both sides of this spectrum: the miserable person and the person around the miserable people. Because she has experienced both of these moments, she realizes and shares with the audience: "How little it takes, it seems to me, to love those who are miserable and who, as a result, often seem so overwhelmingly difficult to love! A touch. A pat on the shoulder. The grasping of another's hand in greeting or prayer" (Kirk 186). Despite her own personal struggles, she realizes and shares with the audience a way that God can use those weaknesses to help others. The audience is much more receptive to these revelations and small encouragements to use their own struggles for God's glory because Kirk allows them to experience how she personally arrived at these conclusions through events in her own life as well as how she put these new ideas into action. Kirk's

open and honest reflections allow the audience to understand her better as well as to apply those same concepts to their own lives.

Not only does Kirk share intimate information about herself, she also reveals her unfiltered initial thoughts, which ultimately allows the audience to be more receptive to her writing; she is honest with them, so they can be honest with themselves. Oftentimes, her insights and reflections are not the traditional “Christian” responses to scripture. For example, when she speaks of sacrifice and how the Israelites would give part of their livelihood to God, she imagines what their true responses would be: “...imagine making grain and drink offerings, dumping your hard-earned produce out on a hot, greasy altar and watching it, literally go up in steamy smoke. *What a waste! I would have been thinking...I sweated and hacked at soil cursed with thistles and thorns, just as God said I would, and now God wants some of it back! It’s not like God needs it or anything*” (Kirk 136). These thoughts are counterintuitive to the message of Christianity because they illustrate selfishness. Additionally, they touch on the fact that God does not, and did not, need the sacrifices from the Israelites; He wanted them. While Kirk does, in the same section, explain how God wants His people to return his love and these offerings are a way of showing that love, her initial negative responses reassure the audience that it is okay to question God and to be unhappy for a time as long as people use those moments to learn and grow. Because she demonstrates these questions and growth in her own journey, the audience can apply those same concepts to their own relationship with Christ.

Because Kirk is mindful about her audience as well as their needs, she clearly explains her ideas and gives relevant examples that are easy to understand throughout the entire text. For instance, in one chapter, she describes how God’s work upon completion will give joy, not resentment (Kirk 142). After identifying the importance of this principle, she recounts the story of the lost sheep from the Bible as an example to illustrate this point. When retelling the tale, Kirk explains that the shepherd “[was] so upset at his loss that he abandon[ed] his main flock” to find the missing sheep (142). This small part of the text confirms her point that sometimes while people are doing God’s work, they may not necessarily be stress-free or even feeling the joy at that moment. In fact, they might feel the opposite just as the shepherd felt when he realized one of his sheep had disappeared. Kirk continues by acknowledging the trouble that the shepherd would have come across in his adventures to find the single sheep.

While most Christians know this story, they may not truly understand the dangers or significance of leaving the other ninety-nine sheep behind. Kirk expertly explains these troubles by referencing her own previous experience by saying: “If you have never been involved in animal husbandry, you can’t know what a big job going after that one sheep probably was for the shepherd— involving not only risk to the rest of the flock but an unwelcome interruption of other necessary duties to lurch from field to field looking for one seemingly invisible animal” (142). When she describes these concepts and uses this story, she allows the audience to understand that not all of God’s work will be pleasurable 100 percent of the time while they are working in it. Of the shepherd, she says that “...he seems unaware of the effort [of finding and catching the

missing sheep]. He feels no compulsion. He just does it” (Kirk 142). However, once the task is complete, great joy will be a person’s reward as Kirk references Luke 15:5-6, which illustrates how once the shepherd found the lost sheep, he had so much joy that he called his neighbors and friends to celebrate. She wraps up her story by explaining, “Doing God’s work should result in sheer joy” (Kirk 142). With her clear explanations and use of the Bible as well as her own personal stories, the audience is easily able to follow her thought process and clearly understand what idea she expresses throughout the entire text.

*The Easy Burden of Pleasing God* has seemingly simple, yet complex ideas. While the book is not a devotional, each chapter contains a Bible verse, a concept, evidence including a personal story and/or scripture, explanation, and application of the concept. This clear organization allows the audience to read her text one chapter at a time if they desire, and they can stop after each chapter to reflect further upon the ideas that she introduces and explains throughout her book. She builds upon her ideas and allows the audience to see pleasing God is something that is tangible and can be achieved. If anyone is feeling discouraged, joyless, or even disconnected from God, Kirk’s book will reinvigorate his/her soul. From her engaging stories to her clear explanations of the Bible, Kirk shows that pleasing God is, indeed, an easy burden.

**Ryken, Philip Graham. *Art for God's Sake*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Company, 2006. 64 pages, \$6.99**

**Reviewed by Sung Joong Kim**

Philip Graham Ryken wrote a book entitled *Art for God's Sake* that reveals an insightful perspective on art. As the title indicates, the author focuses on creating art for God's glory rather than for the sake of those with conservative, biblical views. Whether or not art is created for God's sake depends not on the form, but on its contents. Therefore, art for God's sake should contain *goodness, truth, and beauty*. Ryken wrote with the purpose of "[encouraging] Christian artists in the pursuit of their calling and [giving] artists and non-artists alike a short introduction to thinking Christianly about the arts" (17). This book consists of six chapters that outline the many facets of creating art for God's glory.

Ryken begins by outlining the two main reasons why churches sometimes disapprove of art. First, art often leads Christians into the temptation of idolatry. The author states, "Art is always tempted to glory in itself, and nearly every form of art has been used to communicate values that are contrary to Scripture" (12). In addition, many Christians' ideals have been dominated by postmodern views. Specifically, postmodernism consists of a cynical outlook on the possibility of knowing the truth. Therefore, many Christians were influenced by this view, and did not have the concern to express a real art showing the truth. In this crisis, the author strongly asserts that "we need to recover a full biblical understanding of the arts—not for art's sake, but for God's sake" (15).

Ryken then focuses on the artist's calling, which is one of the main themes of this book. In Exodus 31, he shows how God gives two men (Bezalel and Oholiab) a unique calling for art. This passage "teaches four fundamental principles for a Christian theology of the arts: the artist's call and gift come from God; God loves all kinds of art; God maintains high standards for goodness, truth and beauty; and art is for the glory of God" (18). When calling Bezalel and Oholiab, did they have natural talent for the arts? Ryken insists that although Bezalel and Oholiab might have already had some natural ability, they were given special gifts when God gave them a special commission to make the tabernacle. Likewise, God calls us to be artists regardless of professional skill, because we were created by God in His image, which includes "the desire and the ability to make things" (23). Therefore, the author certainly asserts the church's mission: "The church can help in this pursuit by serving as a community of encouragement that affirms the calling of artists and nurtures the artistic aspect of every human soul" (27).

To clarify, Ryken defines the three major kinds of visual art. What kinds of art does God like? Ryken maintains that "the example of the tabernacle proves that God loves all kinds of art, in all kinds of media and all kinds of styles" (35). To explain, in the process of making the tabernacle, Bezalel and Oholiab produced three major kinds of visual art: symbolic art, which "uses a physical form to stand for a spiritual reality"; representational art, which "imitates life by

portraying a recognizable object from the physical universe”; and nonrepresentational art, which is a “pure form” of expressing themes abstractly (33). God supported all these arts because God wanted them to “flourish in all the fullness of their artistic potential” (35).

Ryken details three aesthetic standards or criteria for its creation: *goodness*, *truth*, and *beauty*. Goodness is connected to ethical standards—for example, Bezalel and Oholiab never violated the Ten Commandments in making the tabernacle. Next, truth and beauty belong together, a concept related to the Gospel. Art is true and beautiful “only if it points in some way to the one true story of salvation—the story of God’s creation, human sin, and the triumph of grace through Christ” (40). In this sense, even though the crucifixion is a disgusting obscenity according to secular viewpoint, it is a beautiful and divine aesthetic to Christians.

From these four facets, the author draws a conclusion, presenting the purposes of art. He tries to warn the artists not to pursue art for their own glory: “When people pursue art for their own purpose they end up worshiping art rather than God” (49). Therefore, the true purposes of art are to praise God’s glory and to love our neighbor. Consequently, the author points out that “the art of a Christian ought to be consistent with a life of faith in Christ” (51).

Ultimately, Ryken highlights the aspect of faith in art, summarizing the entire book. The author is sure that art and God are entwined with each other, because God is “the foundation and fountain of all beings and all beauty” (54). We, therefore, should show our faith to God by expressing the glory of God and the redemptive aesthetic of Jesus Christ, our beautiful savior, in our art. Finally, the author finishes this book by reiterating the importance of the conditions of God’s art: *goodness*, *truth*, and *beauty*. Ryker defines these conditions of art more explicitly: “Only good art is to work within the potentialities of creation to reflect the goodness of God’s being; only true art is to tell the truth about sin and to be sensitive to the tragedy of suffering in a fallen world; and only beautiful art is to incarnate the hope of our redemption” (57).

This book presents the purposes and roles of art on the basis of a conservative, biblical view. In this sense, it shows the possibility to connect art and theology. Nevertheless, the question remains concerning whether the religious philosophy toward art in this book can be applied to secular art. We can interpret the works of secular art in terms of art for God’s sake and interpret the meaning with a biblical lens. However, we cannot grasp the intents and purposes of artists when they create works of art. In this sense, “art” by Ryker’s definition has no choice but to remain within religious boundaries.

## Poems

### “Discipline” and Other Poems

Frank Anthony Priest

#### Discipline

—Genesis 22:10

What voice did you hear, Father, calling  
us to the lake in the early light?  
I followed along despite the rain  
and my chores unfinished at the house.  
What were you teaching me? Your hands clasped,

your body bent over the bridge wall  
as if it were an altar and you might  
have something more than a coffee can  
of worms to sacrifice. I know how  
you work, in silence, your sharpened axe

brought down, the heft of the splitting maul,  
or more fierce—whelps from your belt swung high.  
It is that same motion I see again  
as you launch your hook deep--my fear found  
not in the cast but in the arm drawn back.

#### In the Hands of the Father

—Romans 6:5

*Buried in the likeness of His death.*  
I heard the words. I held my breath.

I felt my body sink in the need  
of forgiveness—of coming up clean.

What does it mean when a father holds  
life in his hands, or death? The white folds  
of his gown swept over me. I lost

the sun, the waning bridge, the pale cross

mesh of water/sky. I blanked. I tried  
to imagine my body would rise

against the weight of his pressing hands,  
remembering the lessons he had

taught me here—catch and release, give  
of yourself so that others might live.

*Raised, in the likeness of His resurrection.*

### **Grey Effect**

This morning when I drove to the lake  
and got out of my truck, the bridge  
hung in a drifting mist, straight and cool.  
What I wanted was to renew  
old promises, to throw rocks off the ledge  
and break the dark reflection, to make  
things right with God, the world, and you.

I picked up a smooth rock I could skip  
and flung it sidearm through the haze,  
split the mist that hid the lake from view.  
I was listening as it hit  
the water, splashed, then rippled a wake  
towards the shore, and I felt something take,  
lift within me and set adrift.  
I couldn't see it, but I knew.

## **“Soon Ah Will Be Done” and Other Poems**

**Todd Sukany**

### **Soon Ah Will Be Done**

Today the choir at our basically  
mono-cultural campus  
took us back to cotton fields  
and hot summer or early autumn.

One could hear hands scraping  
through shrubs, bagging blossoms  
of early planting, all  
to the antiphonal spiritual—  
like stereo headphones—  
a hundred men in one ear  
and a hundred women the other.

One could sense the pleasure  
of nature though  
the joy remains bittersweet . . .  
bitter fruit.

### **On the Last Adventure**

Heralds of the angelic order  
lit overhead of normal  
working folk  
on the final check  
of the flock.

They sang of peace  
and joy  
and goodwill  
toward all inhabitants  
of the planet.

Next time, he'll ride  
a brilliant horse overhead  
where all will watch  
and angels will speak  
one at a time.

**Eternity**

*. . . you received your good things (Luke 16:25)*

Eternity is your  
    never-ending first day  
as an exchange student  
    in a land far away  
where customs and language  
    traditions and values  
are far removed  
    from your experience  
so far removed  
    from the life  
you have lived  
    in front of a mirror

Your entire life  
    hosts  
have been inviting you  
    to join the Family  
so now before the end  
    imagine yourself  
at a table  
    surrounded by  
nothing familiar  
    and  
in a loveseat  
    with the Master  
of the place

Your eyes meet  
    and you don't know  
what to do  
    or say  
but you finally get  
    the message

**Golden**

The church dances with itself  
at the bottom of Mt. Sinai  
when Moses and God  
meet face to face

## **“The Hands of God” and Other Poems**

**Janice Witherspoon Neuleib**

### **The Hands of God**

What sorts of burdens do we choose?

The tall woman with the lost blue eyes gazes,  
beseeches, needing an anchor in a foreign land,

A small infected urchin, nose running, tears  
slipping down her cheek,

Pastor asking, “Are you certified to...?”

Whatever wilderness, whatever cry:

If I do not accept, I do not believe. My faith  
hangs on the thread of this one truth:

God’s hands, my hands: if I do not act,  
then the God of my prayers becomes  
invisible, inaccessible, inchoate.

So I say “Send me,” for if not, I carry the burden:  
silently preached agnosticism  
as I turn from the needy,  
causing no harm but doing no good,  
espousing love, but carefully  
curled in the warm blanket  
of self-indulgence, denying God,  
loving neither neighbor nor self.

### **Deliver Us from Evil (An Advent Poem)**

God incarnate, in the living flesh,  
in the carnal knowledge of breath and muscle,  
of brain and being,

You, God, know what we need, where we  
Find You, not in image, not in greenest forest  
Nor in finest font.

You God took flesh, clenched fists,  
Caressed the cool surface of petal  
And of limb. You knew the ache  
Of work and grief.

You know us as we are.

And you forbade idols,  
Not because they are unreal  
But because they are often  
More real than the sinew  
And soul of self and You.

Keep us from the idolatry  
Of house and hearth,  
Of work and play,  
Of cloth of gold,  
Of life outside the beating  
Heart that You impel  
And oft, we trust, compel.

Be in us, around us,  
And with us,  
Now and forever, Amen.

### **Charitas, an Easter Song**

To give to poor and needy wretches all  
one has, or half, or even some, must be  
the goal of open hearts both great and small:  
This wise precept of Christianity

demands a tithe that's not a tithe but more,  
as much as soul's growth will allow, yet not  
then all the widow's mite? We stand before  
a cross, a body stretched with pain forgot

when life's demands suggest a little less  
than all, when soft deceiving whispers call,  
recounting needs and pleading for success.  
Should fears and wants upon us then hard fall,

or will we at last turn our faces East  
and open hands and gladly share the feast?

## Into the Light

*I believe, oh Lord, help my unbelief.*

Mark 9:24

Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward  
of this faith is to see what you believe.  
St. Augustine of Hippo

In the dream, my father walked toward the light.  
He turned, raised an eyebrow:  
“You can’t come with me this time.”  
I gazed speechless at the light too bright to see.

The phone rang, and I answered.  
“Daddy just died,” my weeping mother whispered.

The light calls us at the last, soothes and comforts in the end;  
we resist, bend, dodge those shafts of radiance.

Even one hint that that reality glows outside the human scope  
offends my rebellious spirit, yet forces tears I cannot quell.

When my time turns, may I lose my unbelief and,  
moving toward the endless dawn,  
walk boldly through the flaming arch.

**after psalm 89**  
**(for Dom Raymond)**

**Darren J. N. Middleton**

God will never appear to me, as god  
the finely crafted syllogism's end point, dumb ox  
notwithstanding. Nor will God blaze across my soul,  
I am no anchorite of secret visions.  
Just a litany,  
living on ordinary time. An honest supplication  
writhing,  
thrashing  
to be free of contingency's snare.

("you sweep men away like a dream")

I keen far off, like the psalmist of old.  
His sighs and cries for meaning mine, my own  
appeal now

lifting,

drifting,

swiftly into God: a life-gift

that will outlive me.

## One to Another

Craig Albin

*One generation shall praise thy works to another,  
and shall declare thy mighty acts.*  
—Psalm 145:4

Through diligent decades they deliver to us  
their treasures. Some come in coin  
lovingly bequeathed, as to family,  
some in song-lifted voices we savor,  
then pray to remember. Some come  
in sermons gifting glimpses of God's ways  
toward man, some in Sunday School lessons  
that latch, somehow, to the slippery DNA  
of the soul. Some come in work-wearied  
backs that bend, time and again, to labor,  
some in warm hands that reach for those  
who hunger, who fear, who grieve.

Let us have ears to hear their mission.  
Let us have eyes to witness their legacy.  
Let us have hands to extend their work.  
Let us have hearts to share their passion.

Let us be one body.  
Let us praise, let us declare, our Lord.

Author's note: The poem was written on the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
First Presbyterian Church of West Plains, Missouri.

## Blood Crying Out from the Ground: Two Poems on Korean Christians Killed During the Korean War

Translated from the Korean  
by John J. Han

### Poem #1:

#### “Thanks to the Blood You Sowed, Martyrs”

By Ko Hun

This poem commemorates the sixty-five martyrs, the entire members of the Yaweal Presbyterian Church, Yeomsan Township, Yeonggwang County, South Jeolla Province, South Korea. During the early days of the Korean War (1950-53), North Korean communists either drowned them at the nearby West Sea (Yellow Sea) or buried them alive. —*Translator*



“Thanks to the Blood You Sowed, Martyrs” inscribed on a rock in the front yard of the Memorial Hall of Christian Martyrdom, Yaweal Presbyterian Church. (All the photos used in “Blood Crying Out from the Ground” were taken by the translator in May 2016.) The poem reads,

Alive we speak;  
in martyrdom you speak.  
We confess with our tongues;  
you confess with your deaths.  
We live by breathing;  
you remain alive here through death by suffocation.

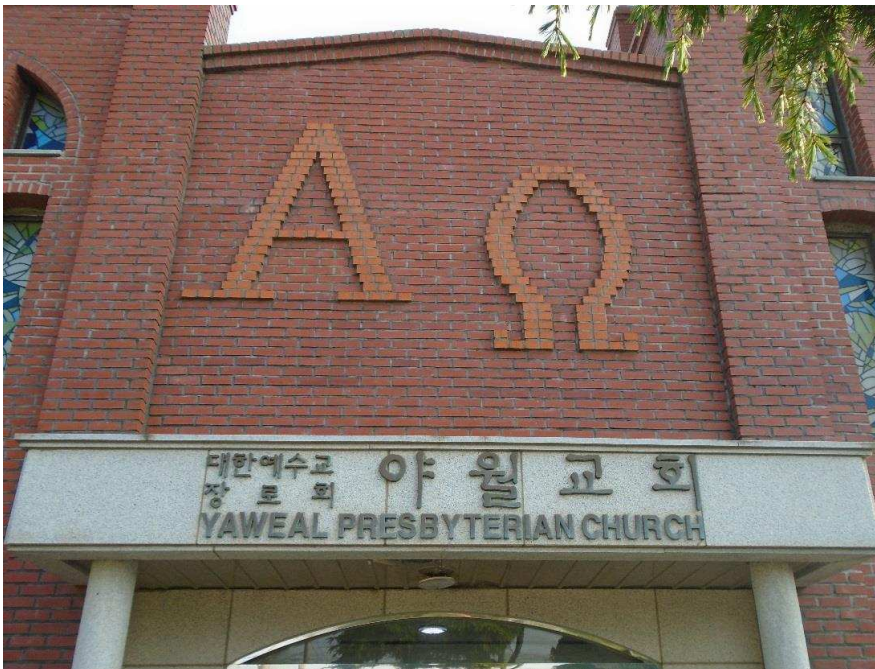
Amidst the mad wind of the Korean War,  
brothers shot each other in the chest,  
stabbed each other in the chest.  
Drenched with blood, the Korean Peninsula  
fell to the ground.  
You embraced the Peninsula in your hearts,  
turning to heaven with nothing but your faith.  
You saw paddy fields, dry fields, rivers, seas,  
villages, churches, sky, and earth reduced to ashes.  
Some of you were pushed to the sea with a rock attached to your necks;  
others were buried alive in wells.  
Dear sixty-five Yaweal martyrs, the entire members of the church,  
the utterly horrendous, brutal memory of your deaths  
still makes our hearts explode with grief,  
yet you presented your lives  
as sacred offerings with silent cries.  
The breeze and the sound of waves from the West Sea  
bring the pain you endured decades ago.  
Today we of little faith stand  
before the altar of your blood,  
harvesting the abundant blessings of heaven.



The Memorial Hall of Christian Martyrdom at Yaweal Presbyterian Church.



One of the displays inside the Memorial Hall of Christian Martyrdom. A South Korean Communist sympathizer tramples on a Christian while North Korea's People's Army soldier impassively looks away. The civilian is holding a bamboo spear, a popular homemade weapon during the War.



Yaweal Presbyterian Church today. The church was originally founded in 1908 by Eugene Bell, a Southern Presbyterian missionary from the United States.

**Poem #2:**  
**“We Are on the Way to Heaven”**  
 By Rev. Park Jong-gu

This poem commemorates the seventy-seven members of Yeomsan Presbyterian Church, Yeomsan Township, Yeonggwang County, South Jeolla Province, South Korea. —*Translator*



The Korean-language poem inscribed on a rock in the church's front yard. During the Korean War, North Korean communists killed seventy-seven members of the church, including the pastor, by drowning them at the sluice gate nearby. Listed at the bottom of the rock are the names of the martyrs. The poem reads,

From here  
 we raise our heads to the hill of Calvary.  
 To the cross of our Lord  
 we offer the seventy-seven martyred souls.  
 We are on the way to heaven, they sing.  
 Their voices become salt,  
 awakening us even today.  
 Their song turns into light,  
 illuminating the souls of the multitudes even today.



A drawing displayed in the Memorial Hall inside the church. The Korean caption reads, “North Korea’s People’s Army soldiers brutally killed even little children.” In most cases, a rock was tied around the neck for easier drowning.



A communal burial mound at Yeomsan Presbyterian Church overlooks the West Sea (Yellow Sea) where the killings took place. The grave contains the remains of thirty-two martyrs. Next to the mound stands a stone marker whose inscription reads, “In Memory of 77 Martyrs. ‘Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown. Rev. 2:10.’”



Yeomsan Presbyterian Church today. The church, located 0.28 miles away from Yaweal Presbyterian Church, was originally founded in 1939 during the time of Japanese colonial rule. The restoration of the original thatch-roofed church building is underway across the front yard.



Map of South Korea (Source: CIA World Factbook). The two churches are located on the West Coast approximately 33 miles north of Mokpo, a port city.

## Notes on Contributors

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## Call for Papers and Book Reviews

# *Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal*

*Published Semiannually by the  
Faith & Learning Committee and the  
Humanities Division of  
Missouri Baptist University  
St. Louis, Missouri 63141-8698*

*Intégrité* (pronounced *IN tay gri tay*) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal on the integration of Christian faith and higher learning. Founded in the fall of 2002 with the Institutional Renewal Grant from the Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College, it is published both online and in print copy. Interested Christian scholars are encouraged to submit academic articles and book reviews for consideration. Manuscripts should be sent as e-mail attachments (Microsoft Word format) to the editor, John J. Han, at [hanjn@mobap.edu](mailto:hanjn@mobap.edu).

Articles must be 15-25 pages, and book reviews must be 4-8 pages, both double-spaced. Articles should examine historical, theological, philosophical, cultural, and/or pedagogical issues related to faith-learning integration. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- the current state and/or future of the church-related college
- history of Christian liberal arts education
- Christianity and contemporary culture
- a Christian perspective on multiculturalism and diversity
- service learning
- academic freedom in a Christian context
- implementation of Christian truths in academic disciplines
- Christian education in the non-Western world
- global Christianity.

Articles must engage in faith-learning issues or controversies in a scholarly, critical manner. We generally do not consider manuscripts that are merely factual, devotional, or sermonic. Due dates are March 1 for inclusion in the spring issue and September 1 for the fall issue.

Articles are expected to be research-based but must focus on the author's original thought. We typically do not consider articles that use more than twenty-five secondary sources; merely present other scholars' opinions without developing extended, thoughtful analysis; and/or use excessive endnotes. Direct quotations, especially lengthy ones, should be used sparingly.

Considering that most *Intégrité* readers are Christian scholars and educators not necessarily having expertise on multiple disciplines, articles and book reviews must be written in concise, precise, and easy-to-understand style. Writers are recommended to follow what William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White suggest in *The Elements of Style*: use definite, specific, concrete language; omit needless words; avoid a succession of loose sentences; write in a way that comes naturally; and avoid fancy words.

For citation style, refer to the current edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Articles should include in-text citations in parentheses, a list of endnotes (if applicable), and an alphabetical listing of works cited at the end of the article. Book reviews need only page numbers in parentheses after direct quotations.