Faithful Lives

General Education

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

Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective. Previous issues of the journal can be freely accessed on the College's website at: www.cofo.edu/Academics/Faithful-Lives.

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Editorial

"General Education": In Search of Words

Few words in the college community stimulate the impulse to yawn like "general education." In fact, in this rare instance, the abbreviated moniker "GE" actually plays better, if merely for the fact that one can move more quickly through the careworn concept. Such observations raise some pressing questions. What is it about these two words that has become so wearisome to campus communities? And, are such pejorative associations warranted? Finally, does the collegiate General Education program need to be abandoned, transformed, or merely renamed? While all of the essays in this volume of *Faithful Lives* explore some, if not all, of these questions, a few preliminary comments are in order.

For some students, and sadly professors, General Education courses are often viewed as the academic equivalent of eating one's vegetables. We all know it's good for you, but no one likes it! In the words of my teenage daughter when I inquired about what she was reading for school—"Stupid Plato!"—oh, the irony. Such student reactions have prompted many to begin to doubt the benefits of such classes. Can students really learn with such strong opposition to the content of the class? Many college-goers are often not inspired to take courses like College Algebra, Western Civilization, College Composition, and the like. Nor do the sirens of Western culture draw them into the value of these intellectual pursuits. As Brad Pardue and Mark Nowack highlight in their respective essays in this issue, the challenges to General Education are cultural, systemic, and substantive.

While debates swirl, taking into account the demands of accreditation for programs and industry expectations, some schools have clung to the vision of *generally educating* their students. But what does such a concept mean? When asked in this way, I am not sure if many college professors could answer the question, "What does it mean to be "generally educated?" Perhaps for some, the challenge most immediately experienced arises from the knee-jerk reaction toward fragmentation in our current cultural moment. "General . . . according to who?" Such notions of being "generally educated" feel like someone defining what it means to be educated, but Western culture tends to reject such metanarrative moves. James K. A. Smith reminds us in his essay "Pedagogies of Desire," that all education demands a *telos*. So, whatever our notion of *general* is, it must be tied to our teleological vision for education.

However, "general" may also be viewed in contradistinction to "specialized" education, such as training for specific tasks or occupations. Here one remembers the old grade-school warning not to be a "jack of all trades, but master of none." And to some, GE curricula destine everyone to this end. Here the argument might be made that the world doesn't need millions of "generally educated people," it needs skilled workers who can actually do things! And certainly, there is an element of truth in this statement. However, such notions really only make sense in the lumbering technological advances of the 19th and 20th centuries, where someone could literally make a career out of keying in data at a rapid pace on a keyboard. In the 21st century, the advances are too quick and the changes too rapid for someone to stake their career on simply learning to do one skill for the rest of their lives.

Historically, schools in America have leaned toward a mixture of *general* education and *specialized* training, as often witnessed in the tradition of the liberal arts college. These schools have long recognized the value of breadth and scope in educating future thought leaders, while accompanying that foundation with specialized training in a specific field. This continues to be the strategy of College of the Ozarks. While recognizing the culturally relevant needs of industry and society, the College continues to hold out a vision—a *telos*—of what it means to be *generally educated*.

The College Catalog aptly states: "At College of the Ozarks the General Education Program plays a vital role in the full restoration of students to what it means to be human beings created in the image of God." This is not a throw-away line, or filler to take up paragraphs in a catalog. The GE program is *vital* to the educational vision of the College, and the essays in the current volume by Stacy McNeill, Anthony Cirilla, and Micah Humphries each explore the ways the *imago Dei* shapes the specific departments of the College—namely, Communication Arts, English, and Agriculture.

If the program remains truly beneficial, perhaps the negative associations many feel are due to nomenclature. Indeed, many colleges and universities have wrestled with terminology for General Education programs in an effort to rebrand or better communicate the goals of the program. Words like "core," "foundation," "pillar," and others fill catalogs and websites. However, I'm not convinced that the name of the program radically impacts the way the community receives it. The issue is not the name, but the nature of the program and the way it is celebrated, received, and put into practice within the institution. Students love what their professors love, and professors that bemoan GE classes, eventually will cultivate students who fail to value such courses. Naming a program can help, but believing in a program is far better. I am thankful to the contributors of this volume and their belief that general education is still good for college students, regardless of the field of study.

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Essays

This manuscript illumination comes from the Landauerschen "House Book" [Nuremberg, 1585]. This particular page depicts a stone cutter shaping a rough limestone block using the various tools of his trade which remained unchanged for centuries. In the ensuing essay James K. A. Smith relates a well known story of two medieval stone cutters that will highlight the difference that perspective can make when considering the purpose of general education in Academia.

Richard Cummings is a Professor of Art and the Director of the Boger Gallery at College of the Ozarks

Hans Pittner Stainmetz ist Anno 1585 in das 58.
Bruderhaus auffgenommen worden, und den 13 Decembr.
Ao 1594 im 70 Jar seines alters gestorben, ist im
Bruderhauß gewesen 9 Jarlang, und bey S. Johannes ist
dem kirchhoff under der bruder hauß geleget worden.

PEDAGOGIES OF DESIRE: Recontextualizing Christian Higher Education[1]

By James K. A. Smith

My Path to Higher-Ed Heresy

I want to begin with a bit of a confession, which is that I became a better teacher as soon as I was willing to become a heretic. Relax, let me explain. Something is only heresy in relation to some orthodoxy, and as a teacher working in the spirit of higher education and academia, I had not realized the extent to which I had been inculcated into an orthodoxy about teaching by my own graduate formation. The imperative of that orthodoxy was that under *no* circumstances should I impose on the autonomy and independence of my students, and really the primary goal of not impending on their autonomy and independence was just so that they could become prodigious consumers in our society. That's kind of the working model. If you went into a PhD at a public university or private university in secular Academia, this model was basically the default.

Now, this might seem strange to some of you, and I mean absolutely no disrespect to my own students when I say this, but I didn't really know how to teach until I started to appreciate the way in which 18-year-olds are still children, essentially. As a young teacher, I imagined that all these bright-eyed 18-year-olds sitting in my philosophy class were just kind of graduate students in waiting, and that's sort of how I approached teaching. I would say it wasn't until my own kids started arriving at college—some of you have probably had that experience—that it finally hit me the way in which the paradigm that I had absorbed in graduate school was kind of disastrous when it came to actually teaching young people. And I think it's because the notion that I had unwittingly absorbed in grad school was really—at

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the end of the day—allergic to formation. It was allergic to the notion that I might have a sense of what students ought to be.

The heresy that I began to entertain was kind of like that historic notion of the faculty *in loco parentis*. Now, there are aspects of this idea I'm not crazy about, but what I mean is I started realizing that what I was hoping my own children were now getting from this college education was not the working model that I was employing the first 10 years of my own career. I had to take stock of the extent to which I, myself, was still carrying in me the kind of disordered version of education that prevented my classroom from being formative in the ways in which I theoretically wanted it to be. So, I came to see that if education was going to be formative, it was going to have to push back on this great orthodoxy which passes for public or secular education in our country.

Importantly, this realization served as an unsettling reminder of the really high calling, this project that we are calling formative Christian education, which cannot be separated from the project of virtue formation. Because if education is a formative project which is aimed at the good, the true, and the beautiful, then the teacher is really a steward of transcendence who needs to not only know the good, but teach from that conviction. So, the teacher of virtue, first of all, is not going to apologize for seeking to apprentice students to that specific substantive vision of the good, the true, and the beautiful, but she will also run against the really scariest aspect of this, which is that virtue is often absorbed from exemplars.

This is where we must reflect on models, imitation, and exemplifying as it relates to the vocation of the teacher in this formative project. I want to invite us to think critically about maybe the educations that we ourselves received (that we may not realize still holds us captive), and then I want us to think more positively and constructively about what does *our* ongoing formation look like if we are going to be formative teachers.

The Formation Audit

So, let's start with what I'm calling a formation audit. In my book, *You Are What You Love*, I discuss the idea of doing a liturgical audit of our lives.

Stepping back, looking at what I do, how I spend my time, what I give my-self over to, and saying, "What are the liturgies shaping me? What are the stories giving me identity? What am I learning to love in those practices?" I'm asking us to do the same thing with our own formation as teachers and educators—to take a formation audit and think critically about our own education.

In 1970, Thomas Kuhn published a very, very influential book called *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In this fascinating work, Kuhn explores how we went from a Ptolemaic view of the cosmos to a Copernican view of the universe. Or, how did we go from Newtonian mechanics to Einstein's quantum mechanics? Both transitions completely change what you think reality is, and yet, such metaphysical changes happened historically. Kuhn is interested in the structure of those revolutions in our scientific obser-vations. In the midst of these explorations, he developed the notion of what he called *paradigms*. His explanation was that a *paradigm* functions when we look at the world, we don't realize the extent to which we have been handed a paradigm—a kind of framework, or a constellation of ob-servational assumptions that really tunes us to see the world in a certain way. We can't understand reality outside it, so it creates blind spots and is mostly unconscious. Consequently, you don't realize what you've absorbed, and when scientific revolutions happen, according to Kuhn, data points keep coming up that don't fit the current paradigm. People either keep explaining incongruities away until you can't explain it away anymore, and then you have to either ignore the data or the paradigm has to explode.

I'm interested in what he calls the paradigm effect, which is this kind of blin-dered way that we can experience our lives, because we don't know that we've been handed a paradigm and the way that it is circumscribing our perception. The paradigm effect is that when you come to a perception of what's in front of you, and it conditions your perception. What I want us to realize is that we all have different educational formations, but I think for those of us who have gone through graduate and Ph.D. programs at major public universities or major private universities in the "secular academy," we may not realize the extent to which we have absorbed an educational paradigm that constrains what we think counts as teaching.

One of the things that's intriguing in Kuhn's work is that when he talks about these paradigms, he talks about them as orthodoxies, and the people who control them as priests of normal science. Why? Because in some ways, our educations are a kind of novitiate. They are a kind of apprenticeship to some big vision of how things work, and we need to take stock of what we have absorbed as educators. You might show up to your college and say, "You know why I want to teach here? Because I'm a Christian, and I want to be able to teach as a Christian, and I want to do all this in the sort of fullness of my identity as a follower of Jesus who cares about these things in the world." And all of that can be true, and yet, we might not be aware of how much the paradigm effect of normal science, in terms of education, is still kind of rumbling around for us unconsciously. One of the goals of faculty development is to just keep unearthing that for ourselves. We need to recognize that our own formal educations were themselves a formative experience.

The Reigning Autonomy Paradigm

And in some ways, one of the challenges I would say for learning how to teach in a Christian college context is that we have to do some of our own unlearning. We have to roll back some of the assumptions, and I would say I'm still doing that twenty to twenty-five years in. So, let's ask ourselves: What vision of education is the reigning Orthodoxy in higher education today? Well, I think if we analyze this, we'd find that implicit in the dominant models of education is a very modern, secularist narrative that prizes autonomy as the ultimate good. By autonomy, I mean every individual is created of themselves, or is a law unto themselves. Independent autonomy. You do you. You get to decide what your good is. That's kind of the default orientation of our culture, and it's not surprising, then, that this has been fostered in many ways by dominant educational models in which we find ourselves.

Consequently, when you hear people talk about the goals of education, if the one non-negotiable given is that students are autonomous, well, then we say, "Education is about critical thinking." Now I'm all for critical thinking, but often when we talk about critical thinking, it's just a vague way of saying,

"We're going to teach you some sort of thinking skills. We are not going to teach you what *the good* is. We're not going to specify what the good is. Why? Because that's up to you! You're autonomous. You're lord and master of your own fate. You decided what the good is. We'll just give you some sort of critical thinking skills, so that you can decide that for yourself." Does this sound familiar at all to you?

So, the good, then, is reduced really to just being authentic. Expressing your own specialness or interiority or whatever it might be. In this model, the good is really just reduced to authenticity and freedom. It's freedom for me to choose what I want rather than empowerment for the good that I am designed for. So, in this sense, any stipulation, any substantive identification of the good, actually impinges on autonomy, because it says, "Here's a way that you ought to be. You were made to be like this." If I say that to you, then it's not up to you… right? There's something bigger than you. In a culture in which autonomy is the only good, that's the one thing you can't do: you can't impose on people's freedom to make up their own good.

If you see that this is the working model, you understand that there is absolutely no way to talk about virtue in that bearing. Why? What is virtue? Virtue is a habitual internal disposition to the good. That specifies it. That's substantive. That's thick and real and says, "This is how to be human." There is no way to talk about virtue unless you have a substantive vision for what it is to be a good human being. And by that, I don't just mean moralistically, but I am talking about a flourishing human being. This is what humans are made for, and we're saying we're made for God.

If you can't specify the good, you can't ever talk about virtue. So, what you get instead in public educations are… values. Now, not all language of values is bad. But, the thing I want us to appreciate is how far this departs from the ancient classical model of education that has been the church's inheritance for millennia. The only way you can talk and approach and foster formation is if you are able to specify what we're being formed for, and the only way that you can specify what we are being formed for is if you can unapologetically articulate a picture of the good life, a story of what human flourishing is.

Virtue Formation and Education

James Davison Hunter at the University of Virginia wrote a wonderful book about education called *The Death of Character*. In it, Hunter argues that there have never been generic values. We'll translate it this way. There are no such things as generic virtues. Virtues are always tethered to a specification of what it is to be human. Now, virtues, then, are these thick realities that also have to be connected to particular communities governed by a particular story. My goal here is not to disparage public education. All I'm saying is it's basically an impossible endeavor, because you don't ever have either the permission or the coherence to articulate a full or specific story about what humans are made for. And if you can't do that, then you can't ever actually have virtue. You can't have character formation.

I hope you see the incredible opportunity for a Christian college and school. One of the things we are liberated to do, called to do, is precisely say, "This is what we believe and what it looks like to be a fully flourishing human being." And because we can unapologetically say that, we can also now also narrate the story of how we can become those kinds of human beings and we can unapologetically lean into education as formation rather than just informing people with critical thinking skills. So to me, it's a Manifesto for exactly why we need to resist the reigning paradigm.

Formative Education Needs Formers

Educational reform begins with faculty. A formative education needs formers. And as soon as you put it that way, I find it a very trepidatious thought. This whole project depends on you. Yes, that is frightening. It's exactly why the most important resource for a formative Christian education is humanness, and our capacity to both understand this and execute it depends on our ongoing formation and intentionality.

If we as educators are going to be part of this—honestly, we're talking about, a classical project. Even if a Christian college doesn't ever call itself a classical Christian college, it is still engaged in a classical endeavor. When you're talking about education that is holistic, that involves formation of character, that is about virtue, you're talking about a classical education

project. And, if we are going to be part of that kind of project, that seeks to form the whole person, to apprentice students to a love for the good and true and beautiful God revealed to us in Christ, then *we* need to be reformed and transformed. That's why educational reform begins with us.

I've spent a lot of time on airplanes, and the rituals of flight can be interesting. I do remember a time when all of a sudden, something in that well-worn flight attendant script at the beginning of the flight kind of hit me. You've heard this, right? It's kind of universal across all airlines . . . like a catholic expression of airline instruction:

Oxygen and air pressure are always being monitored. In the event of a loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will automatically appear in front of you. To start the flow of oxygen, pull the mask toward you, place it firmly over your nose and mouth, secure the elastic band behind your head, and breathe normally. Although the bag does not inflate, oxygen is flowing.

And then this is the part that intrigued me:

If you are traveling with a child, or someone who requires assistance, secure your own mask first, and then assist the other person.

Secure your own mask first. Is that selfish? No. Because if you can't breathe, you can't help the child next to you. This is, I think, both a spiritual principle and a pedagogical principle: *Secure your own mask first.* This principle is amplified in the kind of formative educational project that we are talking about. There is no way that we are going to have the capacity, the availability, the vulnerability, to be educators in virtue if we are not being formed ourselves virtuously, if we are not pursuing this way of life. If I am going to be a teacher of virtue, I need to be a virtuous teacher, or at least on the way. Kierkegaard liked to say when people would asked, "Are you a Christian?" he would say, "I am becoming a Christian." *I am becoming a Christian.* That's not a bad way to answer.

The Virtuous Educator Maintenance Program

If I hope to invite students into a formative educational project, then I, too, need to relinquish my myths of independence and autonomy. Virtue is not a one-time accomplishment. It is a maintenance program. It is a lifelong maintenance program. So, how can we as educators be reformed, transformed, and renewed? What practices can sustain this kind of lofty pedagogical project? What are the practices that we as educators need to engage in in order to invite students into this kind of formative project? The first thing I would suggest is, begin to think of Christian worship as faculty development. Reframe and see your own participation in Christian worship as faculty development.

Being Formed by Worship

Before there is a misunderstanding, let me explain. I would say there are very, very important reasons to distinguish a college from the church. I also don't think there's any such thing as Christianity apart from the church. So, what I mean is the thickness and specificity and availability of God's grace is primarily centered and located in the body of Christ, which finds its expression in congregations of the church, and that is why, to me, the heart of discipleship is worship. Worship is the heart of formation. However, insofar as this Christian college or university is depending on Christian faculty to lead and guide and invite their students into the Christian faith, in some sense, the Christian college and university is depending on the church as an incubator of the Christian imagination and hungers and desires in its faculty. We have to realize that there is a kind of integral connection between the church and the Christian college. And if there's not, the Christianity of the Christian College just becomes a Christianity of ideas. It doesn't have any connection to the specific practices of what Christians do when they gather around a table or when they serve their neighbor.

Re-Narrating Our Work

However, that's the least of what I want to discuss. Another aspect of the maintenance program is what I'm going to call *faculty life together*. There's

an educational theorist named Etienne Wenger, and he wrote a really inter-esting book called *Communities of Practice*. Wegner tells this little anecdote where there are two medieval stone cutters who are both taking a huge chunk of rock and carving it into a perfect cube. And somebody comes up to the first stone cutter and says, "What are you doing?" And the stonecut-ter says, "Well, I'm cutting this rock into a perfect cube." Okay? The person then comes up to the second stone cutter: "What are you doing?" "I'm building a cathedral." Now, on one level, they're both doing exactly the same thing. On another level, this stonecutter has a way of locating his daily labor in a bigger vision that keeps him reminded of why he's doing what he's doing. He's not just cutting the stone into a perfect cube, he's part of building a cathedral. And by the way, I imagined the first stone cutter is like *big eye roll*. "Brown-noser!" Or maybe the first stone cutter says this: "Man, you're right. I forgot. I forgot! That makes it less onerous. That makes it more tolerable. I forgot we're doing something bigger."

Narration is one of the most important practices we can undertake as Christian educators. Nobody wants to do it every day, but it is such an important practice to cultivate, time and space to re-narrate to one an-other what we're doing here: "We're building the cathedrals, we're building cathedrals, we're building cathedrals. Let's remember what we're doing and why we're doing it." Re-narrating to one another the big project is what cultivates *ethos* in an institution. *Ethos*, another Aristotelian term, is—in contemporary vernacular—the hum of an institution. Nowadays, I think the kids would say the *vibe* of an institution. It's this *je ne sais quoi* spirit of a place that you can identify without articulating. It's the spirit of an institution, and in many ways, I think the healthiest institutions are those that maintain this *ethos* precisely because people keep swapping stories about why we're doing what we're doing, and it sustains the narrative of our project. So, let's say one of the first practices that we can keep doing with one another is this practice of mutual narration. There is something about the practice of eating together that has a kind of binding function, but it also creates catalysts for that narration. Like, the family dinner table is not about meeting the rules and everyone checking attendance. It's about what bubbles up if everyone's around the table, it's creating a condition of possibility for encounter. If departments or colleagues or different kinds of

configurations of folks can look for ways to eat together, don't underestimate the *ethos* that is fostered by sharing a table.

Formation through Prayer

Second, pray together, and I know this sounds really banal, but let me explain. More specifically, I would invite Christian faculty to pray together in ways that are themselves formative. Now, what do I mean by that? I get that probably the default of prayer for many of us is what we would call extemporaneous prayer, which is great. I'm all for extemporaneous prayer. But, it's not the only way to pray. And in fact, some of the most historic ways that Christians have prayed are when God gave them prayers to pray together. Do you know what the first collection was called? The Psalms. The Psalms are God-breathed canonically connected prayers that God gives us to help us voice a kind of relation and dependence on God. They are ways that God gives us to train us how to be in relation with him. And in a sense, for some of us (I include myself), the default of spiritual authenticity is making up a prayer. Reciting a prayer feels kind of weird, like you're cheating. No. It's like a gift of tongues. It's the spirit giving you language to pray, and here's why it's formative: by praying the prayers that God gives us in the Psalms, you are actually going to be stretched, because you're going to learn to pray things that you wouldn't have prayed extemporaneously on your own.

We all have our own favorite ranges, pet circles, tropes and foci when we pray, and if you pray the Psalms over and over again, you're going to learn to pray for the whole load in so many different registers. You're also going to learn to lament. You're going to learn to lament. You're going to learn that you can come to God and say, "What the heck is going on? Where are you?" The Psalms, I think, are just a great example of the gift of a formative discipline of prayer that we can pray with one another.

When John Calvin was drawing up his vision of what an ideal Geneva looked like, he said that both morning and evening, the entire city would gather for morning Psalms and evening Psalms. So, the city would sort of find ways to gather to pray Psalms in the mornings, and then everybody goes off and does their work as butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers.

That's all holy, and God sanctifies every single last bit of it, and then they would end their day again, praying the prayers that are given to them. There are all kinds of ways to do this. You could pray the *Liturgy of the Hours*, you could pray *The Book of Common Prayer*. I'm not just trying to make everything sound liturgical, what I'm saying is there are gifts of formation in those kinds of prayers, and I think to pray those as faculty would be very powerful.

Formation through Collaboration

A third practice is to think and gather together. Not that my department's exemplary, but when I came to Calvin College twenty years ago, there was at that time already a 40-year tradition of what was called Tuesday Colloquium. Every Friday, somebody in the department would circulate the draft of a chapter or an article that they were writing, the rest of the department would read it over the weekend, and every Tuesday afternoon from 2:00 to 4:00, no teaching ever happened, and we spent two hours, absolutely shredding that paper. And everybody loved it. It was a gift to the people who were working on it because as philosophers, you want to know the weaknesses and holes that are in your argument. I learned about philosophy in that colloquium, but probably more important, I learned a lot about my colleagues and what they were passionate about, and, it solidified a sense of "We are in a project together."

I think another one of the tensions of our formation as educators is our disciplines want to become our primary identities. Our disciplines sort of train us to think of ourselves as disciplinary people first and college citizens second, and I don't think the formative project works if that wins. We have to keep thinking about how we are involved in a common project with one another. One of the beauties of this whole formational education is it's not linear. It's not do A, then B, then C, then D will follow. It's not programmatic, it's not mechanical, it's not linear. It is fundamentally an exercise in hope. The question isn't what levers to play, the question is how to be faithful and then wait for God to give you the deliverance.

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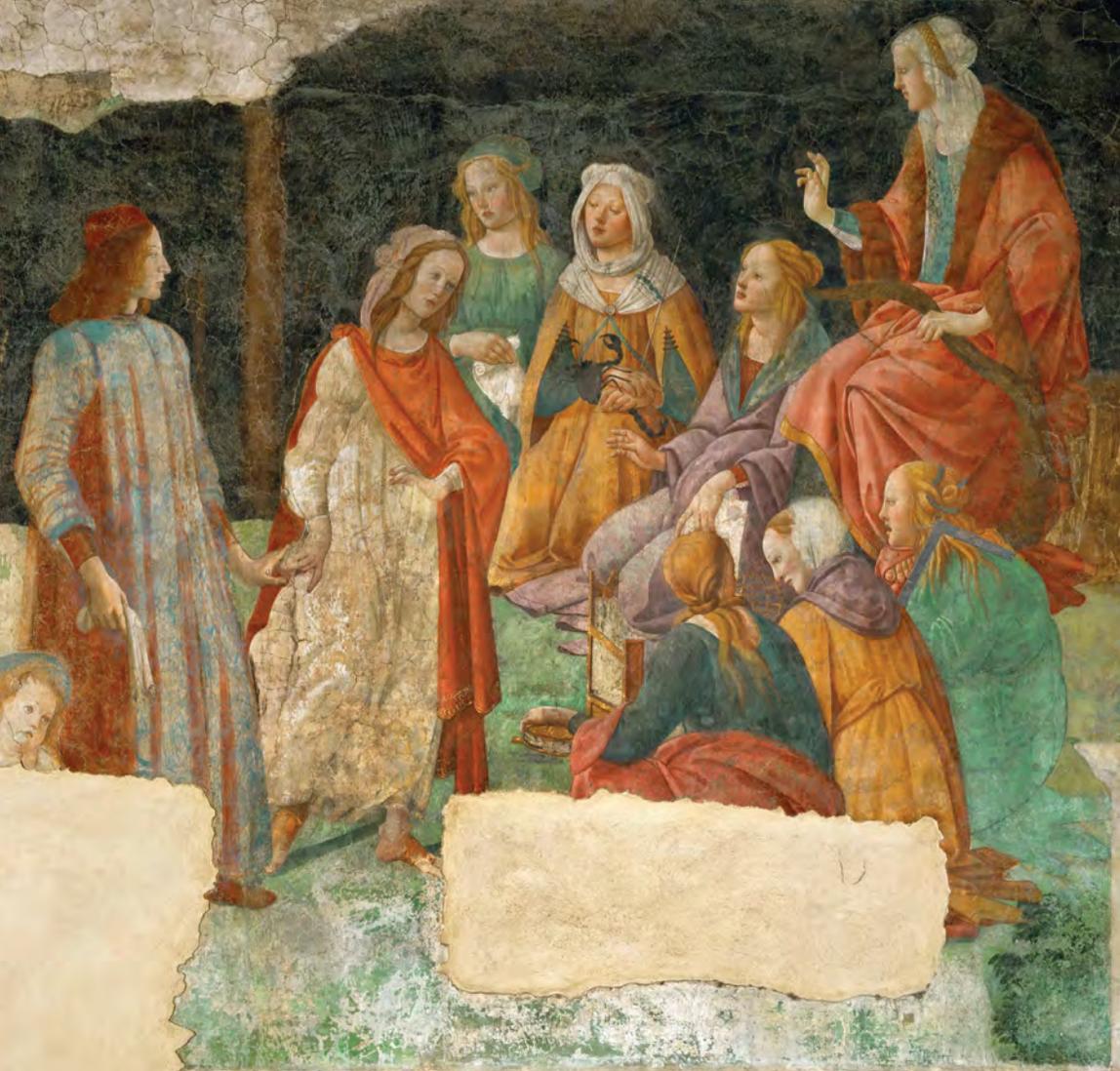
The Seven Liberal Arts, Sandro Botticelli, fresco (removed and transferred to canvas) 1480s, public domain, courtesy of the Lovre, Paris.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PURPOSE OF GENERAL EDUCATION

By Brad Pardue

he cover story of the May 2023 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was a piece entitled "Gen Ed Is Broken."[1] General education courses often make up a third or more of the required credit hours for a four-year baccalaureate degree. At a time when the value and purpose of a college education is being hotly debated by students, their families, and the broader society, it is inevitable that general education would be at the center of many of these debates. The *Chronicle* story's subtitle captures the perspective of many students well: "'Why am I taking this class?' Colleges need better answers." What is the purpose of the general education curriculum?[2] Is general education worth the investment of time and resources that it requires of both students and institutions of higher learning? These are questions that Christian colleges and universities must answer. This essay seeks to provide historical perspective to inform our efforts to do so.

Interestingly, despite the intensity of the current debates, both critics of general education and its defenders agree that the status quo is untenable. Critics argue that many general education courses are poorly taught and irrelevant to students' interests and career aspirations. They suggest that these requirements unnecessarily extend students' time in college and further contribute to the trillion-dollar student debt crisis in the United States. In the words of Nathan English, writing an opinion piece for a Missouri

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1   Beth McMurtrie, "Repairing Gen Ed: Colleges struggle to help students answer the question, 'Why am I taking this class?'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 26, 2023: 14-21.

2   To say that something is broken, as *The Chronicle* essay does, requires that we understand that thing's purpose. For example, you cannot confidently declare that a machine is broken until you know what it was intended to do or accomplish.

newspaper, "General education classes are well-intended but impractical given students' schedules and fees. Students should be able to test out of core subjects, allowing them to focus on major-specific classes, shortening graduation dates and, most importantly, saving them money."[3]

Meanwhile, general education's most passionate defenders are often highly critical of the form that GE programs frequently take. Terry O'Banion asserts "general education is no longer a cohesive core of courses required of all students. It has become, instead, a smorgasbord of courses . . . from which students must make choices of two or three helpings from a buffet of sometimes a hundred or more offerings."[4] Andrew Delbanco and Perry Glanzer, despite very different ideological perspectives, have both bemoaned the "fragmentation" of the higher education curriculum, particularly general education offerings.[5] Sprawling distributive models mean that students may have the possibility of "a healthy curricular meal," but this is certainly not the most likely outcome.[6]

A Brief Survey of the History of General Education

One way of gaining greater insight on the purpose of general education is to step back from these contemporary debates and to consider its place in the broader history of American higher education. As Cynthia Wells has argued, "History matters because it shapes (and misshapes) one's views about general education's contribution to the purpose of higher

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3   Nathan English, "General education courses waste students' time, money," *Northwest Missourian*, February 5, 2020. https://www.nwmissourinews.com/opinion/article_e5b2679c-4889-11ea-a255-2f262afeb205.html (Accessed: 07.11.23).

4   Terry O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2016), 332.

5   Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 86; Perry Glanzer, Nathan Alleman, and Todd Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), particularly Chapter 6: "Falling to Pieces: Declaring Independence from Curricular Coherence."

6   Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 132.

education."[7] A quick survey of the history of general education reveals both the central role it has played in the college experience throughout American history, and the fact that its contents and purpose have often been points of contention.

Where should we begin the story of general education? Wells argues that the phrase "general education" was first used by A.S. Packard, a professor at Bowdoin College, in 1829. Packard wrote, "Our colleges are designed to give youth a general education, classical, literary, and scientific, as comprehensive as an education can well be, which is professedly preparatory alike for all the professions."[8] However, it is often the case that something may exist for a long time before it is actually named, and this is certainly true when it comes to general education. Indeed, Packard's advocacy of general education was itself a product of heated debates in the mid-nineteenth century about the proper form and function of American higher education.

Glanzer and his coauthors trace the history of the western college curriculum all the way back to the twelfth century in Europe, even before the clear emergence of the universities of Paris and Oxford around A.D. 1200. At that time, the Catholic Church played a central role in most intellectual and educational endeavors. Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), one of the most influential scholars of his day, argued that all students ought to be taught the seven liberal arts, which "so hang together and so depend upon one another in their ideas that if only one of the arts be lacking, all the rest cannot make a man into a philosopher" (i.e., lover of wisdom).[9] Although the seven liberal arts (the trivium and the quadrivium) were drawn from classical antiquity, for Hugh the truths of these disciplines and the coherence he found among them was a product of his Christian belief that all truth was God's truth.

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7   Cynthia Wells, "Realizing General Education: Reconsidering Conceptions and Renewing Practice," *ASHE Higher Education Report*, Vol. 42, Is. 2 (2016), 12.

8   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 46.

9   Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 132.

The earliest American colleges, founded in the seventeenth century, inherited many elements of this medieval curriculum. O'Banion notes that the liberal arts were "the common core of knowledge and skills on which Harvard College was established in 1636."[10] It would certainly be anachronistic to apply the term general education as we currently understand it to American higher education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for, as Wells observes, "The colonial college adhered to a fully prescribed, classical, and generalist course of study; in essence, a general education was the whole of a student's education rather than just a part."[11] Graduates of these institutions usually came from elite families and were preparing for jobs in the church and government.

However, during the period of the Early Republic, some began to question the sufficiency of this narrow curriculum, particularly for young men who intended to pursue careers in business. The Yale Report, produced in 1828, defended the classical curriculum, a sure sign that the traditional model was under attack. It is in the context of these debates that Packard's statement on general education in 1829 must be understood. Wells also notes the significant point that the Yale Report "highlighted liberal education, rather than religion, as the primary foundation of a college education."[12] By this point, America's older colleges were already becoming more secular, although the three decades before the Civil War witnessed the foundation of well over one hundred new colleges, almost all associated with various Protestant denominations.[13]

The second half of the nineteenth century was one of the most dynamic in American history, as the United States experienced dramatic demographic, social, economic, and intellectual changes. These developments profoundly affected American higher education. The Morrill Act of 1862 laid the foundation for what would become flagship public universities by creating

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10   O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," 327.

11   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 14.

12   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 45.

13   Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 84.

public land grant institutions, intended "to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in several pursuits and professions of life."[14] Meanwhile, a new model of higher education, the German research university, was beginning to exert its influence in America, perhaps most evidently in the case of Johns Hopkins University (founded in 1876).

In 1869, Charles Eliot, who had done his graduate work abroad in Europe, was appointed president of Harvard, a post that he would hold for the next forty years. Glanzer notes, "Instead of passing down to students a system of fixed knowledge and known truths from faculty and texts, he envisioned the university as a place where new knowledge was created through scientific means."[15] One of the most significant changes that Eliot introduced at Harvard was the elective system, which allowed students greater freedom to choose their own courses. In 1885, Eliot and James McCosh, the president of Princeton, met in New York City to debate the merits of their competing perspectives on the ideal college curriculum. Eliot asserted that "a well-instructed youth of eighteen can select for himself a better course of study than any college faculty."[16] He also encouraged specialization early in the students' college experience. On the other hand, Princeton required a set curriculum for freshmen and sophomores with only limited choices for upperclassmen.

Ultimately, Eliot's model triumphed. Eliot's successor as president of Harvard, Abbot Lawrence Lowell, argued, "the best type of liberal education in our complex world aims at producing men who know a little of everything and something well."[17] It was during this period in the early decades of the twentieth century that Harvard began to require "students

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14 Wells, "Realizing General Education," 22.

15 Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 98.

16 William Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 102.

17 Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 103.

to choose a course or courses in each of several broad areas (thus the beginning of general education requirements) and also to select a block of courses in one discipline or area (thus the beginning of the requirement to graduate with a 'major')."[18] This is still, with certain modifications, the system that college students experience today.

This development was also being driven by the rapid expansion of knowledge and the specialization of faculty, a dynamic that continues right down to the present. In the words of Mark Taylor, "[As] faculty members become more specialized and the subjects of their publications more esoteric, the curriculum becomes increasingly fragmented and the educational process loses its coherence as well as its relevance for the broader society."[19] Delbanco agrees, arguing that as faculty specialize more and more, it becomes difficult for them to "work collaboratively in the sense of setting aside their particular research interests, doing 'introductory' work with eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds, and talking with one another about what and how they are teaching."[20]

It was only in the first half of the twentieth century, when students' college experience began to center more on a particular major or field of study, that general education and its contents, that is, the curriculum that all students should have in common, became a subject of debate. Columbia University took an early step in 1919 when it created a special course called "Contemporary Civilization," which was required of all students. In 1931, the University of Chicago instituted a core curriculum called "The New Plan," considered "the most throughgoing experiment in general education of any college in the United States."[21] Then, in 1945, a Harvard committee issued a report entitled "General Education in a Free Society."

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18   Ringenberg, *The Christian College*, 103.

19   Quoted in Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 131-132.

20   Delbanco, *College*, 88. He continues, "In effect, they [faculty] have to unlearn what they learned—or at least make an effort to connect it with what others learned—in the university that trained them in their academic specialty" (Ibid.).

21   O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," 329.

It called for all undergraduates to take six common courses and justified general education as preparation for citizenship in a democratic society. The Harvard report influenced general education programs across the United States.

It was also during the 1940s that the *Journal of General Education* began to be published. Its founder, Earl McGrath, produced "one of the most quoted definitions of general education as 'a common core of learning for the common man.'"[22] With the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, more popularly known as the G.I. Bill, the number of middle- and working-class people with access to a college education rapidly expanded democratizing American higher education, with all the advantages and disadvantages that came along with that process.

Over the last fifty years, American society has continued to change in significant ways. Greater ethnic and cultural diversity has led some to question the relevance of the Western canon and to demand the inclusion of a wider range of traditions and voices. Like the Yale Report more than one hundred and fifty years earlier, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) defended a classical "Great Books" curriculum, while also wading into the broader culture wars of the day.[23] Dramatic increases in the numbers of college students across much of this period, from 6.3 million in 1970 to 18.1 million in 2010, reflected greater access to higher education, but also put new strains on often underfunded systems.[24] Changes

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22   O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," 329.

23   Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987). For a more recent defense of the Western canon and its relevance for today's college students, see Roosevelt Montás, *Rescuing Socrates: How the Great Books Changed My Life and Why They Matter for a New Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

24   https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics (Accessed: 07/13/2023). The percentage of Americans with a college degree has also risen from 10.7% in 1970 to 37.5% in 2020 [https://www.statista.com/statistics/184260/educational-attainment-in-the-us/ (Accessed: 07/13/2023)]. A dramatic decline in the birthrate since 2008

in the economy led to the emergence of entirely new career fields and a corresponding proliferation of academic programs, each with their own prerequisites and credit hour requirements.

Contemporary Debates about the Purpose of General Education

The general education programs of today are a product of this long and complex process of historical development. College accrediting bodies all require baccalaureate institutions to offer a general education curriculum. For example, the Higher Learning Commission's criteria mandate a GE program "appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution" that is "grounded in a philosophy or framework . . . [that] imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess."[25] Paul Hanstedt notes that general education programs usually fall somewhere on a spectrum running from purely distributive to highly integrative.[26] Wells adds that many programs are also now being framed around developing particular competencies or skills.[27]

This is true of the general education program here at College of the Ozarks. We have a core of courses that all students must take, such as Christian Worldview I (theology), American Experience (history), and Readings in Western Civilization (literature), as well as distributive elements that require students to select courses related to mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts.[28] Our program also seeks to develop such es-

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means that in the coming decades American colleges and universities will facing shrinking cohorts of college students, the so-called "demographic cliff," presenting an entirely different set of challenges.

25   Higher Learning Commission, "2023 Resource Guide," 30. https://download.hlcommission.org/HLCResourceGuide_INF.pdf.

26   Paul Hanstedt, *General Education Essentials: A Guide for College Faculty* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 12.

27   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 44.

28   "General Education," College of the Ozarks College Catalog (2023-2024). https://

sential skills as critical thinking, quantitative thinking, written communication, oral communication, and cultural awareness. We also have a GE capstone course, Christian Worldview II, which provides students with an opportunity to integrate content and concepts from earlier general education courses and to reflect on how their college coursework and experiences relate to their every-day lives and callings.[29]

Such reflection on the relationship between college and "real life" offers a natural transition to consideration of one of the most common critiques of general education: that these courses are irrelevant to students who are primarily interested in a college degree as a means to finding a job.[30] However, there are many reasons that this argument against general education is flawed. Indeed, already back in 1829, A.S. Packard asserted that a general education is "professedly preparatory alike for all the professions."[31] This statement is arguably even more true today than it was in the first third of the nineteenth century given the current complexity of our economy and our society.

Even if one wanted to take a purely pragmatic approach to education as a means to the end of a successful career, there is a strong case to be made for the value of general education. Wells asserts, "The bifurcation of the

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catalog.cofo.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&poid=3303.

29   Hanstedt notes, "An upper-level capstone is one type of core component that asks students to synthesize their learning experiences in other courses they've taken, attempting to create a meaningful whole out of varied and sometimes conflicting information" (Hanstedt, *General Education Essentials*, 14).

30   Such perceptions are part of a broader pattern of students' often limited view of the purpose of higher education. In their recent book, *The Real World of College*, Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner report that their surveys and interviews reveal that 45% of students have a "Transactional" view of college, while only 36% have an "Exploratory" view and 16% have a "Transformational" view [Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner, *The Real World of College: What Higher Education Is and What It Can Be* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022), 127]. Unfortunately, many adults, including parents and even college trustees also share this transactional view (Fischman and Gardner, *Real World of College*, 160).

31   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 46.

major as a narrow preparation for employment and general education as breadth is no longer valid or generative."[32] The economist Bryan Caplan has warned that many students are getting "narrow vocational training for jobs few of them will ever have. Three-quarters of American college graduates go on to a career unrelated to their major."[33] The scholar Eugene Eoyang points out that what employers are looking for with respect to their employees has changed dramatically over time: "from labor (preindustry), to skills (during the Industrial Revolution), to knowledge (from the 1940s to the 1980s), to insight (today)."[34] Many professional fields now recognize that narrow technical knowledge is not enough. Successfully employees will also need a wide range of soft skills, critical thinking, and ethical judgment.

One of the most compelling recent arguments for the kind of breadth reflected in general education programs is David Epstein's *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* (2019). His work demonstrates that while "early specializers jump out to an earnings lead after college . . . later specializers [i.e., those with more breadth] made up for the head start by finding work that better fit their skills and personalities."[35] More importantly, those who are most innovative and successful across a wide range of disciplines and arenas are those with breadth, diverse experiences, and interdisciplinary thinking. Epstein also points to the insight of the psychologist Dan Gilbert, that "[t]he most momentous personality changes occur between age eighteen and one's later twenties, so specializing early is a task of predicting match quality for a person who does not yet exist."[36]

In his classic work, *The Idea of a Christian College*, Arthur Holmes offers a specifically Christian defense of a broad liberal arts education that adds a theological perspective to questions about education as job preparation.

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32   Wells, "Realizing General Education," 35.

33   Referenced in David Epstein, *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2021), 50-51.

34   Hanstedt, *General Education Essentials*, 20.

35   Epstein, *Range*, 9.

36   Epstein, *Range*, 157.

He argues that "liberal education *is* good career preparation . . . Liberal arts education is the education of responsible agents for the vocation of life itself, life in all its parts and as whole."[37] Steven Garber elaborates on this Christian concept of vocation further, noting, "The word *vocation* is a rich one, having to address the whole of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighbors, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this and more is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being."[38] While it is certainly not the case that a college degree is necessary to live out all of these callings, Christian institutions of higher education recognize that they are preparing students to thrive across the various callings in their lives, not just in their careers.

Nevertheless, many contemporary forces are converging that threaten to radically transform higher education, pragmatically stripping it down and disaggregating its constituent elements. Almost a decade ago, Martin Smith published an essay entitled "What Universities Have in Common with Record Labels" in which he argued that colleges and universities will have to unbundle their content. He wrote, "The individual course, rather than the degree, is becoming the unit of content. And universities, the record labels of education, are facing increased pressure to unbundle their services."[39] More recently, Arthur Levine and Scott Van Pelt, in *The Great Upheaval*, have further developed this idea, drawing parallels with developments in the music, film, and newspaper industries over the last few decades.[40] However, while there is certainly a place for certificates and

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37   Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian* College, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 38.

38   Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 11. For a survey of the rapidly growing literature on vocation, both religious and secular, see Brad Pardue and Andrew Bolger, eds., *Restoring the Vocation of a Christian College: A Framework for Holistic Christian Education in a Post-Christian World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 14-21.

39   Quoted in Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 144.

40   Arthur Levine and Scott Van Pelt, *The Great Upheaval: Higher Education's Past, Present, and Uncertain Future* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021).

micro-credentials to aid people in their careers, what is lost is any sense of the unity and coherence of knowledge across fields, and our understanding of education should be driven by more than just market forces.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize that breadth on its own is not enough. The distribution requirements in many GE programs provide students with dozens, sometimes hundreds of course options, itself a source of incoherence.[41] Even a more carefully designed and curated curriculum requires some justification beyond simply exposing students to various fields and disciplines.[42] In a recent provocatively-titled essay, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-rounded," in *Christian Scholar's Review*, Clayton Carlson does a great job of wrestling with just this issue. He observes, "Well-rounded sounds like an attempt to produce Franklins or De Vincis, masters of all trades who would be able to engage in conversations in literature, philosophy, science, and mathematics with equal ease."[43] However, this is clearly unrealistic; introductory general education courses can never achieve such exalted ends. Carlson also points out that some visions of the well-rounded student are reflections of an elitist classism.

Rather than appealing to the idea of well-rounded students, Carlson offers the following justification for general education, grounded in a Christian worldview: "Students need to take liberal arts courses to be responsive to God, to be formed, to learn to be hospitable, and to see the connections

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41   O'Banion, "A Brief History of General Education," 332.

42   A recent report entitled "General Education Requirements: A Look at the Structure of Higher Education," prepared for the Missouri General Assembly Joint Committee on Education (August 2020), reflects this general view when it states, "GE is intended to assure intellectual breadth as opposed to the depth of experience created by a student's major" (p. 1). https://www.senate.mo.gov/jced/GeneralEducationRequirementsRethinkingtheStructureofHigherEducation.pdf (Accessed: 07.20.23).

43   Clayton Carlson, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-rounded," *Christian Scholar's Review* (March 28, 2023). https://christianscholars.com/i-dont-want-my-students-to-be-well-rounded/ (Accessed: 07.20.23).

across God's creation."[44] First, he argues that through their general education courses, students are better able to appreciate the beauty and order of the world and "offer worship to the One who is sovereign over every aspect of creation."[45] Second, he reminds us that exposure to different disciplines is not just a matter of content, it is also formative in that it changes the way that we understand and interact with the world, allowing us to see it through the eyes of a historian, an artist, or a biologist. Third, Carlson argues that "our students need the breadth of courses available in a liberal arts education in order to learn to speak, think, and live hospitably."[46] Finally, he highlights the connections that students will discover as they realize that all the different disciplines "study the same creation, made and sustained by the same Creator."[47]

Another common argument for the value of general education is that such courses help students to develop critical thinking skills. This is a goal that even those who disagree about the specific content of the GE curriculum seem to endorse.[48] However, as with the "well-rounded student," Christian colleges and schools need to carefully consider the underlying assumptions and implications of critical thinking in our modern secular context. First of all, as Charles Fox points out in his article "A Liberal Education for the 21st Century," "Although there is unanimous agreement on the primacy of critical thinking as a general education goal, there is little agreement about what it means to think critically."[49] From a pedagogical standpoint, how can institutions teach, evaluate, and assess a skill that they struggle to define?

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44   Carlson, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-Rounded."

45   Carlson, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-Rounded."

46   Carlson, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-Rounded."

47   Carlson, "I Don't Want My Students to Be Well-Rounded."

48   Critical thinking is among the essential skills that College of the Ozarks has identified within our general education program.

49   Charles Fox, "A Liberal Education for the 21st Century: Some Reflections on General Education," *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, 8 (2): 5-17. http://www.worcester.edu/current (Accessed: 04/04/2023).

What critical thinking often means in practice is actually a bit easier to observe. Consider the following statement from Harvard University's 2007 "Report of the Task Force on General Education." It declares, "A liberal education aims to accomplish . . . [its purpose] by questioning assumptions, by inducing self-reflection, by teaching students to think critically and analytically, by exposing them to the sense of alienation produced by encounters with radically different historical moments and cultural formations and with phenomena that exceed their, and even our own, capacity to understand."[50] Self-reflection and exposure to other perspectives is extremely important, and is certainly one of the great benefits of a robust college education.

However, critical thinking can all too easily take the form of a radical epistemological skepticism. As Perry Glanzer has rightly pointed out, "The critical thinking . . . [students] acquire, especially in post-modern forms, . . . [too often] becomes a sledgehammer used to destroy rather than a bag of tools that helps one create."[51] We must always help our students to remember that implied in the Christian idea that "all truth is God's truth," which explains why we should expect to find truth in the study of many disciplines, cultures, and historical periods, is the fact that objective truth exists. This is a basic affirmation of the Christian worldview.[52] Although I don't know of any Christian colleges or universities that have yet done so, perhaps it would even be useful to consider alternative ways of labeling the kind of reasoning we are seeking to cultivate in our students.[53]

Although certainly not perfect, we here at College of the Ozarks believe

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50   "Report of the Task Force on General Education," Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (2007), 2. https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/gened/files/genedtaskforcereport.pdf?m=1448033208

51   Glanzer, et al., *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 143.

52   Holmes, *Idea of a Christian* College, 17-19.

53   Yoram Hazony, in his recent book *Conservatism*, for example, distinguishes between an often destructive "critical reasoning" and a more positive "constructive reasoning." See Yoram Hazony, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2022), 153.

that our approach to general education, grounded in our broader philosophy of Christian education, thoughtfully reflects our awareness of and engagement with the history and issues discussed above. Our College Catalog declares:

> At College of the Ozarks the General Education Program plays a vital role in the full restoration of students to what it truly means to be human beings created in the image of God. Students engage the Western liberal-arts and American traditions, develop a range of essential skills, and cultivate virtues of Christ-like character guided by faculty and staff who understand and order their lives in accordance with a Christian worldview. The General Education Program helps students integrate knowledge and skills from their academic courses with enriching co-curricular opportunities and the college's unique work program to form students as whole persons who can faithfully pursue their vocations in family, community, country, and the global society.[54]

My hope is that this essay, and others in this issue of *Faithful Lives*, will inform the important conversations that all institutions of higher learning need to have about general education, and that Christian colleges and universities will take a leading role in those debates.

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54 "General Education," College of the Ozarks College Catalog (2023-2024).

At first glance these AI generated images are quite striking, and aspects of each piece are phenomenal. But look more closely and one will notice numerous inconsistencies, errors, and downright abominations. As phenomenal as AI can be at emulating a particular style, (I am especially impressed by the Abstraction image) it currently has severe limitations in accurately portraying some of the most important and meaningful physical aspects of the human person—most notably in the representation of the face and hands. A most aggregious example of an incomprehensively rendered pair of hands can be found in the Surrealism piece (center right). AI has issues accurately portraying humans not because AI cannot recognize sophisticated patterns but because it does not know what a hand is or what it does. It has no human experience. It has never felt the strike or caress of a hand, or felt the slender volume of a hexagonal pencil in its fingers let alone the excitement that comes with the anticipation of a new drawing. In the article that follows Mark Nowak demonstrates that the characteristics that are looked for by engineering employers are not necessarily technical skills. Those skills are assumed to be possessed by graduates. Companies that hire engineers are looking for people who can "get along with others," and display good ethics and positive human virtues; the very things that good GE programs attempt to instill into their students.

Richard Cummings is a Professor of Art and the Director of the Boger Gallery at College of the Ozarks

ENGINEERING BREADTH AND DEPTH

By Mark Nowack

S cience, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs don't of-ten boast about the size of their general education content. In fact, these programs are often under pressure to minimize non-technical content. Repeated calls to reduce the general education content in engineering and other STEM programs presume the general education courses offer less value to students than the technically focused cours-es they displace. The creation of the College of the Ozarks engineering program serves as an opportunity to examine the stakeholder benefits derived from general education content. Surprisingly, messages from engi-neering employers seem to value non-technical attributes general educa-tion courses can provide. Further, the fact that nearly half of engineering graduates nation-wide are in non-engineering primary roles argues for the value of broad-based educational program content. In addition to enhanc-ing workplace value, general education content plays a critical role in pre-paring STEM majors to be effective citizens and community contributors.

Higher education has progressed from a time when students largely took a common set of courses, to one with increasingly specialized majors, particularly in technical fields like math, chemistry, and engineering. David Epstein's *New York Times* best-seller, *Range*, which advocates for breadth, or generalization, over specialization sent some shockwaves through the educational establishment and invigorated ongoing discussions about the benefits of breadth in education, business, and life experiences.[1] Epstein's work is relevant for the current discussion since general education (GE) content, by its nature, adds breadth to narrowly focused major's courses. This discussion is about the value of breadth in the STEM education pro-grams, particularly engineering.

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1   David J. Epstein, *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019).

Since 2000, a change in accreditation compelled engineering educators to focus on their stakeholders' needs. To understand the value of GE content, this essay reflects on needs and expectations of stakeholders who rely on the engineering graduates educated by a combination of technical and GE content. Stakeholders include businesses hiring graduates, communities the graduates call home, parents sending children off to be engineers, faculty, and of course the students themselves.

Apart from GE considerations, the College of the Ozarks engineering program is biased toward breadth. Amidst a sea of more than 2200 specialized accredited U.S. engineering programs, College of the Ozarks' engineering program is one of over 125 multi-disciplinary engineering programs, or those accredited under ABET's "engineering, general engineering, engineering physics, and engineering science" program criteria. The historic engineering disciplines such as civil, mechanical, chemical, and electrical have grown to at least 30 distinct types separately accredited by ABET.[2] Epstein and others might question the wisdom of increasing specialization, or perhaps they would argue that breadth added by an expansive GE program is more critical than ever before. However, many engineering programs prioritize technical content over GE content and seek to minimize GE content.

From its earliest appearance in the United States, engineering education faced an identity struggle. In the late 1700s, English engineers were trained through apprenticeships outside of the college system. France had well developed engineering education based almost exclusively on math and science and housed in separate technical schools such as the École Polytechnique in Paris. Hence, when Congress wanted to address the vulnerability created by a lack of natively trained engineers by creating an engineering school, West Point, the first engineering program, adopted the French model, even using the French language textbooks. The West Point curriculum added some non-technical content that varied widely through

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2   ABET, "Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Programs" (ABET, May 22, 2023), www.abet.org.

history, driven by perceived needs of its primary stakeholders: the army and the Corps of Engineers.[3] Interestingly, the stakeholder-driven curricula at West Point and the other service academies today have some of the largest GE programs – programs that include social sciences, arts, humanities, and non-liberal disciplines including math and even engineering.[4]

In 1861, to address the needs of graduates in superintendent roles, the fourth American engineering program, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institution, added humanistic studies to its French model education, establishing what would become the standard approach to engineering education in the United States. Early engineering education institutes and programs were separate from colleges of the day. Initial attempts at integration did not fare well. For example, the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale College added engineering instruction in 1852, but the engineering students were looked down upon by the classical arts students to the point of engineering students having separate dining facilities.[5] The 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act began the process of bringing engineering programs into the collegiate mainstream and consequently set the stage for increased coherence across programs. This likely facilitated electrical and chemical engineering following a different development path whereby they emerged from traditional college science programs in the 1880s. Engineering programs were still often viewed as second class, illiberal majors.

Engineering education in the United States bifurcated after WWII. Lessons from the war led to calls for increasing math, science, and physics in engineering programs. The shock of Sputnik furthered the pressure to increase engineering science content. As a countervailing result, engineering

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3   Nowack, Mark L, "Liberal Education for Engineers at the Service Academies," in 1994 ASEE Annual Conference Proceedings, vol. 2 (Edmonton, AB: ASEE, 1994), 2924–29.

4   My first formal classroom teaching experience was teaching engineering mechanics at the US Air Force Academy to students that included a wide range of majors including history, psychology, management, and engineering.

5   Lawrence Grayson, "A Brief History of Engineering Education in the United States," *IEEE Transactions on Aerospace and Electronic Systems* AES-16, no. 3 (May 1980): 373-92, https://doi.org/10.1109/TAES.1980.308907.

technology programs rose to promote an alternative hands-on applied skills approach.[6] Neither engineering nor engineering technology programs were motivated to provide business skills and liberal arts content beyond what would be pragmatically needed to help graduates find employment.

Accreditation standards from the Engineers' Council for Professional Development and its successor, ABET, in seeking to meet employer expectations, focused on technical competency. The standards in the late 20th century enumerated required technical content along with 16 credits in social sciences and humanities.[7] However businesses noted that graduates from accredited programs were falling short of changing corporate needs and expectations in areas such as communications, teamwork, and engineering design. To address this concern, ABET was an early adopter of outcomes-based accreditation, whereby the outcomes focused on stakeholder needs in broad categories as opposed to standardized content checklists.[8] The new accreditation approach, known as EC2000, required programs to identify their constituents, determine their constituents' needs, and put in place an assessment and evaluation process to ensure continued alignment between curriculum and stakeholder needs. Programs were granted a great deal more curricular design flexibility under the new approach.

Given a notional, 120-credit engineering curriculum, the ABET criteria

6   Committee on Engineering Technology Education in the United States and National Academy of Engineering, *Engineering Technology Education in the United States*, ed. Katharine G. Frase, Ronald M. Latanision, and Greg Pearson (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.17226/23402. These authors relate the calls surrounding the 1955 ASEE Grinter report with roots in the earlier 1930 Wickenden and Hammond report to formalize separate engineering and engineering technology programs. The divide had previously existed through the co-existence of engineering colleges and technical institutes.

7   ABET, "Criteria for Accredited Engineering Programs Effective for Evaluations During the 1999-2000 Accreditation Cycle" (ABET Inc., November 1, 1998).

8   Atsushi Akera et al., "ABET & Engineering Accreditation - History, Theory, Practice: Initial Findings from a National Study on the Governance of Engineering Education," in *2019 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition Proceedings* (2019 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition, Tampa, Florida: ASEE Conferences, 2019), https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2--32020.

currently calls for a minimum of 30 credits of math and basic science, at least 45 credits of engineering science and design, along with "a broad education component that complements the technical content of the curriculum and is consistent with the program educational objectives."[9] To ensure overarching national industry expectations are addressed, seven outcome areas are specified that all engineering programs must incorporate.[10] Four of the seven required outcomes are non-technical business skills: ethics, communication, teamwork, and lifelong learning. ABET does not direct how the outcomes must be met, or where in the curriculum they should be covered. In fact, challenges with controlling content and conducting assessment across academic divisions lead many programs to address and assess these requirements within engineering coursework, dissociating GE from essential academic major content. The result is potential lost efficiency and curricular coherence.

Engineering programs now have a great deal of freedom in how to approach GE content. Competitive pressures for more technical content tend to reduce the general education component size down to limits imposed by accreditors, states, or institutional policy. For example, the Higher Learning Commission's assumed practice is 30 hours of general education.[11] Missouri's standard is 42 credits.[12] Whiteman's study of the impact of EC2000 on mechanical engineering programs reveals little change in the size of the technical programs, but a 6% (about 2-3 courses) curricular shift

9   ABET, "Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Programs." The ABET broad education requirement for applied and natural sciences is similar to the engineering requirement.

10   These attributes apply internationally to signatories to the Washington Accord. IEA-WFEO Working Group, "Graduate Attributes and Professional-Competencies V2021.1" (International Engineering Alliance, June 21, 2021), http://www.ieagreements.org.

11   Higher Learning Commission, "Assumed Practices (CRRT.B.10.020)," accessed May 24, 2023, https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/assumed-practices.html.

12   Kevin D. Gwaltney, "General Education Requirements: A Look at the Structure of Higher Education" (Missouri General Assembly Joint Committee on Education, August 19, 2020), 20.

from free electives to "liberal arts and social sciences."13 This shift is not driven by ABET requirements, but rather by increases in institutional-level minimum requirements.

Conflicting with the desire for more technical content is a trend of states capping credit counts at state institutions to make degrees more achievable within four years.[14] The consequence is further pressure to reduce GE content, often by pursuing exceptions such as creating double dipping GE and major courses.[15] For example, one Ozark region school uses an international engineering course to meet a general education requirement for cultural exposure. Non-state institutions feel the curriculum pressure indirectly as they compete for students, and they want to have technical content comparable to other institutions to avoid being written off by prospective students and employers. Christian schools which add biblical and religious studies courses to their general education requirements face even more pressure on technical content. To stand out in a positive way, smaller programs tend to articulate the value of unique alternative content and teaching approaches. The College of the Ozarks engineering program promotes its ties to overall College education approach, which flows from the foundational vision.

> The vision of College of the Ozarks is to develop citizens of Christ-like character who are well-educated, hard-working, and patriotic.

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13   Wayne E. Whiteman, "The Impact of EC2000 on Mechanical Engineering Curricula: A Follow-up Study," *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering Education* 39, no. 3 (July 2011): 185–94, https://doi.org/10.7227/IJMEE.39.3.1.

14   Gwaltney, "General Education Requirements: A Look at the Structure of Higher Education," summarizes GE pressures in his report for the MO Legislature. He also notes increasing awareness of the value GE programs bring to STEM programs.

15   Since math and science courses are included in engineering and other science programs, this discussion focuses on the general education content that supplements an engineering program such as social sciences, arts and humanities, along with professional and life skill courses such as physical education and military science.

In the engineering program, the major technical courses, GE, and extra-curricular activities combine to support this vision. Parsing the vision statement into areas of interest to stakeholders provides a means to examine the engineering program-GE relationship.

Well Educated and Hard Working

Industry is the stakeholder most often associated with having a vested interest in the engineering educational process. Their success is the engineering program's success. However, recent studies often show disconnects between traits graduates acquire and what industry desires. Rogers notes a 2013 Oregon Engineering and Technology study where employers singled out shortcomings in

- Written communication
- Getting things done in a complex environment
- Verbal communication
- Client interaction skills

These are some of the same issues that motivated ABET's change to EC2000. Equally troubling is the lack of student self-awareness of their skill deficits.[16] These shortcomings are not primarily technical.

The national employer interest level for engineers with a broad skill set is reflected in the increasing number of engineering programs accredited under the general engineering criteria. These tend to be multi-disciplinary in nature. As seen in Figure 1, the number of these multi-disciplinary program starts grew at a slow and linear pace from the late 1940s until the mid-1980s when the growth rate increased by a factor of four, and then further doubling in the mid 2000s.[17]

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16   Peter Rogers and Richard Freuler, "The 'T-Shaped' Engineer," in *2015 ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition Proceedings* (2015 ASEE Annual Conference and Exposition, Seattle, Washington: ASEE Conferences, 2015), 26.1507.1-26.1507.18, https://doi.org/10.18260/p.24844.

17   Data sourced from ABET.org, accessed 21 May 2023. Accreditation data generally

The overall number of engineering programs was also growing as more small schools came onboard with an average of six schools starting engineering programs each year since 1980.[18] However, even as a percentage of total engineering programs, multi-disciplinary program growth is accelerating as noted in Figure 2. The growth rate change in the 1980s corresponds to the PC revolution and an era of increasing emphasis on computer-based engineering tools. It also was an era of rapidly increasing product globalization, spurring a demand for engineers with a broad base of knowledge to tackle global challenges. This era also saw the rise of professional certifications, such as program management, that were decoupled from academic degrees. These trends reduced the relative demand for undergraduate-trained specialists.

The mid-2000s shift corresponds to the explosion of information and tool availability on the internet followed by the onset of multi-site, including multi-national, product development teams. These developments in part represent a need for a broader technical knowledge base, and sound communication skills including cross-cultural understanding.
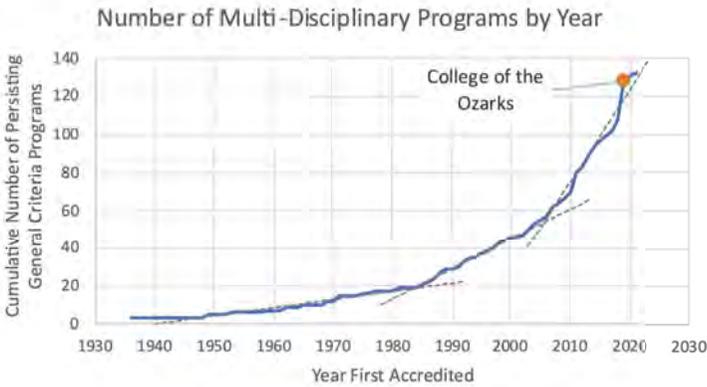

Figure 1. Cumulative Program   Count

shows the academic year of first program graduates.

18   Mark Nowack and Geoff Akers, "An Engineering Program Built Around Work (Presentation)" (2017 Christian Engineering Conference, Cedarville OH: Cedarville University, 2017).
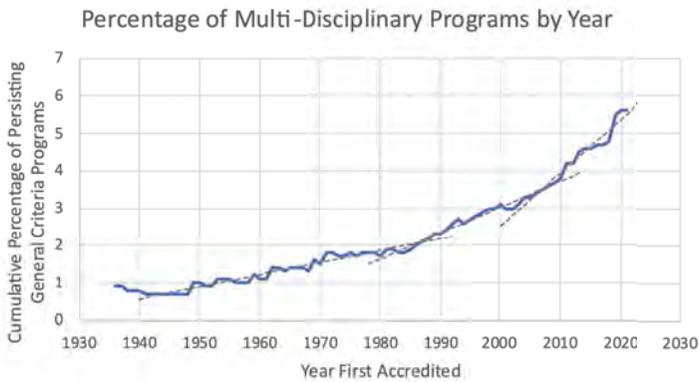
Percentage of Multi-Disciplinary Programs by Year

Figure 2. Cumulative Count as Percentage of All Programs

The ABET data and criteria represent national trends, but College of the Ozarks, as a regionally focused institution, needed to discern Ozark regional industry needs and interests. Beginning in 2015, College of the Ozarks engineering faculty and staff met with numerous regional firms and organizations to develop and refine plans for the engineering program. Interestingly, the most consistent requests from industry were not generally centered on technical skills, perhaps as those were taken for granted, but rather on several attributes that companies found in prior hires from the College such as getting along with others, a responsible work ethic, following instructions, an ability to work unsupervised, and good communication skills.

The desired attributes cross multiple disciplines and are the result of the various academic major programs working with the common portions of the College of the Ozarks educational experience, primarily the GE program, the work program, and the Christian education and cultural programs. Thus, the engineering implementation team decided to leverage the successful existing GE program with as few changes as possible. The engineering program would fit to the GE program, not the other way around. The result is a GE program larger than those found in most engineering

programs.[19] To retain an engineering program that could be completed in four years, the technical content needed to be smaller than competing Ozark-region programs. While the engineering program technical content comfortably satisfied ABET requirements, we would have to sell the program to employers on something other than technical content size. Part of the message is how the engineering program is well-integrated into the proven GE and work programs to provide graduates with non-technical skills akin to prior College graduates. Selling the adequacy of smaller technical program content would have to rely on a reputation created by graduates' work performance and graduates passing the nationally normed Fundamentals of Engineering exam.

Citizens of Christ-like Character who are Patriotic

Engineering employer requests to academia reflect their business needs. Many companies support employee community outreach, but all are ultimately focused on hiring that keeps them in business. They care about business-relevant skills, so in general, citizenship traits and practices of employees are not a major employer interest.[20] Consequently, citizenship traits such as selfless service to community, or neighbor-loving, are easily neglected when educational programs are guided by a focus on business-relevant outcomes.[21]

By contrast, states and local communities have an interest in educational outcomes as the graduates are residents and participants in daily communal life. While STEM accreditor requirements are narrowly focused on

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19   Nowack and Akers, "An Engineering Program Built Around Work,"), 158–66.

20   Social engagement and activism are part of the defining corporate culture for some firms.

21   Lisa R. Lattuca, Patrick T. Terenzini, and J. Fredricks Volkwein, "Engineering Change: A Study of the Impact of EC2000" (Center for the Study of Higher Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 2006). The study notes that while important to a majority of companies, ABET outcomes related to knowledge of contemporary issues, and an ability to work in global and societal contexts are the least important. None of the outcomes address actual social engagement.

technical needs for industry and academia, states dictate content believed to be beneficial to both economic success and citizen well-being. Gwaltney, in reviewing scholarship on GE content for the Missouri General Assembly, notes that it is largely the general education courses that address citizenship as they "instill and reinforce the institutions, traditions, and values a society considers essential for the protection and reproduction of the prevailing social order."[22] The Cambridge Dictionary defines patriotism as "showing love for your country and being proud of it." Love is demonstrated through actions. Engineering students are developing capabilities that can be applied in their communities as citizens, both specific technical knowledge and more general abilities such as problem-solving approaches. State and local government rely on engineers in vocational service to make sure water is clean, roads and bridges are safe, and myriad other behind the scenes activities. Finding joy in such service is rooted in loving neighbors and an interest in preserving and improving community life. GE and co-curricular content provide rationale and examples of individuals sharing their talents to benefit their communities.

Educational institutions understand their societal impact and most institutions have a community impact mission element, either explicitly stated, or implied though targeted graduate attributes. These community mission goals may have support for specific industries (economic impact) and for general citizenship (social impact). Citizenship content is easily overlooked at the STEM program level since citizenship trait requests are often communicated at the College level from churches and think tanks promoting their vision for the nation. To compound the curricular content difficulty at the program level, directly assessing educational impact on citizenship is difficult as compared to economic impact that can be measured in numbers of graduates employed for example. The GE program offsets program level citizenship imbalances.

Engineers are called to undertake community care apart from, and sometimes in spite of, community government. Licensed Professional Engineers

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22   Gwaltney, "General Education Requirements: A Look at the Structure of Higher Education," provides insight into national trends and Missouri state interests.

take on an obligation to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public above personal gain and organizational loyalty.[23] The president of the National Society of Professional Engineers noted "the average engineer holds more lives in their hand than a doctor."[24] I have known engineers who stayed away from design work, much less licensure, out of fear of causing harm and incurring personal liability. Taking personal legal responsibility for essential consequential work requires moral courage and a love for those in the community—areas the GE program addresses.

It turns out that industry does have a collateral interest in healthy citizens. A frequent request from regional engineering employers was for hires who will stay with the company as a long-term employee. Employers have noted a tendency for recent graduates to leave after a year or two to be closer to family. One means to address this issue is helping the students develop healthy life skills that hopefully lead to contentment and a good perspective on work and life. A graduate who is well integrated into the community and has a church support structure is less likely to be lonely and to yearn to be closer to extended family. Promoting love of God and neighbors, a sound family life, and a patriotic duty to engage the community supports developing long-term community members. These of course are objectives of the College of the Ozarks GE program.

Vision

The institutional vision of desired graduate outcomes is shared with the students so that they are active partners in the formation process, from the big picture down to the lessons learned in individual assignments. Engineering faculty challenge students to let God develop in them a picture of where they are headed. The reality of course is students do not know exactly what the future holds so they should prepare across a broad

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23   "Engineers' Creed," National Society of Professional Engineers, accessed June 8, 2023, https://www.nspe.org/resources/ethics/code-ethics/engineers-creed.

24   Britt Smith, "Address to the Missouri Society of Professional Engineers" (2023 MSPE Annual Conference, Camdenton MO, June 8, 2023).

range of skills. This preparation for the unknowable is akin to how the U.S. military academies prepare officers to be ready for as yet unknown adversaries and situations through large and broad GE programs that provide "intellectual agility" and "cultural understanding."[25]

The vision statement for the College of the Ozarks engineering program highlights the ability to think critically, and includes attributes such as ingenuity, courage, humility, fortitude, account-ability, and integrity as well as serving the community. Note that technical content consists of fundamentals and a broad (versus deep) range of applications.

> College of the Ozarks engineering graduates will be well versed in engineering fundamentals and a broad range of applications with the abilities necessary to think critically and to see the problem-solving processes from beginning to end. The work-proven and team-oriented graduates will possess the ingenuity, courage, humility, fortitude, account-ability, and integrity to step up to challenges, adapt to needs, make use of available resources, and serve their company and community to produce results that make a difference. (adopted 7/7/2017)

General education seems to have an important place in supporting the engineering graduate vision at College of the Ozarks as the GE program espoused virtues include courage, humility, and citizenship. The curricular challenge is efficiently and effectively leveraging the existing GE program within the confines of a four-year engineering degree.

Recall that one attribute requested by industry was employees who know how to get along with others. ABET criteria includes an ability to function effectively on teams of "individuals of diverse backgrounds, skills, or perspectives." Engineering faculty exhortations and Biblical and theological studies course content promote unity though loving neighbors. Loving is a

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25   Nick Anderson, "Service Academies: Where the U.S. Military Meets the Liberal Arts," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2016.

skill that is best learned through practice. It is practiced by rubbing elbows with others different than ourselves, whether different majors, or different personalities such as those found in the work program. Elbow rubbing is another benefit of common GE courses outside the engineering enclave. For example, engineers and accountants have a notoriously tense relationship, so the more they take courses together and work on projects together in school, the more likely they are to get along in the workplace. Perhaps they will have exercised their conflict resolution skills a bit.

While the engineering program's primary academic goal is to prepare students to be faithful engineers, the reality is that nearly half of engineering graduates in the U.S. are in non-engineering roles.[26] Some of our engineering graduates have ended up in areas such as law school, seminary, and business management - all fields that benefit from a well-exercised ability to learn and solve problems. A recent Harvard University review of their GE content notes "General education courses are distinguished by their emphasis on breadth, on context, on connectedness, and on the relation between the material students are studying and things they will be doing for the rest of their lives . . ."[27] The GE content is central to tackling new challenges and complements engineering problem solving approaches. Even within the engineering domain, faculty cannot cover all skills required for future work, which is why ABET has life-long learning as a required outcome, an outcome that employs GE-developed skills.

Even if a college student had a correct vision of the future, the typical college student lacks the experiential maturity to wisely select courses. [28] This is aggravated when students see engineering as separate, or disconnected, from other coursework. Several years ago, an engineering student told

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26   *Educating the Engineer of 2020*: Adapting Engineering Education to the New Century (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.17226/11338.

27   Report of the Task Force on General Education (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2007).

28   Charles R Fox, "A Liberal Education for the 21st Century: Some Reflections on General Education," Currents in Teaching and Learning 8(2) (2016) 5-17.

his English professor "I don't need this class because I am going to be an engineer." Of course, faculty who have been practicing engineers know the importance of written communication. Hence specifying key courses and topics minimizes the danger to the student that they will not select what they actually need.

Nationwide, engineering has a reputation for key courses arbitrarily "weeding out" students. While sometimes a student does not have necessary abilities in areas such as math, often as Felder notes, it is simply a mismatch between the student's cognitive style and the traditional lecture-based teaching approach historically popular in engineering education.[29] This disconnect pushes people who have aptitude and passion for engineering vocational success to other disciplines. As a Christian institution such barriers to success should be removed when possible but another dimension must be added, namely keeping a door to another major wide-open, or helping students discern a calling that enables them to thrive.

As an engineering professor seeking to prepare students for life, helping students find a calling that is a good fit is a primary task, whether or not it is in engineering. Exposure to other fields through the large GE program plays a role in this effort. We have had students who have demonstrated necessary aptitude for success in the engineering leave the program and go to Biblical and Theological Studies, Agriculture, and Video Production. These redirections to majors that are a better fit are wins for everyone involved.

For students who remain in engineering roles, non-engineering courses prevent over-specialization. Technical advances are resulting in rapid changes in many STEM professional fields. Entirely new areas surface in professional STEM disciplines. Courses common 30 years ago are gone as a result of computer automation. Students need to be adept at learning and thinking. Engineering programs are wise to focus on core foundational knowledge and universally beneficial skills such as problem-solving and communication skills promoted in GE courses. This was highlighted in a visit

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29   Richard M. Felder, "Matters of Style," *ASEE Prism*, December 1996.

to one of the remanufacturing companies in Springfield MO where the head of engineering wanted engineers with the solid fundamentals learned in the first two years of a typical engineering program, and an ability to learn independently since each product brought new technical challenges.

Develop

"Develop" is oft passed over in the College vision statement which rightly focuses on the five goals. But faithful education is all about investing in student's lives to develop desired traits. Parents as well as students and faculty care about *how* it is done. Engineering after all is about processes.

Parents who visit the engineering program are interested in the total program value. Parents want to know if students take beneficial courses, or will they "waste" time with courses with little redeeming value. They want to know economic details such as types of jobs graduates obtain and the graduation success rate. Parents increasingly want to know how their child will be nurtured, challenged, and impacted by the worldviews espoused in the department. It is tempting for a STEM program at a Christian-based institution to claim uniqueness due to required Biblical studies courses. That is not a satisfying answer to most parents visiting the engineering department. They want to know the entirety of the campus culture. In this regard, a major program that is well-integrated with the GE courses is positioned to provide a satisfying answer. Major instructors know what is covered elsewhere and how the GE content relates to the major program, and leverage this knowledge. Whether explicitly stated or not, parents are interested in how engineering faculty integrate GE themes across the curriculum.

GE courses can take on multiple roles to integrate with the technical portions of math, science, and engineering programs. Typical relationships include providing foundational instruction (e.g. first year English supporting writing in engineering courses), filling in voids (e.g. political science providing topics not covered elsewhere), or reinforcing skills (e.g. teamwork skills applied in both engineering and psychology). The relationship is ideally not simply one way from GE to engineering, but integrated into multiple learning experiences. For example, the agricultural engineering course includes

a major writing exercise to prepare a technical operation or maintenance manual for a product or process on campus that needs one, often in the work program or elsewhere in the academic program. This exercise builds on the foundations laid in speech communication (understanding audience), and the composition course (writing mechanics), and the Biblical and Theological Studies courses and Christian education program (serving others). Being more than a simple academic exercise drives home the engineers' call to bring Shalom to others through engineering.[30]

College of the Ozarks

The GE program provides positive institutional-level effects. Beuttler notes that a common GE curriculum can be a unifying element in a university system that is adrift or struggling with focus.[31] This impact could be taken a step further as helping inoculate an institution from drifting apart—keeping programs headed in the same direction as they progress through inevitable program changes.

General education-induced interaction was a benefit when starting and improving a new professional STEM program in a general, liberal-arts focused institution. Not surprisingly, engineering was viewed with some suspicion as it was pulling resources and students away from existing programs and, due to the demands of an outside accreditor, deviated from several established program curricular practices. Frequent informal discussions over lunch helped the GE-providing faculty and the engineering program faculty understand each other's goals, needs, approaches, and constraints and facilitated adjustments such as course sequencing and coordinating grading standards. This also led to beneficial partnerships such as engineering providing acoustic remediation for music facilities, and acoustics lessons in GE science courses, English faculty helping with writing projects in engineering, and Biblical and theological studies faculty advising on teaching pedagogy.

30   Kevin Timmer, "Toward a Meaning-Filled Introduction to Holistic Engineering," in *Proceedings of the 2013 Christian Engineering Conference* (2013 Christian Engineering Conference, Atlanta, 2013), 24–38.

31   Fred W. Beuttler, "Moral Philosophy in a Social Scientific Age: A Proposal to Reintegrate the Undergraduate Curriculum," *Christian Higher Education* 11, no. 2 (April 2012): 81–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2012.624454.

Care must be exercised to temper expectations for GE results. Fox's analysis of the roles played by GE notes that even GE advocates are concerned that in trying to do too much, little instruction of value may be actually achieved.[32] Clarity of purpose and clear GE objectives helps to focus the limited course time available and facilitates coordination across the institution and programs.[33] An accompanying clear assessment process helps integrate GE with programs like engineering and ensures they don't drift apart. Effective assessment across the entire curriculum ensures employers know what to expect from graduates of the program year after year.

Engineering Education Broadly

Over the last 15 years, the model of the T-shaped engineer has become popular for discussing depth versus breath for practicing engineers. The model posits that engineers need depth in one discipline (e.g. bio-medical engineering), and in one system (e.g. medical device manufacturing facilities) as well as boundary-crossing competencies such as teamwork and communication. Any engineering education program has elements of depth and breadth, but place different emphasis on each. Traditional engineering programs focus on depth in a single discipline. The special T-shaped engineering programs that Rogers and Freuler highlight in their 2015 paper point to the challenge that putting cross-cutting non-technical skills into a traditional engineering program is neither easy, nor the norm, hence GE courses play an important breadth providing role.[34] As Fox notes, an effective GE program changes the options available to faculty, making the cross-cutting portions achievable.[35]

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32 Fox, "A Liberal Education for the 21st Century: Some Reflections on General Education."

33 2023-2024 College Catalog, https://catalog.cofo.edu/.

34 Rogers and Freuler, "The 'T-Shaped' Engineer."

35 Fox, "A Liberal Education for the 21st Century: Some Reflections on General Education."

General education is useful, even for deep technical specialists, or perhaps especially for a deep technical specialist. Breadth of thought is a safety net and generates better ideas. As David Epstein notes in *Range*, "when all you have is a volcanologist…every extinction looks like a volcano."[36] GE provides essential challenging non-engineering input. While it is tempting to limit GE courses to make room for detailed technical content, such a GE-minimalist approach is not perhaps what society needs most.

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36   Epstein, *Range,* 265.
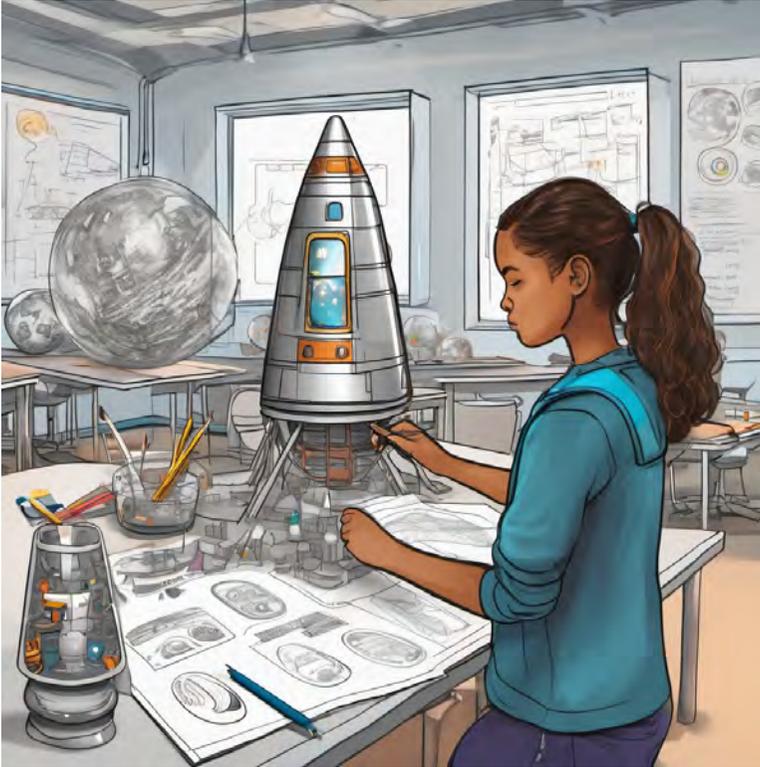
Future Engineer
AI generated digital image (pixlr.com)
prompter: Richard Cummings
prompt: *"STEM classroom with a female artist designing a space capsule".*
accessed January 30th, 2024.

The Virtues | Justice, Courage, Mercy, Politeness, Honesty, Honor, Loyalty, Control.
Damien Hirst
Laminated Giclée prints on aluminium composite panel
2021
Fair Use per Section 107 of the US Copyright Act

The world-renowned British shock artist, Damien Hirst, is perhaps best known for his startling pieces that explore death. His recent *Virtues* series however uses the beautiful-but-fleeting subject of cherry trees in bloom as metaphors for the Japanese Bushido virtues of justice, courage, mercy, politeness, honesty, honor, loyalty, and control. I find it interesting how these human virtues transcend geography, religion and culture. Indeed, these Bushido virtues overlap and resonate with the Christian virtues of wisdom, justice, self-control, courage, faith, hope, and love.

Richard Cummings is a Professor of Art and the Director of the Boger Gallery at College of the Ozarks

SPEAKING OF HONORABLENESS: General Education's Value in Bridging the Virtue-Skill Dichotomy for Communication Arts Majors

By Stacy A. McNeill

As an educator for nearly 30 years, I've heard an oft-cited phrase when advising younger undergraduates: "I just want to get through my GE (general education) classes so I can get to my major . . . you know; the classes I'll enjoy." This perspective invites some reflection on the virtues of general education (GE) as they apply to academic majors and life beyond an undergraduate degree. Mitchell outlines the magnitude of embracing the above mentality:

> Consider what happens when you begin to treat course content as something imposed upon you, as a chore, or as a drudge with no purpose or meaning to your life. The things we are studying become obstacles rather than sources of value. As such, we end by dealing with them dishonestly—denying their power to challenge us or to remake what we already have.[1]

As we contemplate the virtues of undergraduate education, Mogck and Howes invite us to consider the nature of virtue as an excellence of the soul, a foundational discipline of restraining impulses, discovering and developing capabilities, and practicing behavior indicative of how a wise person acts.[2]

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1   Phillip I. Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education," Dallas Baptist University, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.dbu.edu/mitchell/world-view-literature/virtue1.html.

2   Brian Mogck and Thomas D. Howes, "Virtue Can't Be Learned From Devices," *Public Discourse*, The Witherspoon Institute, September 25, 2022, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2022/09/84803/.

The Intersection of Communication Arts and Virtuous General Education

My primary field of study is communication, and I teach in a Communication Arts degree program. According to the National Communication Association (NCA),[3] communication students are prepared to think deeply about the intersection of communication processes related to many of today's important issues, with an understanding that effective communication can unite individuals. Pursuant to these broader goals, our students learn to create social media campaigns, edit video work, write journalistic pieces, blog, speak publicly, and plan events, among other skills.

Yet beyond these skills, fair-mindedness, good listening, wisdom, intellectual courage, love of truth/honesty, as well as sense of calling, humility, and perseverance/hope are all virtues we as faculty in this area seek to cultivate in our students and model for emulation.[4] For although Glanzer asserts the liberal arts are an ideal place to think about the ends of a good life and about virtue, as well as the strengths and weaknesses within various conceptions of the virtuous life, he further touts the necessity of virtue development through learning particular virtues, in particular contexts, in particular ways, through particular practices.[5] Construction of one's intellectual character is a longitudinal, often challenging endeavor:

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3   National Communication Association Website, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.natcom.org/academic-professional-resources/why-study-communication.

4   Barry Schwartz, "Higher Education Should Be Education in Intellectual Virtues," *Virtues and Vocations: Reimagining the Character of Professional Education*, University of Notre Dame, Winter 2023, accessed July 28, 2023, https://socialconcerns.nd.edu/virtues/magazine/higher-education-should-be-education-in-intellectual-virtues/. Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education."

5   Perry L. Glanzer, "Avoiding the Academic Tendency to Generalize about Virtue: Why Virtue Education and Practice Must Be Specific, Part 2," *Christian Scholar's Review*, May 23, 2022, accessed July 28, 2023, https://christianscholars.com/avoiding-the-academic-tendency-to-generalize-about-virtue-why-virtue-education-and-practice-must-be-specific-part-2/.

It is not as though all the smart, honest, humble, open-minded folks are on our side of a given issue, and all the stupid, lying, arrogant, dogmatists are on the other. Rather, we probably all have elements of all these traits within us . . . we find ourselves somewhere between intellectual virtue and vice.[6]

Fair-Mindedness

An initial virtue of fair-mindedness represents critical thinking choices and a reasonable posturing toward others. In the GE communication class at my institution, Public Speaking, there is a distinct focus on fair-mindedness through ethical speaking and listening, based on a Christian worldview. Within the sphere of the course, our younger undergraduate scholars engage in discussion regarding topic selection and oral presentation creation, utilizing audience analysis, or an assessment of the demographics of an audience and psychological factors, such as time of day, environment, or credibility in relation to a group.[7]

Tailoring a speech to one's audience lessens the chance of wasting the audience's time. The Hamilton College Oral Communication Center website notes audience-centeredness as the first of seven cardinal virtues of oral presentation and notes that to influence others who are less interested, knowledgeable, or committed to a speaker's topic requires tailoring a message to one's immediate audience.[8] Gibbs says this taking on of objects

6   Nathan King, "How Intellectual Virtues Can Help Us Build Better Discourse," *Christian Scholar's Review*, July 15, 2022, accessed July 28, 2023, https://christianscholars.com/how-intellectual-virtues-can-help-us-build-better-discourse/#:~:text=To%20be%20humble%20in%20the,minds%2C%20and%20begin%20to%20listen.&text=Open%2Dmindedness%20is%20the%20intellectual,of%20new%20or%20challenging%20views.

7   Clella Jaffe, *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills For A Diverse Society* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning: 2016), 68-78.

8   Oral Communication Center Website, Hamilton College, "The Seven Cardinal Virtues of Oral Presentation," accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/oralcommunication/seven-cardinal-virtues/the-seven-cardinal-virtues-of-oral-presentation.

of consideration is necessary for true virtuous mindfulness.[9] In a recent example of this mindfulness, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine received a standing ovation from members of the U.S. Congress when he asked them for military aid and referenced key American historical events, places, and figures, like Pearl Harbor, September 11th, Mount Rushmore, and Martin Luther King, Jr., in a livestreamed speech he delivered to them.10

Equally important, and also underscored in the public speaking course, is the fair-mindedness concept of becoming a motivated presentation consumer. Jaffe says this entails evaluating arguments and their subsequent claims, evidence, and reasoning, yet pursuing objectivity and an open mind.[11] Something I tell my students frequently is that I'm not grading their persuasive speeches on whether I personally agree with their arguments; rather, I'm considering the strength of an argument's thesis, development, reasoning, and support. As communication arts majors progress through our program, we assess growth in fair-mindedness in both creation and consumerism of oral presentations. There is a distinct recognition that no matter the future careers of our students, there will always be a need to construct and assess messages to and from changing audiences. Our departmental website places emphasis on preparing students toward competent communication in varied and changing business, professional, and academic fields.[12]

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9   Joshua Gibbs, "Mindfulness is A Waste of Time, Not A Virtue," *Cultivating Wisdom and Virtue*, The Circe Institute, May 18, 2021, accessed July 28, 2023, https://circeinstitute.org/blog/blog-mindfulness-waste-time-not-virtue/.

10   Carmine Gallo, "Zelensky's Audience-Centered Speeches Connect To Shared Values," *Forbes Magazine*, March 17, 2022, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2022/03/17/zelenskys-audience-centered-speeches-connect-to-shared-values/?sh=97b6bdd68846.

11   Jaffe, *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills For A Diverse Society,* 221-239.

12   Communication Arts Website, College of the Ozarks, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.cofo.edu/MassComm.

Listening

Along with fair-mindedness, another intellectual virtue Communication Arts students find opportunity for growth in is good listening. Zenger and Folkman convey great listeners don't just passively absorb, but actively support what another is verbalizing, giving the speaker energy and height, like someone jumping on a trampoline.[13] Listening is thus a virtuous act in its inherent focus on others. Ury summarizes listening as a profound act of human respect.[14]

Many undergraduates have yet to discover the difference between hearing and listening, as hearing ability is simply the first physiological step in the listening process. Attending, comprehending, responding, and remembering follow.[15] When GE students filter out the noise inside their heads and make notetaking and application of content decisions in Chemistry, Mathematics, World History, Wellness, or Art Exploration classes, it requires active, not passive, listening skills. Then, if they make eye contact and nod their heads (although this is, at times, more instinctive than intentional), learners begin to deepen their understanding of nonverbal feedback and its role in the responsiveness and valuing of others inherent in accomplished listening. Finally, if students deign to ask or answer a question, they are on a path toward concept retention.

Years later, when collaborating with a client on a promotional endeavor or a colleague on a website, these previous rudimentary listening practices become the focus that allows the cognitive complexity necessary for career communicators to provide a specific, necessary product. Communication students are among the doers, envisioning and creating campaigns, then encapsulating those envisioned ideas into writing, film, graphics, or images.[16]

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13   Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, "What Great Listeners Actually Do," *Harvard Business Review*, July 14, 2016, accessed July 28, 2023, https://hbr.org/2016/07/what-great-listeners-actually-do.

14   Cited in Adil Malia, "The Virtues of Listening," LinkedIn, July 24, 2016, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/virtues-listening-adil-malia/.

15   Ronald B. Adler and Russell F. Proctor II, *Looking Out Looking In* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning: 2017), 247-250.

16   Communications Department Blog, Saint Francis University, "Top 5 Reasons to

Wisdom

Beyond fair-mindedness and good listening, yet another virtue a communicator could attain through a General Education program is wisdom. Schwartz says,

> Wisdom is what enables us to find the balance (Aristotle called it the 'mean') between timidity and recklessness, between carelessness and obsessiveness, between flightiness and stubbornness, between speaking up and listening up, between trust and skepticism, between empathy and detachment . . . wisdom is what enables us to make difficult decisions among intellectual virtues that may conflict.[17]

This balance of wisdom is cultivated in copious ways throughout General Education. One example of this is within a college composition course. The writing process represents a series of steps involving the previous allusions to tenacity and work ethic. A stream of consciousness may come easily to a student, while considerations of tone and transition may not. Thus, reflection and developed wisdom are integral to writing and editing progression. A Communication Arts major may take this virtue beyond a General Education program and into a career and life where it is necessary to identify a central goal, like mitigating the damage of an organization's crisis event, and utilize wisdom to break down the goal into manageable steps (such as speaking to the media, constructing a response statement, and advising the company's president).

Intellectual Courage

Building on fair-mindedness, good listening, and wisdom, another central virtue of General Education is intellectual courage. Schwartz asserts students need this mettle to stand up for what they believe is true, even in the face

become a Communications Major," accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.francis.edu/blog/top-5-reasons-be-communications-major.

17   Schwartz, "Higher Education Should Be Education in Intellectual Virtues."

of collective disagreement from others.[18] Two unique courses within my college's General Education curriculum are Christian Worldview I and Christian Worldview II. This series represents goals of a deeper understanding and practice of a Christian worldview and a comparative analysis of it in comparison to other predominant worldviews.[19] Further stated, these classes challenge students to ascertain their comprehension of and appreciation for the biblical narrative, while inviting them to invoke this insight to love God and others.

Those who take on the challenges and rewards of the communication field will encounter the opportunity to interact interpersonally with others of varying beliefs, talents, and backgrounds. While the aforementioned good listening virtue may allow for deeper insight into the needs of others, intellectual courage is what will give our graduates a voice. Knowing who they are or can be in Christ within the context of a relationship with him, provides the foundational security of redemption and ongoing sanctification that sets students apart to honor him, continually, through their vocation.

Love of Truth/Honesty

Intellectual courage is built on both an innate love of truth and demonstration of honesty. Schwartz cautions against pitfalls in seeking a love of truth. Embracing relativism may make intellectual life easier; however, refusing to speak up or disagree with a fellow student removes the impulse to challenge any view or learn to make a case for a differing opinion.[20] Yet this complicity falls short of, at the least, a pursuit of truth, and an ideal love of it. General Education classes in areas like social sciences and patriotic education (the latter is unique to our GE curriculum) may invoke controversial and sometimes emotive issues, such as the current content of local, national, or international news stories. The abilities of respecting others' points of view and tenaciously

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18   Schwartz, "Higher Education Should Be Education in Intellectual Virtues."

19   *College of the Ozarks 2022-23 College Catalog*, accessed July 28, 2023, https://catalog. cofo.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=17&poid=3181.

20   Schwartz, "Higher Education Should Be Education in Intellectual Virtues."

holding onto to a dissenting position in an honest conversation can carry well beyond a General Education classroom.

King posits that we should reject the idea that merely expressing disagreement is always disagreeable and that with the state of public discourse today, it would be good if we didn't assume our own favored ends are so important that they automatically justify our being disagreeable.[21] The previously noted General Education public speaking course provides a platform for argumentation and allows students deep engagement in formal research, reasoning, organization, and vocalization of one's argument. Overcoming the myriad of anxieties associated with both process and performance and using communicative acts to invite others to truth is a complex and continual process.[22]

A communication graduate may likewise have occasion to serve as both mediator and advisor when facilitating the articulation of an organization's mission and/or vision statements. Audience-centered skills like building relationships, making strong group decisions, helping others navigate tedious situations, managing and mediating conflict, and working in teams in organizational settings of various representative cultures are relevant and desirable in all fields.[23] It is often up to a designated communicator to encapsulate others' thoughts and ideas on the central tenets of what an organization is all about, then to deliver this message to inside and outside publics. Clarity and unity in this process requires both a chasing of truth and demonstration of subsequent honesty, and the communication professional can set both critical thinking and consensus-building tones, keeping stakeholders engaged in this endeavor.

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21   Nathan King, "How Intellectual Virtues Can Help Us Build Better Discourse."

22   Jaffe, *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills For A Diverse Society*, 15.

23   Communication Management Degree Website, Azusa Pacific University, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.apu.edu/comm/programs/communication-major/.

Sense of Calling

Beyond fair-mindedness, good listening, wisdom, intellectual courage, and love of truth/honesty, another virtuous realization is within a student's sense of calling. Mitchell sums up sense of calling for the undergraduate phase in this manner:

> For Christians, college should be a place where we pursue truth, beauty, and holiness. All these are God's. We are called to the university for far more than training and accreditation leading to a job (or better job). We are called to know God more completely, and this means panting after all the truth we can take in. . . . Imagine what happens when our focus also has the big picture in mind, when it can look ahead to God's larger purpose for something. Real conviction of life follows.[24]

The earlier examined Christian Worldview II class within our General Education curriculum asks students to embark upon a reflection of the intersection of one's academic major and a Christian worldview. In the Communication Arts department, we utilize this contemplative paper as a part of a graduating senior's portfolio, which contains a culmination of the student's work within our department. We do this so our scholars will see that along with their news releases and short films, this paper that shows an understanding and articulation of the relationship between vocation and sense of calling must continue to merit lifelong consideration.

Humility

But recognizing a sense of calling must begin with a humble approach. Humility, notes Mitchell, recognizes we aren't God and don't know everything, and that when we identify this, we demonstrate growth in the ability to stay dependent upon the grace of God.[25] Within my college's General Education program, there are several applied fine arts course options required of all

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24   Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education."

25   Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education."

students. These include offerings in Drawing, Artistic Design, Theatrical Vocal and Movement Training, Dance Technique, and individual applied lessons or ensemble music options. Our student body is sometimes challenged with regard to natural ability in these areas. I can recall, for instance, my own struggle through an art class as an undergraduate. The professor told me my final project was artistically weak, but that she could tell I had tried really hard! I knew it was dull, and I was crestfallen by my lack of innate artistic ability. Yet, I was challenged to develop an appreciation of the area of artistic creation.

Communication majors are also sometimes discouraged by tussles with certain academic requirements. They may have natural prowess in speaking and writing, but not in the coding entailed with designing a website (required collateral coursework for many of our communication students). Yet recognizing one's limitations and cultivating growth in these areas can allow for future successes. When a community relations director of a not-for-profit organization is the only person physically present in an organization's branch office, he or she may need to draw upon memory of that humbling mindset toward coding and build the organization's website.

Perseverance and Hope

In culmination of these virtues one may take from General Education to a communication major and future career, the final virtues are perseverance and hope. These two virtues cultivate an attitude of patient endurance. Mitchell notes that it is during those times in one's college career when truth, beauty, and goodness are in scarce supply, the student must learn to cling to the hope that all will appear again.[26] Anyone with an undergraduate degree can recall these episodes of discouragement or even failure. In anticipation of these inevitable moments, we require newly admitted first-year and transfer students to take a course called Base Camp. According to the College of the Ozarks 2022-23 College Catalog, it is an academic orientation course, but also places emphasis on character strengths and habits students need

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26   Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education."

to grow in both their character and calling during their college experience.[27]

Another course our younger students take and that is a unique requirement of the my college's General Education coursework is in the area of swimming proficiency. Students may prove swimming ability by passing a test or taking a class. Some, as one could imagine, have a fear of water and procrastinate on meeting this degree condition. Immersion in the course (no pun intended) requires sincere perseverance for these undergraduates. But this isn't our only General Education-related course involving perseverance and hope. For example, some of our students must take developmental courses in writing and/or math before they may take the General Education courses in these areas. This requires these scholars to embrace tenacity and invest in their future coursework and eventual degrees.

Our Communication Arts students aren't immune to the need for perseverance and hope in academics and beyond. Some wrestle with certain complex academic subjects, both inside and outside of their major requirements. For instance, within the Communication Arts major is a course in communications law and ethics, where we delve, deeply, into court interpretations of the First and Fourteenth Amendments, exploring legal issues like libel and the right to privacy.[28] Class discussions in this senior-level course are weighty and require both cognitive complexity and interdisciplinary perspective.

Our majors may also experience hardships apart from campus life or toil to thrive at balancing jobs here and/or in the community with academic demands. But the challenge and subsequent fulfillment of all required in and out of the classroom at our institution immerses students in the need for perseverance and hope in one's life beyond graduation. When a work project is due, money is tight, and our graduates are still trying to honor God in their future families, churches, and communities, they will have the ability to look back on their undergraduate experience and recognize the great reward that results from a hopeful mindset and actionable perseverance.

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27   College of the Ozarks 2022-23 College Catalog.

28   Mitchell, "Why We Need Virtue and Spiritual Discipline in Our Education."

A Final Stop at the Communication Arts/Virtuous GE Intersection

This essay provides examples of how cultivation of the virtues of fair-mindedness, good listening, wisdom, intellectual courage, love of truth/honesty, sense of calling, humility, and perseverance/hope provide communication arts students with opportunities for personal development across the General Education curriculum. Faculty can recognize ongoing virtues enrichment as complementary to skills enhancement, bridging the gap between the virtue—skill dichotomy that may exist within a major field of study. While my students should strive for proficiency and even excellence in the subjects of new media theory, business and professional speaking, and communications law and ethics, they must, during and after this season of scholarship, reflect upon and glean guidance from these integrous foundations. For cultivation of intellectual virtues, Schwartz maintains, is not meant to be dichotomous with occupational training. Rather, it contributes to such guidance, aiding in the creation of a flexible, self-motivated, and humble workforce.[29]

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29   Schwartz, "Higher Education Should Be Education in Intellectual Virtues."
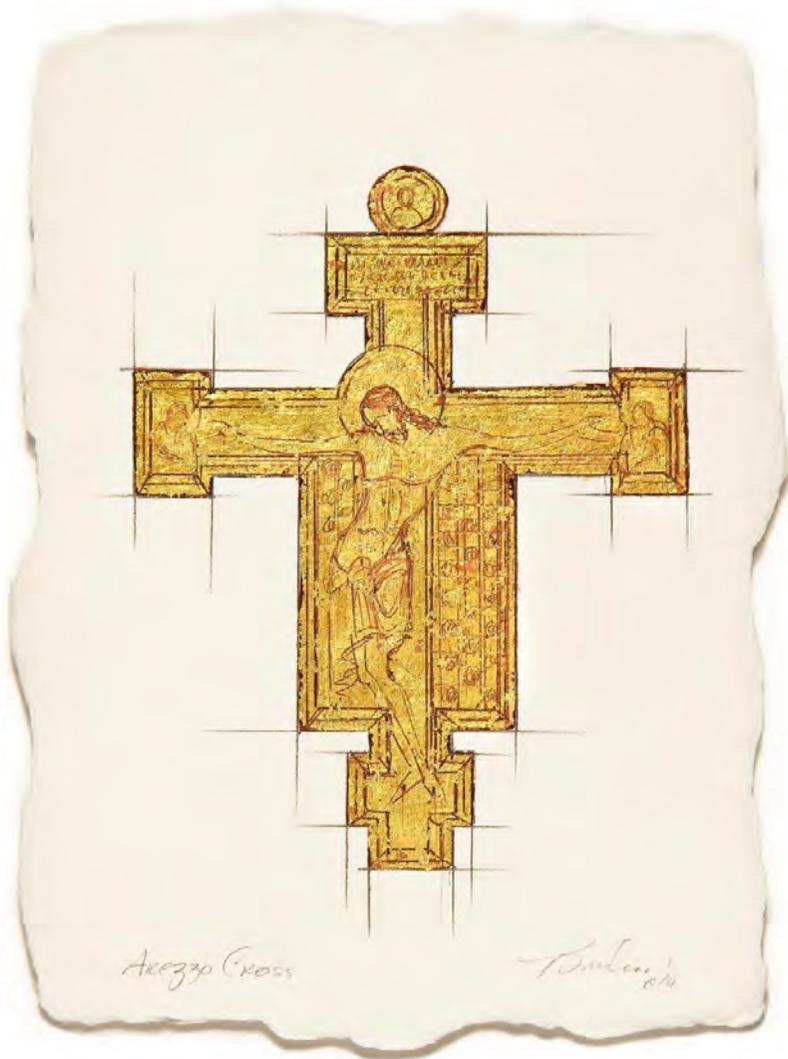
Arezzo Cross.
Sandra Bowden
Mixed media drawing with gold leaf on paper
2010, image courtesy of the artist

A CRUCIFORM IMAGINATION:
Theistic Philosophy as Literary Theory in Tolkien's The Hobbit

By Anthony Cirilla

The question I pose to students in my literature classes is, If the unifying premise of a college or university is the pursuit of knowledge and truth, why do we study literature in such a setting? Of course, knowledge of literature is information, but it is, at first blush, knowledge of the imaginary, of things which are not true. This question is even more pressing at a Christian college. The core answer I offer for consideration is that the mental faculty of imagination is an integral part of our God-given nature, and learning the craft of directing our imaginations is not secondary but essential to the Christian life. Developing a cruciform imagination, therefore, is the aim of studying literature within the Christian university setting, and I believe a powerful tool to this end is the use of theistic philosophy as an interpretive framework for approaching literature.[1] Because of his own explicit comments on the value of fantasy for developing an imagination more vividly capable of reflecting upon Christian truth, I use Tolkien's *Hobbit* as a case study for this perspective.

Christ's Call to a Cruciform Life

Cruciform is, of course, an architectural term for the traditional structure in which a church is built.[2] In liturgical churches across many denominations, it is

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1   As David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch put it, "Teachers are not only shaped by their own ways of imagining, they are engaged in influencing the imagination of those they teach. A teacher's imagination is a serious matter" (See, *Teaching and Christian Imagination* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 4-5).

2   See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), for a fuller discussion of internal and external church architecture and its historical developments.

customary to see crosses and crucifixes in the front and center of the sanctuary, so that when the individual enters the sacred space, the first thing seen is a reminder of Christ's finished work on the cross. The pulpit may have a cross, as may the benchwork, and typically there is even a cross hanging over the door so that Christ is kept at the forefront of one's mind even as the worshipper leaves the worship space. The cross is often printed as well on the bread of Holy Communion itself, signaling the central attention which is thus placed on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice for every facet of our attention, from the small details to the larger structure of our position in the world.[3] Hence the cruciform shape of many churches in this tradition are not simply a nice design touch, but a pedagogical tool for shaping our imaginations into a Christocentric attitude. In a church such as the Williams Memorial Chapel, it is not possible to see the cruciform shape in its entirety from many of its vantage points – standing in a pew in the back, for example, one remembers the cross-shaped space and completes it through memory. This basic principle of design becomes a physical metaphor for how we ought to imagine our lives, the world, and history itself – as cruciform in their fundamental structure.

Christ calls us to cruciform living as Christians, when he is reported six times throughout the Synoptic Gospels as exhorting his disciples to "take up the cross and follow me" (Mk 10:21, KJV).[4] The structure of this command is not trivial—to fully obey Christ, we cannot simply follow him, nor can we simply pick up our crosses. To do the former only risks the error of antinomianism,

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3   The cross has been criticized by some Christians, either as inappropriately remembering Christ's violent death when it is his resurrection which should be the object of our attention, or as a pernicious sign of pagan symbolism infiltrating the church. Of course, I do not intend to disparage churches which do not use the sign of the cross, but as to the latter theory that the cross is pagan in its origin, Bruce Longenecker provides a compelling account of the authenticity of the cross as a Christian symbol in *The Cross Before Constantine: The Early Life of a Christian Symbol* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

4   This specific instance is in fact a command to one who does not become Christ's disciple, namely the rich man. Interestingly, Mark is the only synoptic account of the story which includes the reference to the cross, and some translations gloss over the inclusion of *stauros* in the Greek received text. I use the King James Version as a matter of stylistic preference born of my own participation in the Anglican tradition, rather than out of any academic assertion regarding the translation.

living without recourse to our moral duties, and the latter risks the error of Pelagianism, making ourselves the primary referent of our moral improvement. You could say, in literary terms, that Christ provides a plot for the trajectory of our characters: we must do the work of taking up our crosses as a part of the process of following Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. Of course, in three of the synoptic parallels where Christ's command is recorded (Matt 16:24, Mk 8:34, and Lk 9:23), he is preparing his followers for the inevitability of persecution and, more specifically, for the possibility of martyrdom in his name. However, in one of the three parallel moments, Christ specifies that the would-be disciple must "take up his cross *daily,* and follow me" (Lk 9:23, KJV). This suggests something beyond the exclusive sense of readiness for the possibility of martyrdom: it suggests a way of life.

Indeed, when Christ speaks this proverb for the first time in Matthew 10:38, it is not to strengthen his disciples in the face of persecution, but to underscore the need to develop a perspective which puts Christ before anything, including familial relationships. That Christ intends the attitude of Christians bearing their crosses in pursuit of a life centered around him beyond the possibility of death is even more clear in Luke 14:27, where he says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple," and compares this perspective of bearing our crosses towards His cross to the work of planning out the building of a tower or a king overseeing the affairs of his kingdom:

> For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Lk 14: 28-33, KJV)

Yes, Christ prepares us in these verses for the possibility of a cruciform death, but he also impresses upon our imaginations the call to a cruciform life.

Christ thus imports the power of metaphor to the cross, turning a literally gruesome form of execution into a concept that is imaginatively far afield from the associations with the cross attendant upon the minds of his disciples. As Susan Gallagher and Roger Lundin point out, "The two words translated as *cross* in English are *xylon* and *stauros* in Greek, and before the crucifixion of Jesus both words pointed primarily to the shame and degradation associated with crucifixion in the ancient world."[5] In the passage from Luke 14, Christ not only uses the metaphor of carrying one's cross to help his audience understand what following him requires; he explains *that* metaphor with two illustrations: the process of building a tower and a king's duties when considering waging war. The metaphor of carrying the cross thus gives way to narration, hence "the word cross emerged with dramatically different, rich, and authoritative meanings which would have profound significance for Christians through the ages."[6] It would be surprising that Christ uses metaphor at the juncture of defining what it means to be his disciple, until we recall that he used around thirty-six parables throughout the Synoptic Gospels—indeed, parables make up nearly a third of the entirety of Christ's recorded utterances. Metaphoric narrative resounds throughout the teachings of Christ, and so there is a strong case to be made that both the production and appreciation of literature can have a robust place within one's walk with the Lord.

That being said, if literature is to be a part of the Christian walk, including Christian education, it must contribute in a meaningful way to the cross-conforming work of a Christ-centered life. Arguments which start with literature itself, however, begin in the wrong place. It is not in the nature of *literature*, but in the nature of *humans*, where the value of encountering literature can be perceived.[7] The integral place of imagination within human nature mani-

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5   Susan V. Gallagher and Roger Lundin, *Literature through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 21.

6   Gallagher and Lundin, *Literature*, 22.

7   I think this is the cause of much of the confusion behind the postmodernist questions

fests in the creation story as well as within Christ's teaching of the two great commandments.

When we read in Genesis 1:26, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth," we learn that image-making, the fundamental meaning of the word imagination, is the conceit which God employed in our very creation, and that just as we mirror God within the structure of the natural world, we also signify the natural world in our role as stewards over it.[8] Humans, as medieval writers would put it, are a microcosm of the earthly and divine. In other words, we are the imaginative reflection of the unity of Creator with His creation—or we were, at least, before the Fall. As John Anonby puts it, "The supreme Creator, God himself, has endowed human beings with creative propensities which reflect, in a small measure, his image in us."[9] Imagination is thus central both in our worship of God, because it is the faculty by which we identify the pattern of divinity that he placed within us, and it is the faculty by which we perceive the pattern of godly behavior that ought to guide our actions in regards to others.

This is made explicit in Christ's teaching of the two greatest commandments: "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Lk 10:27, KJV). If we are to fulfill Christ's commandment of loving God with our whole nature, then we must include within it our capacity for imagination, for our hearts and minds operate in virtue of

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of literature, which at best ignore, or at worst, assault the fundamental conceptions of human nature to be found in the Judeo-Christian worldview.

8   I do not of course mean to suggest that imagination is the *only*, or even the *primary*, theological sense of what it means to be made in the image of God—that would be deeply reductive in comparison to the discursive history of the term. I only mean to say that imagination is clearly a *component* of what is imparted by Scripture in this – our capacity for imagination is indispensable for the production of images, and is itself necessary to begin to contemplate what Scripture means by this teaching. See Richard J. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005) for a relatively recent interpretation of this fundamental notion.

9   John A. Anonby, "A Christian Perspective on English Literature," in *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy*, ed. Deane E. D. Downey and Stanley E. Porter (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 234.

that essential power. Of course, therefore, to love our neighbor as ourselves we must envision through imagination what constitutes a godly self-love and enact that love with equal measure towards others—so we must behave towards others in a way which conforms to our imaginative apprehension of the *Imago Dei* which they reflect in the same way we do. It is in the careful study and cultivation of love for "the wonder of written language" wherein this capacity can be profoundly advanced.[10]

Imagination: More than Imaginary

We cannot define the imagination as merely the faculty of pretending or making up the imaginary. This is for two reasons: first, such a definition short-changes our ability to understand and employ the function of imagination within daily life, and secondly, as a result, it truncates our ability to comprehend how the production of imaginary scenarios could inform our lives. When we think of pretending merely as an escape or a playtime, then it seems like merely a pleasant diversion from the business of real life.[11] A better definition of imagination, I think, is that it is the faculty of perception by which we see true patterns which exist between phenomena, and that it is therefore the imagination which allows us to reason about the data which we perceive through the sensory system. This definition can be derived from the theistic philosopher Boethius, who says the following in his *Consolation of Philosophy:*

> Man himself also, sense, imagination, reason and intelligence
> look at in different ways. For sense examines the shape set
> in the underlying matter, imagination the shape alone without

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10   Anonby, "A Christian Perspective on English Literature," 234.

11   David Smith and Susan Felch make this point in the context of centering the importance of imagination for pedagogical purposes: "We often associate imagination with creativity or fantasy… But that's only one side of what our ability to imagine allows us to do. Exercising imagination need not mean inventing things; it's also a way of putting things in context and knowing where we really are… This side of our imagination is active every day as we process the perspectives on the world that come at us from others and frame our own intentions and actions" (*Teaching and Christian Imagination*, 3).

matter; while reason surpasses this too, and examines with a universal consideration the specific form itself, which is present in single individuals. But the eye of intelligence is higher still.[12]

In other words, our senses provide the experiences from which our imagination derives patterns, so that we can then reason about the significance of those patterns. Literature, under this understanding, is thus a pattern seeking effort on the part of the imagination to derive shape without matter from our experiences, so that we can think more clearly about those experiences. Tolkien echoes this philosophical understanding of imagination in *On Fairy Stories*, where he provides his understanding of fantasy:

> The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect, and it should appropriately be called Imagination. . . . Art [is] the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. . . . Fantasy . . . does not destroy or even insult Reason . . . On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make.[13]

Under this view, the goal of writers of literature should not be to fabricate lies, but to use the power of imagination to make more explicit the patterns of life. However fantastic the productions of imagination may be, they are fantastic to the end of making vivid perceptions which the writer deems efficacious at illuminating some truth which ordinarily can only be glimpsed in day-to-day life.

According to the conception provided by Tolkien and Boethius, therefore, the purpose of crafting or encountering vivid imaginative experiences is to provide our reason with richer patterns that allow us to contemplate logical truths about God and His creation more deeply. It may be asked, however, why one might use theistic philosophy for literary interpretation rather than

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12   Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy, in Boethius: Theological Tractates, The Consolation of Philosophy,* trans. S. J. Tester (Boston, MA: Harvard UP, 1973), B.5.

13   J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, in Tree and Leaf (Hammersmith: HarperCollins, 2001), 47-55.

applying biblical theology to texts directly. As shall be seen, the theistic philosophers attempt to understand those truths which Scripture says are known even to the Gentiles without the special revelations of the Holy Spirit as found in the Bible. Romans 1, for example, teaches that the unbeliever has no excuse; Acts 17 teaches that it is possible even for pagans to know that it is in God in whom we live and move and have our being; and if every good as well as every perfect gift comes from the Father of Heavenly Lights as James wrote in his epistle, then it is possible to know goodness through God's created order even apart from Scriptural understanding.[14] This is not to undercut the necessity of Scripture within the Christian life, but rather to underscore that Scripture itself points us to epistemic resources in the world by which we are to better know God and by extension to understand His Word.[15] We could not, for example, understand Christ's parables if we had no knowledge of how the world worked. Scripture provides the final authority by which we learn God's Truth, yet all truth belongs to God, and we should avail ourselves

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14   One can believe this and also believe, as I do, what is stated in many descriptions of Christian faith, such as the 39 Articles of Religion: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation" (*The 1928 Book of Common Prayer,* 603).

15   In "A Christian Perspective on Philosophy," Phillip Wiebe puts it this way: "While the sources of knowledge concerning mundane things are the senses and the power of reason to reflect on what the senses teach, knowledge about spiritual matters is found, at least in part, through a wisdom that is not of this world. This source of knowledge typically does not replace the ordinary sources we employ in relation to everyday events; rather, it supplements that which is normally available. There does not need to be any conflict between holding that revelation is a source of additional knowledge and believing that most of our knowledge is acquired through the senses and the natural reasoning powers with which people are endowed" (359).
Scripture retains pride of place, in a theistic point of view, for revealing the sacred truths necessary to salvation; but in order to understand its revelations more perfectly, disciplines which cultivate our rational and sensory knowledge are still useful. Philosophy thus provides, in Wiebe's conception, a "mundane" (not specially revealed) source of knowledge by which we can better understand truth in general, as well as the truth revealed in Scripture. See Phillip H. Wiebe, "A Christian Perspective on Philosophy," *in Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy*, ed. Deane E. D. Downey and Stanley E. Porter (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009).

of those resources wherever they prove useful to increasing our knowledge.

Philosophy is also helpful for reading literature for two reasons: it helps us to acknowledge problems of interpretation, and it allows us to read literature without falling prey to the instinct to simply allegorize literature to force from it a scriptural meaning (or alternatively to assume it is flatly contrary to scriptural meaning). Of course, Christians must realize that the inerrant truth of God's Word does not mean that our *interpretation* of Holy Writ is inerrant, and so philosophical interpretation of other texts can hone our skills for proper interpretation of the Bible.[16]

Secondly, although the purpose of literature is not necessarily always to illustrate Christian truth, this does not mean that it is antagonistic to Christian truth. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, labors to interrogate the evils of racism that undergird the institution of slavery, and while Twain's perspective is notoriously far from Christian, the conscientious follower of God can nonetheless learn a great deal from reading his narrative carefully. Theistic philosophy can help us to investigate the way in which *natural* revelation (as depicted in Scripture) emerges from productions of imagination.

Theology as an approach to literature certainly can be and has been fruitful, but it is, in Boethius's epistemic terminology, two orders higher than the faculty of imagination—it uses revelations from the divine intellect to study productions of human imagination. Using instead the constructs of human reason, *guided* by faith in divine imagination, to interpret human imagination allows for a more thorough exploration of natural revelation as it may appear within the context of metaphor and narrative. Anselm calls this approach "Faith seeking understanding," where the individual uses reason to explore how to understand a Scriptural teaching from within the framework

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16   David Lyle Jeffrey and Gregory Maillet discuss this in greater detail in *Christianity and Literature: Philosophicla Foundations and Critical Practice* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011): "Christian literature often requires of its readers not only an interpretive response that attempts to understand textual meaning accurately, but also an evaluative response that calls one, in the light of the gospel, to an aesthetic, moral or intellectual transformation" (36).

of human epistemology, a process which requires recourse to the epistemic power of imagination.[17] This approach allows the interpreter of literature to avoid excessive allegorizing of a text's symbolism to force it to accord with specific doctrines (although exploring how they may or may not accord is of course valuable and even essential), while still allowing the Christian to use the given piece of literature as an occasion to contemplate her relationship with God and neighbor.

Cruciform Narratology and Theistic Philosophy: Character, Plot, and Setting

Theistic philosophy, therefore, is to my mind a useful tool for investigating how productions of imagination can be used to develop a mind more deeply focused on God. Although there are multiple avenues one might take for the application of this argument, in the following section I will argue that theistic philosophers like Boethius, Descartes, and Berkeley help us to understand how the fundamental components of narrative help us to reflect on our orientation towards God, as shown in the chart below. Essentially, each theistic philosopher's intellectual inquiry helps us to understand rationally what the divine intellect has revealed in Scripture, their arguments each having, I contend, association with one of the classic three fundamentals of narrative – character, setting, and plot. Their ideas can then be applied to *The Hobbit* in this framework, serving as a case study for our discussion of interpreting literature's imaginative value from a philosophically theistic point of view.

Character and God's Goodness: Boethius

The Boethian theme of what constitutes true goodness, and so authentic identity, emerges as essential to the reader's appreciation of Bilbo's character

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17   Anselm's humble approach to theistic philosophy is an inspiring example for the Christian intellectual to follow: "I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand" (See, Anselm, *Proslogion,* in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans [Oxford: OUP, 1998], 87).

development. Assuming his conception of the word "good" is self-evident, Bilbo tells Gandalf, "Good morning!" Gandalf, with (mostly) pretended curmudgeonly pedantry, asks, "What do you mean? . . . Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?"[18] Bilbo replies, "All of them at once." This is an admittedly smooth reply but one that passes up the opportunity to appreciate Gandalf's fundamental point: our use of the word "good" is rather careless and perhaps often entirely a mistake. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is at its root a meditation on how worldly goods do not satisfy the soul but instead point us to God as the basis for happiness and therefore the basis for identity, since what makes us happy is a powerful way to understand who we are. Bilbo is indeed accustomed especially to the creature comforts of the Hobbit's lifestyle, which in the main prize pleasure and perhaps just enough wealth and honor to sup-

Philosopher	Theme Verse	Philosophical Contribution	Literary Application: Tolkien's *Hobbit*
Boethius (Character)	James 1 Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of heavenly lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning	Through Greco-Roman philosophy, Boethius shows that all human pursuits for happiness, when treated as self-sufficient, leave us unsatisfied and even harmed: only God can be the true source of happiness and so the only basis for the establishment of our identities	Character: Prompted by a Boethian mentor figure, Bilbo discovers that his true identity is not sufficiently manifested in the comfort of the Hobbit's world
Descartes (Plot)	Romans 1: the unbeliever has no excuse	The act of trusting our own minds for judgement logically requires that we believe there is a God who ensures truth, or else there can be no certain answer	Plot: Bilbo discovers new ways of thinking and acting in the world which allow him to become a force of the plot itself
Berkeley (Setting)	Acts 17 It is in God in whom we live and move and have our being	Our tendency to imagine matter as inert, lifeless "stuff" impiously, and irrationally, forgets the dependence of every created thing upon the immediate glory of God	Setting: Bilbo comes to understand a greater sense of how his life in the Shire depends on the larger politics in Mirkwood, & that he is "only a little fellow after all"

Figure 1: Theistic Philosophy and the Elements of Narrative

port the pursuit of that pleasure. This principle of Hobbit life is set out at the very beginning:

> In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit . . . it was a

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18   J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1937), 18.

> hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. . . . This hobbit was a
> very well to do hobbit, and his name was Baggins . . . peo-
> ple considered [the Bagginses] very respectable, not only
> because most of them were rich, but also because they
> never had any adventures or did anything unexpected.[19]

We could say, based on this description, that Hobbits arrange the Boethian goods to place pleasure at the top of the list, and subordinate those things which threaten it—such as a desire for power or glory, which could lead to adventures or unexpected behavior. Sensible as this may seem, however, the reader might find a society such as Bilbo's with no sense of adventure to be somewhat disturbing. And indeed, the commands of Christ to take up one's cross and follow him could never be obeyed under a strictly Hobbitish way of life, for selling all of one's possessions, giving up one's way of life, and surrendering one's autonomy to another all certainly fall underneath the category of unexpected, I daresay adventurous behavior.

Gandalf functions as a catalyst for Bilbo's character development in a manner similar to Boethius's Lady Philosophy, in the respect that both Gandalf and Lady Philosophy push their protagonists to consider a wider range of possibilities than they would in the inertia of their emotional states (Boethius in grief and Bilbo in comfort). Lady Philosophy encourages Boethius to see beyond his immediate appraisal of worldly goods to see that they are not as satisfying as they seem, requiring a refinement of imagination to grasp. Through Gandalf's influence, Bilbo is summoned out of his comfort zone to the imagined grandeur of the worldly goods favored by the dwarves—namely, great wealth, power, and a position of status in the world. The Dwarf song casts a poetic gleam over the more challenging goods which Bilbo has not before desired:

> We must away ere break of day
> To seek the pale enchanted gold . . .

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19   Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* 15.

For ancient king and elvish lord
There many a gleaming golden hoard
They shaped and wrought,
And light they caught
To hide in gems on hilt of sword (27).

Bilbo's character is stretched and expanded by the quest Gandalf pushes him to undertake, such that by the end of it he is no longer entirely satisfied by the "respectable" desires of Hobbits. Returning from his journey to the Lonely Mountain, Bilbo stops suddenly and recites spontaneously a profoundly stirring poem, "Roads go ever on," which suggests that, although he is glad to be home, Bilbo realizes that he has changed and this place will never be home in quite the same way. He has somewhat outgrown the Hobbitish satisfaction in pleasure, which Lady Philosophy critiques in a poem of her own, saying that pleasure "flees, and strikes our hearts/With a too lasting sting" (3.m7.259).

Pleasure cannot ever fully satisfy, and the road goes ever on—our nature cannot be fulfilled in Bilbo's comfortable home, just as Lady Philosophy warned Boethius against identifying himself with his temporal goods. At the same time, Bilbo is also not entirely satisfied by the worldly goods which the Dwarves loved, seeing their capacity to corrupt the individual first-hand, a poignant moment because it mirrors the moment when their poem stirred in him the longing for a greater identity which prompted him to undergo this journey in the first place. Led from satisfaction in one temporal good to desire for another, Bilbo is brought to a state of dissatisfaction with the worldly goods as comprising the full definition of goodness itself—just as Gandalf had prompted him to consider at the outset of the narrative. He has a glimpse, and so do readers, of the full texture of what it means to believe that "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of heavenly lights," the teaching from James which is the core Scriptural insight running through Boethian philosophy. Wherever the fullest satisfaction of Bilbo's heart lies, it is not in Hobbit meals or Dwarf gold or Elven crowns—and the Christian reader is reminded that desire's satisfaction resides within the Lord's Supper, the

jeweled city of Heaven, and the crowns we will someday cast before the Throne.

Plot and God's Truth: Descartes

Where Boethius provides a philosophical means to understand character development in terms of how individuals define their identity based on what they call Good (and that, ultimately, only God can be so called), Descartes provides a means by which the demands of plot upon the character and the reader reveal an invisible faith in the truth of God which undergirds action.[20] When the Dwarves sing, it produces an effect upon Bilbo's imagination: "As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves" (28). Boethius noted (through his character Lady Philosophy) that people do not fully understand their motivations towards temporal goods; Descartes offers insight into why this is by distinguishing between an imagination which is more bodily and one which is more to do with the soul. Soulful imagination, fundamentally, is the result of a motion of will "that causes the mind" to "imagine something that does not exist."[21] But the bodily imagination can also be excited by objects of imagination to generate *passion*—that is to say, imagination can cause us to develop longings or desires without us willing to do so.[22] These imaginative pas-

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20   Thomas Pavel explores aspects of the Cartesian legacy in literary history, as well as pointing out that Descartes' own philosophical project is marked by an archetypal plot, the chivalric romance: "This type of tale, whose plot has been traced back to archaic initiation rites, provided the human imagination with one of its most productive narrative schemata. It became virtually indispensable for narratives of foundation, whether social, religious, or, as in Descartes' case, epistemological." See Thomas Pavel, "Essay 8: Literature and the Arts," in René René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. David Weissman (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1996), 355.

21   Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, 204.

22   Descartes discusses the distinction between the bodily and soulful imagination in Articles 20 and 21, then writes in Article 26, "The imaginations that depend purely on the random movement of the spirits can also be passions just as much as the perceptions

sions thus create in us an intention to seek fulfillment of desires for things which may not necessarily exist in our immediate empirical experience. This is akin, in fact, to Tolkien's belief that the purpose of fairy stories is to fulfill desires of the heart.[23]

Of course, Descartes is disturbed by the notion that our imaginations (as well as our senses and reason) might mislead us, and so the purpose of his *Meditation* is to create an epistemic framework to defend against such deceptions. Bilbo does not engage in so sustained a philosophical reflection as Descartes to determine whether the claim that going on an adventure is a good idea, and yet the "uncomfortable dreams" (39) he is left with by the Dwarf song puts him in a similar epistemic angst. Bilbo cannot discern whether the emotional impact of his dreams should in fact influence his actions in the waking world, a practical corollary to the Cartesian concern over whether we live in the world or in a waking dream. As with Descartes' consideration that he cannot be certain whether he is awake or asleep, Bilbo cannot be certain whether the Dwarf song-inspired dream is meaningful or not. In other words, the crucial plot point of Bilbo's decision to accompany the dwarves is born of his desire to know whether the longings for adventure communicate something true about reality.

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that depend on the nerves" (206). In the Cartesian understanding of the soul and body, it is heat from the heart which refines air in the blood (oxygen, essentially) so that the soul can interact with it via the pineal gland. Although Descartes' understanding was scientifically primitive, it was not the "ghost in the machine" conception it has been portrayed to be by his detractor Gilbert Ryle (1949). Article 30 of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* is "That the soul is united equally to all the parts of the body" (207), and he uses the analogy of a clock merely to illustrate the idea that the body's functions can be understood in a physical way. His understanding of the soul's interaction with the body is more hydraulic than mechanical – the soul must, one could say, swim in the passions of the body and exert stewardship over them to produce more rational actions. Imagination is central to this function.

23   Tolkien writes, "The magic of Faerie is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires." See *On Fairy Stories*, 13.

It may have come as some surprise that the famous Cartesian "cogito" was not used in this discussion to analyze Bilbo's character development, for "I think, therefore I am" seems at first to be a philosophical proclamation of identity. Of course, there is truth to this supposition, and there is a kinship between the Boethian argument for identity residing properly only in God's goodness and the Cartesian argument for certain truth residing properly only in God's nature. But this seems to be interpreting Descartes in light of the developments of Cartesianism, and infusing "ego" with associations of Romanticism or psychology which did not, properly speaking, exist when he coined these words.

Rather than a philosophical experience of self, I think it is more fitting the spirit of Descartes' cogito to regard it as an *event*: the self comes to a *moment* where it realizes that deception and self-existence are mutually inclusive. In his *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes emphasizes his philosophical system as more like a type of *genre* than a type of personality, a genre for actions which may or may not work for others: "But regarding this Treatise simply as a history, or, if you prefer it, a fable in which, amongst certain things which may be imitated, there are possibly others also which it would not be right to follow."[24] Furthermore, Descartes *strips away* all associations of self in his attempt to come to the undoubtable premise, and casts his discovery of the cogito as a moment in a story: "So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true" (64). This is not the self-congratulatory statement it is sometimes taken to be, for the next move Descartes makes is to acknowledge that *because* he is certain that he exists, he is even more certain of something else: *that he is a being which makes mistakes in judgement* (*Meditations* 70-75). This being the case, he realizes he cannot depend upon himself for truth. But if his own existence is a certain truth, then his acknowledgement of that truth cannot come from himself, an error-prone being: rather, it must stem from an infallible source of truth, for the discovery of self-existence, which must be true, cannot have its

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24   Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, 5.

source in an uncertain being such as himself (*Meditations* 75-83). By facing the evil demon of doubt, Descartes argues, he has not proven his *character*, but followed a *trajectory*: he has discovered the philosophical plot undergirding the Scriptural truth that "the unbeliever has no excuse" for disbelieving in the invisible God.

Bilbo's dark cave is not one of such finely tuned metaphysical doubts, but instead one of dark forests, caverns, and castles filled with monsters. The most Cartesian elements of the plot emerge in Bilbo's encounter with the Gollum and his possession of the One Ring. When Bilbo awakens in the cavern where Gollum dwells, "When Bilbo opened his eyes, he wondered if he had; for it was just as dark as with them shut" (76). Bilbo has entered into a place, as with Descartes, where he can no longer trust his senses. Similar in emotional impact to how Descartes portrays himself carefully exploring the mental darkness of a world plunged into doubt, Bilbo slowly "got up and groped about on all fours till he touched the wall of the tunnel" (76). Groping in metaphysical darkness, Descartes encountered the disturbing idea that reality itself might be an illusion from a deceptive being: "some evil genius not less powerful than deceitful has employed his whole energies in deceiving me . . . I may at least do what is in my power and with firm purpose avoid giving credence to any thing . . . imposed upon by this arch deceiver" (62).

Finding himself in the disquieting presence of the Gollum, Bilbo must trade riddles in the dark with an evil demon cut down to Hobbit-size, questioning not whether he can know any truth for certain but testing nonetheless whether he can see through deceptively worded descriptions and see the truth which lies behind them. Bilbo does not actually figure out the last riddle, the answer to which is "Time," but only happens to ask for more of it, thus accidentally tricking Gollum into thinking he had solved the riddle. Descartes stole from the evil demon's deception the certain truth that he exists, even if his whole body is a mystery to him; this insight becomes the magic talisman, so to speak, by which Descartes enters back into the certain light of God's truth. Likewise, Bilbo steals from Gollum the deceptively powerful One Ring that causes his sensible body to disappear, empowering Bilbo not only to escape

the clutches of his demonic counterpart but to find his way back to the Dwarves and Gandalf.

Having restored security in his place in the world, Bilbo is able to then return to fulfill his social obligations. In a parallel sense, once one re-covers belief in the God who created the world, and in loving him, we are thus equipped to meet the demands of the second greatest com-mandment. It is not until undergoing the trans-formative experience of meeting his own evil demon that Bilbo is equipped, like Descartes, to believe in a more essential self than meets the eye of his companions. Just as character development depends upon the events of the plot, Descartes' certainty about judgments in the world depends upon the event of discovering that God's truth confronts him in the working of his own mind. And as Bilbo discovers in the riddle game with Gollum, truth is more complicated than it may seem to one's initial perceptions, and a narrow road of contemplation must be followed to find the next stage in the journey.[25]

Setting and God's Providence: Berkeley[26]

Character and plot are, of course, inextricably intertwined, because it is the actions of characters which substantially define plots—even when the plot is profoundly informed by natural disasters, our interest is cap-tivated by the human response to those events. What happens provides the basis from which the character acts and responds, and subsequent character behavior further changes the story: so the action of the plot

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25 The hero's journey, a concept discussed in great detail by figures such as Joseph Campbell, Lord Raglan, Otto Rank, Maureen Murdock, and many others, is applicable here, and helpful because the framework of the monomyth recognizes archetypal parallels of cognitive progression that work across both philosophical and narratological lines. There is not sufficient space, unfortunately, to unpack the associations here.

26 Costica Bradatan's *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* produces a charitable reading of the philosopher's work, regarding him as more in line with the theological traditions of the Church Fathers and medieval scholasticism than is generally understood.

and the quality of the character develop concomitantly. But setting provides the fundamental basis by which we experience the *reality* of the actions undertaken by the characters, for it is the sense that they are really in some place, and sensitivity to the atmosphere of those places, which provides the compelling sense that a story, even an imaginary one, is in some sense "true" – what Tolkien refers to in *On Fairy Stories* as "Secondary Belief": "To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft" (49). Few fantasy writers ascend to Tolkien's mastery of this skill, which is why Middle Earth continues to stand out as a setting which compels the imagination long after the books initially saw printing in the middle of the 20th century. Setting is where characters, as Paul would put it in Acts 17, "live and move and have their being," and much as Bilbo lives and moves and has his being in the language of Tolkien's world-building, we live in the divine imagination of God's creation. Acts 17 is in fact, according to George Berkeley himself, the basis for Berkeley's philosophical rejection of the concept of prime matter, articulating as he does the notion that God communicates directly to us through his creation (an idea also found in Romans 1, which Descartes also regarded as central to his perspective). Just as Berkeley's philosophical system emphasizes that every experience in creation points to its Creator, Bilbo's experiences in Middle Earth point him to the realization that reality depends on a mysterious benevolence beyond his control.

Berkeley's initially puzzling claim that prime matter does not exist parallels Bilbo's discovery of a meaning in the structure of his world that goes deeper than the immediate question of his safety and satisfaction. When Berkeley argues that matter does not exist, it must not be mistaken for arguing that *things* do not exist. He writes, "[T]he sun that I see by day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is the idea of the former. In the sense here given of *reality*, it is evident that every vegetable, star, mineral, and in general each part of the mundane system, is as much

a *real being* by our principles as by any other."[27] What he denies is the existence of "inert senseless matter" or, put another way, a "senseless, unperceived substance" (55). This is Berkeley's famous *dicta* that *to be is to be perceived*: "the very existence of an unthinking being consists in *being perceived*" (63). This is not solipsism: "It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles, that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between *our* perception of them" (44, italics mine), because though we may come and go, existing realities are perceived continually by "the eternal mind of the Creator" (64).

This provides a philosophical basis for why Tolkien insists in *On Fairy Stories* that "if elves are true, and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them."[28] Elves, we could say, are the human imagination's intuitive grasp of the idea that *thought* inhabits even the most secret places, an intuition we materialize by populating hidden forest glens and shadowy grottos with clandestine observers. It is no wonder then that as Bilbo passes from the sphere of his familiar world in the Shire on his path to Mirkwood that he encounters elves: " 'Hmm! It smells like elves!' thought Bilbo, and he looked up at the stars. They were burning bright and blue. Just then there came a burst of song like laughter in the trees" (57). Bilbo reflexively looks heavenward as he intuits the presence of hidden observers, elves who serve as a reminder that even the wildest places in Middle Earth may be inhabited by perceiving beings. They are, of course, not God, but as what *The Silmarillion* calls the First Children of Iluvatar, they are local manifestations of the grand truth that the whole history of Middle Earth is known to its Creator as was recounted in the *Ainulindale*.

The "unsuspecting Bilbo" (17) we encounter at the beginning of *The*

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27   George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 39.

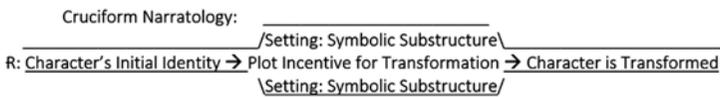28   Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, 10.

Hobbit becomes increasingly aware that the meaning of events as they happen to him must be interpreted in the larger framework of the *meaning* of the world around him, an insight which is of a piece with Berkeley's philosophical rejection of prime matter. For Berkeley, just as we infer the existence of conscience within other men based on our experience of their shape and behavior, once we eliminate the confusion produced by belief in prime matter, we immediately realize that each sensation we experience in the material world is directed by Providence: "[T]hose things which are called the works of Nature, that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on the wills of men," and since they cannot have their reality in something fundamentally insensible and inert (for to be must be to be perceived), "There is therefore some other spirit that causes them, since it is repugnant that they should subsist by themselves" (89). So just as we take the movements of a human body to be directed by the will of a human mind, "everything we see, hear, feel or anywise perceive by sense, [as] being a sign or effect of the Power of God" (91). Our material setting is thus not in any respect removed from God by an uncreated prime matter unknown to the Creator, but instead is the created manifestation of "a spirit . . . which continually affects us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short, *in whom we live, and move, and have our being*" (91).[29]

Although Bilbo does not contemplate the existence of God in *The Hobbit*, he grows into a deeper appreciation of the world as a place imbued with intelligible significance. On his journey back to the Shire, stopping to rest in Rivendell, he hears the elves sing, "Sing all ye joyful, now sing all together!" invoking the familiar hymn, "O come all ye faithful," for Christian readers, an archetypal signal that Bilbo has learned to adore something more fundamental in the world than his own material needs.
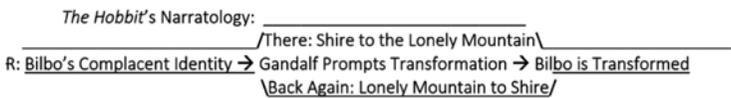
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29   This should not be understood as pantheism, because insofar as God *knows* the material substrate in which we and our surroundings exist, that material is, in Berkeley's conception, a passive result of God's active creation, and therefore *not* God or parts of Him.

This awareness is reflected in his own poem, alluded to earlier, which he recites upon returning home: "Roads go ever on/under cloud and under star,/Yet feet that wander have gone/Turn at last to home afar" (283-284). Gandalf remarks, upon hearing this, "You are not the hobbit that you were" (284). That Bilbo has come to glimpse faith in providence as manifested in the wandering roads of Middle Earth is gestured at in his words to Balin: "Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!" Bilbo interprets his own life at first in a setting of insensible things, but comes to learn that he lives in a world of prophecy—a world whose past, present, and future are under the observation of a knowing intelligence. Gandalf, fittingly as a Maia in disguise, affirms this proto-theistic take on setting which Bilbo has begun to develop: "And why should they not prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?" (286) A manifestation of that hidden spirit which is beyond "mere luck," the Elves serve as a threshold from the safe world of the Shire to the dangerous world of Mirkwood and the Lonely Mountain, and the movement back creates a chiasmic structure so that the plot of Bilbo's character development overlays the setting. In other words, the setting is not an inert, objective landscape over which his life occurs—it is instead what Jordan Peterson would call a "map of meaning" over which Bilbo's character develops. As such, as Gandalf reminds Bilbo at the end of the narrative, the Hobbit cannot understand his story only in light of his and his fellow creatures' perspectives: he must see that *Middle Earth* itself yields perspective, and he is comforted by this perception. Gandalf says, "You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" (287). Accepting this reminder, Bilbo replies, "Thank goodness!" (287) Thank *Goodness*, indeed. Behind the setting of Middle Earth, much to Bilbo's gratitude, there is reason to suppose an author perceiving the structural core of the world which informs, but is itself not reducible to, the agendas of the characters who act within it.

Theistic philosophy has allowed us to see that the basic elements of character, plot, and setting help us to develop our imaginations in a way which better perceives how our identities, our actions and our place in the world should be understood in the light of God's goodness, truth, and beauty. Without doing violence to the narrative by turning it into an allegory, we can instead use who the story of *The Hobbit* happens to, how it happens, and where it happens, as the philosophical basis by which our imaginations are enriched by encountering this narrative. With the character development of Bilbo throughout the novel being the entry point by which we become invested in the plot to which he is subjected, our attention towards his plot-driven identity formation is flanked by the symbolic substructure afforded by the world Tolkien envisions. We can depict theistic philosophy as producing a cruciform narratology in this way:

Cruciform Narratology: _____

_____/Setting: Symbolic Substructure_____

R: <u>Character's Initial Identity</u> → Plot Incentive for Transformation → <u>Character is Transformed</u>

\<u>Setting: Symbolic Substructure</u>/

R is representative of the reader, whose attention rests on the character (or characters) and what happens to him (or them), with that attention flanked by the symbolic substructure which may arrest the reader's attention but which overall serves to give an imaginative space for the character's development to occur. Applied to *The Hobbit*, we can put it this way:

The Hobbit's Narratology: _____

_____/There: Shire to the Lonely Mountain_____

R: <u>Bilbo's Complacent Identity</u> → Gandalf Prompts Transformation → <u>Bilbo is Transformed</u>

\<u>Back Again: Lonely Mountain to Shire</u>/

As Bilbo's interactions with questions of goodness proceed, the Boethian perspective provides insight into whether he is seeking godly goodness or not, and Cartesian philosophy tracks how the plot incentivizes Bilbo to find a framework for adjudicating truth values. In the midst of this, it

is the setting, from Berkeley's perspective, where the arrangement of Bilbo's actions find their order in the narrative, producing the experience of beauty which results from reflecting upon how the Hobbit and his actions live, move, and have their being in the joint imaginative efforts of author and reader. This provides, of course, opportunity for readers to assess their own lives, as in a cruciform mirror for the imagination, to consider their own place within these conceptions according to the literary framework made explicit by the interpretive labors of theistic philosophy.

To conclude, we can see a cruciform structure emerging in the narrative when approached from the standpoint of theistic philosophy. Bilbo's character and the plot to which it is subjected is the narrative energy which keeps our attention rapt as the story unfolds, and our attention to his story is flanked on either side by the accentuating power of the setting in which Tolkien casts him. Without having to make a forced argument that there's a Christ figure in the story or reduce it to a lesson in dogma, we are able through theistic philosophy to maintain the integrity of *The Hobbit's* structure while also perceiving the impact it has on an imagination. Fundamentally, the narrative produces an imagination which longs for something more in the world, as Bilbo does when he hears the Dwarf's song for the first time. Theistic philosophy, when applied to narrative, can in this way help shape our imaginations into cruciform vessels which desire to be illuminated ever more brightly by what Christ accomplished on the cross. Naturally, this paradigm cannot be imported wholesale into any given class, but it does provide a pedagogical point of view from which I seek to help students to rationally bear their imaginations in a more Christlike and more Christ-centered fashion. As such, the aim of a literature classroom operating on the hermeneutic of theistic philosophy can be summed up in this way: As we seek the good which characters seek to manifest in their pursuit of the truth required to prevail in their challenges, the setting lays across their path to provide the coherence of the narrative which makes it beautiful. Perceiving the good, the true, and the beautiful in the text this way can be termed the cruciform image within the literary experience. As we become more practiced at the process of perceiving this structure, we develop the inward

virtue of imagination, an aspect of the crossbeam of love for God and neighbor which we strive to bear and present to the horizontal beam, Christ, upon which all our labors must be fixed lest they be labored in vain.

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The Sower
Vincent Van Gogh
Oil on canvas
1888,
Public domain

A BIBLICAL AGRICULTURAL ETHIC:
Shaping Our Thoughts on Agriculture According to the Scriptures

By Micah Todd Humphreys

Introduction

A clear choice exists in the educational philosophy at a Christian institution—to instruct students in the knowledge and methods of a discipline according to the prevailing trends of the discipline without reference to the God of the Bible, or to admit from the outset that our discipline *does not exist* without the confession "in Him [Christ] all things hold together" (Col 1:17).[1] The purpose of this essay is to suggest the ways in which God has spoken about the agricultural arts, and to wrestle with the content and applications of His thoughts about agriculture. We cannot faithfully educate while being functional agnostic agriculturalists. This essay is first an organization of Scripture's agricultural concepts, second a wrestling with the application of those concepts in real-time on a working farm such as we have at College of the Ozarks, and third a focusing on pedagogical implications for these concepts for students.

My first introduction to the possibility of applying the Bible to scientific practice—particularly environmental issues—was Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology*.[2] In this work, Schaeffer makes a case for a care or concern for the creation which should exceed the level of care that was exhibited by the average hippie

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1   All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version. *ESV Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

2   Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980).

of his day, or the environmental activist of ours. He does not advocate for the activism of tying oneself to a tree to stop a bulldozer from taking it down, but instead he lays a biblical foundation for why Christians in particular should be concerned for the created order, while also obeying the biblical commands of dominion and productivity. This was such a shift in my mind that I have continued to re-read the work, speak on his ideas, and introduce students to the book. Schaeffer's work has borne fruit in my life and academic trajectory, and set a foundation for the proposal of this essay—can we formulate a "Biblical Agricultural Ethic" that is wholistic, theologically sound, and practical? And if we can conclude that God has not been silent towards agricultural practice, then we are free to pose the question to students in our discipline: Has God given us directions for agricultural practice?

The working assumption of this essay is that the Bible is authoritative on everything about which it speaks, and it speaks about everything.[3] Following from that, I want to provide a survey of concepts derived from biblical texts. These texts may directly address agriculture, or may speak in general pictures of a blessed people, which pictures are often pictures of agricultural blessing. Working through the relationship of agriculture and the Scripture is not a new area of exploration and writing.[4] Deriving a scriptural perspective for general care of creation (reduction of pollution, protection of endangered species, *etc.*) has received the most attention

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3   This line was heard in a sermon given by Douglas Wilson, who was quoting Cornelius Van Til's *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003).

4   Philo, *Works. Vol. 3: On Husbandry; Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter*, Translated by F.H. Colson & G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Joel Salatin, *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs: Respecting and Caring for all God's Creation* (New York: FaithWords, 2016); Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sandra L. Richter, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Fred Bahnson*, Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013); Gary Fick, *Farming by the Book: Food, Farming, and the Environment in the Bible and in the Qur-an* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, CSS Teaching Series; T05-1, 2005); Alastair MacKay, *Farming and Gardening in the Bible* (Emmaus: Rodale Press, 1950).

in publications, which I hope to point to and concur with shortly, but applying Bible-derived principles for agricultural practices has not been an area where many books have been published. In what follows, I have organized the topic of a Scriptural Agricultural Ethic into three broad areas: 1) Creation, Dominion, Productivity and the Fall, 2) Scripture directly addressing agricultural practices, 3) Reading agricultural passages for meditation, worship, and the anticipation of already/not-yet fulfillment of "agricultural promises." I firmly believe that as faculty we must ask, answer, and then turn to ask our students to comprehend our very agricultural Bible.

Creation, Dominion, Productivity, and the Fall

It is essential to spend time considering the creation account from an agricultural perspective and to try to derive lessons, applications, and questions for our students related to this account. The creation of heaven and earth by God holds a normative position in our faith, as it is referenced by Jesus as such for marriage (Matt 19:4) and the Sabbath (Mk 2:27-28), and I believe that it also has a normative character for agricultural applications.

God's Garden at Creation

"And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden…" (Gen 2:8a). What a remarkable statement! The Creator has finished creating man and giving him life, when we are told that He begins a work that is less forming from nothing or causing to swarm or "bringing forth," but is an ordering of what was already created—a manipulation in the purest sense of the word. God is a gardener. This fact alone is worth a student's meditation and interaction within a classroom setting. But it does not end there, "… and there He put the man whom he had formed" (2:8b). Another amazing fact is revealed—mankind is placed not in a city, or a cave, or on a mountain (though Eden seems to have been on a mountain, and the garden nearby and downhill within Eden[5]), but in an organized, planted garden. The opportunity for faculty in the agricultural disciplines to capitalize on these inspired words

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5   James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 155.

is clear, and I believe that as we learn to apply Scripture in the agriculture classroom, this is where we should start. Of course, there is much more to be said about the meaning of the passage, but at a foundational level we are dealing with a God who gardens, and who placed the first man into that garden. In teaching horticulture, I have tried to capitalize on this account in particular to both stimulate the students' own reading of Scripture in an "agricultural manner," and as an honest motivation for them in *practicing* agriculture (gardening in particular).

While these thoughts could keep us occupied for a while, in the next verse we continue to be able to apply the words agriculturally—horti-culturally to be specific. "And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9a). God provided growth of plants for two separate purposes: for beauty and for eating. In horticulture, as a program of study, these two categories frame the reasons why we cultivate plants—for ornamental purposes and for consumption purposes. These two categories have been "normed" into the world such that they are self-evident categories recognized by non-believers in the horticulture discipline. But they were God's categories first, and our students deserve to know that, and to glorify God for it!

The Idea of Dominion

In Genesis 2:15 we read that man was not just placed in the garden to consume, but to work and keep it. This is closely related to the first chapter in Genesis, where we are told that mankind was to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26). Here we arrive at a sharp dividing line (philosophically) with most natural science programs at secular institutions in our answer to this question: Are humans simply one of many species in the ecosystem of earth, or are we in a position of special privilege by divine command? The Christian tradition has concluded that indeed we are in a place of authority over the creation, able to manipulate created things for good and right uses.[6]

6　Psalm 8 carries this idea forward from creation.

When presenting the question of the meaning of the dominion command, there are two "ditches" into which one can fall. First, students may assume that mankind does *not* have authority over creation, and that it actually might be better if mankind were not influential at all on earth. The guilt felt by many people for using fossil fuels is evidence for this. Second, students (particularly from agricultural backgrounds) tend to assume that man has full manipulating rights over creation, and that the only rule is a pragmatic one: if we can do it, it is acceptable. I believe our instruction and practice, in order to be faithful, must guard against both of these errors. It is at this point that Francis Schaeffer helps us think deeply, and gives students a thought-path to follow.

Generally, Schaeffer points out that the Scriptures teach the inherent value of creation, a robust idea of dominion, a certain kind of equality of mankind with other created things, the nature of the Fall, and the idea of redemption of mankind and creation based on Christ's resurrection. Providing students the space to come to grips philosophically and scripturally with their relationship to the created world becomes worthwhile in the development of a scriptural Agricultural Ethic. It is worthwhile both as a discipline of the mind in thinking God's thoughts after Him, but also in practice where our decision to disrespect an animal by means of abuse or neglect is contrary to the fullness of what dominion means.

Productivity

Closely associated to dominion is the Bible's teaching on productivity and fruitfulness. Genesis 1:28-30 teaches us that mankind was to be fruitful in terms of human expansion, but also that fruitfulness was to be expressed *through* the dominion of creation. It is apparent, and agricultural practice is founded on the principle, that God built a reproductive and multiplication-nature into all living organisms. This principle, as obvious as it is, must be said out loud, and connected immediately to the Creator's designing and implementation of the principle. Practically this would result in our agriculture students *honoring* God and *giving thanks to Him* as they see multiplication principles in their work (this is a reverse of what the wicked do in Rom 1:21). Connecting this text to daily observations in

animal births and the harvest of grain would appropriately be connected to worship in the course of work, and on the Lord's day when praises are given to God in the gathering of the church. Agricultural work, which is predicated on a God-designed principle of multiplication is an absolute force that should compel us to worship, and we should teach it as such.

The Fall

> [T]horns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field (Gen 3:18).

> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:20-21).

As of 11:45am on the day I write this, I have spent a portion of the morning in the Kranzush Gardens, where sweat has poured from my face, and I have been pricked by spiny pigweed (*Amaranthus spinosus*), the bane of our campus gardens. In setting before a student the biblical view of agriculture, very little needs to be said regarding the difficult circumstances brought in to our production by the fall of our first parents in the garden. Weeds, insect pests, disease, lack of water—all have been seen during my work *today*, and students with any experience on their own farms or in our work stations could list their own versions of spiny pigweed. While we need to fully account for the disease, death, and decay we see, our instruction needs to also answer the question: *Is this the way it must always be*? The verses from Romans 8 above give us a striking answer: no. Somehow, some way, the creation must experience a redemption which is not less than "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" And lest we consider this only applicable in the distant future ending of all things, we are challenged in the following way:

> Christ died, Christ is your Savior, Christ is coming back again to raise you from the dead. So by faith—because this is true to what has been in Christ's death and what will be

when He comes again, by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit—*you are to live this way substantially now*. . . . When we carry these ideas over into the area of our relationship to nature, there is an exact parallel. On the basis of the act that there is going to be total redemption in the future, not only of man but of all creation, the Christian who believes the Bible should be the man who—with God's help and in the power of the Holy Spirit—is treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be then.[7]

So it is of great importance that as we feel the effects of the Fall, we hold it in balance with the promised redemption—redemption of the creation, which is redemption of the field, and we work not as "those without hope," but coming to grips with the impact of Christ's resurrection on the whole of the biogeochemical world.

To conclude this section, we can take to the students the following:

1. The creation narrative is at once agricultural, normative, and motivational in our daily agricultural work.

2. The hierarchy of creation exists, with man in an elevated position, commanded to act in an authoritative way.

3. Dominion is a responsibility of *productivity* and *protection*. Productivity in creation is a reason to praise God.

4. The Fall of mankind and creation is explainable and real. But just as real is the promise of redemption of mankind and creation through Christ's resurrection, which we work towards, just as we do the good works of a righteous life by God's power.[8]

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7   Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 66, 68

8   Instructors who move these foundational concepts forward should probably be ready to talk about eschatology as well. A premillennial view may make it difficult for students to think in terms of improvements prior to the rapture. Amillenial and postmillenial views would entertain the possibility of the creation moving in a direction of improvement prior

What (Else) Does the Bible Say About Agriculture?

Since I believe it is incumbent on professors at our institution to work through these issues of our discipline and our faith, I also believe that the simplest question we answer as we develop a faithful curriculum is *What does the Bible actually say about [enter discipline name here]?* While not perfect or exhaustive, I have tried to ask that question of myself with regard to agriculture, and have settled on categories in which the Scriptures speak of it.

Literary Aspects of Agriculture in the Bible

- **Historical accounts of agricultural occurrences.** Examples would be Cain bringing the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground (Gen 4:3), Noah becoming a "man of the soil" and planting a vineyard (Gen 9:20), or Ruth "gleaning in the field until evening" (Ruth 2:17).

- **Laws dealing with the agricultural production of the land.** An example is the command to Israel to take "some of the first fruits of the ground, which you harvest from your land" and the command to bring it to the priest, who was to "set it down before the altar of the Lord your God" (Deut 26:2, 4).

- **Poem, song, or prophecy with agricultural analogies.** In Psalm 52:8 David says, "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;" in Psalm 80:8 God is said to have "brought a vine out of Egypt . . . and planted it," referring to settling His people after the exodus; and in Isaiah 1:8

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to the end of all things. In my experience, answering those eschatological questions is almost as necessary as presenting the facts as they appear in Romans 8.

we have "And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field . . ."

• **Promises, prophecies or visions of blessing or cursing which are agriculturally relevant.** Jeremiah 29:5 provides a word to God's people in Babylon: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce." Ezekiel prophesies, "[W]hen I bring more and more famine upon you and break your supply of bread. I will send famine and wild beasts against you . . ." (5:16-17) and then the following promises are given: "And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant. . ." (36:29-30).

• **Straightforward analogies based in agricultural production.** Jesus says, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit" (Lk 7:43). John records Jesus' reference to shepherds in 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Paul assumes garden knowledge will make sense of the following analogy: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3:6).

While I'm certain that this list of categories and the examples given could provide material for an extended essay (or the basis for a semester's worth of content in a course titled *Agriculture in the Bible*), I want to focus on just one of the types of Scripture. I hope to explore what impact the Old Testament laws have on the *telos* and *praxis*9 we hope to develop in our students.

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9   Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996).

Old Testament Laws Concerning Agriculture

As we begin to think about the Old Testament laws pertaining to agriculture, we must start at a place that does not dismiss the discussion to an interesting set of historical facts unworthy of our careful attention. New Testament passages like Romans 7:17 ("So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.") certainly stimulate questions like: How *do* the agricultural laws for God's people in the Old Testament pertain to us today?[10] The answer is of course deeply theological—on the face of it probably more so than in dealing with other types of agricultural Scriptures.

And so, what does the Law have to say about agricultural practice? R. J. Rushdoony gave a series of talks titled "Systematic Theology of the Land,"[11] where he references the medieval Jewish law scholar Maimonides, who wrote expositing and interpreting the biblical law code in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Maimonides' treatise on agriculture alone is over 600 pages long.[12] We can't dive into a book of that size in this space, but what we can do is follow his categorization of the laws, and again ask why God placed these laws in the books of His people, which includes being in the Book of our faith. The laws given to Israel for agriculture are in the following groups:

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10   For two different viewpoints on the answer to the broader question of the applicability of Old Testament Law for Christians, James M. Todd, III presents one side in *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), while an opposite view can be had in Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Nagadoches: Covenant Media Press, 2020).

11   R.J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology of the Land* (Wordmp3: https://www.wordmp3.com/product-group.aspx?id=175, 2017)

12   Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides, Book Seven, The Book of Agriculture*, translated by Isaac Klein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). A complete list of the positive and negative commands from the laws dealing with agriculture are at the beginning of each chapter.

- **Diverse Kinds** – seed mixing, yoking together of different animal species, clothing made from different materials.

- **Gifts to the Poor** – leaving the edges of grain crops for gleaning, not stripping all the grapes from the vine or picking up fallen grapes, but leaving food for the poor and sojourner.

- **Tithes, offerings, first fruits** – Maimonides breaks them into the following:
  - o Heave offerings for the priests
  - o Tithe for the Levites
  - o A second tithe set aside by the producer to consume before the Lord
  - o First fruits of production

- **Sabbath, Sabbatical year, Jubilee year** – the resting of the producer and his livestock, the fallowing of the land on the 7th year, the fallowing of the land on the 50th year, forgiveness of loans, the character of the agricultural land surrounding cities.

- **Waiting period for harvest?** Leviticus 20 – 3rd, 4th, 5th years.

Maimonides' categories are based on scriptural texts in Leviticus 19 and 23 and Deuteronomy 14, 22, 24, and 26. Again, whether or not we conclude that these have some application to us in the present time as believers, one thing we cannot do is ignore them as silly laws or treat them as unworthy of our attention. We would find ourselves to be anti-scriptural if we do not, with the Psalmist, have the ability to say, "I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules" (Ps 119:7). In these words, David spoke of the Pentateuch at a minimum.

The safest place to begin our consideration of these laws and their applicability is to think of them as "informative, not normative."[13] These laws however, considered in their context, assumed several points of theology to which Israel was to submit.

First, it taught the people that *the land belonged to the Lord*. He had given the land to them (Deut 4:5), and He had full authority to give rules on the use of that land. Second, the law code enacted a visible sign that they were different from the nations. Third, the law emphasized a care for the poor, "forcing" Israel to have forethought and mercy for those who were destitute. Fourth, the laws honored the priests and Levites – God's special workers. And Fifth, the people were to learn to rest from their labors as God did from His.

I believe that on each one of these points we could readily find the echo, if not an equally direct command, in the New Testament. Connecting these assumptions in the minds of students as this is presented would be advisable. First, the authority of God over all the earth is clearly established in the giving of the Great Commission – all authority on heaven and *earth* has been granted to Christ, as well as the repetition of the land promise to children who obey their parents (Eph 6:3 "…that you may live long in the land."). Second, the separation of God's people from the world is clear from verses like 1 Peter 2:10, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people". Third, both Jesus and John call the New Testament church to care for the poor: "For the poor you always have with you . . ." (John 12:8); "Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10). Fourth, an honoring of God's ministers is assumed in 1 Timothy 5:17-18: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"[14] And Fifth, God has

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13   My friend and ordained minister Christopher C. Schrock gave me this phrase.

14   Of course, part of the reason this verse is helpful in the discussion is because of the assumption that that particular Old Testament law (Deut 25:4) is still in play, and its

set aside a time period in the New Testament era as His - the Lord's Day: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them" (Acts 20:7); "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a voice ..." (Rev 1:10). These instances of repetition should help us to see the connection of the *assumptions* of particular aspects of the law with our own era. So, if we allow for the informing of our agricultural practices from the explicit law of the Old Testament, what might we conclude for the sake of both instruction and practice as our students develop biblical, agricultural standards?

Gifts to the Poor

God requires us to remember the poor throughout Scripture, and the Old Testament law required both a setting aside of sellable goods, and a prohibition against using what had been set aside. Additionally, Deuteronomy 15:7 requires a *soft heart* towards the poor. A direct application for agricultural production would be taking a portion of the produce to food banks or underserved communities in the region. On our own workstations we enact this by sending vegetables and milk to ministries like Bridge of Faith[15] and Elevate Branson. This is of course specific to our setting, and if our students become commodity crop farmers they would need to be creative in enacting this ideal.

Resting the Land

On a pragmatic level, "fallowing" or letting soil remain untilled and unplanted for a period of time, is a common practice with significant benefits in terms of water availability to plants after the fallow period. This is seen most strikingly in arid environments where crops are reliant on precipitation alone. As if simply increasing soil water were not enough of an argument for the practice of leaving the land unworked and unplanted for

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principle is expanded to include elders.

15   https://www.bridgeoffaithcc.com/food-co-op.html. Bridge of Faith supplies the community of Rockaway Beach with access to fresh foods in an area where minimal fresh produce is available at convenience stores.

a year, research has concluded that the increase in arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (a beneficial soil organism) in a fallowed agricultural soil was far above other forms of fallowing (deep tillage, herbicide) and that the weed seed bank was not significantly different from herbicide-induced fallow.[16] A host of additional research gives support to the benefits of fallowing land periodically.[17] The benefits of increased organic matter, higher crop quality and yield, and improved soil quality parameters should not surprise us if we take God's word seriously and humbly ask *why* it is that God required a rest of the land. Additionally, we can't fail to connect the subjection of creation to futility (Rom 8:20), and the eventual renewal and setting free of the created order, to this concept of the resting of the land. On our campus farms, we practice resting of pastures and garden beds every seventh year,[18] not in order to return to the Law, but in recognition that the informative and apparently creational[19] nature of the command is in force.

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16   X. Gu, Y. Cen, L. Guo, C. Li, H. Yuan, Z. Xu, and G. Jiang, *Responses of weed community, soil nutrients, and microbes to different weed management practices in a fallow field in Northern China* (*PeerJ* 7:e7650, https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.7650, 2019).

17   J. Cusimano, S. B. Megdal, J. E. McLain, and J. C. Silvertooth, *Study Finds Land Fallowing Improves Soil Quality in PVID* (Tucson: Water Resources Research Center, https://wrrc.arizona.edu/land-fallowing-soil, 2022); J. Agullera, P. Motavalli, C. Valdivia, and M. Angel Gonzales, *Impacts of Cultivation and Fallow Length on Soil Carbon and Nitrogen Availability in the Bolivian Andean Highland Region* (Bern: Mountain Research and Development, 33(4) : 391-403); D. C. Nielsen and F. J. Calderon, *Fallow Effects on Soil* (Lincoln: USDA-ARS, Publications from USDA-ARS / UNL Faculty. 1391. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/usdaarsfacpub/1391, 2011); J. Latta and G. J. O'Leary, *Long-term comparison of rotation and fallow tillage systems of wheat in Australia* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, Field Crops Research, 83 (2003) 173-190, doi: 10.1016/S0378-4290(03)00073-X, 2003); O. R. Jones and T. W. Popham, *Cropping and Tillage Systems for Dryland Grain Production in the Southern High Plains* (Fitchburg: American Society of Agronomy, Agronomy Journal 89(2) 222-232, 1997).

18   This was begun by Tammy Holder on pastures in 2014. Personal communication, 2022.

19   A word I'm using to mean that the concept is built into the created order such that scientific investigation allows us to see *why* the practice has value.

Laws of Diverse Kinds

It is a fascinating fact that God required his people not to sow different kinds of seeds in the same field (Lev 19:19), not to sow grains or vegetables in a vineyard (Deut 22:9), not to crossbreed cattle with other species (Lev 19:19), not to allow two different kinds of animals to work joined together (Deut 22:10), and to prohibit clothing with mixed fabrics (Deut 22:11). Initially, these laws appear arbitrary in terms of their *effect* on productivity in the field, at least according to modern eyes. Maimonides' comments see the application in surprisingly specific ways: "If one's field is sown with wheat, and he reconsiders and decides to sow it with barley before the wheat has sprouted, he must wait until the wheat seed has decomposed and rotted in the ground, or about three days if the field is well watered."[20] He also sees the relationship of "kinds" in much the same way as we understand families of plants as being related as seen here: "…there are among the seeds cases of two species which resemble each other, their appearance being nearly the same, but which are nevertheless forbidden to be sown together, inasmuch as they are in fact two species."[21] After this he goes on to list exceptions such as two closely related leaf vegetables: kale and cabbage. These actually have the same botanical name in our current system and apparently Maimonides believes Scripture allowed for a planting of these two species together.

The concept of intercropping species with each other has existed for some time, as we see that it was common enough in the Old Testament era to be prohibited. This practice may be useful in increasing production in a crop system.[22] But we remember that *utility* does not itself stand as the absolute

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20   Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides*, 9.

21   Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides*, 10-11.

22   D. Tilman, *Benefits of intensive agricultural intercropping* (online: Nature Plants 6, 604-605, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-020-0677-4); J. Dai, W. Qiu, N. Wang, T. Wang, H. Nakanishi, and Y. Zuo, *From Leguminosae/Gramineae Intercropping Systems to See Benefits of Intercropping on Iron Nutrition* (online: Frontiers in Plant Science, 2019, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpls.2019.00605); R. W. Brooker, A. E. Bennett, W. Cong, T. J. Daniell, T. S. George, P. D. Hallett, C. Hawes, P. P. M. Iannetta, H.G. Jones, A. J. Karley, . Li, B. M. McKenzie,

standard of our practice. As we seek to make an informed inference from this law, or even to determine benefits or drawbacks to the practice, an immediate question that we should wrestle with is the transgenic nature of genetically modified plants. Surely this qualifies as a way that plant species have been "unequally yoked"? In the most common genetic modification in crop plants, DNA from a bacterium is inserted into the genetic code of corn, resulting in a resistance to Roundup® herbicides. Hopefully this example is not a stretch, but presents us with a real and present case of where these kinds of laws from the Scripture might have application. Our students must come face to face with the statement given to us by the fictional chaos mathematician Dr. Ian Malcom in *Jurassic Park*, "Yeah, but your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they *could*, they didn't stop to think if the *should*." In that "should," for our part in the faithful education of agriculture students, we must draw a direct line back to the Scriptures. Why *should* we adopt these technologies? Why should we *not*? Here I would want to emphasize for the student that we are not allowed to pretend that the topic (or something close to the topic) of transgenic plant production is not addressed by Scripture.

A Model of Scriptural Scholé and Worship

So far, we have tried to outline what the Scripture says about agriculture with a view towards the development of guides for our practice in the field. In an effort to recognize the way in which God has made us as whole persons, it is important to address the command of the Sabbath, relating not only to the physical rest of us and our livestock, but also in terms of the concepts of leisure, meditation, and an appreciation of work completed in God's world. The command from Deuteronomy 5:12-14 is:

> Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your
> God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all

R. J. Pakeman, E. Paterson, C. Schöb, J. Shen, G. Squire, C. A. Watson, C. Zhang, F. Zhang, J. Zhang, P. J. White, *Improving intercropping: a synthesis of research in agronomy, plant physiology and ecology* (Hoboken: Wiley Press, New Phytologist 206 (1), 107-117, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1111/nph.13132).

your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

This command addresses the one day in seven to be set aside in particular to *remember* God's work. This is an act of contemplation resulting in worship. Several authors have developed and extended this work/rest/contemplation pattern to apply to cultural work, academic work, and "typical" work in our calling, as God's system of providing a "…life lived in which genuine, contemplative leisure guides and informs both the ends and means of work."[23] A term associated with this act is *scholé* or restful learning/contemplation.[24] The work of agricultural knowledge acquisition, paired with actual field practice, for our students will be unbalanced if we do not also couple rest, contemplation, and worship with that work. We must develop that "love which longs to see and *enjoy*"[25] as our students learn their place in their discipline.

Conclusion

The richness of Scriptures pertaining to agriculture is undeniable. As we express wonder, awe, seriousness, and joy in encountering the variety of

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23   Scott H. Moore, *How to Burn a Goat: Farming with the Philosophers* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019), 183. Moore draws on Josef Pieper's work (*Leisure: The Basis of Culture* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009]) where he advocates "…a certain definite space of time set aside from working hours and days, a limited time, specially marked off – and like the space allotted to the temple, is not *used*, is withdrawn from all merely utilitarian ends" (67).

24   Christopher Perrin has developed this idea in classical Christian education, and his writings are informative and applicable in our context of education as well. See *Learning and Leisure: Developing a School of Schole*, (online: Inside Classical Education, 2010, https://insideclassicaled.com/learning-and-leisure-developing-a-school-of-schole/).

25   David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition)* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 40.

God's thought on fields, crops, livestock, and vineyards, we do so before God and in view of our students. It is a goal before us to provide an enculturation not only into the discipline knowledge, but also into the spiritual apprehending of the fulness of an agricultural worldview—an agricultural–based on God's Holy Word.

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Reviews and Resources

Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture

by Christopher Watkin.

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022. 648 pages, softcover. $49.99.

Review by Mark Rapinchuk
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The length of this book prohibits chapter-by-chapter discussion. Instead, I have selected a few topics and ideas that represent the general argument and highlight some of the major contributions of Watkin's book.

In a cultural context that is increasingly dominated by critical theory, Watkin has undertaken to provide a biblically informed criticism of secular forms of critical theory and to offer an alternative biblical critical theory. As he states in the introduction, "It does not try to explain and defend the Bible to culture; it seeks to analyze and critique the culture through the Bible" (2). He demonstrates that not only is the biblical story a better way of understanding reality, he also shows how secular critical theory is dependent on the Judeo-Christian story for concepts such as justice, equality, etc.

Watkin cautions against trying to allow secular culture to dictate the discussion because the biblical story does not share many of the assumptions of modern culture. If one is unwilling to allow the biblical narrative to challenge and critique culture, and one attempts rather to make the Bible conform to culture, one will "lose the gospel and fail to serve the culture" (24).

Watkin understands that he has undertaken an ambitious task, but he does not claim to offer an exhaustive or complete biblical critique of modern culture. His stated goal is to give labels to ideas others have presented, but to do so in a way that will draw attention to these ideas and to bring these ideas into a more complete and coherent biblical-theological framework (27).

Christian social theory, according to Watkin, should exhibit four characteristics. First, it should present a positive agenda and not mere critique (30). Second, it should challenge customary and fashionable ways of thinking (30). Third, Christian social theory should be politically non-partisan (30-31). And fourth, it should exhibit humility, strength, love, and truth (31).

Watkin appropriately begins his biblical-theological description with a chapter on God; more specifically, the Trinity. He outlines "four features of the biblical God that make Christian engagement with culture distinctive and beautiful: God is personal, God is absolute, God is relational, and God is love" (34) Watkin rightly notes that there are only two options: "either we live in a universe in which everything personal eventually reduces to the impersonal, or we live in a universe in which everything impersonal can be traced back to the personal God" (37).

Since God is love, ultimate reality is not simply loving, but love itself. Because God is love, he expresses his power not in violence, but in the rescue of his people. "The difference is not between power and love but between power expressed in and as violence and power expressed in and as love" (50). Although the most prominent modern conception of power is understood in terms of violence and oppression, the biblical story presents power as power to save, to redeem, and to rescue. Rightly understood, the biblical story provides the basis on which the hope of peace, goodness, and equality can be realized. Without God as described in the biblical account, such hope is merely wishful thinking.

Creation

Foundational to the biblical understanding of creation is that God as creator is fundamentally different from his creation. Watkin notes three significant realities entailed by the creator-creature distinction. "First, there is no metaphysical mediator between God and creation. . . . Second, there are no rival gods. . . . Third, the creator-creature distinction is also important because it shows that God is not just a bigger version of us. God is not the smartest, strongest, or otherwise best creature; he is the Other to all creatures undercutting any attempt to make God in our image so as to

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project onto him our own aspirations" (57-58).

Another important point is the fact that creation is contingent, which means it may not exist. Watkin cites Terry Eagelton's observation, "that the core of the doctrine of creation is 'not the fact that the world came into existence, but that it did not need to'" (60). Nonbiblical explanations cannot give an adequate account for why the universe exists when it is not necessary. Since secular stories cannot give a plausible explanation for the existence of the contingent universe, they simply ignore the question. As Watkin discusses throughout the book, this is not the last time secular accounts accept the reality of things that cannot be explained by nonbiblical narratives (e.g., the importance of justice, human dignity and equality, etc.).

An additional point is the recognition that creation is a gift. "This paradigm of the gift places us in the posture of recipients. We receive existence, we receive meaning, we receive love" (60). Creation is designed and orderly. We may be free to study it and to learn its mysteries and magnificence; we are not, however, free to make it what we will. When we ignore the givenness of creation and assume we can manipulate and coerce it to do our will, we invite disaster and forfeit well-being.

Humanity

God has graciously given us the world we inhabit, but he has also blessed us by creating human beings in his image. This too is an undeserved gift and it provides the basis for human dignity, equality, and human rights (88-89). Since God has created us in his image, we would do well to remember that we do not own ourselves nor do we have the authority to make ourselves as we will (92). Failure to remember our true status as image bearers has resulted in two negative perspectives regarding human beings. The first error manifests itself when human beings think of themselves as 'gods'; the second when they think of humans as mere beasts (93-94). In this section Watkin makes use of a key figure introduced earlier in the Introduction and chapter one. He uses the term "diagonalizing" to describe how the biblical narrative reconciles two seemingly contrary concepts. For example, two competing conceptions of human beings are "no human improvement is

permitted" and "Any and every human 'improvement' is permitted." These two positions are "diagonalized" by the biblical notion that we are created in the image of God (91-92).

Sin and Society

Watkin argues that a return to the biblical doctrines of sin and judgment is necessary for the good of society (108). Although widely misunderstood in contemporary culture, Watkin is convinced that "a winsome, positive, biblically faithful vision of a flourishing society must draw on these two unlikeliest of doctrines" (110). The biblical doctrine that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) "actively subverts social hierarchies based on the inherently superior worth of some individuals over others. To believe that everyone is a sinner is to believe that, in one very important sense, everyone is equal and equally in need of God's grace. Equality is affirmed in creation (the image of God), in the fall (the universality of sin), and as we shall later see, in redemption (through salvation freely offered to all by God's grace)" (116).

These doctrines have political implications. One might be tempted to think that the fallenness of humans beings would rule out democracy because people are not wise enough to rule themselves. Watkin, citing C. S. Lewis, thinks the opposite is actually the case. Because we are fallen, no single person can be trusted with unchecked power over others (119). Later he observes,

> Both the political left and right simplify this complex picture. Broadly speaking, the right would respond to the fall narrative with a shrug of the shoulders: Adam and Eve have made their choice, and they must live with it. It was their sin and nobody else's. Tough love is needed to make them wake up to what they have done and make better choices next time. The left, by contrast, would rail at the injustice of God's judgment: poor Eve was a victim manipulated by the cunning serpent, the problem is with the structure of the garden (why is that tree there?) and not with Eve, and God's

judgment heaps oppression upon deception and systematic injustice. (130)

Watkin concludes that the biblical story is more nuanced. "Adam and Eve are responsible for what they have done (which gives them the dignity of agency and accountability), and they are given clothes and a promise of redemption by God (which gives them hope). Neither simply victims with no agency to help themselves nor simply grownups who should know better, they are responsible agents who made a terrible choice and who can be redeemed: 'Between the misanthrope who knows that men are capable of the worst and the beautiful soul who believes that they are capable of better there is room for a 'third man'—'the fallible man who, like each one of us, is exposed to temptation'" (131).

Sin and Autonomy

Watkin has much to say about the problem of autonomy. When humans act as if they were autonomous, they demote the status of God and promote the status of themselves (134). But this claim of autonomy is, like other forms of idolatry, foolish. Thankfully, some come to realize this foolishness. As Watkin states,

> One of the crucial pennies to drop in the minds of those who find their way to faith in their adult years is often the realization that if there really is a God such as the Bible reveals him to be, then he is smarter that I am and his judgment is more reliable than mine. If he and I differ on a matter, and if he is really God and I am really a creature, then it is more than reasonable to assume he is correct and I am mistaken. To reach any other conclusion would require a bizarre routine of epistemological gymnastics. Either God is God and I am not, in which case his judgment is to be trusted over mine, or else God is not God, in which case there is no reliable way of satisfactorily arbitrating at all between what is reasonable and what is not. (135)

We would all do well to keep this in mind.

Chapter six ("Sin, Anthropology, and Asymmetry) plays a crucial role in Watkin's argument. Genesis 1-3 provides us with two lenses through which to view anthropology. Modern critical theories ignore (or reject) the biblical account and as a result they are left with a "single lens anthropology" which sees everything in terms of the present. But by making the present normative, they forfeit any reasonable basis for criticizing the current state of affairs. Watkins summarizes this well:

> Such a view leaves the would-be social critic no leverage point from which to move the world, no mandate for social activism, no real dream of a better reality, and as C. S. Lewis found out to the frustration of his pre-Christian self, no ground on which to attack God: 'My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? (160)

An awareness of this multi-lens biblical anthropology helps the Christian avoid two different pitfalls. The first is utopianism; the second cynicism. Utopianism fails because it assumes humans have within themselves the power to make things right. Cynicism fails because it assumes that everyone and everything are bad and there is no remedy available. (161)

In chapter seven ("From Lamech to Noah") Watkin introduces two helpful diagrams. The first is labeled the "n-shaped Dynamic" and the second is the "u-shaped Dynamic." The n-shaped dynamic Illustrates a "performance-reward" system in which the person initiates (performs some action) and God responds (rewards the action). In contrast to the n-shaped dynamic, in the u-shaped dynamic God initiates (extending grace) and humans respond (expressing gratitude) (185, 191). The n-shaped dynamic is present in pagan religions but it is foreign to the biblical dynamic, which is best characterized as the u-shaped dynamic.

Watkin's discussion of Jesus' resurrection (chapter twenty "The Resurrection, Transformation, and Power") is excellent and worthy of

careful consideration. He makes the point that Jesus' resurrection is not merely an historical event (436). It is the "first glimpse of the shafts of breaking dawn that will one day flood the sky with brilliant light in the new heavens and new earth" (438). The resurrection is "a manifesto for social change. The resurrection raises our consciousness to a new set of possibilities in this world and shows us that the way things are is not the way they will always be…" (442). "The resurrection of Christ, and the kingdom of which it is the firstfruits, prevent Christian social engagement from being either too idealistic or too cynical. The unduly cynical attitude thinks social change is impossible, and the dangerously idealistic attitude thinks social change can be forced" (443).

Secular critical theory assumes "if only the oppressed could seize power themselves, the idea goes, then they would wield it for the good of all, and the problem of oppression would be solved," but the Bible and history have exposed the fallacy of this position (445). Any proposed solution to injustice that is based solely in the possession and use of power, is doomed to fail as it simply transfers oppression from one group to another.

The secular story (e.g., Sartre and Camus) recognizes that failure and frustration seemed to be "hard-wired into the human condition" (454), but without God there is no hope of change. "The tragic attitude powerlessly rages against the dying of the light; the resurrection attitude purposefully labors because of the rising of the Son" (456). Christians are called to live in the reality of the resurrection.; to understand that it "is not a one-time happening, but the beginning of a new and ongoing age. Christ is risen today and will remain risen for all eternity." (457)

The last several chapters are focused on "the last days" and eschatology. This discussion is not concerned with detailed scenarios of the events of the "last days," but with the church's responsibility to live faithfully in these times. Watkin identifies two great threats to the faithfulness of the church. One threat is the "market," in which the church uncritically accepts the economic policies and practices of the marketplace (463-466). The second danger is the "state," in which those in positions of political power dictate to people what they can believe (462-63). As Watkin states, "If the church

lets itself be colonized by the state or the market, it loses its distinctiveness: its logic of divine superabundance and generosity, its ethic of costly love, its radical hope, its nonlinear view of power and servant leadership. What is at stake is the church's ability (and duty) to be different to the necessity, control, and calculation that characterizes late modernity" (466).

Watkin argues, "…Christians are to present an alternative set of figures to hegemonic modern narratives and modes of desire. Let Christians make no mistake: late modern society is not a neutral space where any and every vision of the good can exist side by side. Modern society as a whole relentlessly catechizes its citizens into very particular ways of being in the world, from the grand liturgies of the nation state to the daily habits of domesticity" (470). This catechism takes place through social imaginaries present in the stories and myths of the dominant culture (471-472).

One interesting analogy used by Watkin is that of "parallax vision." Humans are able to see in three dimensions due to parallax vision. When we look at something each of our eyes sends slightly different images to our brains and these images are "combined into one three-dimensional perception" (478). Watkin suggests the church functions in a similar way; one eye sees through the culture of the day and the other through the lens of God's promises. "Either perspective by itself will give only a two-dimensional understanding of reality: seeing only the culture of late modernity will leave the church condemned to ape its blind spots and assimilate into its figures; seeing only the future fulfillment of God's promises will leave Christians thinking they are free of late modernity, all the while being shaped by it in ways of which they are utterly unaware. Only the parallax view—being both in and not of, living in both the now and the not yet—is adequate to the Bible's account of the last days" (478).

Parallax living will enable the church to be "a forward-living, eternity-anticipating, hopeful, and prophetic community, a city on a hill in the overlap of the 'now' and 'not yet' witnessing to the present world as the firstfruits of the new world" (478). As a counter-cultural movement "the Christian revolutionary stance in the present is therefore one that, by the grace of God, bends history towards this future, not in the sense of forcing its coming but

of living, speaking, thinking, and acting in ways that make sense—and often only make sense—in view of the coming kingdom" (479).

Watkin does an excellent job of demonstrating how modernity has borrowed values from the Christian story and inserted them into a secular narrative, even though these values do not arise from the secular assumptions of modernity (e.g., 509-527). In this discussion he uses an interesting and insightful analogy. "Modernity's relationship to theology is not like building a new form of locomotion using only a wheel and pedals from an existing car; it is like taking the whole car with all its interrelated parts, painting it a different color, and passing it off as a new form of transport. Secularism hasn't only picked Christianity's pockets; it has also picked Christianity's brains" (522).

A few brief comments about chapter twenty-six ("Eschatology and Time") cannot do justice to the insightful discussion regarding eschatology and modernity. After discussing both "conservative" and "progressive" views of history, Watkin notes, "Proponents of secular theories of progress and revolution are 'ideologians,' and secular reductions of complex biblical eschatology leave 'the far right dreaming of a golden age that never was' and 'the left dreaming of a utopia that will never be'" (555).

On the assumptions of secularism there is no reason to be confident that things will get better (555). Only God and the biblical story can provide any reason for hope of a better more just world. This has important implications for social activism, because as Watkin notes, "belief in final justice is the only consistent and comprehensive basis for social activism in the present" (556).

The final chapter ("Eschatology and Culture") is a fitting end to a book about Christianity and social engagement. In his discussion of Revelation 7:9-10, Watkin identifies two features of this passage that "inform Christian cultural critique" (581). First, "people from every nation, tribe, and language have not lost their differences in the new creation: they are still described in terms of their various cultural provenances" (581). The second feature is that "all are united in their cry of praise" (581). Also from this passage Watkin argues that "biblical truth is not acultural. Even in the new heavens

and the new earth, the worship of God is not (and should not be) abstracted from specific cultural identities and forms" (581) Furthermore, he makes the important observation that "biblical truth is not monocultural. No linguistic, historical, or geographical culture is perfectly suited to the reception of the gospel message, such that as Christians mature they will all gravitate towards that one culture" (582).

One final point: "biblical truth is transcultural" (582). The core of the gospel message can be expressed in many ways, but it remains the same message. "The message of the Bible will affirm some aspects of all cultures and challenge some aspects of all cultures, and it can find a home in all cultures as it transforms each of them from within" (583). This observation should help Christians avoid the problem of cultural imperialism and cultural fetishism. "Cultural imperialism assumes that one culture (almost always the speaker's own) is superior to all others. . . . Cultural fetishism, by contrast, assumes that each and every culture has dignity and integrity such that nothing in it ought to be challenged or transformed, however brutal or discriminatory it is" (584).

In the conclusion, Watkin offers a helpful reminder: "Our choice is not whether we will live in light of a social and cultural theory or not. Our choice is *which* cultural theory or theories will shape the figures of our lives and our world. People do not differ according to whether they are guided by a cultural and social theory but by whether they realize it or not, and to go through life not realizing the theoretical assumptions and commitments that are shaping you is like letting a stranger decorate your house, choose your clothes, select your children's school, and drive your car without having to ask your permission. If we would never allow such a thing with our physical possessions and our family, why are we not at least as vigilant when it comes to our social imaginaries and our world?" (604).

In a book of this length it is not surprising that there are a few points with which the reader might disagree or at least desire further discussion and clarification. For example, what did Watkin mean when he wrote, "True, there are no facts before interpretation" (77). Does he mean this in an ontological or epistemological sense? Although there are a few other places

where clarification would be appreciated, it would be unkind to criticize Watkin for a perceived failure to "unpack" every statement.

Anyone who is interested in worldview, social engagement, critical theory, and/or biblical theology would do well to read Watkin's excellent book.

The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction

by Justin Whitmel Earley

Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019. 216 pages, casebound. $20.00

Review by Chip Wiley
Assistant Professor of Library Science
College of the Ozarks

In *The Common Rule*, Justin Whitmel Earley chronicles how he stumbled across the ancient monastic tradition of establishing a "rule of life." Through implementing several habits, Earley experienced freedom from life's distractions.

Earley, a lawyer in the Washington D.C. area, found himself in the emergency room one evening. According to the doctor, nothing was wrong; however, Earley was showing symptoms of clinical anxiety and panic attacks. Sleep was fleeting. Earley began to self-medicate by taking sleeping pills or a few drinks of alcohol to fall asleep. As he journeyed down a difficult road, Earley writes,

> I now see that my body had finally become converted to the anxiety and busyness I'd worshiped through my habits and routines. All the years of a schedule built on going non-stop to try to earn my place in the world had finally rubbed off on my heart. My head said one thing, that God loves me no matter what I do, but my habits said another, that I'd better keep striving in order to stay loved. (p. 5)

Months later, after drafting several habits with his wife, he brought in a couple of buddies to keep him accountable. According to Earley, he did not think the habits he wrote down were *that* important because none of them were groundbreaking discoveries. The gist of the habits was to spend more time in prayer, hang out with people, and spend less time on

the phone, either working or mindlessly scrolling socials. He writes, "I didn't think these habits would matter much because I had no idea how much my ordinary habits were shaping my soul in the most extraordinary ways." (p. 6)

As Earley began experiencing freedom from stress and anxiety thanks to his new habits, he began exalting the benefits to anyone who would listen. One day, he spoke to his pastor about his new habits, and his pastor responded, "Oh, I see. You've crafted your own rule of life." (p. 13)

A "rule of life" is a habit crafted in partnership with God. Establishing a "rule of life" is a formational practice that guides one's life. Monks such as St. Augustine and St. Benedict have used the "rule of life" framework for thousands of years to find communal order. Earley explains that the word "rule" in a "rule of life" is less about obeying and more about purpose. Ultimately, St. Augustine and St. Benedict's "rule of life" could be boiled down to the word "love" – loving God and loving neighbors were the foundational purpose of their "rule of life."

Throughout the book, Earley walks the reader through his "rule of life" or, as he refers to it, *The Common Rule*, which helped transform his life. *The Common Rule* combines eight habits, four daily and four weekly. The daily habits include: kneeling prayer at morning, midday, and bedtime; one meal with others; one hour with phone off; Scripture before phone. While the weekly habits are: one hour of conservation with a friend; curate media to four hours; fast from something for 24 hours; sabbath.

Earley places each habit into two different spectrums. The first spectrum focuses on the love of God and the love of neighbor. The second spectrum contrasts embrace with resistance. For example, the habit of 'scripture before the phone' falls under the love of God and the resistance spectrum. It forces you to turn toward God and fight the temptation of falling prey to the invisible forces battling for your attention.

In *The Common Rule*, Earley provides numerous resources near the back of the book for individuals or groups wanting to implement one or more of his habits into their lives and breaks down strategies for living The

Common Rule for a week or a month. He also includes a section called "The Common Rule for Different Walks of Life." In this section, he creates specific templates for individuals from different walks of life, such as skeptics, artists, entrepreneurs, people with an addiction, or those dealing with mental health issues. The book also includes questions for reflection and discussion for each chapter.

New Year's resolutions often fail because the individual is alone on their journey. Their goal(s) tend to be self-focused. Unfortunately, the temptation to fall back into old habits eventually wins over time.

Through *The Common Rule*, Earley crafts a highly accessible book that invites readers to establish new habits through a formational practice that partners with God. Instead of drafting resolutions and goals with a measurable outcome, a "rule of life" changes one's posture from me to Him; in doing so, one can find freedom from the anxiety and distractions of the world. For millennia, monks have used a "rule of life" to provide structure and purpose to their daily lives, and Early believes the freedom he found can be obtained by all who commit to loving God and loving their neighbor through habitual life-giving practices.

Untrustworthy: The Knowledge Crisis Breaking Our Brains, Polluting Our Politics, and Corrupting Christian Community

by Bonnie Kristian.

Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022. 240 pages, softcover. $24.99.

Review by Gary Heibsch

In *Untrustworthy*, journalist Bonnie Kristian contends we are in an epistemological crisis. Who do we believe? What sources can one trust? How can we obtain accurate information so we can base our decisions on truth? Can what we believe to be true lead us toward God and others, or toward idolatry and isolation? The answers to these questions are profoundly important. Kristian asserts our current media environment gives us a flood of superficial information, but little depth of knowledge. She urges us to interact with and use media differently to enhance our relationships with God and others. The result is a mixed effort with some solid insight and advice comingled with material which feels underdeveloped and under-researched.

Kristian has organized her book using a problem-solution pattern. In the first seven chapters (entitled, "Naming the Crisis," "Media," "Mob," "Schemes," "Skepticism," "Emotion," and "Experience.") Kristian outlines the factors she believes create our epistemic crises. The last three chapters (entitled, "A Practical Epistemology," "A Building Plan, and "A Breath.") identify ways a Christian could interact with media more fruitfully. In these chapters, Kristian provides several solid insights.

Kristian understands from personal experience and family relations the suspicions conservative Christians have regarding a left of center bias in journalism. Kristian acknowledges this bias and agrees it plays a role. Yet, she asserts this is merely one problem with journalism. Other problems, some structural, abound. Kristian points to the disappearance of classified ads as

a development of note. Newspapers used to make substantial sums from these. Revenue came from sources other than an eye-catching headline. Now news outlets must induce people to click. Views equal ad revenue. This encourages dramatic and emotive stories to deliver eyeballs to advertisers while giving us slanted knowledge and distorted understanding.

Kristian also notes the declining trust in institutions and their leaders. This decline has resulted, in part, from outright lies from these sources. Kristian cites as an example Anthony Fauci. In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, fearful that healthcare workers would run out of face masks, Fauci told Americans masks would not prevent the spread of the disease. Fauci justified these statements by appealing to the greater good. Despite the motives, such lies breed cynicism and distrust. Thus, journalists and technology failed to inform us properly.

Yet, Kristian contends we, and our reactions to the media, contribute to the problem. This review will mention two of her examples. Justine Sacco, a young publicist, tweeted out just before she boarded a plane to South Africa in 2013, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" While she was in the air her tweet went viral. Commentators accused her of racism. She landed to find herself canceled and fired from her job. The internet mob gave Sacco no chance to defend herself. Few recognized the tweet could have multiple interpretations, and thus suspended judgement until they heard from her. Instead, the internet mob heaped shame on Sacco. Additionally, the internet has become a place to confirm one's suspicions. Kristian examines the QAnon phenomenon. A supposedly high-ranking military intelligence official, going by the name Q, dropped information about a conspiracy at the highest levels of government. The conspiracy sought to establish Satan worship, child sex trafficking and other ills in our society. Q could offer no proof of (his) position or contentions, but many people believed. The contentions confirmed suspicions they had about social changes in the United States. Many embraced extreme calls for violence against the government and its agents. The internet allows us to indulge our sinful proclivities. From our keyboards we can be fearful, judgmental, and self-righteous. We think ourselves almost omniscient, when in fact we know very little.

Kristian recommends we change ourselves. She asserts objective truth exists, but it is often hard to know if we have it. Kristian recommends we narrow our focus, become studious about a few things, and stop commenting on everything. She also calls upon us to become more intellectually honest and wise. This would require us to admit when information is incomplete or contradicts our narrative. Kristian also recommends love for God and others and obedience to divine commands. Finally, Kristian encourages us to develop habits of scripture reading, fasting from social media, and realizing when it is better to talk with a person face to face as opposed to via social media. All of these are solid suggestions which would make us better consumers of media.

The problems in Kristian's book come in the depth and breadth of her research and the organization. Kristian is a journalist. When one looks at her sources one finds she has relied heavily on journalistic writers. This is understandable, but topics discussed in the book touch on larger issues. For example, as noted above Kristian asserts the need for objectivity. Those familiar with academic debates on the subject know objectivity has come under concerted attack from a variety of sources. This is particularly true of post-modern writers who see objectivity as a mask hiding a drive for power. Kristian mentions the rise of advocacy journalism as a problem contributing to the epistemic crisis. This type of journalism can be seen as the child of the denial of objective truth. While it is not the job of Kristian's book to refute all the philosophical arguments against objectivity, an engagement with this material would have been good. This would have given Kristian the ability to give a fuller and more robust defense of objectivity as a desirable goal.

Another example comes in Kristian's chapter on emotion. Kristian points out many evangelicals have a deeply rooted suspicion of emotion. This suspicion troubles her. Yet, the chapter struggles to suggest an alternative. Here a reference to *The Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards would have been good. The role of emotion in religious life and practice is not new. Thinkers from previous eras can give us language we can use to discuss modern problems. The fact Kristian does not reference Edwards, or others who treated this subject, leaves her discussion feeling incomplete.

Additionally, Kristian does not develop an overarching vision of what media should be. How can the media contribute to our civic life? How can they contribute to our spiritual lives? What standards can we use to judge media? Elements of this are scattered in Kristian's chapters. A chapter devoted to this would have been good.

Thus, Kristian's book provides a solid critique of the media, a solid critique of us as consumers of media, and solid recommendations for our future growth. However, the book fails to provide a full understanding of all aspects of this problem and a fully developed vision of how we should engage with the media going forward.

Cultivating Mentors: Sharing Wisdom in Higher Education edited

by Todd C. Ream, Jerry A. Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers.

Downers Grove: IVP, 2022. 192 pages, softcover. $25.00.

Review by Jennifer Freeman
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Cultivating Mentors: Sharing Wisdom in Higher Education was published in 2022 by a compilation of authors who provide insight into the practice of mentoring within the context of Christian higher education. Although sharing wisdom is the essence of education in general, the authors bring to light how mentoring enhances across different life stages. Editors Todd Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher Devers propose that Christian colleges prioritize relational mentoring. However, the approaches to relational mentoring are implicit, so the opportunities for healthy mentoring are often ill-defined and lacking strategies. Thus, the editors' goals for the book were to provide strategy and theological principles for mentoring relationships across generational lines.

Although I enjoyed the unique perspectives of the different authors in the book, it was difficult to identify a consistent focus. I assumed the book would primarily discuss mentoring relationships between faculty and students, but there was as much information about mentoring faculty members (old and new) as there was about mentoring students. The authors agreed that when faculty members are professionally and personally satisfied, their ability to mentor students improves. There was less agreement about how to meet the needs of younger generations. Overall, the book has two themes: understanding the uniqueness of different generations and providing healthy environments that enable employees to be collegial

and offer themselves in mentoring relationships. I think those who will benefit most from this book are leaders and administrators who are concerned with maintaining the integrity of their institutions' mission while replenishing their workforce with new, often younger employees.

David Kinnaman, author and president of the Barna Group, wrote the first chapter, "The Need to Rediscover: Mentoring as a Crucial Formation Process." The statistical information he provides shows how the practices in Christian community, primarily in the church, shape young adults. Kinnaman identifies Millennials as people born between 1984-1998 and Gen Z as people born between 1998-2015. The data indicates that the discipleship practices from previous generations (before 1985) are not leading young adults to stay in church. Kinnaman indicates young people already feel relationally disconnected due to social media. Therefore, when a church prioritizes its own growth over the spiritual formation of the members, there is little incentive for younger generations to participate (26).

Kinnaman specifies the importance of people feeling genuinely connected in a community of Christians and asserts the value of intergenerational relationships in developing resilience in young people. Thus, he proposes that if Christian schools were to offer a place of belonging where students felt that they were emotionally close to at least one person, it would enhance spiritual formation and academic success. Kinnaman's final exhortation is for people to seek a better understanding of the current culture to help younger people navigate the necessary growth for becoming healthy contributors in their own communities.

In chapter 2, "Leading Integrated Lives," Tim Clydesdale guides students in moving beyond the insulation of the academy through the lens of vocational mentoring. He maintains that vocational development in adolescents and young adults comes from personal discernment and an active obedience to a call from God for work that is essential for human flourishing (37). Discernment and obedience are best learned through the practice of relational mentoring between older and younger adults. Clydesdale calls young people beginning their post-college careers "postmodern pilgrims" who need the opportunity to reflect and live in community while in college in

order to be successful (34).

Clydesdale struggles with generational theory, as indicated in his subheading, "Generation, Smedgeration." Unfortunately, trying to make a case against overt generational theory distracts from his point that there is a need for intergenerational mentoring. Additionally, his case disregards the work of other authors in the book. I agreed with his premise that when creating formulas or stereotypes for understanding people there is a risk of losing sight of the shared human desire for significance and purpose. However, research about the unique circumstances of different generations enhances empathy toward older and younger generations.

Rebecca Hong shares that generational differences benefit workplaces when thinking about flexibility in location and time in her chapter, "Boomers to Zoomers: Mentoring Toward Human Centeredness in our Work." Using data on Millennials' use of technology and their desire for more flexible schedules, Hong shares that Boomers have learned from Millennials about how organizations can be more human-centered, empowering people to grow in their professional and personal affairs. I appreciated her generosity when describing Millennials' overall approach to work and how they have contributed to a healthier workplace.

Tim Elmore, a longtime advocate of intergenerational mentoring, contributes practical advice for faculty and administrators, in his chapter, "Intentional Influence: Relevant Practices and Habits We Must Cultivate in Today's Emerging Generation." Elmore reminds his readers that students have unlimited access to information but lack the ability to interpret and apply that information in their lives. The experience faculty provide when sharing their stories gives students a vision for their potential future. Like Clydesdale, Elmore believes that mentoring provides students with the opportunity to both reflect on their lives as well as practice resourcefulness and resilience. Elmore also encourages intergenerational relationships because, in their reciprocity, each adds value to the other.

The remaining chapters in the book focus on developing healthy faculty members who will in turn positively influence their students. In chapter 3, "Call and Response, Mentoring for Organizational Fit and Flourishing,"

Margaret Diddams gives a brief historical overview (from the 1980s to the present) of the shift in Christian colleges and universities toward developing faculty with better teaching strategies and student outcomes. If new faculty members are not familiar with the expectations of Christian education, the institution needs to provide a formal process for them to be socialized into the community and participate in the mission. Diddams points out that a person's vocation entails both a call and response; it is a call by God for a person toward a group of people and a type of work, as well as a response from a person to a particular place. Therefore, the three onboarding models that she shares are informative for both bringing new employees into a community as well as providing examples of how those employees can positively influence that same community.

Beck Taylor, like Diddams, is also focused on the healthy development of faculty members. In his chapter, "Who Will Lead Us? A Lifestyle Approach to Academic Mentorship," he emphasizes the value of being aware of different life stages. Since smaller universities have a limited number of upper management opportunities, they must find ways to invest in other kinds of development to retain the best veteran faculty and staff members. Taylor recommends that Christian institutions provide ways for individuals to identify their own formation and development through participating in the institution's mission. Irrespective of denominational tradition, Christian institutions that promote internal character development provide employees with opportunities to serve their colleagues as well as students. Senior faculty members can uniquely affirm younger faculty for their service to others as well as their professional development. Taylor's story exemplifies this pattern because it is filled with the positive influence of people who formally and informally mentored him at every stage. He continues to mentor others in the same way and states that the greatest reward in his later years is knowing that younger people will continue to sustain the institution.

The conclusion of the book is written by Stacy Hammons. She is honest about the perils that Christian institutions face yet she maintains there is a greater hope. There is a need for Christian institutions to rethink the basis and the purpose for mentoring, to create intentional discussion about what

a healthy work environment is for students as well as employees, and to inspire empathy between different generations. I wish that I had read the five propositions she gives for change before I began the individual chapters because she summarizes the authors' most significant points, providing additional clarity. Those interested in improving mentoring in higher education will find encouragement for their cause in this book.

Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective. Frequently composed of writing produced by the fine faculty and administration of the College, past issues have included essay by thoughtful scholars and researchers outside the college community, such as: John Lennox, Steven Garber, Amy Black, Louis Markos, Sedrick Huckaby, and others. Previous issues of the journal can be freely accessed on the College's website at: www.cofo.edu/Academics/Faithful-lives.