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A Faith and Learning Journal

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Christian Scholarship, Integration, and Accreditation: 
Looking Two Ways

C. Clark Triplett

When asked to discuss Christian scholarship, integration, and accreditation, it was difficult to find a through-line for these seemingly disparate topics. They are all significant topics for discussion, but not typically addressed together as though they are naturally linked by some common thread. After some thought, however, it seemed worthwhile to attempt to look at these three different projects from a slightly different angle. There has been much written about each of these separate areas and it would be of great value to focus on any one of them. In this case, however, it seemed fit to think about these topics from the perspective of two different audiences, or as the title of this presentation indicates, from two different perspectives: from inside and outside of the Christian community, with perhaps a slightly greater emphasis on the external perspective. This means examining these three components of Christian education in terms of the standards and expectations of the academic community as a whole. This seems like a worthwhile effort since Christians have not always been enthusiastic about scholarship and, when they are, there are often questions about how these research efforts compare to what is being done in the public academy. The “secular” academic community has certain expectations about scholarship that include rigorous norms for research and scholarship, diverse critical methods, and the broader guidelines and standards of learned societies and accrediting bodies. There are many legitimate questions and concerns about the place and importance of Christian scholarship within the academic community. These questions relate to the validity of the claims of Christian scholars and whether “Christian” scholarship is really any different from other kinds of research. In order to determine the validity of Christian scholarship, then, it will be important to look not only at standard expectations for research, but also at how and where Christian scholarship fits within the current critical climate within the academy. These questions have a particular cogency for the project described as the integration of faith and learning practiced at faith-based institutions. How does faith and learning relate to the ongoing complexities of all efforts at integrating different disciplines? Do the efforts at integrations demonstrate the same level of scrutiny and critical thought as other interdisciplinary studies, and is there really an intellectual climate for this kind of assimilative process? Perhaps one of the best ways to answer some of these questions is by looking at these projects from two different directions.
Christian Scholarship within the Public Sphere: 
Is There Really a Distinctive Approach?

One of the important reasons for approaching Christian scholarship from this angle is a kind of extreme fideism that pervades the discourse particularly of some Christian institutions related, in particular, to the project of the integration of faith and learning. There are simply a lot of assumptions that Christians make that are not subject to the scrutiny of a critical review by the broader academic community. Arguments always seem unassailable from the inside, but when truth-claims are carefully weighed by scholars who may not agree with these assumptions they may seem less invincible. They are even more problematic when the institution lacks a culture of scholarship and research that might mitigate some criticism from the outside. This type of fideism is articulated in different ways, including a defensive posture or even, in some cases, an apodictic attitude towards those who might question the claims by those who are not invested in the assertions of the faith-based community. These attitudes and postures related to the discourse on Christian campuses often lead to insular or self-reflexive attitudes that ultimately do not prepare students to engage the larger society. In his early work, The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, historian Mark A. Noll points out rather harshly that secular scholars view the academic efforts of evangelical scholars as “bereft of self-criticism, intellectual subtlety, or an awareness of complexity” (14). Those efforts “are blown about by every wind of apocalyptic speculation and enslaved to the spirit of popular Science” (14). While Noll recognizes that there are certainly many examples of evangelical scholarship that contradict this image, he continues to argue that evangelicals in general have not made scholarship and research a priority of higher education. More often than not, Christian institutions claim they are primarily teaching colleges and do not have the time or need for serious research. He is, of course, aware that evangelicals have been a real force in changing individual lives and saving souls, but this strength has led to significant weaknesses in the area of scholarship. In his later work Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind, written some twenty years later, he admits that if he had it to do over, he probably would have taken a different tone, “more hopeful than despairing, more attuned to possibilities than to problems, more concerned with theological resources than with theological deficiencies” (153). In this more recent work, he asserts that one of the major reasons that evangelicals suffer from a lack of intellectual seriousness is that culture in general suffers from the same deficiency. In a context of radical populism and anti-intellectualism that privileges sound bites over insight and warranted arguments, it is difficult to develop a climate that encourages critical inquiry. If Christians wish to engage in intellectual discussions at-large, there must be a willingness to look two ways, both inward and outward. This means the shades will have to be pulled up and doors unlocked so that Christian scholarship can be challenged in the same way that any other scholarship is challenged rather than operating from a position of privilege.
The intellectual landscape of secular colleges and universities provides quite a different picture in terms of the kind of research and critical thought that is considered acceptable. The dominant academic culture within universities emphasizes what has been often described as “scholarly detachment” and “freedom of inquiry” that must not be encumbered by authoritarianism and prejudicial ideals that hinder the scientific enterprise. Although during the nineteenth century this cultural context was based on liberal protestant moral ideals, the values of higher education gradually became disconnected from their religious foundations and were more and more defined in naturalistic terms. While higher education continued to nod its head to the importance of “higher ideals” and emphasized the importance of shared values, these were simply identified as Western democratic ideals without mention of any religious tradition. The portrait that modern universities wish to portray about the scholarly enterprise is that it is “non-sectarian” or “neutral” and is understood as a uniform application of the scientific method in all areas of inquiry. The separation of faith from learning has been a principle taken for granted even by Christian scholars who teach in tier one research universities. Christians who teach in secular universities find that silence about background beliefs is the best policy to remain in good standing at these institutions.

In his well-received work The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship, Notre Dame historian George Marsden argues that the mainstream academy’s resistance to what is described as the intrusion “religious prejudice” is a red herring because it is not consistently applied and “there is no way that it could be applied without excluding too much” (49). This is an important observation because the secular academy certainly does not exclude all background beliefs, although sometimes they feel justified in excluding certain control beliefs, particularly if they are religious. However, Marsden believes that, as long as representatives of such beliefs are acknowledged and scholars are willing to defend such assumptions with arguments and evidence that are publicly accessible, there is no reason why one scholar’s views should be discredited just because they include some background religious beliefs. It is easy enough to identify other types of background beliefs that are not automatically excluded even though they may not be shared by everybody. Otherwise, almost all minority moral opinions would be excluded before they had the opportunity to be debated and subjected to critical debate. For instance, beliefs about anti-slavery and the equality of men and women were not self-evident to most Americans in the nineteenth century. According to Marsden, “even very traditional Christian perspectives need not be so outrageous…, but can fit in nicely with the current rules of the academy if only those rules are applied equally to religious and nonreligious views” (57).

Following the main point of Marsden’s cogent argument on secular attitudes in the academy related to religious background beliefs, the question still must be asked: What difference could it possibly make if research is labeled Christian or not? Is there really any unique difference between one kind of research and another? Do Christians discover different elements of reality when doing research in the biological or physical sciences? Obviously, there are
different methodologies for research across various disciplines and there has been an ongoing debate on which is more rigorous. Interestingly, a distinction was made early in the nineteenth century in European academies where academic disciplines were differentiated in terms of the Natural Sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and the moral or human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). However, regardless of the debate about which methods are more rigorous, most disciplines have well defined standards for doing research. So, what does Christian scholarship have to add that is uniquely different from what has already been developed over a long period of time? Is there such a thing as reformed biology or Wesleyan psychology? The basic difference, according to Marsden, is not the methodology that is used, but the interesting questions asked about the data being analyzed and the importance of the topic being considered. Different questions determine what areas of study may seem more important than others. The difference is much more apparent in some areas of study than in others. Obviously, there is less variation in the field of biochemistry than in political science because the methods are much more tightly controlled and there is less variation in the subject matter to be studied. However, it “does not follow that, because there is no special Christian view of photosynthesis, there is therefore no Christian view of biology” (61).

Marsden’s main point here is that the way Christian scholarship may vary to some extent from mainstream research is the way research questions may be framed. That is, the angle of vision may precipitate different interests and different areas of focus from those of someone who is not oriented to faith. Of course, this could also be said about a Muslim or Buddhist researcher as well. Marsden uses a helpful image based on gestalt psychology to explain the many commonalities and differences between Christian and non-Christian scholarship. The work in gestalt psychology describes how the mind organizes information so that individuals may look at the same set of patterns and see different things as in the well-known image that may look like a duck to some viewers and like a rabbit to others. The patterns we use to organize Christian beliefs shape and revise the things we think are important and the questions we might ask about a particular area of study. Christian scholars may focus on subjects and situations that are significant to issues of faith, for example, by looking at how religious beliefs may have influenced certain historical events, or the value of certain religious themes in literary works, or even the intellectual climate that may have engendered the scientific spirit. Otherwise, the difference between secular and faith-based scholarship varies little across disciplines in terms of methods and even outcomes. Along with these unique questions, however, there is also a unique attitude towards the intellectual life that Christians have historically demonstrated. This unique attitude, according to Robert Wuthnow, professor of social sciences and director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton, is one which “sacralizes” or makes sacred the intellectual life. It gives larger meaning to research that should encourage a sense of integrity and seriousness to the process of scientific discovery (Rediscovering the Sacred, 23-24). Therefore, Christians may ask questions that lead, at least indirectly, to larger questions that elicit questions
about the meaning and validity of the background beliefs and assumptions of Christian scholars.

An important question that arises in the discussion about the difference between Christian and non-Christian approaches to scholarship is the interpretive schemas that may be part of the context of any rational inquiry, regardless of the discipline or subject matter. These agendas are influenced by social, cultural, and linguistic contexts that effect not only research on religious topics, but on critical inquiry in general. Although we will touch on this in more detail in the next section on the current intellectual climate, it is important to re-emphasize that the prejudices of the secular academic community often determine what research may or may not be considered as legitimate. Although there are many good reasons for accepting most of the parameters and guidelines of the liberal academic establishment, many contemporary scholars in the field of scientific philosophy are skeptical of the myth of scientific “neutrality” that has often been espoused by positivist thinkers. Scholars such as David Bloor (Knowledge and Social Imagery), Joseph Rouse (Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science), Steve Fuller (Social Epistemology: Science, Technology, and Science), Karin Knorr Cetina (Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge), and George Canguilhem (The Normal and the Pathological) have been deeply critical of some of the assumptions of the scientific community and their claims to escape the social and political contexts that are present even within the laboratory setting. They make strong arguments that there simply is no “God’s eye-view” or “view from nowhere” that is not deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric. The knowledge bases of the scientific community, which are quite diverse across disciplines, did not develop in a vacuum, and these “knowledge societies” are part of an epistemic culture that is really “amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms—bonded through affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence—which, in a given field, make up how we know what we know” (Cetina, 1). In all scholarly work, there are always some underlying, inescapable assumptions that reflect the interpretive horizon and social nexus that are the warp and woof of the life of the academy.

As I hope to make evident in this discussion, a clear understanding of the social, cultural, and linguistic context of research and critical thought provides an opening for Christian scholars to get into the game and do the hard work of legitimate research. Since all critical inquiry includes interpretive agendas and background beliefs, there is space for Christians who are interested in entering the fray. This means, of course, changing certain attitudes about special privileges and claims that they are speaking for God whenever presenting their work to the broader academic community. While Christians can make the case that the modern academy has not always been fair-minded in considering their work, they have also been guilty at times of a certain smugness and triumphalism in their claims about the truth that have not been subjected to the critical analysis of scholars who may or may not agree with their point of view. If Christian scholars wish to be accepted and respected by the academic community, they must be willing to accept the fact that if they follow the common rules and procedures of legitimate research they will find that more often than not that they come to the
same conclusions as non-Christians. However, because of the unique questions they may ask from their point of view, there may be occasions when they offer new insights and alternative conclusions that the liberal academy has either avoided or shown no interest in. For example, Christian historians such as Nathan Hatch, whose work *The Democratization of American Christianity* considers the effects of a democratic culture and the development evangelical churches, provide a creative and fresh look at American Christianity that has been highly acclaimed even within the secular academic community.

**The Balance of Christian Faith and Critical Inquiry:**

**The Integration of Faith and Learning**

Questions about the integrity of Christian scholarship are closely related to the project that Christian institutions describe as the integration of faith and learning. This concept has been discussed at great length in numerous publications and has been offered as a central tenet of evangelical colleges and universities. It is a unique feature of these institutions that clearly distinguishes their educational mission from secular institutions. The idea of faith and learning has been articulated in various ways within faith communities depending on whether the focus is on cognitive, devotional, or formative aspects of academic life. Although all of these approaches have value and should be considered as important components of discussions on faith-based learning, this discussion will focus on the cognitive and substantive process that stresses the cross-disciplinary interaction of subject matter, multivariate methods, aims, and knowledge bases of different fields of study. This process includes a reflection on various ways of perceiving reality and the specialized critical methods for analyzing data, evidence, and theories within particular fields and whether there is a possibility of finding common ground between different areas of study. Consider, for example, the wide differences between the critical theories of literature, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. As we shall see, there is a wide variance in the way the subject matter is analyzed and how conclusions are determined. The point is that the project of the interdisciplinary integration of faith and learning is much more than a sprinkling of Bible verses at the beginning of a discussion on serious academic subject matter such as Max Weber’s theory of the Protestant work ethic or Thomas Young’s wave theory of light. It is also not simply the imposition of specific theological constructs on different disciplines in a way that does not consider the critical parameters and language games of that discipline. Integration is a tough-minded, time-consuming process in which there is a serious interdisciplinary engagement between the methods of investigation of one discipline (Christian theology) and the investigative methods of another (psychology, literature, physics). Each has its own “’grammar’ that determines what its discourse means and this often renders its language inaccessible to those who have not learned how to use it” (*Theology as Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, xxi). In many cases, these disparate disciplines have competing claims about the validity of their own knowledge bases and so are insulated from critical or
skeptical claims from outside. This is the reason why integration is so difficult because it demands a willingness to give and take and a concerted effort to discover new metaphors that will help create a common ground for discussion. Some disciplines may fit together more easily than others because they include overlapping subject matter and applications. Disciplines such as theology and literature and/or the social sciences are easier to integrate because they use similar language games (family resemblances), but in others cases such as the natural sciences it is almost like speaking a different language. To learn something from another discipline requires an “attitude of openness,” what Italian jurist and philosopher Emelio Betti calls Aufgeschlossenheit, “open-mindedness” or “receptiveness” that entails listening, patience, and respect for the other perspective (Thistleton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics). Philosopher Paul Ricoeur also talks about the hermeneutical process of opening up to new possibilities, what he describes as a “second naiveté,” in which the imagination opens to the new and unforeseeable in external events (336). Serious integration requires a receptive and open response that is integral to finding connections between the theories and methods of different disciplines. There must also be a recognition that integration is an ongoing process that is always receptive to correction and improvement as well as to an expectation of the broadening of horizons. Integration is a project that includes both critical thought and imagination that seeks new and unique ways of explaining and understanding reality through the use of common metaphors that make sense within and between two rational cultures. Therefore, integration is always a two-way street in which overlapping discourses may lead to new insights about the nature of man and the processes and order of the universe.

There are many examples of critical projects on the relationship between theology and other academic disciplines. In a recent work sponsored by the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, Theology as Interdisciplinary Inquiry: Learning with and from Natural and Human Sciences, edited by Robin W. Lovin and Joshua Mauldin, contributors from different disciplines discuss research that attempts to relate theology to their own discipline by raising interesting questions about the connection between the two disciplines. For instance, Colleen Shantz, associate professor of New Testament studies at St. Michael’s College in the University of Toronto, shows how there is a connection between psychology and faith by “demonstrating how an in-depth understanding of psychology can help the biblical scholar to identify cognitive structures that make biblical accounts of human experience compelling across the distances of history and culture that separate us from the text” (xvi). By looking both ways the scholar attempts to provide a clarification of human understanding by offering common spaces for theology and psychology to assist each other. Another example includes the work of Andrea Hollingsworth, adjunct professor of theology at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, who discusses her research on Nicholas of Cusa’s De Visione Dei that shows how this classic work in Western spirituality anticipates modern psychological insights into cognitive change and transformation. Nicholas’s spiritual exercises, according to Hollingsworth, are clearly intended “to lead his readers not only to moments of
illumination, but to lasting changes in the way they understand God, the world, and themselves” (xvi). As indicated in these few examples, integration works in two directions and assumes intersubjective understanding and the mutual interplay of language games.

Integration of theology with the natural sciences has been particularly complicated because of tightly controlled methods that make it more difficult to engage in the cross-fertilization of ideas and inquiry. This has also been problematic even within the somewhat diverse disciplines within the natural sciences. However, there are a number of internationally acknowledged Christian scholars who have made an effort to find a connection between theology and the natural sciences. In some cases, these individuals have incorporated science within their own theological methods. Each of them, however, makes it clear that scientific method does not presuppose a positivistic worldview. To use mechanistic methods for the purpose of understanding specific empirical data is different from assuming a mechanistic view of all reality, as if everything without remainder can be fully explained in mechanistic or positivist terms (Thistleton, The Hermeneutics of Doctrine, 146). Arguments against reductionism are paramount in understanding the possibility of integration between theology and/or any of the disciplines included in the hard sciences. Extending scientific method by appealing to a broader worldview requires a kind of discourse that reaches beyond the boundaries of the “traditional” or “received” scientific method. At the same time, theologians such as Thomas F. Torrance, Bernard Lonnergan, and J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, argue that “genuine questions about the possibility of knowledge cannot be raised in abstracto, but only in concreto, not apriori but only aposteriori” (Theological Science, 1). This simply means that discussions on the relationship between science and theology must begin within the context of the situational, historical, life-world in which humans exist. Thomas F. Torrance, former professor of dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh, who has written extensively on the relationship between science and theology in a number of works including his magnum opus Theological Science as well as other popular works, including The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science and Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi’s Thought for Christian Faith and Life. Throughout his body of work, he insists on a hermeneutical perspective. Torrance interacts with the seminal work of a number of scientists including the theories of James Clerk Maxwell (formulated the theory of electromagnetic radiation), Michael Polanyi (contributions to physical chemistry, economics, and philosophy), and Albert Einstein (formulated the special theory of relativity). In the development of his approach to “theological science,” he attempts to argue for the unified character of theological and scientific knowledge. Taking his lead from the work of these accomplished scientists, he makes a serious effort to show how the “personal factor” assumed by all scientific knowledge particularly because all knowing is personal knowing and can never escape this starting point for any truth-seeking. Torrance’s entire theological enterprise is founded on the premise that the intelligibility of the universe is shared by both theology and science by
arguing that there is a clear convergence between the two disciplines around the boundary points of the two divergent rational cultures. In the process of interacting with science as a theologian, he developed many helpful metaphors and themes that would open up the possibility for engagement between the two disciplines.

In a like manner, Bernard Lonergan, former Stillman Professor of Divinity at Harvard University and Distinguished Visiting Professor at Boston College, attempted to come to terms with modern scientific theory and set out to do what Thomas Aquinas did for his time. His best-known works are *Insight and Methods in Theology* in which he attempts to meticulously and specifically lay out the important relationship between theology and science. Like Torrance, Lonergan emphasized the personal aspect of critical inquiry. Through “self-appropriation” or “personal discovery” of the dynamic structures of inquiry including insight, judgment, and decision, the seeker discovers his own intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility that is the foundation of every inquiry. From this foundation, he argued consistently that even the natural sciences are profoundly influenced by hermeneutics: “He goes beyond merely disparaging value-neutral abstraction and shows that interpretation, understanding, and judgment reside within the process of “scientific inquiry” as well as within the broader inquiries related to human beings and to God (Thistleton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 151). Lonergan argued that all research, regardless of content, is approached in a similar fashion: “Fact, then, combines with the correctness of experience, the determinateness of accurate intelligence and the absoluteness of rational judgment…. It is the anticipated unity to which sensation, perception, imagination, inquiry, insight, formulation, grasp of the unconditional, and judgment, make their several, complementary contributions” (*Insight*, 331). For Lonergan, this integrated approach is a “transcendental method” or “transcendental inquiry” which begins with the personal knower who raises two questions: What am I doing when I know? What do I know when I do it? (Thistleton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 155). Lonergan, therefore, emphasizes the importance of both the individual knower and the community-at-large so that what is known gains currency in the public square. This transcendental approach to knowing, regardless of subject matter, guards against feelings, judgments, and beliefs being overtaken by every new fashion in changing cultures. At the same time, the methods and knowledge bases of each discipline is understood in terms of horizons which relates to the limits of the scholar’s “field of vision.” All disciplines, whether in the human sciences or natural sciences, have different “worlds of interest,” but in principle each is capable of enlargement to include the other (Thistleton, 155).

Many other scholars have made similar attempts to integrate faith or theology with not only the natural sciences, but with diverse fields of study such as history, psychology, sociology, literary studies, law, art, and medicine. Exploring the work of scholars such as Nancey Murphy, Alister McGrath, John Polkinghorne, Colin Gunton, David Benner, Robert Wuthnow, George Marsden, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, Anthony Thistleton, and Arthur Peacocke, to name a few, is well worth the effort. Some of these scholars are more oriented to Protestant evangelical theology than others, but all of them
attempt to seriously engage the diverse interpretive schemes of these disciplines at a critical level. Unfortunately, there is neither time nor space to analyze their accomplishments in this discussion. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen was mentioned earlier and we will refer to his work in the next section. There have also been a number of very ambitious projects on integration that have included the collaboration of a large number of scholars from different fields. There is one project, however, I would mention because it demonstrates the level of work that has been done in some venues. The collaborative work of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences and the Vatican Observatory which resulted in the publication of five weighty volumes on a number of major of scientific discoveries including Chaos and Complexity, Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature, Quantum Mechanics, Evolutionary and Molecular Biology, and Neuroscience and the Person. This series of scholarly works was edited by several well-known theologians and scientists including Robert Russell, Nancey Murphy, John Polkinghorne, Philip Clayton, and Arthur Peacocke, among others.

**Important Shifts in the Intellectual Climate: New Opportunities for Discourse**

An important reason why some doors have opened for contributions of Christian scholars, as well as the possibility of cross-disciplinary collaboration, is the evolving intellectual climate in the United States and European academic centers. The shift relates to the two most common approaches to explaining knowledge and rationality, which were conceived as antithetical approaches in academic institutions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In philosophical circles, these two approaches are distinguished as the fields of epistemology and hermeneutics. This dichotomy has shaped the strong separation in Western culture between the natural sciences, which attempts to explain things in terms of universal laws and grand narratives, and the human sciences, which attempt to not only understand things in particular, but also within the broader context of culture, language, and the varied situations of life. This was initially articulated in the work of German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey who distinguished between *Erklärung* (explanation) and *Verstehen* (understanding). For Dilthey, this bifurcation is the way individuals make sense of the various kinds of phenomena being studied. The natural sciences will tend to approach phenomena in terms of causal explanations, including particular phenomena under a general rule, while the human sciences have tended to study particular phenomena in light of the broader context of life. At the time, Dilthey’s intention was to emphasize the uniqueness of the human sciences for understanding the special function of the human mind. He was not denying the validity of scientific “explanation,” but he did wish to affirm the value and significance of the human sciences and the interpretive methods that are unique to the field. Although Dilthey’s discussion provided a clarifying distinction between various methodologies for considering different kinds of phenomena, this distinction has been the underlying aporia in the sometimes-heated debates between modernist
and postmodernist camps. Whereas modernism has argued for “explanations” which are universal, transcontextual, and abstract in descriptions of rationality (what postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard calls Grand Narratives), postmodernism rages against the universal rationality of modernism and emphasizes the local, culturally influenced nature of rationality that is rooted in particular traditions and contexts. These particular contexts have their own coherence, eschewing the goal of explanations that are external to or stand outside particular life situations. For Dilthey, the focus on human sciences expands the conversation about the importance of “life” (leben) or “lived experience.”

According to Dilthey, life represents the flow of human activity which constitutes experience in all of its diversity and individual particularity (Shults, 69). As previously indicated, this distinction would have a major impact on the shift in the intellectual discourse in the late twentieth century that divided the academy and made it even more difficult to agree on the parameters of critical debate.

Interestingly, it would be philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer who would move this debate to the mainstream of the academic world. He would argue that the imperial approach to modern rationality advocated by positivism and scientific naturalism has dominated not only the natural sciences, but also fields such as psychology, sociology, and political science. Ernest Nagel, for example, a logical positivist philosopher, was an exemplar of trying to apply scientific method to explain the diversity of social interactions and as the model for critical inquiry in the social sciences as well as the natural sciences. Gadamer argued for just the opposite, in his major work *Truth and Method*, by insisting on a universal hermeneutical approach to all knowledge including the disciplines within the natural sciences as well as the human sciences. Initially, most scientists, including social scientists, rejected what they considered such loose, non-empirical methods for describing reality. However, beginning in the 1960s, a number of significant intellectual changes occurred that would have a lasting impact on all areas of study. These changes would have an impact on accepted paradigms in the natural sciences, social sciences, literary studies, theology as well as diverse disciplines such as art and law. Three seminal works would have a profound effect on the acceptance of the “received model” of scientific method used as the framework for many different disciplines. Some of these works will be familiar, including Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Peter Winch’s *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, and Hans Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (Bernstein, 20-44). Those three treatises would have a revolutionary impact on rational discussions across the disciplinary scope of academic scholarship. Controversies emerged from several areas of study that would question the nature of scientific inquiry. Kuhn would seriously question the way new scientific paradigms develop and whether they naturally and logically flow from each other or are basically incommensurable with the received tradition. Winch, who based his analysis of sociology on the work of the later Wittgenstein, would insist that sociology cannot appeal to the same kind of justification as the natural sciences and argued that different rational cultures demand criteria that are specific to that culture. Gadamer would make the case that traditional methods of inquiry are just
another form of “prejudice” which is not recognized and without this awareness the interpreter will inevitably impose his own understanding of the "text" rather than recognizing the distance between the two horizons—the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. The concept of text would be broadened to include not only written works, but also social interactions including academic discourse. According to Gadamer, “(h)ermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness…between being a historically intended, distanciated object and belonging to a tradition. The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (Bernstein, 295). So alternative debates between “explanation” and “understanding” would touch off great controversy concerning the possibility of a universal rationality that is cross-disciplinary or trans-contextual. Later this shift would lead to approaches to knowledge and rationality that would be taken to their logical extreme particularly in the works of Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida.

Although there has been considerable debate about a strictly hermeneutical approach to rationality, this shift in the focus of inquiry would open up the conversation to include methods that were previously viewed as illegitimate by a more mechanistic understanding of reality based on a closed system of cause and effect. With this changed landscape, even theologians began to enter the conversation with unique rational claims. This turn towards hermeneutical models of knowledge brought new and imaginative avenues of scholarship. This new approach to inquiry would take into account the importance of cultural, linguistic, and life-situated categories in intellectual discourse. At the same time, other counter arguments about the possibility of critique across various cultural paradigms. With this shift, there were both opportunities and problems. Eleonor Stump, Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy at St. Louis University, address some of her concerns about this shift in the intellectual climate in both directions. According to Stump, this challenge is rooted in the Enlightenment belief in learning as a universal and generically human enterprise. When learning is seen in these terms, science emerges as the preeminent scholarly enterprise, for it deliberately disregards human particularities—of race or gender, class, or religion—and insists that truth is available openly and equally to all through the exercise of reason and the pursuit of method. Within the tradition of Enlightenment modernism, passion and commitment have no place in the scholarly enterprise, and scientific detachment becomes the standard. (*Christ Across the Disciplines*, 9)

She goes on to remind us that more recently this assumption has been challenged by the postmodernists who “assume all human endeavors, including the scientific enterprise to be riddled with biases, self-interested actions, and the quest for power and domination” (Ibid.). While Stump is sympathetic to the concerns and criticism of postmodernism, she concludes that the postmodern position is untenable because it does not provide a basis for criticism: “On postmodern
grounds, individuals who find themselves under the sway of one particularity have no grounds for judging someone who acts on the basis of different, highly particular premises” (Ibid.). Following Stump’s lead, many critics argue that without some over-arching narrative like the empirical-analytical methods of science, it is not possible to justify the legitimacy of the truth claims of a particular, rational position. Unless there is some trans-contextual perspective that provides a critical framework, there is no method for analyzing pathologically self-deceptive rational systems. The postmodern project ultimately leads to relativism.

In spite of the intellectual dilemma between modernism-postmodernism, epistemology-hermeneutics, or explanation-understanding, there are a number of scholars who have attempted to find a via media stance between these polar positions. These scholars accept many of the criticisms of postmodernism related to traditional approaches to knowledge and the disregard for social and cultural contexts, but, at the same time, recognize the need for an intersubjective, trans-contextual critique that bridges the boundaries of particular rational cultures. In other words, they make an effort to accommodate the postmodern concerns without collapsing into a relativistic hermeneutic that provides no method for critical analysis. It is a position that understands that epistemology and hermeneutics are integrally linked and mutually conditioning rather than mutually exclusive (Shults, 78). Some scholars, therefore, attempt to split the difference and land somewhere between modernism and postmodernism, epistemology and hermeneutics, and explanation and understanding. The representatives who have tried to follow this path offer new grounds for interdisciplinary collaboration that takes into account the cultural, linguistic, and situational background of any rational argument while retaining a “praxial” or “pragmatic” critique that is resituated within the dynamics of sociohistorical engagement. Calvin Schrag, former Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University, explains this new synthesis in his own unique way:

We propose for consideration a refiguration of rationality as interpretive narration and praxial critique. Setting aside, at least for the time being, the modernist notion of rationality as a mental act (or set of mental acts), let us consider rationality as a social practice, albeit of a special kind. It is a social practice that involves the telling of a story, laden with interpretation, (and) containing resources and strategies for critique. In this notion of rationality there are three principal moments that overlap and intercalate: narrativity, interpretation, and critique. As such it contains features of postmodernism (…narrativity), features of modernity (…critique) and a middle or mediating term “interpretation.” Rationality is embodied in the telling of a story that provides a critical account of our interpretive understanding of self and world. (Life-World and Politics, 87)
Schrag, therefore, uses a new metaphor to describe this approach that he calls “transversality” that avoids the limitations of the atemporal, ahistorical view of modernity (the view from nowhere) and the situationally imprisoned position of postmodernism.

Several prolific scholars advocate this via media position. These include several of the scholars we have already mentioned, such as Thomas Torrance, Bernard Lonergan, J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, and Calvin Schrag. There are others as well who have developed sophisticated rational systems that emphasize a mediating position such as Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Bernstein, and Karl-Otto Apel, to name a few. Each of these scholars come from different sides of the divide in the epistemological-hermeneutical or modern-postmodern debates. Paul Ricoeur, for example, approaches his mediating position, described as the “hermeneutic of suspicion,” from the direction of philosophical hermeneutics while Jürgen Habermas approaches rationality from the epistemological side using the medium of communicative action. Since each of these scholars argues that rationality is multifaceted and, to some extent, diverse, there is space for claims from various disciplines and belief systems. Part of this allowance is the result of the inclusion of the field of hermeneutics which recognizes the importance of human situatedness within a specific culture and language system. Wentzel van Huyssteen, like the other scholars who advocate a mediating position, makes a case that the natural sciences as well as every other mode of human inquiry is always already hermeneutically conditioned. He argues fiercely that the old myth that science is about reason and theology is simply about faith has been overturned because all explanations emerge out of a fiduciary rootedness, but the quest for intelligibility also involves a drive to search beyond those roots for a broader understanding through a cross-contextual, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary dialogue (Shults, 71).

These changes in the intellectual climate have provided a new impetus for cross-disciplinary studies. It does not alter the need for rigorous scholarship, but it does create a space for considering possible dialogue between theology and other disciplines. While there has been a considerable amount of work done on the project of integrating faith and learning by Christian scholars in varying fields, it is often written for a limited audience who are expected to accept the tenets of the Christian faith that are imposed upon the content of a specific discipline with little effort to compare and contrast methodologies, theories, constructs, and practices that make meaningful discourse possible in seeking common ground. In many cases, theological constructs are simply imposed on the field without considering whether there are compatible language games, to use Wittgenstein’s term, that allow for a unified perspective on the meaning of disparate constructs. Integration is only possible through use of a language that bridges the gap between two disparate linguistic cultures. Wentzel van Huyssteen makes a strong case for the use of metaphor to provide a bridge between two alien languages: “A good metaphor, which figuratively helps us to understand the unknown in terms of the known, ultimately makes us see our ordinary, everyday world in novel and unusual ways” (Theology and the Justification of Faith, 133). This is particularly important in relating theology to other disciplines. Theological language is quite
strange and enigmatic to many and even more so for scientists and critical inquirers. Since it is the nature of theological language about God to be mysterious, it becomes problematic in trying to translate this language into the concrete language of everyday life. At the same time, however, the Bible is rich in the use of metaphors that are articulated in diverse literary forms. Wentzel van Huyssteen believes that this richness provides an opportunity for confluence in relating various disciplinary models: “It is pertinent to the quest for creditable rationality model for systematic theology that metaphoric speech is currently again at the center of the philosophy of science and literary studies” (Theology and the Justification of Faith, 134). This is not a surrender to imagination or fiction; rather, metaphors become a way of explaining things that cannot be explained in any other way such as wave theory, relativity, the uncertainty principle, or the double helix. Metaphors are not anti-intellectual; instead, they are, as Max Black argues, “a distinctive mode of achieving insight” (Huyssteen, 134).

Anyone who has read the work of Sally McFague, Paul Ricoeur, or Elayne Botha understands the value of metaphors in theory building. As McFague explains, “Thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects, events, or whatever the one of which is better known than the other, and using the better-known one as a way of speaking about the lesser known” (McFague, 15); therefore, metaphor is indispensable to the process of integrating the methods, theories, and languages of different disciplines. It provides a vehicle for “looking two ways” and widens the dialogue for a clearer understanding of constructs that are foreign to the other. Metaphor serves as an organizing framework to widen the vision and extend the interpretive horizons of scholars from different disciplines working together to redescribe the world. This occurs, of course, in a context of patient attempts to understand the other. Emelio Betti’s concept of Aufgeschlossenheit (open-mindedness) and Empfänglichkeit (receptiveness) is paramount in finding avenues for connecting with other forms of life and language games. It requires a willingness to listen and respect the other and to even be corrected when necessary in a process of continuous discovery.

**Christian Scholarship and Accreditation: A New Mandate**

The importance of Christian scholarship is necessitated by the recent focus of both regional and program accrediting bodies. Accreditors have been accommodating to faith-based institutions including the development and approval of agencies that are specific for theological and biblical education such as the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). However, more and more institutions that are approved by these organizations are also opting for approval from secular, regional bodies because they either wish to be considered legitimate institutions of higher education by the broader society or there is a need for students to seek advanced graduate studies in secular research institutions. In general, most faith-
based liberal arts colleges and universities are accredited by one of the regional agencies such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), or one of the four other regional bodies that are part of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Institutions may also seek approval from the many program or specialized accrediting bodies that approve programs in specific disciplinary studies such as psychology, education, social work, business, music, counseling, engineering, law, and nursing, among others. Although accrediting bodies emphasize the importance of teaching and learning, in recent years there has been a greater insistence that institutions demonstrate quality of programs based on rigorous scholarship and research particularly for schools with graduate programs. Closely linked with scholarship is the importance of faculty credentialing which also includes a history of serious research and/or scholarship in their field. This is becoming a significant component of accreditation reviews that look for evidence of publications, professional presentations, and original research across the various programs and divisions of the institution. Faith-based colleges and universities with graduate programs can no longer simply claim that they are primarily teaching institutions, although there may be alternative ways of demonstrating scholarship for teaching schools.

The proposed revised criteria of the Higher Learning Commission provide a number of references to scholarship and research which also include expectations and standards related to the monitoring and review process for research with human subjects. For example, in core component 2.E.1, there is an expectation that institutions will provide “effective oversight and support services to assure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.” While this component aims at having systems in place to safeguard the integrity of any and all research, such as having a formal institutional Review Board (IRB), it also assumes that research is being done across campus by faculty, staff, and students. Institutions are responsible for assessment and research related to teaching and learning by demonstrating institutional effectiveness using tools that evaluate the effectiveness of campus-wide services. Core component 3.B.5 indicates an expectation that “the faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution’s mission.” Here the commission takes a broad perspective on research and creative production across disciplines and by level of work whether undergraduate or graduate. The Commission is relatively flexible and accepts many different kinds of research including “action research” at teaching institutions. In other words, there are different expectations in different disciplines for quality advanced work. The reference to the institution’s mission relates expectations related to the special learning goals of each institution. For faith-based institutions who make claims about either the value plus or integration of faith learning, there is an expectation of evidence that demonstrates research and creative output related to these stated goals. Finally, core component 3.D.5 indicates that “the institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.” Here the primary intent is that the school
offers training for and monitors the appropriate use of citations as well as the use of standard academic guidelines, such as APA or MLA, in the submission and publication of research. It is enough to say that both regional and program accreditors have a clear expectation that both faculty and students are engaged in scholarly activities and expect a culture of research across disciplines and levels of the university. This means that scholarship is not something that is done haphazardly or as an ancillary activity that faculty and students can simply take or leave. It is an essential component of a quality academic program that flows from the mission and goals that Christian institutions advertise as unique markers of their educational programs.

Although many Christian schools have found ingenuous ways to avoid engaging in research or the development of a culture of scholarship, this is no longer an option and it is incumbent upon administration, faculty, and students to find creative ways to incorporate it into their academic world not because they have to, but because it is important in affirming their Christian mission. This will not be easy for some schools because the faculty at most faith-based institutions often wear many hats and many have not developed the discipline or the fortitude to focus on research when there are so many other things to do. This will require a commitment on the part of the academic administration to provide the time, resources, and space to make it happen. An important value of accreditation for Christian institutions is that it forces Christian scholars to engage with the broader academic community. If Christians want to make the case that their institutions are not only equivalent to other universities but also offer a value plus in their educational programs, they must be willing to be evaluated in the same way as everyone else. This may mean changing the level and type of discourse on campus so that there is a climate of open-mindedness and receptiveness, using Betti’s terminology, that considers a broader audience and the more diverse expectations of wider academic community rather than accepting a context that is insular and defensive. It does not mean compromising the faith heritage and commitments of the Christian community, but it will require serious commitment to quality research and critical inquiry that engages the broader academic community. Based on these new standards from accrediting bodies as well as the expectations of the outside academic world, Christian scholars need to consider creating a context that looks two ways by affirming their Christian faith while demonstrating a level of academic excellence that garners at least a nodding respect from even the non-Christian community-at-large, including accrediting agencies.

Perhaps it is easier to think of the task of research and scholarship as a kind of Christian formation which is not only a matter of “fashioning” Christians, but also shaping lifelong scholars of character. The formation of character draws on the qualities of listening, patience, and mutual respect for the other, and scholarly character, in particular, means the development of an identity that is self-reflective and acutely aware of the danger of the self-delusion of closed systems that do not allow new information across overly rigid identity boundaries. Paul Ricoeur talks about the pretensions of a culture of narcissism that masks the idolatrous deceptions of the need to always
be right that is reinforced and shaped by “self-talk.” So Ricoeur exclaims, “The idols must die—so that symbols may live” (Freud and Philosophy, 531). Symbols, according to Ricoeur, stretch beyond the boundaries of self-deception to the outside world in order to gain a critical perspective on the echo-chamber of all closed systems of thought. Scholarly character insists on the formation of a “hermeneutic of alterity” that looks both ways. The hermeneutic of alterity (the other) creates an expectation of “provocation” and “challenge” that forces a rethinking and reshaping of the horizons of understanding. It is why it is important that scholars, including Christian scholars, read widely and deeply in order to gain new perspectives on their own views of the world which are always limited by the experiences and particularities of the identity groups that have shaped them in the past. Anthony Thistleton discusses Robert Hans Jauss’s reception theory which argues that classic literary works provoke horizons of expectation that “enlarge and reshape the horizons of readers and make a transformative impact on how they think and how they act” (The Hermeneutics of Doctrine, 101). Hearing the voices of others provides a sounding board for self-reflection that may create a context for formative, life-changing effects on the receiver. This does not suggest a naïve reception of other ideas; rather, it assumes both a critical and imaginative posture that respects the value of the “strangeness” and “adversarial” perspective of the other. Scholarly formation creates a disposition that welcomes the arguments of others without losing the intellectual anchors and moorings of one’s own traditions. This is what is admirable of the work of scholars such as N.T. Wright, who engages in interactions and projects with radical scholars such as Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan without feeling intimidated or abandoning his Christian beliefs.

The willingness to expand the intellectual conversation to those who are alien to the Christian tradition, including accrediting bodies, will pay important dividends. This is particularly important for those institutions that are faith based while offering an open admissions policy. These institutions have a unique responsibility as well as an opportunity to provide a scholarly climate that is comfortable with what Jurgen Habermas describes as an “ideal speech situation.” Such a context allows for questions and arguments that without the need to be fearful and defensive. Habermas argues that basic communicative action breaks down because of recognized barriers in speech acts of different groups in society. In overcoming these barriers, it is important to understand the nature of discourse itself and how our discourse may alienate the other rather than opening up the conversation. The Higher Learning Commission assumes this kind of academic climate in member institutions that emphasize a context of free inquiry where there is clear evidence of a respect for diverse ideas and cultures. Accreditation forces sometimes insular faith-based institutions to address the broader concerns and expectations of the entire academic community. It means revising the Christian stance in relation to the wider and more diverse world. Whether the institution is a Bible college, Christian Liberal arts college, or larger research-based university with a Christian heritage, there is a need to find a way to fit within the public academic culture
through the process of research, critical inquiry, cross-disciplinary interaction (integration), and compliance with the standards and expectations of accrediting bodies, without compromising or sacrificing their faith-based mission.

Conclusion

In this discussion of Christian scholarship, integration, and accreditation, I hope I have been able to make a case that Christian education has a responsibility and mission to demonstrate its unique identity as Christian institutions, but also its commitment to valid intellectual inquiry. This will require building a context or climate that has the latitude to “look both ways,” both inward and outward. Through Christian scholarship and legitimate research Christian’s have an opportunity to push the conversation about the deeper questions of life beyond the boundaries of either the faith community and the accepted standards and expectations of the public arena. I have tried to argue that through the process of serious and legitimate research there is an affirmation of the Christian mission and commitment of the Christian academic project. To complete this project, there will need to be a “buy-in” from administrators, faculty, and students who are convinced of the value of such efforts. It will be a challenge and it will take time in the same way that building a culture of assessment did. Christian institutions have not often be identified as research institutions, so this new attitude recognizes the absolute necessity of implementing new processes and resources that make it possible. Faculty and students who are willing to engage in research projects that are of interest that allow for critical response may find that in the end they have not really accomplished that much different than every other scholar, but this does not mean that is without value or significance to the academic community. This means abandoning the position of privilege that does not allow for critical comment from outside. An interest in open conversation and serious scholarship should also extend to efforts at the interdisciplinary efforts of integrating faith and learning. Real integration demands a respect for the library of research of other disciplines and a critical framework that considers the varying methods and theories that are integral to each discipline. This may require the development of new metaphors that will make it possible to build new linguistic bridges that make mutual understanding possible. The current intellectual climate that attempts to find a balance between explanatory (epistemological) models and hermeneutical models offers a more fluid, overlapping context for the inclusion of methods of inquiry that in the past have been dismissed in the past. Finally, the process of accreditation provides a forceful incentive for Christian institutions to at least begin the process of building a culture of research and critical inquiry that is no longer optional. The standards and expectations of learned societies will ensure the quality and equivalency of Christian education.

There is risk involved in interacting with non-believing critical arguments within the public square, but either the Christian faith is valid or it is not. If the tenants of the faith are not compelling then we are simply engaging in self-deception. Either we take on the challenge or remain silent which does not seem
to fit with the mandate to be salt and light in the world. I happen to believe that the Christian faith will hold up as it has done for centuries and the willingness to take the risk will provide new possibilities for Christians institutions and their mission to share the gospel message with the world-at-large.

Works Cited


“My Heart Is Restless until It Rests in Dee”: Rickety Cricket as the Augustinian Antitype in *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*

Matthew C. Easter

**ABSTRACT**

This essay argues that the recurring character Matthew “Rickety Cricket” Mara in the American sitcom *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* is an antitype of Saint Augustine in his *Confessions*. Augustine opens his *Confessions* in prayer to God: “You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (1.1.1). The autobiographical prayer that follows depicts an Augustine ever-distracted by romantic love. It is not until Christ frees him of his lustful desires that he finds true rest. Rickety Cricket—who starts his career on the sitcom as an ordained priest—follows the opposite path, spiraling into greater unrest as the seasons pass. Like Augustine, Rickety Cricket’s restlessness is intertwined with his search for romantic love, here in his lustful desire for the character of Dee Reynolds. By comparing Augustine with Rickety Cricket, we discover the enslaving power of seeking romantic love over communion with the Triune God.

**Keywords**: Augustine, the *Confessions*, concupiscence, pop culture

The American sitcom *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, which first aired on FX, a pay television channel, in 2005 and is still in production, follows five characters: Dennis, Dee, Charlie, Mac, and Frank (played by Danny DeVito). The first four of these characters, also known as “The Gang,” run a bar in Philadelphia called “Paddy’s Pub.” “The Gang” and Frank are reprehensible characters. For example, Charlie pretends to have cancer to get a girlfriend; the pub purposefully sells alcohol to high school students because they can charge more; Mac and Frank run a sweatshop; Charlie kidnaps a short person believing him to be a leprechaun; Mac and Dennis hunt humans for sport; Dee tells the IRS that she has a baby to claim a tax exemption and then stages a funeral for the fake baby; and more. The show’s recurring characters are nearly as vile as Frank and the Gang, often serving as participants in or motivations for the main characters’ ill behavior. The second-most recurring character in the show is also the most ethically complex. Matthew “Rickety Cricket” Mara appears in all but the first season in the show. Rickety Cricket (so nicknamed by the Gang for the leg braces he wore as a child) first appears in the series as a Roman Catholic priest, but quickly spirals into the most revolting character on the show.
In this essay, I will argue that Rickety Cricket is an antitype of Saint Augustine in his *Confessions*. Augustine opens his *Confessions* in prayer to God: “You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.” The autobiographical prayer that follows depicts an Augustine ever-distracted by romantic love. It is not until Christ frees him of his lustful desires that he finds true rest. Rickety Cricket follows the opposite path, spiraling into greater unrest as the seasons pass. Like Augustine, Rickety Cricket’s restlessness is intertwined with his search for romantic love, here in his lustful desire for the character of Dee Reynolds. By comparing Augustine with Rickety Cricket, we discover the enslaving power of seeking romantic love over communion with the Triune God.

Augustine describes his early life as enslavement to sexual desire. Augustine was fixated on love, which he considered the only thing that could delight him. Looking back, he recognizes the disordered nature of this quest for love, which blinded him from seeing the virtues rightly. Augustine writes, “From the mud of my fleshly desires and my erupting puberty belched out murky clouds that obscured and darkened my heart until I could not distinguish the calm light of love from the fog of lust.” When he was pursuing sexual desire he believed himself to be free, but he sees retrospectively that he was merely “relishing the freedom of a runaway slave.” He found no rest in the sexual sins of his early days, as his life of sin was not freeing, but binding. Perhaps the nadir of his bondage to sin is when he robs a pear tree in his teens. He admits he had no need for the pears and had better pears at his disposal. He “simply wanted to enjoy the theft for its own sake.” He admits: “I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself.” Although the robbing of the pear tree is not explicitly connected to his sexual lusts, the pear tree incident shows a captive Augustine who has learned to enjoy his captivity.

Even as God begins to draw Augustine to salvation, Augustine’s desire for sex continues to battle against the divine beckoning, leaving Augustine “turning and twisting in [his] chain.” Augustine famously prays, “Grant me chastity and self-control, but please not yet.” He wanted to believe and will the good, but he could not do this on his own. Finally, in the midst of his struggle, he followed a divine command to read the Bible, and in so doing, “the light of certainty flooded [his] heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away.” It was not until Christ cast

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2 Augustine, *Confessions*, II.2.2. He later admits that he was simply in love with the idea of being in love (III.1.1).
3 Augustine, *Confessions*, II.2.2.
4 Augustine, *Confessions*, III.3.5.
5 Augustine, *Confessions*, II.4.9.
7 Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.11.25.
out his evil desires that he was truly free. Looking back on his own story, Augustine concludes that all humans are slaves to sin without the liberating work of Christ in their lives. Apart from this prevenient grace of God, no one has hope of freedom. Augustine gives God all of the credit, praying: “You have enabled me to love you with all my strength and with passionate yearning grasp your hand, so that you may rescue me from every temptation until my life’s end.”

God was with him during his struggles, “redoubling the lashes of fear and shame,” to keep Augustine from giving up. For this reason, Augustine is right to pray early in the Confessions: “set us free who already call upon you. Set free those also who do not yet call upon you, so that they may invoke you and you may give them freedom.” Augustine has moved from bondage of sin to liberation through Christ.

Rickety Cricket follows the opposite path of Augustine. He enters the “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” series as a young priest, who is invited into the pub to bless a water stain as a manifestation of the Virgin Mary. We learn that Cricket has loved Dee since childhood, when they “were in physical therapy together twice a week after school.” Dee cannot remember him until he reminds her of his leg braces, which should have been a first clue to the vacuous object of love he will soon be chasing. Nevertheless, now that Cricket is an ordained priest, Dee finds his elusiveness attractive. Cricket spends nearly the entire episode rebuffing Dee’s advances. He explains that he is a priest now and she is “leading him on,” so he sends her away. Dee returns, this time in the confessional. She explains that she is “in love with a man that she can’t have, and he used to love [her] too.” Cricket knows the confessor is Dee and explains that this man that she used to love “made a commitment that can never be broken.” Cricket tells her that God has a different plan, but she is not convinced. By the end of the episode, Cricket has a change of heart. Like the teenage Augustine, Rickety Cricket chooses to pursue lust instead of God. Cricket leaves the priesthood and professes his love for Dee at Paddy’s Pub. Dee explains that she no longer loves him and that he should go back to being a priest. If only Rickety Cricket had studied his Augustine better in seminary, he would have learned that “Flirtatiousness aims to arouse love by its charming wiles, but nothing can hold more charm than [God’s] charity, nor could anything be loved to greater profit than [God’s] truth, which outshines all else.”

Rickety Cricket’s life begins to spiral downward after leaving the priesthood. Now living on the streets begging for money, he meets Charlie and

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10 Augustine, Confessions, IX.1.1.
11 Augustine, Confessions, I.15.24.
12 Augustine, Confessions, VIII.11.25.
13 Augustine, Confessions, I.10.16.
15 Augustine, Confessions, II.6.13.
Dee, who are hooked on cocaine in this episode. Cricket admits that he is in “one of the darkest times of [his] life.” Charlie and Dee want Cricket to sell cocaine on their behalf, since he likely “knows a lot of drug addicts.” Cricket admits that he does—and was in fact attacked by a couple the night before—but he initially refuses. As in his most recent encounter with Dee, he initially resists the temptation. He reminds them that he is a former priest with a master’s degree in theology and assures them that selling drugs is not a smart move. The opportunity for love, however, once again proves too strong for Rickety Cricket to resist. Charlie convinces Cricket that Dee still likes him, and he can stay at Dee’s place if he sells the drugs for them. Cricket agrees. From this moment forward, we see Cricket becoming ever more enslaved by the power of sin. As the episode closes, we learn that Cricket used some of the drugs, sold the rest, and purchased trash cans as kettle drums with the profits. In subsequent episodes, Cricket’s life degenerates out of control. Dennis and Mac hunt him for sport in the streets of Philadelphia. Frank shoots him in the hand. Cricket agrees to wrestle as an Islamic terrorist character in a WWE-style match, during which Frank hits him with a trash can, resulting in a large wound to his neck that appears in future episodes. Cricket gets in a fight with a chocolate Labrador, and is sentenced to community service as “a dog janitor.” He gets half of his face burnt off when the Gang locks him in their burning apartment.

Rickety Cricket’s de-conversion occurs in season 6, where he confesses he is an atheist. He recounts on a radio show that a person stole his kidney, which led him to disbelieve in God. Shortly after proclaiming his atheism, Cricket tells Dee that he is over her. Cricket holds true to this disavowal of love for Dee, for at

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no other time in the rest of the series has he expressed love for her. Even though he is an atheist, Cricket exploits his former priestly vocation for material gains. In season 7, Rickety Cricket appears to redeem himself at a high school reunion, where he arrives cleaned up and dressed like a priest.  

He informs Dee that he should be called “Father Mara” again. However, we discover at the end of the episode that Cricket robbed all of the guests of their jewelry and hid the contraband under his vestal garments (along with his ringworm infestation). Here Rickety Cricket mirrors Augustine’s Pear Tree experience, as he moves past the pursuit of love to the revelry in sin for sin’s own sake. Rickety Cricket is in the same situation as Augustine, who says of his life prior to his conversion: “I was deafened by that clanking chain of my mortal state.”

Reading Rickety Cricket through Augustine’s Confessions reveals him as an Augustinian antitype. Whereas Augustine travels from debauchery to finding rest in God, Rickety Cricket seeks his rest in Dee’s love, which takes him from priesthood to moral debasement. We learn from Rickety Cricket what Augustine knew long before: namely, that no person can be obedient to God without God’s enabling grace. For Augustine, God’s grace does not make a person more faithful, but simply faithful. Reflecting on the Apostle Paul, Augustine writes, “he knew that he had not first given the beginning of his faith to God, and had its increase returned to him by God, but had been made faithful by God.”  

As Augustine is quick to remind us (quoting Paul), “What do you have that you have not received?” (1 Cor 4:7) Anything good in us—including faith—is a gift from God. Therefore, faith does not mark us as better than any other person, for nothing in our nature merited this gift of faith. Augustine explains, “It is not in the free choice of the human will either to believe or not to believe, but because in the elect the will is prepared by God.” Insofar as we judge another person—like Rickety Cricket—we betray our conviction that faith arises from within our own nature, thereby sawing off the branch of God’s grace upon which we sit. This, for Augustine, is the insidiousness of a judging one another, for it claims responsibility for faithfulness that is in truth an unmerited gift from God. Instead of comparing ourselves against an unbeliever, Augustine rather invites us to turn to God in thanksgiving. Without question, Rickety Cricket’s character in It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia is repugnant (as are all of the characters on the show), but Augustine shows us how reprehensible characters such as these can point us to the creator God. As Augustine explains in prayer to God:

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24 Augustine, *Confessions*, II.2.2.


A soul that turns away from you therefore lapses into fornication when it seeks apart from you what it can never find in pure and limpid form except by returning to you. All those who wander far away and set themselves up against you are imitating you, but in a perverse way; yet by this very mimicry they proclaim that you are the creator of the whole of nature, and that in consequence there is no place whatever where we can hide from your presence.  

Perhaps in this perverse mimicry of God, the defrocked priest Rickety Cricket can teach us to give thanks for God’s enabling grace and omnipresence in our broken world.

ABSTRACT

This paper will offer a cultural critique on the relationship between the titular characters from the cartoon sitcom Rick and Morty. Rick Sanchez, a genius mad-scientist, and his adolescent grandson, Morty Smith, embark upon adventures that take them into alternate universes and strange dimensions. Their exploits find them traversing a multi-verse where versions of themselves abound. Rick’s materialist and scientistic attitudes lead him to devalue Morty on the grounds that there are infinite Morties in infinite universes and that the particular Morty in Rick’s universe must therefore be insignificant. I will evaluate Rick’s metaphysical presuppositions alongside the philosophical writings of C.S. Lewis to reveal the flaws in such reasoning. Lewis urges us to understand that for the many to matter at all, the one must matter. In this way, I will challenge the foundational claim of Rick’s nihilism: that because we are infinite and not individual our lives cannot possibly have meaning. Understanding Rick’s failure to love will help viewers of the show to be more critically aware of the ways a broader cultural nihilism has influenced American popular culture.

**Keywords:** C. S. Lewis, Debunking, Meaning, Nihilism, Rick and Morty

Rick Sanchez is one of the title characters on Cartoon Network’s Rick and Morty (2013). The show is about an eccentric scientist who goes on adventures with his teenage grandson, Morty. You may recognize a similar partnership in Robert Zemeckis’s 1985 cult classic Back to the Future. Like Back to the Future, the characters of Rick and Morty undertake various adventures. These adventures often involve traveling either through time or through the many dimensions that, within the show, make up their reality.

As a cultural artifact, the show is often hilarious and repulsive by turns. The characters are complicated. They are sometimes capable of eliciting genuine pathos. At other times, they represent the very deepest depths of human depravity. In addition to its humor and its complex characters, Rick and Morty often deals with mind-bending science fiction scenarios that cause the characters to experience real angst about the nature of love and meaning. In some ways, the show wants to have its cake and eat it, too. On the one hand, it wants to be easily dismissible, a mere frivolity. On the other hand, the show wants to be wise. It wants the viewer to think it has something of grave importance to say. It wants to
give you pause amid your laughter to consider the desperate need humans have to seek meaning and to find love, and it wants you to consider whether the objects of such desires can ever be found. In a way, the show wants to be like King Lear’s fool. It wants to be the voice of reason amidst a cacophony of irrational but more dominant voices. However, it also wants to be unaccountable for its own lapses into irrationality. It is only a jester, after all, and you believe the jester at your own risk. This combination of seriousness and folly makes *Rick and Morty* a rather interesting, if problematic, site for cultural critique. How are those who watch it supposed to discern the earnest from the ironic when they are woven so seamlessly together?

This paper attempts to answer this question by making a judgment about one of *Rick and Morty’s* more serious suggestions: namely, that seeking meaning in this life is a futile endeavor and that love is merely an illusion that makes our limited human lives more pleasant while it lasts. *Rick and Morty* founds these suggestions on the central premise that the world we inhabit is not special. It is instead only one of an infinite number of universes, many of which contain their own Rick and Morty. The infinite number of universes leads Rick to conclude that life is meaningless. How can we consider our own personal woes significant when faced with the idea that there are an infinite number of us struggling and seeking happiness? Never articulated but ever-present is the assumption that individuals are no different from goods or, perhaps, money. There is an economic law at work in Rick’s reasoning—a kind of metaphysical supply and demand. To illustrate Rick’s perspective, consider the last time you stopped to pick up a penny. How likely would you be to pick one up if you saw one on the ground now? The more pennies (or quarters or dollars) we have, the less likely we are to have need of yet another cent. For Rick, Morty is like a penny. Because has access to Morties in abundance, he does not need to feel particularly attached to this one.

Here, it is important to note that not all Morties are similar to the one in the show’s primary world. For the sake of clarity, I will designate the universe that the Rick and Morty of the show occupy as the ur-universe and the show’s Rick and Morty as the ur-Rick and the ur-Morty. While Rick has the technology to travel at will to any universe, the Morty he will find there may be largely similar to the ur-Morty, or he may not. He may also have three arms or three eyes or be monstrously deformed in a world that exists after a nuclear apocalypse. Indeed, viewers of the show meet many such Morties and Ricks in the course of their adventures. But what are a few outliers among an infinite number of choices? Rick often emphasizes Morty’s relative insignificance, noting that he could be replaced, and Rick talks about the trouble it would take to find a suitably similar Morty as though it were a moderate inconvenience but an inconvenience unworthy of his time. The idea becomes so commonplace that the show even inserts a visual joke to reference it in the opening montage for season three. Here we see Rick at a store, choosing a Morty from an assortment of Morties, each contained in its own blister pack and with matching accessory. This image encapsulates Rick’s metaphysical supply-and-demand theory handily. In a multiverse with an infinite number of Morties, one Morty is as good as any other.
Many popular culture bloggers and YouTubers have noted that Rick’s attitude represents existential nihilism quite well. Existential nihilism asserts that life has no intrinsic meaning and, as a consequence, human life is ultimately insignificant.\(^1\) These commentators often understand Rick’s attitude as a courageous decision to embrace a grim but undeniable reality, but I suggest there might be an intellectual defect in play.

To consider the possibility of Rick’s intellectual failure, I will here enlist the help of C. S. Lewis in his *The Abolition of Man*. Here Lewis identifies a habit of thought that results in severing all statements of value from an objective reality. He calls this intellectual posture “debunking,” and he sees an example of it in a textbook written by two well-respected educators of his day. In this example, the authors analyze the text of an advertisement for a cruise. Lewis writes, “The advertisement tells us that those who buy tickets for this cruise will go ‘across the Western Ocean where Drake of Devon sailed,’ ‘adventuring after the treasures of the Indies,’ and bringing home themselves also a ‘treasure’ of ‘golden hours’ and ‘glowing colours’” (Lewis 3). Lewis calls this text “a bad bit of writing” and notes that the authors would have done well to show how it is an example of “venal and bathetic exploitation” (3). If these authors had placed such writing next to an example that deals with similar but well-expressed emotions, and if they had shown what the differences were, Lewis argues, they would have done their students a real service. Instead, they go on to explain that “the luxurious motor-vessel won’t really sail where Drake did, that the tourists will not have any adventures, that the treasures they bring home will be of a purely metaphorical nature” (4). In other words, the authors of this textbook induce their students to believe that the arousal of emotion itself is fundamentally a lie. Lewis goes on to argue that the students will learn “precisely nothing [about literature] but will instead learn quickly enough, and perhaps indelibly, [...] the belief that all emotions aroused by local association are in themselves contrary to reason and contemptible” (4).

Observe first that what Lewis calls “debunking” is not a well-reasoned refutation of mistaken ideas. He is instead speaking about an intellectual posture that habitually fails to make distinctions. The examples the textbook authors use fail to observe the way how succumbing to an advertisement that plays upon one’s emotions is different from the other emotional responses genuinely aroused by the real qualities that the object doing the arousing possesses. Not all value statements, in other words, are statements about the speaker’s own feelings. Lewis shows that such a statement is not even coherent within the framework of the writers’ own argument. When a person claims that a waterfall is “sublime” for instance, he or she is not saying that “this waterfall gives me sublime feelings.” Quite the contrary, Lewis argues that when we call a waterfall “sublime,” the feelings we have are the inverse of sublimity. We feel humble and weak in comparison to the force of nature that stands before us. While it may be true that sometimes, even often, we project our feelings onto external objects in order to make statements of value, it does not follow that all statements of value are merely projections. For Lewis, when we view a waterfall and deem it “sublime,” we are really observing qualities that are intrinsic to the object. The
torrent of water that cascades down a mountainside is powerful, whether we acknowledge it as powerful or not. It inspires awe because we perceive its power, and its power puts us in our place as mere mortals whose frail bodies are often at the mercy of the elements.

Thus, for Lewis, the writers of this textbook are not simply wise to the game advertisers playing with their target audiences, they have reduced everything to an advertisement. They fail to distinguish between earned and unearned emotional responses, and, as a result, they approach all value judgments with skepticism. They have achieved the sophistication of the adolescent who first learns the humor of sarcasm and then for whom all humor becomes sarcasm. It is perhaps telling that so many of the show’s more avid fans are adolescent males who can, themselves, so often be consumed by “debunking” the conventional values of society.

What I have just described is the “debunking” attitude in a nutshell. It is the failure to distinguish between that which is justly ridiculed and that which only resembles things that ought to be justly ridiculed. Returning now to Rick and Morty, we see that Rick is also consumed with “debunking.” In one episode, Rick “debunks” romantic love as he says to Morty: “Listen, Morty, I hate to break it to you but what people call ‘love’ is just a chemical reaction that compels animals to breed. It hits hard, Morty, then it slowly fades, leaving you stranded in a failing marriage. I did it. Your parents are gonna do it. Break the cycle, Morty. Rise above. Focus on science” (“Rick Potion Number 9”). Contrary to Rick’s insistence that his grandson is of sub-par intelligence, Morty proves to be an apt pupil. The show’s most often cited example of nihilism is when Morty reveals to his sister, Summer, that he and Rick no longer occupy their own ur-Universe. They jumped to the present one after destroying their primary world and locating a new universe in which that Rick and Morty died in an experiment gone bad. The ur-Rick and the ur-Morty bury themselves in the backyard of the family home and go on living in the deceased Rick and Morty’s places. As he speaks with Summer, Morty points to mounds of dirt in the backyard, the unmarked graves of that world’s Rick and Morty. As one might expect, this is a deeply troubling experience for Morty, and, as he relates this story, he tells Summer what it has taught him: “nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, everybody’s gonna die. Come watch TV” (“Rixty Minutes”). Again, Morty’s conclusion here is predicated upon the infinitude of realities and iterations of people who exist in endless variety. The show’s implicit assumption is that human life, much like our currency, is only valuable when it is rare.

The error here tracks alongside the error of the writers in Lewis’s textbook example. It is a failure to make distinctions between true value and false value which leads to the eradication of value altogether. To claim, as Rick does, that the emotion of love can be observed through a person’s brain chemistry is, to be sure, an effort to debunk it. However, why should such an observation destroy the meaning of love? To reduce something to only its observable phenomena is to fail to understand the difference between a cause and an effect. It is like saying that wind is a myth because all we can see is the swaying of branches or the rippling of leaves. Rick is likewise mistaken when he claims that Morty is
valueless simply because there are an infinite number of him. The claim is undermined by its own logic. The value of the collective depends on the value of the individual; it does not, as Rick suggests, undermine it. The only way a million pennies can make a single penny seem like a trifle is to add the single value of a penny a million times. Put another way, the reason we do not stoop to pick up the penny is that we already have so much money—so many items of value. The penny is only insignificant in our perception, not in reality. If it were truly devoid of value, we would never have the experience of not needing it. Only when we rightly distinguish between the value spread among individuals can we feel the cumulative worth of the collective. By this logic, Morty has to matter. If one Morty doesn’t matter, no Morties matter, infinitely. Blurring the distinction between Morties is what creates the metaphysical economics of the show. Rick and Morty offers only poverty masquerading as abundance.

Even those who wish to defend Rick and Morty against charges that the show embraces nihilism do not deny its nihilistic elements. They argue instead that the show ultimately rejects complete nihilism by revealing small moments of love and meaning that occur despite the world’s lack of value. The argument runs as follows: nihilism does not abandon one to meaninglessness, but rather it frees one to construct one’s own meaning. However, why this would be a comforting idea the show never explains. In a world that contains intrinsic value, it may be possible to construct meaning. In a meaningless world, however, no person’s will can ever be strong enough to create it. We may as well ask children to build a tower without giving them the blocks to do it. If meaning does not exist, it cannot possibly be an ingredient for personal meaning. Only God can summon something out of nothing. In the meaninglessness that Rick and Morty posits, any effort to construct meaning for oneself will always ring hollow. The show’s creator, Dan Harmon, engages in precisely this incoherency when he says, “knowledge that nothing matters, while accurate, gets you nowhere...but when you zoom in on earth, when you zoom in on a family, when you zoom into a human brain...you see all these things that matter. We have this fleeting chance to participate in an illusion called ‘I love my girlfriend, I love my dog,’ how is that not better.” Here, Harmon presents the ideal of human happiness as the willing participation in the lie of meaning. One can hardly be blamed for asking how this self-deception is any better than the alleged self-deceptions Rick rails against in the show. In the end, the best answer to the question of human meaning that Rick and Morty can offer is no different from the debunked answers the show finds it so important to challenge in the first place.

There is, however, one bright spot, and it is this: Rick is often better than his philosophy. While Rick frequently tells Morty that he is replaceable, in practice he does appear to be attached to the ur-Morty. In one episode, Rick prepares to sacrifice himself to save Morty from a cold death in space as he hurtles deeper into the void. He makes the decision to use his only remaining device to bring Morty back to their original timeline—a decision that will leave him stranded and facing his own imminent death (“A Rickle in Time”). Luckily, this sacrifice proves to be unnecessary as a second device moves toward Rick out of the darkness while he is praying to a God he does not believe in for rescue. As
Rick saves Morty, he tells him to “be good. Be better than me” (“A Rickle in Time”). Later, when Morty remembers Rick saving him, Rick mocks him, and it is clear that Rick now views his heroism as faltering at a critical moment. As a consequence of Rick’s impulse to debunk, he has created an impossible scenario for himself. He has committed to the idea that life is devoid of meaning, and yet, at the level of his own experience, he does find meaning in his relationship with Morty. Sadly, whenever he makes strides toward meaning, he can only understand it as weakness. Because of this ambivalence, Rick is desperately unhappy. He is a chronic alcoholic, and he indulges in other dissipations to achieve some brief happiness. In one episode, Rick invents the seemingly nonsensical catchphrase: “wubba lubba dub-dub” (“Meeseeks and Destroy”). At first blush, this catchphrase emphasizes his carefree attitude and his conviction that everything is meaningless. Only later do we learn that this phrase is not nonsense. After a raucous house party in which Rick debauches himself, one of his old friends reveals the meaning of Rick’s catchphrase: “In my people’s tongue it means, ‘I am in great pain. Please help me’” (“Ricksy Business”). The immediate interpretation is that Rick has indulged himself as a way to numb his pain, and this makes sense. Precisely what causes this pain is left to the viewer to intuit. Perhaps the most concise way to phrase it would be to say that Rick’s nihilism places an essential element of his humanity at odds with his intellect. If Rick’s intellect were functioning properly, then this would be an insoluble problem. His impulse toward love would be maladaptive, but he can no more get rid of it than he can get rid of his drive to eat or sleep. However, what if Rick’s intellect is not functioning properly? If this is true, then there is more hope for Rick than we may previously have believed. Rick fails to make important distinctions, and one of the distinctions he fails to make is between the ur-Morty and all the others. However, perhaps slowly, over time, Rick will learn that the ur-Morty is his Morty, and, in the end, maybe this difference is enough to set him apart from all the Morties in the multiverse.

I said earlier that Rick and Morty is a bit like the Shakespearean fool, and, like the fool, the show deserves to be taken seriously. Culturally, those who enjoy Rick and Morty do take it seriously. So, how can we, as Christian scholars, empower our students to take the show seriously in a rigorous way? Lewis proposes that a culture’s failure to recognize meaning is really a failure of education. We must teach our students to distinguish between things that deserve ridicule and things that demand our reverence. If we do not, Lewis warns us what the end result may be. “The right defence against false sentiments,” Lewis writes, “is to inculcate just sentiments. By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes” (6).

Notes

1 See Wisecrack, “Gaze into the Abyss: Nihilism in Rick and Morty and Bojack Horseman,” YouTube.com for example.

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Paul’s Wisdom to Millennials on Self-Promotion and Social Media: The Language of Boasting in 2 Corinthians

Eric Turner

ABSTRACT

This paper will explore how the context of Jeremiah provides a better understanding of Paul’s rhetoric of boasting in the latter section of his second letter to the Corinthians. The belief is that Paul relies on Jeremiah in more than a surface-level manner, choosing to draw deeper connections with the prophet Jeremiah for his readers. This paper seeks to explore the context of Jeremiah’s language of boasting as well as Paul’s context, stitching together possible connections between Paul and Jeremiah. Finally, this paper will make application to the millennial generation’s social media worldview, one that is faced with the precipitous temptation of idolatry.

Keywords: boasting, 2 Corinthians, idolatry, social media, millennials

It is not the mark of a foolish person to be ashamed to praise himself when by praise he is likely to confer the greatest benefits; just as it is also...to do the opposite—put on airs and talk about oneself a great deal, in case some risk or loss be involved?

Dio Chrysostom

Introduction

In a modern culture that has immediate and unfiltered access to avenues of self-praise, one should consider this Greek orator’s wisdom. While praise in Chrysostom’s time was more of a local flavor, putting on airs and talking about oneself in our context is a global phenomenon, facilitated by the connective tissue of technological advancement. We foolishly refuse to be ashamed to praise ourselves, ignoring the possible risk or loss of our words or images conveyed upon an imbecilic, affirming clientele. Certainly, it is intentional that Facebook does not offer its readers a “dislike” button. After all, everyone deserves a “like.”

The New Testament provides ample warnings on the perils of pride and self-promotion. Jesus grounds discipleship in denying oneself. James warns us that no one can tame the tongue. Even Luke records in Acts the consequences of giving glory to ourselves rather than to God through the example of Herod being
struck down. However, the NT writer who has the sharpest rhetoric on self-praise is the Apostle Paul. Perhaps the one who was saturated in self-promotion prior to his conversion understood just how serious we should guard against this threat. Paul’s greatest polemic against this danger is in the letter of 2 Corinthians.

Timothy B. Savage has rightly observed that “boasting was a matter of great importance to the Corinthians.” Thus, we should not be surprised to find that Paul addresses this concern so forcefully in the letter. But what approach does Paul take in his argument? And, with respect to modern day issues of self-promotion, can Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians offer a corrective to this problem? The answer to the latter question is a resounding “yes”; however, our affirmation of Paul’s help depends greatly on how we understand the approach and the answer to the first question. In short, comprehending Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians against boasting requires us to consider the prophet Jeremiah.

Therefore, this paper will explore how the context of Jeremiah provides insight into Paul’s rhetoric of boasting in the latter section of 2 Corinthians. First, we will explore the context of Jeremiah’s language of boasting. Second, we will look at the context of Paul’s language of boasting. Third, we will attempt to suggest possible connections between Paul and Jeremiah. Finally, by way of application, we will offer some comments on a modern sphere of boasting, namely, social media.

Jeremiah’s Context of Boasting

Before we begin to examine Jeremiah’s connections to Paul, the obvious must be stated; Paul extensively utilizes the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians. Scott J. Hafemann reminds us of Paul’s propensity for the OT when he states that “there are no fewer than fifteen explicit OT quotations and forty-six allusions [which] appear in 2 Corinthians.” Specifically, Paul seems fond of LXX Jer 9:4, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Why ground his argument in this key verse from Jeremiah? Does the citation of this verse simply strengthen Paul’s argument in one portion of the letter or is there a parallel one can draw between Paul and Jeremiah which may provide a deeper insight into the wider Corinthian milieu?

An initial suggestion might be that Paul and Jeremiah’s ministry contexts are similar, leading Paul to draw parallels to the ancient prophet. In other words, Paul tethers himself to Jeremiah’s rhetoric in order to provide credibility before Corinthian opponents who are charging that Paul is not credible in his ministry. In what way then is Paul’s context similar to that of Jeremiah? C. H. Bullock sums up Jeremiah’s context when he writes,

The point of contention between Jeremiah and the false prophets is clear. The latter practitioners dispensed a message of peace when there was no peace (6:13-15; 8:11; 14:13-16; 23:17). They were guilty of bringing false hope to a people that was doomed by its idolatry.
Bullock is stating here the key theme of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry, namely, God’s word of judgment against an idolatrous people. In essence, they have forsaken a monotheistic call for the polytheistic false promises of the nations which surround them. In a striking statement, God tells Jeremiah, “See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (Jer 1:10, ESV).” Thus, God is speaking from his judgment seat a word of retributive justice upon those who habitually practice idolatry. The severity of God’s judgment becomes even more justified when one considers the content of Judah’s idolatry.

The historical date of Jeremiah’s ministry can be expressed with confident parameters. Jeremiah 1:1-3 tells us that his ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah, and ends with the exile to Babylon, allowing us to say with precision that he spoke to God’s people from 627 to 587 BC. This period is narratively sketched by 2 Kings 21-25 as well as by a host of other witnesses. From these accounts we read of false gods taking up residence in Israel’s temple, the restoration of fertility cults, ritual prostitution, and human sacrifice. Shockingly, God’s people not only tolerated such practices, but became willing participants in them. John Bright makes an insightful comment which sums up the time period:

It was, in short, a time of thoroughgoing religious decay, and one that posed an immense, and in some ways a novel, threat to the integrity of Israel’s faith. It is, to be sure, unlikely that any widespread and conscious abandonment of the national religion had taken place. It was, rather, that the essential distinction between Yahweh and paganism had become so blurred in the minds of so many people that they were able to practice pagan rites alongside of the cult of Yahweh, and perhaps even dedicate those rites to Yahweh, without any awareness that they were guilty of apostasy in doing so.

The result of forsaking Yahweh led God’s people to a place where they took pride in their position, rather than shame. The reforms of King Josiah only brought temporary change in the hearts of a stubborn people (see 2 Kings 23:1-4). Jeremiah comments that these changes were only outwardly put on; in fact, no true repentance on the part of God’s people was evidenced (Jer 6:16-21). Idolatry had so infected God’s people that they not only were blind to their state, but they boasted in it. Prior to the announcement of impending exile in Jer 10:21-22, the prophet speaks about the folly of boasting and the proper basis of boasting.

We are told in Jer 9:23 that the three classifications of Judah’s boasting are wisdom, strength, and riches. These three categories are a result of rampant idolatry. In other words, Judah’s mingling with the surrounding nations has led them to a lack of inward, moral obedience to Yahweh’s covenant promises. Jeremiah declares that the true sphere of boasting lies in an understanding and knowledge of the Lord, a knowledge rooted in the kindness, justice, and
righteousness of Yahweh. F. B. Huey remarks, “These three [character traits of Yahweh] express the very heart of Hebrew religion. They are not only the attributes of God; he delights in those who manifest these same qualities.”

Jeremiah’s ministry context consists of a battle against the inward attitude of boasting/pride evidenced by God’s rebellious people. This boasting was a direct result of Judah forsaking its distinctiveness among the pagan nations. Consequently, these realities now placed the potential of divine wrath and judgment upon them. Yahweh would not stand any longer for the compromise of his exclusivity. His people must recognize that true boasting only resides in a covenant relationship, not a compromising relationship with the culture. Now we may proceed to establish some connections with the Apostle Paul.

**Paul’s Context of Boasting**

Boasting is a key theme in the letter of 2 Corinthians, especially in the latter three chapters. In fact, Paul’s comment in 2 Cor 10:8 reminds us of the call of Jeremiah when he writes, “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame.” Hafemann draws the connection when he says that Paul’s words are a “fulfillment of Jeremiah’s promise of the new covenant to come, whereas under the old covenant, the emphasis of Jeremiah’s *prophetic* ministry was just the opposite.” What is the context of Paul’s boasting? Specifically, it is best understood through the contrasts that he draws with his opponents at Corinth, those who are preaching *another* Jesus (2 Cor 11:4). These differences are observed in where Paul grounds his boasting versus where his opponents direct their boasting.

Paul’s grounds for boasting are observed through the frequent linguistic collocations of the *kauс* (boasting) stem. In other words, the *kauс* stem, in its verbal and substantive forms, collocates (habitually occurs), in contexts centered on Paul’s confidence to carry out new covenant ministry. This confidence is rooted in the testimony of his conscience (1:12), the mutual understanding of their partnership (1:14), the answer of pride in appearances (5:12), the knowledge of proper conduct in the church (7:4, 14), the desire of a collection for further ministry (8:24; 9:2, 3), the recognition of Paul’s apostolic authority (10:8), and the reality of his weaknesses (11:30; 12:9). Paul’s confidence for this type of ministry exists because he has received it from the Lord. The *kauс* (boasting) stem defines this ministry and creates a dichotomy between Paul and his opponents.

The identity of Paul’s opponents is fiercely debated among Pauline scholars. Savage offers the best summary of this dilemma when he writes,

What has hindered scholars is the paucity of explicit information on the opponents. All we *really* know is that they were Jewish (2 Cor 11:22) and outsiders (11:4). Beyond that we may infer that they preached a different Jesus than Paul (11:4), were intruding
into the sphere of ministry (10:12-18), were receiving financial support (11:12), and were behaving in a heavy-handed manner (11:18-20). We know simply too little about the opponents to construct an adequate background to Paul’s teaching.\textsuperscript{12}

Savage’s conclusion may, at first glance, seem unsatisfactory. However, for our purposes, we may possess all the information needed to understand Paul’s rhetoric of boasting against his opponents. Knowing at the very minimum that Paul’s critics are Jewish outsiders preaching another Jesus,\textsuperscript{13} we can claim that the Corinthian church was enticed away from the true gospel by those who preferred style over substance, i.e., outward appearances versus inward truth. They are no less than idolaters who are facing God’s judgment.

To sum up, Paul grounds his boasting in the Lord while his opponents ground their boasting in the idolatrous cultural norms of Corinth. So for Paul, “boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable” (12:1). Paul is utilizing a rhetorical switch; that is, he is employing their own rhetorical techniques against his idolatrous enemies. Here is where the influence of Jeremiah on Paul is at its strongest.

\textbf{Jeremiah and Paul}

What is the evidence that Paul is intertwining his ministry with that of Jeremiah? The problem here is how Paul uses the OT. While it is outside the scope of this essay to consider all the debate around biblical inter-textuality, we may say this: the saturation of direct quotations and allusions implies that Paul is not simply quoting Jeremiah as a proof text in his argument, rather, he is drawing deeper parallels for his readers. These parallels are observed in two key areas: (1) lexical and (2) contextual. We will explore these briefly.

First, because of the matrix of similar terms between Paul and Jeremiah, we may claim that a \textit{lexical} link exists. Three words which are of particular importance for understanding of this connection are \textit{kaqairew}, \textit{oivkodomh\texttt{,} and \textit{evkdike\texttt{,}}. Paul argues in 2 Cor 10:4 that our spiritual weapons are powerful before God “for the tearing down (\textit{kaqai\texttt{,}} \textit{resin}) of fortresses, [and] destroying (\textit{kaqairou/ntej}) speculations.” Similarly, God tells Jeremiah in Jer 31:28 (LXX Jer 38:28) that he has “watched over his people to tear down (\textit{kaqairei/n}).” This statement is a reiteration of Jer 1:10.

Paul’s use of the word \textit{oivkodomh} in 2 Cor 10:8 and 13:10 evokes a lexical equivalence with Jer 1:10 and 31:28. In both of the 2 Cor citations, Paul notes that the Lord has given him authority, “for building up and not for tearing down (\textit{eivj oivkodomh\texttt{,}} \textit{n kai, ouvk eivj kaqai\texttt{,}} \textit{resin}).” These two occurrences (10:8 and 13:10) form a frame (inclusio) around Paul’s response to his boastful opponents. Paul’s reversal of Jeremiah’s ministry call is profound, whereas he has authority to tear them down, he chooses instead to build them up, evidence of \textit{mercy} under his new covenant ministry in contrast with Jeremiah’s message of \textit{judgment} under his old covenant ministry.
Perhaps the strongest lexical connection to Jeremiah is Paul’s term of judgment, \( \text{evkdike,}\). In total, Jeremiah uses this word and its cognates twenty-eight times in his letter referring to God’s retributive justice on idolaters.\(^{15}\)

Paul states in 2 Cor 10:6 that “we are always ready to render a penalty (\( \text{evkdikh/sai}\)) against every disobedient act, whenever your obedience should be completed.” Paul’s argument here is that the Corinthian church should choose obedience (fidelity to Christ) and when they do, Paul will be ready to render God’s retribution against the idolaters in their midst.

Moving from the lexical connection, we may also make note of a contextual link between Paul and Jeremiah. Even though their covenantal messages differ, these two men faced similar realities. First, they encountered the challenge of an idolatrous culture that threatened the exclusive worship of Yahweh as the one true God. For example, 2 Cor 6:16 asks the question, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” Jeremiah 6:15 poses a similar question, “Were they ashamed when they committed abominations?”

Second, Paul and Jeremiah both face false opponents who are distorting the truth for personal gain, or self-promotion. The false prophets of Jeremiah’s day offer empty, superficial promises of healing and peace. Likewise, Paul’s opponents are leading a superficial lifestyle as so-called “super apostles,” distorting the gospel by preaching another Jesus. Therefore, God is using both of these men to warn his people (the nation of Judah and the church) of this important truth: idolatry leads to punishment and certain destruction. Paul sources his rhetoric in Jeremiah to deliver this urgent message.

To sum up, Jeremiah’s context is similar in substance to that of Paul. Their opponents are boasting in externals instead of an understanding and knowledge of the Lord. This human propensity to boast is equated with idolatry. The worship of self above God is deserving of nothing less than God’s retributive justice, His wrath is displayed in Jeremiah’s time through exile in Babylon (to an idolatrous culture) and in Paul’s day through excommunication from the church body (to an idolatrous culture). What then can we learn from Paul and Jeremiah about the challenges we face in our culture? In other words, do these men of God have wisdom to give us concerning modern idolatrous tendencies?

**Paul’s Wisdom: Self-Promotion on Social Media Is Idolatry**

Paul and Jeremiah teach us that boasting with the intended goal of self-promotion is idolatry. In our context, the clearest example of self-promotion is in the realm of our social media profiles. For instance, think with me for a moment about the social media phenomenon of the last few years, the “selfie.” If I stopped here and asked you to spend a few minutes scrolling through your Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook app on your smartphones and for you to count the number of “selfies,” how many would you find? The answer is probably “too many to count.” The fact is, we are in love with ourselves. Our tendency to boast in ourselves on social media plays out daily, revealing that we need even more the wisdom of Paul and Jeremiah. So, what principles can they teach us in this area?
First, idolatry is a core problem of the human condition. The similar challenges faced by Paul and Jeremiah bear out this truth. So what about us? While very few Christians would ever put a gold statue in their living room, offering sacrifices to it daily, we have no problem posting a picture of ourselves and checking our status updates for the number of sacrificial “likes” we receive. This tendency is a fundamental part of our fallen nature. Idolatry is everyone’s problem. Your idolatrous heart will always demand a misdirected worship. We should fight against this inward bent, especially when avenues for it are at our fingertips.

Second, boasting grows out of an idolatrous heart. Jesus makes it perfectly clear that the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart (Matt 12:34). In other words, boasting is the natural outflow of the inner problem of idolatry. The worship of ourselves has subtly crept into our lives and our culture says it is perfectly normal. Please hear me clearly, I am not labeling a “selfie” as always synonymous with idolatry, but only that I am encouraging you to think about why you do what you do? Is it for the approval of men? Is it so you can feel better about yourself? The idolatry perpetuated by our culture is dangerous. Paul warns us that proper boasting is only to be in the Lord, not in ourselves. We must be quick to air our complaints to the Lord rather than Twitter.

Finally, unrepentant idolaters will face God’s discipline and judgment. God’s holiness will not be mingled with paganism, even in the so-called neutral space of second-life realities. All space is sacred space. Yes, this includes our virtual, artificial environments created for self-promotion and the soothing of our consciences. Social media allow us to create our own worlds where we believe we are in control, thereby leading to self-deception and inevitable divine judgment or discipline. God will not be shut out of any part of our lives, and yes, this includes our virtual personas. They are not morally neutral. As believers, we can take comfort that God will chasten us in this area with a redemptive purpose. But let us not rely on God’s mercy by bathing in disobedience. Let us hear the warning of Jeremiah 4:22 and not be “wise—in doing evil.”

In a modern culture that has immediate and unfiltered access to avenues of self-praise, we should pay close attention to the wisdom of Paul and by proxy, that of Jeremiah. May we not be fools who boast in ourselves, ignoring the possible risk or loss of our words and images conveyed upon an audience who dispassionately consumes what we feed them. Instead, let us ground ourselves in the proper sphere of boasting—the wisdom of the Lord, a wisdom rooted in his kindness, justice, and righteousness.

Notes

1 Dio Chrysostom, Orations 57.5.

2 Timothy B. Savage, Power through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians (SNTSMS 86; ed., Margaret E. Thrall; Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54. Savage’s comment here is somewhat of an intentional understatement. For example, he points out that the verb kauka,omai and its
cognates occur 39 times in the Corinthian correspondence versus other Pauline letters. While counting alone is not evidence of intended rhetoric, Savage is correct in noting that Paul’s opponents are fond of self-promotion (boasting) and critical of Paul’s refusal to self-promote (boast). Whether boasting has approached ‘slogan like’ status is an interesting suggestion, but outside the scope of this essay.


4 Unfortunately, some confusion arises over what is exactly meant by the term Septuagint (LXX)? For the purposes of this study, LXX will refer to the generally accepted edition by Alfred Rahlf, *Septuaginta: Iudex Vetus Testamentum Graecae Iuxta Interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935; reprint, 2 vols., 1979).


6 Four of the six Hebrew infinitives in this verse are communicated to Jeremiah in the negative. These negative statements foreshadow that Jeremiah’s ministry is not going to be popular or received well by God’s people.

7 For example, Jeremiah’s contemporaries include Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel. Besides these internal witnesses, archaeological and cuneiform records such as the Babylonian Chronicle shed further light on the context. A fuller treatment of the latter is given by John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1965), xxviii – liv.

8 Bright, *Jeremiah*, xxxviii.


11 Of the thirty nine times Paul uses this stem in his letters, twenty-six occur in 2 Corinthians. Moreover, as the letter draws to a close, the rhetorical saturation of this stem reaches its peak.


13 The reference here to “another Jesus” (11:4) is critical as the Greek term refers to “another of a completely different kind.” Thus, the so called “super-apostles” are preaching a Jesus who is wholly different in style and substance than the Jesus that Paul preaches.

14 I am indebted here to Scott J. Hafemann for this term.

15 For example, see Jer 11:20; 20:12; 23:12; 25:12; 26:10-21; 27:15-31; and 28:11-52.
A Place of Emotional and Spiritual Restoration: The Ozarks in *The Shepherd of the Hills*

John J. Han

**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the ways in which the Ozark region appeals to outsiders as a place of emotional and spiritual restoration in Harold Bell Wright’s *The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907). Despite its one-dimensional plot and characterization, Wright’s romance novel portrays the Ozarks as a safe haven for the weary and burdened. This story of sin, redemption, and forgiveness is set against the tranquil setting of the Ozark hills. Mad Howard, a young man from Chicago, once committed grievous transgressions by impregnating and then abandoning an Ozark girl. The girl died during the delivery of a baby boy, and her father, Mr. Matthews, swears vengeance on both Mad Howard and his father. Already knowing the secret story involving his son and the girl, Dad Howitt has come to the Ozarks to make amends for his wayward son. At the end of the story, Dad Howitt—now known as “The Shepherd of the Hills”—decides not to return to Chicago. Wright is not naïve enough to view the Ozarks as an idyllic region; it has its share of socioeconomic problems. However, he makes it clear that the country offers something soothing to the soul that the city cannot.

*Keywords*: the Ozarks, nature, sin, redemption, forgiveness
Introduction

*The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907) is one of Harold Bell Wright’s six novels set in the Ozarks, the others being *That Printer of Udell’s* (1902–03), *The Calling of Dan Matthews* (1909), *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* (1919), *God and the Grocer*ymen (1927), and *Ma Cinderella* (1932). Written from the perspective of Christian faith, this work deals with the themes of sin, redemption, and forgiveness. Like his other novels, *The Shepherd of the Hills* begins with tragedy but ends in comedy—a structure similar to that of Christian Scripture, which begins with the Fall of Adam and Eve and ends with the coming of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21–22). *The Shepherd of the Hills* is in contrast to many mainstream American novels of Wright’s time. For instance, Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925) are set in big cities where characters lose their innocence. In Wright’s fiction, a big city may hover in the background, but the main plot enfolds in the country, where characters experience emotional and spiritual renewal.

This paper examines the ways in which the Ozarks region appeals to outsiders as a place of restoration in *The Shepherd of the Hills*. Despite its predictable plot and simplistic characterization, Wright’s romance novel portrays the Ozark hills as a safe haven for the weary and burdened. The Ozark region is not always an idyllic place; it has its own problems, such as gang violence, narrow-mindedness, illiteracy, religious hypocrisy, and poverty. Yet, Wright’s novel shows that the area is much more suitable than urban areas in regaining peace of mind thanks to its pristine surroundings.

A Brief Outline of *The Shepherd of the Hills*

Wright dedicates *The Shepherd of the Hills* to his wife, Frances (m. 1899; div. 1920). In his words of dedication, he fondly recalls the time he and his wife spent in the Ozarks:

*To Frances, my wife*

*In memory of that beautiful summer in the Ozark Hills, when, so often, we followed the old trails around the rim of Mutton Hollow—*

*the trail that is nobody knows how old—*

*and from Sammy’s Lookout watched the day go over the western ridges*

(*Shepherd* 13; italics in the original)

The pastoral mood permeating these lines continues throughout the novel. As the story opens, Dad Howitt, a mysterious man who pastored a Chicago church, comes to the Missouri Ozarks. He says that he is in search of a peaceful place. However, this is not the only reason he came to the Ozark Mountains. In addition
to being a romance story, *The Shepherd of the Hills* is a mystery novel in which a moral lapse results in the death of an innocent person, a desire for revenge lingers, and the mystery is resolved at the end. Years earlier, Dad Howitt’s wayward son, Mad Howard, committed grievous transgressions by impregnating and then abandoning a girl at Mutton Hollow, a valley in western Taney County, Missouri. The girl died while delivering a baby boy, and her father, Old Matt (Mr. Matthews), swears vengeance on both Mad Howard and his father. Already knowing the secret story involving his son and the girl, Dad Howitt has visited Mutton Hollow to atone for his son. Unbeknownst to him, Mad Howard also lives in a nearby cave trying to expiate his guilt. Mistaking him as a Baldknobber, a posse shoots Mad Howard as he tries to save others in the crossfire. Mad Howard dies in the presence of his father and Old Matt, who finally forgives the young man. On his deathbed, Mad Howard sees a vision of Old Matt’s daughter:

“I loved her—I loved—her. She was my natural mate—my other self. I belonged to her—she to me. I—I can’t tell you of that summer—when we were together—alone in the hills—the beautiful hills—away from the sham and the ugliness of the world that men have made. The beauty and inspiration of it all I put into my pictures, and I knew because of that they were good—I knew they would win a place for me—and—they did.[…]

[…]

“Do—do—you—hear? She is calling—she is calling again. Yes—sweetheart—yes, dear. I—I am—com—[.].” (*Shepherd* 181)

Mad Howard dies in an act of selflessness, and reconciliation takes place between the two families. At the end of the story, Dad Howitt—now known as “The Shepherd of the Hills”—decides not to return to Chicago, staying in the place he calls God’s Country.

**Nature in *The Shepherd of the Hills***

Dad Howitt’s appearance in the Ozarks marks an encounter between urbanity and rusticity. He exudes an air of knowledge, refinement, and authority, yet he also looks distressed and sorrowful. In addition to wet and misty weather, the author’s description of Dad Howitt’s physical characteristics makes it clear that he is fatigued and burdened: “His form stooped a little in the shoulders, perhaps with weariness…. [His face] was the countenance of one fairly staggering under a burden of disappointment and grief” (*Shepherd* 21).

Dad Howitt, who serves as the author’s mouthpiece, repeatedly lauds country life. When a young local man, Jed Holland, asks the stranger whether he came to the Ozarks for wealth, he answers, “No, I’m not looking for mines of lead and zinc; there is greater wealth in these hills and forests, young man” (*Shepherd* 22). Dad Howitt, who assumes that Mad Howard has committed suicide,
considers the country an ideal place for burial. In his conversation with the elder Matthew, Dad Howitt expresses his envy of a country cemetery: “I wish that my dear ones had a resting place like that. In the crowded city cemetery the ground is always shaken by the tramping of funeral professions” (Shepherd 28-29). The Chicagoan also explains that he came to Mutton Hollow to restore his body and soul: “This is good for me; it somehow seems to help me know how big God is. One could find peace here—surely, sir, one could find it here—peace and strength” (Shepherd 29). According to Dad Howitt (and by extension, Harold Bell Wright), the country is a place where one finds God more easily than urban areas.

In chapter four, Aunt Mollie—Old Matt’s wife—tells Dad Howitt that the natural wonders of the countryside are deceptive, adding that country life is hard and dangerous. That is why, says Aunt Mollie, girls like Sammy Lane want to move to the city. In response, Dad Howitt points out that city life entails even more challenges for its inhabitants: “The city has its hardships and its dangers too, Mrs. Matthews; life there demands almost too much at times; I often wonder if it is worth the struggle” (Shepherd 34). While acknowledging that country living is tough, Dad Howitt also notes that it is grounded in honesty and hard work. While naturalistic novels—such as Daniel Woodrell’s Winter’s Bone (2006)—debunk romanticized myths about country life, The Shepherd of the Hills portrays the Ozarks as a place for retirement from the hustle and bustle of city life. Wright’s main character finds something valuable in the country cities fail to provide.

In his classic book The Country and the City (1973), Raymond Williams explores how the country and the city are represented in English literature. According to him, while the concepts of country and city are not always clearly distinguishable, certain characteristics are associated with each locality. Positively, the country represents “peace, innocence, and simple virtue,” whereas the city is representative “of learning, communication, [and] light” (1). Negatively, the country is “a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation,” whereas the city is “a place of noise, worldliness and ambition” (1). In popular writing, the stereotypical images of country and city generally hold true. Wright is not naïve enough to view the Ozarks as an entirely idyllic region. Although city life is supposed to represent evil and corruption, there is also an envy of city life among country people. At the beginning of Wright’s novel, Jed Holland feels that he is “in the presence of a superior being” based on Dad Howitt’s urbane demeanor (Shepherd 22). However, in The Shepherd of the Hills, Wright makes it clear that the country offers something soothing to the soul that the city cannot.

**Nature in Wright’s Life: A Biographical Background**

Wright’s positive representation of the countryside likely comes from his rural background. As many social scientists have discovered, some early childhood experiences shape a person’s adult life. In his autobiography To My Sons (1934), Wright explains he learned to appreciate nature through his mother’s influence:
She taught me, before I knew books, to wonder at the beauty of a snowflake, to marvel at the patterns of frost on the windowpanes, and to note the delicate traceries of ice forming in a tub or bucket of water. Through her eyes, I saw the exquisite green of opening leaves and buds and watched the unfolding of blossoms. With her, I felt the breathless beauty of the sunset sky, delighted in the cloud forms, and was awed at the majesty of the storms and the mystery of the moon and stars. Through her eyes, I saw the true glory of the humble dandelion and buttercup and daisy. With her, I looked for the first robins, listened to the music of bobolink and lark, traced the flight of the swallow and shared the happiness of mating birds from their first choice of a building-site to the day when the fledglings timidly ventured from the nest. (To My Sons 56)

Whereas his brother Will was akin to their father, Harold and his mother were alike both physically and emotionally. She deeply cared for him, he adored her, but she sadly died when he was only eleven. Her brief presence in his life, however, left a long impact on his psyche. One of them was the appreciation of nature he learned through her, as he further explains in To My Sons:

If I have sometimes overburdened my writing with attempts to paint in words the beauties and the wonders of nature; if I have weakened my work with sunsets and flowers and trees and meadows and pastures; if, in short, I have tried to put into my stories the feel of the out-of-doors rather than the feel of the city, you know, now, the reason. It is not, as you shall see, because I have not known the life of cities. It is because in those days of my early boyhood I saw so much through [mother’s] eyes. (59)

Wright’s view of city and country may also reflect the influence of the Bible that he knew very well. Scripture presents cities both positively and negatively. Many cities in early Jewish history embody sinfulness; Sodom and Gomorrah are two of the cities condemned by God for their wickedness. In the meantime, ancient Jerusalem is known as the Holy City (Neh. 11:1), and Bethlehem as the city of David. However, the Bible represents the country as a place of spiritual fulfillment. Before the fall, Adam and Eve lived in a pastoral setting. The Psalmist sings, “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters” (23:2 NIV). In Psalm 55:6, the poet identifies the country as a place of rest: “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (NIV). In Isaiah 43:20, God declares that he protects and nurtures nature: “The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen” (NIV). Having lived both in cities and in the countryside, Wright finds rural living more conducive to the welfare of the human soul.
Conclusion: Wright’s View of Nature

Wright frequently portrays the pristine beauty of the countryside and the integrity of country people in his fiction—not only in *The Shepherd of the Hills* but also in his other Ozark novels. Of course, he is not the only twentieth-century novelist to do so. For instance, Willa Cather describes the unspoiled landscape of the Great Plains in her novels *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918). Yet, some of Cather’s other fictional works—such as *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *One of Ours* (1923)—depict the countryside as a dreary place and country folk as narrow-minded, so that her main characters leave for cities in pursuit of cosmopolitan culture. Even in *My Ántonia*, the narrator—a Nebraska native who now works as a successful lawyer in New York City—appreciates Nebraska from afar as a place of natural beauty and Nebraskans as hard-working, indomitable people; once he visits Ántonia, a long-lost childhood friend, at her farmhouse, he returns to the city.

Wright’s idea of nature somewhat recalls the “back to nature” movement among the British Romantics, who resisted urbanization caused by the Industrial Revolution in the early nineteenth century, and the ancient Greek idea of the first cause that governs the universe. In *To My Sons*, Wright writes, “God is present in the very materials of which my house is built. My home is not figuratively but literally a house of God. […] As God is in all matter, He is literally in me. In God I have my being” (250). He also views God as “a mysterious force” that holds everything together in this world (250). Accordingly, Wright has a new view of worship:

The sound of the harvester in a field of wheat is to me now a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. The smell of newly plowed ground is the incense of prayer; the acres of grain rippling in the breeze are the banners of Divine Glory; the sunshine is His strength; the rain His graciousness; the night His Peace. All who in any capacity serve are God’s ministers. The garb of the laborer is a priestly robe. […] To live is to worship; to worship is to live. (*To My Sons* 251-52)

However, unlike pantheists, who equate divinity with creation, Wright seems to emphasize the immanence of God: God is involved in every aspect of human affairs. During his tenure as pastor of the Pierce City Christian Church, Missouri, he repeatedly emphasized “applied Christianity” over “denominational Christianity” or “churchianity” (*To My Sons* 209, 207, 211), which raised suspicions from not only area pastors but also church elders. The idea of applied Christianity also pervades his works of fiction. As someone influenced by the Social Gospel and by the Restoration Movement (the Stone-Campbell Movement), Wright proposed that the church should avoid doctrinal disputes and instead “engage in social activities,” helping the needy and restoring moral decency among the public.
In addition to his lack of theological education, Wright’s committed efforts for social reform may have given the impression that his idea was doctrinally nebulous. Although his concept of God sounds like the first cause of all that exists, Wright also affirms in *God and the Groceryman* (1927) a personal God whom believers “worship […] as He is revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus” (587). God is more than a philosophical concept for him. On the other hand, in his fiction and nonfiction, Wright has almost nothing to say about the miracles in Scripture or judgment in the afterlife. In this regard, Wright was what C. Clark Triplett calls a “liberal Puritan” in line with Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and other classically liberal theologians.\(^3\) Considering Wright’s conception of God as a sustaining force, it is surprising that a number of his readers mistakenly view him as an evangelical Christian. He was indeed a liberal Christian whose ideas were shaped in part by Enlightenment thought. The Social Gospel, which he learned through Charles Sheldon’s *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (1897), served as a theological framework for his novels, particularly *That Printer of Udell’s* and *The Calling of Dan Matthews*.

Notes

1 Thanks are due to Dr. Clark Triplett of Missouri Baptist University and Dr. Eric Turner of Hannibal-LaGrange University, both of whom informed me of the TV series *Ozark* (since 2017). The episodes in the series portray the Ozarks as a region of drug production and trafficking instead of a tranquil, innocent, and unspoiled place. I have not watched the show, but it recalls Daniel Woodrell’s *Winter’s Bone*, which represents the Ozarks in a predominantly negative light. The series also recalls Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which demonstrates how a human soul degenerates as it encounters the seemingly innocent natural surroundings. *The Shepherd of the Hills* romanticizes the Ozarks, whereas *Winter’s Bone* and *Ozark* highlight the seamy side of the region. Accordingly, it would be fair to say that the real Ozarks lies somewhere in-between—between Wright’s idealized version and a pessimistic version based on geographic determinism.

2 In *The Eyes of the World* (1914), a novel set in southern California, Harold Bell Wright uses William Wordsworth’s poem “Tintern Abbey” (1798) as a prologue. Wright may have found the Romantic poet’s pantheistic view of nature agreeable to him. Thanks are due to Dr. Miles S. Mullin II of Hannibal-LaGrange University for mentioning, after my presentation, that Wright sounds akin to Henry David Thoreau in his conception of nature.

3 Not much scholarship on Wright’s theology exists. Discussions with Dr. Triplett were instrumental in understanding the author’s theology. I appreciate his insights into this matter.

Works Cited


Reviewed by Matthew Bardowell

In this book, film critic and podcaster Josh Larsen offers a meditation on the intersection of film and faith. *Movies Are Prayers* is the rare intellectual undertaking that merges theory, expertise with primary material, and devotional piety. Larsen’s book is intended for Christians who have perhaps driven too wide a wedge between popular culture, art, and religion but who are, at the same time, prepared to consider how these things converge. Larsen makes his case with a compelling litany of examples from film as well as both ancient and contemporary theological thought. Central to Larsen’s thesis is that all the works of humankind are in their way prayers, even when human makers may not believe in God or even think that they are praying. There is a profound truth to this premise that lends the book a feeling a serenity. Larsen is not anxious to persuade, he is simply offering a claim he believes to be true and, from the perspective of faith, incontrovertible. After all, belief in God does not actualize his existence, nor does our acknowledgment of his presence activate his ability to hear. Larsen presumes a God who loves us and who hears us even when all we can do is groan in what we believe is isolation.

To foreground his study, Larsen begins with a chapter entitled “Movies Are Prayers?” Here Larsen assumes some mild skepticism from his reader. As I mention above, one would expect that the book will find its primary audience among Christians, some of whom might doubt that secular films can rightly be classed among prayers. Larsen makes his case in admirable fashion, observing the adage “Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the spirit of God” (8). Larsen follows this observation by offering a framework for the remainder of his study: “This book examines the ways movies exhale. Not only *Chariots of Fire* or *Amazing Grace*. I mean movies you wouldn’t immediately associate with religious meaning. *Chinatown. Do the Right Thing. The Searchers. Pinocchio. A Hard Day’s Night. The Muppets.* (Yes, the ones wearing felt.)” (8). The theology Larsen relies upon for these conclusions arises from thinkers like Richard Foster and Abraham Kuyper. From Foster, Larsen extends the idea that prayer is an innate human urge that we enact even when we do not consciously recognize that we are engaged in it. Thus, prayer is a mode of human expression in which all people, believers or non-believers alike, cannot help but partake. Early in the chapter, Larsen cites two films that seem on their face to be uninterested in prayer
and shows in a brief but effective pair of rhetorical questions just how true Foster’s idea is:

You’ve longed, you’ve desired, you’ve marveled, you’ve groaned.
You’ve looked around at the beauty of the world, as the Welsh miners do in *How Green Was My Valley*, and said, “Wow.”
You’ve seen great suffering, as Sheriff Ed Tom Bell does in *No Country for Old Men*, and asked, “Why?” Who is it that you and the miners are praising? Why are you and the sheriff bothering to complain? (5).

For Larsen, prayer can be found in unexpected places, and in this he aligns himself with Kuyper’s oft-cited statement: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (qtd. in Larsen 11).

The structure of Larsen’s book follows the outline he observes in the story of humanity as it is expressed in scripture. Thus, the unifying concept of each chapter follows a progression beginning with creation, moving to the fall, through redemption, all culminating in restoration. Each brief chapter develops various aspects of this trajectory, which proceeds as follows: praise, yearning, lament, anger, confession, reconciliation, obedience, contemplation, and, finally, joy. Larsen brings his adroit descriptions of particular film scenes—a skill he has honed well—to bear on the various facets of prayer that lend substance to his chapters.

Larsen illustrates the first movement in this progression, creation, by discussing movies as prayers of praise. In this chapter, Larsen acknowledges the human impulse to create, arguing that as creations of the Creator, our desire to make something in our way is a natural manifestation of the image of God within each person. Film makers such as James Cameron channel this creative impulse in the fictional worlds they develop. Larsen chooses Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) as an example of this kind of imitative creation: “With an expansive vision and a careful eye for detail, Cameron and his animators capture something of that unbridled vitality in *Avatar*. There is a story . . . , but the movie mostly thrills as an act of imaginative world building” (17). Larsen also acknowledges the creative accomplishments of Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life* (2011), a film shot through with quiet moments of grace as well as suffering that nevertheless speaks to the abundance and beauty of God’s creation. Perhaps the most unexpected film to be included in Larsen’s chapter on praise is Alfonso Caurón’s *Children of Men* (2006), a dystopian film set in a grim world where humans have mysteriously ceased to have babies. Larsen’s analysis draws parallels between this film and the birth of Christ by showing that the characters in the film set aside their animosity in reverence for the new and miraculous child that has been born (28-9).

While some of these film selections are fairly intense for the average movie-goer, Larsen can often be playful as well as insightful in his examples. In his discussion of confession as an aspect of the fall, Larsen considers how a film
like John Lasseter’s *Toy Story* (1995) presents moments of epiphany and painful honesty for its characters. Buzz Lightyear, Larsen argues, is deluded about his true identity and must face a moment of confession in order to live in harmony with his community of toys. Larsen emphasizes a scene in which Buzz, who believes he is a real space ranger (not merely a toy), sees a TV commercial advertising himself: “The real kicker for Buzz comes with the ad’s disclaimer: ‘Not a flying toy.’ Refusing to admit this declaration of his deficiency, Buzz jumps up on the railing at the top of the stairs. He launches himself into the air with confidence, but of course he crashes to the hard tile below, breaking off one of his arms” (83). Here Larsen showcases the versatility of his approach to film. In offering a serious analysis of an animated film, he is able to show how the human condition is present in anthropomorphized toys and how Buzz’s epiphany is instrumental to his later heroism. In this way, Larson holds surprises for his reader and demonstrates that his conclusions are relevant across a wide range of genres.

Larsen not only demonstrates how to take popular films seriously, he also introduces his audience to the rarefied world of silent, foreign, and independent films. Larsen encourages his readers to challenge themselves with the kind of films they consume and to regard them not merely as outlets for escapism and entertainment. Some films of this type on which Larsen reflects are Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) and Krzysztof Kieslowski’s *The Decalogue* (1988), a series of ten films in which each episode treats one of the Ten Commandments. Here Larsen explores enigmatic films that raise more questions than they answer. They are themselves meditations on human flourishing, and they in turn drive us to approach God in contemplative prayer as we consider their meaning and the wisdom (or warning) in what they reveal (142). While addressing the theme of meditation and contemplation, which he positions among his chapters that address redemption, Larsen floats freely between sixteenth-century mystics (St. John of the Cross), Romanticist poets (William Wordsworth), and medieval mystics (Julian of Norwich). The result is a delightfully eclectic history of contemplation within the Christian tradition. In his treatment of contemplation, Larsen urges his readers not to eschew the boring, but to attend to it instead. If we do, we may be rewarded by discerning the quiet moments of beauty within troubling experiences.

Little in the realm of film is excluded from Larsen’s redemptive vision. He even considers old-fashioned, highly-choreographed Hollywood musicals as an illustration of joy. Larsen argues that joy, as a feature of restoration, shines through in Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers films. Likewise, Hayao Miyazaki’s animated film *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and the Muppet movies can engender a feeling of elation that Larsen associates with the human response to the Gospel. While some may regard these films as nonsense, Larsen observes that “there is a holiness in this nonsense, a sense in which it functions as prayerful joy. Christian joy after all, is itself a response to the silly, the absurd: the good news” (159). In such moments, Larsen proves insightful in showing how film can aid us in reflecting on the felt experience of our improbable redemption.
Movies Are Prayers is pitched to the non-specialist and, indeed, to the non-academic. Larsen’s casual prose is intended for the layperson who may have an interest in film but who may not be initiated into the world of film theory or criticism. The chapters are rather short and, as a consequence, Larsen truncates his analysis of particular movie scenes. Indeed, the longer scene descriptions are often confined to the beginning and endings of chapters in order to serve as stage dressing for that chapter’s theme and then to round out the chapter by returning to the film with our understanding of, say, confession, firmly in place. Larsen’s final chapter, “Prayer as Journey,” however, contains a welcome extended analysis of a single film and demonstrates how each element of the creation-fall-redemption-restoration cycle is at work within it. The film Larsen selects for this treatment is Wes Anderson’s Rushmore (1998), a film about the relationship between an over-achieving High School student, a mourning first-grade teacher, and a disillusioned father. Rushmore receives the fullest analysis of all the films Larsen mentions, and by seizing on critical scenes he shows how each feature of the Christian story can be found within a secular film. The reader may wish for more of Larsen’s close work with specific movies, and this reviewer certainly hopes we can anticipate future books that offer it. Larsen makes his closing appeal to the Church at large. He writes, “Let’s be a congregation, not a censor board. Let’s be open to the possibility that as movie watchers, we’re privileged eavesdroppers on a dialogue between God and the creative beings he made” (180). Those who draw bright lines of distinction between “Christian art” and “secular art” will be well-served by this exhortation. The generosity and serenity Larson exhibits as he makes his case is a wonderful example to Christian critics. Larsen shows how we may see God’s redemptive work in unusual places—even in one’s nearest multiplex.

Reviewed by Matthew Bardowell

Following in the footsteps of writers like John Garth, who wrote *Tolkien and the Great War* (2003), Joseph Loconte offers an account of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis’s early years set against the historical backdrop of World War I. Tom Shippey has associated Tolkien and Lewis with a long list of prominent twentieth-century fantasy writers who he calls “traumatized authors.” By including them on this list, Shippey suggests that there is something about experiencing the horrors of war firsthand that induced this cohort of writers to express themselves through the medium of fantasy literature. Loconte, however, perceives an important distinction between Tolkien and Lewis and their war-traumatized contemporaries. It is this difference he seeks to elucidate, and his investigation into the cultural history of Europe in the early twentieth century allows readers to see precisely how the faith of these two men sets them apart. Early in the book, Loconte offers an appraisal of other studies that address Tolkien’s and Lewis’s wartime experiences and makes a claim about what he adds to the conversation: “the newest offerings examine the war from nearly every angle—military, political, social, economic—except from the vantage point of faith. What is needed, however, is a fresh appraisal of the spiritual calamity of the war and the human condition in light of this experience” (xviii). Given the cultural zeitgeist of the turn of the twentieth century, Loconte asks his reader to consider how Tolkien and Lewis resisted the sense of moral disintegration and existential dread that affected so many of their contemporaries.

Loconte begins with a cogent account of the “Myth of Progress” that informed scientific and religious thought in the early twentieth century. That Tolkien and Lewis rejected the notion that progress would usher in a new era of human thriving will not be novel, but Loconte’s skillful historical narrative concerning the rise of the “Myth of Progress” places this well-known trait in a particular social context. Loconte shows with devastating force how the hope of progress was dashed to pieces with the start of World War I. He also shows how these notions, steeped as they were in scientific justification, were nevertheless linked to a mythic narrative of their own. This cultural disposition toward scientism is something Lewis challenges rather explicitly in his *Space Trilogy*, and Loconte demonstrates with clarity and insight precisely how Lewis achieves this critique. The scientism of the early twentieth century was not limited to scientists. Loconte argues that even prominent members of the clergy embraced a facile reliance upon scientific methods and regarded them as central to their vision of the good life. Perhaps the most sinister manifestation of the scientism of religion at this time is to be found in the way the Church of England embraced eugenics as a solution for bringing heaven on earth. Loconte offers the Church
Congress of 1910 at Cambridge as an example: “Attendees . . . were treated to ‘brilliant’ addresses urging the clergy to promote the eugenics agenda at every turn” (16). One of the great strengths of Loconte’s book is how effectively he makes the case that those who embraced the myth of progress had succumbed to a woefully inadequate cultural hermeneutic that failed to anticipate or address the horrors of war, genocide, and racism that would supplant “The Myth of Progress” as the legacy of the twentieth century. Loconte develops the cultural milieu of Europe during the formative years of Tolkien’s and Lewis’s lives. In his subsequent chapter, Loconte departs from focusing on these two men, but such a deviation is well worth it as he is able to develop more fully the way these writers find a third way between the nihilism and rejection of convention that defined so many modernists.

Tolkien and Lewis are often regarded as somewhat retrograde compared with other thinkers of their day. They are sometimes labeled as conservative, but this descriptor can often suggest a flawed alignment with our fraught political climate. The extent to which these men believed that truth was enduring and eternal, was rooted in the fabric of reality, and was not the product of the subjective mind suggests a certain philosophical conservatism, it is true, but one of the benefits of Loconte’s approach is that it reveals them to have resisted numerous preformed cultural categories. Loconte shows that these men seemed not to feel at home in the any of the established encampments of their culture and would likely have much to teach us about our own inclinations to choose a side and stick to it. Unlike the clergy who turned to eugenics for an answer to societal ills, Tolkien and Lewis knew there was no worldly solution to the spiritual problem of fallen-ness. The chapters that follow examine The Great War by considering the spiritual condition of those engaged in it. Loconte then positions Lewis and Tolkien within this framework, showing how each writer observes and addresses these spiritual conditions through his writing.

While their stories often depict scenes of war, Loconte argues that Tolkien and Lewis never adopt the triumphalist attitude that those in positions of cultural authority embraced. As he develops this claim, Loconte offers students and scholars further historical context for interpreting some of the characters in their fiction. For instance, in the final book of Lewis’s Space Trilogy, That Hideous Strength (1945), Reverend Straik justifies the militaristic tactics of the National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments (amusingly abbreviated as the N.I.C.E.). Straik finds himself atop a slippery slope that progresses from dissection of animals, to vivisection, to outright murder—all of which he accepts as necessary means to what he deems to be a good end. Loconte observes that “Straik might well have been modeled on any number of WWI ministers enchanted by the prospects of spiritual revival” (51). Loconte sees Tolkien’s response to triumphalist attitudes of war in the way he “deliberately submerged the Christian elements of his story, making even the idea of God only a suggestive aspect of the narrative” (51). As a result, Loconte illustrates the way Tolkien and Lewis imbue the martial aspects of their works with an “unexpected humility” and “empathy for the person who is asked to risk all for a noble cause” (52).
The premise for Loconte’s book is that the faith of these two men sustained them both during and in the years following the trauma of the war. One of the striking features of Loconte’s logic is its aesthetic quality. He argues that both men kindled an enduring vision of beauty and goodness that the extreme violence and destruction of World War I could not extinguish. How this vision of goodness arises from faith is complicated. Tolkien was a devout Catholic from earliest boyhood and remained devout through the war and beyond. Lewis, however, rejected faith in God at a young age and often viewed the ravages of war as confirmation of his atheism. Tolkien fought in the Battle of the Somme, one of the most deadly battles of World War I, and lost a number of close friends during the war. Loconte suggests that the evils of these experiences informed the creation of the evil landscapes that comprise part of the geography of his Legendarium—the Dead Marshes on the path to Mordor is an example (72-4). Loconte also shows, however, that the goodness found in one’s fellow soldiers and the duty they felt toward one another formed the basis for the particular brand of courage found among his hobbits. Sam Gamgee, Loconte observes, illustrates the way small and simple folk can exude an uncommon bravery in the face of calamity (75). For Lewis, Loconte suggests, it was his early exposure to fairy tale and mythology that planted the seeds of what human flourishing could be like. The horrors of Lewis’s war experience prompted poetry of the kind found in *Spirits in Bondage* (1919), but the memory of the goodness he perceived in his childhood reading created a longing for something better. Scholars most often identify the point of Lewis’s Christian conversion as sometime in the early 1930s, but Loconte suggests that Lewis makes some progress toward an acknowledgement of spiritual reality as he convalesces in a London hospital after being wounded at the battle of Arras: “The experience appears to have wrought a change in Lewis—a small change, but a permanent one. It quickened his belief in the spiritual, otherworldly source of natural beauty” (101). Again, this observation is striking for its aesthetic quality. It is the beauty of the natural world that somehow appears to have shown Lewis that, despite its temporal manifestation, its source must be eternal. Loconte links such sentiments deftly back to the themes in the literature that moved Lewis prior to the war, most notably George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*.

As Loconte concludes, he frames two competing mythologies. There is first the mythology that emerged after “the Myth of Progress” failed. The belief that material solutions could address humankind’s greatest ills gave way to another myth of doubt, disillusionment, and dehumanization which would influence literary modernism so strongly in the twentieth century. Tolkien and Lewis address this modernist myth with mythologies of their own making but which are rooted in the true myth of Christianity. As Loconte explains, “fortified by their faith, they proclaimed for their generation—and ours—a True Myth about the dignity of human life and its relationship to God” (138). Loconte argues that the power of Tolkien’s and Lewis’s writings are that they awaken the “moral imagination” of their readers at time when such an imagination was facing a deep and abiding stagnation.
Loconte’s book will interest those who study and teach the Inklings or either Tolkien and Lewis at the university level. Loconte’s work in this book lends vital historical context to those who work within the discipline of English literature. Unlike authors who concentrate on either Tolkien or Lewis, Loconte’s decision to focus on both men reinforces the significance of their wartime experiences both as intensely formative on a personal level but also as part of the formation of the community that would support them as they wrote their most enduring stories. Loconte’s archival does not yield much new information. Indeed, his work with the correspondence and biographies of each figure is indebted to the discoveries of others. But his ability to weave together elements of their lives, their fiction, and the dominant cultural attitudes of their day presents a compelling narrative that literary scholars will have less completely and systematically than the way he presents it here. As such, *A Hobbit, a Wardrobe, and A Great War*, will be a welcome addition to the shelves of Tolkien and Lewis scholars, particularly those who study or teach them from a perspective of faith.
Intégrité: A Faith and Learning Journal


Reviewed by Julie Ooms

The title and subtitle of Jacobs’s brief book both read as arresting and hyperbolic at first glance. But the claims made by its title and addressed throughout its pages are comforting to teachers of writing and argument, like myself, who might increasingly despair the effectiveness of their own work and the possibility of thought itself in our divided age. They also engaged my students, nineteen- and twenty-year-olds whose familiarity with the frequent disintegration to which online discourse is prone made them simultaneously hungry for and jaded in their approach to any idea that clear, charitable, and thoughtful dialogue is possible. How to Think is not an exhaustive study of thought or rhetoric, but it does not aim to be. As a short guidebook that gives students, their professors, and other members of their communities clear terms and reliable strategies, How to Think succeeds; I hope it is widely read, particularly in high school and college classes on rhetoric and argument.

Throughout the book, Jacobs names concepts helpful for framing what good thinking is, and what pitfalls it helps would-be thinkers avoid. In the following paragraphs, I will name a handful of these, focusing on the ones I find most helpful, as well as those that most piqued my students’ interest. My goal is to give teachers of reading and writing an overview of what I have found most helpful in my classes in an effort to help them decide whether Jacobs’s book would be a valuable text for their own courses.

The first concept—one my students kept returned to in the four class days we devoted to Jacobs’s book—appears in the introduction to the book; Jacobs, citing Daniel Kahneman, discusses “System 1” and “System 2” thinking. System 1 is fast, intuitive thinking; this system “provides us with snap judgments, instantaneous reads on a given situation, strong predispositions toward approving some ideas and disapproving others” (16). This type of thinking is the “program” we are running most of the time to get through each day. Occasionally, though, System 2, “conscious reflection,” kicks in “when we perceive a problem, an inconsistency, an anomaly that needs to be addressed” (16-17). Jacobs, citing Jonathan Haidt, uses the metaphor of a rider steering an elephant to illustrate System 2 directing System 1, an image Jacobs finds hopeful: “The idea is that our intuitive thinking is immensely powerful and has a mind of its own, but can be gently steered—by a rider who is truly skillful and understands the elephant’s inclinations” (17). My students immediately latched on to this image because it felt very true to them; it feels true to me, as well. So much of our responses to ideas are knee-jerk, reflexive, unaffected by careful thought. The speed at which we can share our thoughts and responses to others in the age of social media only exacerbates this our tendency to depend on System 1 rather than taking the time to turn on System 2. But it is in System 2, Jacobs points out, that we slow down, sit with ideas (and with our interlocutors) and begin to think well. In responses to
this opening section of Jacobs’s book, nearly all of my students mentioned this framework for thinking about thinking, and it became fodder for fruitful discussion about what it means to think well and why we often avoid it.

Another of Jacobs’s ideas that my students and I found helpful came from an example Jacobs shares in chapter two, “Attractions” (this chapter is best assigned along with chapter three, “Repulsions,” for obvious reasons). The example is of a group of students at Yale University who are involved in a debate society called the Yale Political Union (YPU); the idea is called being “broken on the floor,” which in the context of the YPU means to change one’s mind in the middle of a public debate in front of everyone. Being “broken on the floor” is “a token of good faith and an indication of a willingness not just to accept but to live out the values of the community” because it indicated “you were vulnerable to changes of your own mind” (53). My students and I wrestled with this concept a bit—after all, if we enter every discussion ready to change our minds, doesn’t that mean we aren’t maintaining our convictions?—but we recognized its importance, especially when faced with its opposite. A person who enters every discussion primed to disagree, refusing to listen to other perspectives in a way that might affect him or her, we all clearly saw as a person who, finally, is refusing to think.

The idea that we should be cultivate a willingness to be “broken on the floor” dovetailed with two ideas in chapter four, “The Money of Fools,” that in turn connected with my students, who mentioned both in their responses to this section of the book. The first, which Jacobs takes from Robin Sloan, involves a suggestion for formatting debates, just like the YPU example. In this model, the first of two debaters makes her argument; then, the second debater must summarize the other’s argument to the satisfaction of the first before he can continue with his own argument (108). This model for debate interested my students because it is so at odds with how they—how we all, I imagine—usually experience argument. Our experiences are usually in line with the second idea my students found noteworthy in this chapter: that not only do we often conceive of arguments using metaphorical language, but one of the “most deeply embedded metaphors in our common discourse…identifies argument as a form of warfare” (97). This metaphor leads to, among other things, a tendency to dehumanize our interlocutors, because they cease to be other people from whom we wish to learn and with whom we hope to achieve some kind of understanding: they become, instead, “mouthpieces of positions we want to eradicate” and we, “in our zeal to win…[sacrifice] empathy” (98). My students all recognized that the “argument as war” metaphor is alive and well in their own experiences; I think this may be why the idea of having to summarize another interlocutor’s argument to their satisfaction during a discussion was so appealing to them, because it gave them the opportunity to develop a new metaphor for argument that was less about warfare and more about neighborliness.

Neighborliness brings me to the fourth idea from Jacobs’s book that my students and I found worth engaging deeply. This idea comes up in the first chapter, “Beginning to Think,” and is threaded through every subsequent one; it’s introduced with the provocative section heading “Why Thinking for Yourself is Impossible.” Jacobs argues that, whatever we might think about the mightiness
and primacy of the individual, none of us thinks independently of other humans. “Thinking is necessarily, thoroughly, and wonderfully social,” he says, and “Everything you think is a response to what someone else has thought and said” (37). My students were—as, I’m sure, many of us would be—resistant to this idea. Indeed, when one is used to praising people for thinking for themselves, and when one lives in a cultural landscape where most privilege the original thought over the viewpoint that seems unoriginal or overly influenced by others, one would naturally be so. But as we discussed it further, it became clearer that indeed, we are all part of communities with which we think—faith communities, school communities, family communities, and others. In my own discipline of English, my best academic arguments are made when I intentionally engage with a scholarly conversation rather than trying to form an original thought outside of the wider discussion. Once we learn to see ourselves as members of thinking communities, and recognize that we truly do not think for ourselves, we are better able to understand the limits of our own knowledge and to recognize that we, as much as anyone we agree or disagree with, cannot say we are beyond the influence of others. And once we recognize our indebtedness to other people, we can start to see neighborliness and charity as essential pieces to any act of argument or thought.

Jacobs’s book provided my students and me with the language to explore the process of thinking and argument in fruitful ways. The book is not perfect—its organization is more topical than strictly logical, and was occasionally confusing; its frequent mentioning of current trends in social media discourse were well woven into the overall argument but run the risk of being outdated very soon. But as a classroom text, this book works well; it stimulated good discussion, and would be useful alongside other relatively recent books such as Esther Lightcap Meek’s A Little Manual for Knowing, Marilyn McEntyre’s Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies, and Richard A. Holland and Benjamin K. Forrest’s Good Arguments. Overall, How to Think is a helpful tool for professors, their students, and for any other person who wants to think more deeply about thinking.

Reviewed by Julie Ooms

In the Fall 2018 semester, right around the time I had begun reading Karen Swallow Prior’s *On Reading Well*, I taught a literary theory course. Early in the term, my students and I discussed moral and philosophical frameworks for analyzing literature. Many of my students were drawn to this approach for two main reasons. First, analyzing a text in order to find its theme and therefore its message about some aspect of human life fit neatly with how they had been used to analyzing literature in other classes. And second, approaching literature this way dovetailed with their own religious perspectives—perspectives that, among other things, led them to believe implicitly that stories have meaning and that those meanings can be connected to our own lives.

Moral and philosophical approaches to literature are often seen as out of favor; a paper using these approaches would likely not get far if submitted for publication in a major literary journal. But Prior’s *On Reading Well* shows the continued relevance of such an approach, and she shows how it can be done well. Her exploration of twelve different literary works helps scholars, teachers, and students develop their skills as readers; those skills, in turn, she effectively argues, help grow and shape readers’ hearts. This book is worthy of a place on every Christian literature teacher’s shelf; its chapters can spark useful discussion amongst colleagues and in the classroom as well.

The book’s overarching argument is that reading good books well can help readers both understand and practice virtues, so that they may themselves become more virtuous. Because the language of virtues is not necessarily familiar to all readers, Prior begins the book with an introduction, providing an explanation of virtue ethics and its connection to reading that is informative enough for its context while simultaneously showing the reader where else s/he might look to further explore its ideas. Reading well leads to transformation, Prior argues, because it “adds to our life—not in the way a tool from the hardware store adds to our life, for a tool does us no good once lost or broken, but in the way a friendship adds to our life, altering us forever” (18). Literature can alter our lives this way because the characters, conflicts, and resolutions in stories allow us to see virtue’s presence or its lack and respond accordingly: “We must imagine what virtue looks like in order to act virtuously” (26). Therefore, reading a good book that displays a virtue, whether positively (through that virtue’s presence in a character) or negatively (through its absence), allows readers to imagine what possessing that virtue looks like, and cultivate that virtue within their own lives. Reading well, thus, allows us to gain not only fluent reading skills, but to grow in wisdom, and while the latter is more difficult, it is more valuable in the end (28).

I find this argument not only appealing and well-articulated, but extremely timely. We who read and teach others to read, who work as Christian educators
who try to encourage a love of reading and growth of character in our students, often feel at odds with the culture of higher education around us, whether we work in secular or faith-based institutions. Education is more and more seen as a private good than a public one; our students come to college to learn skills that will be immediately relevant to the workforce and their planned careers, not to develop empathy, understand their place in history, or to ask big questions about what makes a truly “good” life or how their work and their desires fits into a larger plan God has not only for their individual lives and successes, but for the world. Learning to read, and to read well, in order to cultivate virtues and grow in wisdom is something all of us, teachers and students alike, would do well to practice and to teach.

Following this introduction, Prior does just that: she practices reading well as she guides readers through twelve works, each of which, she argues, helps readers cultivate one of twelve virtues. She begins with the four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and courage. The three theological virtues, faith, hope, and love, follow. The book closes with the five heavenly virtues: chastity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. The chapters themselves work well as a whole and individually, and their helpfulness is multifaceted. Some of the chapters allowed me to reexamine a work I’d read before in a different, and unexpected, light. The chapters on faith and hope, which consider the novels *Silence* and *The Road* respectively, paired virtues with works that seemed to me clearly well-matched. When I saw that the chapter on love concerned Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, however, I was skeptical; upon reading it I saw Prior’s point, and the chapter invited me to reread *Ivan Ilych* through a different lens. Some of the chapters examined works I had never read before, and led me to put them on my reading list based on Prior’s analysis (I am slightly embarrassed to admit that I have put off reading *The Tale of Two Cities* and *Pilgrim’s Progress*). Some chapters introduced me to virtues that resonated specifically with my own experiences and the self-knowledge I have gained about which vices I tend toward most; the first chapter, on prudence and Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, gave me the definition of a virtue I had never concretely considered but knew myself both personally drawn to and often lacking in. All three of these ways of reading *On Reading Well* offer something to each reading, whether or not that reader also teaches others how to engage with literary works.

If that reader is, like me, also a teacher of literature, the book’s helpfulness extends into the classroom. Its language is very readable, and Prior provides thorough and clear definitions for unfamiliar terms and ideas; the book should be accessible to most college students. I have already mentioned that it is a strong example of the application of moral and philosophical frameworks to literary works and that my literary theory students have found it useful as an example of how such an approach can be done well—how literary theory can be moral without moralizing, concerned with truth without sermonizing. The chapters of the book can also be used separately in the classroom if the class is discussing one of the works Prior examines. For example, my American literature students are currently reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and they will read Prior’s chapter on the virtue of courage in *Huck Finn* as part of the course. Later in the
semester, my world literature students, who read *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, will read Prior’s chapter on that work, and I am already planning to use the chapter on *The Road* and hope in my contemporary American literature class in an upcoming semester. Prior’s choice of literary works that are not only excellent but also frequently taught helps make her book an excellent resource for literature teachers.

The book has some flaws, as all books do. The introduction is excellent, but the book lacks a conclusion, instead asking its last chapter (on humility in some of Flannery O’Connor’s stories) to function as both literary analysis and conclusion. The chapter, unfortunately, cannot quite bear that doubled weight. The chapters are brief, and they cover a lot of ground: each names and defines its virtue, provides some background of each text, and conducts analysis. While the chapters are largely sufficient, the reader might wish they were longer and allowed for more in-depth analysis, especially the chapters that tackle longer works.

These flaws, however, are small, and do not keep the book from arguing its thesis or from introducing (or reintroducing) readers to a way of reading that both enlightens the mind and shapes the soul. *On Reading Well* is a worthy edition to the syllabi of literature teachers and the bookshelves of all those who recognize the power of stories to instruct and shape us.

Reviewed by John J. Han

Best known for his masterful Christian allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come* (1678), John Bunyan is also the author of lesser-known prose works, such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), *The Holy War* (1680), and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680). However, not many people, even Christian readers, know that Bunyan was also an excellent Puritan poet. Poemhunter.com and other websites contain some of his poems. To the delight of Bunyan enthusiasts, *John Bunyan’s Poetry: Divine Emblems* collects all of his poems along with their respective illustrations in a handsome portable volume. Originally published in 1686 with the title *A Book for Boys and Girls, or, Country Rhimes for Children*, the volume adopted in 1724 the title *Divine Emblems: Temporal Things Spiritualised*. The book is currently in public domain.

As a preacher imprisoned for his nonconformist faith for twelve years, Bunyan wrote poems with an instrumental view of art—poetry primarily as a tool for conveying doctrinal, moral, and ethical teachings—in mind. What sets his poetry apart from many other premodern English poems lies in its intense spirituality, which is typical of Puritan writing in general. In their didactic nature, Bunyan’s poems are indeed sermons in verse form that embody Puritan faith: the gravity of sin, the Calvinist idea of the elect, the importance of conversion, the centrality of Scripture, and holy living.

As a seventeenth-century poet, Bunyan follows the traditional conventions of English verse writing. Many of his poems consist of 11-syllable lines, but others have eight syllables in each line, as in “My little bird, how canst thou sit / And sing amidst so many thorns? (56). Almost all of the poems have the meter of iambic pentameter (10 syllables arranged in a succession of unaccented and accented words), which is the most natural rhythm to the English language. Here is an example of lines in iambic pentameter: “The egg’s no chick by falling from the hen; / Nor man a Christian, till he’s born again” (8).

Bunyan also uses other techniques traditionally used in English poetry, such as end rhyme, inversion, figures of speech (simile, metaphor, and personification), parallelism, rhetorical questions, and dialogue. After the end of a poem, Bunyan sometimes adds an explanatory section, “Comparison,” in which he interprets and draws a lesson from the poem. This section is usually short, but sometimes it can be longer than the poem itself, which reflects the poet’s instructive tendency. In “Upon the Frog,” for instance, Bunyan censures religious hypocrisy by using the analogy of the frog. By nature, the frog is “both damp and cold [that] loves to be / Croaking in gardens, though unpleasantly” (65). In “Comparison,” the poet explains, “The hypocrite is like unto this frog, […] And though he seeks in churches for to croak, / He neither loveth nor his yoke” (65—
The technique recalls Jesus’ explication of his parables for his disciples and Aesop’s fables, each of which always ends with a lesson derived from the story.

Bunyan’s poems serve two specific purposes: to expound Protestant, especially Puritan, theology and to advocate a Puritan lifestyle. In “Upon the Sacraments,” for instance, he professes his belief in only two sacraments: “Baptism and the Supper of the Lord” (29). In other poems, Bunyan illustrates his belief in the dichotomy of heaven and hell. A case in point is “Upon Fire,” which portrays the eternal damnation of unrepentant sinners:

Who falls into the fire shall burn with heat;
While those who remote scorn from it to retreat.
Yea, while those in it, cry out, O! I burn,
Some farther off those cries to laughter turn. (98)

The lines envision the surety of eternal, physically tormenting hell awaiting those who delight in sin. In other poems, Bunyan expounds the importance of spiritual rebirth and persistent prayer.

Some of the poems address the subject directly—as William Blake does in “To a Lamb” and “To a Tiger.” In “Upon the Lark and the Fowler,” for instance, Bunyan cautions a lark against the snares of the devil:

Thou simple bird, what makes thou here to play?
Look, there’s the Fowler, pr’ythee come away.
Do’st not thou behold the net? Look there, ’tis spread.
Venture a little further, thou art dead. (3)

Here the Fowler represents the devil who tries to lead Christians astray.

As a pietistic Christian, Bunyan sometimes expresses suspicions about intellectuals. For his poem “Upon the Vine-Tree,” which stresses the importance of fruitful Christian life, Bunyan adds the following “Comparison”:

What are professors more than other men?
Nothing at all. Nay, there’s not one in ten,
[...]
Good are they, if they mortify their sin,
But without that, they are not worth a pin. (7)

These lines reflect the Puritans’ emphasis on holy living: the extent of a person’s knowledge has nothing to do with his or her salvation. Furthermore, the “Comparison” implies that men of worldly knowledge are not likely better than those who lack it.

Almost all of the poems in Divine Emblems are exhortatory and serious, yet readers will find ironic and sarcastic ones as well. A good example is “Upon Apparel,” which consists of only four lines:

God gave us clothes to hide our nakedness,
And we by them do it to expose to view,
Our pride and unclean minds to an excess,
By our apparel, we to others show. (31)

George Offor, editor of the 1701 edition of *Divine Emblems*, adds a footnote: “This is one of Bunyan’s keen, shrewd, home thrusts. Clothes professedly made to hide what they studiously display!!” (31) Bunyan’s criticism of immodest dressing for women derives from Biblical teachings (Proverbs 11:22 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10, for instance). It is interesting to note that the way women dress has always been a topic for discussion in Judeo-Christian history—in the times of the Old and New Testaments, Bunyan’s days, and even today.

In his book *Who Are the Puritans? and What Do They Teach?* (Evangelical Press, 2000), Erroll Hulse writes, “In spiritual experience, in doctrine, in preaching style, and in life, John Bunyan is the perfect exemplar of the Puritans” (102; italics in the original). The statement sounds somewhat hyperbolic, considering that Puritanism developed in two different strands: intellectual Puritanism embraced by scholars such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy and pietistic Puritanism typified by John Bunyan and Cotton Mather. It would be fair to say that Bunyan was a perfect exemplar of the Puritans. As a man devoted to the Puritan way of life, he composed poems as extensions of his sermonic prose. Similar to his simple approach to faith, his poems are devoid of floweriness and excessive artistry. As a persecuted Christian, Bunyan must have felt it his duty to deliver Puritan messages in whatever forms were available to him. One may find in *Divine Emblems* elements of anti-intellectualism and simplistic thinking, yet it would be hard not to appreciate the uplifting fervor of a Christian man who risked his life to defend nonconformist faith. In an age of a commercialized, feel-good Christianity, *Divine Emblems* serves as a refreshing reminder of the centrality of Christ and his undiluted teachings for humanity. As a collection of evangelical poems, *Divine Emblems* also serves as a textbook example of didactic verses that skillfully use a number of devices.

Reviewed by Gillian Haenggi

Known for crazy lock-ins, extreme parties, fun mission trips, and ample time with friends, high school youth groups excel at engaging students. The problem? It stops there. Senior year flies past, a gown is worn, a cap is thrown, and in the faith community students are swept from under their feet, leaving them floundering in the “real world.”

Sharon Galgay Ketcham addresses this spiritual epidemic in her book *Reciprocal Church: Becoming a Community Where Faith Flourishes beyond High School.* In two parts, Ketcham addresses the spiritual scaffolding churches create for young adults by disrupting the theological ideals regarding the Church’s role in harboring community and then highlighting the exercises and beliefs of a church community in which young adults continue to thrive.

Ketcham, who teaches theology at Gordon College, defines reciprocal church in her introduction, stating, “Reciprocation involves a type of motion. Unlike linear motion that follows a straight line or rotary motion that moves in a circle, a reciprocal church’s motion is a push and pull or back and forth between persons” (1). The reciprocity is what allows the Holy Spirit to enter into the space of the people and create a community that succeeds in the Kingdom of God. Ketcham writes with commanding headers, italicized sub points, and starbursts of quotes throughout the book to engage the reader. With a common vernacular, *Reciprocal Church* invites people of all intellectual levels to enter the discussion of helping young adults bloom within the walls of the church.

*Reciprocal Church* is written in two parts. Part One, “A Theological Vision for Flourishing Communities” (11), includes five chapters that delve into reasons why students do not carry their faith after high school, why the church fails at creating that community, and biblical truth as to what God intended for our community. Part Two, “Values and Practices for Flourishing Communities” (85), contains five chapters that recognize the values of memory, mutuality, potential, contribution, and maturity as ways for the church to encourage young adults in their faith. This outline clearly establishes the doctrine behind Ketcham’s beliefs and why the church needs to put her ideas into practice. Then, the practicality of her doctrinal beliefs are exhibited through the suggested church values.

Many of her chapters are filled with extended metaphors and stories, and part one is no different. With the title itself being an allegory, part one, chapter one, “Eating Melons on Tuesdays: Young People and Faith” (29), illustrates the misconceptions churches use to wrongly diagnose “healthy spiritual growth” in students, and why that is a problem. In relation to such a metaphor she writes:
Here’s an exaggerated example. Imagine researchers demonstrate that young people who eat melon on Tuesday are among those with sustained faith. In response, ministries focus on increasing melon consumption. Small groups move to Tuesdays. They serve melon balls, melon smoothies and melon pizza, the benefits of melons become the focus of leader training. [...] Here’s the problem. Did anyone ask what eating melon on Tuesday has to do with Christianity?

While Ketcham highlights a great fault in our church system, she fails to elaborate on the real-world application of her analogy. With a quick tidbit saying, “I bet you can fill in the blank with popular data findings we grab as if they solve everything” (18), Ketcham then moves on to theological reflections to consider so that a church does not end up “eating melons on Tuesday” (19).

The shift between the lack of explanation over the melon example to the theological reflection of the church was drastic enough, however, to give readers whiplash. If her intent were to use the metaphor lightly, she explained it in too much detail. If her intent were to encompass the entirety of the metaphor, she lost the application in her excitement to get to the theology. Regardless, a discontinuity exists between ideas found in many of the chapters.

Numerous times Ketcham highlights the struggle between the culture surrounding young adults and the pressure to be in the world but not of it. As a young adult, I am passionate to find answers to this balance, and Ketcham emphasizes it well. For young adults, the consumeristic society devours us, the individualistic society isolates us, and the pressure to be the best at everything overwhelms us. Ketcham affirms this toxicity that our culture “reduces the church’s role to another consumable product and people to tools for personal discipleship” (167). The reciprocity between people who live in the culture and the church body can sometimes be volatile; however, Ketcham suggests that by the power of the Holy Spirit reciprocity can facilitate growth for both parties. She argues church belongs inside of culture, and culture belongs inside of church. Ketcham successfully highlights this incredibly important balance.

Ketcham combines theology and values with the passion for creating a church culture that appreciates young adults and their spiritual growth. Readers will not doubt her intellectual abilities and sound doctrine within the pages of this book nor will anyone argue against her passion for the lost. She vehemently urges the Church to change, and she desires all congregants feel welcomed and connected to the faith community. I think this passion exudes from the pages, and her intention for this book is well noted.

What I found challenging about this book is that each chapter holds anywhere from four to eight different ideas regarding how the church can grow, ideas which are difficult to connect to the main point of the chapter, and further to the main purpose of the book. Some analogies distract from the main point, and most chapters fail at tying all the points together. This discontinuity makes it challenging to understand the main ideas.
Through verified application, many acclaimed writers echo Ketcham’s ideas regarding what a church community should do to encourage young adult growth. She speaks with a knowledge of the current world around her, and wisely integrates that knowledge into her writing. As a millennial, I appreciate her voice in speaking up for us and demanding change from our churches.

As a millennial called to serve as a clergyperson, I am concerned about this significant lack of young adults in the church. I have seen my peers and close friends grow farther and farther away from the church, and at the same time I have seen older adults turn a blind-eye to that reality. I grew up in a vibrant church, and yet I know that many of the students who accompanied me in Sunday school will lack a faith in the future—a reality that saddens me. With passionate people like Ketcham advocating for the young adults of this world, however, I believe hope remains.

Reviewed by Katie Klingstedt

Amidst the ongoing debate inside and outside Christianity regarding social justice, injustice, and race, Eric Mason cuts through the noise and delivers a succinct, practical call to racial reconciliation within the church. Mason wrote his book, *Woke Church*, as a response to the deep needs he has seen as a pastor and minister in an urban setting. Mason, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, is the founder of Thriving, an urban resource organization, and is founder and head pastor of Epiphany Fellowship in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He has gained a reputation as being a relevant and passionate resource for churches looking to expand their mission of reconciliation. *Woke Church* now takes the training and coaching Mason provided to churches and pastors and makes it accessible to all.

While Mason’s book is geared toward church leaders and those well established in the church, his work is of special appeal to millennial Christians. The title itself catches the eye of a generation entrenched in difficult conversations surrounding race, religion, and politics. In studying the millennial generation’s relationship with the church, focusing especially on why millennials are leaving the church, I was especially interested to see how Mason addresses issues causing tension within the church, especially between generations.

Part One of Mason’s book, “Be Aware,” provides a fleshed-out theology of justice and racial reconciliation rooted in Scripture. He asks the question “How big is the Gospel?” at a time when church scandals, partisan conflict, and deep divisions make the Gospel seem too small to bridge any of the chasms that divide us. Mason boldly claims the Gospel is made small by “neglecting and dismissing as inappropriate for discourse” the idea of justice as central to the heart of God.

Part Two, “Be Willing to Acknowledge,” takes that theological basis and applies it to racial conflict, both the historical context of the United States and the current climate. Mason provides a brief outline of how the church engaged with race and racial injustice throughout American history and puts forward suggestions on things for which the church needs to lament.

Parts Three and Four, “Be Accountable” and “Be Active,” provide practical steps for becoming a “woke” church and community, and what *wokeness* looks like in action. “Be Accountable” focuses on our responsibility as the church to speak with a prophetic voice into the world, and “Be Active” provides practical steps for structuring our churches in communities in ways that foster racial reconciliation.

Mason is first and foremost a pastor, which is demonstrated by his exegetical approach to these topics. He also addresses people on both “sides” of the justice debate, calling each incomplete and incorrect. For people who hold fast to their commitment to justice while considering the Gospel unnecessary to it,
he makes the case that justice flows directly from the cross. Leaving the cross behind leaves justice and reconciliation empty, based on nothing more than what is preferred or popular at this time in this culture. For people who hold fast to the Gospel, viewing justice and earthly reconciliation as secondary to, or even a distraction to, the Gospel, Mason boldly confronts them, saying, “To ignore justice is to ignore God.” One cannot get around the fact that justice is an inseparable part of God’s character and the work Christ did on the Cross.

In this regard, Woke Church is an important and timely word for all, no matter how “woke” one currently considers him or herself. He marries the church with a call to working for justice in a bold, explicit way. Mason is passionate and dedicated to Scripture and the Gospel. He is intentional and thorough in not making claims for which an established Scriptural basis does not exist.

Mason’s message is accessible and approachable no matter how much experience one has in discussing racial injustice or how much one agrees with what he offers. Along those lines though, some of Mason’s work skirts around the more offensive or controversial parts of conversations concerning racial reconciliation. Most notably, in his list of things the church should lament, he makes no mention of historical grievances perpetuated or condoned by the church that have yet to be lamented by most of the church.

A brief overview of such grievances would include the church’s justification of slavery, its participation in Jim Crow laws, and the unwillingness on the part of much of the church to admit injustice still remains. While he discusses segregation within the church itself, and the church’s silence on the Black Lives Matter movement, a noticeable omission exists concerning the more controversial history of the church in the section on lament, even though that history is referenced in the previous chapter. He talks about the history without directly saying how this history should be dealt with today.

The book is essentially apolitical, and while this posture may at times come across as avoidant or “watered-down,” Mason does not lack convictions, nor does his book. However, Mason has earned a platform large enough, and is a respected enough voice, that he can set a high standard for the church and effectively and graciously show the church where they have fallen short. He thus has the right to be more direct, and I would argue that many in the church need a harsher word on this topic. Though such a choice feels like a missed opportunity, the book is still incredibly effective. He intentionally stays away from politics, trigger words, and polarizing language in an effort to reach his intended audience: white evangelicals who are not yet “woke.”

Since one of the top reasons many millennials are leaving the church is an apparent lack of concern with justice, this book is a welcome call to action. Millennials are hearing a concern for justice and reconciliation from almost every area of their lives except the church. As they attend college, engage on social media, and read blogs, books, and articles, they are presented with a false dichotomy: you can care about justice or you can be a Christian.

How then are they expected to believe anything else when what is preached from non-profits and “woke” celebrities on Instagram often echoes the calls of Jesus Christ more closely than what is being preached from the pulpit?
Woke Church is therefore a vital resource for this generation: a call for justice rooted in Scripture and coming from inside the church. Mason argues Jesus Christ as not only a proponent of justice and reconciliation, but the source of it. This book is a message Millennials are longing to hear and a message other generations need to hear as well.
Poems

Two Poems

Philip C. Kolin

In What Country Does the Eye See Best

In what country does the eye see best. Is it in the land of clouds that sweep in after we close our eyes for the night and like curtains that both hide and open, as at a theatre, present a performance impossible while we are awake. Or do we see best in dawn light when a new day offers a chance to be the best version of our self? But maybe our vision is brightest at high noon, the season of sext, the liturgical hour when day is half done and waiting for the other half to begin. But perhaps our sight is clearest at dusk when light and dark switch places, and sunsets relinquish the keys to the world to waiting shadows, that in between sphere where the numinous calls us.
Shorthand

She never went so far as high school
but studied Gregg and Pittman

shorthand with its dots, strokes, lashes,
faces with angular tears and jagged laughs.

She used these symbols to record
what her braggart bosses said,

but all they ever did was
wag their tongues in her face

and degrade her for not catching
every syllable of their spittle.

She married late in life—
a WW I vet and widower

and a carpenter who lifted
barroom tables with his teeth.

He gave her a rabbit punch
for an anniversary gift

and left her years ago
for bar stools and jukebox lovers.

She wrote to God about her sorrows
in shorthand in her diary.

Then one day she received a call—
he was committed behind

the locked screen doors
on Veterans Row at the local asylum.

When she promised to pray for him,
his face looked like a tangle

of the shorthand notations she used—
upside down smiles, tears without eyes.

She continued to take dictation
for despots for another 30 years
who targeted her
with their hatchet invectives.

When she retired, she left them
a message written in shorthand.

But they couldn’t figure
out what it meant.
“This, Too, Shall Pass” and Other Poems

Thomas B. Richardson

This, Too, Shall Pass

Bleak-branch Winter
surrenders icy hold,
bends toward sibling
Spring’s embrace.
Though they cannot stay,
neither mourns
because soon
the others come and
take their places,
perform appointed work.

So let us, too,
in our dreary days,
look for fresh-bud
swelling.
Yet in our
bloom-time
we must admit that
Falling greets us soon.

Time does not judge,
but moves,
and we grow.
A Child Wrestles with Theodicy in Mississippi Springs

When tornadoes came, Sis and I moved with lightning speed to grab transistors, wedge on batting helmets, and anchor ourselves under pillows and blankets in the claw-foot tub. Mom would read us Psalm 91 by flashlight as the overheads strobed, popped, and failed. *You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day.*

We could always hear the train—not a dissonant horn, but the violent rumble-chug of twisted air laying its own tracks—closer or in some other family’s yard. *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.*

When the silence won, every time, we unfixed our knees and elbows from cold porcelain and set out to check on neighbors, report downed lines. We’d find chimney bricks in drainage gutters, pine needles pierced through trunks, but everyone we knew whole and thanking God. Next to my Cheerios, the sprawled morning paper ran death tolls, photos of oaks dissecting Camrys or someone’s grandmother missing near the county line. *The Lord has his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*
And All God’s People Said “Amen”

When my grandmother died,  
the preacher eulogized her coconut cake.  
Somewhere between “Psalm 23” and “Blessed Assurance,”  
he gave those packed in the pews at  
Manly Presbyterian Church  
a revival in confectioner’s sugar and full-fat milk.  
While the Hammond warbled behind him,  
the Reverend Doctor picked up speed,  
wiped his brow as he reminded every mourner  
that the only grace there was  
was the grace they could taste,  
the kind that paints a sheen on the lips,  
and in Etta’s kitchen, there was a slice for every  
widow, orphan, outcast, and addict.  
Into your hands we commend your sweet servant, Lord.  
What is love but four sticks of butter, hand whipped  
and spread smooth behind an unlatched screen door?
A New Verse

_for James C.P. Brown (1927-2015)_

You even hummed when you ate your grits.
Every wheelbarrow trip, hauling pine straw
or grandchildren, had a soundtrack,
a folk tune from the farm or a hymn
practiced years behind the pulpit.
No wedding reception or graduation
was too formal for impromptu baritone blessings.
But your leaving was too unlike your living:
sterile silence, trach tubes and still hands,
a decrescendo on hospice.

So sing on, James.

Now that you’ve got your voice back,
hit that Old Man River; let your bass
set the whole earth on a rumble.
When you meet that Sweet Little Jesus Boy,
give him your best Noah’s Ark—
he’ll join in on the _cock-a-doodle-doo_—
or maybe Froggy Went A-Courtin’,
and let him strum the chords;
teach him what we got to learn on your lap.
Ask Precious Lord to take your hand,
and join in the kingdom opry eternal.
When they finally let God back in schools

He took a seat behind Stephanie and Brad and Melody, who pulled their shirts over their noses and cut their eyes, snickered and whispered with all the other Stephanie and Brads and Melodies.

When he crossed the room for a pencil from the bin, Ms. McGill chided his neglect and insisted he remove that hood and pull up those pants if he wanted to be more than a common criminal.

In the hallway, his bowed and shuffling gait caught nudges from the crowd, scattering his things across the gray tiles where muddy sneakers trampled his anatomy notes and geometry formulas.

After lunch, students gathered at the flagpole to link arms and sing praises to God from whom their blessings flowed. There was no room in the circle for him, but he listened as they prayed:

*We thank you, Father God, for making us just the way we are. We ask that you send us your spirit that it may dwell among us and that we will do your will on Earth, Amen.*
Someday I’ll Love Thomas Richardson

*after Ocean Vuong (after Roger Reeves after Frank O’Hara)*

Thomas, step out of line.
The handkerchief, the parasol
will be there when it’s time,
and the mourners will
go about the streets.
There is no devil in this town,
and you’ve made gods of niche
and urn and ash.
When the courthouse tower
strikes and chimes, lay down
the symbols, the fathers
and fathers in mechanical
succession to dust and silence.
Your father, your son,
your love still burns in
beatific vision on the
Dalí in your chest:
hot reds and golds
melting upward toward
piercing blue skies.
Take these love-fierce hands,
clamped like jaws of life, and crack
open the cavity, Thomas. Let burst
forth the fire that licks clean your
matted eyes and warms the feet of
freaks who dance and clap till morning.
Faith Dips

*after Emily Dickinson*

Faith dips and darts, but sticks—
Chicle on my sole.
An ever-stalking shadow—
Whispering on a stroll.

In cathedrals, temples, tents—
Confidence sustained.
Evidence in victories—
Robed commandants’ refrain.

Cracked Lisbon, drowned New Orleans—
Buoyancy will fail.
Rotting Auschwitz plays the part
Of Jacob—Israel.

Cross calculus drilled in [Sunday] school—
Dispatching mystery.
The saved avoid the voice of God
For stagnant clarity.
Impressions: Country Churches in the Mississippi Delta

John Zheng

off-road drive
in the glow of sunset
a lean-to church

last respect—
cars slide in close file
to the churchyard

…

old country church
stands still in autumn wind
and dead time

ghost town churchyard
headstones loom
in overgrown weeds

…

blowing wind
even the church bell
sounds shivering

defunct church
the bell catches a shine
from red sunset

…

church with broken windows
dust twirls
in chunks of sunlight

wall-crumbling church
the dusty floor
crackles under feet
“Question and Answer” and Other Poems

Jane Beal

Question and Answer

*Question:* Why is impatience our natural default in personal relationships instead of patience?

*Answer:* Impatience takes no effort. But patience is different. You want an apple? Go plant an apple tree.

*Then wait for it to grow.*

A Flower in a Prayer-Vision

As I was praying for you, beloved, I saw you lifted into heaven and a flower opened above you and poured a golden fragrance over your head.

*I praise God for the possibility of the healing of memory.*
Out of the Birdcage

In a dream I had about you
before I met you,
there was a birdcage.

But you were a stag
walking across a golden field,
and the blue mountains,
snow-capped, shone behind you
as you stepped toward me.

I was a little parakeet
on the edge of the cage—
where a little, golden, wire gate
had been left open,
giving me a choice.

I was looking back
at all the memories in the cage,
deciding if the wings
that had only fluttered
could fly.

Turns out, they could.
When I took flight,
I looked down and saw beneath me
a labyrinth that seemed to go on forever—
until I came to the edge of the sea.

The Red Bridge

There is a field on the edge of civilization,
and a covered, red bridge over a little stream.

There are open windows in the walls
that look out over the field and the trickling water.

We looked through those windows
as a plane landed on a private runway
and the white-winged doves were startled
into the cool, night air.
Wave

The World-maker has given me a new word: wave. I don’t fully know what it means now or what it will mean in the future. But I want to know.

This huge ocean wave is standing more than ten feet tall, blue and green, without turning over completely on the shore—

this wave is bringing seashells from deep places toward my heart.

The Path of Life

Keep us on the Path of Life. 
That’s the way: we want to walk in it.

We know there is a tall tree with roots that go deep and branches that go high—the deeper, the higher, my love.

The Sun makes the Tree grow into a Kingdom.

The birds with no homes come to nest in those leaves and make their nests and lay their eggs in faith.

New life is coming into this bright world.
Paraphrase

from an ancient Greek letter

I am thankful
to God for you always.

Every time
I remember you,
I pray for you.

I rejoice
because you’re with me
in the good (and the bad),

but I see that the good work
will come to completion
in you on the appointed day.

It’s right for me
to think this way
because you are in my heart,

and you’re with me
in prison and in grace,
a witness to my life,

and I yearn for you,
beloved, from a place
deep inside of me.

I ask for your love
to abound and increase
through deeper knowing

and clearer seeing
until you affirm the things
that are above

until you (and I)
are pure,
without shame or blame,

and the fruit is right,
so that we taste salvation
in glory

and give all the praise
to the God
who hears our cry.
“On Watch” and Other Poems

Jane Blanchard

On Watch

Awaken one, awaken all,
And listen for the first footfall.

Each day perform your share of toil;
Each night refill your lamp with oil.

Bear patiently the tedium
While waiting for the Lord to come.

Since His delay can disconcert,
You must take care to stay alert.

If you should dare indulge in sleep,
You afterward may wail or weep.

Awaken one, awaken all,
To hear and heed this timely call.

Shepherd . . .

Shepherd, lead us in the way
You would have us go each day;
May we follow here or there,
Ever in your loving care.

Shepherd, rouse us with your rod
Should we need a gentle prod;
We are often unaware,
Even of your loving care.

Shepherd, calm us with your staff,
Close at hand on our behalf;
We are ever prone to scare,
Even in your loving care.

Shepherd, keep us in the fold;
Help us do as we are told,
Not to wander off somewhere
Far beyond your loving care.
Listen . . .
Listen, sheep, both strong and weak,
Listen to your Shepherd speak.

Since He knows and loves you so,
He will guide you as you go.

If you let Him have the lead,
He will meet your every need.

Hoping to increase His flock,
He takes morn- and evening stock.

When you wander from the fold,
He will bring you back to hold.

Should some danger cause alarm,
He will keep you safe from harm.

Lamb newborn or sheep long-grown,
For your life, He gave His own.

The Tenth Station
So, here I am at Calvary.
My body whipped repeatedly
Must now be stripped of dignity.

What use is left for any clothes
To be distributed by those
With lesser roles in these last woes?

The cross lies there upon the ground.
When lifted up, may it expound
A Savior has indeed been found.

No, wine like that is not the way
For me to carry out this day.
The Shepherd never goes astray.
Continuum

The Spirit moved across the Earth,
And what was made was given worth;
Since man and woman chose to sin,
Their children must be born again.

So those enslaved could be set free,
There was a parting of the Sea;
And still they wandered through the sand
Until they reached the Promised Land.

Yet sadly predisposed to err,
They proved unfaithful anywhere;
The Son who would deliver them
At last was born in Bethlehem.

This Savior showed them how to love,
Thus how to serve the One above;
He made the Father pleased and proud,
So said the Spirit to the crowd.

Christ, knowing why he had been sent,
Proved perfectly obedient;
When prayer did not spare him the cup,
The cross indeed was lifted up.

Within the tomb he would not stay
So followers could learn the way;
Once he ascended, they felt lost
Until the gift of Pentecost.

Let all of us each day embrace
A life of goodness, peace, and grace;
Redeemed, baptized, sustained, inspired,
We have what Eden’s own desired.
**Notes on Contributors**

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Call for Papers and Book Reviews

Intégrité:
A Faith and Learning Journal

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

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

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