

2007

Henry and Beaty's "Christianity and the Soul of the University" - Book Review

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Douglas V. Henry & Michael D. Beaty (eds.)

Christianity and the Soul of the University.

Grand Rapids: Baker 2006 pb 192 pp \$24.99

ISBN: 10: 0-8010-2794-2 and 978-0-8010-2794-9

This collection of essays grew out of a 2004 conference that asked how Christian faith relates to the university as an intellectual community. Henry and Beaty have directed these worthwhile essays toward any higher educator interested in connecting faith and learning. Some such collections lack a cohering vision, but this collection coheres, and the editors and authors deserve commendation.

Richard B. Hayes begins with his essay, "The Palpable Word as Ground of Koinonia" (pp. 19-36). Based on I John and a few passages from Paul, Luke and Peter, Hayes argues that Christianity offers the proper basis for community within the university. He lists five characteristic practices of the Christian community: it values concreteness, it tells the truth, it discerns the cultural idols, it intentionally locates itself within God's story and it acts charitably toward the outsider. In "To Serve God Wittily, in the Tangle of One's Mind" (pp. 37-47), Jean Beth Elshtain recounts some of her own educational biography and reviews the faith struggles of a number of intellectuals to contextualize and formulate her call for Christians to put away their fears (p. 42) and engage the culture, without apology, as Christian intellectuals. Elshtain's ability to combine autobiographic details, scholarship and long involvement in public theology bring a richness to this essay perhaps unmatched elsewhere in the book.

John C. Polkinghorne argues in "Christian Interdisciplinarity" (pp. 49-64) that the academic disciplines need each other, and that science needs theology and ethics especially. But he does much more, noting that all defenses of scientific approaches are themselves metaphysical and not scientific. In his final paragraph, Polkinghorne fires a shot across the bow of contemporary physics – his own field – with these words: "A true theory of Everything is not superstring theory, but Christian theology. Bearing witness to that is the indispensable contribution that Christian interdisciplinarity can make to the soul of the University." Polkinghorne's essay perhaps fits least easily into the whole book, but it makes worthwhile reading in its own right.

Joel A. Carpenter argues in "The Christian Scholar in an Age of World Christianity" (pp. 65-84) that Euro-centric Christian scholarship had better take note of the changing demographics of the church. Those in the west must take seriously the scholarship now emanating from southern and eastern sources. Following Carpenter, David Jeffrey offers his carefully-crafted essay, "Faith, Fortitude, and the Future of Christian Intellectual Community" (pp. 85-99), a call for Protestants to adjust significantly their approach if they are ever to have a great and thoroughly Christian university. The most significant adjustment he names is to work with Roman Catholics, who have been at the task all along. Susan Felch closes the "Basic Issues" half of the book with "Doubt and the Hermeneutics of Delight" (pp. 103-118), a warning to universities to set limits on the doubt they attempt to produce in students, recognizing the ultimately corrosive effects of

deep doubt. For her, doubt often "spreads out into an ironic or cynical miasma, an unwholesome, menacing atmosphere of uncertainty" (pp. 103-104).

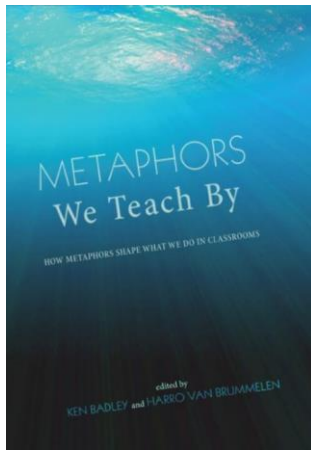
Henry and Beaty call the last five chapters of *Christianity and the Soul of the University* "Vital Practices." The writers here explore where the first chapters might land on the ground. Aurelie A. Hagstrom begins with "Christian Hospitality in the Intellectual Community," a call for Christian universities to welcome the "other" but not to hide or downplay their own faith commitments in the name of tolerance or pluralism (pp. 119-131). She asks for Christian universities to celebrate their Christian heritage, while taking "the identity, story, and tradition of the guest seriously." In "Communal Conflict in the Postmodern Christian University" (pp. 133-144), Steve Harmon makes an interesting departure from the usual faith-learning discussion; he sees worship and Eucharist as two foundations for faith-learning integration in Christian higher education.

Daniel Russ and Marc Sargent offer "Moral Imagination at a Christian Institution" (pp. 145-161), a call for Christians to foster growth of what Richard Hayes calls the "moral imagination." By this, they mean both the "concern for personal integrity and moral discernment" and "concern for justice and redemptive action" (p. 148). Daniel Williams ends the book with his instructive history of how American higher education abandoned the Christian concept of calling, while wanting still to offer students some kind of moral and civic compass. In "American Protestantism and Vocation in Higher Education" (pp. 163-179), he recounts the historical drift argument by noting that some American Protestants distanced themselves from more enthusiastic expressions of Christian faith and then ended up with universities with no sense of institutional call.

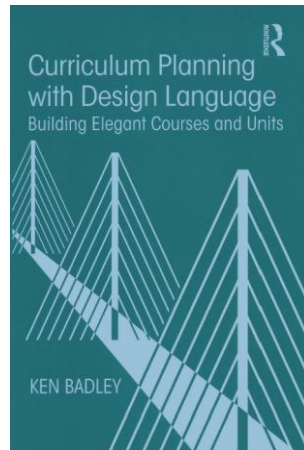
Libraries should purchase *Christianity and the Soul of the University*. Despite its largely American flavour, readers from all continents will benefit by giving their attention to this book.

Ken Badley

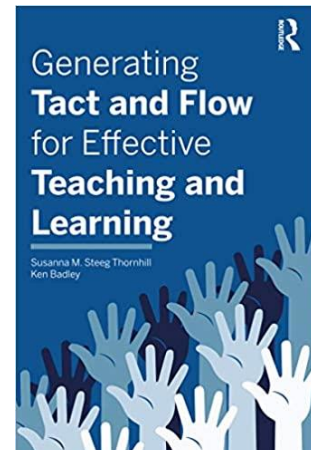
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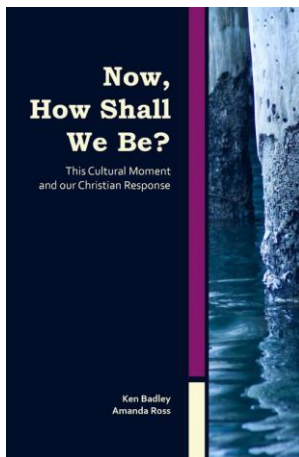
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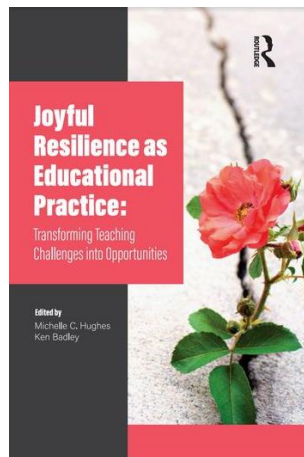
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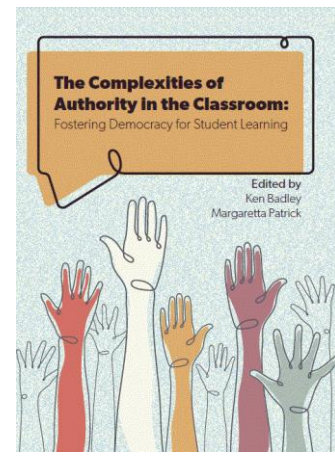
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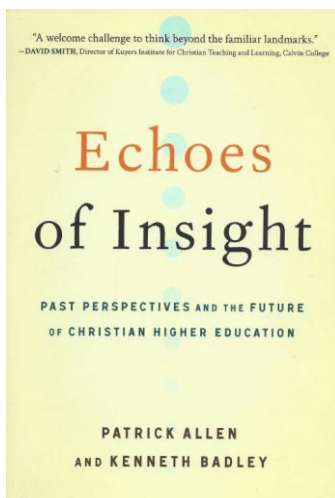


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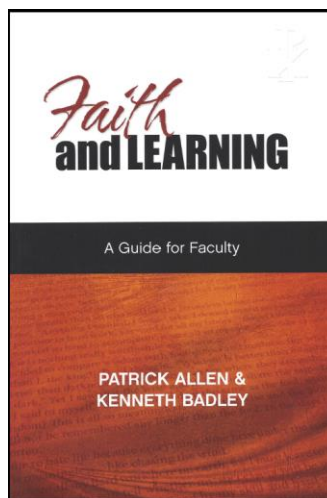


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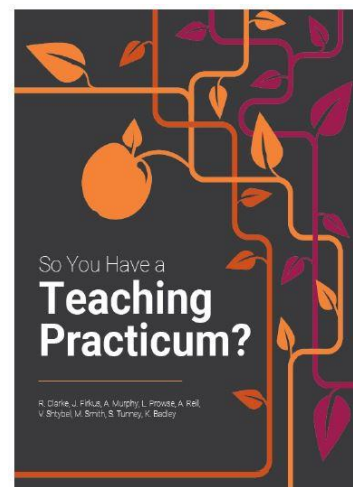


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