

2009

Downey and Porter's "Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy" - Book Review

Ken Badley

George Fox University, kbadley1@gmail.com

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Deane E. E. Downey and Stanley E. Porter (eds.)

Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy

Portland, OR: Pickwick / Wipf & Stock 2009 pb 541pp \$50.00

ISBN 978-1-60608-529-5

In the last five decades a small subgenre of books has emerged within the larger discussion of faith-learning integration, Christian worldview in academic life, and how to understand and approach Christian scholarship. In this subgenre, scholars, often from a single Christian college or university, write a selection of essays in which they attempt to show how one might approach various academic disciplines from a Christian perspective. In one sense, this new offering from the faculty of Trinity Western University in British Columbia fits the pattern: a variety of authors address the faith and learning dimensions of a variety of specific academic disciplines from (in this case) a broadly evangelical perspective. However, this new volume differs in significant and refreshing ways from the usual offerings in this subgenre of books about Christian scholarship.

The editors openly state their wish to serve both students and faculty, an ambitious intent and one at which their more than two dozen authors for the most part succeed. The writers keep the identified target readers in plain sight, producing

a book that almost all students would find accessible and most professors would find useful. The authors of many of those chapters offer concise and very helpful introductions to the contours of the respective disciplines themselves. My own reading of these chapters reveals a straightforward prose style and a respectful tone; the material may be purposely introductory, but the authors never patronize their readers. Students in Christian worldview courses, professors new to the questions of Christian scholarship, and all who have not yet studied all the represented disciplines will learn much from the authors of these chapters.

Crossing the Academy does cross the academy. Many books in this subgenre offer ten or twelve such essays; this volume gives twenty-six chapters over to different disciplines, arranged alphabetically from “Art” to “Theatre Art.” This arrangement does not imply that the arts are the alpha and omega of the liberal arts curriculum; rather, it provides easy access and underlines quietly the editors’ purpose to survey the whole liberal arts curriculum, not just to present a few paradigm examples. Early in the gestation of this weighty volume, the editors made a wise choice regarding the length of the individual essays: they went for length rather than brevity. The chapters remain true to their introductory purpose but offer depth of treatment missing from most books of this kind.

This volume not only crosses the academy, it crosses the spectrum of approaches by which Christians have attempted to understand their call to be faithful in the academy. Some *Crossing* authors use “faith-learning” language and others use “worldview” language. Some speak of “Christian scholarship” or “Christian perspective,” while others adopt different language altogether to discuss the tasks of the Christian in the academy. This variation enriches, rather than detracts or distracts from, the reader’s experience. And it helps make the point—albeit very subtly—that not all people of Christian faith approach their scholarly tasks in the same way or talk about their approach using the same language. Those interested in reading inductively to articulate a taxonomy of faith-learning models will find this volume a valuable treasure.

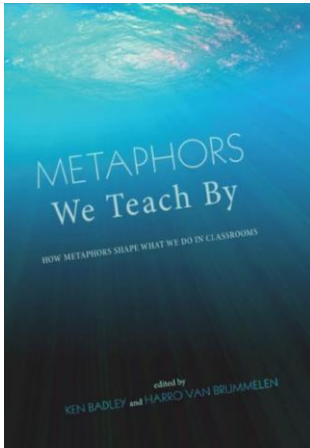
As one might expect, the quality varies, both in writing and in understanding. Some essays would have benefitted from one more edit, especially by comparison to the many chapters marked by clear, graceful writing. The chapters also vary in theological nuance. A very few betray a sense of an author having to stretch to make theological sense of an academic discipline. Most chapters reflect long and careful thought. Most of the professors involved in *Crossing the Academy* had already taught their respective material in courses or integrative seminars, in some cases many times over. This repeated trial by student shows throughout and adds to the accessibility of the book. The finished volume betrays that much time passed between the conception of this project and its birth. Some essays could perhaps pay more attention to more recent movements within their respective fields. But the long gestation of this book brings it strength too; the whole shows maturity of thought and attention to expression that ought to benefit students and professors for years to come.

Not to make too much of the title, but *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy* raises—and answers—this question rather well: What would it mean for the academy to be *cross-ed*, to encounter the cross? Chris-

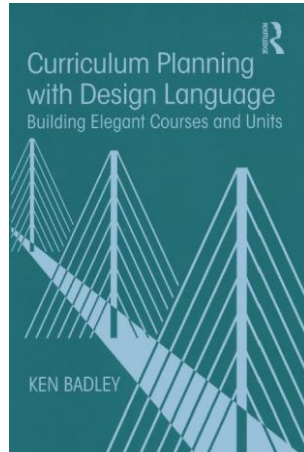
tian university and Christian college libraries will certainly want to include this book in their collections. Professors in both public and church-related settings and campus workers from such organizations as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship should own copies for their own study and for recommending and lending to students and colleagues. The faculty of Trinity Western University deserve commendation for the gift they have given the academy in this weighty volume.

Ken Badley

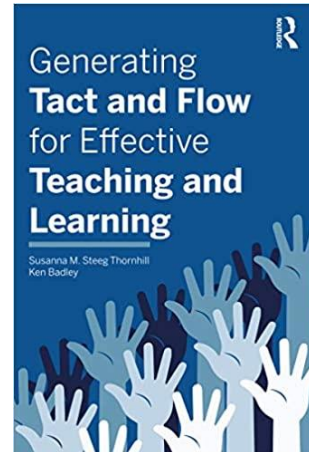
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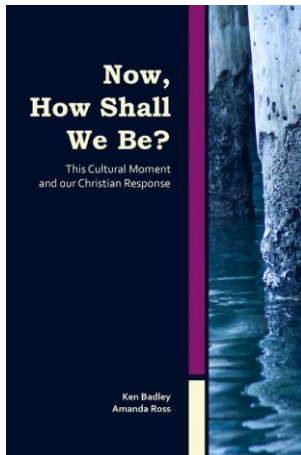
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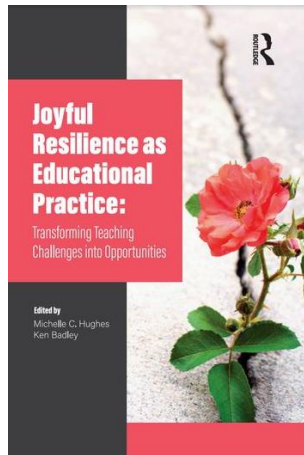
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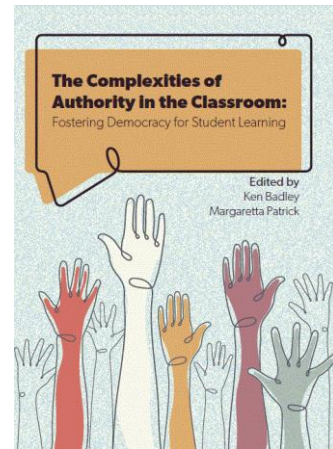
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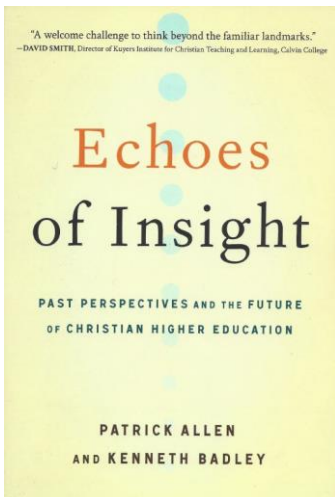


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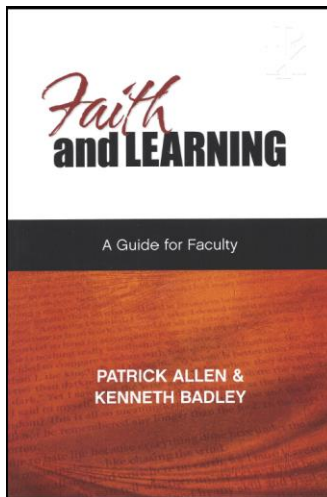


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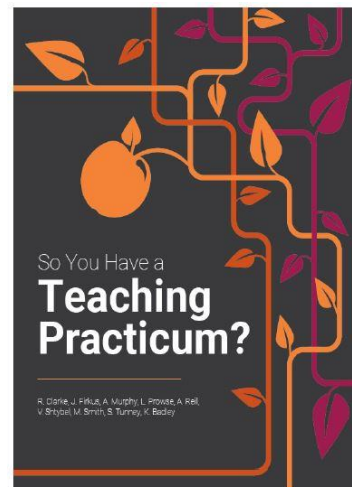


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