

2011

Glanzer and Ream's "Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education" - Book Review

Ken Badley

George Fox University, kbadley1@gmail.com

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Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream
Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education
New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009 hb 286pp \$85.00
ISBN 978-0-230-61240-2

Readers familiar with the direction of Glanzer and Ream's scholarship over the last several years will welcome this addition to their growing corpus of works related to Christian education. In *Moral Identity*, they explore a sobering shift, noting how universities once saw moral formation of students as their mission or part of their mission but today claim no such mandate. In fact, Glanzer and Ream find many universities today going to some lengths to avoid being involved in that task at all.

Glanzer and Ream begin their book by clarifying what they mean by *moral development* and *moral education*. They note the influence of Lawrence Kohlberg, other stage theorists, and various cognitive psychologists on contemporary thinking about moral education. And they point out how these understandings—which actually deny a role for what Glanzer and Ream call moral education—have shortchanged society. In contrast to such understandings of moral development, they argue for a more Aristotelian and biblical approach that considers moral behavior, not just moral reasoning, as evidence of moral development.

Having made clear both this important distinction and which side of it they prefer, they then connect moral formation to identity. They distinguish three kinds of identity in which universities typically engage (p. 20). First, universities want to produce graduates who will function well in their chosen professions. Some higher educators identify a second purpose by identifying such qualities as citizenship and neighborliness. A few educators and institutions identify a third purpose: to shape good people.

In chapter two Glanzer and Ream provide the historical background to the decline—some might say kidnapping—of the third kind of formation. They argue quite persuasively that, while most educators agreed that the purpose of colleges was moral formation, it was disagreement about moral traditions that led to the

situation we see today. The competing claims of Christian, Enlightenment, and democratic traditions led to compromises and ultimately to large-scale abandonment of the development of moral identity as a suitable aim for higher education.

Chapters three and four return to Kohlberg as well as some well-known observers and critics of higher education, ranging from Jacques Barzun to Stanley Fish. Here Ream and Glanzer open up and explore a concept important to the remainder of their argument, what they call “less than human” moral education. Less-than-human moral education is that which deludes itself into thinking that universities can “engage in the science of objective, tradition-free moral development” (p. 67).

Chapter five begins the second section of the book. The kernel of the book’s purpose appears here with the argument that more human moral education must ground itself in tradition and in community. Glanzer and Ream eschew such sources of identity as citizenship, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as sufficient grounds for moral education. In chapters five and six, readers will find a handful of examples of colleges that have tried to get it right but, on our authors’ terms, still offer moral education that is less than fully human.

Readers start to get at the heart of *Moral Identity* in the next chapters, where Ream and Glanzer offer more detailed appraisals of a few colleges from the 156 colleges whose materials they studied (all members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities or Lilly Fellows Program). Based on their reading of published materials, the authors chose nine colleges to visit: Bethel, Calvin, Eastern Mennonite, George Fox, St. Olaf, Seattle Pacific, Univ. of Dallas, Univ. of St. Thomas, and Xavier University. These institutions all state—in varying language—that they aim at the development of moral character.

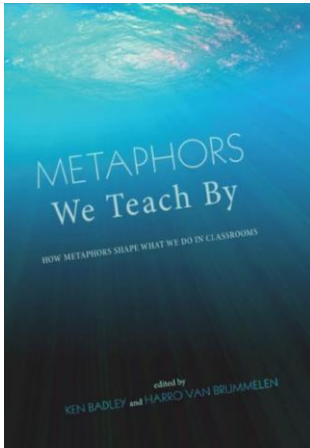
Many of Ream and Glanzer’s readers will have followed the last decade’s discussion of whether Christian higher education has lost its way. For some students of this question, two titles catch the debate. James Burtchaell began the current round of discussion with his 1998 book, *The Dying of the Light* (Eerdmans). Robert Benne answered Burtchaell with his 2001 title, *Quality with Soul* (Eerdmans), and several others have raised their voices since Benne’s title appeared. For those unfamiliar with the titles, Burtchaell pointed to colleges that, in his view, had abandoned their Christian mission. Benne provided examples of the opposite. Ream and Glanzer echo Benne’s language with a major subheading in chapter seven: “Quality with Soul in Moral Education: Profiles from Our Case Studies.” Readers dismayed by Burtchaell’s report or encouraged by Benne’s will take special joy in the 25 pages of chapter seven given to reporting on the condition of the campuses that Glanzer and Ream visited while writing this book. In their view, some colleges still “seek to add a moral vision to students’ selves that does not merely attempt to strip away students’ humanity, but actually seeks to offer students the opportunity to enrich and even strengthen portions of it” (p. 222). These colleges go about their tasks in different ways, and they use different language to describe their specific missions, but in Glanzer and Ream’s terms they offer a more human approach to moral education.

Early in *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education*, Ream and Glanzer list the three audiences they hope will find their book useful: those in the disciplines

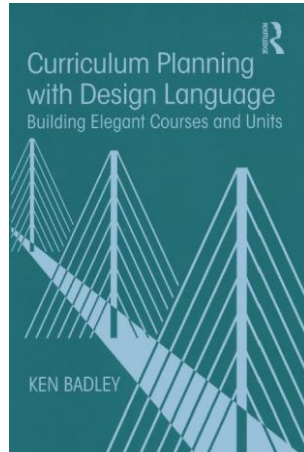
that ask what it means to be human, those who study higher education, and faculty and administrators in Christian colleges and universities. On my reading, this volume will appeal to all three audiences. Without doubt, Christian college and university libraries should have *Moral Identity* in their collections. But individual faculty and whole departments would do well to read and discuss this title as well. According to *Moral Identity*, the light has not died. Anyone needing reminding of that claim, or evidence for that claim, will take courage from this excellent volume.

Ken Badley

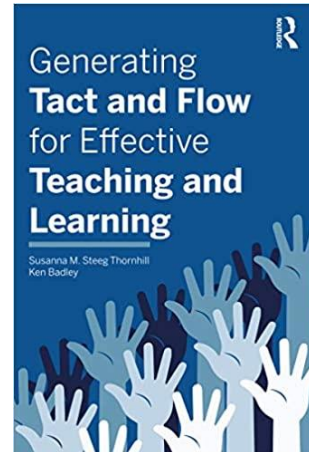
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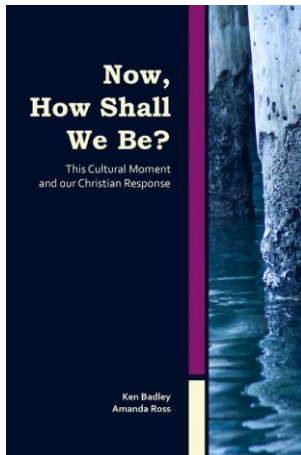
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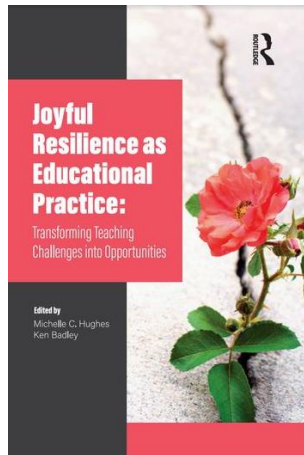
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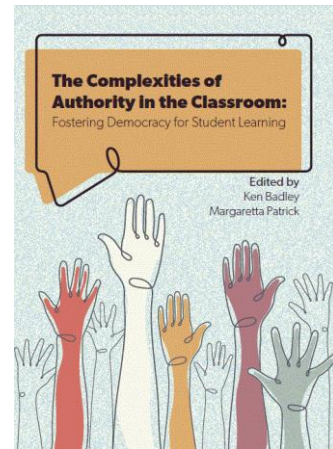
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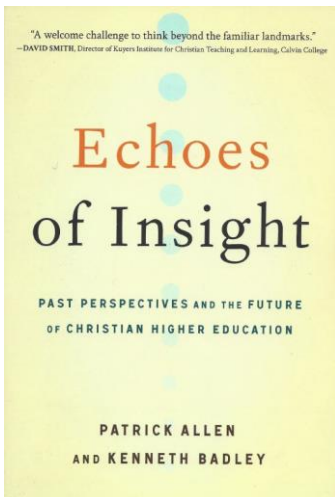


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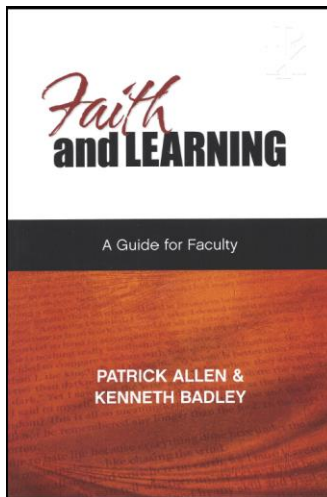


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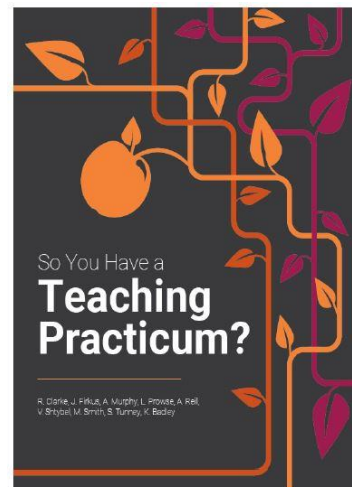


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