Jeffrey and Evans' "The Bible and the university" (Book Review)

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This volume was first jointly copyrighted by the University of Gloucestershire & The British and Foreign Bible Society. Then it was jointly published in the UK by Paternoster Press and in the USA by Zondervan Publishers in 2007. The volume was dedicated to Rosemary Hales “for her sterling and personable administration of the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar.”

The “Preface” by series co-editor Craig Bartholomew highlights that this series of books on renewing interpretation of the Bible is energized and motivated by the need demonstrated in the changing Christian demographics and world situation including the growth of Islam and the rapid growth of Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere (South America & Africa). He welcomes this scholarly input into the discussions.

The “Introduction” by volume co-editor David Jeffrey highlights the importance of biblical Studies in western intellectual history and the university curricula and warns of the danger of not including it in the future. He also includes a postscript explaining this book’s cover art and why it was specifically selected.

Chapter 1, by Dallas Willard, discusses how the Bible is a source of knowledge, values and truth. Therefore, it is the job of Christian intellectuals in the universities to help explain it to each generation.

Chapter 2, by William Abraham, explains that Christian theology derived from Scripture has expanded into a cacophony of voices often missing the truths of the biblical text. He uses strong words like: platitude; disaster; critical problem; apocalyptic; theological rants; crisis and tragedy to warn universities of functional atheists and amateur epistemologists.

Chapter 3, by Al Wolters, explains that, unfortunately, theology is no longer the queen of disciplines. Every academic discipline functions with certain foundational assumptions which must include the importance and authority of Scripture to achieve true Christian scholarship. Theological assumptions, worldview assumptions, and philosophical assumptions must line up with Scripture to be valid.

Chapter 4, by Scott Hahn, carefully overviews the writings of Pope Benedict XVI on the Bible.

Chapter 5, by Glenn Olsen, wants modern higher education to recover the spiritual sense of the Scriptures by rethinking the apostolic exegetical tradition, and to
reconsider the terms allegory and typology to reclaim the “historical” sense of the Bible. He concludes with the need to restore analogical imagination.

Chapter 6, by Robert Roberts, explores the psychological concept of heart (rardia) in the New Testament. He asks the question “Does the situation affect the heart of a person?” or “Does the heart affect the situation?” The heart knows, changes, is hidden and then is revealed. He concludes that both can affect the other.

Chapter 7, by Robert Cochran Jr., writes a powerful chapter about how God’s law affects man’s law. He states that God’s Law is a “blessing” bringing truth, love and justice to humanity, and that the liberal academy does itself damage trying to teach morality without a biblical foundation. Natural law is based on God’s Law.

Chapter 8, by David Smith, proposes that Comenius’ idea of the garden of delight in Genesis 2 displays a metaphor for teaching, learning and faith produced by a biblically informed imagination. He goes on to encourage that shalom comes through scholarship, vision and pedagogy.

Chapter 9, by John Sullivan, asks: “Is the practice of reading in the university declining?” He thinks that it is for a number of reasons, but he suggests that with the right reading habits, guided by Scripture, the university can once again become a place where it is possible to move from knowledge to wisdom.

Chapter 10, by Byron Johnson, makes a case for the empirical assessment of biblical literacy in America. Using charts and graphs he shows that religion is important to American society. It significantly improves health & well-being. According to his charts, membership, church attendance & religious readings are declining slightly, but still important to many Americans. He concludes saying that much more research & discussion needs to be done in this subject area.

Chapter 11, by Roger Lundin, emphasizes that modern American literature without the Bible acts as if God were dead. He overviews key authors honorable use of the Bible in their literary works to help educate the cultural and intellectual elites.

Chapter 12, by David Jeffrey, overviews how biblical literacy affects academic freedom and Christian liberty. He wants us to have a shared worldview and to reacquire this relationship to the Bible in our churches, in our private and communal reading, teaching and exposition. Then mentioning the Bible will come naturally.

The afterward, by C. Stephen Evans, contains some concluding thoughts and possible future directions on the Bible and the academy. He carefully and thoughtfully examines each of the previous chapters and makes comments about them. He
concludes with three major lessons: first, Christian scholars must not lose their nerve to keep speaking out in both Christian and secular environments; second, we must read the whole Bible as the “Word of God” without degradation by critical scholars; and third all of this is because moral and religious knowledge affect the whole person and their respective communities and practices.”

It is useful in most of its main points, but written in wordy “academic” prose that is difficult to wade through. The bottom line of this work is that whether Christian or secular higher education, neither can stand without acknowledging the authority and veracity of the Bible in its original manuscripts as God’s revelation to men and women.

Most chapters contain either footnotes or bibliography or both. The back cover blurbs by Stanley Hauerwas states that this is “an important book.” Likewise, Rev. Richard John Neuhaus suggests that this books is “an informed provocation.” Finally, Mark A. Noll’s comment that this is “a superb collection; the final volume in a very important series” makes this work worthwhile in any collection.

**Reviewer**

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The editor of this collection is an Indiana University Professor of Religious Studies. His goal is to collect “illustrative case studies that speak to the important historical contributions and contemporary lives of Muslims in the West” (p. x). The articles are excerpted and reprinted from books and journals with original publication dates ranging from 1995 to 2015. Only three of the 29 readings were originally published before September 11, 2001, and two of these readings are in the historical section of the book.

The readings are arranged topically, with major sections on “Islam in Western history” and “Islam in the contemporary West.” Each section is further subdivided by themes that include “Muslims in the making of the West”, “Muslims in the modern West”, “Western Muslims in the late twentieth century”, “Practicing Islamic religion in the West”, “Islam, Muslim women, and gender”, “Muslim citizenship, belonging, and dissent in the West”, and “Muslim music, TV, and comedy in the age of terror” (pp. vii-ix).