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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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form of feminist theory offers the possibility of replacing a rhetoric of power with a rhetoric of care that could better frame gender partnership. Economist Kurt Schaefer provides an account of the successes and failures of American policies and programs concerning poverty in the second half of the twentieth century, highlighting expected and unexpected effects of particular programs on different social groups as well as the role of public perceptions of those effects. His careful analysis offers grounds for being wary of popular political reactions to various programs, and shows how a more finely grained analysis can help the formulation of more just interventions. Finally, geographer Janel Curry uses a case study of the handling of property rights and fishing rights on New Zealand’s Great Barrier Island to show how particular views of the person’s relationship to nature, society, and moral frameworks are embedded in policy decisions and have consequences for communal well-being. She advocates a more holistic approach in which local, contextual knowledge is consulted within a framework that emphasizes the connections between self, society, and nature rather than treating them as sharply demarcated.

While the rather specialized nature of a number of the topics in this volume will leave many readers picking and choosing, one of the collection’s strengths is its provision of strong examples of Christian scholarship that goes beyond the expected handful of general philosophical themes and demonstrates relevance to more particular disciplinary issues. This makes the volume a welcome addition to the literature on faith and learning in higher education.

David I. Smith

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

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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James L. Drexler (ed.)

Schools as Communities
Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Pub. 2007 pb 392pp $33.80
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Effective Christian school administrators must be wise leaders, skillful managers, and faithful Christians, every day, all at the same time. As wise leaders they must articulate the schools’ missions and shape their organizational cultures, and as skillful managers they must translate educational visions into thoughtful plans for specific learning communities, educational programs, needed resources, and governance of independent organizations. This is the necessary work of private school administrators. But for Christian schools such leadership knowledge and managerial skill, while necessary, are insufficient. Beyond these specifics, Christian school administrators need to be cultivated as followers of Jesus who openly acknowledge the world as God’s, readily rely on God’s Word, and envision their Christian schools with their administrations as grateful responses to our saving God. It is at this three-way intersection between Christian faith, leadership, and management that Schools as Communities makes its seminal contribution.

Edited by James Drexler, academic dean of the Master of Education program at Covenant College (Tennessee), Schools as Communities is a remarkable assembly of chapters by Christian teachers, scholars, and practitioners who are thinking together about the Christian nature of administration in faith-based schools. The majority of the authors have experience in North American Christian schools, and most of them are members of two significant Christian school associations that connect Christian faith to all aspects of Christian calling and living. The volume was originally intended as a professional development resource to serve schools within these two membership groups, but it is valuable for the cultivation of Christian school leaders worldwide, across many networks of association.

Multiple authors weave biblical and theological themes through their commentaries about ways in which Christian administrative leaders nurture school communities of grace, justice, and social engagement; how they shape faith-based communities of practice with teachers and staff; and how they build model Christian subcommunities that envelop the school’s students. Among the chapters, the discussion flows back and forth between focusing on the leader’s cultivation of the school as Christian and the personal Christian development of the leader.