Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, eds., CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSITY: FAITH AS A FOUNDATION FOR INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

Michael A. Cantrell

Recommended Citation

Griffiths has not seduced this reader. The two main Augustinian argu-
ments he endorses are seriously flawed. Nonetheless, there is much of
interest and value in this book which I would recommend to anyone with
an interest in Augustine or the topic of lying. The book displays a remark-
able and very eclectic scholarship and breadth of knowledge. It is gener-
ally very well written, although the lack of an index makes it less useful to
scholars than it would otherwise be.

NOTE

1.   Augustine's definition clearly implies that making a statement that
one believes to be false constitutes telling a lie. It's not clear what he would
say about cases in which one makes statements that one doesn't believe to be
either true or false, as is characteristic of bullshit.

*Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual
Community*, ed. Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty. Baker Academic,
2006. Pp. 192. $24.99 (paperback).

MICHAEL A. CANTRELL, Baylor University

Scottish tartans, as everyone knows, are woven according to a design that
has been handed down within a Highland clan from time immemorial.
One can imagine the shock felt by many, then, when historians discovered
that these designs were actually invented by an enterprising eighteenth-
century *English* textile merchant. As the old song warns, what everyone is
liable to assume "ain't necessarily so." Indeed, all too often, what every-
one *believes*, nobody really *knows*.[1] Such is the case with the much-touted
fundamental antagonism between faith and reason. The present deeply
ingrained notion of a perennial conflict between respectable scholarly in-
quiry and robust Christian commitment was, if not invented, then cer-
tainly popularized only a little more than a century ago by the publica-
tion of Andrew Dickson White's *History of the Conflict Between Science and
Theology in Christendom* (1896). The contributors to the volume presently
under review uniformly reject this prejudice of our age; however, rather
than making it their task to debunk this myth (a task that others have
ably accomplished), the essays in this volume represent the fruits of a re-
vival of reflection on the positive and constructive role that Christian faith
can play in informing scholarship, specifically by unifying the life of the
Christian intellectual community.

   Christianity and the Soul of the University is the product of a sustained
conversation that was initiated in connection with a conference of the same
name, held at Baylor University in March 2004. Noting "the properly com-
munitarian character of the well-formed Christian college or university,"
the editors express the contributors' shared vision that "[i]n the best of cir-
cumstances, church-related higher education instantiates an existentially
committed way of Christian life in community, grounded in dependence
on others and on a range of theologically shaped practices and virtues

necessary for its flourishing, and in all such respects finding its *telos* in the Triune God." The book is divided into two parts. The first part, focused on "basic issues," surveys some of the fundamental matters that bear on the notion of Christian intellectual community. This part includes essays by Richard B. Hays, Jean Bethke Elshtain, John C. Polkinghorne, Joel A. Carpenter, and David Lyle Jeffrey. Although an awareness of the importance of practical issues is not absent from the essays of part one, by and large each essay in part two (on "vital practices") emphasizes a particular practice that the authors suggest would characterize a distinctively Christian intellectual community. This section of the book includes contributions by Susan M. Felch, Aurelie A. Hagstrom, Steven R. Harmon, Daniel Russ and Mark L. Sargent, and Daniel H. Williams.

In the book's first essay, Hays asks, "Can or should faith offer a foundation for intellectual community?" Or, as I prefer to cast the question: "Can there be intellectual community apart from faith?" Drawing from his experience at Duke University, Hays argues that to split the intellectual from the moral and religious is to eliminate a necessary precondition for intellectual community. Hays draws on 1 John's discussion of *koinonia* to aid his reflection on what a properly Christian intellectual community would be like. *Koinonia* "suggests sharing, commonality, fellowship, *community*. It is not just a matter of friendly social relations, (as 'fellowship' might suggest), but a matter of a deep bond of common interest and commitment." Furthermore, Hays suggests that a Christian intellectual community can emerge only as a result of the proclamation of God's revelation in Christ: as 1 John has it, the message is proclaimed so that "you" might enter into *community* with "us." Thus, in contrast to the story of Western capitalist "progress" and human autonomy, such a community will seek to ground its common life in the highly particular story of the people of Israel.

The conditions for the common life of a Christian intellectual community is a theme taken up by Jeffrey, who notes that there can be no virtuous practice of academic freedom that does not seek the common good. Recognizing that this view has fallen on hard times, Jeffrey criticizes the "two-spheres" mentality that splits faith from intellect and that, historically speaking, has eroded the Christian character of the institutions which have adopted it. Ostensible intellectual neutrality with respect to faith, Jeffrey maintains, in fact generates excessive individualism, functionalism and fragmentation: a recipe for communal self-destruction.

A university in the truest sense of the word can be founded only upon the *unity* of knowledge, and Polkinghorne devotes his essay toward exploring the necessarily theological foundation of such unity. The fact that the world is a divine creation means that it will be a *cosmos*, not a *chaos*, and this ontological foundation provides a common grounding for all of our epistemic pursuits. This common grounding goes hand-in-hand with a shared responsibility to the community; therefore, like Hays and Jeffrey, Polkinghorne addresses this matter, but from a slightly different direction. Polkinghorne views Christianity's contribution to the interdisciplinary life of a university as absolutely indispensable. While not asking scholars in various disciplines to engage in the theological enterprise themselves, Polkinghorne nevertheless argues that scholars (in whatever

discipline) whose work is theologically informed and motivated stand the greatest chance of making the most important contributions to the life of their intellectual communities. Polkinghorne draws attention specifically to the self-transcendent character of the individual disciplines, pointing up the meta-questions that arise out of the very activity of pursuing academic research. Why is science possible? What moral constraints should guide both our inquiries and our applications of the knowledge acquired therein? Christianity's deep and richly articulated view of reality provides the resources for the development of satisfying answers to such questions.

Separate essays by Jean Bethke Elshtain and Joel Carpenter round out part one of the book. As for Elshtain's contribution, one searches in vain for a central thesis; perhaps the closest thing is the essay's title, "To Serve God Wittily, In the Tangle of One's Mind," which Elshtain borrows from Robert Bolt's play about Sir Thomas More, *A Man For All Seasons*. This essay is an interesting, almost semi-autobiographical meditation on the Christian's responsibility to continue the centuries-long tradition of thoughtful Christians' bringing together of faith, scholarship, and the life of the mind. Marshalling insight and inspiration from Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Bonhoeffer and others, Elshtain gives counsel to believers about ways in which they can address the public square from the ground of faith. This counsel drawn from the great tradition of the Church is nicely complemented by Carpenter's essay, which takes stock of a quite recent development in world Christianity. As Carpenter notes, "For the past millennium, Christianity and Christian consciousness have been tied to Europe, and our conversation here about Christianity and the life of the mind bears the deep stamp of European culture. Today, however, Christianity is in deep decline in Europe and yet is rising elsewhere." Indeed, Christianity has largely moved south and east, and "Christian scholars," Carpenter maintains, "must reorient their course accordingly." A continued scholarly focus on the cultures of the North Atlantic region of the world is likely to hinder the Church's ability to navigate the new, truly global era of Christianity. Carpenter rightly emphasizes that the contemporary Western secular academy's views on the world are highly contextual and suffer from a radical historical absent-mindedness.

Part two of the book begins with probably the most original contribution of the entire collection, an essay by Susan M. Felch entitled "Doubt and the Hermeneutics of Delight." Felch's essay argues that the classroom which is informed by a Christian ethos will not be controlled by what she refers to as Doubt (with a capital D) and the critical distance it engenders. To be sure, Felch does not denigrate doubt as such; rather, she recognizes that a learner's development into maturity involves some measure of doubt regarding what one has been taught, believed and even experienced. Nevertheless, Felch argues, an atmosphere in which Doubt is absolutized hampers students' development into mature knowers. Felch proposes a hermeneutics of delight as the Christian alternative to Doubt. Delight, Felch maintains, "provides us with the much richer aesthetic and moral topography through which to chart our course as scholars and teachers as we confess and profess our Christian faith."

Recovering hospitality as a theologically significant moral category is the goal of the contribution by Hagstrom. Contrasting hospitality with tolerance, Hagstrom argues that the latter can foster only a false form of engagement with others, as it tends to trivialize matters of deep controversy. Unlike tolerance, Christian hospitality requires that the host's religious identity, praxis, and worship not be abandoned or apologized for as a condition for conversation; as such, one who is hospitable to others will not capitulate to the ideological banalities of relativism or pluralism. All the same, hospitality demands a deep personal openness on the part of a host to those with whom one has deep philosophical, theological, and political disagreements. As long as a community of learning is wholly oriented to the same narrative, hospitality helps to foster an environment where academic freedom can flourish.

But how often, in reality, will this be the case? My guess is that such unanimity will be rare, and that some degree of intra-communal conflict will be the norm. Perhaps not coincidentally, precisely this kind of conflict is the topic of the following essay. There Harmon observes that a community that reflects on the implications of faith for its endeavors will inevitably engender some internal conflict. Recognizing that controversy is a mark of vitality, Harmon encourages Christian institutions not to shy away from this kind of conflict, but rather to encourage *constructive* dissension within their ranks.

An essay by Russ and Sargent on the moral imagination and another by Williams on the importance of confessional commitment to Christian higher education round out the book. Williams' essay, a rock-solid contribution to the volume, might be read as communicating, in brief, the most important lesson to be learned from George Marsden's monumental study, *The Soul of the American University*; that is, that church-related institutions of higher learning simply must maintain their confessionalism if they wish to preserve their identity.

In sum, this book deserves to be in the library of anyone who is concerned with the intersection of Christianity and higher education. Readers will be struck by the emphasis on the importance of narrative elements and approaches that run throughout many of the essays in this book and by their many literary references (especially those to medieval literature—a fabulous resource for Christian scholars which has been neglected by their secular colleagues, for quite predictable reasons). As Hagstrom notes in her essay, church-related colleges and universities can become places of learning that are stronger and more vital than their secular peer institutions precisely because, and not in spite of, their religious commitment. Recovering a consciousness of this fact is the central aim of this book, one which all Christian scholars would do well to recognize for themselves.

<div align="center">NOTE</div>

1.   I have adapted these introductory remarks from comments made by Stephen Toulmin in *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 12.