

# RECONSIDERATIONS

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EXPLORING A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AND CULTURE

MAY 2002

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

## PARADOXES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

*On March 23, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Graduate and Faculty Ministries and the Christian Study Center worked cooperatively in hosting "The Colloquium on Faith and Scholarship." The colloquium brought graduate students and professors together to discuss the relationship between a scholar's Christian perspectives and his or her academic calling. This special edition of "Reconsiderations" offers some of the thoughts from that day. It includes an abridged version of "Paradoxes of Christian Scholarship," the keynote address delivered by the Study Center's Director, as well as excerpts from colloquium panelists. We also include an essay by Todd Best, the Study Center's intern and research assistant, who is currently completing a Masters degree in Religion at the University of Florida. Todd's thesis investigates the ways that faith commitments shape scholarship.*

I would like to suggest that the term "Christian" functions far better as a noun with reference to persons, than as an adjective with reference to practices or the products of those practices. In other words, we get further when we think about the fact that a particular historian or artist, lawyer or physician, student or teacher is a Christian, than when we think in terms of Christian history or Christian art, Christian law or Christian medicine, Christian learning or Christian teaching. The further we try to go with the adjective, moreover, the less helpful and more

problematic the adjective becomes: Christian comics, Christian movies, Christian recipes, Christian exercise videos, Christian cruises, and so on.

The more we focus on what it means that a particular person is a Christian, on the other hand, the more likely we are to get at differences that make a difference. Whereas the emphasis on practice leads too easily to secondary and sometimes artificial distinctives, the emphasis on persons orients us toward deeper substantive differences. This is because the noun points us more directly toward the relationship with Christ that makes a person a Christian and toward the understanding of human experience that flows from this relationship. The more we focus on this relationship with Christ and on the understanding of life that flows from it, in turn, the more likely we are to get at differences that make a difference and that may or may not be obvious in the work the individual does.

One reason why the adjective form of the word is not so satisfying may be that when we use the term as an adjective, we tend to emphasize differences that are at best secondary and at worst artificial. Paradoxically, the desire to be different leads to artificial differences on a secondary, more obvious level and to conformity on a more profound, more hidden level. We live in a

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society that lives on the surface all too much. Our culture is all about appearances, political gamesmanship, and manipulations, and when we focus on appearing to be distinctive, we easily become a part of the very way of thinking from which we are attempting to distinguish ourselves. We end up conforming to non-belief in our very attempt to be distinct from it. While we may manage to manufacture some apparent differences, therefore, and while these differences may make us feel better about ourselves, we may well be conforming to views we oppose at a far more fundamental and important level. The first paradox of something called Christian scholarship, then, is that a drive toward distinctiveness, may be distracting us from being distinctively Christian in more profound and important ways.

Let me pause for a moment, however, and anticipate a criticism that may have already come to your mind. I am sure it will occur to some readers that the name of the organization of which I am the director has the term "Christian" in it, and it appears as an adjective. Our center is, after all, called the Christian Study Center of Gainesville. I will simply say that I am not hankering after a new name for our organization, nor do I want to be an annoying hard-liner when I encourage us all to think in terms of nouns and persons rather than adjectives and activities. Language does evolve. The adjective has its place, and it does its share of the work. In the case of the Center, it identifies us as Christians, which I am glad to have it do. Having said that, however, I would reiterate that whether we are talking about Christian scholarship or Christian study centers, we do well to keep the emphasis on being Christians and on the understanding of life that flows from our relationship with Christ.

There are many passages in the Scriptures that could instruct us in these matters, but for now consider just one. In the context of instructing us to put on a new self that is "renewed in the spirit of your mind," the

These students were  
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examining plant cells,  
and when they read  
those books and  
studied those cells,  
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Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians chapter four, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, producing a good thing with his hands that he may have something to share with him who has need. (v. 28)" As simple as this verse is, it offers a wonderful, all-embracing understanding of life that is rooted in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The passage paints the picture of an individual who has been brought into the life of God through Jesus Christ and is now modeling his life on God. Concerned not to grieve the Holy Spirit, he imitates God by putting his natural gifts and talents to work in creative ways. In this case he puts his hands to work. No longer lending his talents to negative purposes as a thief, he puts them to work in a way that pleases God and serves others. Being linked to God through Christ, this person now has a healthy sense of self, enters into a harmonious and fruitful relationship with the natural order, and works with his own hands to produce a good thing that will be of value to his neighbor.

This verse is not telling us to get a job so that we can "make money" and then put something in the offering plate on

Sunday morning. It is telling us to think in a new way about the work that we do, no matter what that work is or where we do it. The passage tells us to place the work itself in the framework of a relationship with our Creator and Redeemer. Through this relationship we gain a healthy view of self, we enter into a harmonious relationship with the world around us, and we view our work as a way of creating pleasure for God and for the people who benefit from our work. The work that occupies the great majority of our time and energy is not separated from the spiritual aspects of our lives but understood to be central to our spiritual worship of God. No part of life is left out of this Christ-centered understanding. Whether you are a cook, a dishwasher, a gardener, a mechanic, a maid, a parent, an artist, a physician, a student, a teacher, a scholar, or all of the above, you would do well to think about all you do in the terms provided by Ephesians 4:28.

A few weeks ago, here at the Study Center, Todd Best led several sessions for undergraduates, in which we discussed issues of faith and learning. One of the highlights of these sessions came when a couple students began talking about the pleasure that they were experiencing in their studies. As we discussed this pleasure, it became apparent that it was rooted in their relationship with their Creator and Redeemer and in fulfilling the purposes for which He created and redeemed them. They were discovering the truth of Eric Liddell's famous line in "Chariots of Fire." "God made me fast," Liddell observed, "and when I run I feel His pleasure." These students were recognizing that God had created them for reading books and examining plant cells, and when they read those books and studied those cells, they could feel God's pleasure. They were experiencing His pleasure in His work, His pleasure in us, our pleasure in Him, and our pleasure in the work that He has given us to do. They were participating in the understanding of life that flows from a relationship with Christ.

One could go on at length exploring aspects of an understanding of human experience that is rooted in Christ, but let me conclude by focusing on another paradox of Christian scholarship. This time I do not have in mind the contradiction that flows from our ill-advised attempts to appear different in secondary or artificial ways. This time I have in mind the central paradox that lies at the heart of a biblical, Christ-centered, first-order narrative or world-view. At the center of a biblical understanding of the human condition stands the paradox that there is both glory and corruption in each and every one of us. On the one hand, by virtue of God's work in Creation, we humans have something of the divine in us. A remnant, at least, of the divine image remains in each one of us, and the glory of that image reveals itself repeatedly. When human beings think, inquire, wonder, create, relate to each other, and go to work, they reveal the glory of their Creator. On the other hand, by virtue of the fall, the glory of our

Creator has been corrupted, and now we live with the fallenness of a fallen world. Our thinking and our creating, our relating and our working all reveal this truth too. We are, as Blaise Pascal observed, both "the glory and refuse of the universe." Here is the central paradox of a biblical understanding of human experience, and it stands at the center of a Christian understanding of scholarship and of all of life.

As we go to work as students, teachers, scholars, artists, doctors, lawyers, bricklayers, and bakers, then, we should expect two constants. One, we should expect to see the enduring glory of God, in truth, beauty, goodness, love, community, inquiry, analysis, knowledge, critique, creativity, etc., and we should act on this expectation. As those whose work is rooted in the creativity of the Creator, we have every reason to appreciate every glimmer of the glory of God in the

work of scholars, artists, artisans, and professionals, and we ought always to remain open to the fact that people with whom we have deep disagreements will teach us a lot if we will let them. They will not only make us smarter but wiser. The biblical first-order narrative keeps us open to wonderfully humbling moments of enjoying, appreciating, and learning from people with whom we have deep

philosophical and ethical differences, and we would do well not to try too hard to predict when these moments will come. We just don't know where and how the next idea out of Chicago or Boston, Berlin or Paris, Delhi or Tokyo is going to reveal the glory and wisdom of God and where it is going to betray the fallenness of a fallen world.

The second constant we should anticipate, however, is rooted not in Creation and the glory of God but in the fallenness of a fallen world. While we ought always to expect the glory of God to burst through, we should also remember that the fall and its corruption and curse will always be with us too. The territory that God created and in which he sanctified inquiry,

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knowledge, and creativity, has become a troubled land. We all live in contested territory and we do well to be straightforward about this fact. While we do our work with wonder, appreciation, humility, and openness, therefore, we also do it with courage and vigilance. We remember that we are in a fight that demands hard work, sacrifice, careful study, good writing, and a willingness to argue in the meekness and gentleness of Christ-but argue nonetheless. The university has always been a place for argument. It has always been a place where ideas compete, and when any of us tries to pretend otherwise, we are only participating in the worst sort of deception and tyranny. There is no use either whining about this situation or becoming obnoxious about it. We should, instead, celebrate the fact that there is such a place of argument, and we should enter into the battle of ideas by framing inquiry and argument in a biblical understanding that encourages inquiry even as it makes sense of argument.

The paradox of glory and corruption, then, is not simply the paradox of Christian scholarship but the paradox of scholarship of every sort. Indeed, we find it everywhere. The paradox of glory and corruption marks individuals and institutions, teachers and students. It characterizes arts and sciences, trades and professions, theory and practice. It frames the work of our allies and our antagonists and colors the scholarship of those with whom we have our deepest fellowship and those with whom we have our deepest disagreements. It characterizes our own work, and it also makes sense of the people who reject the first order narrative that understands them best. When we offer a biblical first-order narrative, we do so not only as a way of

making sense of the work that we Christians do but also as a way of making sense of the work that everyone else is doing as well.

Finally, the paradox of glory and corruption creates one last paradox. Because there is glory and grace in each of us, it is not only possible, but common, for people who do not hold to a biblical understanding of their world or of their work to contribute truth, beauty, and goodness to this world. The biblical paradox of glory and corruption helps us understand that by virtue of God's creative glory and common grace, all human beings remain capable of inquiry that leads to truth, creativity that yields beauty, and moral activity that makes the world a better place. By the same token, because there is corruption and fallenness in each of us, a Christian scholar can begin within a profoundly true framework and still come to mistaken conclusions. This is why we do well not to put too much emphasis on being distinctive in our practices or our conclusions. We just don't know how these things are going to play out. A biblical understanding of life encourages us to give ourselves to knowledge, understanding, creativity, and to making the world a better place. At some points in these processes our colleagues will agree with us and at others they will disagree, and at some points they will be right and at some points we will. It is the biblical understanding of life that makes sense of this fact, and it is this understanding of life, rooted in the biblical doctrines of creation and fall, that is the difference that makes a difference.

*Richard V. Horner, Director  
Christian Study Center of Gainesville*

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### *Looking for some thought-provoking reading on faith and scholarship?*

Richard T. Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

## THE COLLOQUIUM ON FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

*Excerpts, assembled by Shannon Magnan*

"What should distinguish Christian scholars is good work, rather than the label "Christian." However, the Christian has a unique view of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. If the Christian worldview is at odds with the basic premises of scholarship in a certain field, the Christian should, at the least, examine the pre-suppositions very carefully. This may not call for a Christian version of the discipline, but it will challenge the Christian to examine the underpinnings that others may take for granted."

*Dr. Jed Keesling, Department of Mathematics, University of Florida*

"If there is such a thing as Christian scholarship, then there is also such a thing as Christian anthropology, Christian psychology, etc. Although the connection may seem incredibly difficult to see, an inability to see the connection between one's discipline and the Christian faith is the result of one of two possibilities. Either one has not thought deeply enough about the Christian faith or quite simply, one is not a "scholar" in the fullest sense of the term--to grasp and to reflect critically on the fundamental assumptions of one's discipline. Undoubtedly, this may strike some as an unusually heavy burden. However, it is a contingent obligation and a unique obligation for those Christians who are scholars."

*Dr. Justin D. Barnard, Department of Philosophy, Florida State University, Faculty-select, Messiah College*

"Scholarship was invented to eliminate faith or anything personal; however, you could speak of a Christian integrating faith and scholarship within himself. Christians see through what others may think is self-evident--people who are totally integrated into the culture of their day aren't as aware of their assumptions as people who are estranged from that culture. Remembering that world-views are inevitably personal relates to the fact that we want to win people, not arguments, even in our scholarly discussions. People want to move on to the ideas they live by, not just the ones they speculate about."

*Dr. C. John Sommerville, Department of History, University of Florida*

"I do not accept that everything is a matter of chance, although it may appear so from our limited perspective. If our Creator God exists in more dimensions of time than we can dream about (even the future), then chance does not exist for Him. Unlike many, I also approach science from the basis that there is purpose (design). We need to be humble and not presume we can always know the purpose."

*Dr. George Bowes, Department of Botany, University of Florida*

"A person's art is a product of who he is, such that if someone is a sinner redeemed by Christ, his art will invariably reflect that. It will be the art of a Christian, but it may not necessarily be "Christian art." For in the practice of art, craft must figure highly for the sake of making the content clear and beautiful. The Christian sells himself and his art and his faith short if he prizes message over craft. Of course, the opposite will not do either, for craft without regard for message is empty and careless. But this effort will not go gently into the night--one must work at it with much faith, and faithful scholarship."

*Jennifer Strange, Department of English, Centenary College*

# NEWS FROM THE CENTER

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## "QUESTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM"

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In February, the Center hosted a three-week series of open discussions called "Questions from the Classroom." Directed by Todd Best, and designed especially for college students, this discussion group aimed at helping students to identify obstacles and opportunities in approaching their studies from the perspective of Christian faith. We looked at ways that Christians find themselves on the defensive and then moved on to see scholarship as a way to worship God. We concluded by beginning to think of the ways in which a biblical understanding of human experience shapes particular academic disciplines. .

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## WENDELL BERRY READING GROUP

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Throughout the spring semester two reading groups discussed the writings of Wendell Berry, a former English professor who now farms and writes from his home in rural Kentucky. Working from a perspective that is rooted in biblical wisdom, Berry offers insight across a broad range of issues including community, economy, family, war, gender, work, agriculture, education, and more. His work spans genres from novels and short stories to essays and poetry. If you want to explore Berry's writing yourself, we would recommend the following: for essays, *What Are People For?*; for fiction, *Jayber Crow* and *Fidelity*; and for poetry, *A Timbered Choir*. As all of us who participated in these reading groups can attest, Wendell Berry will provoke you to thought. We think you will be glad you read him.

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## "BLAISE PASCAL:

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## PRE-MODERN PROPHET FOR POST-MODERN TIMES"

Though Blaise Pascal lived at the dawn of modernity, he understood the story of the past three hundred and fifty years as well as anyone who has lived in late or post-modern times. He also brought biblical wisdom to bear on this cultural story as well as anyone has ever done. For these reasons Dr. Horner taught a four-week course on this 17th century philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and theologian. In his *Pensées*, Pascal describes the human condition of both glory and corruption and shows Jesus Christ to be not only our righteousness and holiness but our wisdom as well. This will not be the last time that students at the Study Center will have the opportunity to learn from Blaise Pascal.

# NEWS FROM THE CENTER

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## INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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### BUILDING FUND

Imagine you and several of your friends are going fishing. You know there are fish in the sea and the season is right. You have a great boat, and you have bait that you know the fish will go after. Every one is eager to get at it. The problem is that you have only one fishing line and no rods or reels.

Sometimes this is how it feels here at the Study Center. Several people are eager to go to work. The university community is full of people who are interested in what we are doing, and we know the time is right. We have a great building, and we know that what we have to offer is both wanted and needed. Our problem is that we have only one small classroom upstairs, and it seats only twenty people.

Meanwhile, we do have the space for what will be a wonderful classroom on the main floor. It will seat seventy-five people and will open up opportunities that we can only dream about now. Without question, our lack of this space is the single greatest limitation to the work of the Study Center. We have no doubt that if we build it, God will fill it. With fifty thousand dollars we can create this classroom and take care of some other immediate needs in the building. The plans are in place, the permits are on the way, and the workers are eager to get to work. Please, pray with us that we will be able to move into a new classroom this fall.

*Would you like to help us build a classroom for the Study Center?*

If so, please make your check out to Christian Study Center of Gainesville,  
and mark "building fund" on the form on page 11.

### GENERAL FUND

If every reader of "Reconsiderations" were to contribute either \$25 a month or \$100 a year, the Christian Study Center of Gainesville would be able to provide for its staff, cover basic operating expenses, and lay a solid foundation for serving the university community.

Thank you for considering investing in the work of the Study Center.  
If you are able to help, please use the form on page 11.

*Thank You.*

## TALKING ABOUT RELIGION(S): THE USE OF REASON IN A PLURALISTIC RELIGIOUS SETTING

"The Colloquium on Faith and Scholarship" held recently at the Christian Study Center focused on "paradoxes of Christian scholarship." The paradoxes mentioned were mostly general in nature, but I was reminded of a more particular paradox in my own field of religious studies. As the field has become more sensitive to the plurality of religions in America, it also has become more susceptible to methods that seem to undermine religion itself. Too often we do not look to religion as a source of meaning. Instead, we merely describe religious behavior. Whereas religion as a field of knowledge has historically offered rich understandings for the human experience, the academic study of religion appears to be narrowing to sociology of religion. With a growing number of scholars of religion limiting their attention to sociological analysis alone, the vibrant and substantive ideas that have been found in religious thought are increasingly pushed to the margins.

It is possible, however, for religious ideas to become relevant again in the academy, and for an enriching conversation with genuine understanding to take place amidst a multiplicity of religious voices. The means toward such a conversation, I propose, lies in a broader use of reason that seeks understanding instead of employing reason only to reduce or deconstruct religious beliefs.

The context in view here is called pluralistic, and for the purposes of this discussion, the term pluralistic is used simply as a descriptor of the religious climate of American culture.

To say that this culture is pluralistic is to recognize that a multitude of religious world-views are interacting and competing simultaneously. While these various belief systems have some overlap, their central understandings of reality are often at odds with each other. This very fact requires serious thinking about how to seek the best environment for healthy co-existence and conversation about common questions.

The response to this pluralistic condition in academia is two-fold. First, one often encounters a carte blanche acceptance of religious beliefs that views all religious views as "right." This view rests on the fact that all religions are seen as social constructions that offer nothing transcendent. This leads, in turn, to the reduction of the study of religion to the sociology of religion, which narrows the purview of analysis to phenomenology and neglects the evaluative treatment of religious ideas. Sadly, both of these stances miss out on a rich discussion about the metaphysical claims offered by the various religious traditions.

This problem of reduction is not isolated to religious studies. In fact, it can be seen throughout the Humanities in general. A popular theory of knowledge in the academy denies the possibility of arriving at any kind of conclusive knowledge through humanistic studies. As a result, the Humanities have come under two reductionistic approaches. The first is to scientize texts so that the things studied are quantifiable in scientific fashion and therefore useful to those seeking knowl-

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edge. The second is to deconstruct texts that have previously offered substantive accounts of reality, ignoring the content of these texts and showing only the purported weaknesses and deceptions of the texts. The ultimate result has been a shrinking interest in the Humanities either because they offer nothing of substance or because they deny the possibility of knowing anything.

Often the two tendencies of scientizing and deconstructing run together. Such is the case for Russell T. McCutcheon, a scholar of religion who denies that there is actual meaning in any religious system. McCutcheon suggests a "new" method in the academic study of religion. First, he says, scholars should cease to be "caretakers" who nurture their particular traditions. Then, they can "objectively" observe and describe the sociological realities of religions. In short, they should scientize their discipline. Next, he says, scholars of religion are to be "critics" who can expose and tear down the false beliefs of the religion they have studied. In other words, they should deconstruct the object of their study. McCutcheon offers a prime example of someone who views religion as a merely sociological phenomenon. He gives no consideration to the often-robust meanings and truth claims offered by respective religions. Working from a hermeneutics of suspicion, he wants to expose the beliefs of religious practitioners as manipulative power plays by which they dominate lesser-known voices.<sup>1</sup>

While McCutcheon's view is far from being the norm for the field, it does seem to be the direction in which religious studies has been moving. If it continues, it could lead the field of religion to a dead end that loses contact with

genuine discourse about the central questions of meaning that humans ask. But must it be this way? The answer is, No, the study of religion does not have to follow McCutcheon's method and theory. Scholars in the field of religious studies can reject McCutcheon's commitment to the atheistic study of religion and find a way to think about the questions that religions try to address, while acknowledging that various views do exist.

We can move in this direction by employing a holistic kind of reason as an arbiter in pluralistic discourse. This broader, more constructive understanding of reason stands in contrast to

its reductionistic counterpart that so easily dominates the academy. Holistic reasoning avoids the reductionistic tendency of scientizing and also offers an alternative to the dissolving kind of reason used in deconstruction. Rather than just criticizing, reducing, and deconstructing, holistic reason seeks answers that are both intellectually

plausible and experientially compelling. Reason, in this case, guides the mind to what is most reasonable in the face of a given conundrum that religious perspectives seek to understand. As various ideas are offered by certain religious systems, we might ask, "What seems to make the most sense to believe regarding the issue at hand, all things considered?" This fuller understanding of reason seeks what is credible and also experientially promising. It imagines how an intellectually plausible perspective might work in life and seeks the answer or resolution that offers the richest understanding in practice.

I envision the process of holistic reasoning in a pluralistic setting to look something like the following. First, curiosity identifies a question

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or quandary that emerges from human experience. Second, the question or quandary leads to inquiry into the ways that various religious systems might answer the question or resolve the quandary. In this stage, new ideas, including religious ideas, are "accessed." Next, new ideas are compared with a previously existing body of knowledge. Critique and evaluation follow as various ideas are allowed to engage each other, including other religious viewpoints. Finally, revisions are made, and a constructive alternative is embraced based on what seems to make the most sense. The result is a broader understanding of the original quandary and a solution to that quandary that is not only plausible but also experientially compelling.<sup>2</sup> Not content simply to reduce or deconstruct, holistic reason gives ascent to a point of view upon considering available factors. It answers the question: What constructive alternative offers the richest understanding of the quandary and provides the most satisfying and compelling way to resolve it?

In his essay "What Pragmatism Means," William James pictures how a pluralistic society might function. He describes it:

like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in the third a chemist investigating a body's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms.<sup>3</sup>

While James' corridor provides a picture of pluralistic existence, it fails to provide an ade-

quate means of arbitrating among competing ideas. James' corridor needs another room where various ideas can engage each other and where holistic reason can be applied in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. We must avoid the broad-sweeping, unreflective validation of all viewpoints and must, instead, acknowledge that there is something at stake in the ideas held by those who live on the cor-

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ridor. In fact, religious questions are where the stakes are often highest. Perhaps we could add something like a faculty lounge where representatives of different views gather at a roundtable for dialogue. Here in this lounge the

fair interchange of ideas could take place, and each individual would be given the chance to make her case, defend her position, refute others, and enjoy the opportunity to compare her position with other views. At the end of the day, the participants and observers would be better off for having allowed their ideas to be tested, examined, mulled over, criticized, and then either embraced, revised, or rejected.

If this use of holistic reason in a pluralistic setting were to become a standard for dialogue in religious studies, many benefits would follow. First, we could have a true conversation among competing viewpoints in a humane, open, and respectful way. Second, there would be room for actual evaluation of the merits and weaknesses of ideas. Third, after the conversation ends, there would be a place where genuine differences can remain. Fourth, this framework could provide hope for the pursuit of meaning in the Humanities. Fifth, holistic reason recognizes that there are epistemological limits within fields of study, and thus, a place for humility among scholars. Finally, it would become apparent that there is indeed knowledge to be gained from religion.

In response to a negative trend in religious studies, which tends toward reductionism and deconstruction, I would suggest an alternative that looks to a holistic notion of reason in order to recover a more fruitful dialogue in the academy regarding religion as a response to the quandaries of human experience. This common sense approach to pluralism would offer a broader understanding of reason that recognizes religious thought and not merely practice in the conviction that there is knowledge to be gained through the exploration of religious ideas. Certainly, we need to give more thought to this application of reason, but with this much of a starting point, perhaps religious studies can once again become a field to which other disciplines look for knowledge about the human condition and for answers to common dilemmas facing humanity.

*Todd Best, Intern/Research Assistant  
Christian Study Center of Gainesville*

Notes

1 Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001).

2 My thinking in these matters has been greatly enhanced by conversations with my colleague Richard Horner. I am most grateful for his input and rigorous criticism.

3 William James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 32 as quoted in George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 46.

CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTER OF GAINESVILLE

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