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Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning (Book Review)

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features of creaturely existence. Furthermore, while Christian Platonism views mathematical theories as discoveries of truths about some super-sensory realm, Christian Mathematical Empiricism sees an important supportive role for invention as well since humans are the ones abstracting and theorizing about the mathematical structure they find within creation.

It's good to see a somewhat balanced presentation of different Christian perspectives on mathematics, but more could have been done with the second approach. Christian Mathematical Empiricism could have been highlighted sooner in the book instead of being relegated to six pages in the tenth chapter "Ontology." A neo-Kuyperian Christian perspective has things to say about history and foundations and epistemology and

applicability, too, but those writing the earlier chapters on these things made no attempt to explain what difference the second approach might make there.

With the publication of *Mathematics through the Eyes of Faith*, college mathematics educators have some new supplementary material for incorporating reflections on mathematics and Christianity into their courses. Not all parts of the book will work well in a single course for mathematics; some chapters are a better fit for an introductory course and others for a capstone seminar. Since very few books or articles give an academic treatment of the relationship between mathematics and Christian faith on any level, another resource in this vein, such as this one, is welcome.

Smith, David. A., and James K. A. Smith, eds. *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. 223 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6685-1. Reviewed by Patricia C. Kornelis, Professor of Education at Dordt College.

In *Teaching and Christian Practices*, editors David Smith and James Smith, along with several Christian university professors, wrestle with how faith is integrated into the acts of teaching and learning. The editors note that Christian scholarship has essentially ignored how teaching pedagogy itself is shaped by faith. Most scholarship regarding Christian teaching focuses on Christian content (ideas and perspectives that reflect a Christian worldview) or Christian modeling (the personal character and spiritual self of the instructor). While not wishing to disregard these aspects of Christian teaching, the editors argue that there is more to the idea of Christian pedagogy. In *Teaching and Christian Practices*, the reader is invited to explore "what Christian practices can contribute to how teaching and learning are carried out and experienced" (11). Through the experiences and experiments of ten college professors in redesigning their courses, the reader witnesses how historic Christian practices such as hospitality, fellowship, testimony, sharing a meal, time-keeping, and adhering to a liturgical calendar are infused into various college courses with the intent of re-imagining the teaching and learning process in relation to God's purposes. This book offers concrete examples of what Christian teaching looks like in practice.

A key underlying theme of this book is one that is expressed in James Smith's earlier work *Desiring the Kingdom*: the idea that "Christian education is not just about the transfer of information but also about the

task of formation" (140). Smith argues that Christian education should focus not only on content and perspective but also on practices that shape us—practices that allow us to fully desire the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In chapter 8, Smith recounts how his own pedagogical practices contradicted his theoretical presumptions about the role of formation. By presenting his own pedagogical dilemma and his subsequent reshaping of his course, Smith allows the reader to discover alongside him how incorporating practices of fixed-hour prayer and attending to the liturgical calendar changed and deepened students' learning as they connected these practices to themes of the course.

In another example, Walton and Walter, in their chapter "Eat this Class," describe how the practice of a shared meal with nursing students in a nutrition course supported a goal of Christian formation in that it allowed students to actively participate in the connection of food and faith while learning and practicing sound nutrition. Further, the practice of the shared meal and the community that this practice fostered allowed students to move beyond individual competitive learning practices to ones that respected the accountability of communal experiences.

In other chapters of the book, college professors note how incorporating historic Christian practices also impacts professors themselves. Carolyne Call, in her adolescent psychology course, notes how the practice

of hospitality that she infused into her course challenged her presumptions about her own teaching. One of Call's goals for her adolescent psychology course was for her students to develop greater awareness, tolerance, and empathy for others—specifically their future adolescent students—by becoming more insightful about their own beliefs and behaviors. By creating a learning community shaped by the practices of hospitality, Call realized for herself how draining and challenging it is to truly care. Until she engaged in the practice with her students, Call hadn't realized how emotionally removed she had been from her students, how her prior teaching had not truly reflected her presumed beliefs about what it meant to be a Christian educator.

Another underlying theme of this book is the reciprocal role of reflection and practice. In her college philosophy course on Aquinas' writing on virtues and vices, professor Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung establishes a rhythm of study, practice, and reflection. For instance, in a study of the vice of "vainglory," students learned about the concept through examples both current and historical. Vainglory, the desire to have undue attention and approval, is a concept that describes the American reality well. But to move it beyond an abstract concept, Konyndyk DeYoung asked her students to participate in an historic Christian practice of silence—or more specifically in this case, the silence of not speaking about oneself. After living the practice for a week, the students and instructors noted how very difficult such a "silence" practice was. As the students then shared their reflections in journals, they noted their awareness that this vice was relevant to their own lives; even the practice of "sharing" was done "in a manipulatively self-aggrandizing, attention-grabbing way" (33). To conclude the study, the instructor asked her students to engage in a final assignment, a "translation project," where they took course understandings to the residence halls. There students made presentations on the vices in ways that made the concepts real for a greater audience. This deepening of the learning experience through practice and reflection invites students to engage in Christian practices beyond the scope of a one-semester course.

Lest the reader presume that Christian practices are best suited for philosophy or psychology courses, the editors offer a wide cross section of the liberal arts curriculum—from spiritually formative reading practices in a literature course to community-building practices in a history course. Probably the most surprising application of Christian practices to pedagogical practice is Kurt Shaefer's technical econometrics course, in which he radically alters the pedagogy to engage in Christian hermeneutical practices relevant to knowing well. Shaefer acknowledges the unique challenges faced in applying historic Christian practices to a course that lacks a pre-modern history. This professor determined that he wanted to ensure that the Christian practices he applied to the course were not mere "add-ons" but rather were practices that complemented the kind of thinking required in the field. Shaefer emphasized, in his course, that good techniques were not enough to become a good econometrician; rather, the emphasis needed to be on thinking well, wrestling with what we can know and why we can know it. Shaefer found that working with Reformed hermeneutical practices and principles and engaging in pedagogical practices of conversation rather than lecture deepened his students' understanding of course material.

The editors' intent in the examples provided is not to provide recipes or "how-to" prescriptions for Christian teaching. Rather, these college classroom experiments are intended to highlight the possibilities and potential of Christian practice. The openness of the various college professors in articulating the challenges, struggles, and barriers in reshaping their courses should serve as an encouragement to any instructor who is serious about good teaching. One cannot come away from reading this book thinking that the authentic integration of faith with teaching and learning is an easy endeavor. However, for those of us teaching in Christian colleges and universities, this book should be seen as an invitation to change. As Craig Dykstra notes in the foreword, "Reading it will stir their imagination, encourage their faithfulness, and renew their pedagogy" (x).