

HOW PUBLIC COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCE BIBLICALLY-INFORMED
LITERATURE TAUGHT AS CULTURAL DOCUMENTS:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenology describes the experience of public college students who study biblical or biblically-informed literary texts that are taught merely as cultural documents in literature and humanities courses. Two primary theories informed this study: transformation theory in adult learning and the theory of literary apologetics. Furthermore, qualitative methodologies of data collection included journaling, individual interviews with 13 public college students, and focus groups. Data analysis included epoche, member checks, and horizontalization. Three research questions guided the study: (1) How do public college students describe their experiences with biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents? (2) How do public college students describe the effect or influence that different classrooms, contexts, or situations have on their experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)? (3) What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation? Using open-coding enumeration via Atlas.ti software produced six major themes: biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy; exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure; technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts; instructor "passion," "safe" facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion; literary study as a neutral zone; and literary study as empathically formative. Future recommendations include conducting the same study in different geographical settings, considering literature as character education in higher education, and further exploring literary study as empathically formative.

Keywords: transcendental phenomenology, biblically-informed literature, transformational learning, literary apologetics

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List of Abbreviations

Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR)

Regents Online Degree Program (RODP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter details the context of this study by first exploring its background—how many general education courses in composition, literature, and the humanities involve canonized literary texts that are biblically-informed. Secondly, the situation to self describes how my own educational background and teaching experience in higher education inform this study. Thirdly, the chapter states problem and purpose statements, respectively, also delineating the significance of the study. Finally, the core research questions and definitions are introduced and explained.

Background

As part of the general education core requirements in most public colleges and universities, students are required to take one or more introductory composition, literature, and humanities courses. These are generally taught within the disciplines of English literature and language, humanities, cultural studies, and/or liberal arts studies. Because such courses are intended to ground students in the basic trends and currents of philosophy, culture, history, and the arts through a literary lens, canonical texts are generally the curricular focus.

Historical Overview

This traditional approach is also sometimes referred to as the Great Books approach or, even more casually, an education in the classics. From the ancient to the modern, such texts inform the very basis of our Western heritage and culture. Although taught in order to educate students and not to proselytize them, many of the texts—including the Bible itself—are either launched from a biblical worldview or are more implicitly informed by inherently biblical concerns and themes; essentially, even when scripture or scriptural paradigms are not studied for the purpose of establishing spiritual context in a state college classroom, they are examined for

the purpose of exploring a cultural context (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Beauregard, 2001; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Dungy, 2012; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gutek, 2011; Jasper, Prickett, & Hass, 1999; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; L'Engle, 1995; Maillet, 2014; Manzo, 2007; Marshall, 2010; Mulcahy, 2009; Nohrnberg, 1974; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987; Van Brummelen, 2002; Youssef, 2010). In a typical survey of composition, literature, or humanities, students at a state college (a public, tax-payer funded institution of higher education) may certainly explore such biblical or biblically-informed works as Augustine's *Confessions*, the entire Gospel of Luke, the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the medieval poem "Dream of the Rood," the full and unabridged twelve books of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, Herbert's *The Temple*, C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*, J.R.R. Tolkien's "Ring" trilogy and its inception in the Christian elements of *Beowulf*, T.S. Eliot's poetry, and much, much more (Ames, 2014; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Lee, 2010; Maillet, 2014; Syme, 1989; Pike, 2003; Warner, 2012).

Society-At-Large

Even if not overtly "Christian" literature, as it might be more colloquially known, much of the canon of literature is informed by archetypes and paradigms that are inherently biblical (Bainton, 1964; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Gold, 1983; Gros-Louis, 1975; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Maillet, 2014; Nohrnberg, 1974; Pike, 2003). For example, Shakespeare's universally acclaimed body of work—while perhaps not theological in intent—often points to theological concerns, in addition to relying heavily on biblical archetypes and paradigms (Avni, 1970; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Battenhouse, 1986; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Chiang, 2012; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Franson, 1977; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983;

Knoepfle, 1989; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Tiffany, 2011; Varga-Dobai, 2015; Waugaman, 2012). Even such contemporary literary essays as Martin Luther King’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” for example, depend upon an understanding of its biblical framework—that King recasts himself as a modern-day Paul writing fellow Christians from a place of imprisonment (Snow, 1985).

The potential for selection of texts to be biblically-founded or informed becomes even more pronounced within the context of introductory surveys of British or American literature; for the history of British literature is, in many respects, the ecclesiastical history of the Church of England, and the American literary tradition is especially rich in the traditions of the Puritans, hymnology, and other more contemporary sources of worship (Avni, 1970; Battenhouse, 1986; Beauregard, 2001; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Franson, 1977; Grund, 1983; Knoepfle, 1989; Parker, 2006; Tiffany, 2011; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013). Even more foundational, Gallagher and Lundin (1989) suggest that the very development of literary genres throughout history “represents one of the ways that human beings have worked out the literary potentials of God’s creation” (pp. 159-160), while Schaeffer (1973) points to Hebraic scripture as the prototype for technical excellence in poetry and “strict literary discipline” (p. 40).

To engage with literature is to engage with its essential worldview, and a great deal of the Western texts taught as part of the general education core in public higher education are launched from a biblical worldview, whether or not they are ever explicitly regarded by instructors or students as such (Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Cook, 2011; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gutek, 2011; Manzo, 2007; Marshall, 2010; Newell, 2009; Sanacore, 2013; Schaeffer, 1973; Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018; Van

Brummelen, 2002; Wartell, 2013). Cunningham and Reich (2010) perhaps most elegantly describe this phenomenon:

For more than three thousand years, the stories and (equally important) the persons in these stories have been etched in the Western imagination. The faith of Abraham, the guidance of Moses, the wisdom of Solomon, the sufferings of Job, and the fidelity of Ruth have become proverbial in our culture. These events and stories from the Bible are models of instruction and illumination . . . no humanities student can ignore the impact of the biblical tradition on our common culture. Our literature echoes it . . . absorb[ing] much of the Hebrew Scriptures into the texture of our culture. (p. 143)

Theory

Despite the richness of educational implications for this topic, no research exists regarding the presence of a relationship between students' exposure to these texts in public colleges, how that exposure may correlate to some understanding or experience of a biblical worldview, and how that experience may be transformative (Mezirow, 1997). Because many students may enter such courses with an essential spiritual illiteracy about the Bible (Nather, 2013; Van Brummelen, 2002), such coursework may represent the first and last time they are exposed to a biblical worldview.

Although much critical attention has been devoted to literary study as a general education requirement (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018), its devaluation as a general education requirement (Ferrero, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Munson, 2011; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Vail, 2001), trends in literary appreciation in higher education (Beeghly, 2005; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Osguthorpe, 2013; Ostenson & Gleason

Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Senechal, 2011), the necessity of literary appreciation for college and career preparation (Ferrero, 2011; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Treble, 2009; Sanacore, 2013; Vail, 2001), and the role of literature appreciation in shaping cultural literacy and personal ethics (Bainton, 1964; Cook, 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Knight, 2006; Newell, 2009; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006; Van Brummelen, 2002), no study has explored how public students experience biblical concepts when taught through the lens of rhetorical, literary, and cultural appreciation.

Situation to Self

As one who has taught literature and humanities full-time in a state college since 1997, I am especially interested in this topic for several reasons—some that are perhaps profoundly personal. I was born into an unusual confluence of cultural influences, with one part of my family being comprised primarily of Islamic Middle-Easterners and another part comprised of nominal Christians, mostly of Appalachian descent. Emphasizing rules and religion over relationship, both worldviews had the capacity to be so legalistic that faith in Christ alone was overshadowed by a cultural Christianity rooted largely in tradition—one that is often pervasive in the Southeastern United States.

As a very young girl, I needed to know who Jesus was—not according to family or communities of faith, but rather through what I now know is God’s revelation of Himself in His Word. Challenging life circumstances forced me into deep questioning at a young age—something for which I am now grateful. Fortunately, I was a voracious reader, and when I was seven, I encountered C.S. Lewis’ character, Aslan. I began to understand how, like the great lion Aslan, Jesus was not safe, but good. Through a kind of back door that literature represents for me, I began to understand what C.S. Lewis called the deeper magic of grace that encompasses

law, the passion and the resurrection, and the nature of the One who was calling me to Himself (Lewis, 1994). As I tell my students, fiction is a lie we tell to get at the truth. And I am convinced that, in my case, it was the literary masters who led me to the Bible—which led me to eventually accept Christ, fully understanding the nature and cost of that decision. That passion for literature’s power to remove cultural blinders and allow truth to penetrate has never left me. This passion is largely why I pursued the bachelor’s and master’s degrees in literature and, later, a master’s degree in religion.

Years later, I have now spent a good portion of my adult life teaching literature to students enrolled in a public college. I am not sure I would have it any other way. For as we engage a text together, especially one that is immersed in a biblical worldview, I have noticed two things as we examine its rhetorical, literary, and cultural elements: first, students who might otherwise have rejected God’s Word often drop their defenses in the context of a literary discussion; and, second, students who may have developed no previous spiritual literacy regarding a biblical worldview are often genuinely interested by such topics when they are couched within the context of a compelling literary work, rather than within a gathering intent on proselytization.

Anecdotally, this phenomenon is one I have witnessed at multiple institutions, and many of my Christian colleagues at different state schools have noticed similar trends. Yet no research exists that describes the experience college students have in studying biblically-informed literary texts merely as cultural documents, even though it is at that level—not elementary or secondary—that most of the quintessential Great Books of western culture are likely to be taught in their unabridged, original form (Avni, 1970; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Dungy, 2012). Because I firmly believe that a call to teach is also a call to minister, the proposed topic is of

great personal importance. Although I should not and would not overtly share of God's love, sacrifice, and redemption of mankind in a state setting, I can certainly expose students to literature that does in the confidence that all truth is God's truth.

Literary study on the typical public college campus is an academic discipline which is potentially rife with controversy, largely because literature conveys worldviews and their associate values, whether or not the intention is such. Thus, this theoretical framework would be incomplete without being firmly grounded in a biblical view of knowledge. To this end, Van Brummelen's (2002) biblically-based considerations of knowledge, curriculum, and student engagement are foundational. Van Brummelen (2002) approaches literary instruction with a unique viewpoint, describing how Christian professors of literature in state institutions may nonetheless use the "beauty, wonder, and vicarious adventure of literature . . . to shape their students' view of and responses to life" (p. 508).

In teaching literature and its rhetorical role in the humanities and cultural study, I operate from a research paradigm of interpretivism as described by Van Brummelen (2002), recognizing that an adult college student's appreciation of a literary text is socially constructed and formed by ideas that emerge in class discussion and interaction. However, the ontological assumption from which this study arises is that the nature of truth itself is unchangeable, for it is secured in Christ's preeminence. As Van Brummelen (2002) explains, "knowledge is grounded in God's revelation of Himself in His created reality and in the Bible . . . [and] goes beyond one's intellect and involves personal response, commitment, and service" (p. 199). Thus, my epistemological assumption is that all truth is God's truth. To explain, in a public state college that may be generally skeptical of claims to absolute truth, I approach teaching rhetoric, culture, and literature with the belief that all truth is ultimately God's truth and thus merits careful intellectual

inquiry. Although Christian professors teaching in state institutions cannot and should not proselytize, they may nonetheless operate from a biblical axiology and epistemology by teaching what is true.

Problem Statement

The problem that leads to a need for this study is that no research describes specifically the experience that public college students have with studying biblically-informed literature in the context of cultural appreciation. Although college level literary appreciation and its trends in higher education have been studied (Beeghly, 2005; Bernadowski, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Chan, 2016; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Ostenson & Gleason Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Senechal, 2011; Varga-Dobai, 2015), it has not been explored in relationship to specifically biblically-informed literature. Furthermore, literary study's ability to shape personal ethics and effect life transformation has been frequently explored (Ames, 2014; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Cook, 2011; Feinberg, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Heineke, 2014; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; Maillet, 2014; Nather, 2013; Newell, 2009; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Poyas, 2016; Sanderse, 2013; Stallworth et al., 2006), but generally within the context of either an extra-biblical worldview or the misnomer of a "values-free" curriculum. One reward of teaching literature is the opportunity to impart values through the power of story—values that students might not as readily understand otherwise. As Van Brummelen (2002) has aptly commented, through literature, students "become committed to certain values" (p. 504)—whether for better or worse. So effective is fiction at illustrating essential truth through the figurative "back door," so to speak, of students' psyche, intellect, and emotions that we see even Christ using fiction through the construct of the parable to disarm deeply complacent listeners and help them awaken

to truth. L'Engle's (1995) observation in *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* resonates perhaps most profoundly: "Jesus was not a theologian; He was God who told stories" (p. 149). Nonetheless, while this phenomenon permeates the public college students' experience in literature, no research describes specifically the experience that public college students have with studying biblically-informed literature in the context of cultural appreciation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology is to describe the experience of public college students at a higher education institution in Tennessee who study biblical or biblically-informed literary texts that are taught merely as cultural documents in composition, literature, and humanities courses. Such texts will be understood as literature that is excerpted from scripture or that explores a biblical worldview, even if ultimately to depart from it. Many canonical ancient and contemporary works of literature explore a biblical worldview or incorporate biblical paradigms, whether supporting them, rejecting them, or simply referencing them for cultural context (Ames, 2014; Azmi, 2013; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bernadowski, 2013; Burkett & Goldman, 2016; Chan, 2016; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Freeman, 2014; Feinberg, 2014; Heineke, 2014; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Jose, 2015; Maillet, 2014; Nather, 2013; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Poyas, 2016; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Sanacore, 2013; Varga-Dobai, 2015; Wartell, 2013).

The theoretical framework for this study is primarily informed by two theorists: Mezirow (1996) and C.S. Lewis (1966). Mezirow's (1996) transformation theory of adult learning focuses on how adults cultivate the ability to think autonomously and responsibly as the goal of higher education. Because literature, as a discipline, uniquely and innately requires students to explore the essential existential questions of humanity, literary study offers the capacity to enact the

transformative learning Mezirow (1996) outlines in his seminal study. Furthermore, Lewis' (1966) theory of literary apologetics suggests that public college students who read biblically-informed literary texts only as cultural documents have the capacity to see biblical concepts “for the first time appear[ing] in their real potency” (p. 37). Although discussed in greater detail in the literature review, Mezirow's (1996) and Lewis' (1966) concepts predominantly guide the theoretical framework for this phenomenology.

Significance of the Study

As part of the exploration of a phenomenon, this study seeks to establish its broader implications—empirically, theoretically, and practically. As such, each realm of this study's implications is briefly explored.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

Although conversations in higher education are increasingly concerned with fostering moral education, ethical judgement, and character development within a variety of contexts such as business, teacher education, student services, and more (Bowen, 2008; Bunch, 2005; Chickering, 2010; Dungy, 2012; Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, & Sanger, 2009; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jones, Webb, & Neumann, 2008; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Langer, Hall, & McMartin, 2010; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Rabin & Smith, 2013; Reason, 2011; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Wartell, 2013), virtually none explore the unique yet extraordinarily common confluence of the college-level study of biblically-informed literary texts in a state higher education institution, despite the fact that this combination presupposes an exhaustive consideration of ethical, moral, and character-based issues. Even more broadly, however, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature in

considering the connections between college-level literary study and spiritual/ethical formation. The literature is saturated with explorations of the connections between primary and secondary literature study and spiritual/ethical formation, often framed as character education through literature (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, Feeney, & Moravcik, 2011; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya, Aungsumalin, & Worapong, 2014; Young, Hadaway, & Ward, 2013). Yet no literature exists on the phenomenon of how college-level students in public institutions of higher education experience literary texts that are either biblical or informed by biblical paradigms and archetypes.

Practical Implications

For Christian professors in secular colleges, such research raises questions about how students experience biblically-informed literature. Almost 20 years of watching students respond to inherently biblical concepts couched in the context of classic literature have left me finding this phenomenon increasingly compelling yet lacking in attention the research gives to peripheral dimensions of the topic. Such a phenomenon is important, for like that of many other Christian professors in state colleges, my roster contains Christians, Muslims, Shintos, atheists, agnostics, the nominally Christian, Buddhists, seekers, and the list goes on. Perhaps even more compelling are those Christian students steeped in a faith tradition who report having received significant theological insight through various literary works. This is not surprising, for because literature is inherently rooted in a worldview and because many of the canonical texts of our culture operate from a Christian worldview, those texts taught in general education courses are biblically-informed, even if that particular worldview is never acknowledged or validated. Although the

implications of this phenomenon are many, no studies to date explore how students in public colleges experience such texts.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology is to describe the experience of public college students who study biblical or biblically-informed literary texts that are taught merely as cultural documents in composition, literature, and humanities courses. Thus, using Creswell's (2013), Patton's (2002), and Moustakas' (1994) respective recommendations for designing phenomenology, the three following research questions will guide the study:

1. **RQ1: How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents?** Invariably, as part of their education in especially Western culture, college students in public institutions of higher education will explore biblical or biblically-informed literary texts in one or more of their general education courses. In their required coursework in composition, literature, and the humanities, students will explore the canon of such works, considering them as cultural documents—outside of a context that has potential for religious proselytization. For example, when students enroll in an introductory humanities course, they explore such texts as the *Gospel of Luke*, Augustine's *City of God* and/or *Confessions*, and more. Whether such texts are direct excerpts from the Bible (as in the case of the *Gospel of Luke*) or are merely biblically-informed (as in the case of Augustine's *City of God* and/or *Confessions*), students analyze these texts not for their spiritual influence but for their cultural elements. Even more specifically, for example, the *Gospel of Luke* provides an excellent context in which students may explore the confluence of Jewish practice and Christian ideology within the context of Roman

occupation during the first century in Jerusalem. Whether students are exploring the rhetoric of Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in composition, the Anglo-Saxon meter of “The Dream of the Rood” in literature, or the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 in humanities, each text is respectively regarded as an artifact which embodies elements of its respective culture. In a faith-based institution, the very same texts may be valued for their decidedly biblical content—but not within the context of a secular institution (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Battenhouse, 1986; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; Knoepfle, 1989; L’Engle, 1995; Manzo, 2007; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Pollak, 1974; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Van Brummelen, 2002; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013).

2. **RQ2:** How do public college students describe the effect or influence that different classroom contexts or situations have on their experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)? While the content across sections of college composition, literature, and humanities courses may remain relatively static, the classroom contexts or situations in which such literary content is delivered and thus experienced can change dramatically. Given the trends in technology, students may be enrolled in a face-to-face course typical of traditional interaction, in a hybrid setting which combines synchronous

face-to-face interaction with elements of asynchronous online delivery, or in a fully online course. Furthermore, while some students may experience literature in a setting that is primarily focused on the respective instructor's lectures and oral transmission of information, many students may learn within a more learner-centered environment—one that uses such experiential and interactive elements as reading circles, discussion groups, and even theatrical interpretation and adaptation. Finally, students could conceivably explore the cultural elements of the very same literary text in composition, literature, and humanities courses but use the respective discipline's rhetorical approach quite differently (Arikan, 2008; Beeghly, 2005; Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013; Bertonneau, 2010; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Carter, 2007; Choi & Piro, 2009; Cook, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Elliott, 2002; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Goldberg, 1987; Gordon, 2012; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Knowles, et al., 1984; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Maillet, 2014; Marable, Leavitt-Noble, & Grande (2010); Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1996; Miller, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Mulcahy, 2009; Munson, 2011; Nash, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; O'Neill, 2013; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Rabin & Smith, 2013; Raymond, 2008; Reason, 2011; Rosenblatt, 2005; Sanacore, 2002; Sanacore, 2013; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Senechal, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Treble, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015; Watts, 2010).

3. **RQ3:** What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation? Exploring literary study as formative in students' character, spiritual makeup,

and personal ethics is a common theme in research conducted in K-12 secular settings, in K-12 faith-based settings, in faith-based institutions of higher education, and even in extracurricular activities in the college experience, whether secular or faith-based. Furthermore, each of these situations presumes a level of intentionality in using literature as a means to encourage the spiritual and ethical formation of students. However, no study considers this experience in the context of the secular higher education classroom nor within a setting where such a goal is not intentional (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman et al., 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Kleiman, 2008; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Langer et al., 2010; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Lewis & Baynes, 1994; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Pike, 2003; Puka, 2005; Sanderse, 2013; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Wartell, 2013; Youssef, 2010).

Definitions

1. *Biblically-informed literary texts* – Although biblical texts are taken verbatim from scripture, biblically-informed literary texts reference themes, archetypes, paradigms, and even individuals from scripture without necessarily being theological in purpose (Avni, 1970; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Battenhouse, 1986; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Chiang, 2012; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Franson, 1977; Groves, 2007;

Grund, 1983; Knoepfle, 1989; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Tiffany, 2011; Waugaman, 2012).

2. *Literary texts as cultural documents* - Literary texts may be studied for a variety of purposes; however, when they are studied merely as cultural documents or artefacts, they are regarded in relationship to the historical, sociological, philosophical, linguistic, and artistic context of a specific place in time—as reflections of a particular cultural moment. As Cunningham and Reich (2010) explain, as a literary text, a cultural document/artefact carries with it the concept of a “surplus of meaning” (p. 16): “Having ‘surplus of meaning’ means that a certain work not only reflects technical and imaginative skill, but also that its very existence sums up the best of a certain age” (Cunningham & Reich, 2010, p. 16). Thus, to reference an earlier example, the *Gospel of Luke* may be read in a faith-based setting for its spiritual application; however, within the context of a secular college classroom, it would be analyzed as a document for its “surplus of meaning” as relates to the convergent cultures of living as a first-century Jew under Roman occupation.

Summary

Chapter One included an overview detailing how many general education courses in composition, literature, and the humanities involve canonical literary texts that, in varying degrees, are biblical, biblically-informed, or contain biblical paradigms and archetypes. This phenomenon is especially prominent in documents of Western culture. The background section further explored the specifics of how many literary texts in such coursework explore the elements of a biblical worldview, yet a significant gap in the literature exists in describing students’ experience with such texts when considered within the context of public higher

education. In the situation to self, I described my educational background, my own experience with literary works as a form of apologetics, and how these both relate today to my experiences teaching literature, composition, and humanities full-time in a state institution of higher education. Finally, the major research questions and definitions are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter first describes the phenomenon students experience when studying biblical or biblically-informed texts as cultural documents in a public institution of higher education. Secondly, this chapter explores how several theorists and their respective ideologies provide an especially useful context in which to consider what biblical or biblically-informed texts mean to public college students when taught merely as cultural documents within composition, literature, and/or humanities courses. The theoretical framework from which this study is launched relies primarily on Mezirow's (1997) theories of transformative learning and C.S. Lewis' (1966) theory of literary apologetics—literature's capacity to convey truth through what is, at least in terms of strict literary definition, a fiction. On a lesser level, also informing this study are Piaget's (1977) theories of cognitive stage development, Knowles' (1984) andragogical assumptions about the motives relative to adult learning, and Tolkien's (1965) literary theories of mythopoeia. Finally, Chapter Two will devote considerable attention to a review of the related literature, exploring a variety of themes both central and tangential to this phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

Mezirow. Transformational learning is “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Mezirow (1997) describes this cultivated ability to think responsibly and autonomously as the primary goal of adult education, for it is a central facet of what it means to be a human being:

A definition condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an

authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking.

(Mezirow, 1997, p. 5)

Essentially, Mezirow theorizes that when authentic transformation occurs through learning, it is because a dramatic and essential change has occurred in one's perspective or in one's frame of reference. Because literature innately challenges students to ask the essential questions of man, literary study has the capacity to connect to the transformation of perspective that Mezirow (1978) describes in ten phases in his seminal study.

Lewis. Although perhaps more popularly known for his fiction and apologetics, C. S. Lewis' acuity in literary theory and critique has significantly influenced how literature (especially the "Great Books" of the Western cultural canon) are approached in terms of study and appreciation. In his posthumously released essay entitled "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What Needs to Be Said," Lewis (1966) expounds his purpose in writing *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a means of advancing a significant theoretical perspective—that literature is a "lie" one tells to get at the "truth." By extrapolating the basic truths of Christianity into a fictional setting, Lewis (1966) thought that by "stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency" (p. 37):

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed [sic] much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings.

And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. (Lewis, 1966, p. 37)

For the purposes of this phenomenology, Lewis' (1966) description of literature as "fairy stories" captures well that mythic sense in which classic literature, under the cloak of fiction, conveys inherently biblical truth. While some may regard teaching classic literature that is often grounded in a biblical worldview in a secular environment which does not permit proselytization to be mutually exclusive categories, Lewis' (1966) literary theory establishes how they are not—how they are, in fact, native to the routine experience of any reader of great literature. Moreover, public college students who read biblically-informed literary texts as cultural documents are often in the process of seeing biblical truths "for the first time appear[ing] in their real potency" (Lewis, 1966, p. 37).

Piaget. Piaget's (1977) theories of cognitive stage development offer a useful context in which to examine the phenomenon central to this study. Of specific interest to adult learning in literature appreciation is Piaget's (1977) theory of adaptation which describes the disequilibrium the learner often experiences between the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Although Piaget's (1977) theories are generally associated with the development of children, the developmental mechanisms of assimilation and accommodation are experienced by adults, as well, and "are closely intertwined in every cognitive activity from birth to death" (Miller, 2002, p. 65).

In the context of this phenomenology, Piaget's (1977) theories of disequilibrium and their relationship to structuralism, the process of building schemata, and the mechanism of scaffolding all relate well to investigating how public college students in literature/humanities courses may

or may not lack the necessary schema for processing biblical or biblically-informed texts as anything meaningful for their lives and spiritual literacy or formation beyond literature.

Connecting Piagetian concepts of assimilation and accommodation to the study of literary texts, Goldberg's (1987) seminal work further suggests that when students explore literature, their experience "must include integration of new material (accommodation), changing the original structure of the intellect in a way possible only if the new material is truly meaningful" (p. 275). Piaget's (1977) ideas of adaptation lend themselves well to this study of students' experience of biblically-informed texts, then, for literature has the capacity to, as Goldberg (1987) suggests, "elicit the students' own self-regulating equilibrations . . . and [thus] activate the assimilating and accommodating schemes" (p. 275).

Knowles. While the review of literature for this phenomenology includes a great deal of research about the relationship between literature and spiritual/ethical/character formation in K-12, little if any research has been conducted to explore these phenomena in adult learners. For this reason, Knowles' (1984) andragogical assumptions about the motives relative to adult learning form part of the theoretical framework, as well.

Essentially, Knowles (1984) posited four main assumptions about how and why adults learn: that adults prefer to participate in the design and assessment of their learning environment; that they largely bring their own experiences into the learning environment, creating a contextual basis that would look quite different in pedagogy; that their primary interest is in learning about subjects which have the most relevancy and immediacy in their personal, academic, and vocational lives; and that they tend to focus more on problem-based learning than on content-based learning. Given this context, one might easily infer that the motives adult students bring to courses involving literary appreciation are quite different than that of typical K-12 students. As

most, if not all, research conducted on literature-based character education and spiritual formation studies is focused on the pedagogical issues of the K-12 population, Knowles' andragogical assumptions provide a unique lens through which to consider this phenomenon.

Tolkien. Although perhaps best known in popular culture for his fictional trilogy *Lord of the Rings* and other acclaimed literary works of high fantasy, J.R.R. Tolkien (1965) is perhaps more recognized in the literary academic community of higher education institutions for his role as a linguist, philologist, and literary theorist. Tolkien's (1965) literary theories on language as an entity created by God are central to the assumptions underlying this theoretical framework and literature review, for it was he who coined the term "mythopoeia." In its most general sense, Tolkien (1965) uses the term "mythopoeia" to describe his belief that literary works, which he and many other critics describe archetypally as "myths," are all in some way reflections of highest truth:

We have come from God, and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming 'sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man aspire to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbor. (Carpenter, 1977, p. 151)

Tolkien's literary theory is critical in contemporary philology, literary study, and linguistics, and thus his recasting of literary texts as products of mythopoeia—supposed myths that contain divine truth—is critical to assumptions about literary works underlying this phenomenology.

Related Literature

For Christian professors of literature and humanities in state colleges, it is important to understand how students experience biblical or biblically-informed texts when they are presented simply as significant works of literature, as mere documents of a culture's time, place, and values. Because Western culture has been profoundly shaped by texts that are inherently informed by biblical issues, such texts are widely taught in state institutions of higher education throughout the United States on the basis of their historicity and canonicity—not in order to proselytize.

Along the periphery of this phenomenon are many related issues: literary appreciation and study as vital to college students' ability to read, think, and write critically with higher-order reasoning, to understand and engage Western culture with sophistication and ease, and to holistically develop crucial skills that are transferable to any major, career, or life stage. Also tangential is much research on the controversies of biblical education as proselytization in public settings, the relationships between character formation and literary study in K-12 settings, the role of biblically-informed literature in faith-based college institutions, the tensions surrounding appreciation of literary works taught as representations of absolute truth, the spiritual formation of college students in various academic disciplines, and more. No research, however, considers the phenomenon of this unique yet extraordinarily common confluence of factors: the experience college students have at a public institution when studying biblical or biblically-informed literary texts as cultural documents.

Literary Study as a General Education Requirement in State Colleges

Across majors and academic disciplines in state institutions throughout the nation, literature appreciation is a foundational requirement in the general education core of most

associate's and bachelor's degree programs. Effective in the fall semester of 2011 in Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) higher education institutions, every institution in the system shares a common undergraduate general education core curriculum comprised of 41 semester hours for baccalaureate degrees and associate degrees in both arts and sciences programs (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018). Within that core, students must take nine semester hours in humanities and fine arts, at least three semester hours of which must be literature appreciation coursework; students may opt to take literature appreciation coursework for the other remaining six hours, as well, for a potential total of nine semester hours (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018). Even if students decide to fulfill part of the requirements with straight humanities coursework, a significant portion of that coursework will involve literature appreciation, as well (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018). In order to fulfill those requirements, students have a variety of introductory literary surveys from which to choose, including but not limited to some variation of the first and second halves of the following three semester hour courses, respectively: World Literature, American Literature, and British Literature (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018). Depending upon an institution's individual offerings, Children's Literature and African-American Literature may also be available.

Relative to that institution's organization of course offerings into academic disciplines, these introductory surveys to literature may be offered under the auspices of a literature or language department, a liberal arts core, a humanities program, or even a cultural studies division (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018). Such is the case in state colleges throughout the United States, as literature appreciation and study are regarded as critical in the development of the college student and future employee.

Literary Study Increasingly Devalued as a General Education Requirement

Although introductory survey courses in literature and humanities are part of the general education core of state colleges across majors, even in academic disciplines in business, medicine, science, and technology, such courses are increasingly devalued (Ferrero, 2011; Munson, 2011; Vail, 2001). In pursuing what some may regard as a more “practical” course of study emphasizing technology or other disciplines seemingly removed from the humanities, literary study is often viewed as impractical to the goals of education and preparation for a career (Ferrero, 2011; Munson, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Vail, 2001).

A challenging discipline in which to teach, literature appreciation also represents a sometimes difficult course of study for instructors, as Stallworth et al. (2006) reported. Although instructors of literature (both within the English discipline and beyond) often appreciate the exposure to other voices and viewpoints that literature study encourages, they either felt ill-equipped to teach effectively in the discipline or felt that their primary stakeholders (administrators and students) would not support their desires.

Even if supported, some instructors find literature instruction challenging as well, as Gordon (2012) explored in his research. Because literature appreciation involves so many dimensions of the learning process, in “literary English teaching, this [ability] comprises attention to micro and macro aspects concurrently, for example, through attention to individual texts concurrent with consideration of conceptions of readers and reading” (p. 375). Attending to the “micro and macro aspects concurrently” (Gordon, 2012, p. 375) of a literary piece illustrates the inherent complexities involved in teaching and learning literature appreciation. Beliaeva (2009) similarly lamented that because the number of students in college who have not deeply

engaged in literature of “high artistic quality” continues to rise, the methodology of literature appreciation needs deeper attention.

Literature Appreciation as Essential to the College Experience across Disciplines

The research overwhelmingly indicates that facilitating literature appreciation is critical to students’ ability to think critically, to demonstrate higher-order reasoning, to independently pursue learning for a lifetime, and to develop life skills that translate well into other majors and career paths (Elliot, 2002; Ferrero, 2011; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Sanacore, 2013; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001).

While Sanacore (2013) reported literary study as central to literacy and lifetime learning, for example, Treble (2009) discovered that incorporating literature appreciation into all disciplines was crucial to reinvigorating the broader culture of an entire school, inspiring students as well as faculty to pursue learning even for its intangible rewards. Similarly, Locke and Cleary (2011) concluded that literary engagement was irreplaceable in students’ cultivation of critical literacies—higher-order reasoning skills central to effective engagement with the intellectual challenges of college and career.

Even beyond the study of literature for its own innate rewards, others encourage the cultivation of literature appreciation as a path to improving cross-disciplinary achievement (Gordon, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Youssef, 2010). As Youssef (2010) emphasized, for example, engaging students with the “great books” of literature is critical, as the “implications in praxis will extend beyond the discipline of literature to other disciplines in college teaching” (p. 28). As Youssef (2010) further explains, the study of literature helps students better grasp how to analyze the rhetorical claims, textual evidence, and themes of texts in other academic disciplines, as well.

Although various research studies tout the exportable value of literature appreciation into other areas of college, career, and life itself (Mulcahy, 2009; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001; Van Brummelen, 2002), others focus primarily on trends in student engagement, blended learning, and other strategies as they relate to literature appreciation (Beeghly, 2005; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Ostenson & Gleason Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Senechal, 2011). Nonetheless useful, however, are those studies that explore what may contribute to a student's meaningful engagement with literary works, especially those classic works of art.

Senechal (2011) encourages faculty to employ neither instructional practice that is too prescriptive in its pedagogical practice nor too open in having students select their own reading lists but rather to “let the strategies serve literature” (p. 52). While Ostenson and Gleason Sutton (2011) employed digital literacies and discussion questions to “invite students to have meaningful experiences” (p. 42) with canonical literary works, Pace (2003) posited that even pessimistic or negative reactions by students to literary works still highlight humanity and human experience if that commentary is incorporated into class as corollary text. Among many disciplines, as Beeghly (2005) notes, literature has that unique capacity to ignite the grand conversations that should characterize the college experience.

In studying the debate surrounding how students engage in literature-based courses, Macken-Horarick and Morgan (2008) point to more significant issues of how “literary study has had to compete with a broader range of texts” (p. 22) that are often considered more culturally important in contemporary communication. Furthermore, Billington and Sperlinger (2011) investigate how the perceived value of literature appreciation among members of faculty and administration in higher education reflect similar but broader issues involving the “looming

turbulence in higher education” (p. 515). Indeed, although much research (Mulcahy, 2009; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001; Van Brummelen, 2002) explores literature appreciation as central to preparing for college, career, and life itself, little research considers what students in humanities and literature courses in state colleges regard as the significance of their experience—and no research considers how they experience biblically-informed literary texts presented simply as cultural documents.

Community based activities that involve literature, perhaps most recently identified in the scholarship as “literature circles,” are increasing as a trend in the study of literature appreciation (Azmi, 2013; Bernadowski, 2013; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010; Bromley, et al., 2014; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Fredricks, 2012; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Stewart, 2009; Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2012; Whittaker, 2012; Whittingham, 2013). Taught in the context of a variety of courses, the relationship between literature appreciation and literature circles is suggested to improve what Azmi (2013) calls college students’ “soft skills” (p. 8), such as being more creative, thinking more critically, and moving from beyond rote reaction to literature to more independent thought.

Not only does Sanacore (2013) regard literature circles as vital in facilitating college students’ ability to pace their reading and become more reflective practitioners, but Bernadowski (2013) found that literature circles help students survey content more effectively and thus improve their general attitude toward reading literature.

The connection between cultural relevance and literature appreciation has also been made through literature circles. For example, in her qualitative exploration of 23 literary discussions conducted by undergraduate and even graduate literature students over the course of five semesters, Heineke (2014) discovered that “culturally relevant” (p. 117) literature circles helped

education majors better explore and articulate their understanding of diverse English language learners. Fredericks (2012) similarly found that what she termed “culturally responsive EFL critical literature circles” (p. 494) encouraged group members to articulate their personal reactions to their own life struggles as refugees—wartime experiences, ethnic persecution, and racial discrimination in America.

In terms of diversity, Thein et al. (2012) pinpoint how cultural difference—even expressed as subtly as social identity within one racial group—affects college students’ confidence in the very act of literary analysis. In their case study of one six-week literature circle, they explored how four white students from different social and economic strata responded to Dorothy Allison’s novel entitled *Bastard Out of South Carolina*. Findings include an emphasis on how social class difference impacts literature analysis and appreciation in the college classroom (Thein et al., 2012).

Indeed, across multiple studies of how literature circles impact literature appreciation, one common denominator involves the articulation of difference, whether in terms of students’ degree of college preparation (Elhess & Eghbert, 2015; Whittaker, 2012) or facility in interacting with literature (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010; Levy, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011).

Literary Study and Educational Technology

Given the manner in which the digital age has ushered in an increasingly intense experience with social networks and technology-based instruction, it is no surprise to also find overlap in the development of trends in literary study and the way that development connects to digital literacy (Bromley, et al., 2014; Edmondson, 2012; Stewart, 2009; Whittingham, 2013). Furthermore, as Choi and Piro (2009) have emphasized, one way to bolster the role of the humanities, such as literature, within education is to expand its study within “new contexts of

technology and globalization” (p. 27). As building a learning community is often a goal in courses which employ literary study, educational technologies offer unique advantages and challenges in encouraging student interaction with classmates and faculty.

As Trudeau (2005) has emphasized in his study of e-based discussion tools, any course which encourages textual analysis and appreciation depends heavily upon the need for students to read assigned texts before class and discuss texts in class. Thus, as Trudeau (2005) argues, it is vital for instructors to “create a structure that encourages and even permits pre-class preparation” (p. 291). According to Trudeau (2005),

When the atmosphere is cordial, when students learn that all humans—even students, let alone professors—make mistakes but survive, we eventually create a context in which even shy and/or struggling students begin to feel that it’s okay to participate. My experience suggests that once participation during class becomes the norm, student preparation for class becomes rational and, in their self-interest, and they will now act accordingly, if they can. (p. 291)

Meskill (1997) cites similar advantages to those of Trudeau (2005) in employing electronic media in a response-based community for teaching and learning literary texts. In her qualitative study on student discourse among undergraduates exploring the Beat poets (such as Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Ferlinghetti), results suggested that online collaboration and student response in literary study is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that of face-to-face interactions.

As Meskill (1997) further explains, online literary communities offer “a place for students to explore and make meaning about what they read in a variety of formats and allows for the kind of collaborative exchanges valued by response-based practices” (p. 15).

Farabaugh's (2007) study further complements Meskill's (1997) assessment, as her study of wiki-based discussion groups in Shakespeare courses suggests that such e-based communities offer "an ideal platform" (p. 41) for facilitating student-centered language awareness specifically in the domain of literary study. Arikan (2008) conducted a content analysis of web-based discussions groups used specifically in college American and British literature courses—but in this case, as a purely optional activity. Interested in exploring how students opted to use the groups, if at all, "the application sought ways to leave students on their own with little guidance coming from the instructor" (Arikan, 2008, p. 24). In this study, Arikan (2008) found that the discussion groups were primarily used for formal interaction among the students, rather than the communal construction of meaning and interpretation regarding literary texts. Arikan (2008) posits that this result may be the consequence of either of two possibilities: "[E]ither the students were not used to working in this new medium or traditional educational habits which do not encourage learners to collaborate affected the nature of their interaction within this new medium" (p. 24).

Rosenthal's (2011) qualitative study considers how online communities within courses which involve literature appreciation give instructors the option to reexamine old schema and essentially reinvent pedagogical practice for their students. Noticing how persistently students engaged in their communal construction of meaning from the online discussion postings she had created, Rosenthal (2011) analyzed their commentary using a system that codes and then organizes idea construction into discrete units based on purpose. As Rosenthal (2011) observes of her literature students,

As a professor of writing, I could not help but notice that the writing students did in electronic forums (both posts and blogs), knowing that their classmates would

read and respond, seemed to be better articulated expressions of their thinking than I had received in more formal papers directed to me in other courses. There is a comfort level that students seem to experience in expressing themselves in an online environment. (p. 26)

Miyazoe and Anderson's (2011) study explored posts and blogs, as did Rosenthal's (2011), but also considered wikis—a frequent form of communal online writing in college-level literary courses. Furthermore, the students in this study considered literature within the context of English as a foreign language course. Results of the qualitative textual analysis of all three forms of communal electronic writing activities revealed progress in students' ability to differentiate between distinct types of style and tone in literary readings, a conceptual ability that instructors may find challenging to facilitate even without the barrier of English as a foreign language (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010).

Miyazoe and Anderson's (2011) study seems to confirm similar findings regarding the benefits of online writing communities in literature courses, such as Coffey's (2012) integration of technology into peer-led, small group discussion of literary topics. Benefits included the ability to construct meaning with a larger audience, as well as to connect readers in interactions beyond a face-to-face or even online literary course, as the format is generally asynchronous (Coffey, 2012). Of special note is Coffey's (2012) observation that e-based literature discussions allow for an unexpected advantage: "Transcripts of threaded discussions or online chats can be saved and/or printed and offer teachers and students an opportunity to reflect and analyze their discussions" (p. 399).

Larson (2009) similarly posits that even when discussions about literature are initially awkward or lack coherence and unity, giving students transcripts of the actual discussions and

having them evaluate them can be a useful tool in improving future literary interaction. Along similar lines of exploration, Brown (2011) employs Emily Dickinson's poetic observation ("I dwell in Possibility—A fairer House than Prose—") of the potentials in poetry "as a metaphor for the possibilities of information and communication technologies over written modes of expression" (p. 1).

Of note and similarity to Larson's (2009) and Coffey's (2012) findings is Brown's (2011) discovery that such electronic communities of learning not only broaden the experiential aspect of interacting with texts, but inclusion of such transcripts in e-portfolio development may further demonstrate the students' learning and preparation for the workplace—especially among adult learners.

The opportunity to build students' ability to foster social capital through leading online class discussions is the focus of Schoenacher's (2009) study. As Schoenacher (2009) explains, when students are tasked with the potentially intimidating prospect of launching their own discussions among peers, the "results are that they gain much more than a passing grade. Students learn that interactions with their classmates can be a source of valuable information" (p. 291). Often overlooked in studies of the impact of using such digital literacies in discussion groups, Schoenacher (2009) concludes that online discussion that is student-led is one "excellent tool for promoting the building of social capital skills and information sharing" (p. 299)—a useful skill in both college and career preparation.

Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart (2012) considered how preservice literature and language arts teachers in college literature courses may employ electronic platforms to make literary analysis more "authentic" (p. 343). Using Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* as the focal point for this collaboration, Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart (2012) established a collaborative community

of three individuals: the preservice teacher, the teaching mentor, and the professor in order to “find and develop best practice in academic community building among a community of students” (p. 346). Of particular note is Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart’s (2012) finding that just this sort of collaborative literary response enables teachers to “honor student voices in an effort to prepare students for the academic writing demands of college classrooms” (p. 351).

Just as powerful is the implication advanced by Alsup, Brockman, Bush, and Letcher (2011) that the traditional literacies of reading and writing assignments are being enhanced—not replaced—by such technological practice. Nonetheless, as Smith and Dobson (2011) emphasize in their quantitative study of 21st century literacies and literature appreciation, as new forms of communication increasingly redefine literacy and what it means to be interact and engage with the literary text as a construct, all who engage in language arts instruction should be as engaged in digital literacies.

Literature Appreciation as Vital for Developing Cultural Literacy

Generally offered at the sophomore level, literature survey courses are just that—they are surveys designed to expose students to the trends and currents of culture (history, the arts, philosophy, linguistics, social movements) through the stylized lens of literary texts. Because the nature of such courses requires that students study texts which document the culture of our own Western heritage and value system, these texts invariably explore issues related to a primary influence in our culture—the Bible. In our own state institution, our primary text for all Humanities courses is decidedly secular and yet names the Bible as the most influential document of our culture (Cunningham & Reich, 2010).

So, not only is literature appreciation of classical works vital for developing cultural literacy, but a cursory literary appreciation of the Bible and, by extension, biblically-informed

works is crucial for being able to function with academic sophistication and ease in modern culture. Most students enrolled in the courses in which these works are taught are non-English majors, simply fulfilling a general education requirement, so their exposure to these classic works is potentially very brief. And, anecdotally speaking, their exposure to biblically-informed works or even the Bible itself is even more abbreviated.

In their highly respected secular text used by literature and humanities college students in public higher educations throughout Tennessee and the United States, Cunningham and Reich (2010) make the following claim about the influence of the Bible:

One fundamental issue about the Bible must be emphasized: Israel, subsequent Jewish history, and the Christian world have made the Bible *the* central document not only for worship and the rule of faith but also as a moral guide and anchor for ethical and religious stability. The Bible, directly and indirectly, has shaped our law, literature, language, ethics, and social outlook. It permeates our cultureThe Bible is not a philosophical treatise; it is a sacred book. It is, nonetheless, a book that contains ideas; those ideas have enormously influenced the way we think and the way we look at our world. (p. 135)

Given that fundamental assumption, much research has been dedicated to exploring the influence of biblical education on students in both public and private institutions. In a strongly postmodern climate of education, exploration of the Bible is increasingly more marginalized, especially in public institutions—and to their detriment.

In their contributions to this consideration, Webster, Runions, Lopez, McGinn, Penner, and Howell (2012) explore learning outcomes for students studying biblical concepts in college-level liberal arts courses. In short, their analysis includes that studying biblical concepts can not

only “develop the critical reading and writing skills that are the hallmark of undergraduate education” (Webster et al., 2012, p. 262), but that these skills may even be “furthered by not bracketing from study the normative truth claims in the texts and instead strategically and critically encouraging the identity work and religious seeking associated with religious uses of these texts” (Webster et al., 2012, p. 262).

As Manzo (2007) argues, well beyond the traditional proselytizing setting of a seminary or faith-based institution, understanding scripture is essential for grasping even our most secular dimensions of modern culture, for students must “understand biblical content, particularly as it relates to historical documents and events, literature and the arts, and even current events, if they are to be fully educated” (p. 25). Consequently, Manzo (2007) notes, illiteracy of the Bible and, by extension, of biblically-informed literature is not simply a religious concern or issue, but rather a “civic problem with political consequences” (p. 26). Feinberg (2014) further contends that teaching biblical content, themes, and motifs in secular institutions goes straight to the core of what he terms “the unique mission of public education” (p. 394). Similarly, in his study, Delfra (2005) argues that even a narrative approach to an explicitly religious education should include both biblical narratives, as well as secular literature, for so much of Western literature, especially, is built upon biblical motifs and themes: “Non-sacred literature is used to augment the Christian revelation and cultivate students' minds and imaginations to engage with narrative toward an explicitly catechetical end” (p. 348).

Marshall (2010) further asserts that biblical illiteracy has broader consequences beyond a student's inability to engage meaningfully with culture because such underexposure threatens the very foundations of our educational system: “History and sociology are deeply imprinted with religious roles, perhaps nowhere more so than in the field of education” (p. 285). Moreover, one

may regard the history of biblical practice to be, in one sense, the very history of public education itself, as a great deal of contemporary pedagogical practice arose from the traditions of the medieval religious world and its contemporaries—education once being one of the functions of the church (Gutek, 2011; Marshall, 2010). Perhaps Yale’s Professor Emeritus of Ecclesiastical History, Roland Bainton (1964), summarily expressed it best in his commentary on the influence of the Bible and Christianity on Western culture:

The history of Christianity is inseparable from the history of Western culture and of Western society. For almost a score of centuries Christian beliefs, principles, and ideals have colored the thoughts and feelings of Western man. The traditions and practices have left an indelible impress not only on developments of purely religious interest, but on virtually the total endeavor of man. This has been manifest in art and literature, science and law, politics and economics, and, as well, in love and war. Indeed, the indirect and unconscious influence Christianity has often exercised in avowedly secular matters—social, intellectual, and institutional—affords striking proof of the dynamic forces that have been generated by the faith over the millenniums. Even those who have contested its claims and rejected its tenets have been affected by what they opposed. Whatever our beliefs, all of us today are inevitable heirs to this abundant legacy; and it is impossible to understand the cultural heritage that sustains and conditions our lives without considering the contributions of Christianity. (p. 128)

Interestingly, even courses which explore literature and culture through the lens of popular culture and postmodernism depend upon students’ rigorous understanding of the foundations of Western culture and its associative ethical assumptions, as Bertonneau (2010) explains in his

background to the study: “Provoking students to see that they are not free from moral and material causality figured centrally in my plan for the semester” (p. 429).

Literature Appreciation Coursework as Worldview Education

In many academic disciplines such as science or history, inclusion of the Bible and biblical concepts seems to lead to many frenzied debates—even if its inclusion is purely for the purpose of exposing students to another viewpoint. In literature appreciation, however, especially on college campuses, the issue seems to raise less controversy, and this is ironic, for literature appreciation is inherently and often overtly worldview education. In fact, one of the most rewarding dimensions of being a literature professor is the opportunity to impart virtues and values through story that students might not otherwise as readily apprehend. As Van Brummelen (2002) suggests, through the exploration of literature, students “become committed to certain values” (p. 504), whatever those values may be.

In fact, so effective are literary works or fictions at introducing truths through the “back door” of readers’ intellect, emotional state, and psyche, that even Jesus used story-making through His parables to engage and even disarm otherwise complacent or potentially hostile members of His audiences throughout the Gospels. As Newell (2009) suggested in his study, even Jesus’ historical role as a teacher in his rabbinical context points to his status as a worldview educator of the most significant sort. Accordingly, Newell (2009) references the importance of the Bible and biblically-informed texts as crucial elements of a thoroughly collegiate course of study in secular institutions because “Jesus as worldview educator shows us that teachers of all specialties function as religious educators” (p. 151).

Furthermore, as Bowen (2011) found, experiencing literature cognitively invariably involves experiencing literature affectively; a student’s imaginative processes perhaps build

schemata so that they may be open not only to new literary concepts but to very truth: “Both affective and cognitive learning can take place as students become participants in a liturgical performance, rather than merely the audience at a reading” (p. 51).

Perhaps a fundamental misunderstanding of what Van Brummelen (2002) calls the misnomer of “neutral curriculum” lies at the heart of this gap in the literature, for little research makes connections between how college literature students experience the Bible or biblically influenced texts, and none point to that phenomenon specifically within the context of public institutions. Although a curriculum “free” from values is practically celebrated on many secular campuses as the product of a sophisticated intellect, the reality is well described by Knight (2006) who describes such a situation as actually being “faced with the frightful task of producing values out of nothing” (p. 79).

Despite the overarching claims of postmodernism, there is no such thing as a “neutral curriculum,” especially in literary study. Presumably, the widespread and false belief that literature study is a neutral curriculum makes possible the ongoing reality that literature and humanities appreciation include a great deal of theological study without the typical controversy present in, for example, science classes that teach creation or history classes that mention the possibility of God’s sovereignty. Essentially, the implicit message of a neutral curriculum is that instructors should teach, but teach nothing as an absolute, as an idea, or as a value—especially on a public campus. Problematic about this theory of curriculum is that it in itself is an absolute, so much so that any educator adopting this stance perpetuates a belief system that upholds neutrality as an absolute truth.

Even beyond that self-contradicting aspect of the term, however, is what Van Brummelen (2002) calls subtle indoctrination: by “aiming for a neutral curriculum, they [educators]

indoctrinate students into thinking that values are either unimportant or can be chosen at will” (p. 3). Even if teachers and students could somehow achieve the impossible, presenting and then absorbing curriculum objectively detached from any worldview, philosophy, value system, or ideology, as Van Brummelen (2002) insists, the curriculum would only reach teachers and students after being filtered through many curriculum players at higher institutional levels who are anything but neutral (p. 4). Furthermore, good teachers are “reflective practitioners” (Van Brummelen, 2002, p. 5) who care enough to select the best materials for their students: “They consider, choose, adapt—and reject—parts of guides, textbooks, and other resources” (Van Brummelen, 2002, p. 5).

Even when not directly acknowledging the inherently value-laden nature of literary study, educational researchers from secular and faith-based backgrounds alike seem to peripherally and even intuitively recognize this phenomenon (Cook, 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Stallworth et al., 2006). For example, although their research does not reference biblical worldviews, Stallworth et al. (2006) convey literature’s power to inspire adult learners to adopt new and different perspectives about their core values and beliefs; thus, they insist that “although literature is only one strand of the English language arts curriculum, it is at the heart of everything English language arts teachers do in the classroom” (Stallworth et al., 2006, p. 478).

Similarly, Gallagher and Lundin (1989) argue that “by understanding that literature as one of the ways that human beings cultivate the potentials of God’s creation, we can see literature’s universal nature” (p. 60). Furthermore, in Bowen’s (2010) study of what she has termed the necessity of “epistemological humility” (p. 7) in the humanities classroom of faith-based institutions, she explores how different professors find the locus of intellectual mastery in the power of story, narrative imagination—both vehicles for developing moral empathy.

Along similar paths of investigation, Cook (2011) considered how Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory impacts literature-based instruction, noting how simply reading literature is an action that invites learners in faith-based and public institutions to explore the essential questions of mankind and his significance in the cosmos. Using as an analogy a passage from C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* in which Aslan breathes and sings the world into existence, Cook (2011) thus invites literature instructors to explore literature's power with students in four steps: "Awake. Love. Think. Speak" (p. 10). Regardless of its context within a public educational setting or a faith-based one, a "literary work belongs to God's created world; it is not an independent cosmos created only for pleasure" (Gallagher & Lundin, 1989, p. 59).

Other than the authoritative, God-breathed Word that is scripture, literary text has no power in and of itself to redeem, yet the student who reads literature that is biblically influenced is partaking in God's creation; and that act itself, that phenomenon, is one that is not being studied specifically, despite its frequency. This gap is both significant and unfortunate, regardless of the setting, as Van Brummelen (2002) emphasized, for teaching, studying, and reading literature innately gives rise to the essential questions of mankind—questions that find resolution only in Christ (whether or not instructors are legally permitted to state this as such):

How is human nature portrayed? Are people basically good, or are they born with a bias toward sin? Are people locked in deterministic patterns, or are they shown to be able to change? What is the cause of evil or justice? Is there ultimately hope or meaning? If so, what is its source? (p. 508)

What Van Brummelen (2002) addresses, then, is the periphery around which most research in this review of the literature flows, and for the Christian professor of literature in a

secular college classroom, such research begs the question of how students experience literature informed by the principles of a biblical worldview.

Literature Study and Character Formation in K-12 Settings and Faith-Based Colleges

Although the research is conspicuously silent on the specific phenomenon of how public college students experience literature that is biblically-informed, there exists research on the “cousins” of that phenomenon: the relationship between literary study and character formation, spiritual literacy, and the shaping of values and ethics in K-12 settings (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman et al., 2011; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013), and in faith-based college settings (Binkley, 2007; Ellenwood, 2006; Freeman et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012), and the ironic lament of how biblical content in public college settings is equated to “narrow-mindedness” (Rice, 2008; Carter, 2007).

At its broadest levels, much academic conversation has centered around how the concept of literary study and its relationship to ethical formation and empathy development should be central to the educational experience (Booth, 1988; Campbell, 1997; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freire, 1993; Freire, 1985)—although not in the context of public college coursework involving literary texts that are biblically-informed. Freire (1985) has argued exploring literature is a strategy that cannot be separated from the corresponding emphasis on character formation, social justice, and ethics. In his seminal work entitled *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth (1988) suggests that the central plot of all great literature emerges from the “characters’ efforts to face moral choices” (p. 187) and that in “tracing those efforts, we readers stretch our own capacities for thinking about how life should be lived, as we join those more elevated judges, the implied authors” (p. 187). Booth (1988) comments that

until relatively recently in our own cultural history, those who discussed literary characters were inevitably incorporating ethics:

[E]veryone who talked about character would have assumed . . . that one could make distinctions among good and bad characters—whether in literature or life—and that the ultimate point in talking about character was to improve it, to save one’s soul To talk of character or characters at all was of course to use evaluative language People generally assumed as a corollary that anyone’s character could be genuinely corrupted or improved through contact with literary characters. (p. 230)

At a foundational level, Ghabanchi and Doost (2012) have demonstrated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and literary appreciation in their study of ninety college students enrolled in English literature; whether that relationship is correlative or causal, however, is not explored. Fostering emotional intelligence through literary study of biblically-informed works has also been investigated within the context of Christian higher education (Gliebe, 2012) but not within the context of a public institution of higher education.

In their study, White and Haberling (2006) argue that “questions of character ought to be at the very center of teaching and learning in literature classrooms” (p. 2). They further suggest that instructors of literature are in a unique context in which they can help students “cultivate concern for character by enriching students’ understanding of and responses to the lives and decisions of literary characters” (White & Haberling, 2006, p. 2). Such inquiry into literary study as character education, White and Haberling (2006) explain, is their hopeful response to an increasing level of bullying and violence in our culture.

In somewhat similar fashion, Marable et al (2010) used qualitative methods to investigate literary study in college students as a means of impacting their attitudes about people who have disabilities. Their analysis produced results revealing a significant increase in positive perceptions of people with disabilities, include respect, deeper insight, and empathy. As one teacher candidate enrolled in the course commented on her interactions with literature with the goal of instilling deeper empathy, “As an upcoming teacher, I really saw the problems that a child with disabilities could cause within a family; the added stress they may have. I want to make sure that I take that into consideration when I teach” (Marable et al., 2010, p. 150). Similarly, another student described developing insight into the complexities of disability through reading literature, probing “questions inside of me that I would have never considered thinking about” (Marable et al., 2010, p. 149). Drawing a parallel between literature-based character education in K-12 settings and the college classroom, Freeman et al. (2011) suggest that incorporating children’s literary works into college literature courses can “evoke emotional, aesthetic, and moral responses” (p. 3). Although this study does consider how adult students in public higher education institutions experience works with an often explicit moral vision, it in no way refers to biblically-informed classic works of literature—those works that form a large portion of the Western canon traditionally studied as part of any two or four-year general education core. Galda and Beach (2001) explore students’ social construction of meaning in interpreting literature, suggesting that they essentially construct texts as cultural worlds—a finding with significance for how readers might perhaps experience literary study:

Moving beyond a focus on individual characters to a consideration of the systems that shape the characters, the author’s construction of them, and the readers themselves can

help readers consider how lives reflect social forces and how individuals can influence these taken-for-granted practices. (p. 67)

Weaver (1994) posits that the characters in a literary work can “assume almost the same potential for influencing the reader as real people” (pp. 33-34). Ellenwood (2006) similarly considered the potential connections between literary exploration and spiritual formation but only in the context of ethics education. Using Lawrence Kohlberg’s theories of cognitive moral development as his framework, Ellenwood’s (2006) research explores the span of literature-based character education from the quintessential McGuffey primer to the modern novel. Ellenwood (2006) found that teaching and/or learning about a literary work inherently involves spiritual exploration, yet again that experience is only studied within the framework of good behavior and not biblical literacy: “The experiences of people with good character as laid out in works of literature and biography are a good tool for teaching morality to students” (p. 21). Leal’s (1999) study further correlates well with Ellenwood’s (2006) research in this following finding:

In addition to examining literary traits, students became quite engaged not only in discussing character traits demonstrated by the book characters, but also went on to discuss these character traits in their own lives. Teachers expressed delight to see students applying their understanding about different character traits to personal situations, for instance acknowledging when they have and have not been respectful to one another. (p. 245)

Krakowiak and Oliver’s (2012) research focus seems to negate even that finding, as they assert that while “good characters are enjoyed because they are well liked, bad characters . . . are equally as transporting, suspenseful, and thus cognitively engaging as other characters” (p. 117).

Such a discrepancy in results illuminates an important point: when moral behavior and spiritual formation are explored apart from a logical, cohesive, and consistent worldview of biblical truth, the pursuit occurs in an intellectual and ethical vacuum.

As Gutek (2011) aptly expresses it, truth is an “eternally stable and unchanging realm of ideas, or pure concepts” (p. 39). Jeynes (2009) does explicitly explore biblical literacy, noting the correlation between biblical knowledge and academic achievement and good behavior in elementary and secondary settings. Although not geared toward a college setting, Jeynes’ (2009) study does consider the impact of biblical literacy in both public and faith-based settings, concluding that biblical exposure which is often part of a literary arts curriculum is associated with positive outcomes across the board.

When biblical concepts imparted through texts are considered within a state college setting, the research often reflects a common perception among faculty that the “academy” and “faith” are mutually exclusive categories. This bias seems common even when dealing with those Judeo-Christian literary or philosophical ideas that have been canonized because they comprise a significant portion of our cultural heritage in the humanities.

For example, in his research included in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Rice (2008) relates the “narrow-mindedness” of students who are not academically prepared for college with their Baptist faith, insisting that they must be “saved” from “narrow-mindedness” before continuing in academia. Carter (2007) advances a similar concern, but more specifically within the context of college English coursework. In her scholarly article entitled “Living Inside the Bible (Belt),” Carter (2007) researches the challenges Christian students assume when they enroll in what she calls “the academy”: those public higher educational institutions representing a value system she believes is intellectually irreconcilable with Christianity. Describing her own

experience as a professor of English at a state institution in Texas, Carter (2007) explains that the “evangelical Christianity with which a number of my students most identify functions— rhetorically, ideologically, and practically—in ways that appear completely and irreconcilably at odds with my pedagogical and scholarly goals” (p. 572).

Given my own anecdotal experience as a college professor of English and Humanities in a state institution and those of my peers in similar contexts, Carter’s (2007) stance is a common one. In fact, the overwhelming perception among faculty in public institutions that biblical concepts and academic sophistication are somehow incompatible may partially explain the gap in the literature concerning how students experience biblically-informed literature texts when presented as mere cultural documents.

It was just this type of cultural deficiency which Schaeffer (1981) explored in his work entitled *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts* when he lamented that these gaps have been “relegated to the bottom drawer of Christian consciousness” (p. 16): such is the source of “much bitter fruit, taking us out of touch with the world God has made, with the culture in which we live, and making us ineffectual in that culture” (Schaeffer, 1981, p. 16).

Such a gap is concerning, as the almost frenzied debate in more recent literature indicates that the culture of higher education is desperate for direction in fostering ethical, moral, and character development among all of its participants (Bowen, 2008; Bunch, 2005; Chickering, 2010; Dungy, 2012; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jones, Webb, & Neumann, 2008; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Langer et al., 2010; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O’Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Rabin & Smith, 2013; Reason, 2011; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Wartell, 2013).

Summary

Chapter Two first offered a general overview of the phenomenon of the experience college students have when studying biblical or biblically-informed texts as cultural documents in a public institution. Next, the theoretical framework of the study was articulated, specifically exploring Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning, Lewis' (1966) notion of literary apologetics, Piaget's (1977) theory of cognitive stage development, Knowles' (1984) assumptions about andragogy, and Tolkien's (1965) literary theory of "mythopoeia." Finally, the related literature was reviewed in detail, including such themes as the devaluation of literary study, how literary appreciation is considered vital to the college experience, the role of technological innovation in literary study, cultural literacy and its connections to literary appreciation, literary study as worldview education, the relationship between literature and character formation in K-12 settings and faith-based colleges, and more.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter details the methodology of this study, including the procedures, research design, and analysis. This study is a transcendental phenomenology of how public college students experience biblically-informed literature taught only as cultural documents. To meet state general education requirements for humanities, most public college students take one or more literary survey courses. Such coursework is grounded in the study of literary texts—whether in the context of world literature, cultural studies, humanities, and more. To explore literature is to explore worldviews, many of them inherently biblical in nature. Although taught to expose students to culture and history and not to proselytize them, much canonical literature in such courses is biblically-informed, including the Bible itself.

For Christian professors of literature and humanities in state colleges, it is important to understand how students experience biblical or biblically-informed texts when they are presented simply as significant works of literature, as mere documents of a culture's time, place, and values. Because Western culture has been profoundly shaped by texts that are inherently informed by biblical issues, such texts are widely taught in state institutions of higher education throughout the United States on the basis of their historicity and canonicity—not in order to proselytize.

Design

For the purposes of this study's methodology, a qualitative research design was employed; the specific design was a transcendental phenomenology. Because this study focused on the common experiences of college freshmen and sophomores in a state institution who study biblically-informed literary works for the purpose of cultural exploration, the phenomenological

research design lent itself especially well to the central concerns of this project—the lived experiences of a specific group of participants. As Moustakas (1994) explains, phenomenology is the “*first* method of knowledge because it begins with ‘things themselves’ . . . [and] step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment” (p. 41). Essentially, as Moustakas (1994) emphasizes, phenomenology seeks to rationally achieve a “transcendental state” (p. 41) in which the experience of a phenomenon can be freshly explored and “not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience” (p. 41). Creswell (2013) further notes that “phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (pp. 57-58). Although phenomenological study involves several different approaches—hermeneutic, transcendental, consensual, and more—the transcendental approach was used, as its purpose best suited the concerns of this study. As Creswell (2013) explains, a transcendental approach within a phenomenological design is “focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (p. 80). As a primary source in the establishment of phenomenological design procedure, Moustakas (1994) offers similar observations. Because of the nature of the researcher’s potential involvement in the participant pool for this project, Moustakas’ (1994) recommendations regarding epoche, or bracketing oneself out of the study, make the transcendental approach especially appropriate as the intent of this design is to ensure that “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). In its relationship to human science inquiry, epoche is vital to “orient us toward looking before judging, and clearing a space within ourselves so that we can actually see what is before us and

in us” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). The central challenge of epoche, moreover, is to be as transparent as possible to ourselves, to “allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86).

Moreover, as Creswell (2013) further confirms, in a transcendental phenomenology, “investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (p. 81). As the two essential questions that drive the transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) further recommends the following two questions in developing the essential experience: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or experiences have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” (p. 72). Creswell (2013) further provides the rationale for designing a transcendental phenomenology around these two, essential questions: “Other open-ended questions may also be asked, but these two, especially, focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a textual and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (p. 82). As Moustakas (1994) emphasizes, the methods of preparation involved in formulating the questions involved in human research must make known more thoroughly the essential meaning of a human experience, must reveal the qualitative rather than the quantitative elements of that experience, must engage the “total self” (p. 105) of the participant, and must not seek prediction or causality but rather bring the experience to life through “careful, comprehensive descriptions” (p. 105).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural?

RQ2: What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)?

RQ3: What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation?

Setting: Chautauqua State (pseudonym)

The setting for this phenomenology was Chautauqua State (pseudonym), an institution of higher education in the Tennessee Board of Regents with an average yearly enrollment of 8,000 students. The Tennessee Board of Regents consists of 46 institutions with a combined annual enrollment of over 200,000 students, making it among the nation's largest systems of public higher education. Because freshmen and sophomores are required to take as few as three credits or as many as nine credits in order to fulfill their general education core in literature and humanities, all students will take coursework from the following core of fully transferable general education courses that meet those categorical requirements: Composition I and or II, English Literature I and/or II, American Literature I and/or II, World Literature I and/or II, Introduction to Humanities I and/or II, and African-American Literature (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018).

The demographics of the population from which my sample was drawn are as follows. During the course of the data collection, the headcount at this institution was 8,632 students. Of those students, 152 were Asian, 19 were American Indian, 1,009 were African American, 483 were Hispanic, 6,357 were white, 33 were unknown, 8 were Hawaiian Pacific Islander, and 301 were of two or more of the ethnic origins mentioned previously. In terms of age demographics, 15.8% were aged 17 years or younger, 37.3% were aged 18-20 years, 18.16% were 21-24 years,

18% were 25-34 years, 10.2% were 35-64 years, and .2% were over 64 years old. As for enrollment trends, 4,018 students were full-time, while 4,344 were part-time. Men comprised 1,775 of the full-time students, while women comprised 2,243 of full-time students. Of those who were enrolled part-time, 1,674 were men, and 2,670 were women.

Participants

Participants were college freshmen and sophomores enrolled in composition, literature, or humanities survey courses at Chautauqua State, as well as those who had completed those courses. The potential composition, literature, or humanities survey courses in which students may be enrolled include the following from TBR's common core of fully transferable general education courses:

- Composition I and/or II
- English Literature I and/or II
- American Literature I and/or II
- World Literature I and/or II
- Introduction to Humanities I and/or II
- African-American Literature (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2018)

Because the recommended sample size for a transcendental phenomenology varies considerably, the sample size for this study was 10 to 15 (precisely 13, ultimately) based upon an average of recommendations from a variety of definitive qualitative sources. While Dukes (1984) recommends three to 10 participants and Riemen (1986) recommends 10 participants, Polkinghorne (1989) recommends 10 to 25 participants. Creswell's (2013) recommendation, however, is to remember that "the intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information . . . but to elucidate the particular, the specific" (p. 82), so this transcendental

phenomenology involved an average of the participant numbers recommended by the experts (13 participants).

Broadly speaking, purposeful sampling was employed because of transcendental phenomenology's focus on the commonly lived experiences of a group of individuals. As Creswell (2013) explains, "The inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). More specifically, criterion sampling was employed as it ensures that all individuals involved in the study have experienced the phenomenon in question. Although appropriate criterion sampling ensures that participants are those who have experienced the phenomenon, maximum variation then varies the context widely to ensure such a difference in backgrounds so that the essence of the experience is strengthened. Because Creswell (2013) regards this approach as popular in qualitative research, the students in this study who were enrolled in the aforementioned courses were drawn from face-to-face courses, online courses, hybrid courses, and Regents Online Degree Program courses (other TBR institutions' students enrolled online through my home institution).

Moustakas (1994) regards the participants in research for a transcendental phenomenology as co-researchers because they essentially are the researcher's partner in defining the very essence of the phenomenon. As Moustakas (1994) explains, in recruiting and selecting participants for the study, the essential criteria are that the participants have experienced the phenomenon and are willing to participate in interview(s) which will be recorded and/or taped and included in a dissertation for publication. Employing these essential criteria, I recruited participants by sending out emails to students who had completed one or more sections of the 11 aforementioned courses. All students at the institution have at least two

official email addresses assigned them by the institution upon enrollment: a general email address related to the broader institution, and a web course management system email related to the specific classes in which they are enrolled. Students were sent recruitment emails through both channels (using the text which may be reviewed in Appendix A).

Among the students who met essential criteria in each semester (depending upon spring, fall, or summer enrollment), I sent emails out to elicit participants which described the risks, benefits, and the purpose of study as well as contact information via emails/addresses. Among students who voluntarily responded to the email, students who qualified for the study were contacted to further assess their interest and willingness to participate. As part of purposeful sampling, maximum variation sampling was employed (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) defines the term, maximum variation sampling involves “purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest” (p. 243). The essential purpose of this form of sampling is to not only document unusual variations that might surface in different contexts, but also to note any significant patterns that, as Patton (2002) phrases it, “cut across variations (cut through the noise of variation)” (p. 243). Such variation in the sample helps the researcher avoid “one-sidedness of representation of the topic” (Patton, 2002, p. 109).

Furthermore, because data collection instruments were created and field tested for the specific context of this study, a pre-study pilot focus group was held, using participants who fulfilled the essential criteria but who did not later participate in the actual study. These participants’ input on the piloted questions was then used to evaluate and accordingly revise the instruments for data collection (journaling, semi-structured interview, and focus groups). To ensure trustworthiness, the focus group in the pre-study pilot was formed in the exact way that the study participants were later identified. Purposeful sampling was employed to identify pilot

participants who fit the same criteria as the study participants who were later identified. As with the actual research participants, Moustakas (1994) asserts that the primary criterion is that the participants have experienced the phenomenon. To that end, I recruited pilot participants by sending out emails to students who had completed at least one of the 11 general education courses mentioned previously—those that employ literary texts. At Chautauqua State, students have two official email addresses—one institutional email and one based in the course management system, and each one was utilized to solicit participants. Participants formed a focus group, the members of which read, evaluated, and commented upon the relative value of the questions for journaling, semi-structured interview, and focus group data collection instruments. In turn, such responses were then employed, along with two content experts, to revise testing instruments, if needed (however, no revision was deemed necessary).

Ultimately, the sample for the phenomenology was comprised of 13 students whose demographic information is detailed in the table below:

Table 1.

Demographics of Chautauqua State Students in the Sample

Students	Gender	Race	Age Bracket	Number of 11 courses completed
Student 1	F	Caucasian	36-44 years	7
Student 2	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4
Student 3	F	Caucasian	46-55 years	2
Student 4	M	African-American	18-24 years	4
Student 5	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4
Student 6	F	Caucasian	18-24 years	2
Student 7	M	Caucasian	46-55 years	3
Student 8	M	Caucasian	46-55 years	2
Student 9	M	Hispanic	26-34 years	5
Student 10	F	Asian	26-34 years	6
Student 11	F	African-American	26-34 years	3
Student 12	F	Caucasian	26-34 years	6
Student 13	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4

Procedures

After my dissertation proposal was formally accepted via my work in EDUC 989 and successfully defended, the IRB application and all ancillary materials were submitted to Liberty's Institutional Review Board (IRB) via irb@liberty.edu. The IRB form for the institution where the study was conducted was also included. See Appendix B for IRB approval.

In continuing my role as researcher in this transcendental phenomenology, I used epoche to bracket myself out of the study (Moustakas, 1994). For the data collection portion of the study, validity and reliability were ensured by conducting a pre-study pilot focus group to evaluate the trustworthiness of the three methods of data collection: journaling, semi-structured interview questions, and focus group questions. I specified this particular sequence so that the journaling would give students a chance to reflect on their experiences of the phenomenon without the pressure of time constraint. The interviews followed next, as that sequence allowed students to freely reflect further in a "safe" atmosphere in which, as I repeatedly said to students, "all input is good input." Finally, the focus group was sequenced as last, for students' interactions with other students who had also journaled and been involved in the semi-structured interview brought a richness to the dialogue as students made further connections and raised new issues that might not have occurred in isolation.

Transcriptions of this pilot were made available to content analysts/experts who evaluated the entirety of the pilot results and concluded that no changes should be made to the journal prompts, semi-structured interview questions, and focus group questions. Once data collection instruments were validated by the pre-study pilot, the real data collection was launched with the public college students from Chautauqua State. See Appendix A for the participant recruitment letter/informed consent form .

After data were collected, the data analysis fulfilled Moustakas' (1994) recommendations which include phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesizing composite textural and structural descriptions. Atlas.ti software was employed to systematically gather and organize the qualitative data.

The Researcher's Role

An integral component of a transcendental phenomenology, "epoche" refers to the process by which the researcher brackets himself/herself out of the study by conveying his or her role in the study and thus the preexistent biases. In this study, I occupied a variety of roles: interviewer, transcriptionist of thick and rich descriptions, and analyzer of that information. I functioned as what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as a human instrument.

As the human instrument in this study, then, I bracketed myself out by intentionally setting aside all of my "prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). As Moustakas (1994) explains, "this is a difficult task and requires that we allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself" (p. 86). As mentioned previously, this bracketing requires the process of epoche (Moustakas, 1994), acknowledging my own experiences with this phenomenon and stating what Moustakas (1994) describes as "prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas" (p. 85). Such epoche reflections included that I am a tenured associate professor of English and Humanities; have taught full-time at the college level for more than 20 years; that my background combines literature and religion (M.A. in English and American Literature from UT, M.A. in Religion from Liberty; Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from Liberty); and that I am Christian and thus embrace a biblical worldview, although I never present literary texts in order to proselytize but rather encourage students to examine each text's merits independently.

Data Collection

In order to ensure reliability and validity, the journal questions, semi-structured interview questions, and focus group questions were formulated based on the research and input from peers and content experts. Using three methods of data collection, also known as data triangulation, helped establish the study's integrity and strength by allowing one to both combine and cross-check multiple sources of data (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2013) and Phillimore and Goodson (2004) also encourage this corroboration of evidence. Because the qualitative nature of transcendental phenomenology requires that participants examine phenomena "as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), data collection instruments were generated and field tested for the specific purposes of the study itself. Thus, a pre-study pilot focus group was conducted, using public college students who fulfilled the criteria but who were not in the actual study itself. Their input on the questions was then used to assess and revise the various data collection instruments (journaling, semi-structured interview, and focus groups), as needed (no revisions were requested). In order to ensure trustworthiness, the pre-study pilot focus group was formed in precisely the same way that the real participants were later identified. Purposeful sampling was used to identify public college students who fit the same criteria as the real participants who were later identified. As with the study participants, as referenced earlier, Moustakas (1994) explains that the essential criterion is that the participants have experienced the phenomenon. Thus, I recruited public college students for the pilot by sending out emails to students who had completed at least one of the 11 general education courses that employ literary texts centrally. At this institution, students are given two official email addresses—one general institutional email and one for the web-based course management system. Both were used to solicit participants. Participants then comprised a focus group, which was asked to read, evaluate, and comment

upon the efficacy of the questions for the journaling, semi-structured interview, and focus group data collection instruments. Those responses were then used, along with two content experts, to revise the instruments, as necessary. The content experts found that no revision was necessary.

Journaling

Before the public college students completed the semi-structured interview and their focus group interview, they journaled about their experiences of studying biblical or biblically-informed literary texts merely as cultural documents. As field documents, journals are considered a valid component of research (Creswell, 2013). Using Moustakas' (1994) emphasis on allowing a "phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself" (p. 86), reflective writing prompts (a copy is in Appendix C) were given to each participant to facilitate their exploration of the experience of the phenomenon itself. Journaling was presented first in the sequence for data collection to allow students to begin to reflect on their experience in preparation for the semi-structured interview. Also, a copy of the questions without the accompanying research citations is available in Appendix H.

1. Describe any previous experience you may have had with content that is from the Bible (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Franson, 1977; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; Lee, 2010; Maillet, 2014; Manzo, 2007; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pike, 2003; Pollak, 1974; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Syme, 1989; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013).

2. Describe your previous experience with reading and studying literature (Avni, 1970; Beeghly, 2005; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Dungy, 2012; Ferrero, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Munson, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Ostenson & Gleason Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Senechal, 2011; Vail, 2001; Van Brummelen, 2002).
3. Describe how reading and/or studying literature has, at any point in your life, has made any change in how you see the world (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Binkley, 2007; Bones, 2010; Bowen, 2011; Cook, 2011; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Knight, 2006 ; Leal,1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; Newell, 2009; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Van Brummelen, 2002).
4. When studying a work of literature, what sorts of experiences impact your understanding of it (Arikan, 2008; Azmi, 2013; Beeghly, 2005;Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013;Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Brown, 2011; Coffey, 2012; Choi & Piro, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Galda & Beach, 2001; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011; Nash, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Schoenacher, 2009; Senechal, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?
5. Describe how, if at all, seeing a literary character make decisions and experience consequences has impacted your own decision-making (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Campbell,

1997; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Freire, 1985; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013).

Data collected from this particular method was valuable in that the 13 public college students began to think more deeply about the questions they would later be asked in the semi-structured interview and focus groups. As a whole, this exercise enabled them to preemptively reflect on their experiences before delving more deeply during the interviews and focus groups.

Interviews

Moustakas (1994) specifically recommends informal, open-ended, and interactive conversations, in addition to the three primary research questions that were asked of each participant. Creswell (2013) agrees, suggesting that this format is particularly well-suited for eliciting participants' understanding of the meaning of their lived experiences. Because both Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) recommend keeping the structured questions to a bare minimum, the three research questions were the source from which the other questions were generated. Furthermore, Patton (2002) highlights the importance of not only establishing rapport with interviewees but establishing it in such a way that "it does not undermine my [the researcher's] neutrality concerning what the person tells me [the researcher]" (p. 365). As Patton (2002) further explains, a balance of neutrality and rapport is extraordinarily important in reassuring the interviewee can say anything without feeling that the response effects any favorable or unfavorable response within the researcher/interviewer:

I want to convey to them that their knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and feelings are important. Yet, I will not judge them for the content of what they say to me.

Rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment. (pp. 365-366)

To that end, ice-breaker questions were a useful way to begin building rapport while maintaining neutrality. Thus, an ice-breaker prefaced the structured questions:

Ice-Breaker(s): What has been your favorite class so far? What would be a dream job for you to acquire upon completing college? What is the best movie or book you've experienced lately?

RQ1: How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton,1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Battenhouse,1986; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund,1983; Gutek, 2011; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; Knoepfle, 1989; L'Engle, 1995; Manzo, 2007; Milward,1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Pollak, 1974; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Van Brummelen, 2002; Warner, 2012;Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013)?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the first research question:

1. What, if anything, does the phrase "biblical literature" or "biblically-informed literature" mean to you (Avni, 1970; Bainton,1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Franson,1977; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund,1983; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; Manzo, 2007; Milward,1991; Moore, 2004; Parker,

- 2006; Pollak, 1974; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013)?
2. What, if anything, does the phrase “cultural value” mean to you (Avni, 1970; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Van Brummelen, 2002)?
 3. You have had one or more general education courses that include literary texts. Although such texts are taught for their cultural value only, some of those literary texts reference content or ideas found in the Bible. The authors of these literary texts might view the biblical content positively, negatively, or neutrally. What are some of the texts and/or ideas you have experienced (Ames, 2014; Bainton,1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Beauregard, 2001; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Groves, 2007; Grund,1983; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; L’Engle, 1995; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pollak, 1974; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012, Welch & Greer, 2013)?
 4. What, if anything, did encountering biblical content within a literary text mean to you (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Beauregard, 2001; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Favre,1984; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985)?
 5. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was different about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only (Battenhouse,1986; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Favre,1984; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jose, 2015; Shaheen, 1987)?

6. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was similar about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only (Battenhouse,1986; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Fabiny,1992; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jose, 2015; Shaheen, 1987)?
7. What, if anything, would you additionally share about what it meant to experience studying biblically-informed literature for its cultural value (Avni, 1970; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Gutek, 2011; Jasper et al.,1999; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Van Brummelen, 2002)?

RQ2: What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents) (Arikan, 2008; Beeghly, 2005; Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013; Bertonneau, 2010; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Carter, 2007; Choi & Piro, 2009; Cook, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Elliott, 2002; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Goldberg,1987; Gordon, 2012; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Knowles,1984; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Maillet, 2014; Marable et al., 2010; Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow,1996; Mezirow,1997; Miller, 2002; Moustakas,1994; Nash, 2011; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Raymond, 2008; Reason, 2011; Rosenblatt, 2005; Sanacore, 2002; Sanacore, 2013; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Senechal, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stewart, 2009; Treble, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the second research question:

8. In the class or classes under consideration, what was the format (face-to-face, fully online, hybrid) (Beliaeva, 2009; Bertonneau, 2010; Goldberg,1987; Jeynes, 2012; Knowles,1984;

Kaufmann, 2010; Larson, 2009; Marable et al., 2010; Miller, 2002; Raymond, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005)?

9. How, if at all, did the format affect your experience of the phenomenon (Beliaeva, 2009; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Galda & Beach, 2001; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Senechal, 2011; Stewart, 2009)?
10. Was technology ever used in the course? If so, describe how it was used (Brown, 2011; Choi & Piro, 2009; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Rosenthal, 2011; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Smith & Dobson, 2011; Whittingham, 2013).
11. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon (Brown, 2011; Choi & Piro, 2009; Coffey, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011)?
12. Were discussions of any kind (literature circles, small group discussions, online discussions) ever used in the course (Arikan, 2008; Azmi, 2013; Beeghly, 2005; Bernadowski, 2013; Coffey, 2012; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 201; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Nash, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Schoenacher, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?
13. If so, describe how discussions were used. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon (Arikan, 2008; Beeghly, 2005; Choi & Piro, 2009; Coffey, 2012; Edmondson, 2012; Stewart, 2009)?
14. How would you describe the instructor's approach toward teaching biblical content in literary texts? How, if at all, did this approach affect your experience of the phenomenon (Beliaeva, 2009; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Booth, 1988; Carter, 2007; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fredericks, 2012; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Gold, 1983;

Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Mezirow, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Stallworth et al., 2006; Treble, 2009)?

RQ3: What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman et al., 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Kleiman, 2008; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Langer et al., 2010; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Lewis & Baynes, 1994; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Pike, 2003; Puka, 2005; Sanderse, 2013; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Wartell, 2013; Youssef, 2010)?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the third research question:

15. What, if any, meaning did you experience when characters' actions led to specific consequences (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014)?
16. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your perception of ideas or opinions of content that is biblical (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gros Luis, 1975; Jeynes, 2009; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Manzo, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?

17. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your ethics (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Leal,1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
18. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your sense of spirituality (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Leal,1999; Nesteruk, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
19. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was this experience different (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin,1989; Jeynes, 2009; Leal,1999; Manzo, 2007)?
20. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was it similar (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin,1989; Gros Luis, 1975; Jeynes, 2009; Leal,1999; Manzo, 2007)?
21. What, if anything, would you additionally share about experiencing this phenomenon in terms of ethics or spirituality (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; Leal,1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013)?

These questions for the semi-structured interview are also available in Appendix D.

Before these interview questions were used in the actual study, a pre-study focus group was held

to pilot the questions and gather input from content experts; no revision was suggested. Also, a copy of the questions without the accompanying research citations is available in Appendix F. The 13 semi-structured interviews that were then conducted with the public college students as part of the phenomenology produced many pages of transcriptions—all of which offered a variety of responses to the research questions, as will be detailed in Chapter Four.

Focus Groups

In addition to the questions asked in the individual interviews, focus groups were employed to flesh out themes or fill in gaps from individual interviews. The same public college students who were selected for the journaling and for the interviews also comprised those who participated in the focus groups. Because public college students could interact and know other's responses, "they are likely to express feelings or opinions that might not emerge" (Gall et al., 2010, p. 349) otherwise in individual interviews. These focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, as well. The following are the questions that were used to launch discussion in the focus group. Although fewer questions were asked in the focus groups than in the semi-structured individual interviews, the questions did overlap in theme in order to ensure thematic saturation.

1. How have you encountered biblical content in literary texts in college (themes, motifs, allusions, allegories, direct text verbatim from the Bible, skepticism, etc.) (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; L'Engle, 1995; Manzo, 2007; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pollak, 1974;

Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013)?

2. If you have had previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did your prior knowledge impact your experience of the literary text(s) (Battenhouse,1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Favre,1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson,1977; Gallagher & Lundin,1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis,1975; Gutek, 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal,1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987)?
3. In the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts (Battenhouse,1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Favre,1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson,1977; Gallagher & Lundin,1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis,1975; Gutek, 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal,1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987)?
4. If you did not have previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did that omission impact your experience of the literary text(s) (Avni, 1970; Battenhouse,1986; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny,1992; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson,1977; Gutek, 2011; Gold, 1983; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987, Van Brummelen, 2002)?
5. Again, in the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts (Avni, 1970; Battenhouse,1986; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny,1992; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson,1977; Gutek, 2011; Gold, 1983; Jasper et al.,1999;

Jose, 2015; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987, Van Brummelen, 2002)?

6. What, if any, literary works stand out to you in your college experience? Why (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Chickering, 2010; Cook, 2011; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Tolkien, 1965)?
7. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your own ethics? How (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Leal, 1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
8. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your experience of spirituality (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Leal, 1999; Nesteruk, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?

Data identified from this aspect of the data collection produced rich responses (once transcribed) because students answered many of the same questions from the journal reflection and semi-structured interviews but in greater depth, in that they were also responding to each other during interactions. A copy of the questions without the accompanying research citations is available in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data involved several elements as recommended by Moustakas (1994), in order to obtain a complete description of the lived experiences of the public college students in the study. For this transcendental phenomenology, the data analysis fulfilled Moustakas' (1994) recommended model which includes epoche, the process of phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of both composite textural and composite structural descriptions. This qualitative data was systematically collected and organized by using the qualitative data software Atlas.ti.

Epoche

In epoche (a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment), the researcher values the typical features of human research (such as qualitative analysis, searching for essences of experiences, etc.). However, epoche is at the core of transcendental phenomenology, as it encourages the researcher to launch the study using systematic procedures that permit him/her to see the phenomenon "freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). In order to successfully achieve epoche, reflexive journaling/memoing was employed to encourage sufficient analytical distance from any presumptions about the phenomenon.

Phenomenological Reduction

In phenomenological reduction, the researcher essentially brackets out all presuppositions and influences of the world in order to reveal the data in its purest form, uninfluenced by outside intrusions (Patton, 2002). It is during this phase, as Patton (2002) explains, that the researcher "holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection. It is taken out of the world where it occurs. It is taken apart and dissected" (p. 485), with the researcher taking great care not to interpret the phenomenon in terms of the standard concepts associated with it according to the current

literature. As Patton (2002) emphasizes, in this process of bracketing, “the subject matter is confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms” (p. 485).

Imaginative Variation

Moustakas (1994) describes the task of imaginative variation as seeking possible meaning “through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversal, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, and functions” (p. 97). Ultimately, as Moustakas (1994) explains, the ultimate goal of imaginative variation is to enable the research to derive “structural themes from the textural descriptions that have been obtained from phenomenological reduction” (p. 99).

Synthesis of Meanings and Essences

Described as the final stage in the process of transcendental phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) explains that the synthesis of meanings and essences is the “intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, each of which is detailed below. Methods to ensure trustworthiness include triangulation, direct quotes, enumeration, and member checking.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality. As part of ensuring credibility, triangulation was employed as a means of ensuring a study’s strength and integrity by combining multiple sources of data (Patton, 2002). Not only does Creswell (2013) recommend this method of cross checking through triangulation, Phillimore and Goodson (2004)

also identify triangulation as the absolute best way to ensure trustworthiness. Thus, in order to ensure triangulation, or evidence corroborated from different types of sources, data was gathered in three different ways: journaling, interviews, and focus groups.

Furthermore, bracketing was employed. Originating in Husserl's (1859-1938) phenomenology entitled *The Idea of Phenomenology*, which was published posthumously in 1950, this term (also known as epoche) comprises Husserl's argument that general, everyday presumptions of the "independent existence of what is perceived and thought about (what he called 'the natural attitude') should be suspended, so that one could investigate what is perceived and thought about without that assumption" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 24). In order to ensure trustworthiness, epoche was employed in that everyday assumptions and perceptions will be bracketed or set aside so that the experience of the phenomenon itself is the focus, or as Schwandt (2007) expresses it, the researcher can concentrate "on *how* that experience is constituted" (p. 24).

Dependability and Confirmability

As part of establishing dependability and confirmability, descriptions that are both thick and rich were used as a means to ensure external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Essentially, writing comprehensive, detailed descriptions about a phenomenon enables other readers to also evaluate how conclusions have been reached, as well as to potentially transfer those conclusions to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Van Manen (1990) attests, "Rich descriptions, which explore the meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced, gain a dimension of depth" (p. 152). Writing detailed descriptions that are both rich and thick, as Creswell (2013) recommends, will allow readers to assess transferability. To that end, writing thick and rich

descriptions was one of the primary ways I confirmed the trustworthiness of my qualitative research.

In addition to writing thick, rich descriptions, an audit trail was also established in order to ensure replicability, if possible. Establishing the audit trail involved documenting each stage of the research process, including examples of materials in the appendices, storing physical raw data in a locked cabinet for five years, and password protecting electronic raw data on a personal computer for five years, as well. As Patton (2002) explains, establishing an audit trail is one more way to “verify the rigor of your fieldwork and confirmability of the data collected because you want to minimize bias and maximize accuracy” (p. 93).

Transferability

In order to maximize transferability, peer review (also known as debriefing) and external checks provide an additional layer of accountability of the soundness of the research process (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend, such measures, in addition to other processes, are defined as essential to establishing the transferability of the study. Thus, both procedures were employed in this transcendental phenomenology.

Member checking (also known as respondent validation) was used to gain feedback from the original respondents on the researcher’s inquiries and subsequent findings (Schwandt, 2007). Although some find member checks questionable since “on epistemic grounds, it is not entirely clear how the procedure actually helps establish the truth of the findings” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 186), conducting member checks is really rooted more in ethics than in epistemology: “The consensus seems to be that member checking is not profitably viewed as either an act of validation or refutation but is simply another way of generating data and insight (Schwandt, 2007, p. 188). Framed as Schwandt (2007) explains the process, conducting member checks is

another way to ensure trustworthiness in this phenomenology. Member checks essentially involve ensuring that public college students are able to check and recheck the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups in which they were involved for accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure that every ethical consideration has been made, a series of measures was taken. First, advance approval was secured—through IRB, with the public college students, with the site managers, and all parties involved. Second, full disclosure of the study's elements and processes was made to public college students, site members, the institution, and all potential parties without pressure and with complete sensitivity. Third, respect was shown at the site and to the public college students, with as little interruption in observed activities as is possible. Fourth, in order to ensure that the maximum of additional protections had been taken on the public college students' behalf, the voluntary nature of the study was emphasized (including the right to withdraw at any time), consent was solicited from all public college students, pseudonyms were used for all of the public college students (as well as for the name of the college), paper data is now kept in a locked filing cabinet, and electronic files are stored on an encrypted external USB drive that is stored in the locked filing cabinet. Finally, complete transparency and confidentiality were maintained in gathering, analyzing, and ultimately reporting the data. No compensation was ever involved or offered in the study for participation (as is emphasized in the consent form).

Summary

Chapter Three outlined the methodology of this study, including the procedures, the research design, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. This study was a transcendental phenomenology of how public college students experience biblically-informed

literature taught only as cultural documents. The suitability of this design for this particular study was explored, as well as the three essential research questions which were asked of every participant, among other open, unstructured interview questions. The setting for the study was Chautauqua State, and public college students were students who had completed any one of the 11 identified composition, literature, or humanities courses from TBR's common core of fully transferable general education courses. Procedures, the researcher's role, and data collection were discussed, including the details of how data collection involved interviews, journals, and focus groups. Data analysis included epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of both composite textural and composite structural descriptions. Measures to ensure trustworthiness including triangulation, bracketing, peer review and external checks, conducting member checks, writing thick and rich descriptions, and establishing an audit trail.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results from this study of how public college students experience biblically-informed literature taught as cultural documents. This qualitative transcendental phenomenology was designed to study how a sample of 13 public college students who have completed one or more courses in composition, humanities, and/or literature at Chautauqua State experience biblical or biblically-informed literature when taught merely as cultural documents and not to proselytize. Each of the 13 public college students is introduced, as well as the resulting thematic data organized by the study's controlling research questions. Results are discussed in the form of a narrative organized by the research questions and then presented as responses to those research questions (which are stated below):

RQ1: How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents?

RQ2: What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)?

RQ3: What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation?

Participants

Of the 2,353 students who qualified to participate in this study, 13 agreed to participate by providing information about their experience in or more of the following courses:

Composition I and or II, English Literature I and/or II, American Literature I and/or II, World Literature I and/or II, Introduction to Humanities I and/or II, and African-American Literature.

These public college students are described below using pseudonyms and broad demographic information in order to ensure each participant's anonymity.

Mary

Mary is an individual who is passionate about literature. She is Caucasian and falls within the 36-44 age bracket. Having successfully completed seven of the 11 courses under consideration, she offered significant experience with the phenomenon. She reports having significant exposure to the Bible and biblical concepts prior to attending Chautauqua State. As she reports, "I had a lot of experience with the Bible before college. I had been raised in church and had read the Bible all the way through and participated in many Bible studies, both on my own and in groups with others." She is also an avid reader and self-described life-long learner.

Sam

Sam is a student at Chautauqua State. He is Caucasian and falls within the 18-24 age bracket. As an English major and self-described aspiring writer and enthusiastic learner, he has completed four of the eleven courses under consideration in this study. Although he has read a significant amount of literature for his coursework, he reads widely on his own, across a number of genres and traditions. Sam reports that because his father is a minister, his "life has been defined in many ways by biblical content."

Emma

Emma completed two courses (as a transient student) among the eleven under consideration at Chautauqua State. She is Caucasian and falls within the 46-54 age bracket. She describes her love of literature as being sparked by her mother reading aloud to her and her siblings while traveling in the seventh grade. Upon hearing *Little Women* read aloud, she reports, "I was hooked!" As for her previous interaction with biblical content, she reports that she

attended a private Christian school through twelfth grade, completed a bachelor's degree from a private Christian university, and then began taking courses at Chautauqua State as an adult to expand her literature hours in preparation for later pursuing a Master's in degree in literature. Her experiences at Chautauqua State represented her first experience of taking coursework of any kind within a secular educational institution.

Nate

Nate is a sophomore at Chautauqua State who is currently pursuing a General Transfer degree. He intends to graduate from Chautauqua State and go to a four-year state university in Tennessee, where he is considering a major in some form of engineering. He is African-American and falls within the 18-24 age range. Having successfully completed four of the 11 courses under consideration in this study (and having been currently enrolled in one additional course from the list at the time of the study), he prefers to read about current events and developments in science and computer and technology. He says that he “nevertheless has a soft spot for Shakespeare and Mark Twain.” Although he has been heavily exposed to biblical concepts throughout his life, having been involved in church and other faith-based settings to this day, he reports that the “culture of Christianity here in the South is very different from my [his] experiences of the Christian culture in Washington, D.C.” where he spent many of his childhood and teen years.

Steve

Steve graduated from Chautauqua State in May of 2018. He intends to transfer to a four-year state university in Tennessee, where he is considering a major in Computer Science. He is Caucasian and falls within the 18-24 age range. Having successfully completed four of the seven courses under consideration in this study, he says that he likes to read “primarily for

entertainment” and names J.R.R. Tolkien and Ayn Rand among his favorite authors. Having been exposed to biblical concepts throughout his life from his family of origin, he cites the Old Testament as having the most influential impact on his worldview and ethics, as he explains: “Perhaps my favorite story and character from the Old Testament is that of King David. I was struck at an early age by the strength and depth of the relationship that the Bible describes between God and David, despite David’s sinful nature.”

Cora

Cora currently attends Chautauqua State. Having successfully completed two of the 11 courses that are the focus of this phenomenology, she is in the process of completing all of her general education coursework in preparation for a possible major in English. She is Caucasian and falls within the 18 to 24 age range. Although required to read expansively throughout her homeschool experiences before college, Cora reports that she elects to also read literature independently from a broad variety of literary genres and worldviews. As she explained,

Without them [books], I could never have explored other worlds, like Narnia and Middle Earth, or other cultures and their mindsets, like Asia’s Eastern ideologies and Africa’s spirituality. I’ve learned about the lives of historical figures—Roosevelt, Churchill, John Adams, Martin Luther—what motivated them, their worldviews, and the small decisions they made every day to become the great men we know today. I don’t know how I would have learned anything about anything or anyone, as a child, or now as a young adult, without books.

Cora was homeschooled throughout high school and has been raised, as she says, in a “family of professing Christians.” Thus, her considerable progress at Chautauqua State represents her first educational experience at a secular educational institution.

Ben

Ben graduated from Chautauqua State in May of 2018. He intends to transfer to a four-year university, with scholarship funding at both state and Ivy League institutions as possibilities, given his outstanding college career. Although he performed admirably across all disciplines, he is leaning towards programs which concentrate on physics, possibly computer technology, math, and the sciences. Ben is Caucasian and falls within the 44-55 age bracket. Although he successfully completed three of the 11 courses under consideration in this study, he reports that despite the fact that he is “not a big reader . . . and not crazy about literature,” he did enjoy some of the literary content in some of his courses: “I certainly did enjoy *Beowulf* . . . as well as the *Canterbury Tales*. I never would’ve picked up those books otherwise, but I’m really glad that I did.” Ben had exposure to biblical concepts prior to his education at Chautauqua State. As he explains, he “was forced to go to church by my [his] parents and attend Sunday School.” This lasted for him until his early teens when he “expressed his [my] dislike for going to church.” As a self-described agnostic, Ben reports that during his time at Chautauqua State, “even though I don’t accept the Bible as truth, all of my actual experiences with biblical content have been perfectly fine in that we studied them for their cultural and historical value.”

Will

Will has taken coursework from Chautauqua State as a transient student (completing two of the 11 courses under consideration) and currently works in IT. Will is Caucasian and falls within the 44-55 age bracket. Before attending Chautauqua State, Will had significant exposure to biblical concepts throughout his lifetime. Aside from his exposure to literary text at Chautauqua State, Will enjoys reading from a variety of genres, including theological studies and fantasy/science-fiction literature.

George

George is currently enrolled full-time at Chautauqua State. Although he has yet to declare a major, he has taken a significant amount of coursework, including five of the 11 courses under consideration in this study. George is Hispanic and falls within the 26-34 age bracket. In addition to his full-time enrollment in college, he also works part-time within the food service industry. Before attending Chautauqua State, George had significant exposure to biblical concepts throughout his lifetime, having grown up in a devout Catholic family in Mexico. In fact, because he attended private Catholic school in elementary, middle school, and high school, Chautauqua State is the first secular institution of education in which he has ever been enrolled. An avid reader in both Spanish and English, George reports that he has greatly enjoyed his exposure to various literary texts in his coursework thus far. Moreover, he enjoys reading mysteries, biographies, and historical fiction set in the United States because, as he explains, “reading about America and stories that have English characters in them helps me understand parts of living in the United States that I don’t understand.”

Shelley

Shelley is currently enrolled full-time at Chautauqua State. Although she has yet to declare a major, she has taken a significant amount of coursework, including six of the 11 courses under consideration in this study. Shelley currently leans toward declaring a major in philosophy, English, or possibly one of the behavioral/social sciences. Shelley’s ethnicity is partly Asian although, as she explains, she was born in the United States and identifies “more thoroughly as a Westerner (hemisphere) culturally than as an Easterner.” She falls within the 26 to 34 age bracket. Shelley also reports that she had almost no prior contact with or understanding

of biblical concepts. To quote her, she says she that in terms of religious practice or belief, she identifies officially as “confused.”

Kim

Currently enrolled in coursework at Chautauqua State, Kim has yet to decide what her major will be. As a high-performing student, she has traveled abroad and takes Honor classes, including three of the courses on the aforementioned list of 11 under consideration for this study. Kim is African American and falls within the 26-34 age range. She has had some previous experience with biblical concepts, as her family took her to church throughout childhood. She reports that she does not identify today as being religious in any respect. She enjoys reading and learning and especially having contact with and exposure to other cultures.

Lucy

Lucy graduated with Honors from Chautauqua State as an English major, so she successfully completed six of the courses from the aforementioned list of 11 under consideration for this phenomenology. Lucy is Caucasian and falls within the 26 to 34 age range. Although she reads widely by choice and enjoys a variety of genres, she maintains a special affinity for the British Romantic Poets whom she encountered in British Literature at Chautauqua State because, as she reports, that group of poets was comprised of atheists, agnostics, and Christians, yet “they all explore the same themes, like mutability. There’s just this fact that we're here today but maybe not tomorrow. We might not be alive again for that. The Romantic poets and how they differed on that issue—that was what I found was fascinating about that.” As for prior experience with biblical concepts, she reports,

My experience with reading the Bible as a child was very impersonal, consisting of intense, guided focus on particular passages with very little time spent reading

and experiencing/exploring the passages for myself. It wasn't until high school that I began appreciating the Bible for its literary merit. Throughout college, I enjoyed studying the Bible from a literary, philosophical, and sociological perspective.

Kevin

Kevin is currently enrolled in Chautauqua State full time and has completed four of the courses of the 11 under consideration. Although his major is currently undeclared, he intends to pursue a degree and career related to the sciences. However, as he explains, although he “will never be a literature major, I really like to read and have read a great deal throughout my life.” In addition to required reading, Kevin independently enjoys science fiction, fantasy, comic books, biographies, historical fiction, and war fiction—especially the writings of Tim O'Brien, literature related to the Holocaust, and literature inspired by WWI, as he noted. Kevin is Caucasian and falls within the 18 to 24 age range. With the exception of having had his grandmother take him to Mass as a very young child, Kevin reports that he has had very little experience with biblical concepts in any context. As he explains, “my parents are agnostic, so I never had much more to do with it after I was pretty small, and she [his grandmother] passed away.” Kevin also cites his having been raised in the Northeastern United States as contributing to his inexperience with the Bible:

It wasn't in our house or anything. I think this also has something to do with my not being from this part of the United States. It seems like there's a church on every corner here, but in the north, it was a lot more rare except for Mass and some of the things I was exposed to by my grandmother. I never really heard much about it at school growing up or anything.

Table 2 (below) gives a visual overview of the gender, ethnicity, age range, and number of key classes completed of each of the thirteen public college students.

Table 2.

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age Bracket	Number of 11 courses completed
Mary	F	Caucasian	36-44 years	7
Sam	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4
Emma	F	Caucasian	46-55 years	2
Nate	M	African-American	18-24 years	4
Steve	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4
Cora	F	Caucasian	18-24 years	2
Ben	M	Caucasian	46-55 years	3
Will	M	Caucasian	46-55 years	2
George	M	Hispanic	26-34 years	5
Shelley	F	Asian	26-34 years	6
Kim	F	African-American	26-34 years	3
Lucy	F	Caucasian	26-34 years	6
Kevin	M	Caucasian	18-24 years	4

Results

After an exhaustive review of the data collection gleaned from the 13 public college students (transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, journaling exercises, and focus groups), I used Atlas.ti software to systematically gather and organize the qualitative data using Moustakas' (1994) recommendations which include phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesizing composite textural and structural descriptions. This presentation of results is comprised of two subsections: Theme Development and Research Question Responses. The first subsection (Theme Development) will describe how the qualitative data was analyzed to develop the six themes that were identified from the lived experiences of the 13 public college students. The second subsection (Research Question Responses) will offer a composite

description of how the study results answer the three research questions guiding this transcendental phenomenology.

Theme Development

As a transcendental phenomenology, this study employed Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for data analysis as described in Chapter Three. Transcriptions of all interviews, journaling exercises, and focus groups were downloaded into Atlas.ti software. Using the memoing notes that had occurred throughout data collection as part of the bracketing process, 21 codes were developed. Next, by employing the "open-code" function of Atlas.ti, these 21 units of meaning were then used to code all data from the data collection portion of the study. Table 3 (below) lists the 21 codes, as well as their occurrence across all data sets.

Table 3.

Codes and their Occurrence Across Data Sets in Atlas.ti

Codes	Occurrences of codes across data sets
meaning of biblical literature	27
meaning of cultural value	34
examples of lit texts	33
biblical content in lit text	42
differences: bib. content before college lit	36
similarities: bib. content after college lit	12
meaning: interaction lit, bib content	11
meaning: interaction bib, lit, culture	18
format: F2F, online, hybrid	11
format impact	16
tech use type	13
tech use impact	23
discussion type	8
discussion impact	9
instructor approach	12
instructor impact	11
meaning: character action=consequence	21
lit impact perception bib content	13
lit & spiritual/ethical formation	20
diffs: spirit/ethic pre-college lit	12
sims: spirit/ethic pre-college lit	8

empathic development

31

Finally, Atlas.ti was employed to further reduce the codes into essential themes, of which six ultimately were identified. Table 4 (below) depicts the 21 codes and their reduction into six essential themes.

Table 4.

The Reduction of Codes into Six Essential Themes

Codes	Themes
meaning of biblical literature meaning of cultural value examples of lit texts biblical content in lit text	biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy
differences: bib. content before college lit similarities: bib. content after college lit meaning: interaction lit, bib content meaning: interaction bib, lit, culture	exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure
format: F2F, online, hybrid format impact tech use type tech use impact	technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts
discussion type discussion impact instructor approach instructor impact	Instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion
meaning: character action=consequence lit impact perception bib content lit & spiritual/ethical formation	literary study as neutral zone for essential questions of humanity
diffs: spirit/ethic pre-college lit sims: spirit/ethic pre-college lit empathic development	literary study as empathically formative

In order to present an overview of the broader analytical process, Table 5 (below) presents the open-coding, the enumeration of open-appearance across data sets, and the resultant six themes.

Table 5.

Open-Codes, the Enumeration of Open-Appearance Across Data Sets, and Themes

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
meaning of biblical literature	27	biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy
meaning of cultural value	34	
examples of lit texts	33	
biblical content in lit text	42	
differences: bib. content before college lit	36	exploring biblical content in literature with/without
similarities: bib. content after college lit	12	
meaning: interaction lit, bib content	11	proselytization
meaning: interaction bib, lit, culture	18	pressure
format: F2F, online, hybrid	11	technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts
format impact	16	
tech use type	13	
tech use impact	23	
discussion type	8	
discussion impact	9	Instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion
instructor approach	12	
instructor impact	11	
meaning: character action=consequence	21	literary study as neutral zone for essential questions of humanity
lit impact perception bib content	13	
lit & spiritual/ethical formation	20	
diffs: spirit/ethic pre-college lit	12	literary study as empathically formative
sims: spirit/ethic pre-college lit	8	
empathic development	31	

Theme One: Biblical Literacy as Cultural Literacy

Whether public college students considered themselves as “literate” or “illiterate” in biblical concepts, especially in terms of prior experience, one clear theme was identified across data sets: after having completed as few as two and as many as seven of the 11 courses under consideration, public college students experienced biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural

literacy/illiteracy—especially within the realm of literary texts. For example, although Kevin had experienced a minimal level of exposure to biblical concepts in childhood, as a result of his grandmother having occasionally taken him to Mass, he expressed his desire for having been more educated in biblical content so that he could have more fully engaged in an Introduction to Humanities class:

Since I'm not really a religious person, I guess it [Mass] didn't mean anything to me like her faith. But it did mean a lot to me for education. So, like with some of the literary stuff I've talked about, I wish I had known more about the Bible so I could understand, even if people are disagreeing with it. Like when we studied how the Bible is organized in that class, I didn't ever really know what the Old Testament was or what the New Testament was. So that was really interesting, and it probably would have helped me in other classes. That seemed, I guess, kind of obvious to most of the class, but I had no idea. You know?

Along similar lines of inquiry, Shelley discussed having been exposed very little to biblical content, despite having grown up here in the Southeast (unlike Kevin, who was raised in the Northeast)—a distinction/correlation that both public college students independently made. During a focus group, Shelley commented on her frustration:

It's been frustrating to me because I haven't studied the Bible before very much. So I'm always like 'Hey, people! Help me here!' It seems like in this part of the country everyone knows everything about the Bible, but I grew up in this area, too, and I've had very little exposure to it. But it [biblical content] has come up in my literature classes and in humanities and even in composition, and I have had to have people explain things to me.

In contrast, despite having grown up in another country with a different language, George explained that the biblical literacy he cultivated by attending Catholic school throughout childhood and early youth has been an asset in terms of education. Repeatedly describing this aspect of the phenomenon as “wonderful,” George offered the following perspective: “For me, it is wonderful. It is wonderful that I know the Bible when it comes up in the readings. I worry because English is my second language, but because I grew up in Catholic school and in a Catholic community in South America, I know the Bible very well.” George further explained that his prior biblical exposure gave him a bit of an edge in understanding literature and its cultural context: “I am very happy when it [biblical content] comes up in literature and other courses with the readings because I know something about this already, and I don’t really feel the language barrier.”

While public college students sometimes offered broad descriptions of what encountering biblical content in literature meant to them in terms of cultural literacy, others became very specific. For example, Sam pointed both to his father having been a minister as well to his broader reading preferences as sources of his finesse with culture and literature. As he explained in a journaling exercise, “Outside of religious exposure to scripture, I’ve seen consistently in the largely Western literature I read themes and motifs of Biblical origin (i.e. David and Goliath, Prodigal Son, etc.). It’s a part of the popular lexicon and literary short-hand used to express an idea evocatively to a Western audience, even if that audience is otherwise religiously inclined.”

In contrast, Kevin discussed at length one particular example of how understanding biblical content (if only for educational purposes) would have nuanced his experience with Flannery O’Connor’s short story “Revelation” (commonly assigned, as with Kevin, in Composition II at Chautauqua State):

We talked about a story that was entitled “Revelations” [sic] and it referred heavily to biblical content but only because the lady in the story was such a hypocrite. It’s funny because her name was Mrs. Turpin and that case that just came out on the news about the parents of the 13 kids they were mistreating were . . . they had the name ‘Turpin,’ too [reference to news story about the April 2018 reports of David and Louis Turpin and their alleged abuse of their 13 children]. We talked about how she is, Mrs. Turpin . . . she is very religious, like she’s always talking about how much Jesus loves her and what Jesus does for her and how thankful she is for Jesus. But the problem is, that she is thankful that she’s white and that she’s not trash and that she’s not black and . . . I’m not saying what I feel . . . I don’t feel that way at all . . . I’m just quoting what she [O’Connor’s character, Mrs. Turpin] says. From what little I know about Jesus, I like him and I don’t think he would have been OK with racism and with calling other people ‘trash.’ But she is very hypocritical. We discussed that story in small groups, and one of our group members was a Christian, and she told me some things that I don’t think I would’ve picked up like about the pigs in the story and how her trying to keep pigs clean and then ending up in a pigpen herself—it’s kind of like the story of the prodigal son. That was really cool to me. That connection.

Ummm. So I know a little bit about the avoidance of pigs from Jewish grandparents, but I don’t think I would’ve ever connected it in the story. So, I don’t know if this is helpful, but I guess that knowing more about the Bible than I do would’ve helped me quite a bit more understand that story. It was really stunning . . . like gross . . . how hypocritical she was. I think anyone would’ve

picked up on that because there was nothing about her that had anything to do with loving others. She pretty much worshipped herself.

The same story came up without prompting in another semi-structured interview, this time with Nate, who identifies as a Christian, and who seemed to regard his prior biblical knowledge as an expansion in his education. In reference to O'Connor's same character, Mrs. Turpin, he described the following experience in his Composition II course:

Like it's hard to see right off hand, but she [O'Connor] reveals what hypocrisy and racism and wolves in sheep's clothing in the church look like. I think that she was pretty open about being a believer in God? In class, people debated about her main character in 'Revelation.' I cannot remember the lady's name [Mrs. Turpin] in the story, but she was like a terrible . . . or maybe perfect . . . example of corruption of the church in the South. I consider myself a follower of Christ, but I don't feel like she and I would have had any opinions of people in common. I don't think I put people in categories and in a hierarchy. She kind of needed that book in the face from Mary Grace. I'm not pro-violence, either, but still. I enjoyed that story.

Mary referenced the significance of biblical literacy as cultural literacy in her interview, as well. Having been previously educated only in faith-based settings, Mary described her enrollment in Chautauqua State as her first experience in a secular educational institution. In referencing one of the 7 courses she completed (of the 11 under consideration), she expressed the importance of biblical exposure as cultural education:

Understanding biblical content meant a lot to me, to be honest, especially at that point in my education because I was still very religious then and very connected

to a lot of religious ideology at that time. Seeing literature that has connections to the biblical ideas that I had been exposed to really helped me to be able to connect with texts, even if I disagreed with them. That cultural background was important. We read a work that referenced Cain and Abel extensively. I remember explaining the Cain-Abel narrative and Eden to a classmate because she had never heard of these references. The work wasn't even 'Christian,' you know, but you had to know its biblical context.

Although the 13 public college students represented a variety of religious backgrounds (their self-referential terminology included "atheist," "agnostic," "believer," "seeker," "Christ-follower," "officially confused," "spiritual, but not religious," "Christian," "Catholic," etc.), none of the public college students found the inclusion of biblical or biblically-informed texts inappropriate or limiting but rather appropriate and expansive in terms of their cultural education. Ben is an agnostic who describes the Old Testament as "a complete work of fiction with little or no historical value" and the New Testament as "more historically accurate." Nonetheless, when exploring Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* in a literary survey course, he connected the material with his childhood involvement in a Methodist Church his parents attended:

When we did the *Canterbury Tales*, we had a lot of conversations about corruption within the church, and I mean Chaucer is point-blank about the fact that his goal is a moral one. And I probably wouldn't have ever bothered to care about that work, but when we looked at it in class and saw the extreme but subtle corruption of the church during the Middle Ages, that really caught my attention because I grew up seeing some of that in the Methodist Church where I attended

as a kid. And I knew so much of the religious terminology and narratives, like the Woman at the Well, and purgatory, and the Widow's Mite. There was a bunch. And, even though I am agnostic, I did like the Parson. He is exactly what he says he is. He is not in it for the money, but to help people, and so, yeah, that hit a chord with me.

It should be noted that of the 29 pilgrims outlined in the *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer's narrator/persona Harry Bailey (the 30th pilgrim), the Parson is the lowest on the ecclesiastical ladder but the highest in terms of character and ethical regard for others. In contrast to portraits of the most sinister and rapacious pilgrims, a group which includes several members of the clergy, the Parson emerges as a kind of Christ figure, living out an example before preaching it: "This noble ensample to his shepe he yaf – That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught" (*General Prologue*, line 498). The translation of this description from Middle English to Modern English reads, "This noble example to his sheep he gave, that first he wrought (made manifest his good works) and afterward he taught (or preached)."

During a focus group, Cora also offered insight into how her thorough training in and exposure to biblical content improved her cultural literacy in terms of approaching courses in composition, literature, and humanities (and other courses she additionally cites):

Yeah, I hadn't really thought about it until you had us do the journal exercises and then the interview because I've also always taken it for granted. But I guess one of the ways I think about it is like this: what if I were to be sat down in a completely orthodox Middle Eastern culture without any knowledge of Islam whatsoever and then the literary works were dependent upon my understanding of that? Well, I'd be kind of in a mess. So, I think that my thorough knowledge of

the Bible helped me understand a lot of courses: composition, different literature classes, humanities, and—I know it’s not on your list—but art history. It’s like almost every single painting is in some way either reacting against or supporting or neutrally drawing upon content in the Bible. And yet, it’s almost like a taboo subject to discuss. And I don’t know why. It’s just information. Yes, I personally believe it, and I’m aware that some of us in this group do not, but we still have a good relationship with each other. So, I would say it [exposure to biblical content] definitely impacted the way I experienced literature because, yeah, western civilization is built upon it. I think it would be probably hard to be from a dominantly eastern culture and eastern religion and understand a lot of the impulses we experience here.

Cora makes an important distinction here, one worth emphasizing—that “biblically-informed” does not necessarily mean “biblically-endorsed,” but rather simply drawing upon biblical themes, content, motifs, narratives, etc. in terms of culture. The biblically-informed literary text might support biblical ideology, conflict with biblical ideology, or be simply neutral. No matter the intent, the biblically-informed literary text depends upon a knowledge of its underlying themes, motifs, content, etc. in order for the student to grasp its cultural context and significance.

Theme Two: Exploring Biblical Content in Literature with/without Proselytization

“Pressure”

This unexpected theme was identified across all data sets (journals, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups). Although a few public college students had assumed, before college, that any discussion of the Bible for any reason would be disallowed or be (as both Kevin and Shelley, described it) a “taboo” subject, the majority of public college students nevertheless

described the freedom they experienced in being able to discuss biblical concepts without what they repeatedly referred to as the “pressure” of proselytization (according to the Atlas.ti search feature, the word “pressure” came up specifically in the context of proselytization attempts nine times across all data sets). The following discussion will illustrate the prominence of this theme, as well as the one outlier experienced at Chautauqua State, and an additional outlier experienced at another institution.

Lucy is a thoughtful and accomplished writer and professional, having completed six of the 11 courses in the study at Chautauqua State. While enrolled here, she developed a special affinity for the British Romantic poets, a passion that continues to this day. In her interview, she touched on an interesting paradox which several public college students would also reference. Although she had experienced exposure to biblical content in a church setting prior to her college enrollment, she felt that the way she experienced biblical or biblically-informed literature in college was the way that she should have experienced biblical or biblically-informed literature in church. As she explains, “You know, in my literature classes here, the Bible definitely came up. Especially in American literature and British literature. And we would analyze it from a literary perspective in class, but not for religious reasons.”

However, as she goes on to explain, she experienced a freedom to discuss the biblical content thoroughly in her college literature courses that she expressed she had not experienced in church:

So, in terms of exploring biblical content, I feel like church should have been the most impactful experience outside of a literary setting. You know, the pastor or the youth group leader or whomever it is that is teaching is, you know, sharing a story from Scripture and then follows up with the lessons that we can learn from

the faith. But there was no discussion of this. We were taught the literature, told how to process it, and then we experienced it as something we must immediately accept without question. How is that formative? I don't think that . . . that faith doesn't involve questions. So . . . I never . . . I guess when we would do that and talk about the biblical content in church . . . we were not in a position to really talk through it but just pressured to accept whatever interpretation the adults had found. You know, being there and being exposed to it as a child was an opportunity to think about the Bible, but you weren't really supposed to think. If we were, I would have found it more compelling. The chance to process and interpret. Does that make sense?

As Lucy goes on to explain, after having experienced the Bible in the setting of her church as a child and young adult, she experienced it differently when she encountered biblical content in her literature courses at Chautauqua State where, as she says, "We were looking at a lot of the same things, but the approach was different." In the following passage, she describes how, for her, the "pressure" to accept the Bible without the opportunity to explore and process it had the opposite effect of any attempt at proselytization:

We were individuals, you know? In these literature classes, we would look at the texts, look at the story, and we were getting some guidance from faculty about how to proceed with our interpretation rather than being forced to accept each word as gospel truth. That was the case in literature that was biblically-informed in any way, and in literature that was not. My instruction in the past, well, I just grew up a bit more with the pressure to look at it as a kind of icon I must accept – not as a suggestion or starting point for genuine exploration. Studying it in the

freedom of a classroom in college gave it more meaning in my life. I guess I . . . I felt freer to explore and really engage with what was happening in the biblical texts in college rather than being forced to make a decision on the spot. The texts are similar (and in some cases the same), but I'm free to disagree. Free to think before I agree or disagree. Studying literature in college helped me put myself in a character's predicament or setting or anything related to the work. So I felt like it made it much more approachable and relatable. Whenever it was done that way, even if I got religious instruction or context for the sake of education . . . oddly enough . . . it made the same subject matter more appealing to me in this setting (college classroom).

Kevin spoke of a similar experience—having been drawn to the Bible in college, although he had at first assumed that “talking about the Bible seems like an unspoken taboo, like it's forbidden in secular settings—which seems really odd to me since this is the place where freedom of expression should reign.” Even though biblical content is presented in college for the sake of education, for providing cultural context, Kevin was surprised to encounter it at all. However, he seemed to find that encounter beneficial, as he explains:

I guess, in my case, since I had relatively little experience [with biblical content], it made me want to research more and find out more about content that was from the Bible, especially when it was connected to literature, or humanities, or some kind of social justice. We did a lot with social justice in composition . . . so I guess you could say that it made me, um, want to look more closely at things in the Bible so I better understood how people were referring to them. Their frame of reference. Like their concept map. I kind of have some baggage . . . some

baggage or . . . I don't know . . . bad 'ju-ju' tied to the fact that my family was hyper-religious but not really all that kind about it. Aw, h--l. They were mean. The whole church was mean. The Bible was like a weapon or something. So hearing it from a different perspective made me interested and more likely to want to return and revisit ideas that I had . . . previously kind of, um, rejected wholesale. But being exposed to it a bit differently in college literature and other classes. I find that it is a book that has some beautiful parts to it that I might study more. Before, I might've shut this conversation down. But now . . . I'm maybe open to looking at it further. Without the pressure to take a side this moment. You know. Walk to the altar RIGHT NOW.

When Kevin made that last statement in our interview, he pounded the table in mock sternness. He was laughing. However, his commentary did have a distinct pathos that surfaced.

Although George was not impacted in the same way as some of the other public college students, like Kevin, had been by his earlier exposure to biblical content in other settings (namely, church and/or families of origin), he did identify with the freedom to engage and ask questions. In this excerpt from the semi-structured interview with him, he makes some similar observations about his own upbringing in a strict Catholic community in Mexico:

Me (De'Lara): Okay, so . . . this is the fifth question. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was different about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only?

George: Hmmm. Okay. Okay. So I study the Bible, you know, the biblical things, my whole life in school and in church until I get to college. So I study it in church from the time I was a little kid, and I study it in Catholic school from when I was a little kid, and

my family we study together and go to Mass together, so I am always studying about it before I come to this institution. Even to this country. We study it here, too, but it is different.

Me (De'Lara): Okay. Okay. Talk a bit more about what made it different in your experience.

George: Well, I grow up in [with] very strict, very strict rules about the Bible. So, I do believe it. My choice. But I probably would get in trouble if I asked questions about it or maybe make my family or my teachers or the priest think that I was asking the wrong questions. Here, I can ask questions and talk about it more. It is for education.

Me (De'Lara): You used the phrase 'wrong questions.' Can you tell me more about that?

George: [laughs] Well, yes, all questions are the wrong questions [laughs]. I grew up in a very strict culture. I do believe what I was taught to believe, and that is not changing for me. But here, I can talk with other people about different ideas and try to understand it without people getting kind of angry. Here (at Chautauqua State) it is for education, but everywhere else in my experience it is required to believe it. With my kids, I let them ask questions.

At a similar place in the semi-structured interview I had with Shelley, she expressed many of the same sentiments, although grounded within a different context:

Me (De'Lara): Okay. So. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was different about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only?

Shelley: Well, I haven't studied the Bible very much outside of the public college classroom or really anywhere. So I guess the only example I can really relate to is when

my neighbor took me to her church when I was a kid. And then I did a few things with teens later—you know kids who were my age at the time—at churches. So . . . I guess the main difference would be that in the church settings, when we learned about biblical things, the purpose was for us to accept it and I guess convert to it is the right word? Conversion? I think that's the big difference about studying there vs. studying it inside of a public classroom, where you really get to take your time and look at it and explore it and understand it without having been pressured to feel a certain way about it. I remember feeling like if I didn't agree or had a question that I was somehow not good or not part of the group. So the little bit that I've studied while I'm here in college is probably better for me because I can ask questions, I can actually learn about it. And because I can also think of it as literature. Does that make sense?

Me (De'Lara): I am tracking you. Can you tell me more about studying it as literature, as you described?

Shelley: Well, yeah. I mean I think that whether it's in a church or inside of a state college, you're studying it as literature both ways. Um. Yeah. But I think my neighbor would've gotten really upset if I called anything in the Bible 'stories.' What's crazy about that is that sometimes, if I remember, Jesus was telling stories and was calling them stories. Like they were just examples and didn't really happen. Like I am—I guess you call it a parable? But, I don't know, that kind of observation seems kind of threatening to some churches. I guess that's probably too harsh of a word (threatening). But in a public college classroom I have the freedom to really learn about it. I am not a religious person, but I might be if I studied something and had, I guess . . . I don't know . . . the space to think about it more. I guess that's what I mean is different about it as literature.

In a focus group, Cora and Ben addressed this theme as well. Although Ben describes himself as agnostic and Cora describes herself as Christian, their take on this theme was somewhat parallel.

Ben: I've never had any professor here hold any agenda other than education. No proselytizing at all. Just trying to inform you and teach you information for information's sake, right. I'm agnostic. Sometimes we discussed biblical references to bring insight into the literary text. It was good. This is what happened from a historical standpoint, right? This is what happened from a cultural standpoint, you know? Like in British literature when we looked at the nuns and prioress and their scriptural vows of chastity and poverty and obedience, and where they took them from the Bible, and we also looked at the . . . you know . . . the way they sold people out for personal gain and corruption, you know like the pardoner. Yeah. You know they were making money and they were corrupt. Not all of them, but most of them. It was a transparent discussion with no agenda but education. We looked at that biblical context as, like, a literary element. We didn't look at it as a judgement on the religion of Christianity, right? Or anything to advance it either. Really. Just as an element in the story. Why did . . . why did Chaucer write it that way? We would ask those questions, and they dealt with so much of the Bible. Right? We would think through concepts, and we would have discussions like that whereas you know when I was in a religious Sunday school. When I was a kid, you know, they were teaching this as a basis for me to try and, you know, to try and get me to believe what they believe. Right? There was major pressure to accept it without getting the chance to think about it. Major turnoff. Like if you want someone to accept or

believe something, you ought to give them space and choice. Not force a decision. If it's true, it'll hold up. That's just my opinion. You know?

Cora: Yes, I do. I do understand that. I grew up in a Baptist school and then was homeschooled, and while those beliefs remain the same for me, I can see how in a secular setting, you have more freedom to actually discuss ideas. I recognize that you (Ben) I have different perspectives on the issues, but it's refreshing that we can talk about them openly without it being an argument. My dad is a minister, as well, so . . . so I know how the church can sometimes, I don't know, I guess kind of 'gang up' on people who are simply seeking and are trying to understand. Not always. But sometimes. Questions are important. They need to be acknowledged.

One of Will's experiences seemed to be a bit of an outlier, at least in contrast to this particular data set, in that he describes taking a composition course and feeling "pressured to drop [his] faith":

I am a Christian attending a secular institution, and I get the concept of freedom of religion. I get it. I really enjoyed class discussions over readings in both composition classes, even when we students were in complete disagreement. We were all grown-ups and, you know, calm about it. But one of my teachers was so fixated on the idea that being Christian equaled—I don't know—maybe being dumb? I'd have to say that sometimes in that class I felt pressured to drop my faith—which to me is just another form of proselytization. Like I don't think a class can be values-free. That was the phrase he [instructor] kept using. Like it's philosophically impossible to be values-free, right? I mean, you know, I didn't expect anyone to adopt Christianity or endorse it, but I felt pressure in some literature discussions to reject it. That professor—he kept saying that

being a Christian would muddle my thinking. That we couldn't have an intellectual discussion if our values got in the way. Huh? But his saying that—that in itself—that is a value that really was getting in the way of, like, a scholarly conversation. I was frustrated. Just . . . he was advancing a different belief system, and I was kind of forced to disregard mine, I felt. It wasn't even about one of the great controversies—just about poverty. We were talking about a section of *All over But the Shoutin'*. I hope that makes sense.

Although Emma took coursework at Chautauqua State as a transient student, she spoke of a similar incident that had occurred at another institution—one, as she explained, that helped her appreciate balance and logic when approaching what can sometimes feel like awkward or personal conversations where personal belief systems come into play.

We were reading a work that was connected to Judaism, and I simply said this writer was more liberal than I had expected. Just an observation. But our professor just stopped me in my tracks and said, 'This is not the place to do that.' Yes, I teach at a Christian school myself, but I teach works that aren't 'Christian' or don't align with my worldview in the interest of education and exposure. But all through that class, the instructor seemed to have a kind of knee-jerk reaction to me because she found out I was a Christian. I thought it was interesting because others were commenting on the relative conservativeness of other works. So my takeaway was . . . if this was a secular educational environment for free-thinking, and education is supposed to be a safe place for everyone, why wasn't it safe for me? But this was only safe for agnostics and atheists. This was not a safe place for evangelical Christians. She [the instructor] kept emphasizing that her literature class was about freedom of thought. But her censoring my comment wasn't an

intellectual choice. Later, I tried to talk about that with her very respectfully. But it was done. She'd labeled me, and I . . . I was incapable of changing her stereotype of me.

That's when I was done with this, and all I wanted was my credit. I just had to get through it because I needed the hours. It's too bad. I was so disappointed. I'm very interested in Judaism in literature. I teach Elie Wiesel to my own students, you know?

The contrasts represented by these last two lived experiences with that of other students was ironic and interesting—almost paradoxical. While some public college students who identified as agnostic or as seekers felt a certain freedom to explore the Bible that they had not experienced in prior faith-based settings, some public college students who identified as being Christians felt restricted in the very environment that was purported to be characterized as “free-thinking.”

Theme Three: Technology/Format Preferences and Tensions of Interacting with Biblically-Informed Literature as Cultural Texts

Across the various data sets collected from the journals, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups involving the 13 public college students, a curious theme was identified from the conversations regarding technology and format preference for discussing literature broadly—as well as discussing more specifically biblically-informed literature as cultural texts. Responses were notably varied, as will be discussed, but a more surprising theme was identified, as well: the potential tensions of having conversations about biblical content in literary texts within secular educational settings and how particular preferences may speak to that phenomenon.

In terms of sheer numbers, of the 13 public college students, six students preferred to discuss biblically-informed literature in face-to-face classrooms (where technology might still be used in a supplementary role), one preferred the hybrid format (where online asynchronous

meetings replace up to half of the face-to-face meetings), and six preferred the exclusively online format. On the face of it, most students seemed to assume that discussing biblically-informed literature (whether the literature is perceived as endorsing biblical concepts, rejecting biblical concepts, or neutrally referencing biblical concepts) had the potential to be a tense and/or controversial conversation. For example, Nate had experienced four of the 11 courses under consideration. Among those four, two were exclusively online, one was a hybrid, and one was face-to-face. As he said of the role of technology in terms of class format, the processing time that asynchronicity allows was valuable, although he did appreciate the opportunity to interact in face-to-face settings:

In the lit classes and humanities, the ones I had online were asynchronous—that's the word?—so you could somewhat work around your . . . your schedule. I loved working ahead if that was possible. When you're ready to begin, you can begin. Sometimes that means that you've had these ideas running through your head and you can kind of make sense of it better when technology is being used. When you were meeting face-to-face, there's give-and-take there. You are having to share time with someone else's feelings and thoughts as you discuss issues. That has its own benefits, I think, but . . . I guess . . . I guess I really liked the online lit classes I did take—probably as much as the face-to-face, all things considered. It's like six of one, half a dozen of the other. You know? I think technology just gives you a place to sit back and think through what you believe or think about an issue. Um . . . you don't have to depend on someone else's thoughts or opinions in real time. You can think through the entire situation in your own time and in your own way. Or at least that's my take.

While Nate’s initial impression and assessment seemed to capture well the relative preferences of students, his description of how this particular phenomenon had, for him, inherent tensions was especially noteworthy:

Sometimes literature—especially if it refers to something biblical—negative or positive—sometimes it can be a lightning rod. In my physical class, there was some tension at times. I guess that’s inevitable.

Similarly, Shelley expressed an inexplicable tension that seemed to surface in some conversations surrounding biblical concepts as “walking on eggshells.” As referenced earlier, she’d had very little experience with biblical concepts prior to college, so she appreciated the technological elements of film and research databases that allowed her to better understand the cultural context of biblical content—one that she couldn’t fully explain. As she says of her interaction with biblical content in a face-to-face literary survey, as well as a humanities course,

Actually, I opted to watch quite a few educational videos that I didn’t really have to watch, you know, so I could understand things that have to do with Christianity or Judaism or Islam or whatever. So I watched a few things on the Bible or about biblical stuff. There was another one I meant to, um, mention a minute ago, and this reminds me of it. We did some of *Paradise Lost* and . . . well, d--n, if you don’t know what’s in the Bible, you’re completely lost. I felt like most the class knew the bare-bones of what was going on, but I was clueless. I didn’t know Satan was ever supposed to have lived in heaven. Who knows that? And I didn’t know about the angel [Raphael] giving Adam advice. And then I found out that’s not really in the Bible. So the whole thing is pretty confusing for me. I just straight up wish we studied it more. You know, like I said, I don’t want um . . . anything . . . to be crammed down my throat, but I do want to know what it

says. And it seems like everyone is just walking on eggshells when you talk about it like you're going to break the law or something, but it's a book, people. It's a book. We should be able to read and study it and understand what it means.

Although Nate had experienced considerable exposure to biblical content before college (although he expressed that experience as being very different in Washington, D.C. than what he experienced after moving to the Southeast), he referenced technology as giving him “space” for reflection and a means to avoid the “lightning rod” issues. Interestingly, Shelley had almost an opposite experience from Nate's in terms of prior exposure, but her description was markedly similar to Nate's observation about the same phenomenon:

I mean, you know, I did not grow up around the Bible much. And part of that was because my parents had really been just treated bad by some churches when they were younger, so they always were cautious about it and just . . . I guess . . . I don't know . . . wanted me to stay away from it. So I wasn't really into studying it, or didn't even know how to study it, so the technology gave me some tools to study it without any pressure. Just to have a journey of my own. You know?

Exploring literature with any biblical content inspired Shelley to later conduct independent research on the *Harry Potter* series, which she'd read on her own, apart from coursework. Again, she references tension:

Like I know people got all bent out of shape about *Harry Potter*, and I wondered why, especially because of the Bible verses Rowlings quotes, so . . . I ended up doing a lot of research on it after those courses. I mean . . . I see the whole thing really differently than the people who think it's anti-Bible or anti-Christian. But I thought it kind of supports the Bible. The themes and the quotes on their graves. But I'm not posting that on

Facebook. I'll get unfriended by everyone for one reason or the other. I didn't mind as much posting stuff in classes. I mean the professor wouldn't have let anyone be rude to me about my opinion on a discussion board. I felt a little bit safer with the tech buffer zone.

Biblical content as a "lightning rod," "walking on eggshells," "tech buffer zone," and other such terms that connote tension or the defusing effect of technology and its format surfaced repeatedly in terms of the relative pros/cons public college students experienced specifically in relation to biblical content in literary texts within a secular educational setting. Even more interesting was that such comments came from public college students who had had very different levels of exposure to biblical content before college.

Similar to Nate's and Shelley's descriptions, respectively, Kevin spoke to a similar tension that various uses of technology (depending upon the format of the course) might have defused. For example, in both a Composition II course and an American literature course (both of which were fully face-to-face), Kevin reported that while he preferred the real-time, live discussion of literature, he might have also preferred what Shelley referred to as the "tech buffer zone" in conversations referencing biblical content:

I chose face-to-face interaction because I wanted to hear what people thought and help me understand the work better. I have not taken a fully online course or the other? Hybrid? But I have used online interaction in face-to-classes. And I did like that. I felt like I could speak up more and see more than I would in another setting where we are actually talking in real time. So I guess if we were talking about things related to the Bible, I would probably enjoy it online more. Even though I'm not a religious person, I have many friends who are [religious]. . . and . . . and I'm just asking questions to try to

understand things, but sometimes it seems like people get offended just because I'm asking questions. I wish I could just study the Bible formally more. I'm not good at understanding it on my own.

Kevin's broader experience also resonates with the first theme (biblically literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy), but a specific encounter he described highlights the notion of discussing biblical content as potentially tense and awkward:

In the Comp II class, we did literature. I love class discussion, but one woman got upset if we said anything that didn't sound Christian. Or that sounded like we were anti-Christian. Um. I tried to listen . . . but . . . but I didn't really feel like she was listening. We did the story about a guy in pilgrim days who went into the forest? He meets the devil? Maybe a dream? And sees his girlfriend there? His fiancée? ["Young Goodman Brown," commonly taught in Comp II at Chautauqua State]. And that woman just got touchy about us talking about it. She took everything as anti-Christian. And then another guy took everything as pro-Christian. He wasn't [Christian], so they argued. So, in that case, I wished it was online. I felt more comfortable speaking up without them overreacting. In both directions. Total sidetracks. I tried to always respect their opinions, but . . . but she kept saying that college teachers try to turn you off of Christianity, and that wasn't true at all. Not in this case. Not at all. The teacher was great—very neutral. It was just a conversation about the main character and his references and stuff to the hypocrisy in their small town. I think it was Salem. Anyway, those two people couldn't just talk.

As mentioned earlier, Cora identified as a "committed Christian" who had been homeschooled exclusively before entering Chautauqua State. In contrast to the "woman" in

Kevin's class, she expressed an intentionality in maintaining courtesy and sensitivity in literary discussions involving biblical content, which she perceived to be potentially "controversial":

Yes, I prefer face-to-face because of the whole body language thing and non-verbal communication issue, especially when you're discussing potentially controversial topics. Biblical content doesn't have to be controversial, but sometimes it ends up that way. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, so I will pay close attention to how everyone in the room is viewing . . . um . . . seeing, you know, the topic, and I might take a cue of 'oh, I've said too much.' I'm careful to be courteous and mindful of this first and not just be . . . be talking out. I have strong opinions, but I also want to be conscientious of encouraging group cohesiveness . . . and . . . and if I can tell someone is stirred to say something, I might hold off, so someone else can feel like they are encouraged in this thought process. Face-to-face—yeah, I think it just enforces camaraderie.

Mary also preferred the face-to-face interaction with classes involving literary content, specifically, as she is very comfortable expressing her opinions, even if perceived as controversial. However, she also noted how certain technologies might ease the tension for those less apt to speak up on certain topics:

I have taken online and hybrid courses in other subject areas besides literature. But I prefer face-to-face for literature for sure. I have to be face-to-face to really get the maximum benefit from courses involving literature. And I just think being able to talk with people face-to-face and having that text in that moment and being able to really talk about it in real time—not just typing it—is just a lot more meaningful to me. The discussions are richer and better. OK. But . . . but I can see how someone who is

introverted about sharing opinions—especially when lit had something connected to a religious issue—they might prefer the safety of a screen. But I like to interact in real time.

Will also preferred face-to-face interaction when biblically-informed literature was involved because, as he explained, “if it’s connected to something biblical, even if it’s neutral, it feels personally important to me. Literature itself seems more personal, as a subject, since these are stories. They are about life itself, and so you talk about issues and human things. I like to be ‘in person’ in these conversations, even if there’s disagreement.” Because English is George’s second language, he expressed the desire to “see people’s hands and faces and expressions to understand them. I did not grow up in the states, and even hand expressions are different here. Literature and religion can get, you know, touchy, so I like to see people when they are talking.”

Having experienced a great deal of interaction about literature in a face-to-face Composition II course that included both in-class and online discussion, Kim offered input that established another connection. Although she also described herself as “extroverted” and “very comfortable expressing my [her] opinion on anything,” she found the opportunity to connect online valuable, especially when a topic was controversial and her more introverted classmates were quiet in class:

I love online literature discussions when students who are reticent get the chance to speak up. And then it's so cool when one does, it’s almost always like—yeah—I wish that person would talk more in class because they said something really interesting online. When people step out, you know, they start to find that they just enjoy that experience more. They start to connect that way.

In terms of specifically biblically-informed content, Kim thought that the online format might encourage camaraderie in that, as she explained, “anything that might feel emotionally charged

could . . . for some people . . . make the conversation more careful, I guess.” Interestingly, however, she does not experience the tension that she perceived as a potential in other “reticent” students, as she explains: “Experiencing literature is freeing for me—it is an open forum where you can talk about ideas without feeling pressure to, you know, have some particular kind of experience. I actually think it’s been easier to talk about religious issues in literature class that are lightning rods in other settings.”

Theme Four: Instructor “Passion,” “Safe” Facilitation, and Student-Centered Literary Discussions

As occurred with theme three, exploring public college students’ preferences in instructors’ approaches led to surprising interactions regarding how many public college students feel about their relative “safety” and comfort level in discussing literature—especially when potentially controversial content is involved. Furthermore, the instructor’s passion for the topic and facility in eliciting student feedback without forcing an interpretation was also highlighted frequently.

Steve prefers to read literature by himself first, as he explained, so that it is “raw and unfiltered”—especially if it is tied “in any way to any religious concept.” Although, as he explained, it might be conceivably argued that all literature is tied, in some way, to a religious concept (even if by its denial), he prefers to “have an instructor who’s more hands off and just tries to help the students garner their own interpretation—especially when religious content is involved in a secular setting.” Steve further emphasized the significance of the instructor’s level of passion and enthusiasm: “The teacher being really excited about the work means so much, too, but without forcing one particular interpretation but really fostering a discussion.”

Kim's responses resonated in many of the same ways as Steve's interview regarding this theme. Kim prefers instructors who are "passionate about what they're teaching and really want to talk with students about the text, the literature. I love when instructors give you the chance to voice your opinions, when they are interactive, and when they are very optimistic and passionate about the material." Compared to another class in another college (not Chautauqua State) in which, as she explained, "we were all given numbers and we didn't have names yet," having a student-centered literary discussion with an impassioned teacher was very important:

We just . . . we just came in. We were quiet. He spoke. We had a number. We never talked to teach other. Not officially. He [instructor] never talked to us and then we left. Someone else, like an assistant or something, graded our papers. This was literature? And it was just like more of something to be endured instead of a genuine pleasure to be involved. No thanks. Not doing that again.

Nate especially valued instructor enthusiasm and openness, citing one exception to that experience in his coursework at Chautauqua State:

Being a Christian, I had several classes in which biblical literature or biblically-informed literature was taught. Like the examples I mentioned earlier. I had one professor—only one—who seemed to be advancing an agenda of atheism. Which, to me, is no different than bringing a faith perspective into the classroom (which is also inappropriate—at least to enforce students to accept it). So that . . . that affected me. I was really careful about what I said. I mean, I would've been [careful] anyway. Careful not to offend anyone. Ever. But he [the instructor] seemed easily provoked. And I could tell it . . . it impacted other students in the class (this was face-to-face). We tended to be . . . quiet because he shut us down if we just referenced scripture. Like one student was talking about the

Inferno, and he only said that it was different than the biblical portrayal of hell in some ways. And the professor said something like, ‘That’s not really helpful. We’re not concerned about the Bible.’ It was just a reference. An accurate reference. If anything, the professor was advancing an agenda with a belief system attached. That was kind of frustrating for me. That was the exception, though. Otherwise, in every other class I had in lit the teacher was simply teaching lit with biblical concepts with no animosity . . . maybe that’s too strong . . . or, I guess, agenda. In those classes, I felt, I don’t know, peaceful? I could share freely and others could, too, and it was okay either way, no matter the belief system. It was fun. I did not feel any emotional tug on correcting or trying to prove a point or even trying to censor what I was saying. I think the teacher has a powerful and influential position in the classroom, especially a literature classroom where very human and universal and sort of core values and ideas and questions are put out there. That is, if it’s a good class. I guess that’s my opinion, anyway.

As with Nate, other public college students cited this sense of “safety” and mutual respect as key in literature classes that rely in any way on discussion. George reported worrying about a potential language barrier, but his having had “kind and respectful instructors” was impactful, as he explained:

I had good experiences. My teachers talked about respecting people with different opinions. I could talk about my beliefs, and I could ask questions about literature. Sometimes I felt like my question might have been stupid to others because I don’t understand everything in the culture, but one teacher would always say ‘There is no such thing.’ I think there probably is such a thing [laughs], but it helped me open up and learn.

Cora's experience involved two contrasting scenarios which, for her, highlighted the significance of having student-centered discussion and interpretation in courses involving literature.

The professor I had in one class mostly talked and read the literature. There was almost no discussion, and she didn't really encourage it. So it was just kind of awkward and stilted. Later I was in another class with a far, far more engaging professor. Very passionate, and so she definitely created an atmosphere for us to discuss and laugh and still be on track. Even with some tense topics at times. So that was very helpful, I think, just putting a student at ease will really help them open up and engage to form their own opinion. That's huge. Yeah, that's huge.

Sam also expressed valuing a student-centered discussion where literature is involved, as he says, because "self-discovery in my [his] opinion is the most important kind of discovery," while Kevin valued the "safety" of such an approach in several different classes he completed: "I'm thinking of a few different classes from that list. The instructors all did a good job of just getting us to discuss opinions and feel safe about those perceptions, even if it's not what other people in the class see." In one class, specifically, Kevin experienced difficulty with how the biblical content informed the cultural context, yet the instructor made a vital difference:

In composition, the teacher was good at discussing the Christianity—the topics—that was behind some of the literature, especially in the short stories and one novel. Biblical things also came up when we talked about like Martin Luther King and some of his speeches. I think it was 'Letter from the Birmingham Jail'? That makes sense since he's a minister. The only thing that made that class a little bit challenging was, again, the student who was kind of hypersensitive about anything in the Bible. She seemed to think we were all

trying to make her into an atheist and that was not the case at all. [Laughs.] I think she thought less of me because I said I wasn't religious. It kind of made me feel bad because I do respect her beliefs. She made a lot of assumptions that weren't really true. But to the point, the instructor always brought everything back into focus.

Shelley offered a similar explanation when in my office for a semi-structured interview, pointing to a plaque a student had once given me:

I don't think every instructor had the same approach in these classes, but on the whole, they were willing to answer my questions—which were many! [laughs] I think that instructors teach best in literature classes when they teach you how to think—how to think about literature and form an opinion. Like your plaque right there says. [points to plaque on my book case] 'The best instructors show you where to look but don't tell you what to see.' That's really important when you're bringing in something religious or controversial. When we talked about biblical content here, we always discussed it for education's sake. Fine by me. It was good.

Will placed instructor approach in high regard, citing enthusiasm as “crucial”:

The instructor being enthusiastic is crucial to me; the students feed off the enthusiasm of their professors, especially in classes where discussion is important. I think that's the case whether it's . . . whether it's online or in person. Technology is my thing, I mean, I love technology, but at the same time I think it can only enhance literary discussions but cannot replace the teacher or the interactions.

Although Ben described a class in which he felt very mild pressure to react in certain ways, based on the instructor's approach, he felt that in most classes involving literary texts, he

was “encouraged to learn and think independently, as long as I [he] can adequately support a viewpoint”:

You can tell, especially in the lecture classes with literature, you can tell when some professors had a specific personal feeling about that literary text. I had one professor who would always go off on tangents from Genesis; he really, you know really believed that. I think he was trained in that. The Old Testament should have been purely historical reference. But you could still tell that he was wanting you to adopt a particular stance rather than letting you facilitate your own and support it. But that was the exception. In other classes, biblical content was discussed—but discussed as cultural. Those literature professors who nurtured your voice and ability to support your ideas were more powerful. At least to me.

Theme Five: Literary Study as a Neutral Zone for Exploring the Essential Questions of Humanity

As public college students engaged in discussion over the literary texts they identified as powerful, they also considered what it meant for them to experience literary characters’ movement through the arc of a story—their journey, albeit fictional, toward outcomes, toward existential consequence. One significant theme that was identified across data sets was that literary study itself seems to provide a kind of “neutral zone,” as it were, for exploring the essential questions of mankind. Although students often referenced specific works and/or characters, they almost inevitably moved to broader issues of identity, oppression, justice, origin, destiny, character, and more. Frequently, public college students referred to studying literature as “trying on” a particular worldview, role-playing, or exploring a human issue they might not have ever explored in “real life,” so to speak.

For example, in more than one interaction, Steve eloquently described the literary journey of *Hamlet* and the impact it had on his experience of humanities and of literature:

Hamlet makes decisions based on his love and passion for his father and for the fact of just what his father had been. For the fact that his father had been profoundly noble—he was motivated by love for his father. We talked about his character as a Renaissance man—a thinker rather than a doer, but, really we went deeper. His personhood—it’s the main theme. Really. And with the vengeance trip that he goes on which . . . you know . . . you need to look at: is this just revenge? Is it courage or is it weakness? Hamlet is not just a nice guy, you know, or a representation, but he really kind of deserves a space for consideration and action. It made me go and think, what would I do? In Hamlet’s place? What would I do?

Much like Nate, Emma found herself asking the question, “What would I do?” regarding specific characters in settings/time periods/events she herself had not experienced—essentially, in literary texts set within the Holocaust. In this passage from her semi-structured interview, she describes a work in which a character actively works to help Jewish refugees escape:

The whole time I’m reading these works, I’m thinking, ‘What would I do in this situation?’ Would I even be able to be capable of taking in refugees and hiding them and doing all the spy work that they did and then going through the psychological and physical torment that she went through? It all makes me question: What do I hold dear? What are my priorities? I mean really, what are they? Would I rather keep myself safe than put myself in harm's way for someone else? Or like *Night* by Elie Wiesel. So many stories about people who have either denied their faith or left it or anything like that? It just is exciting to experience other people's choices through fiction. It’s just like living in

another culture that I wouldn't get to experience otherwise. I get to live different lives and kind of, you know, try them out I guess.

In her semi-structured interview, Lucy independently posed almost the exact same question (like Nate and Emma) regarding placing herself in a character's figurative "shoes," although in reference more broadly to the nature of literature as a discipline:

I can only speak for me, but I feel like I always am affected by literature. I get to play a different character, explore how they react, how they respond to different things. That's why I read the novel and other types of literature. It's kind of like I enjoy the escapist aspect of it, and I put myself in the shoes of that group and, you know, I just kind of think, how would I respond? Or, you know, that kind of thing. So how would this situation affect me? You know, my world was turned upside down in my educational process, especially when studying literature, so I'm probably a little bit more sensitive because—sure, people are very, very concerned about issues—but I feel like I'm pretty deeply affected by what I read. I'm very empathetic, very empathic.

In her journaling reflection, Cora also referenced a tendency to identify with fictional characters, often as if she herself were going through the same experiences but in a neutral and "safe" environment—an environment free of consequence in "real time":

Being on the outside of a story looking in, I have gotten frustrated with characters, and their behavior. It reminds me that if I saw myself from that perspective, I would also be screaming advice and frantic warnings to my current self. I cannot see my situation as a whole, just as what's happening right in front of me. I don't have the birds' eye view of the reader, or the extra information and context to which he is privy. It reminds me to slow down and think carefully about my decisions. Reading also gives me a chance to

learn from others' mistakes. If I can read about how making a certain decision worked out for them, or didn't, I can evaluate whether or not I would be wise to make the same decision in my own life.

Like the aforementioned interviewees in this theme, Nate also used the metaphor of "trying out" an ethical dilemma through literature without necessarily experiencing it in real life, and he further connected it specifically to his own biblically-informed worldview. Also notable in this excerpt from his semi-structured interview is the apt distinction Nate makes between a literary work being "Christian" vs. its being biblically-informed:

Me (De'Lara): What, if any, meaning did you experience when characters' actions led to specific consequences?

Nate: Well, in biblical belief, the whole idea . . . the idea is that actions do lead to consequences. So, when characters are living a certain way you can, at times, predict how situations will work out. For me that goes back to appreciating a literary work (whether it's Christian or not in terms of the author's supposed worldview) because it, um, it accurately portrays life, reality. Like the Hemingway thing. He might not be proselytizing, but he does capture well the basic tragedy of life lived entirely for one's own pleasure, I guess? He's really honest. He captures the reality of war, what it does to people. How relationships can be empty and sort of self-serving. He captures hopelessness well. I know I sound depressing, but it's powerful. Literature is a way, I guess . . . to explore real moral dilemmas. Um, in one of my comp classes, I think, we did this very short poem called "Travelling in the Dark" by William something?

Me (De'Lara): William Stafford? About the man on the highway?

Nate: Yes. Yeah, I think so. He has to decide about the deer and its baby? Is it that.

Me (De'Lara): Yes, the life of the unborn deer vs. the lives of the other travelers on that route? That one? The 'swerving'?

Nate: Yes—the swerving. That has to be it.

Me (De'Lara): I think so. Many Comp II classes cover that poem.

Nate: Ok. Yeah. In Comp II, as a class we talked about the difficulty that the guy faces.

And it was powerful to discuss that all together. So I think literature lets you try out different situations without necessarily being in them. That's pretty powerful for me. I enjoyed that part of literature in classes.

Me (De'Lara): That part?

Nate: Yes, exploring other worlds, settings, you know, characters' lives, and talking through choices with others. It's something that, I don't know, I can't think of another setting in which you do this. I mean there probably is, but not off the top of my head.

In his journal reflection, Sam noted that studying literature provides him the opportunity to consider a lifestyle of which he does not approve—one that allows him to be more conscientious in self-examination, as he explains: “For example, I’m unlikely to be attracted to a lifestyle such as the one expressed by the titular Dorian Gray (character in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde); however, the philosophical principles expressed through that life—selfishness, superficiality, self-delusion—has stuck with me, and subconsciously I consider them as I continuously examine my own life.”

Kevin made a similar observation about the capacity of literature to influence the reader to consider a life choice he or she has no intention of making, yet being able to evaluate that choice from a critical distance that literature provides:

You know *Crime and Punishment* [novel by Dostoevsky] just blew me away.

Raskolnikov has no intention of murdering anyone at first, you know, at least I don't think he does. But these little incremental choices add up, and he does. And I kind of felt as horrified as he did. I think because I identified with him at first—as someone who . . . who wouldn't ever murder. But watching that process unfold slowly made me realize that, I mean, unless you're like completely psycho, just soulless, probably many people don't decide to do something horrific. But little steps take them there. We talked about that in class and then also about *Oedipus Rex*, you know, who basically says because of the prophecy that he would never kill his dad or have an inappropriate relationship with his mom. Nor would I. But then we talked in class a lot about how his choices lead to his destiny. And he does those very things. But like I said, it's very . . . um, incremental. I did not think he was controlled by fate. I think he made choices. Man, it was heavy stuff.

George also described an experience with literature in Comp II in which he initially identified with a character whom he admired, at first, until he realized that, as he says, “she is pure evil”:

We read a very hard book called *Serena* (a novel by Ron Rash). And you know, it was difficult reading for me, but I did like it. But what bothered me, though, and I even tell my wife about it . . . is . . . is that I liked the woman Serena at the beginning. I thought she is so powerful and almost like an angel. As we keep reading this book and discussing it, I find out she is pure evil. She's a murderer. Very manipulative. And I'm thinking, how did I like her? And then I think about what evil really is. And you know I am a devout Catholic, and I should have known this. Evil can look very, very good at first.

Until you know better. So this book made me . . . I guess remind myself? Remind myself to really watch situations and people. This is exactly what evil is—this beautiful woman who seems like she is going to take care of everything. But she is a killer. She is kind of like, I think, a poison.

Shelley also expressed appreciation for literature’s capacity to give students a space to process the existential questions of mankind, but she emphasized that a text must be “honest.” In other words, it must contain what literature scholars would likely describe as verisimilitude.

It’s important that the text is believable. So I prefer fiction with real consequences. Like the way certain actions might lead to certain consequences in real life. I don’t like happy endings if they don’t happen on their own, like if they’re forced. I don’t like sad endings if they don’t happen on their own. Like if they’re forced. Believability, I guess, truth is really important to me. It was really cool when we did “The Things They Carried” and the honesty of the writer about the brutal way war changes people. I mean he was kind of crass and hard. One girl in class was offended. I don’t . . . I don’t know why, really. It was just what happened. But you could tell he [author, Tim O’Brien] was compassionate, too. People do bad things, yeah, but they get hurt and they’re suffering. It’s very human. Like also, when we did a part of *Paradise Lost* in another class, we talked about . . . um, I guess you would say free will? Our class debated whether or not Satan was heroic? I mean he acts like a rock star at the beginning. But also like he’s God’s victim. I have almost no biblical knowledge, so I was looking stuff up like crazy. Google. Wikipedia. But I disagreed with most of my classmates. I thought that Satan and his, um, his . . . the demons did have choices. Satan just didn’t want to see God as God. I felt, well, I felt . . . like his actions lead to specific consequences. I don’t know

how much of that was from the Bible, but you know I liked how raw it was. I was like, Satan, dude, you're Satan because you want to be. You like this gig.

Theme Six: Literary Study as Empathically Formative

The sixth and final theme of this study arose largely from questions and interactions involving spiritual and ethical formation. Although those were the initial and intended focus, and although those issues are involved in the results, empathic formation was identified clearly as the dominant theme.

During her semi-structured interview, as well as in her journaling exercise, Lucy offered a powerful overview of literature's capacity to enhance the formation of empathy. As she writes quite eloquently in her journal,

My experience with reading literature is constantly shaping the way I see the world because the stories shape me as I read them. All experiences leave a mark and a good book can immerse us in a fictional world so fully that we internalize the experiences of the characters. We empathize with them, and cry with them, and route [sic] for them. We are sometimes affected by their experiences as if they were our own . . . even just hearing an alternate point of view through a literary character allows you to do so with a more open mind. What's more, you not only get to hear it, you get to experience that point of view through the character's lens, and it can sometimes be an eye-opening experience.

Lucy's assessment captures in broad strokes many of the specific connections public college students made to how the study of particular literary moments enhanced their empathy for situations they might not have otherwise understood and perhaps never will experience. In his semi-structured interview, for example, Kevin discussed how literary study of oppressed

people groups (including Holocaust victims and those who suffered from racist ideology during the Civil Rights movement in the United States).

One type of literature that, I think, changed the way I see the world is literature about the Holocaust. I had read Anne Frank's diary when I was . . . little . . . pretty little, it seems. And then we read *Number the Stars* (YA novel) later. And that had already kind of gotten to me. Some of my descendants [ancestors] are Jewish. On one side, there are great aunts and uncles who were Polish, and I knew they'd been involved . . . or in the camps, but . . . it wasn't discussed. Ever. So I had a lot of questions. And then we did *Night* in college, the Elie Wiesel trilogy, in Humanities. I was taking Comp II at the time, too. And in there we were talking about the Civil Rights and 'groupthink.' I had never heard that term before. But in that semester, I . . . I connected them. So I don't know about spirituality or ethics. I mean I think my ethics are already pretty firm. But empathy. Yeah. Reading about those experiences, even if some of them were fictional, made me change the way . . . I guess . . . the way I saw how people are corrupted really fast if everyone goes along with something that's wrong. It's like a lot of . . . little decisions. You know? I mean, it's a slippery slope? If you have empathy, I don't know that you can be part of group think. I don't know. But I really do think studying *Night* and Civil Rights literature at the same time just clicked. It makes me want to be really careful. I'm not religious, but I do care about people and see them all the same. And, yes, then, I guess that is biblical content. The equality of mankind. I'm kind of just . . . all over the place, I know. Does this make sense?

As I affirmed to Kevin, it absolutely did. Although some public college students didn't connect to the concept of spiritual formation or of ethical formation, almost all public college students

connected to the notion of empathy—of better understanding the plights of others in a way they may not otherwise have without literary study.

Kim similarly expressed that although she does not identify as being in any way religious, she reports that studying literature in college has deepened ethics that she has already formed and increased empathy and understanding for various situations. As she explained in her semi-structured interview,

I was surprised at how literature does influence me. And it might not be because the characters are always admirable, you know? Sometimes . . . sometimes I've seen people that I don't want to ever be like, and then there are others. In Comp II, we studied several works of Civil Rights literature, and it might sound silly. I guess it's silly. But I want to be someone like Rosa Parks or Sojourner Truth. It makes me see what's possible. I also start to understand . . . you know situations I already had conclusions about, but I realize I'm maybe wrong. Stories, especially in settings I haven't experienced, make me understand the world more, be more empathetic. It's really hard to know all the ins and outs of situations or people's lives, and assumptions are . . . well, they can be dead wrong. I know I'm being really general, but . . . like reading about others' experiences with racism—all racism—has made me more conscientious about pushing back against any kind of racist ideology anywhere it happens. Like even in Shakespeare, you get to see individuals. You see that all problems people have, people have everywhere. I think literature connects us.

In a focus group, Shelley made a similar observation, explaining that although she identifies as “confused” when it comes to religion and, more specifically to Christianity (which she attributes to her upbringing), literature has helped her form a definition of spirituality:

I think that I am spiritual in some ways because I have empathy for others. I see value in people. Um . . . as for biblical content, we did read some works that made me think much more about what evil is, you know, how something evil happens. We did *Heart of Darkness* (novel by Joseph Conrad), and I was kind of wigged out by how Kurt [Kurtz] slowly falls into . . . really . . . really terrifying evil. Creepy. That's very biblical, I think. And we did *Serena*, and that woman [Serena] was just a freak show. I mean, not at first. Not at all. That's what sent chills up my spine. I mean she seemed so noble and kind of cool and then we watch her become . . . become monstrous, just scary evil. So I guess you could say it contributed to my spiritual formation—it kind of, I guess, shaped my deeper understanding of what evil is. Like it's not the obvious villain always. Like I said a ton of times, I haven't had much biblical content exposure before college, but in these lit texts (and a bunch more) I did develop, I guess, a sense of what evil is. The horror of it. Because it starts small, it makes me want to live carefully. I found myself rooting hard for Rachel (noble/humble character who escapes Serena and survives) and, really, hoping I am more like Rachel.

As a devout Catholic, George felt that his spiritual and ethical positions had been firmly established, but that encountering literary texts with biblical or biblically-informed content reinforced them and developed his sense of empathy for situations he hadn't encountered in real life, so to speak:

I am thinking of many examples, but one sticks out. *Hamlet*. I do not think Shakespeare is . . . what one would say is a Christian probably, but he writes about things that come up in the Bible all the time. There were many of . . . of the spiritual matters in *Hamlet*. I know he is sad about his father's murder and he is very mad about his uncle being a

murderer. I know this. I cannot imagine his loss. But, you know, Hamlet . . . he does have the chance to walk away and—this is my opinion—leave matters to God. But that is my own belief system. But Hamlet . . . he is trying so hard to play God, that he destroys himself. That is not the opinion of everyone in my class. But in that way, I guess I could see the spiritual side of things because he was trying to take matters into his own hands. I don't know if I could forgive someone for murdering my father and tricking me like that, but I think I would make the hard choice. Shakespeare, he does, show you that vengeance is . . . it is dangerous for everyone.

Although Nate was less specific in terms of the works he read in literature classes (for this question), he spoke of reading from “a wide range of writers from different parts of the world” in various courses from the 11 under consideration and how that enhanced his empathy:

Literature . . . reading and studying a broad range of it . . . I think it is important because it makes you take a step back from your own life and realize that the way . . . well, in my case . . . I grew up in the South is very different in the way people grew up in other parts of the world. My culture in this area can do a great deal in shaping me for good or bad. I have to be able to realize that my past is different from others' past. When I do this, I'm beginning to realize that the Bible was not written solely for a southerner, solely for an American, solely for a particular racial group. I realize that other people from other parts of the world live differently and know different ways of life that I do. This helps me relate to them, with who they are, and where they are during times of learning or life in general. This does not make my way or my past the best. It's simply helps me realize there are many different types of people out there in the world. I don't know if this makes

sense. I guess I'm saying that literary study helps you get outside of yourself and understand others. Be more empathetic to the world around you.

Sam referenced how literature facilitated in him this same empathic sensitivity toward others, but this time—in the context of war. In *American Literature II*, as he described, he had been exposed to naturalistic writers, such as Jack London, and explored the concept of randomness and nihilism and naturalism—ideas that were at odds with his own biblical worldview—but which he assimilated as key to empathy, to understanding another worldview. As he explained,

The Things They Carried was critical in developing a sense of empathy in me for soldiers in fronts far abroad, a particularly poignant idea for an American. In *American Literature*, I just left with this idea that very, very rarely are conflicts worth the price that we paid to get into them without ethics—largely from an American perspective. It doesn't often feel like these conflicts that we get into whether it's Vietnam or Iraq or even Afghanistan—to an extent it doesn't quite feel worth it. When you've read of experiences like that and the things that we go through, it never quite feels worth it. I don't know. After reading these works, I just felt so much more compassionate to our military, to what they must see, and to what coming home must be like. Back to Tim O'Brien [author of *The Things They Carried*], I'll just never forget this quote, something like: 'It was better to try to avoid the shame than to avoid the draft.' And another one: he says, 'they used a hard vocabulary to contain the terrible softness.' So, I guess what I'm saying is . . . is just that my own ethics and spiritual formation is already very much rooted in a biblical worldview. But reading literature helps me understand, be more empathic and attuned, you know, to others' difficulties or suffering.

In her semi-structured interview, Mary described how she was relatively unaware of the events of the Civil Rights movement until encountering a series of literary works in her Composition II course.

The civil rights literature because that was something that I had not studied before I went to college. And so for me, when we studied that, and we did study about the Birmingham church bombing, and racial tensions of the time, well . . . I'd never encountered that in history or anything else. It was a huge gap in my educational studies. 'Ballad of Birmingham' and MLK's speeches, etc., they were all new and eye-opening to me . . . so that cultural understanding increased my sense of empathy, you know, just for understanding different perspectives and viewpoints—especially with the Civil Rights movement and how it still impacts our dynamics in the South today.

Research Question Responses

The six themes that were identified from the qualitative analysis of the data sets provided the foundation for answering the three controlling research questions of the study. Each theme is connected to one of the major three research questions, as outlined below.

Research Question One Responses. *How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents?* This question was designed to assess how students interpret the term “biblically-informed literature,” how they understand biblically-informed literature as cultural documents not intended for proselytization, if students understand that biblically-informed works do not necessarily endorse scripture (but may react against it or remain neutral), and how prior settings in which biblically-

informed literature was experienced were similar to or different from their experiences at Chautauqua State.

After the various forms of data across all data sets (semi-structured interviews, and journals) were condensed into smaller units of meaning, two themes were identified as responses to Research Question One: how public college students experienced biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy when studying biblically-informed literary texts as cultural documents and what exploring biblical content in literature with or without the pressure of proselytization meant to public college students.

Public college students' prior experience with biblical content varied significantly along the continuum of exposure. Several students had never experienced biblical content within a secular educational setting until attending Chautauqua State while, on the other end of the spectrum, other students had experienced little or even no exposure to biblical content before attending Chautauqua State, and others fell somewhere in the middle—having minimal exposure that at least gave them the benefit of mild recognition of content in cultural contexts in college coursework. In light of increasing concern among scholars regarding the devaluation of literature appreciation as a general education requirement (Ferrero, 2011; Munson, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Vail, 2001), students' apt sense of literature itself as essential to the college experience was interesting. For public college students who'd been exposed to biblical content before college, it was much easier to understand the cultural dimensions of the Western world as expressed in literature, composition, and the humanities. This finding was especially resonant in light of Chan's (2016) recent study of how students connect academic subject identity in literary studies to other domains. Furthermore, although many of the public college students who'd been exposed to biblical content before college had not embraced it as a

worldview, had rejected it as a worldview, or who expressed uncertainty of it as their worldview, not one participant felt that his or her respective education was in any way diminished by that knowledge but rather expanded. The development of this subtheme well extends prior theorizing that facilitating literature appreciation to expand cultural awareness is vital to students' development of critical thinking, higher-order reasoning, independent learning, and self-efficacy in moving toward educational and career goals (Ames, 2014; Elliot, 2002; Ferrero, 2011; Heinert & Chick 2017; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Sanacore, 2013; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001). Along those same lines of concern, Sam's commentary from a focus group, below, for example, offers an insight into the broader theme of how significant prior exposure to biblical content tended to benefit public college students from an educational standpoint.

I am the son of a minister, so I had encountered quite a bit of it [biblical content] before college. However, in college, especially in courses that dealt with Western World or World literature or British literature or the humanities, I constantly encountered biblical content because it is so closely aligned with western civilization, even if we don't practice it from a position of belief. In my humanities class, for example, we read the Psalms, we read the book of Job, and we explored Dante's *Inferno* quite thoroughly. We were not studying it from a biblical worldview, but we were studying it in order to better understand the culture. For example, it's very difficult to understand Dante's *Inferno* unless you understand the biblical content and medieval Catholicism that he is exploring. Some of us had it. Some didn't. Some thought that Dante's version of hell is just like the one described in the Bible. Wow. Hardly. When we talked about Job, some had never heard that name before, while for others in the class, the mere mention of the name

automatically conjured up ideas like patience, suffering, God as a whirlwind, you know, all these associations that are necessary to the richness of an education.

Sam's (and others') commentary on this issue was particularly apt in light of research exploring how the literary appreciation of classical works is vital for developing cultural literacy, as well as how even a cursory appreciation of biblical content is significant in terms of being able to function with academic ease and finesse in contemporary culture. Not only do Cunningham and Reich (2010) identify the Bible as "the central document" (p. 135) of our culture, but Webster, Runions, Lopez, McGinn, Penner, and Howell (2012) explored learning outcomes for students studying biblical concepts in college-level liberal arts courses. In short, their analysis resonates with these findings, as they conclude that studying biblical concepts "develop[s] the critical reading and writing skills that are the hallmark of undergraduate education" (Webster et al., 2012, p. 262).

The second theme that was identified as a response to Research Question One involved what exploring biblical content in literature with or without the pressure of proselytization meant to public college students. Although some public college students had no previous exposure to biblical content prior to college (and considered themselves biblically illiterate), of the public college students who had experienced prior exposure to biblical content, several expressed a somewhat unexpected response—that the state college classroom offered them the chance to process biblical content and its significance for them, as individuals, in a way that some church settings had not. In light of how several researchers' findings seem to suggest that literary appreciation coursework imparts values of some kind—that a "values-free" curriculum is both philosophically and logically impossible, the observation that some public college students in this phenomenology had regarding the relative freedom of the state college classroom in contrast

to some faith-based settings was significant. As educational theorist Van Brummelen (2002) has asserted, through the very act of literary exploration and appreciation, students have the capacity to “become committed to certain values” (p. 504), whatever those values may be. Furthermore, as Newell (2009) and Bowen (2011) had found, to experience literary study cognitively inevitably translates into experiencing literature affectively, as the students’ imaginative processes acquire new schemata through interpretation. How interesting, then, that this phenomenology seems to both confirm and even extend this notion, while also suggesting that some faith-based settings may not always give students the same opportunity.

While some public college students described experiences in faith-based settings that required them to accept biblical content “on the spot” without the opportunity to ask questions or the space to process its significance, others even felt that they might experience alienation from those settings if they were not to make an immediate decision. Interestingly, interacting with biblical content in literature solely for the purpose of cultural study gave some public college students the first opportunity they’d had to really think through the significance of that content in their own lives. Some even reported that they would not have revisited it otherwise. Although many direct quotes were included in the prior section of this chapter to illustrate this theme, still others abound. As Lucy explained,

I mean, basically, you know, like what I said before, you know, it is a kind of like . . . like you can get rid of hang ups that you may have because of previous bad experiences in church settings. It is kind of like, whew, the pressure to make an immediate decision is off, and then you honestly get reintroduced to these biblical concepts or themes or content that I, personally, probably never would have just elected to just go and read for their literary or cultural value on my own. And I just had kind of put them in a little box,

you know, that's like a religious box and didn't want to take it out again. It wasn't even the biblical content. It was the setting and how you weren't given a chance to think. There was just the pressure to listen to a lesson and accept it on the spot. You know, because without pressure and this expectation to accept ideas without question, you can suddenly once again approach ideas with an open mind and feel free to process them and ask questions and explore.

Notably, even students like George and Emma who had been raised in exclusively faith-based educational systems also reported enjoying the opportunity to further discuss issues related to biblical content without the “pressure” (a word that came up frequently) to make a decision about the material in the moment. As Kevin unwittingly but quite poignantly expressed in his semi-structured interview, “I'd always kind of felt like a statistic for a church to record when we talked about biblical content. But it felt different here. I was drawn to it more so for that reason even though we were just looking at it for its . . . cultural . . . you know its educational importance.” Given what prior researchers have noted regarding how setting, format, and approach impact students' experience of literature (Battenhouse, 1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson, 1977; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis, 1975; Gutek, 2011; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987), the development of this theme resonates with new significance.

Research Question Two Responses. *What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)?*

This question was designed to explore what sorts of situations, settings, approaches, etc. impact how students experience biblical content specifically when taught for educational and cultural purposes. Although this question generated a significant amount of data, it was eventually condensed down into seven codes from which ultimately two themes were identified: first, technology/format preferences and tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts, and second, instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussions.

Asking students about format preferences (face-to-face, hybrid, or online) in courses involving literary study was originally intended to elicit information about technology and its impact on exploring biblically-informed literary texts as cultural documents. The literature had addressed this to some extent. For example, Ostenson and Gleason Sutton (2011) combined digital literacy and discussion questions to, as they described, “invite students to have meaningful experiences” (p. 42) with many canonical works, while Beeghly (2005) and Pace (2011) noted that, whatever the outcome—whether pessimistic or positive—literature ignites grand conversations that should characterize students’ college experience and digital literacies may enhance that possibility. Along similar lines of implications, Alsup, Brockman, Bush, and Letcher (2011) had found that traditional literacies of interpretative writing (such as that of literary analysis) are being enhanced—and not replaced—by technological innovation, while Smith and Dobson (2011) emphasized in their quantitative study that as new forms of communication increasingly redefine literacy, e-based interactions also redefine what it means to engage with the literary text as a construct. As Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart (2012) had previously considered, instructors of college literature courses may employ electronic platforms, such as discussion boards, to make literary analysis more “authentic” (p. 343). However, these

findings extended that observation into new territory, especially regarding literary conversations that involve worldview exploration. Not only does this phenomenology advance that notion of authenticity, but it suggests that students are willing to venture directly into territory that seems, for them, often laden with potential tension.

In terms of sheer numbers, six public college students preferred the face-to-face format, one preferred the hybrid format, and six preferred the exclusively online format. Those preferences, however, became less relevant or perhaps extraneous, as an unexpected thematic pattern was identified: a consistent characterization of how discussing biblical content in literature might become tense or controversial, even though taught exclusively for cultural and educational significance—not to proselytize. Public college students used phrases like “lightning rod,” “walking on eggshells,” and “tech buffer zone” to describe an inexplicable tension that seemed apparent to them when exploring specifically biblical content in literary texts within the state/secular educational setting. So although Research Question Two was designed simply to capture information about technology and format preferences, what was identified is a surprisingly consistent characterization of technology and technologically-defined formats as having a defusing effect on that tension. This theme remained consistent across data sets, regardless of whether the participant, respectively, had experienced little or significant exposure to biblically-informed content. Furthermore, even if the individual expressed his/her comfort discussing opinions in an atmosphere of tension, it was they who referenced the very existence of the tension—nothing about the question’s wording connotes any awareness of this phenomenon. Although many public college students’ comments regarding this phenomenon have been included verbatim in the narrative thus far, still others exist. As Lucy explained,

This fear or apprehension might make online classes more appropriate. You know some people are intimidated by discussing literature already and probably even more by discussing religious content, even if it's just for the sake of education. Maybe if they're sitting in front of a laptop in a room alone, they might be more apt to say what they really think . . . you know . . . in the safety of an online platform. Especially if there's discussion around a religious or biblically-influenced idea.

Public college students also heavily prioritized the need for the instructor to be passionate about the material, “safe” in terms of creating a space where opinions are respectfully exchanged, and student-centered in the sense of facilitating students’ ability to form, articulate, and support their own interpretation—again, as noted, especially when biblical content is involved. Because facilitating learning communities is a primary goal in literary study courses, educational technology offers unique advantages and challenges in promoting student interaction (Arikan, 2008; Bromley, et al., 2014; Choi & Piro, 2009; Edmondson, 2012; Farabaugh, 2007; Rosenthal, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Trudeau, 2005; Whittingham, 2013), as has been established in the literature. However, this phenomenology emphasized, perhaps more intensely and specifically, how digital literacies—especially discussions—offer a sense of safety in settings that might involve worldviews in conflict.

Research Question Three Responses. *What does this experience mean, if anything, to students’ spiritual or ethical formation?*

As the final research question controlling this phenomenology, this question was designed to explore what the experience of studying biblically-informed content for educational and cultural purposes means (if it means anything at all) to students in terms of their spiritual or ethical formation. Although this question generated a significant amount of data regarding

spirituality and ethics, it overwhelmingly referenced the concept of empathy—a somewhat unexpected but welcome addition to the study. Eventually condensed down into six distinct codes, two themes were identified in response to the research question: first, literary study as a neutral zone for exploring the essential questions of humanity, and second, literary study as empathically formative.

This exploration of empathy in this phenomenology is perhaps most compelling because the literature has been conspicuously devoid of study on how public college students experience biblically-informed literature—particularly in relationship to spiritual, ethical, and empathic formation. Although the confluence of these concepts has been thoroughly studied in K-12 settings (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Feinberg, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Rizzo & Bajovic, 2016; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013), in faith-based higher education settings (Binkley, 2007; Ellenwood, 2006; Freeman et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jeynes, 2012a; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Langer, Hall, & McMartin, 2010; Maillet, 2014; Rugyendo, 2015), and in broader settings that concern the college experience as a whole (Agnew-Cochran & Fozard, 2017; Auciello, 2006; Binkley, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Nather, 2013, Feinberg, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Gates, 2011; Graham & Diez, 2015; Heineke, 2014; Osguthorpe, 2013; Rabin & Smith, 2018; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya, Aungsumalin, & Worapong, 2014), little if any attention has been given even to the periphery of concepts this phenomenology explores.

In the process of answering this particular research question and its respective follow-up questions, public college students frequently named works they identified as powerful for them—powerful for different reasons. Furthermore, they often referenced study of literature as a

kind of substitute experience—a kind of “neutral zone”—for stepping into the worlds of characters and experiencing (without the real-time/real-life consequences) the arc of those characters’ stories and lives. Connected to this exploration involved also discussing the broader questions of mankind—notions of justice, oppression, identity, how character is/isn’t destiny, and more.

For example, many students had studied Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and explored it from a variety of interpretations. While some public college students, such as Steve, were inspired by Hamlet’s fatal quest since he embarks on a journey fueled by his love and passion for his murdered father, George regarded that journey as unnecessary—one that could have ended simply, as he explains, by leaving him to God, just as Hamlet’s deceased father has suggested when he addressed him as a ghost. Grappling with these notions of justice and loyalty, albeit in the context of fiction, was found very worthwhile by both public college students, as they were able to explore ethics and moral choices in the context of a setting that promotes the free exchange of ideas. As they both expressed independently, it was surprisingly refreshing to have this opportunity, and neither could think of another setting which would work in exactly the same way.

Nate also expressed appreciation for this neutral zone, and he consistently made the compelling distinction between a literary work being called “Christian” and being called “biblical.” As with Shelley’s commentary earlier, he longed to experience characters and works marked by honesty—or, as a literature professor would probably express it—verisimilitude:

Nate: I would call myself a ‘Christ-follower’ because the word ‘Christian’—at least in America right now—is too politically loaded and carries connotations that I hope don’t characterize me. I love the sort of neutral place that a literary discussion gives people of

all beliefs a chance to talk. Like I don't think this could even work in a church, even though it should. I'm sorry—I'm bogged down with the idea of something being 'biblical' as opposed to 'Christian.'

Me (De'Lara): No worries. I understand the distinction. It's why I used the terms 'biblical' or 'biblically-informed' in my study, as they are far more precise than what the word 'Christian' might connote to the individual, depending upon the context. You can continue—I really do get it.

Nate: I guess I think encountering biblical content within a literary text was really important to me. I tended to enjoy writers who cover biblical concepts topics accurately because I think that all truth is God's truth. I follow Jesus, so that's important to me. But I don't mean that I only cared about so-called 'Christian' writers. I cared about if the writer was writing honestly—about what is true. And I loved talking about that with other students of all belief systems. I'm getting too philosophical and abstract?

Me (De'Lara): Not at all. Can you say more about that?

Nate: Jesus always attracted people to himself who didn't know him. So when a writer is presenting something that is true or rings true even if it is controversial, it is compelling to me. Whether or not the writer is a 'Christian.' Whatever that means today.

'Christian'—at least the word—is a loaded concept. I don't know. Like it's a culture or a tradition to a lot of people. I don't know that I'd equate something called 'Christian' with something that is biblical. Like I think Huck Finn, the boy, is a moral hero. Twain might not be pro-God, but I think Jesus would've been pro-Huck Finn. You know? We had that conversation in class, and I don't think it could happen so civilly, so honestly, anywhere else. I'm in church every Sunday and glad to be there, but I think this kind of

conversation would get hijacked fast because Mark Twain isn't a Christian, yet he writes about truth. And there's no way this conversation would last five minutes on Facebook.

[laughs] You know what I mean?

Me (De'Lara): Yes. I do. I do. It's unfortunate.

Nate: But here you can discuss the basic questions of mankind, like we said, in a neutral area. Like I'm not sure we could have had that conversation about Huck Finn in a faith-based literary classroom—at least not many of them.

The theme of literary study as empathically formative is closely aligned with this theme of literary study as a neutral zone in which to step into the lives of characters and settings that a reader may never experience otherwise. What is empathy, if not the capacity to place oneself within another's position and fully experience their frame of reference? The conceptual grid through which they view the world? Van Brummelen (2002) had perhaps most notably and seminally explored this concept, as he emphasized that the study of literature innately involves exploring the essential questions of mankind:

How is human nature portrayed? Are people basically good, or are they born with a bias toward sin? Are people locked in deterministic patterns, or are they shown to be able to change? What is the cause of evil or justice? Is there ultimately hope or meaning? If so, what is its source? (p. 508)

Even Van Brummelen's (2002) commentary, however, was limited to faith-based educational settings. However, in this phenomenology, public college students explored this concept within the realm of a state college classroom.

In exploring this theme, students cited many examples. Kevin found himself drawn to Holocaust literature as means of entering the world of his great aunts and uncles in Poland—

many of whom were in concentration camps during the Holocaust (a matter, he explained, that his family would not discuss). Raised in Mexico with English as a second language, George repeatedly described how reading American and/or British Literature has helped him discover the nuanced aspects of culture that he might not otherwise notice. In terms of empathy, Mary noted that, although she spent part of her childhood in the south, she had never really explored the Civil Rights movement or issues of racial segregation as they occurred in the southeastern United States, so encountering those experiences through literature was, as she described it, “eye-opening.” Multiple public college students noted how reading works related to war, especially the more recent ones in our own national history, made them much more empathetic to the plight of veterans, to the challenges they face both in war and if, perhaps more poignantly, they survive and return. One of Shelley’s observations perhaps best encapsulates the entirety of this theme:

Studying literature here has definitely changed the way in which I see the world. I mean I already talked about how I had no biblical knowledge, so talking about biblically-informed texts helped me in other classes, too. But I also think one of the most powerful parts of reading is that you get to explore lives or places or issues or events that you may never actually be a part of but you get to see it from someone who’s there. Like, I don’t think I would really have understood the Civil Rights Movement and how badly that must’ve hurt people here in the South until I read a few different pieces in Comp II. My family is part Asian, so I wonder how things would have been for us here at that time. Some of the war literature like O’Brien but then also the WWI poets in British literature—that made me think more about our current national issues. The possibility of more war and what coming home must feel like for vets. I mean, a lot of my classmates

are veterans. Reading *Night* and a few other short stories and poetry made me finally get how the Holocaust really happened so recently. The whole idea of how one group can obliterate another. It seems to happen in small, unnoticed steps, and that, I guess, is what has changed me the most. Every little step you take has to be in one direction or the other, you know. You can't really be neutral about human suffering. That's made me sober about understanding how we treat people. I think that I'm trying to say is that it helps me see how when a culture or a race or a large group does such horrible things, it starts with one wrong act that others ignore and then it snowballed into something horrifying. That's definitely impacted my life.

Although the literature had covered peripheral issues that are, perhaps, “cousins” of the focus of this phenomenology, (Agnew-Cochran & Fozard, 2017; Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Leal, 1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011), public students' responses such as Shelley's and others in this phenomenology addressed a gap in the literature—considering the confluence of literary study, empathic formation, and higher education in an exclusively secular setting.

The fifth theme that was identified from this phenomenology involved how literary study can operate, for the students, as a kind of neutral zone for exploring the essential questions of humanity. In the process of answering particular research questions that led to this theme and their respective follow-up questions, public college students frequently named works they

identified as powerful for them—powerful for different reasons. Furthermore, they often described their study of literature as a substitute experience—a kind of “neutral zone”—for entering the worlds of fictional characters and experiencing vicariously the development of those characters’ outcomes and consequences. These discussions often led to students asking what Van Brummelen (2002) most aptly called the broader questions of mankind— notions of origin, justice, moral consequence (if any), oppression, identity, the role of character in destiny, and more. Although the empirical studies had explored related or peripheral concepts that are somewhat connected to the focus of this phenomenology, (Agnew-Cochran & Fozard, 2017; Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Leal, 1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; O’Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011), none had considered this particular confluence of influences.

The sixth and final theme of literary study as empathically formative is follows organically upon the heels of the fifth theme of literary study as a neutral zone in which to step into the dilemmas and lives of characters, into the arc of experience and settings—elements that a reader may experience vicariously. What is empathy, ultimately, if not the ability to place oneself within another’s framework of experience? This theme has been perhaps the most compelling because the literature is significantly silent on how public college students experience biblically-informed literature—particularly in relationship to spiritual, ethical, and empathic formation. Although these elements have been studied in K-12 educational settings (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington,

2002; Feinberg, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Rizzo & Bajovic, 2016; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013), in higher education institutions that are faith-based (Binkley, 2007; Ellenwood, 2006; Freeman et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jeynes; 2012a; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Langer, Hall, & McMartin, 2010; Maillet, 2014; Rugyendo, 2015), and in consideration of the entirety of the college experience (classroom, social life, etc.) (Agnew-Cochran & Fozard, 2017; Auciello, 2006; Binkley, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Nather, 2013, Feinberg, 2014; Freeman, 2014; Gates, 2011; Graham & Diez, 2015; Heineke, 2014; Osguthorpe, 2013; Rabin & Smith, 2018; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya, Aungsumalin, & Worapong, 2014). But no attention has been given to the unique confluence of settings and influences this phenomenology explores. Chapter Four details the public college students' in rich and specific detail, but it should be noted that students independently explored notions of justice, oppression, family loyalty, forgiveness, racial divides, racial reconciliation, the nature of evil, patriotism, religious differences, and many other existential questions of mankind that several students noted they may not have otherwise considered. Most surprising and even exciting about this theme is that although the research questions began by exploring spiritual and/or ethical formation, the students' responses took the study into the realm of empathic formation—an area that the literature has not explored in terms of this particular phenomenon whatsoever.

Summary

Chapter Four provided the results of this transcendental phenomenological study describing how public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught merely for cultural context and not to proselytize. Brief portraits of each of

the 13 public college students were then presented, in order to give readers a better sense of their backgrounds, respectively. Next, the process of condensing the data across all data sets and the resulting six themes that were identified were then presented. Employing Atlas.ti to conduct open-code enumeration across data sets produced six overarching themes: biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy; exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure; technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts; instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion; literary study as a neutral zone; and literary study as empathically formative. With each theme, public college students’ quotes were used to support and illuminate the narrative. Finally, each of the three controlling research questions were answered, using the themes and data descriptions as support.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught merely for cultural context and not to proselytize. This final chapter concludes with a summary of findings as well as discussion of how the findings include implications related to the relevant literature and theoretical concepts outlined in the literature review. Finally, the methodological and practical implications are discussed, an outline of the study's delimitations and limitations are presented, and recommendations for future research are made.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were established by using Moustakas' (1994) recommended methodology for conducting transcendental phenomenology. Chapter Four outlines the details of these findings in depth. However, the following sections outline a summary of these findings, using the six themes as responses to the three controlling research questions of this transcendental phenomenology.

Themes

The six themes that were identified in this phenomenology include the following: 1) biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy; 2) exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure; 3) technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts; 4) instructor "passion," "safe" facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion; 5) literary study as a neutral zone for the essential questions of humanity; and 6) literary study as empathically formative.

It was from the data collected across all data sets in response to Research Question One (“How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents?) that theme one (biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy) and theme two (exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure) were identified using Moustakas’ (1994) method of data analysis. In responding to Research Question One, whether through journaling, semi-structured interviews, or focus groups, one clear pattern was identified that biblical literacy (or the lack thereof) was a clear indicator of cultural literacy (or the lack thereof)—especially when studying literary texts in composition courses, literary survey courses, and humanities courses at Chautauqua State. As stated in earlier chapters, the 11 general education courses that were selected for this study subsume disciplines which feature literary study quite centrally.

Among the 13 public college students, Kevin and Shelley had experienced the least amount of exposure to any sort of biblical content at all, and as the more detailed narratives in Chapter Four explain, they subsequently found themselves sometimes “lost” and “frustrated” in course discussions that involved any biblically-informed concept, motif, theme, narrative, character, or other frame of reference—whether or not the content was presented as endorsing the Bible, rejecting the Bible, or simply using it as a neutral frame of reference. The rest of the public college students were diverse in their personal worldviews as relates to the Bible, and they chose to identify themselves in a variety of ways: as “not religious,” as “not religious but spiritual,” as “agnostic,” as “uncertain,” as “atheist,” as “Christ-followers,” as “Christian,” as “Catholic,” and as “seekers.” What the remaining public college students had in common to varying degrees, however, in contrast to Kevin and Shelley, is that they experienced exposure to biblical content before entering Chautauqua State. Consequently, they enjoyed an ease and

facility with the contextual elements of literature survey courses, humanities courses, composition courses, and even additional courses they referenced which were not included in the study (art history, history classes, philosophy, world civilization, and other such disciplines were mentioned in the course of data collection). These students also noticed the struggle that some of their classmates had in grasping basic cultural context. Mary described explaining the Cain-Abel narrative to a classmate, Nate helped a classmate understand that the Old Testament and New Testament were not divisions in the life of Christ, Sam explained to another students that Dante's *Inferno* bore little resemblance to the biblical representation of hell, and George noted that his educational grounding in the private Catholic schools of his childhood and young adult years gave him an edge in coursework that seemed to compensate for the difficulties he experienced in English being a second language. In contrast, although Shelley identified as "officially confused" in terms of religious belief, she expressed more than once her regret over not having been more fully educated in biblical content, even if just for the sake of cultural awareness:

Like in composition, someone used the term 'the golden calf,' that something was America's 'golden calf.' And everyone nodded, and I had no idea that came from the Bible. Later, we were reading a passage from Faulkner, maybe? Anyway, someone described a character as a good 'Samaritan,' and I had no clue as to what that meant. I thought it meant they had something to do with that company that's kind of like Goodwill. So I guess I tended to participate in discussion a little less because I just don't know a lot of the biblical allusions or terminology. You know I'm all for freedom of religion, but that doesn't mean you never learn anything about other religions.

The second theme that was identified from the data generated by Research Question One was exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure. Although

Research Question One was designed with no anticipation of this theme emerging, the frequent occurrence of this concept across data sets could not be denied. While a few public college students assumed that discussing biblical content in college simply as cultural text would be “taboo” or “restricted,” most public college students described a kind of freedom to process and question key concepts without what they repeatedly identified as the “pressure” to immediately act up on it (“it” being, as they variously described, the pressure of proselytization, of having to make a decision “on the spot,” of being asked to “walk to the altar,” to make a “faith commitment,” of—perhaps most poignantly—“becoming a statistic for the church to record”).

Lucy, for example, described a freedom to discuss biblical content thoroughly, to ask questions, to process biblical concepts, etc. that she had not felt in previous faith-based settings. Although George was very comfortable with what he described as the strictness of his Catholic upbringing in Mexico, he nonetheless commented that at Chautauqua State, he can “ask questions” that would have been regarded as “asking the wrong questions” in prior settings with his family or teacher or priest. When I asked him if he would talk more about the phrase “wrong questions,” his response was humorous but also illuminating: “Well, yes,” he said, laughing. “All questions are the wrong questions.”

Although Chapter Four details many more specific conversations verbatim, often in narrative form, students of various faith backgrounds mostly (with one exception) described their experience of exploring biblical content at Chautauqua State as more engaging in terms of being able to question, process, and analyze information. Interestingly, some public college students described electing to independently study the Bible for the first time or once again, an action they don’t feel they would have otherwise taken.

From data collected in response to Research Question Two (“What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students’ experience of the phenomenon?”), theme three (technology/format preferences and tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts) and theme four (instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussions) identified. Research Question Two was designed with the intention of garnering insights about how technology and formats shaped by particular technologies (face-to-face class format, hybrid class format, and online class format) might impact how students experience biblically-informed literature when taught only as cultural texts, an unexpected pattern was identified which informed the formation of both theme three and theme four. On the whole, public college students seemed to assume in a rather unspoken/unwritten sort of way that discussing biblical content—even if just for educational and cultural reasons—would automatically be characterized by tension.

As referenced earlier, certain phrases (“lightning rod issue,” “walking on eggshells,” “tech buffer zone,” and more) surfaced repeatedly and unexpectedly. So the data began to point more toward technology’s role and how it shapes various delivery formats in terms of its potential to defuse this inexplicable tension and awkwardness surrounding the discussion of biblical content. In response to Research Question One, both Shelley and Kevin had repeatedly used the word “taboo,” apparently assuming that even discussion of biblical content as culture (regardless of the author’s stance toward it—albeit positive, negative, or neutral) would somehow be restricted or even disallowed in a state institution. With this second controlling research question, however, the notion of tension and even potential conflict became more pronounced.

Although some self-described extroverts such as Mary, Cora, and Nate reported that they would not have minded such tension in the context of class discussion, they all nonetheless pointed to online discussions, asynchronous interaction, and other technological applications as ways to minimize the potential for a “lightning rod issue” to cause tension in face-to-face interactions. There seemed to be no correlation between individual participant’s religious views (or lack thereof) respectively and this perception, but students who enjoyed the spirit of even intense debate described technology mostly in terms of its ability to reduce potential conflict over “emotionally-charged” issues surrounding biblical content. \

The fourth theme (instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussions) that was identified from Research Question Two seemed to quite naturally follow the essence of the third theme. Public college students consistently referenced the importance of instructor passion and enthusiasm in teaching especially literature—as they found literary study to be innately more personal and interpersonal than other disciplines in general. As many of the narrative quotes from Chapter Four affirm, this seemed to be even more significant in terms of interacting about literature that is in any way biblically-informed—apparently because of the corresponding perception that such content has the capacity to produce tension and even conflict among discussants. “Safe” facilitation and literary discussions that were student-centered, then, were thematically linked for public college students. As Ben remarked, “those literature professors who nurtured your voice and ability to support your ideas were more powerful. At least to me.” As further examples, students also shared moments in which they did not feel “safe” in advancing an opinion about biblical content because either the professor or a classmate had “knee-jerk” responses to anything religious—those “knee-jerk” responses ranged from a professor who insisted that no biblical content enter class discussion to a professor who seemed

intent on requiring students to accept a biblical viewpoint to a student who reportedly stated aloud, in class, that college professors primarily attempt to make students reject biblical content. It should be noted that not all of those events occurred at Chautauqua State and that public college students overwhelmingly described their experiences in studying biblically-informed literary content as purely for the sake of cultural awareness and education at Chautauqua State—a goal in keeping with the mission of state institutions of higher education.

Finally, it was from data collected in response to Research Question Three (“What does this experience mean, if anything, to students’ spiritual or ethical formation?”) that theme five (literary study as a neutral zone for essential questions of humanity) and theme six (literary study as empathically formative) was identified using Moustakas’ (1994) method of data analysis. In this portion of the research, public college students discussed what it meant for them to experience literary works they described as powerful and/or impactful, also exploring what it meant when characters experienced consequences, although fictional, as they moved through the dimensions of a story. Public college students tended to respond to this question in terms of specific works that had impacted them (which are discussed at length in Chapter Four), but they almost inevitably then moved to the universal experiences of humanity—across time, culture, setting, and other specifics. Literary study, as they variously described, gave them the opportunity to “try on” and explore a very human issue within the neutral and consequence-free context of fiction. Repeatedly, public college students brought up the question “What would I do?” in reference to various characters’ moral and ethical dilemmas and decisions. This tendency lead quite organically into the sixth theme regarding literary study as empathically formative. It was within this context that public college students described not only their spiritual and ethical formation, if applicable, but their empathic formation, as well. From better

understanding the plight of Jewish ancestors who had suffered during the Holocaust to identification with oppressed peoples in parts of the world they may never visit to better understanding the Civil Rights movement in America to deepening empathy for veterans of various wars, public college students repeatedly described how literary study allowed them to step into a very human issue they may not have encountered otherwise. In terms of biblically-informed content, despite students' varying experience with biblical concepts, they all spoke of some aspect of moral exploration—discerning the true nature of evil, for example, analyzing how corruption is often slow and incremental, considering how individuals might unwittingly damage themselves in the process of seeking vengeance on others, and so on. While the question posed to public college students involved the spiritual and ethical, it was they who advanced it into the realm of the empathic.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe the experience of public college students at Chautauqua State, a higher education institution in Tennessee, who study biblical or biblically-informed literary texts that are taught merely as cultural documents in composition, literature, and humanities courses. Such texts were understood as literature that is excerpted from scripture or that explores a biblical worldview, whether to endorse it, reject it, or simply use it neutrally as context. Using Moustakas' (1994) recommended methodology for transcendental phenomenology, six themes were identified as study findings. From the first research questions, the following two themes were identified: (1) biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy and (2) exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure. From the second research question, the following two themes were identified: (3) technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-

informed literature as cultural texts and (4) instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion. Finally, from the third research question, the final two themes were identified, as follows: (5) literary study as a neutral zone for essential questions of humanity and (6) literary study as empathically formative. These findings will be discussed below in relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Mezirow’s (1996) transformation theory of adult learning and C.S. Lewis’ (1966) theory of literary apologetics guided this qualitative study. Thus, each will be discussed in turn.

Mezirow. Among his theories of adult learning, Mezirow (1996) describes transformational learning as “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). Advancing this finessed ability to think autonomously and responsibly as the primary goal in educating adults, Mezirow (1997) explains that in “contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgements, and feelings of others” (p. 5). As he further explains, “facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). As the findings of this phenomenology confirm, literature innately offers students the opportunity to cultivate their own interpretations of the essential questions of mankind and to subsequently develop autonomous thinking in the process. Literary study—perhaps especially when connected to the biblical content so woven into our Western frame of reference—provides a space in which authentic transformation may occur through learning. As Mezirow (1996) theorized, transformative learning happens when a dramatic and essential change has occurred in one’s perspective or frame of reference. Several of this study’s themes, in no particular order, support Mezirow’s (1996) theory.

For example, theme five describes literary study as a neutral zone for exploring the essential questions of humanity. Not only does this theme describe the process of adult students (ranging from age 18 to age 55) identifying literary works they identified as impactful in terms of self-exploration, but they described being transformed as they “tried on,” so to speak, the roles of characters, entering the arc of a story they may never experience in real life but developing autonomous thinking that lead to transformation nonetheless. Steve described how, in studying *Hamlet*, he began to understand the moral complexity of vengeance that while murderous, is also motivated by what he described as love for one’s father. As he stated, “It made me go and think, what would I do? In Hamlet’s place? What would I do?” Similarly, Emma’s experiences with Holocaust literature made her question the impact of her own ethical formation in relation to her biblical worldview. Studying Elie Wiesel’s *Night* trilogy and other literary works were not just assignments to her; they required her to explore the very core of her ethical framework: “It all made me question: What do I hold dear? What are my priorities? I mean, really, what are they? Would I rather keep myself safe than put myself in harm’s way for someone else?” Lucy’s description of how “my [her] world was turned upside down in my educational process, especially when studying literature” certainly fulfills Mezirow’s (1996) definition of transformative learning as occurring when a dramatic and essential change has occurred in one’s perspective or frame of reference.

Although many other participant narratives in theme five expand or fulfill Mezirow’s (1996) theory of transformative learning, theme six (literary study as empathically formative) and its related narratives further support other dimensions of the theory. In relation to this theme, participant input repeatedly references how the study of particular literary moments increased their empathy for others in settings and situations they hadn’t previously understood

and perhaps will never experience in what they identified as “real life.” Whether in the realm of fiction or reality, the transformation was nonetheless complete, as they described. For example, Kevin recounted how studying literature that featured oppressed people groups (including victims of the Holocaust and of racist ideology during the American Civil Rights movement) deepened his empathy and compassion for the plight of individuals he may not know personally. Holocaust literature was especially profound for him because his great aunts and uncles from Poland had been numbered among both the victims and survivors of the Holocaust:

Some of my descendants are Jewish. On one side, there are great aunts and uncles who were Polish, and I knew they’d been involved . . . or in the camps, but . . . it wasn’t discussed. Ever. So I had a lot of questions. And then we did *Night* in college, the Elie Wiesel trilogy, in Humanities. I was taking Comp II at the time, too. And in there we were talking about the Civil Rights and ‘groupthink.’ I had never heard that term before. But in that semester, I . . . I connected them. So I don’t know about spirituality or ethics. I mean I think my ethics are already pretty firm. But empathy. Yeah.

Kevin went on to discuss “groupthink” and how that has made him reconceptualize his former notion of evil as “obvious” into the idea that evil is often insidiously incremental and almost, at first, invisible. Although Kevin is agnostic, his description was curiously profound in terms of its biblical acuity. His narrative is only one example of many where public college students identified literature as empathically formative—as prompting what Mezirow (1996) would describe as the kind of autonomous thinking that indicates transformative learning—especially among the adult population.

Lewis. More popularly known for his young adult fiction, war-time radio addresses, and sermons, C.S. Lewis was a noted Medieval and Renaissance Literature Professor at both Oxford

and Cambridge. His remarkable acuity in literary critique and literary theory have significantly influenced especially the Western cultural canon. In fact, in many college-level literary anthologies, it is C.S. Lewis's literary critiques and explanations of such genres as the epic that preface medieval, renaissance, and even some contemporary literary texts. Perhaps most unique to Lewis' (1966) theories is his concept of literary apologetics, one in which he explains that by recasting the essential tenets of Christianity into a fictional setting, by, as he explains, "stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency" (p. 37):

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed [sic] much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as it were something medical. (Lewis, 1966, p. 37)

In terms of the themes that were identified in this phenomenology, Lewis' (1966) literary theory captures well several of the themes associated with studying literature in various settings that became apparent in this study. Although several of the findings in this study support Lewis (1966) theory, the second theme surfaces with such resonance: exploring biblical content literature with/without proselytization "pressure." The emergence of this theme was somewhat surprising, largely as a response to a subquestion of Research Question One—simply asking public college students to discuss any similarities or differences they had noted in studying biblical content in literary coursework simply as cultural texts and studying the same in any other setting. It was at this point that public college students, despite having a wide range of

backgrounds in relationship to faith-based settings, began to repeatedly and independently use words/phrases like “pressure,” “accept without question,” “asking the wrong questions,” “all questions are the wrong questions,” and more. Many of the public college students—even public college students who identified as Christians, or Christ-followers, or believers—described the freedom to discuss biblical content, to process, explore, question, and analyze it that they experienced in the public college classroom as different from what they had sometimes experienced in faith-based settings. Although Chapter Four details the more specific narrative statements in detail through direct quotation, many public college students reported that they felt that what happened in the college classroom is what should have happened in faith settings. So prominent was this type of response across data sets, as Chapter Four details, that listing them all here would not be appropriate. However, Lucy’s comment provides an overview of what became variations on a theme:

So, in terms of exploring biblical content, I feel like church should have been the most impactful experience outside of a literary setting. You know, the pastor or the youth group leader or whomever it is that is teaching is, you know, sharing a story from Scripture and then follows up with the lessons that we can learn from the faith. But there was no discussion of this. We were taught the literature, told how to process it, and then we experienced it as something we must immediately accept without question. How is that formative? I don’t think that . . . that faith doesn’t involve questions. So . . . I never . . . I guess when we would do that and talk about the biblical content in church . . . we were not in a position to really talk through it but just pressured to accept whatever interpretation the adults had found. You know, being there and being exposed to it as a child was an opportunity to think about the Bible, but you weren’t really supposed to

think. If we were, I would have found it more compelling. The chance to process and interpret. Does that make sense?

This theme was identified rather surprisingly across all data sets (journals, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups). Although Kevin and Shelley assumed that any discussion of biblical content—even neutral educational context—would not be allowed, the majority of public college students described instead the freedom they experienced instead discussing biblical concepts without “pressure” of proselytization. It should be noted, too, that public college students did not note that the desire to proselytize in prior, faith-based settings was problematic, but that the pressure to convert without discussion, processing, questioning, etc. was the issue. Throughout this study, these kinds of comments from public college students resonated strongly with Lewis’ (1966) observation of the inhibition and paralysis that had characterized his own childhood experiences with Christianity. As he described, he felt it was “so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God [because] . . . one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings” (p. 37).

In terms of the six specific themes, the findings of this phenomenology either confirmed, corroborated, extended, or diverged from not only the theoretical research, as discussed above, but the previous empirical research, as will be discussed.

The first theme, biblical literacy/illiteracy as cultural literacy/illiteracy, both supported and extended the empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, although the empirical literature had explored cultural illiteracy in the college experience as a whole, how biblically literacy/illiteracy may impact higher education, and how literature appreciation is vital to cultural literacy (Ames, 2014; Bainton, 1964; Bertonneau, 2010; Chan 2016; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Delfra, 2005; Elliot, 2002; Feinberg, 2014; Gutek, 2011; Heinert & Chick 2017;

Locke & Cleary, 2011; Manzo, 2007; Marshall, 2010; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Sanacore, 2013; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001; Webster et al., 2012), the first theme that was identified from this phenomenology advanced this notion within the confluence of three factors: public college students' experience; literary study in literature, composition, and humanities courses specifically; and the impact of biblical exposure (or the lack thereof) specifically on their understanding of the cultural context of literary works. As the findings in Chapter Four explain in greater depth, public college student with exposure to biblical content prior to college found it much easier to contextualize their literary readings within the cultural dimensions of the Western world. This aspect of the phenomenology resonates with and extends Manzo's (2007) observation that biblical illiteracy is not simply a religious issue within higher education but a "civic problem with political consequences" (p. 26), Feinberg's (2014) argument that teaching biblical content in secular institutions is part of the "unique mission of public education" (p. 394), and Marshall's (2010) assertion that biblical illiteracy has significant consequences even beyond a student's inability to interact effectively with culture because such underexposure threatens the very foundations of our educational system: "History and sociology are deeply imprinted with religious roles, perhaps nowhere more so than in the field of education" (p. 285). Certainly this phenomenology validated those ideas, reaffirming that because so much of Western literature, especially, is built upon biblical motifs and themes, biblical illiteracy strongly correlates to cultural illiteracy. This theme specifically aligns with the seminal research conducted by Yale's Professor Emeritus of Ecclesiastical History Roland Bainton (1964):

Indeed, the indirect and unconscious influence Christianity has often exercised in avowedly secular matters—social, intellectual, and institutional—affords striking proof

of the dynamic forces that have been generated by the faith over the millennia. Even those who have contested its claims and rejected its tenets have been affected by what they opposed. Whatever our beliefs, all of us today are inevitable heirs to this abundant legacy; and it is impossible to understand the cultural heritage that sustains and conditions our lives without considering the contributions of Christianity. (p. 128)

The second theme, exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure, seemed to address a significant gap in the literature, expanding upon the periphery of some research (Battenhouse,1986; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996 Favre,1984; Franson,1977; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jose, 2015; Shaheen, 1987), but largely advancing new information concerning specifically that phenomenon of the differences in exploring biblically-informed literature in a state college classroom with no pressure of proselytization as opposed to another setting in which the pressure of proselytization was possible. (As a side note, the term “pressure” was one the students themselves generated and repeatedly used.) Although some public college students had little or no previous exposure to biblical content before college (and identified themselves as biblically illiterate), several public college students expressed how the state college setting gave them the space to process biblical content and its personal significance for them, respectively, in a way that some faith-based or church settings had not. Considering Van Brummelen’s (2002) assertions that students analyzing literature “become committed to certain values” (p. 504), whatever those values may be and Newell’s (2009) and Bowen’s (2011) assertions that cognition invariably involves affective experience in literary study, this theme’s emergence in this phenomenology is new territory in terms of the empirical literature. Perhaps even more profound was that while some public college students experienced what they described as pressure in faith-based settings to accept biblical

concepts without asking questions or having the opportunity to process them as potentially life-altering decisions, others even feared alienation from those settings if an immediate decision about the content was not made. Although prior researchers have explored how format, setting, and approach may affect how students experience literature (Battenhouse, 1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson, 1977; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis, 1975; Gutek, 2011; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987), no study has explored how students compare it to other settings when biblically-informed literature is involved.

The third theme that was identified was technology/format preferences and the tensions of interacting with biblically-informed literature as cultural texts. In asking students about their format preferences regarding technology in courses (face-to-face, hybrid, or online), the original intention was to garner information about how technology impacts exploring biblically-informed literary texts as cultural documents. The empirical literature had addressed this to some degree, although considering only the role of technology in literature and not specifically biblically-informed literature (Arikan, 2008; Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013; Bertonneau, 2010; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Carter, 2007; Choi & Piro, 2009; Cook, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Gordon, 2012; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Maillet, 2014; Marable et al., 2010; Miller, 2002; Nash, 2011; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Raymond, 2008; Reason, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Senechal, 2011;

Stallworth et al., 2006; Stewart, 2009; Treble, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015). Furthermore, Beeghly (2005) and Pace (2011) had emphasized that digital literacies, such as online discussions, may enhance the possibility to improve literary interaction, while Ostenson and Gleason Sutton (2011) noted that e-based discussions “invite students to have meaningful experiences” (p. 42). Similarly, Alsup et al. (2011) found that interpretative writing such as literature analysis is enhanced and not supplanted by technological innovation, while Smith and Dobson (2011) suggest that web-based discussion has redefined literary interaction as a communication construct. Moreover, Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart (2012) encouraged literary analysis that involves e-based discussions more “authentic” (p. 343). However, the third theme that arose from this phenomenology not only advanced the concept of how the relative anonymity of technology might encourage authenticity in literary discussion, but it introduced the notion that conversations around biblically-informed texts have the capacity to be laden with tension (and thus would benefit from the “safety” technology can provide). What began as an exploration of how different technological formats impact literary discussion of biblically-informed texts became an unexpected discussion of how technology provides a “buffer zone” (Shelley, personal interview, April 6, 2018) from what students called “lightning rod” (Nate, personal interview, March 29, 2018), subjects and an environment that involved “walking on eggshells” (Shelley, personal interview, April 6, 2018). In short, although biblical motifs, concepts, paradigms, or even passages are taught in state institutions purely for their cultural significance, and not to proselytize, students seemed to consistently characterize that phenomenon as breaking some unwritten rule regarding discussion of the Bible in public education, although perfectly legal when taught as culture. What began as an attempt to capture themes regarding technology preferences in studying biblically-informed literature became a consistent and somewhat

surprising description of technology and technologically-defined formats as having a defusing effect on that tension. Relatively consistent across data sets, this theme persisted regardless of whether the individual participant, respectively, had experienced very little or even very significant exposure to content. And yet another departure from the literature was that it was the students who identified the very existence of that tension, as no part of any questions' wording connotes any awareness of this phenomenon.

The fourth theme in this phenomenology is instruction “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion. Although much of the empirical literature discussed approaches instructors take in terms of teaching literary study (Arikan, 2008; Bromley, et al., 2014; Choi & Piro, 2009; Edmondson, 2012; Farabaugh, 2007; Rosenthal, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Trudeau, 2005; Whittingham, 2013), the public college students in this study held in priority their need for the instructor to be passionate about the literature, to create a “safe” space for opinions to be respectfully discussed, and to be student-centered in terms of guiding students toward their own well-supported interpretation—especially when biblical content is involved. Furthermore, this phenomenology emphasized, perhaps more intensely and specifically, how digital literacies—especially discussions—offer a sense of safety in settings that might involve worldviews in conflict. Although much has been written about how educational technology and instructor approach impact literary study (Beliaeva, 2009; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Booth, 1988; Carter, 2007; Fredericks, 2012; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Gold, 1983; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Treble, 2009), this phenomenology delved deeper into the specifics of how instructors may offer

“safety” using technology in contexts potentially more controversial in terms of literary discussion.

Implications

The results of this phenomenology produced findings that have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for a variety of individuals. The purpose of this section is to enumerate the implications of this study and to provide recommendations to potential stakeholders such as public college students, professors of literature (especially in state colleges), administrators, as well as any individual responsible for teaching biblical concepts in settings outside of a state college classroom.

Theoretical Implications

This transcendental phenomenology was informed by several theories. The first was Mezirow’s (1996) theory of transformational learning in adult education. Essentially, Mezirow (1996) posits that transformational learning is the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 162). Furthermore, Mezirow (1996) regards this process as the cardinal goal of adult education. The results of this phenomenology support and advance Mezirow’s (1996) theory of transformational learning in adult education, especially in connection to the fourth (Instructor “passion,” “safe” facilitation, and student-centered literary discussion) and sixth (literary study as empathically formative) themes that was identified from the study. In describing their experiences with the phenomenon of studying literature that is biblically-informed only for its cultural significance, public college students’ repeatedly referenced the notion that with an impassioned instructor, deeply invested in the material, and the perception of “safety” in terms of being free to advance and support individual interpretations, they were able

to scaffold from former interpretations of literary pieces into new understandings that effectively changed their perspectives and, thus, future actions. From deciding to reexamine biblical ideas taught in youth, to rethinking their understanding of the oppression of a particular people group, to reformulating a conception of what it means to be truly evil, for example, public college students' expressed ways in which they had been transformed in their thinking—particularly in terms of empathic formation.

A second theory which informed this phenomenology was Lewis' (1966) theory of literary apologetics—the notion that classic literature, under the cloak of fiction, often conveys very truth in a way might allow readers who might not be otherwise interested in the “dogma” of biblical concepts to reconsider them when extrapolated into the world of fiction. As Lewis (1966) explained, “by stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency” (p. 37):

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed [sic] much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. (p. 37)

As Chapter Four's rich and thick descriptions of individual responses detail in greater depth, Lewis' (1966) theory was overwhelmingly supported by this phenomenology—and most obviously through the emergence of theme two (exploring biblical content in literature with/without proselytization pressure). This theme was identified rather surprisingly and unpredictably across all data sets (journals, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups). Not only did public college students from very diverse ethnic, religious, and educational backgrounds

reference the notion that the secular college classroom gave them a newfound freedom to explore particularly biblical concepts without the pressure to proselytize, but they also repeatedly referenced how previous settings—particularly faith-based ones—did not always encourage critical thinking, measured consideration, and the freedom to ask questions. Perhaps most compelling and poignant in terms of the theoretical framework that Lewis' (1966) observations provided was the repeated statement from students that the very place they had hoped to experience that kind of freedom was in church—not in a state college classroom.

Empirical Implications

The implications of this phenomenology in terms of empirical research proved significant in terms of advancing, illuminating, and/or refuting established literature. For example, although general education courses which involve literary study are increasingly devalued in pursuit of other areas of academic study regarded as more practical in terms of preparation for further education and a career (Burkett & Goldman, 2016; Chan, 2016; Ferrero, 2011; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Maillet 2014; Munson, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Vail, 2001), the implications of several of the themes that was identified from this phenomenology emphasize how literary study involves far more than simply reading fiction.

Rather, literature appreciation requires that students engage in higher reasoning, think critically, uphold interpretations through rigorous research, develop empathy for situations with which they may be unfamiliar, understand how to respectfully and meaningfully engage with others whose opinions may be vastly different from their own, and develop team-playing skills that encourage healthy communication in group atmospheres. Certainly, all of these skills are valuable in future educational and career-related endeavors, as this phenomenology's identified themes suggest. Moreover, as much of the literature contends, literary study is vital to the

college experience across all disciplines (Elliot, 2002; Ferrero, 2011; Gordon, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Pitts, 2017; Sanacore, 2013; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001; Youssef, 2010).

In terms of the interplay of literature appreciation and technology, the implications are intriguing. The results of this phenomenology suggests, as had the literature, that technology need not replace the element of human, face-to-face interaction, but may actually enhance it, especially when literary discussions in class are blended with literary discussions online. The empirical literature had frequently considered the interplay of these elements (Arikan, 2008; Bromley, et al., 2014; Choi & Piro, 2009; Coffey, 2012; Edmondson, 2012; Lewis, 2017; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011; Nobles, Dredger, and Gerheart, 2012; Rosenthal, 2011; Schoenacher, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Trudeau, 2005; Whittingham, 2013). However, none had considered the implications of technology as a “buffer-zone” or a “safe” means to share opinions with the class that might be somewhat controversial (and less likely to be discussed openly). However, that particular theme was identified frequently in this phenomenology, perhaps because of the inclusion of biblically-informed works as an element.

Finally, empirical literature concerning literature as “character education” (as K-12 studies have framed it) or as spiritually, ethically, and empathically formative had significant implications for future studies—especially as these issues had not been covered in public institutions of higher education. Although much has been studied regarding the need for facilitating empathic formation as part of education, whether in faith-based settings, K-12 settings, and the secular higher-education experience (Bowen, 2008; Bunch, 2005; Chickering, 2010; Choo, 2017; Dungy, 2012; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jones, Webb, & Neumann, 2008; Katzner & Nieman,

2006; Langer et al., 2010; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Rabin & Smith, 2013; Reason, 2011; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Wartell, 2013; Watanabe-Kganetso, 2017), none have considered this phenomenon specifically within literary studies in secular college classrooms. This phenomenology's findings have implications for all stakeholders involved in what may be a large group of stakeholders (students, professors, and administrators in any course which covers literary texts in secular colleges).

Practical Implications

In exploring the very practical implications of this phenomenology, several basic considerations emerge. One of the most basic assumptions that most students seemed to hold in the process of engaging in this research is that there is something “taboo,” “controversial,” or even illegal about discussing biblical or biblically-informed literature in the context of a state institution. Even some of the empirical literature seemed to operate under that assumption. One implication of this study, albeit it practical, is that public college students be made aware that any religious text may be discussed for its cultural value, as long as proselytization is not the purpose. In fact, a well-rounded education demands it. Much of the literature has established how understanding biblical concepts is vital for comprehending even the most secular dimensions of our modern culture (Delfra, 2005; Feinberg, 2014; Manzo, 2007; Marshall, 2010; Gutek, 2011); as Manzo (2007) so aptly expressed it, biblical illiteracy is not merely a religious concern but rather a “civic problem with political consequences” (p. 26). However, an apparent gap in the literature is the perception public college students have of the legality of discussing biblical or biblically-informed content simply for its cultural merit—not for the purposes of proselytization. Furthermore, another related but unexpected implication that occurred across at

least the data sets in this phenomenology is the frustration many students had in their lack of biblical knowledge, as well as own observation that, at least in the Western world, biblical illiteracy has implications for settings beyond the realm of religion. More than one student expressed regret and frustration at their lack of understanding some of the most basic paradigms of our culture because they had not been educated in biblical concepts—even if only for the sake of the education and cultural awareness. Although the literature (as described above) had suggested biblically illiteracy was a concern, no study had examined that concept in light of the students' perception that such illiteracy was a concern for them.

Second, the field of public college education is ripe for further studies in ethical and empathic formation—particularly in terms of specific disciplines and their respective forms of praxis. While the literature is abundant in studies involving “character education” in K-12 and this sort of study in faith-based settings (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman et al., 2011; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013) and in faith-based college settings (Binkley, 2007; Ellenwood, 2006; Freeman et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012), there is little if anything in terms of the public higher educational experience. Although some of the research discusses how literary study invariably relates to ethical formation and empathy development (Booth, 1988; Campbell, 1997; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freire, 1993; Freire, 1985), still none of the research explored literary study within the college classroom—particularly that involving biblical concepts. This was especially surprising to me, given that the college experience itself, as it is classically understood, is meant to be a period of self-exploration, critical reasoning, and what Mezirow (1996) has emphasized in andragogy as transformative learning. Consequently, hearing students

connect those dots—identifying studying biblical and/or biblically-informed literature in a state college as empathically formative—was validating for my own experiences with this phenomenon.

A final and unexpected outcome that was perhaps even poignant at times was the implication that, of all settings, the public college literature classroom was one of the “safest” settings students had known in which to process biblical concepts—even (and often especially) if they had been exposed to biblical concepts which were primarily designed for proselytization. Given what the literature has to say regarding how vital group interaction (whether online or face-to-face) is for appreciating literature (Azmi, 2013; Bernadowski, 2013; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010; Bromley, et al., 2014; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Fredricks, 2012; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Stewart, 2009; Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2012; Whittaker, 2012; Whittingham, 2013), this particular outcome was not only resonant but expansive. Although the research has lamented the gradual devaluation of literature appreciation despite findings that literary study is critical to students’ ability to write and think critically, practice higher-order reasoning, become independent learners, and develop exportable life skills that translate well in other majors and careers (research overwhelmingly indicates that facilitating literature appreciation is critical to students’ ability to think critically, to demonstrate higher-order reasoning, to independently pursue learning for a lifetime, and to develop life skills that translate well into other majors and career paths (Elliot, 2002; Ferrero, 2011; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Munson, 2011; Newhouse, Propper, Riedel, & Teitelzweig, 2012; Sanacore, 2013; Treble, 2009; Vail, 2001), the notion of “safety” was a powerful aspect of this outcome. Furthermore, for stakeholders who are connected to this issue through ministry or other faith-based settings, there seems to be much-needed conversations about what it means to

teach people about the Bible or help them explore a biblical worldview. Because students' observations often involved this notion of the "pressure" to adopt a particular stance without thorough consideration, the freedom to ask questions, and the sensible and expected permission to process its implications for their entire lives, studies among stakeholders about how their apologetics function seem very worthwhile.

Delimitations and Limitations

In qualitative research, delimitations and limitations need to be addressed, as well as the rationale behind those decisions made to limit the scope of the study.

One delimitation of this study was that public college students be aged 18 or older. Several reasons for this delimitation exist. First, the college campus traditionally educates adult students. The campus is perhaps unique in that it has a large number of students under the age of 18 who enroll in college courses under the umbrella of a collegiate high school that exists within the framework of the college. Students in this program earn high school and college credit concurrently. However, in order to streamline consent issues, only students 18 and over were included. Furthermore, because Mezirow (1996) and his theories of transformative learning in adults informed the theoretical framework, the population needed to be limited strictly to adults.

A second delimitation is that public college students were required to have completed at least one of the 11 general education courses which feature literary texts prominently as a focus of study: Composition I and/or II, English Literature I and/or II, American Literature I and/or II, World Literature I and/or II, Introduction to Humanities I and/or II, and African-American Literature. This delimitation was essential in that students who have had one or more of these classes from Chautauqua State will have experienced some basic commonalities in experience

which help to anchor the study, somewhat. Furthermore, each of these courses contains some measure of biblical content, in varying degrees, as the educational context for the literature presented therein. This inclusion was necessary for the aims of the phenomenology in terms of the identified phenomenon. As it turned out, the least amount of these classes any participant had successfully completed was two, and the most was seven.

As for limitations, there were several potential weaknesses, depending upon interpretation. The first potential limitation was geographic location. Whether this is truly a limitation may be dependent upon interpretation, but multiple public college students referenced the Southeastern United States as having a pervasive cultural form of Christianity that is more rooted in tradition than in practice or belief, as opposed to other parts of the country, such as the Northeast. Again, this potential limitation was identified in the public college students' varied observations.

Another potential limitation was that public college students opted to volunteer for the study because of having especially strong opinions about the topic based on past experiences—both positive and negative. Again, this may not have been a true limitation, as public college students' backgrounds were quite varied, but it is important to note that all public college students did have strong opinions, nonetheless.

A final limitation was that the diversity of the group was proportionately slightly less diverse than the larger Chautauqua State population, as nine participants were Caucasian, two were African American, one was Hispanic, and one was Asian. Interestingly, however, although there are more women enrolled at Chautauqua State than men, there were seven male participants, and only six female participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, many recommendations for future research are suggested below.

Because so many public college students referenced the Southeastern United States as experiencing a pervasive kind of cultural Christianity that is rooted more in tradition than in practice, doctrine, or belief, conducting a transcendental phenomenology with a similar focus in a completely different geographical location in the United States might yield an entirely new set of findings—certainly findings that would triangulate those of this phenomenology. So prominent was this perception that several students were pointed in making a distinction between the word “Christian” and the word “biblical”—a prior observation that I, too, had made in designing the title and research questions.

Although the focus of this study was the state college classroom, students' description of how presentation of biblical content differed in the faith-based settings they previously experienced warrants further study and investigation. Many public college students conveyed their perception that although they expected proselytization in faith-based settings, they were frustrated that a faith journey did not seem to welcome—as least in their opinion—the space to process information, to ask questions, to share internal conflicts, to express doubt, and to simply share their personal struggles without the threat of being alienated, perceived as critical or inflammatory, and other such labels. To that end, studies of how churches present biblical content, especially to the seeker or to the simply uninformed, seem all the more critical.

Although this study touched on the notion of character formation in adults in some of the themes that were identified, a full-scale study focusing exclusively on that phenomenon is recommended. Strong critical attention has been given to character education and moral

formation through literary study in K-12 settings, but virtually none have been conducted in higher education settings—either among faith-based colleges or secular state institutions. Given Mezirow’s (1996) theories of transformative learning among adults, this phenomenon seems ripe for further empirical attention.

Finally, in an atmosphere of increasing debate about the role of the Bible in contemporary culture, a study which examines how students perceive the legality of studying the Bible simply as a cultural text within the college classroom could be compelling. Throughout the course of the study, many students had the perception that it was illegal to reference anything biblical—simply for the purposes of cultural study and education—within the college classroom. Yet, on the face of it, they did not seem to have the same perception about other sacred texts. Furthermore, a significant lack of basic biblical literacy and its corollary in basic cultural literacy, especially in the Western hemisphere, left many students without the recognition that, despite their perception of it as “taboo,” they are actually studying its content across multiple disciplines, even if they do not recognize it as such.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenology described the “lived experiences” of 13 students from Chautauqua State had in studying biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught merely for cultural context and not to proselytize. A summary of findings was presented, using the three major research questions to organize the discussion of the six themes that ultimately were identified from the quantitative analysis of the data. The theoretical implications of the study were summarized, and delimitations and limitations were further outlined. Finally, recommendations for future research were made. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how public college students experience biblical

or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught merely for cultural context and not to proselytize. This final chapter concludes with a summary of findings as well as discussion of how the findings include implications related to the relevant literature and theoretical concepts outlined in the literature review. Finally, the methodological and practical implications are discussed, an outline of the study's delimitations and limitations are presented, and recommendations for future research were made. Although this phenomenology produced several themes, all of which are ripe for further explanation, one of the most powerful takeaways was that all students, no matter their faith background or lack thereof, perceived any education in biblically-informed concepts to be expansive and not reductive, especially through the exquisitely rendered lens of art that is literature—a beautiful “lie” the best writers tell to show us the truth. And, finally, perhaps most poignantly, was the emergent reality that literature does not exist in a vacuum, in a value-free curriculum. For better or worse, it leaves the engaged reader with some deeper understanding, perhaps empathic or even more impactful, of something of the way that the world works. Regardless of the outcome, literature does function as a kind of mythopoeia, as Tolkien or might have described it, leaving its readers to grapple with some apologetic—some reasoned argument one must decide for oneself. For me, it was the Great Lion, Aslan, who sang Narnia into existence and who taught me—without the “stained glass and Sunday school” associations—that Christ was not safe but good. Given my life circumstances, I may have never discovered Him otherwise. Although all may not reach the same conclusions, it is powerful and poignant to know that for the conscientious reader, literature makes a difference and it does matter. Regardless of the outcome, it lives every time a student reads, and if nothing but for that reason alone, it matters.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

(The following consent form will be emailed to potential student participants. Because they are college students and thus subject to the Buckley Amendment to the Privacy Act, parental consent will not be solicited.)

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/21/2017 to 9/20/2018
Protocol # 2882.092117

Consent Form

HOW PUBLIC COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPERIENCE BIBLICALLY-INFORMED
LITERATURE TAUGHT AS CULTURAL DOCUMENTS:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY
De'Lara Khalili Stephens
Liberty University

You are invited to be in a research study of the experiences state college students have in studying literature that is biblical or biblically influenced simply for its cultural merit. You have been selected as a possible participant because you have completed or are enrolled in one or more of eleven General Education courses that contain such literary texts.

De'Lara Khalili Stephens, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experience of public college students studying biblical or biblically-informed texts in composition, literature, or humanities courses. If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a pre-interview journaling exercise which will take approximately 30-45 minutes.
- Participate in an interview of approximately 25-30 minutes long; interviews will be recorded in audio and/or internet-based formats. If needed, participate in a follow-up to this interview. Member checking will be employed at this stage.
- Participate in a focus group of approximately 30 minutes in length, which will also be recorded in audio and/or internet-based formats. Member checking will be employed at this stage.

Risks and Benefits: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to

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the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym, and interviews will be in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Only the researcher will have access to data. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. As for confidentiality, I cannot assure participants that other members will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, Chautauqua State, or De'Lara Khalili Stephens. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is De'Lara K. Stephens. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at dkstephens2@liberty.edu or (423) 697-2449. You may also contact the Dissertation Chair, Dr. L. Daniele Bradshaw, (434) 592-6296, ldbradshaw3@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk with someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email the Board at irb@liberty.edu.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
9/21/2017 to 9/20/2018
Protocol # 2882.092117

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

By checking the box, I authorize and give consent for the researcher to audio-record or electronically record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B



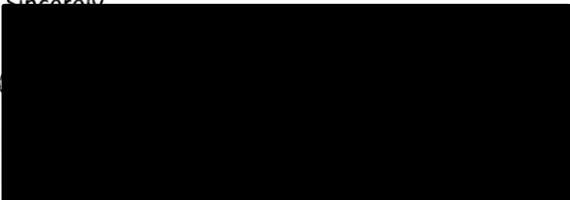
September 18, 2017

De'Lara Khalili Stephens
Associate Professor of English and Humanities



I have reviewed your research proposal and grant permission for you to recruit students enrolled at Chattanooga State Community College for the purpose of your research, "How Public College Students Experience Biblically-Informed Literature Taught as Cultural Documents: A Transcendental Phenomenology".

Sincerely,



Institutional Review Board



LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 21, 2017

De'Lara Khalili Stephens

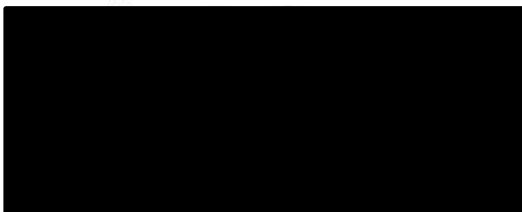
IRB Approval 2882.092117: How Public College Students Experience Biblically Informed Literature Taught as Cultural Documents: A Transcendental Phenomenology

Dear De'Lara Khalili Stephens,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

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APPENDIX C

Journaling Prompts

1. Describe any previous experience you may have had with content that is from the Bible (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Franson, 1977; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; Lee, 2010; Maillet, 2014; Manzo, 2007; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pike, 2003; Pollak, 1974; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Syme, 1989; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013).
2. Describe your previous experience with reading and studying literature (Avni, 1970; Beeghly, 2005; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Dungy, 2012; Ferrero, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Munson, 2011; Mulcahy, 2009; Ostenson & Gleason Sutton, 2011; Pace, 2003; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Senechal, 2011; Vail, 2001; Van Brummelen, 2002).
3. Describe how reading and/or studying literature has, at any point in your life, has made any change in how you see the world (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Binkley, 2007; Bones, 2010; Bowen, 2011; Cook, 2011; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Knight, 2006; Leal, 1999; Lintner, 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; Newell, 2009; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Van Brummelen, 2002).

4. When studying a work of literature, what sorts of experiences impact your understanding of it (Arikan, 2008; Azmi, 2013; Beeghly, 2005; Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Brown, 2011; Coffey, 2012; Choi & Piro, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Galda & Beach, 2001; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011; Nash, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Schoenacher, 2009; Senechal, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?
5. Describe how, if at all, seeing a literary character make decisions and experience consequences has impacted your own decision-making (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Campbell, 1997; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Freire, 1985; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Karatay, 2011; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013).

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What, if anything, does the phrase “biblical literature” or “biblically-informed literature” mean to you (Avni, 1970; Bainton,1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Burnet,1980; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny,1992; Fajardo-Acosta,1996; Franson,1977; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund,1983; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; Manzo, 2007; Milward,1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pollak, 1974; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013)?

2. What, if anything, does the phrase “cultural value” mean to you (Avni, 1970; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Van Brummelen, 2002)?

3. You have had one or more general education courses that include literary texts. Although such texts are taught for their cultural value only, some of those literary texts reference content or ideas found in the Bible. The authors of these literary texts might view the biblical content positively, negatively, or neutrally. What are some of the texts and/or ideas you have experienced (Ames, 2014; Bainton,1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Beauregard, 2001; Charney,1996; Cheney,1983; Chiang, 2012; Favre,1984; Ferrante,1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson,1977; Gold, 1983; Groves, 2007; Grund,1983; Jasper et al.,1999; Jose, 2015; L’Engle, 1995; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pollak, 1974; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012, Welch & Greer, 2013)?

4. What, if anything, did encountering biblical content within a literary text mean to you (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Beauregard, 2001; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Jose, 2015; Knight, 2006; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985)?
5. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was different about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only (Battenhouse, 1986; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jose, 2015; Shaheen, 1987)?
6. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was similar about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only (Battenhouse, 1986; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Fabiny, 1992; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gutek, 2011; Jose, 2015; Shaheen, 1987)?
7. What, if anything, would you additionally share about what it meant to experience studying biblically-informed literature for its cultural value (Avni, 1970; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Gutek, 2011; Jasper et al., 1999; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Van Brummelen, 2002)?
8. **RQ2:** What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents) (Arikan, 2008; Beeghly, 2005; Beliaeva, 2009; Bernadowski, 2013; Bertonneau, 2010; Billington

- & Sperlinger, 2011; Carter, 2007; Choi & Piro, 2009; Cook, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Elliott, 2002; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Goldberg, 1987; Gordon, 2012; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Knowles, 1984; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Maillet, 2014; Marable et al., 2010; Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1996; Mezirow, 1997; Miller, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Nash, 2011; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Raymond, 2008; Reason, 2011; Rosenblatt, 2005; Sanacore, 2002; Sanacore, 2013; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Senechal, 2011; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stewart, 2009; Treble, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?
9. Semi-structured interview questions informed by the second research question:
10. In the class or classes under consideration, what was the format (face-to-face, fully online, hybrid) (Beliaeva, 2009; Bertonneau, 2010; Goldberg, 1987; Jeynes, 2012; Knowles, 1984; Kaufmann, 2010; Larson, 2009; Marable et al., 2010; Miller, 2002; Raymond, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2005)?
11. How, if at all, did the format affect your experience of the phenomenon (Beliaeva, 2009; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Galda & Beach, 2001; Macken-Horarick & Morgan, 2008; Mezirow, 1997; Senechal, 2011; Stewart, 2009)?
12. Was technology ever used in the course? If so, describe how it was used (Brown, 2011; Choi & Piro, 2009; Harris, Lykken, & Rose, 2010; Ostenson & Gleason-Sutton, 2011; Rosenthal, 2011; Sapire & Reed, 2011; Smith & Dobson, 2011; Whittingham, 2013).

13. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon (Brown, 2011; Choi & Piro, 2009; Coffey, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011)?
14. Were discussions of any kind (literature circles, small group discussions, online discussions) ever used in the course (Arikan, 2008; Azmi, 2013; Beeghly, 2005; Bernadowski, 2013; Coffey, 2012; Edmondson, 2012; Elhess & Egbert, 2015; Heineke, 2014; Levy, 201; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Nash, 2011; Sanacore, 2013; Schoenacher, 2009; Varga-Dobai, 2015)?
15. If so, describe how discussions were used. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon (Arikan, 2008; Beeghly, 2005; Choi & Piro, 2009; Coffey, 2012; Edmondson, 2012; Stewart, 2009)?
16. How would you describe the instructor's approach toward teaching biblical content in literary texts? How, if at all, did this approach affect your experience of the phenomenon (Beliaeva, 2009; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Booth, 1988; Carter, 2007; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fredericks, 2012; Galda & Beach, 2001; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Gold, 1983; Jollimore & Barrios, 2006; Jones, Webb & Neumann, 2008; Justman, 2010; Locke & Cleary, 2011; Mezirow, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Stallworth et al., 2006; Treble, 2009)?
17. **RQ3:** What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman et al., 2011; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gates, 2011; George, 2008; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay,

- 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Kleiman, 2008; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Langer et al., 2010; Leal,1999; Lewis, 1966; Lewis & Baynes,1994; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Nather, 2013; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Pike, 2003; Puka, 2005; Sanderse, 2013; Saunders & Butts, 2011; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Wartell, 2013; Youssef, 2010)?
18. Semi-structured interview questions informed by the third research question:
19. What, if any, meaning did you experience when characters' actions led to specific consequences (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal,1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014)?
20. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your perception of ideas or opinions of content that is biblical (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin,1989; Gros Luis, 1975; Jeynes, 2009; Leal,1999; Lewis, 1966; Manzo, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
21. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your ethics (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Leal,1999; Lintner,

- 2011; Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
22. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your sense of spirituality (Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner & Nieman, 2006; Leal, 1999; Nesteruk, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?
23. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was this experience different (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Jeynes, 2009; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007)?
24. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was it similar (Bones, 2010; Ellenwood, 2006; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gros Luis, 1975; Jeynes, 2009; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007)?
25. What, if anything, would you additionally share about experiencing this phenomenon in terms of ethics or spirituality (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Jeynes, 2009; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013)?

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions

1. How have you encountered biblical content in literary texts in college (Themes, motifs, allusions, allegories, direct text verbatim from the Bible, skepticism, etc.) (Ames, 2014; Avni, 1970; Bainton, 1964; Barnaby & Wry, 1998; Beauregard, 2001; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cheney, 1983; Chiang, 2012; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson, 1977; Gold, 1983; Gros Louis, 1975; Groves, 2007; Grund, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Knoepfle, 1989; L'Engle, 1995; Manzo, 2007; Milward, 1991; Moore, 2004; Parker, 2006; Pollak, 1974; Shaheen, 1987; Sherbo, 2009; Snow, 1985; Tiffany, 2011; Warner, 2012; Waugaman, 2012; Welch & Greer, 2013)?

2. If you have had previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did your prior knowledge impact your experience of the literary text(s) (Battenhouse, 1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson, 1977; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis, 1975; Gutek, 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987)?

3. In the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts (Battenhouse, 1986; Bones, 2010; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Ellenwood, 2006; Fabiny, 1992; Fajardo-Acosta, 1996; Favre, 1984; Feinberg, 2014; Ferrante, 1992; Franson, 1977; Gallagher & Lundin, 1989; Gold, 1983; Gros Luis, 1975; Gutek, 2011; Jeynes, 2009; Jose, 2015; Leal, 1999; Manzo, 2007; Shaheen, 1987)?

4. If you did not have previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did that omission impact your experience of the literary text(s) (Avni, 1970; Battenhouse, 1986; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson, 1977; Gutek, 2011; Gold, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987, Van Brummelen, 2002)?
5. Again, in the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts (Avni, 1970; Battenhouse, 1986; Burnet, 1980; Charney, 1996; Cunningham & Reich, 2010; Fabiny, 1992; Favre, 1984; Ferrante, 1992; Ferrero, 2011; Franson, 1977; Gutek, 2011; Gold, 1983; Jasper et al., 1999; Jose, 2015; Manzo, 2007; Phamotse & Kissack, 2008; Schaeffer, 1973; Shaheen, 1987, Van Brummelen, 2002)?
6. What, if any, literary works stand out to you in your college experience? Why (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Billington & Sperlinger, 2011; Bones, 2010; Booth, 1988; Chickering, 2010; Cook, 2011; Dovre, 2007; Edgington, 2002; Freeman, 2014; Freeman et al., 2011; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012; Hester, 2001; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Leal, 1999; Lewis, 1966; Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011; Lintner, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Sanderse, 2013; Singsuriya et al., 2014; Tolkien, 1965)?
7. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your own ethics? How (Auciello, 2006; Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Bones, 2010; Chickering, 2010; Dovre, 2007; Dungy, 2012; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Freeman, 2014; Freeman

et al., 2011; Hansman, 2009; Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Leal,1999; Lintner, 2011;
Nesteruk, 2007; O'Neill, 2013; Osguthorpe, 2013; Puka, 2005; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?

8. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your experience of spirituality

(Besson-Martilotta, 2013; Edgington, 2002; Ellenwood, 2006; Ghabanchi & Doost, 2012;
Hersh & Schneider, 2005; Hester, 2001; Jeynes, 2009; Karatay, 2011; Katzner &
Nieman, 2006; Leal,1999; Nesteruk, 2007; Saunders & Butts, 2011)?

APPENDIX F

Structured Interview Questions (without supporting research citations listed)

Ice-Breaker(s): What has been your favorite class so far? What would be a dream job for you to acquire upon completing college? What is the best movie or book you've experienced lately?

RQ1: How do public college students experience biblical or biblically-informed literary texts when they are taught simply as cultural documents?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the first research question:

1. What, if anything, does the phrase “biblical literature” or “biblically-informed literature” mean to you?
2. What, if anything, does the phrase “cultural value” mean to you?
 1. You have had one or more general education courses that include literary texts. Although such texts are taught for their cultural value only, some of those literary texts reference content or ideas found in the Bible. The authors of these literary texts might view the biblical content positively, negatively, or neutrally. What are some of the texts and/or ideas you have experienced?
3. What, if anything, did encountering biblical content within a literary text mean to you?
4. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was different about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only?
5. If you have ever experienced exposure to biblical content outside of a public college classroom, what, if anything, was similar about studying it in a literary text for its cultural value only?

6. What, if anything, would you additionally share about what it meant to experience studying biblically-informed literature for its cultural value?

RQ2: What classroom contexts or situations typically affect or influence students' experience of the phenomenon (the phenomenon being experiencing biblical or biblically-informed literary texts taught as cultural documents)?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the second research question:

7. In the class or classes under consideration, what was the format (face-to-face, fully online, hybrid)?
8. How, if at all, did the format affect your experience of the phenomenon?
9. Was technology ever used in the course? If so, describe how it was used,
10. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon?
11. Were discussions of any kind (literature circles, small group discussions, online discussions) ever used in the course? If so, describe how discussions were used.
12. How, if at all, did the inclusion of technology affect your experience of the phenomenon?
13. How would you describe the instructor's approach toward teaching biblical content in literary texts? How, if at all, did this approach affect your experience of the phenomenon?

RQ3: What does this experience mean, if anything, to students' spiritual or ethical formation?

Semi-structured interview questions informed by the third research question:

14. What, if any, meaning did you experience when characters' actions led to specific consequences?
15. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your perception of ideas or opinions of content that is biblical?
16. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your ethics?

17. How, if at all, did your experience of this phenomenon impact your sense of spirituality?
18. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was this experience different?
19. If you had previous exposure to biblical content or concepts before taking this class(es), how, if at all, was it similar?
20. What, if anything, would you additionally share about experiencing this phenomenon in terms of ethics or spirituality?

APPENDIX G

Focus Group Questions (without supporting research citations listed)

1. How have you encountered biblical content in literary texts in college?
2. If you have had previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did your prior knowledge impact your experience of the literary text(s)?
3. In the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts?
4. If you did not have previous exposure to biblical content before cultural study in college, how did that omission impact your experience of the literary text(s)?
5. Again, in the reverse sense, how did (if at all) your experience of the literary text(s) impact your perception of the Bible or biblical concepts?
6. What, if any, literary works stand out to you in your college experience? Why?
7. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your own ethics?
8. What, if any, literary works had some impact on your experience of spirituality?

APPENDIX H

Journaling Prompts (without supporting research citations listed)

1. Describe any previous experience you may have had with content that is from the Bible.
2. Describe your previous experience with reading and studying literature.
3. Describe how reading and/or studying literature has, at any point in your life, made any change in how you see the world.
4. When studying a work of literature, what sorts of experiences impact your understanding of it?
5. Describe how, if at all, seeing a literary character make decisions and experience consequences has impacted your own decision-making.