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Review of *The Cruciform Faculty: The Making of a Christian Professor*

Jody Jessup-Anger

Title: The Cruciform Faculty: The Making of a Christian Professor

Author(s): Mark H. Heinemann, James R. Estep, Jr., Mark A. Maddix, & Octavio J. Esqueda

Publisher: Information Age Publishing, Charlotte

ISBN: 1681236796, **Pages:** 76, **Year:** 2016

One unique aspect of higher education in the United States is the sheer number of choices that prospective students are afforded in the type of institution to attend. Among the options are two-year or four-year, non-profit or for-profit, public or private, secular or religious, not to mention specialty institutions like historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, women's colleges, and military institutes. While reading *The Cruciform Faculty: The Making of a Christian Professor*, I was reminded why it is misleading to talk about higher education as a monolithic entity. The variation within each institutional type may be as wide as the variation across institutional types.

In the introduction, the authors explain their envisioned purpose for the book: namely to provide a resource that would situate the “role of faculty from a distinctly evangelical Christian perspective” (p. xxii). They draw upon their experience in Christian higher education and frame their discussion around the tripartite role of faculty in teaching, research, and service. Their intended audience includes new and seasoned Christian professors, Christian higher education administrators, and faculty developers.

The first chapter, written by Estep, lays groundwork for what it means to be a Christian professor and the balance of spiritual and academic life. Among the tenants of the chapter, Estep presents a helpful figure to depict how spiritual and academic values might act in concert with one another, ranging from foregrounding one without concern for the other to situating both values within one’s role as a professor. Estep advocates for a more symbiotic integration of spiritual and academic values, explaining “my academic work can be a spiritual act of worship, and my academic work is in a spiritual discipline that advances my relationship with Christ” (p. 4).

The remaining chapters are divided according to common faculty roles. Chapter Two, written by Esqueda, presents teaching as an act of ministry. The chapter explores teaching as a vocation and calling. Esqueda urges readers to regard themselves as followers of Christ first and foremost and to recognize the unique positionality they bring to teaching that might otherwise be absent. He argues that bringing Christianity into the classroom is paramount and urges faculty to envision their work as interdisciplinary; attending to one’s discipline while simultaneously attending to God.

In Chapter Three, Estep discusses the scholarly work of faculty, addressing the uniqueness of scholarship in a Christian context. Estep uses an image of a male standing in the intersection of a Venn diagram to urge readers to imagine the scholarly home of a Christian professor as the overlap between the church and the academy. He argues that Christian faculty (in contrast to others), “seek to glorify God through their [scholarly] endeavors rather than themselves” (p. 26), contending that these scholars conduct scholarship to defend and affirm the church, or to correct it when warranted. Estep identifies challenges to the success of a Christian scholar and encourages readers to adopt serious study habits, network with professional associations, and identify opportunities to expose their work to broad audiences.

Chapter Four, written by Heinemann, invites readers to consider the role of faculty in mentoring both students and pre-tenure faculty. He defines mentoring as “a process in which a Christian professor relates to a student or another professor with a view toward giving and receiving mutual help in growing as learners and as persons on a spiritual journey” (p. 36), and then outlines the considerations for both mentors and mentees as they engage in the process. Heinemann calls on mentors to envision themselves as teachers, coaches, and shepherds that provide guidance in professional, personal, and spiritual development. He encourages mentees to envision themselves as lifelong learners, nascent community members, and spiritual journeyers who can benefit from the guidance of mentors.

Maddix authors the last chapter of the book, which examines servant leadership in the context of Christian higher education. He argues that embodying a faculty service role is central to what it means to be Christian and reflects one’s faith in Christ. Maddix distinguishes new faculty who become servant leaders as different from

other new faculty because they learn to “redirect ego and image” (p. 52) that he claims often comes with the earning of a terminal degree. He portrays common service roles that faculty often undertake in and outside of their institutions.

The Cruciform Faculty offers unique considerations for faculty interested in Christian institutions or who seek to contemplate the role of Christianity in their work. That said, the book lacks clarity in key areas and makes unwritten assumptions that are difficult to surmount. For example, in the introduction the authors describe Christian higher education and Christian faculty in higher education as synonymous, as though there are no faculty in Christian higher education who do not practice religion or who practice other religions. Furthermore, although one line in the introduction states the “distinctly evangelical Christian perspective” (p. xii) shared by the authors, the adjective evangelical is not used in the rest of the book, which leads to a troubling overgeneralization of Christian higher education. In addition, there are platitudes peppered throughout the book that distort differences between Christian and other faculty. The authors paint a portrait of secular faculty as egocentric, opportunistic, and purposeless and Christian faculty as acting to glorify God. Also troubling is the unspoken gendered portrayal of faculty. Although the authors are careful to use “he/she” when discussing faculty, the reliance on scripture to support their claims along with several figures that depict faculty as male may leave readers with an uncomfortable impression of faculty as solely male. The authors also make a feeble attempt in Chapter Three to raise concerns about women’s marginalization within Christian higher education with advice that ignores the structural barriers often faced by women.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspects of the book are the hierarchical, transactional framing of teaching and learning and the oversimplification of issues in Christian higher education. There is a disconnect between the relational way that the authors describe faculty and their depiction of teaching and learning. From a figure portraying the archer as teacher, bow as method, and target as student to generic advice on educational planning, readers of this book will not gain a nuanced perspective about teaching and learning in a decidedly Christian context. Further, the book does nothing to engage the tensions that often exist in religious higher education; absent is any discussion about the relationship between faith and reason, the role of religious pluralism on campus, or the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.