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## Christ Across the Disciplines: Past, Present, Future

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## *Christ Across the Disciplines: Past, Present, Future*

Lundin, R. (2013). Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Reviewed by Genesis J. DeLong

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*Christ Across the Disciplines: Past, Present, Future* is a collection of thought-provoking essays that offer diverse, scholarly viewpoints on the connection between the Christian faith and the life of the mind. While the idea of the integration of faith and learning is not a new concept for Christian higher education professionals, the theological, ethnic and international diversity of the authors sets *Christ Across the Disciplines* apart from many other books on the topic. Because of this diversity, the authors cover a wide array of disciplines and, as editor Roger Lundin notes, speak “as representatives of vibrant Christian traditions rather than as members of a cohort seeking to supplant what they take to be a shop-worn faith and learning model” (p. 3). The result is a unique, fresh perspective on the past, present and future challenges of Christian educators and scholars seeking “to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear upon the desires of our hearts, the longings of our souls, and the life of our minds” (p. 15).

## The Past

The first three essays provide a historical context for faith and learning by examining the tensions and early development of Christian scholarship. In the opening essay, “The Discipline of History and the Perspective of Faith Since 1900,” David W. Bebbington examines the approaches to the discipline of history in the twentieth century and highlights the gradual shift toward the acceptance of religion in the historical landscape. This shift was furthered by the cultural wave of postmodernism, which enabled “ideas and religion” to return “to the center of the discipline” (p. 34). Bebbington discusses the Christian’s response to postmodernism, encouraging Christian historians to take a “discriminating approach” in order to “write history that appeals to the twenty-first century but remains faithful to all the dimensions of biblical revelation” (p. 34).

John Schmalzbauer’s essay, “The Blessings of an Uneasy Conscience: Creative Tensions in Evangelical Intellectual Life,” delves into the historical tensions between religion and academia and fundamentalism and evangelicalism, out of which “came a renaissance in evangelical intellectual life” (p. 48). He encourages evangelical scholars to embrace the uneasiness of the integration of faith and learning by mediating between the worlds of the “conservative religious subculture and an academy that leans to the left” (p. 71).

In “Science and Religion: Place, Politics, and Poetics” David N. Livingstone further explores historical tensions between faith and learning by providing detailed accounts of the Christian response to Darwinism in various locales during the late nineteenth century. Livingstone emphasizes the importance of viewing the debates of science and faith through the context of their location, politics and culture. He suggests the need for Christian scholars to understand that “we, too, are located” (p. 98) and that faith traditions “need to be in constant, critical dialogue with themselves” (p. 99).

## The Present

The next two essays shift the focus of *Christ Across the Disciplines* to present challenges to the integration of faith and learning by exploring “Christian responses to modern intellectual practice and thought” (p. 7). In his essay, “On the Theology of the Intellectual Life,” John Webster observes that theology is “about everything in relation to God” (p. 100), including the human intellect. Webster reflects on the inextricable connection between life in Christ and the regenerate intellectual life, viewing “the intellect and its operations” not as “pure natural elements but created realities, to be explicated by reference to God’s loving work of origination, preservation, reconciliation, and perfection” (p. 116).

Eleonore Stump’s essay, “Christianity and the Contemporary Challenge,” examines internal and external challenges to the integration of faith and learning. She asserts that the external challenges stem from hostility to Christianity in the academic culture while the internal challenges stem from divisions among Christians. Stump concludes that, “for the integration of faith and learning, it is crucial for Christians to love and protect those they take to be their enemies” (p. 132) by “welcoming diverse perspectives” (p. 128) and viewing challenges as blessings.

## The Future

The remaining four essays in *Christ Across the Disciplines* provide, as Lundin notes, “a series of disciplinary perspectives on the current challenges and future prospects that engage Christian scholars” (p. 10). In his essay, “Modern Physics and Ancient Faith,” Stephen M. Barr provides insight into the conflict “between religion and scientific materialism” (p. 133) by contrasting materialist arguments with scientific developments that point to a universe “governed by laws that have a grandeur and sublimity that bespeak design” (p. 151). He concludes that “the deepest discoveries of modern physics and mathematics give hints, if not proof, that the human mind has something about it that lies beyond the power of either physics or mathematics to describe” (p. 151).

In “The Future of Theology Amid the Arts: Some Reformed Reflections” Jeremy S. Begbie reflects on the discipline of the arts through the lens of the Reformed faith tradition and the themes of beauty, sacrament and language. He argues that “as theology and arts conversation continues to unfold apace, resources from the Reformed world – so often buried beneath an understandable but exaggerated shame – have considerably more to offer than is often supposed, especially if we are seeking to delve more deeply into the plotlines and harmonies of a scripturally rooted and vibrant trinitarian faith” (p. 182).

Katharine Clay Bassard's essay, "Emerging Conversations: Race and Redemption in the Age of Obama," describes the election of President Barack Obama as evidence of a changing conversation about race and a "symbolic representation of the hopes and fears in America around the nexus of race and religion" (p. 183). Using three examples of African American novels that speak to the emerging discourse on the topic of race and redemption, Bassard encourages Christian scholars to position themselves at the forefront of these conversations and to "lead in developing a discourse of reconciliation and redemption" (p. 187).

In the final essay, "The History and Future of the World: Christian Scholars and Race, Culture, and Nation," Sujit Sivasundaram examines the concepts of race, culture and nation through the case studies of three nineteenth century Christians who, during an age of unprecedented European expansion, struggled with "the intellectual history of global understanding" (p. 202). Through these examples, Sivasundaram seeks to help Christian scholars understand how they should engage with the world as the center of Christianity continues to shift away from Europe and America.

Through a diverse set of authors covering a variety of disciplines, *Christ Across the Disciplines* successfully provides Christian educators and scholars with a unique and fresh perspective on the past, present and future challenges to the integration of faith and learning. Whether serving as faculty, administrator or staff member, higher education professionals who seek to "cultivate the life of the mind for the sake of the Body of Christ" (p. 4) will appreciate this distinct picture of Christ's work throughout the disciplines and will gain a greater understanding of their role in cultivating a dynamic, relevant and integrated faith and learning both now and for the future. 

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