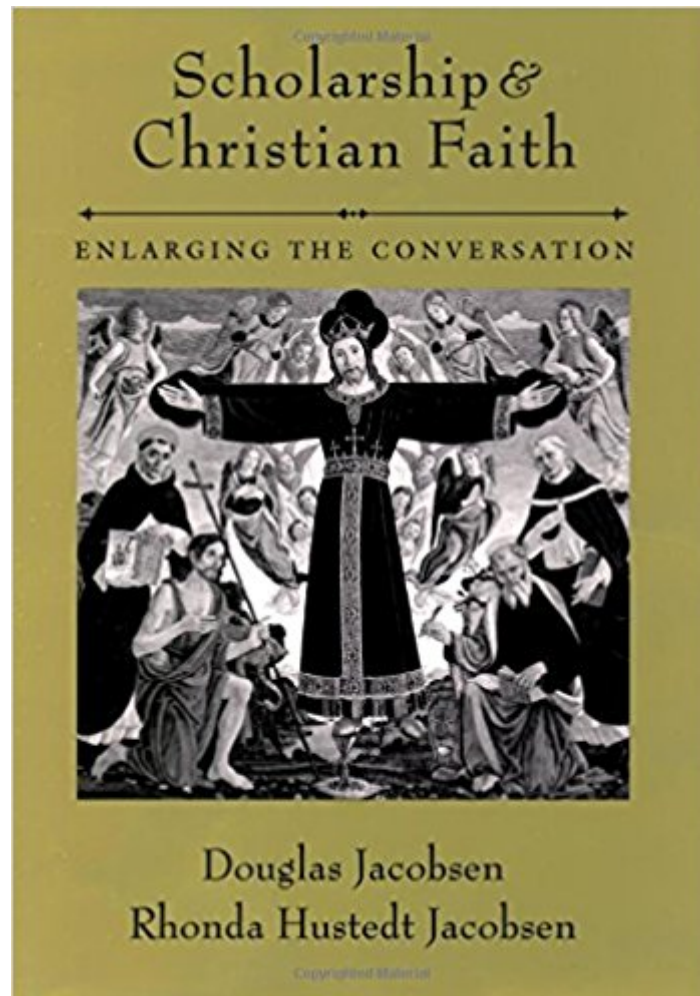




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Scholarship And Christian Faith: Enlarging The Conversation



Synopsis

This book enters a lively discussion about religious faith and higher education in America that has been going on for a decade or more. During this time many scholars have joined the debate about how best to understand the role of faith in the academy at large and in the special arena of church-related Christian higher education. The notion of faith-informed scholarship has, of course, figured prominently in this conversation. But, argue Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen, the idea of Christian scholarship itself has been remarkably under-discussed. Most of the literature has assumed a definition of Christian scholarship that is Reformed and evangelical in orientation: a model associated with the phrase "the integration of faith and learning." The authors offer a new definition and analysis of Christian scholarship that respects the insights of different Christian traditions (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, Anabaptist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal) and that applies to the arts and to professional studies as much as it does to the humanities and the natural and social sciences. The book itself is organized as a conversation. Five chapters by the Jacobsens alternate with four contributed essays that sharpen, illustrate, or complicate the material in the preceding chapters. The goal is both to map the complex terrain of Christian scholarship as it actually exists and to help foster better connections between Christian scholars of differing persuasions and between Christians and the academy as a whole.

Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 2003. Corr. 2nd Printing ed. edition (April 8, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195170385

ISBN-13: 978-0195170382

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 1 x 6.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #261,723 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #129 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Education #400 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Faith #433 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Faith

Customer Reviews

"This ranks as one of the best contributions to the debates so far. This is a helpful and serious study, which manages to be constructive as well as realistic. It may be warmly recommended to any readers

who are concerned with the relationship between their commitment to scholarship and their commitment to Christianity." --Theology

"Clearly, the Jacobsens have succeeded in their goal. They have enlarged the conversation. They have raised questions, gained clarity on some issues, and provided dialogue from a part of the Christian community that has not spoken so clearly on the subject before. Yet, let us keep the conversation alive." --Calvin Theological Journal

"Wise and compelling, fresh and creative, this book helps us think in bold new ways about the relation between Christian faith and secular learning. Mounting a strong critique of the integrationist model that has dominated the conversation about faith and learning in recent years, this book lays out a powerful argument that the work of the Christian scholar is first of all the constructive work of building bridges--bridges that link the life of the mind to the life of the heart, bridges that reach from Christian learning to secular learning, and bridges that tie learning not only to faith, but to hope and love as well. Here is a book to be savored." --Richard T. Hughes, author of *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*

"This book will advance and appreciably enlarge the national conversation about the character of Christian scholarship. Its lively 'configural' organization exemplifies what it recommends: creative exchanges among faculty members, each of whom belongs concurrently to multiple communities of belief and discursive practice. The tangled but often productive relationships between religious conviction and open inquiry have seldom been so well displayed and so thoughtfully analyzed."--Mark Schwehn, author of *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*

"Scholarship and Christian Faith adds rarely heard Anabaptist and evangelical voices to the expanding dialogue about Christian faith, higher education and the intellectual life. The Jacobsens and their friends, whose conversations created this book, are refreshingly realistic, pastoral, and constructive, pushing beyond too easy appeals for integration to confront questions of faith formation, curriculum, and religious practice. Serious, reflective Christians will find this book useful and at times inspiring."--David J. O'Brien, author of *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture*

Douglas Jacobsen is Distinguished Professor of Church History and Theology at Messiah College and is the author, most recently, of *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (2003). Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen is Professor of Psychology and Director of Faculty Development at Messiah College.

This book is a collaborative effort of some faculty and administration from Messiah College. The wife and husband team, the Jacobsens, compiled this book, which includes some of their work and

the contributions of several others. The structure of the book centers around five chapters written by the Jacobsens. The first four of these chapters have accompanying essays written by others of the group to help illustrate each chapter's theme. Likewise, the prologue and epilogue are from other contributors. The book's overall goal is to widen the perception of Christian scholarship. The Jacobsens are reacting to the evangelical definition of Christian scholarship, which sees its goal to be the "integration of faith and learning." Our authors seek to educate their readers to the reality that Christian scholarship is anything but monolithic or well defined. Instead, one will find a diverse concept that includes many different traditions and goals. On the whole, Christian scholarship (as is all scholarship) is limited in scope and effectiveness. It is impossible to know everything about anything and thus scholarship should be a communal effort, both in terms of dialoguing with others in the Christian community as well as those outside this tradition. For the authors of this book, Christian scholarship is a calling, a vocation. Several different definitions are offered but a common understanding of Christian scholarship is it serves the world as one offers to God their gifts of analyzing, applying and empathizing in the pursuit of truth. Those who are part of a church-related college or university will find this book timely. It does a good job of portraying the many components of Christian scholarship and how one should not seek to limit its scope and appeal with too narrow of an understanding. The need to be informed by others, as well as the goal to reach out and communicate to a vast audience is a suitable corrective to any concept that can seal itself off from our pluralistic society. However, the book does not really deal with the flipside: how does one become a respected voice in our society today and still remain faithful to the gospel message? The point of the book is that Christian schools should not be dogmatic, but if readers are looking for a clear call to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, then this book will somewhat disappoint them. There is never the implication to refrain from sharing one's belief but there is never an explicit call to make Christian scholarship primarily a vehicle for spreading the good news. This book will present a different view than evangelicals are used to; such an argument will profit those who do read it.

The authors are challenging the narrow definition of "integration of faith and learning" as being too reformed-ish. They intend to "enlarge the conversation" and broaden the definition. They want to include things like integration of "faith and hope" or "faith and love" not just integrating sterile faith and the sterile disciplines. They want to add the hands and heart to the head stuff the integrationists talk about. Written by a wife-and-husband team (Psychology and Church historian) they are provoking a stir in the reformed dominated educational cartel. It is probably good these writers are from an Anabaptist heritage where they are accustomed to being persecuted-I bet the wonderfully

brilliant Calvinists who are given to "the life of the mind" will burn Rhonda and Jake Jacobsen at the academic stake! Hint to speed-readers: 80% of the book's contribution is in the first Chapter and 10% is in the epilogue. Great book to read through with other faculty at a book-lunch, that's how I did it. Raises great issues. Now it is time for the non-reformed people to do the heavy lifting of outlining in detail their (our) alternative approach... this book is (like Arminianism) not a true alternative approach--but a complaint against the accepted (reformed) approach. --Keith Drury, Associate Professor of Religion, Indiana Wesleyan University.

A lot of books have been written about Christianity and higher education in the past decade and this is the most positive book by far. The authors manage to be optimistic, insightful, critical, and creative all at the same time without ever moaning about how much the academy is prejudiced against religion. That is totally refreshing, and Martin Marty underscores that point in his foreword. However, this book delivers much more than that. The authors/editors have a chapter on different kinds of scholarship in general (they call these analytic, strategic, and empathic) which have nothing directly to do with faith, but which will be helpful to anyone involved in college or university life. People who might not be interested in reading other books dealing with religion and scholarship should read this one.

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