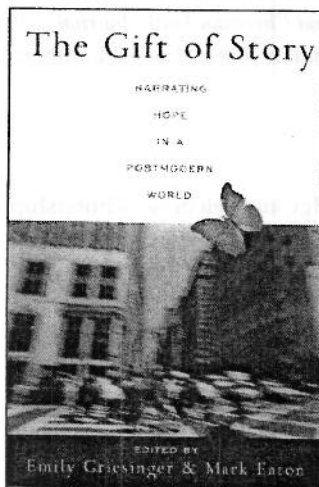


RESEARCH REPORTER



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Postmodernism and the Persistence of Hope



Drs. Emily Griesinger and Mark Eaton edited *The Gift of Story: Narrating Hope in the Postmodern World* (Baylor, 2006), a collection of essays from sixteen Christian scholars who explore our postmodern ills revealed in literature and film. Modernism, particularly in the nineteenth century, began with certainty that a better world was just on the horizon and that mankind could bring itself there by its own means; yet that certainty quickly crumbled after World War I and

seemed to finally collapse in the 1960s, leaving us in an emotionally hurried, technologically bothered, and spiritually tumultuous civilization, where truth is pragmatic and the otherwise sacred values of our lives are dominated by utility. Yet even here stories can touch us. Whenever there is a beginning and a middle, we find ourselves longing for an end – for the completion, fulfillment, and purpose that endings might bring, even when we have been denied the possibility of such things. The contributors to this edition all argue that although we may grant the contingency of truth or the aimlessness of life, we simply cannot abide dangling or pointless plots; we *must* see *meaning*, if nowhere else, in our stories. Even the most sarcastic comedies and brutal tragedies presuppose a plot – some reaffirmation of life. In this, stories always point beyond themselves and compel us to do the same. Indeed, even in the depths of postmodern angst, hope persists. Hope is of course the second of the three theological virtues; it is the eternally youthful, perpetual forward-looking “not yet” within us, whose object – even when all objectivity is rejected – always stays in view. When we know that object to be God, we find a way of making the best of postmodernism. Hope shows how the collapse of modernism is in fact a new beginning if we choose to make it so – a chance to admit how our faith reminds us that we aspire to know better and to inspire others through love to do the same. – Kevin Walker

Psychology

Therapy At/Caring For

Dr. Kevin Reimer, along with Al Dueck from Fuller Seminary, argue for the use of Clifford Geertz’s “thick” descriptive social research method, not only for understanding but also for sensitive and effective caregiving. It is a way of granting the self-understanding of people, especially those in foreign cultures where our individualistic assumptions might easily turn into “psychological imperialism”. “Thick” description begins with an awareness that though we share a common humanity structured by

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universal norms, those norms express themselves – as they must – in very different ways. If researchers do not allow for this and instead fall back on Western individualism that shapes so much of modern psychology, they can cause more harm than good. “Thick” description should be no problem for Christians, the authors argue; we are, after all, a people whose own self-understanding is shaped by grace, which allows us to see those who still live under law as they see themselves and, through this, to give them the best possible care. Reimer and Dueck give the example of a young Iraqi boy named Soheil who was injured during the American invasion in 2003 and shows signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. How does a relief worker address his problems in the best way, given his Islamic identity – an identity that owes far more of itself to the community than that of a Westerner? A true caregiver cannot approach Soheil from the outside with the certainty of psychological methods that are themselves shaped almost entirely by Western ways of thinking. Real help can only come through those willing to grant the full extent of Soheil’s view of things, or to *participate* in the pains, hope, and joys of his life – as indeed Christ himself did. “Inviting Soheil: Narrative and Embrace in Christian Caregiving,” appeared in the Winter 2006 issue of the *Christian Scholar’s Review*. – Kevin Walker

Church Attendance and Human Needs

Drs. William E. Fiala, along with Jeffrey P. Bjorck and Richard Gorsuch from Fuller Seminary, dispel the assumption that religious attendance implies religious support. Their study uses C. E. Cutrona’s and D. W. Russell’s Social Provisions Scale as a model to investigate social support within a religious context. 252 Protestants (along with a cross-validation sample of 93 Protestants) were assessed in terms of their perceived support from their congregation, church leaders (church lay counselors, pastors, clergy, and others), and God.

Interestingly, in both the original and cross-validation samples, “participants reported more God Support than either Congregational or Church Leader Support.” Further, “religious attendance was positively related to Congregational Support in both samples, to Church Leader Support only in the main sample, and to God Support in neither sample.”

“Congregational support was also correlated with decreased depression and increased life satisfaction for both samples” as was church leader support. The authors believe that, given their instrument’s reliability and validity, it could be used to identify congregations at risk and through item analyses to determine particular weaknesses: “This information, in turn, could inform organizational development within churches as well as secondary prevention intervention efforts.” “The Religious Support Scale: Construction, Validation, and Cross-Validation” was published in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* (30:6 [Dec. 2002]: 761-786). – Carole Lambert

Nursing

Teaching Prudence in Nursing

Dr. Marilyn Klakovich and Dr. Felicitas Dela Cruz developed and tested the Interpersonal Communication Assessment Scale (ICAS) for use in the profession to assess how well undergraduate and graduate nursing students connect with patients. The ability to communicate with patients can be more important than technical knowledge; the clues of any given ailment often come from simple questions asked at the right times and stated in the right ways. ICAS assumes that nurses can connect their knowledge of possible conditions with skill in using the best questions – with the intent to meet patients where they are. Effective communication outcomes hinge on the appropriateness of the communication to the context. Through a quantitative analysis, Klakovich and Dela Cruz find ICAS a useful and reliable approach to educating nurses, although they recognize the limitations of their study due largely to gender and ethnicity that shape the communication norms, as well as a variety of factors that make up many contexts. The researchers recommend further testing of ICAS to address the limitations, as well as further comparisons between undergraduates and graduates in order to show improvement over time and perhaps isolate factors that students can improve on. “Validating the Interpersonal Communication Assessment Scale” appeared in the January-February Issue of the *Journal of Professional Nursing*, pp. 60-67. – Kevin Walker

Theology

Biblical Humanity and Bioethics

Drs. Paul and Cahleen Shrier describe the scientific belief that human embryonic stem cell (HESC) research may help to alleviate grave illnesses such as quadriplegia and multiple sclerosis in the future, and they point out that some scientific and political communities are making claims for potential cures that the research does not yet support. More importantly, they consider Old Testament counsel regarding conception, pregnancy, and birth, affirming “that a Christian community ethics, not an abstracted moral position based upon individual rights, is required to judge which policy options the Christian community ought to support.”

A key question for ethicists of all religions is when does human life begin since “embryos are destroyed before day 14 to harvest” the stem cells needed for research. Catholics, believing that human life begins at conception, oppose HESC research. Many Protestant denominations either join them or allow limited support of HESC research.

Study of the Old Testament indicates that “conception occurs through the agency of God” and that “fertility is God’s primary blessing” to a family and its broader community. Further, “conception and birth are always linked as the natural and desirable sequence of events”: “Only God can interrupt pregnancy.”

In contrast to postmodern individualism, the Shriers emphasize answering the questions of “whether or not human embryos ought to be destroyed” or “created expressly for the purpose of being destroyed, to harvest stem cells” in terms of a believing community’s response to God’s sovereignty over conception, pregnancy, birth, and death. They conclude that the most important question Christians should ask is “How should a Christian regard and care for the fetus as a child?” They affirm, “A kingdom of God ethic argues that HESC research should not be done until and if stem cells can be obtained without harming human embryos.” “Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research and Christian Community Ethics: An Old Testament Investigation” appeared in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith: Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 58:1, March 2006. – Carole Lambert

NEXT YEAR

It has been a joy for us to acknowledge and celebrate scholarship at APU over the past year. We look forward to hosting the APU Writers Retreat in Malibu this May. We will also provide complete reviews of the essays in *Christian College, Christian Calling* (AltaMira Press, 2005), edited by Drs. Steve Wilkins, Paul Shrier, and Ralph Martin, as well as *Holiness as a Root of Morality: Essays on Wesleyan Ethics* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), edited by Dr. John Park. Next year, we will launch our webpage version of the Research Reporter, archiving all APU Faculty Publications and other scholarly activities, and will continue with our colloquia.

If you have any suggestions on how we can better serve you, please let us know!

APU FACULTY RESEARCH

The Office of Faculty Research and the Office of Sponsored Research and Grants work to assist APU faculty with their research and dissemination endeavors, provide external research funding, and promote an academic climate that celebrates and strengthens the Azusa Pacific University community of Christian scholars and researchers.

Office of Research Personnel:

Director, Office of Research: Dr. Carole Lambert (CLambert@apu.edu)
Consultant, Office of Research: Dr. Beverly Hardcastle Stanford (BStanford@apu.edu); Director, Office of Sponsored Research and Grants: Dr. Luman Wing (LWing@apu.edu); Grants Services Specialist: Kevin Walker (KMWalker@apu.edu); Administrative Assistant: Lydia Tracy (LTracy@apu.edu). Visit us in Ronald 164.