

Book Reviews

into revised chapters before publication. The result would have been a more polished and more insightful collection of ecotheological contributions.

That said, the *Ecotheology* project is largely successful in meeting its stated goal of assisting individuals and communities to develop their own ecotheology. The chapters were great conversation starters for us. Although the book could have been sharpened by deeper dialogue and collaboration among the authors and editors, the essays and responses in *Ecotheology* will stimulate good conversations among other readers, too!

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TO THINK CHRISTIANLY: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement by Charles E. Cotherman. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 320 pages. Hardcover; \$35.00. ISBN: 9780830852826.

How do Christians studying at secular universities, where religion is either ignored or attacked, achieve an integral Christian perspective on their areas of study and future careers? Charles Cotherman presents a first-rate history of one way that Christians have sought to answer this question, namely, in establishing Christian study centers on or adjacent to university campuses.

The Christian study center movement (CSCM) in North America arose to teach and guide Christians in how to think and behave Christianly in all areas and professions of life, by drawing upon the insights of biblical and theological studies. Cotherman defines such a study center as “a local Christian community dedicated to spiritual, intellectual and relational flourishing via the cultivation of deep spirituality, intellectual and artistic engagement, and cultivation of hospitable presence” (p. 8). He rightly contends that the roots of the CSCM movement are found in two institutions: L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland (founded 1955) and Regent College in Vancouver (founded 1968). In Part 1, Innovation, he presents the history of these two institutions.

In chapter one, Cotherman gives an account of the birth and development of L'Abri under the leadership of Francis and Edith Schaeffer. As missionaries to an increasingly secular Europe, their encounter with its culture, art, and philosophical ideas led Francis to contextualize the gospel—as an evangelical Presbyterian minister rooted in the Reformed faith—in an intel-

lectually honest fashion to people influenced by this culture. L'Abri's ministry was so effective because of two other equally important features: the practice of a deep spirituality amidst the rhythms of everyday life, and the practice of relationships in a hospitable community, both of which Francis and Edith were instrumental in shaping. As more people visited L'Abri and were helped in their faith or accepted the gospel, it became known in the wider evangelical Christian world. This gave rise to branches of L'Abri being established in other nations, and to Christians seeking to establish communities on university campuses that embodied L'Abri's intellectual, spiritual, and relational strengths.

In chapter two, Cotherman presents the history of the rise of Regent College and its progress toward financial and academic stability at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The first principal, James Houston, played a key role in attracting good faculty and in shaping the curriculum to educate lay-people in the Christian worldview for their secular careers. It provided students with a strong sense of community and vital spirituality. Regent also sought to be a witness to and partner with the university by purchasing property on the campus and by obtaining university affiliation. With the decline in enrollment for lay theological education in the 1970s, Regent survived by offering the MDiv degree (1978), attracting new students preparing for pastoral ministry. When other attempts at establishing Christian colleges and Christian study centers were initiated at other universities, Houston served to encourage and guide such ventures by drawing upon Regent's experience.

Inspired by the vision and community of L'Abri and by the success of Regent College, Christians ministering at other university campuses sought to establish “evangelical living and learning centers” on or near the campuses of state universities (p. 91). Part 2, Replication, gives an account of three such CSCM ventures: (1) the C.S. Lewis Institute (initially at the University of Maryland, later in downtown Washington, DC); (2) New College, Berkeley; and (3) the Center for Christian Study at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Cotherman also includes in this section a chapter on the history and progress of Ligonier Ministries under the leadership and teaching gifts of R.C. Sproul (initially in Pennsylvania, then in Orlando, Florida). Although originally modelled after L'Abri as a lay-teaching retreat center in a rural setting, Ligonier's move to Orlando marked a shift to a ministry focused on Sproul's teaching gifts in (Reformed) theological education that

concentrated on video and print materials. The history of Ligonier is clearly the outlier here. Perhaps Cotherman includes it because it began as a retreat center for students, but it gradually became focused on general lay theological education, especially after its move to Orlando.

The three Christian university learning centers all began with grand visions of providing university-level education to aid students, studying at the large universities, in formulating a worldview to enable them to integrate their Christian faith with their academic and professional education. Although these three sought to become free-standing colleges with high-quality faculty, to teach courses during the academic year, and in summer study institutes, the challenges of raising funds, attracting full-time faculty, and finding permanent facilities resulted in all of them having to scale back their plans. The Lewis Institute turned its attention to relational learning, eventually establishing regional centers in eighteen cities; New College, Berkeley, became an affiliate, nondegree granting institution of the Graduate Theological Union, being the evangelical voice there; and the Center for Christian Study shifted its focus to being an inviting and hospitable place for study, formation, and relationships in its building on the edge of the campus. All three found that replicating a Regent College was a much more difficult project than they had originally thought.

Cotherman notes that all four attempts of the CSCM, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ran into the new reality: American Christians were not willing to take a year off their careers to study for a nonaccredited diploma. Students were more interested in getting degrees that had financial payoffs. The most successful venture was the Center for Christian Study, which used the building it purchased as a hub for various Christian ministries at the university, and as a center for hospitality to Christian and non-Christian students. The Charlottesville Center became a catalyst for the formation of the Consortium of Christian Study Centers across North America. This included not only the three university centers mentioned above, but also numerous others that had arisen on university campuses. Many of the centers became convinced that “the path forward was more a matter of faithful presence through deeply rooted, engaged and hospitable relationships and institutions than it was about the apologetics or cultural bluster that had defined some aspects of the movement in its early days” (p. 252).

Cotherman’s concluding chapter notes that the CSCM has largely focused on ministries of faithful presence and generous hospitality, with the goal of holistic flourishing at the universities that they serve. Such flourishing includes helping Christian students to cultivate the ability to think Christianly about current issues and their vocations as they engage the pluralistic ideologies, cultural practices, and neopagan practices on university campuses. Cotherman rightly observes that, while both L’Abri and Regent College inspired many to establish such centers, it was Regent that had played the prominent role as a model for those aiming to guide students and to interact with modern secular universities. L’Abri was focused around the unique community that the Schaeffers created and the giftedness of Francis and Edith, but L’Abri failed to interact with the wider academic world. In striving to be a Christian presence on campus, Regent was the appropriate model for the CSCM.

The details of the historical accounts in the book serve to remind the reader that, while grandiose visions and goals drove many in the movement, their reduced aspirations led to the CSCM being better suited to effective witnessing, appropriate educating, and faithful service to students and laypeople today. Any who would start such a Christian study center or who wonder how an existing one can survive should read this book and learn the lessons from the history of the ventures presented. Humility in one’s plans and small beginnings are appropriate for any such ministry to avoid the mistakes of the centers presented.

While Cotherman touches on the rising antagonism to Christianity and Christians on university campuses, he fails to provide significant treatment of this new challenge that the CSCM faces. I think we can imply from this fine book that, as the CSCM movement adapted to the new realities in the latter part of the twentieth century, it can also adapt to the intensified attacks on the Christian faith in the twenty-first century. While the challenges ahead are great for Christian university ministries, Christian witness has the resources of the word of God, the wisdom of the Spirit, and the motivation of the gospel which continue to guide biblical discipleship and faithful witness. This historical survey by Cotherman can serve as an encouragement to campus ministry for our increasingly secularized western culture.

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