

Book Review
For *Partner*, a newsletter of the
Canadian Association of Christians in Student Development
(CACSD)

Murphy, Debra Dean. *Teaching that Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004. 255 pages. \$27.99. ISBN 1-58743-067-3.

As a mentor of university students, I am always seeking ways to enrich their university experience so that they can grow both as scholars and as active disciples of Jesus Christ. My particular role is worship leader, responsible to facilitate Trinity Western University's daily, voluntary chapel program. I often reflect on the intersection of worship and the academy, and wonder about how to confront the values of our secular culture in the lives of students as they come (or don't come) to corporate worship. This is why Debra Dean Murphy's book, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Brazos Press, 2004), caught my eye. Here were my two passions – discipleship and worship – being placed together in one book!

As a Christian educator in her local United Methodist church, and as a professor of religion and philosophy at Meredith College, Murphy brings a wealth of scholarship and experience to her writing. In her book, Murphy challenges modern concepts of religious education (represented by, among others, Gabriel Moran, Thomas Groome, and Mary Boys) that have influenced contemporary Christian education. This modernism-birtherd religious education aims "objectively" to discover and promote "common religious values" of transcendence, liberty and justice based on human rights, and good citizenship within modern democratic capitalism.

In contrast to this neutral "objectivity," Murphy calls us back to the notion of *catechesis*, which more fully captures the goal of Christian education as *transformation*. Christian catechesis invites people to be changed – to submit to a personal God, whose self-revelation in Jesus Christ and whose claim to Lordship has fundamentally questioned and redefined our understanding and encounter with reality. Because education in light of Christ's Lordship is dealing, not just with value-neutral knowledge, but with issues of allegiance and desire, Christian formation must be birthed out of, and lead to, worship.

Yet it is more than leading songs, providing spiritual “warm fuzzies,” or using deeply theological texts to help people “think Christianly.”

Worship, Murphy argues, especially the historic liturgy of the church, actively engages our whole beings – thoughts, emotions, bodies, voices, and most importantly, our will – with the counter-values and counter-practices that characterize God’s rule. In essence, corporate worship’s participatory nature makes it not only *descriptive* of Christian truth, but *performative* in shaping Christian virtues and kingdom thinking. The book’s greatest strength is Murphy’s thoughtful demonstration of how each specific action in the historic liturgy of the church – prayer, passing of the peace, baptism, Eucharist etc. – contributes to the transformation of people. This emphasis on *active learning* ought to ring true for those of us working in the student development profession.

Murphy’s masterful synthesis of cultural analysis, contemporary liturgical studies, classical theology, and moral philosophy renewed my conviction that vibrant corporate worship is integral to Christian academic community. Murphy argues that worship and catechesis ought to be integrally linked within a church community; it follows, I think, that Christian scholarship should also, wherever possible, be pursued within a community of devoted disciples who live under the redefining reality of a relationship with the Triune God. This mystery of communion with God will only fully transform the classroom or the study group when it is first experienced in worship.

Since the consistent discipline of gathering together in worship has the potential to give people the language, postures, responses, and convictions that will drive a life of worship, and since it can inspire the pursuit of scholarship and vocation as an act of devotion to God, we are called to be more intentional with our leadership. We must lead holistically, incorporating mind, emotions, and body in ways that invite the whole person into a transforming relationship with the Triune God, drawing especially on the historic and global resources of Christian worship. Further, we must instruct our “scholarly” congregation of what we are experiencing in worship. And where it is possible, we must invite Christians in the academy, whether at a Christian or secular school, to join us in worship, so that, as believers, we are not only *thinking* about the implications of God’s reign in the world, but *celebrating* it and *imagining* it together. Whether they become scholars, professionals, parents or educators, I believe that university students who,

through worship, begin to catch a picture of the richness of God’s character and His intentions for creation will be the kind of people God can use to make an impact for His glory “in the various marketplaces of life.”

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Bio: Tim McCarthy is the Associate Director of Student Ministries for Chapel Programs at Trinity Western University, in Langley, BC. In addition to leading worship, he enjoys equipping student worship leaders to embrace the story of God’s reign in Scripture as their own, to appreciate the wealth of wisdom and inspiration found in the historic worship of the church, and to contribute their unique gifts to leading congregations in an active, responsive love relationship with the Triune God that bears fruit in worship and witness. If you have any questions or insights into how to deepen the worship life of a Christian academic community, email Tim at mccarthy@twu.ca.