



Confidence and Humility by Eliot Grasso

When one hears of a Great Books college that happens to be Christian, one might expect a curriculum stocked exclusively with the great works of Christian theology: Augustine's *City of God*, Aquinas's *Summa*, Calvin's *Institutes*, and the like. And, in fact, these works are part of the Gutenberg College curriculum. What might surprise some Christians, however, is that Gutenberg's curriculum also contains works by staunch secularists. Over their four-year journey at Gutenberg, students will read and discuss the writings of skeptic David Hume, atheist Friedrich Nietzsche, and postmodernist Michel Foucault, all philosophers who openly challenged biblical Christianity.

This fact might raise concern among some Christians: Why perpetuate a curriculum around the ravings of these delinquent philosophers when that time could instead be devoted to biblical theology? Or worse: Doesn't exposure to questionable and explicitly critical writings threaten the foundation of a college student's faith? I propose, however, that the objective of understanding secular texts in Gutenberg's curriculum cultivates two attributes that are essential for Christians: confidence and humility.

We at Gutenberg College hold that among the vast diversity of great books available to humanity, the Bible is the greatest. We believe that when a person assents to the truth of the Bible, it is God and not man who convicts that person's soul and gives true knowledge about Himself. We believe that God has given us the Bible to be the sole, infallible author-

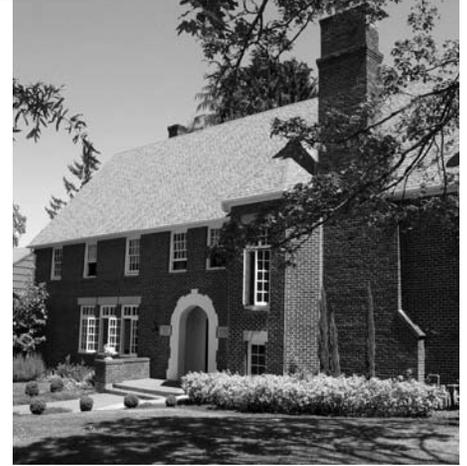
ity with regard to matters of ultimate truth. Thus, the tutors at Gutenberg are committed to the idea that what the Bible says about God, man, and the world is absolutely true. Part 2 of Gutenberg's Biblical Foundation Statement, "The Summary of the Primary Message of the Bible," expresses the following sentiments:

1. What the Bible calls LIFE is the greatest good for any and every human being. LIFE would truly fulfill a human individual, fulfilling his created purpose and longing. No human being can be truly fulfilled who does not enter into LIFE.

2. We believe that God created human rationality, that it is a universal, God-given faculty of every human being, and that God made it to be the ultimate epistemological authority—that is, we believe that what is soundly rational can and should be assumed to be true, and we believe that what is true will be soundly rational. Furthermore, we believe that what is not soundly rational should be assumed to be false.

The curriculum is designed with this belief in mind:

11. The essential core of biblical Christianity, therefore, can be summed up as follows: the one who acknowledges, appreciates, values, and endorses all that Jesus was, is, and did—as outlined in [point 10]—(and who, accordingly, gratefully receives God's promise of LIFE as a gift of divine mercy) is among those chosen by God to be granted LIFE in the age to come. The one who stubbornly refuses to acknowledge, appreciate, value, and/or endorse all that Jesus was, is,



and did is not among those who will receive mercy and LIFE.

Because we at Gutenberg believe that the Bible is true, we have confidence that it will win the day in the marketplace of ideas. We want our students to have that same confidence.

Yet, while we believe that the Word of God will triumph over other writings in its analysis of the condition of reality, we at Gutenberg also recognize that something valuable may yet be learned from Friedrich Nietzsche and other secularists.

When I read Nietzsche's writings, I find that I disagree with him on many points: many of his perspectives clash with biblical Christianity. For example, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche's first published work, released in 1872), Nietzsche argues that life is not worth living "but that in a tragic culture, one can learn to tolerate the knowledge that it is not." As a subscriber to the Biblical Foundation Statement* that I quoted above, I, by contrast, happen to believe that life is indeed worth living.

But, Nietzsche also argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the society he knew lacked unity, coherence, and meaningfulness, and that modern individuals had developed their talents and powers in an overspecialized, one-sided way. He posits that, consequently, their

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* Gutenberg's Biblical Foundation Statement is available online at http://gutenberg.edu/about_gutenberg/biblical_foundation-statement.





New Provost for Gutenberg College

On July 1, Gutenberg College will have a new provost who is not new to Gutenberg. We are pleased to announce that Dr. Eliot Grasso will become provost, replacing departing provost Tim McIntosh. Eliot joined Gutenberg's faculty in 2012 and teaches art practicums, gives lectures, and leads Great Books discussions. Eliot holds a B.A. in music from Goucher College, a M.A. in ethnomusicology from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, and a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. In addition to his teaching, Eliot is an internationally recognized performer, scholar, composer, and recording artist who has performed before heads of state, at world-renowned venues, and—to the delight of our community—at Gutenberg College. You can learn more about Eliot's intellectual and artistic endeavors at www.eliotgrasso.com. Below, Eliot explains why he is excited to be Gutenberg's next provost.

My road to Gutenberg was a winding and unusual one. I first encountered Gutenberg College several years ago when Charley Dewberry dropped his sons Andrew and Dylan off for fiddle lessons where I was teaching music. "Is that Plato's *Republic*?" I asked, noticing Charley's book. "In Greek?" "Yes," Charley replied. "Plato and the Greek language are part of the curriculum at Gutenberg College, where I serve as dean and tutor."

The idea of interacting with primary sources has been important to me for a long time. I was

blown away by the idea that undergraduates were reading primary sources in the original language. Then he showed me the syllabus for the Western Civilization course. I was totally captivated. I had studied the classics at Loyola High School, a nineteenth-century Jesuit preparatory school in Baltimore, Maryland, the city where I was born. Further, my background in Irish traditional music cultivated an abiding desire to examine the nuances of original texts, or, in the case of Irish music, live recordings of master musicians. In fact, I traveled to Ireland to learn directly from these "authors" what they were trying to do in their music-making.

In the summer of 2012, I sat before the Gutenberg founders in the college library to interview for an adjunct teaching position. I explained how I was raised Catholic and had come to the existential realization that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event and how that realization had completely transformed my thinking, behavior, and the trajectory of my life. I was thrilled when, after hearing my story, they invited me to begin teaching art philosophy and the art practicum in the fall.

The Gutenberg College program is highly distinctive among college curricula due to its rigor and depth. Gutenberg is an impressive project with the objective of connecting twenty-first century human beings to the landmarks of human history by bringing them into contact with the original writings that have shaped civilization. For this to take place within a context supported by a biblical worldview is quite unique. All the tutors are dedicated to pursuing truth as a whole picture established by God in which each human being has value.

But Gutenberg is much more than its outstanding curriculum and rigorous standards. Perhaps an even more important distinctive is how the students are treated. Students are treated as if the wholeness of their humanity is of the utmost importance to the tutors. Students are trusted. Students are listened to. They are respected because they are fellow human beings in pursuit of truth. As such, much is expected of them—the two-year exams present the challenge of creating a holistic picture of Western civilization and then defending that picture before the faculty. The bar is set high, and rightly so.

The mind can be capable of great things when properly trained.

As a tutor, what I want more than anything is for my students to know that God loves them—that the infinite, eternal, magisterial Being par excellence has, with unparalleled intensity, great care for their person. I want students to engage with their humanity, to see that they are valuable—that their thoughts, actions, words, and feelings matter. I want them to seek wisdom, humility, gentleness, charity, clarity, and honesty. I want students to have concern for others—to learn to listen to and understand ideas that may seem incomprehensible or objectionable. I believe that the curriculum fosters this. Students come into contact with the ideas of other human beings who are taking life seriously—the tutors first of all and then authors who have pondered a question for years and who offer an earnest and carefully crafted response to a significant question. Such projects are impressive, and they demand to be taken seriously.

Gutenberg has gathered around itself a fantastic community of students, alumni, donors, and supporters. All Gutenberg events are branded in my mind as warm, friendly, sincere acts of human authenticity. I believe others in North America and throughout the world can benefit from the project of Gutenberg College, and I want to help those people to connect with Gutenberg. To this end, Gutenberg College is enhancing its outreach through partnerships and workshops to engage with institutions and families that want to understand God, their world, and themselves. Through dedicated service and God's provision, I believe that Gutenberg can build a financially sustainable model that will allow it to serve many students in the years to come.

As incoming provost, it is important to me that certain things remain consistent at our school. I am committed to maintaining Gutenberg's position on the Bible, its authorship, and its message. I am committed to maintaining Gutenberg's methodology of education, to grant to all students the right to freely search for truth and understanding. I am committed to ethical approaches to administrative tasks that align with biblical morality and our school's cultural ethos.

My objective is to expand the reach of our school to neighboring organizations within

the community and throughout the nation so that we may serve others in our community and in order to become visible for men and women interested in pursuing truth through a Great Books education. My goal is to further develop our alumni outreach program and other career-development programs for our current students.

Gutenberg is very much a group effort. Every contribution helps our students to engage with their intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. I invite readers to keep abreast of further developments through Gutenberg's website, mailing list, and social media, and where appropriate, to let me know how they might like to contribute to the work done here at Gutenberg College. Ω



Dean, Dr. Charley Dewberry, and incoming provost, Dr. Eliot Grasso, on a road trip to Bend, Oregon, where Gutenberg sponsored a Classical Conversations Parent Practicum.

Confidence and Humility, continued

lives and personalities were fragmented—not integrated—and thus people lacked the ability to identify with their society in a natural way and earnestly play the role assigned to them in the world. So, while I do not agree with Nietzsche about whether life is worth living, I do agree with some of his insights about how man functioned as a social and psychological being in nineteenth-century Europe. Nietzsche's remarks fail to satisfy me when I try to locate existential meaning, the content of what's worth believing, and the method by which Jesus saves mankind. But, his analysis of the condition of society at large is not so unreasonable, at least as he frames it in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

It takes humility to be willing to examine the thinking of someone like Nietzsche, to

take it seriously, and to be able to see that in parts of his analysis we can learn from him. And so, while we at Gutenberg want our students to gain confidence that the biblical worldview is true, we also want to foster in them the humility to listen to all kinds of writers—both for their own sake and for the sake of others.

The reality is that every believer is confronted with the world and its fragmentary perspectives, shifting morality, and questionable logic. But, it is also the case that some Christians never test the coherence of their faith against other formidable systems of thought—like the system posed by Nietzsche—either because they fail to see the point in doing so or because they are afraid to do so. I would argue, however, that sorting through compelling critiques from secularists and interacting with authors like Nietzsche can help us sort through the contents of our minds, and for a serious student of biblical Christianity, this sorting process can be extremely profitable.

Indeed, interacting with ideas that have shaped Western civilization (as the Gutenberg curriculum asks its students to do) reflects the confidence of the apostle Paul, who believed that the claims of God would make the world's wisdom seem ridiculous (particularly in the area of salvation through belief in Jesus) but also that God's wisdom would seem ridiculous to the world. He wrote about this to the church at Corinth in the early years of the church:

Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.
(1 Corinthians 1:20-27, NIV)

So then, reading secularists can benefit Gutenberg students (and us), but it can also

benefit others. The influential ideas that have shaped the world we live in were not all generated by Christians. Yet, God has placed Christians in a world populated by all kinds of thinkers and has asked us to interact with others who disagree with us.

In order to understand and serve our neighbor, one must cultivate humility, for genuine servitude requires humility. To serve well, it behooves us to lean in and listen to what the secularists were (and are) trying to say, even if we do not adopt their thinking, conclusions, and culture. The disciples ventured into the world time and again, and in so doing, they interacted with a wide variety of people. In order to communicate the gospel, the disciples had to know who they were talking to; they had to have both a knowledge of the world they were speaking into and confidence in the message they were trying to share.

While I may not agree with Nietzsche when he says that life isn't worth living, understanding why he thought that way may help me interact with my neighbor who thinks in a similar vein. Thus, in order to help our students to serve their neighbors, understand how the Bible has been received up through the twenty-first century, wrestle with the events of human history, and communicate with compassion and charity, the Gutenberg curriculum offers a voice to literary and philosophical authors considered *personae non gratae* by many Christians. We read the secularists not merely to dismiss their ideas, to expose their errors. We read them to understand their picture of the world—for that is the world in which God asks us to serve.

For a Great Books curriculum like Gutenberg's to include a variety of secular authors makes great sense. It gives students the opportunity to examine their own beliefs, and those who believe in the truths of the Bible can gain confidence that their beliefs are well founded.

During the process of reading the secularists, students learn to understand, respect, evaluate, and interact with opinions they may find disagreeable and unsatisfying, and in so doing, they mature in their character, develop in their mental acumen, and, by God's grace, grow in humility and learn to love their neighbor by practicing how to "listen" to the authors of the Great Books—and their fellow students. Ω



2017 Seniors (left to right): Tobias Humphrey, Meredith Wilkins Bishop, Paul Bishop, Arminas Novakas, Ian Hughes, Benjamin Chase, Dan McLaughlin

Gutenberg College Commencement June 9 at 7:00 PM

Gutenberg cordially invites you to the Commencement Ceremony for the class of 2017. The ceremony will take place at Central Lutheran Church (1857 Potter Street in Eugene) at 7:00 PM. Speaking this year will be Provost Tim McIntosh. A reception at Gutenberg will follow the ceremony.

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Gutenberg College
McKenzie Study Center • Art Project
1883 University Street
Eugene, OR 97403

TELEPHONE: 541-683-5141
541-485-4801 (MSC/AP)
FAX: 541-683-6997
EMAIL: office@gutenberg.edu
INTERNET: www.gutenberg.edu

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2017 Summer Institute: Meaning and Flourishing in a Secular Age

July 27–29 Why do we suffer? How can we flourish? We humans have always asked such questions. But now we live in a thoroughly secular era, and answers are hard to come by. How did our culture end up here? How can a person of faith pursue a transcendent vision of life in such a culture? Gutenberg's 2017 Summer Institute will explore such questions. We'll search passages from the Bible, from the classics, and from contemporary works to find timeless truths and practical ways for pursuing God and flourishing in a secular age.



2016 Summer Institute

Early registration deadline: July 4
Details at www.gutenberg.edu