

REFERENCE POINT

NOVEMBER 2019

The Place of Confrontation

And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.” (2 Thessalonians 3:13 NIV)

What led you to become a Christian? What led you to become a librarian? More importantly, what has led you to remain a Christian librarian through the passage of time? As Christians, engaging with our loved ones and neighbors in a world increasingly ignorant and hostile toward the faith can push us to retreat or to abandon our hope. As librarians, leaving the honeymoon phase of our work along with the awe that once drew us to libraries can result in discouragement and burnout. As Christian librarians, we are challenged with staying true to our calling, both spiritually and professionally.

Last summer I stumbled upon a radio broadcast with Chris Armstrong, recent director of Opus: The Art of Work program at Wheaton College. He was discussing a presentation he gave at the Acton University conference titled “Must work ‘secularize’ us?” Dr. Armstrong told the story of ancient church leader, Gregory the Great (540 - 604 AD), who struggled with moving from a contemplative life as a monk to the active life as he was appointed Bishop of Rome. Initially Gregory feared the harm that his work in political and economic life would have on his spiritual well-being, but then came to embrace it. He discovered, as Armstrong put it, that “the active life is a place of confrontation of who we are and who others are, of the sinfulness in us . . . but it is also a place where God can communicate with us.”

The library can be a “place of confrontation.” Seemingly unaware administrators press us to do more with less, demanding patrons expect the best resources at the last second, and we often seek out our own prestige and status to the detriment of others. Yet it is precisely in this place where our Lord can shine. We can work with our administrators to strengthen our institutions; we can equip and prepare our students for their future professions; and we can allow God to “communicate with us” in our work. After all, in the end it is not about the library at all. As Mother Teresa so wonderfully put it, “Our vocation is nothing else but to belong to Christ. The work that we do is only a means to put our love for Christ into living action.”

It can be tiring to discern what is “good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2) in our professions in this time and place, but we have each been given wonderful opportunities to serve and find God through this work. We also have been given a whole community of brothers and sisters in Christ through the Association of Christian Librarians to support and encourage each other in this work. May we not tire of doing what is good.



—Eric Bradley

Eric is a Research & Instruction Librarian at Goshen College in Goshen, IN. He has been an ACL member for 13 years.