

# A DOXASTIC COMMUNITY APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

GREG GANSSLE | SENIOR FELLOW, RIVENDELL INSTITUTE

## SUMMARY

Greg Ganssle lays out the significance of community in our practices both as Christians and scholars. As he unpacks this concept, he also analyzes the similarities and differences between the Church and the academy.

## ASSESSING THE TEXT

***"In the Church some have believed that a commitment to scholarship inevitably leads to the rejection of or at least a revisioning of the faith. In the Academy, it has been heard that Christian concerns inhibit the pure and open attitude necessary to the scholarly pursuit."***

How have you encountered each of these attitudes in both the Christian and scholarly communities?

Which is more frustrating to you as someone who lives in both of them?

***"I believe there are valuable insights to be gained by thinking of these communities as Doxastic, or belief forming, communities."***

How is the scholastic community belief-forming in the same respect as the Church?

***"As a Christian, I participate in a family of activities by which beliefs are formed and sustained within me. This family includes participation in liturgy, in worship, in listening to sermons, in studying the scriptures. I also engage in the responsive readings of the psalms, in the sacraments, in meditation, prayer, and in discussion. My everyday religious experience, which Alston calls "Christian Mystical Perception" is also included. For the most part, these activities are not engaged in isolation. I enter into them in the community of Christian people. This family of practices may lead me to form beliefs."***

Why is it important to participate in these belief-forming activities within the context of community, rather than individualistically?

What is the danger that comes from removing yourself from Christian community?

How do these practices help us form or modify our beliefs? Have you ever had an experience where your beliefs or convictions were molded by your experiences with the spiritual disciplines?

***"As a philosopher, I engage in another family of belief forming activities. This family includes various aspects of analyzing arguments, disputing conclusions, proposing alternative answers to controversial questions, recognizing and evaluating the entailments of specific claims, uncovering disputable assumptions and refuting anticipated (or stated) objections. These activities are learned and pursued in the community of other philosophers."***

What belief-forming practices do you engage in as a participant in your field of study?

***"Both the Church and the Academy define themselves accordingly. The creeds functioned as sketching the boundaries for orthodoxy. If I hold beliefs outside those prescribed, I am no longer Christian. In the academy there has been talk about an orthodoxy of method as well as of belief. Orthodox methodology is that which determines what is real scholarship and what is spurious."***

Just like there are certain beliefs that are not tolerated by orthodox Christianity, what are some of the beliefs in your field that define a person as either an insider or outsider?

How do those beliefs conflict with those of the Church?

***"The Church and the Academy differ significantly, however, in at least two ways. First, in spite of some overlap, they do hold different sets of inputs and outputs to be acceptable. Second, they differ as to how the boundaries are set and maintained. In the Church there is a legitimate appeal, as input, to the authority of scripture, tradition and creed as well as to the reasoning process. In the Academy, there may be covert appeal to authority as long as it is to the authority of the scholarly community or to the proper methodology. As far as outputs are concerned, in the church supernatural explanations are expected while in the community of scholars, such explanations are granted reluctantly if at all."***

How do these differences make it difficult for the two worlds to understand each other?

***"Christians often ground the importance of scholarship reductionistically as well. Scholarship has value if it promotes the concerns of Christian community, specifically in persuading others that Christianity is true."***

What's wrong with reducing scholarly practices to such a utilitarian approach?

***"God has a redemptive mission for the world and He has drafted His people into this mission. As Christians we are called to embody God's redemptive mission to the whole world. This includes our roles as heralds of the gospel but it also involves our redemptive engagement with all that is created and fallen. In other words, my deepest priorities must be kingdom priorities and kingdom priorities are redemptive. I cannot be content merely to pursue a faithful execution of my scholarly opportunities. I must make God's aims my own and His aims are transformative."***

How do you go the extra step of prioritizing the Kingdom through your scholarship?

What's the risk one takes in doing this?

***"It turns out that there is a better metaphor to describe the relation the Christian Scholar has to the two communities. It is not original. In fact, St. Paul applied it to his own ministry as well as to ours. We are ambassadors."***

What does an ambassador do?

How does this illustration by Paul inform your concept of mission in the academic community?