



Session 4: Thursday, June 6, 1:45–3:15 p.m.

American Religion

Roundtable Discussion: “Gender and Race in the History of Churches of Christ: How Does the Past Speak to Today?”

Location: Lamb and Scroll

Scott Billingsley, *University of North Carolina at Pembroke*, Convener

- **Richard T. Hughes**, *Lipscomb University*
- **James L. Gorman**, *Johnson University*
- **Kathy J. Pulley**, *Missouri State University*
- **Loretta M. Hunnicut**, *Pepperdine University*
- **Edward A. Robinson**, *Texas College*
- **Doug Foster**, *Abilene Christian University*, Moderator

Based on sections of the Hughes and Gorman book, *Reviving the Ancient Faith, 3rd ed.: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, this roundtable discussion will focus primarily on the fragmentation of the Churches of Christ from the 1960s to today, with the emphasis on the cultural issues of gender and race. All panelists will informally discuss whether the church’s history on gender and race affects churches today in regard to unity, identity, and direction for the future? Discussion from the audience is desired.

Business & Economics

“Christian Business Topics”

Location: Yarnton

Russell Dabbs, *Lubbock Christian University*, Convenor

- **James Woodrow**, *Vanguard University*
- **Dutch Kendall**, *Indian Wesleyan University*
- **Ebenezer O. Danso**, *Heritage Christian University College*

This session will introduce a diverse set of Christian business topics including characteristics of christ-centered companies, customer discrimination law and private Christian higher education in Ghana.

James Woodrow, *Vanguard University*, “Distinguishing Characteristics of Christ-Centered Companies”

Business and industry function best with a strong sense of purpose and how it’s reflected in an equally strong, vibrant culture. When created, communicated, and supported effectively from the top down, the mission, core values, and strategy of a Christ-centered company has the power to transform the work of its employees and its service to customers into positive, Christ-centered outcomes. To investigate the distinguishing characteristics that set these unique companies apart from secular business and industry, a review of the literature and contemporary

practices resulted in a variety of distinguishing characteristics, best practices, and findings, which will be shared in the presentation.

Dutch Kendall, *Indian Wesleyan University*, “Navigating Customer Discrimination Law” This article is the third in a series on legal challenges particular to Christian owned and operated businesses. According to official directories, there are over 60,000 businesses in the United States that lay open claim to the title “Christian owned and operated.” Making this sort of faith statement is protected by law in the United States but can result in legal challenges. There is a dialectic legal tension between freedom of religious expression, guaranteed by the First Amendment and Title VII, and protections against discrimination in the provision of goods and services, guaranteed by Title II. Unfortunately, the intersection of these rights is ill-defined and unclear, and often dependent on latent variables like jurisdiction. When these statutory arenas collide, it has resulted in dramatic court cases that become media events. This article uses specific cases as illustrations to illuminate the boundaries between free religious expression, prohibited customer discrimination, and the large, dangerous middle zone likely to lead to painful lawsuits.

Ebenezer O. Danso, *Heritage Christian University College*, “Challenges and Opportunities: Private Christian Higher Education Institutes Under Ghana’s Higher Education Act 2020”

A major shift in the higher education landscape of Ghana has been caused by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023). The Act mandates that affiliated tertiary institutions must charter within four years. Previous to the legislation, new institutions were required to affiliate with an existing chartered institution during accreditation, but this system has not worked for a variety of reasons. Thus, this new Act demands all tertiary institutions must prepare for charter or risk foreclosure. For already affiliated institutions, mostly Christian-based non-governmental higher learning institutes, it is a transition riddled with challenges but also opportunities. The transition necessitates strategic planning, resource mobilization, and institutional capacity building that aligns with the standards set forth by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). In this, there is an opportunity to reassess educational mission, pedagogical approaches, and student support services for long-term sustainability and competitiveness. However, the number of regulatory bodies, government agencies, and other stakeholders essential to navigate the transition makes the journey complex and difficult. This paper, therefore, explores the positioning and future sustenance of Heritage Christian University College with a specific focus on the implications of the Act.

Christian Apologetics Featured Lecture

“Engaging the Changing Landscape: The Urgent Need for Intellectual Credibility in Christian Apologetics”

Location: Stone Chapel

Charlie Styles

Styles is CEO of the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics (OCCA). With more than 15 years of experience in the field of theology and pastoral studies, Styles is passionate about helping people discover and defend the truth and relevance of Christianity. Through the OCCA, he leads a global team of speakers, trainers, and researchers who engage with various audiences and contexts on the questions and challenges of faith and culture. Before joining OCCA in 2022, he served as the rector of the Wycliffe Fellowship at the Church of England for nine years. He holds an undergraduate degree from Durham University and a postgraduate diploma in theology and pastoral studies from Oak Hill Theological College.

Practical Theology

“The Church in Crisis and Hope: Collaborative Engagement with the Work of Andrew Root”

Location: Journals Room

Gary Selby, *Emmanuel Christian Seminary at Milligan*, Convener

- **Carson Reed**, *Abilene Christian University*
- **Jeff Brown**, *Woodmont Hills Church*, Nashville, TN
- **Tiffany Dahlman**, *Courtyard Church of Christ*, Abilene, TX
- **Josh Kingcade**, *Preston Road Church of Christ*, Dallas TX
- **Bradley Steele**, *University Church of Christ*, Abilene, TX

Few figures on the contemporary theological landscape have spoken to the church’s place within secular culture with greater clarity than Andrew Root. Root’s prolific writings integrate biblical and theological reflection with insight from history, literature, popular culture, and the work of philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Michel Foucault, and Hartmut Rosa, in order to help us understand this unique moment of crisis in the church’s history. At the same time, he offers a hopeful vision for pastoral identity and ecclesial calling centered in the agency of the “God who is *God*.” This roundtable brings together a diversity of voices from the academy and the church in order to explore the implications of Root’s thought for the contemporary church.

Sciences

“Pedagogy and Practice in an Open-source, AI World”

Location: Pembroke

John Lewis, *Lipscomb University*, Moderator

- **Sarah Parker**, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*
- **Juan Rojas**, *Lipscomb University*
- **Finney Premkumar**, *University of Birmingham*

In this session on the sciences the power of collaboration using open-source software to facilitate science communication and two perspectives on artificial intelligence will be explored. Please join us for a timely discussion!

Sarah Parker, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, “Empowering Collaboration through Open-Source Tools, Education, and Effective Communication”

Scientific research often involves experts compartmentalizing themselves and their discoveries into their own fields of expertise. This makes interdisciplinary collaboration more difficult, and makes scientific findings more likely to be inaccessible and misunderstood by the wider community. Yet, in a current world filled with frequent crises, a broad understanding and trust in science is crucial. My research focuses on closing this gap between complicated scientific findings and general public understanding in two main ways. First, I am developing and using open-source, user-friendly software tools to visualize and interpret complex data, specializing in genomics. Second, I am developing and implementing educational programs to teach coding and data science skills to a wide range of learners, from high school and graduate students to university faculty and working professionals. Through the use of these software tools and educational programs, we are not only promoting collaboration between scientists of varied career and educational backgrounds; we are also making new scientific findings more available to a wider audience by ensuring that these initiatives establish clear, visually engaging ways to

communicate scientific data. Through these programs, scientific research will become more efficient, effective, and accessible, but this is about more than just advancing scientific research. It's about creating a world where science is a collaborative, understood, and trusted part of daily life, enabling hope and resilience especially in times of global challenges.

Juan Rojas, *Lipscomb University*, "Exploiting the World of Symmetry to Accelerate Artificial Intelligence"

This talk will present methods by which Artificial Intelligence and robots decision making is being sped up. Imagine a robot learning new tasks in minutes rather than hours or days. The foundational principles used here come from group theory – the area of mathematics that helps us understand symmetry and transformations. By identifying and using symmetries in the environment, agents learn from their experiences much faster. This involves a technique called equivariant learning, where symmetries give the robot the ability to multiply a single experience. We share how equivariant learning can be systematically used to speed up the agent learning and produce more robust and adaptable policies. The impact of the work promises more efficient and sustainable learning with greater learning outcomes making the agents more versatile and capable partners in a variety of settings.

Finney Premkumar, *University of Birmingham*, "The Imago Dei: Why Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) will never replicate a Human Person"

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) has become a subject of much interest and discussion recently. I wish to maintain that the development of AGI and the associated existential risks are a non-existent problem. Regardless of the undeniable strides that AI research has achieved, it's not a matter of increased complexity but one of principled impossibility from a Christian standpoint. I will forward two arguments that will converge on the inevitable conclusion to support my position in this paper. First and foremost, the difference between humans and machines is not merely a difference in degree but a difference in kind. Secondly, in order for AI systems to replicate and not merely simulate human agents there must be an identifiable subjective state. A state of what it feels like to be in that state. In order for this to be exemplified there must be more than the accumulation of physical states. Consciousness is to some extent this transcendent state that is not identifiable with any purely physical constitution. This qualitative difference is to be expected in a reality created by a Divine Being since the effect exemplifies characteristics of the cause. Finally, I wish to conclude that from a Christian paradigm what makes us human is the "Imago Dei". Accordingly, as long as we cannot create or transfer the image of God to machines, any proposed equality of Being between the two will remain a mere proposal and not an actual instantiation. All in all, AGI seems to be a principled impossibility.

Theology & Philosophy

"The Asbury Outpouring: Thinking Theologically About Revival"

Location: Malamat

Mark Powell, *Harding School of Theology*, Convener

- **Jason Vickers**, *Baylor University*
- **Tom McCall**, *Asbury Theological Seminary*

Jason Vickers and Tom McCall, two well-regarded systematic theologians, were teaching at Asbury Theological Seminary in spring 2023 during the Asbury Outpouring. In their recent book *Outpouring: A Theological Witness* (Cascade Books, 2023), they give a personal account of the event and reflect on charismatic phenomena like revivals from the standpoint of theology. In this session they will share personal and theological reflections on the Asbury Outpouring, with questions and discussion to follow.