Session 5: Friday, June 7, 9-10:30 a.m.

Arts and Spirituality

"God and Gaming: the Intersection between Faith and the Burgeoning Art of Video Games"
Location: Pembroke

Micki Pulleyking, *Missouri State University*, Convener
- **Grant Testut**, *Oklahoma Christian University*
- **Timothy Williford**, *Student, Oklahoma Christian University*
- **Chris Rosser**, *Theological and Instructional Librarian, Oklahoma Christian University*

Video games have been around for over half a century. Though the medium still struggles to be accepted by some circles as a viable art form, it has demonstrated its ability to influence the broader culture through economics, language, music, and a recognizable iconography. Some game developers have used their craft to make profound statements about life, death, love, loss, politics, and even religion. This session is a venue for the discussion of video games as art, and of their potential to hold meaningful conversation with people of faith.

Grant Testut, *Oklahoma Christian University*, "'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance': Rekindling Jesus' Playful Ethic in Theological Education"
   The presenter recently built a theology course called God and Gaming, in which the class explored faith in conversation with video games. They learned about video games as play, as art, and as interactive narratives; they learned about the theology of play. The course was even structured as a game in which the participants were not just "students" but "players". This paper explores what the course revealed about a neglected corner of theology, and how such theology can spur students and faculty to collaborate in creating art out of education.

Timothy Williford, *Oklahoma Christian University*, "Am I Jesus Christ?: the Ludological Effects of Portraying Christ in Video Games"
   SimulaM is developing a first-person Jesus Christ simulation video game through publisher Space Boat Studios, which is called "I Am Jesus Christ". This paper explores how placing the player in the role of Jesus Christ has problematic ludological results that do more to undermine than to support the gospel narrative. The presenter will explain the player-avatar relationship in video games, outline the differences between narratology and ludology, and critique SimulaM's game against another upcoming religiously-themed game.

Chris Rosser, *Oklahoma Christian University*, "Learners at Play: Seven Pedagogical Shifts for Teaching across Epistemologies"
   The rise of gamer culture has inspired innovative strategies for gameful course design by which classroom identity reconfigures from communities of learning to learners at play. Gameful design helps mitigate problems of epistemic authority, de facto instructor or institutional assertions of authority over diverse epistemologies. Just as video games broaden encounters with different ways of thinking and of inhabiting diverse worlds, so also gameful design encourages exploration and fosters desire-driven encounters with diversity. This presentation outlines seven key pedagogical shifts for teaching across epistemologies, illustrated through three exemplary gamified courses.

Civil Rights

"Navigating Southern culture, commerce, color and church: An ethnographic reflection on student and faculty learnings"
Location: Yarnton

- **J. Goosby Smith**, *Pepperdine University*
- **Ben Postlethwaite**, *Pepperdine University*
- **Christopher Collins**, *Pepperdine University*

"The South" birthed gospel, blues, and country music. It prospered from cotton, tobacco, and rice. Its immigrant entrepreneurs were invaluable "brokers.". Color, race and racism are endemic, from indigenous names to slavery, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights. The Black church emerged and was integral in fighting racism. Based upon taking undergraduate students to Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, we present student learning and use autoethnography to frame the impact of this high impact practice upon us individually and as a biracial teaching team.

Congregational Science

"Congregations: Challenging Times, Hopeful Solutions"
Location: Journals Room

Marsha Vaughn, LMFT, *Adler University*, Convener
- **Chris J. Gonzalez**, LMFT, *Lipscomb University*, Convener
- **Holly Catterton Allen**, *Lipscomb University*
- **Earl Lavender**, *Lipscomb University*

As congregations face challenging times with membership declines, generational fragmentation, church hurt, and many members experiencing deconstruction of their faith, some church leaders and members are having a hard time holding on to hope. This session addresses several of the main challenges facing congregations by offering insights and potential solutions to meet these challenges.

Chris Gonzalez, *Lipscomb University*, "Deconstructing Deconstruction: Systemic Perspectives on Faith Deconstruction"
    For several years, many people questioning their faith have described the process they are going through as "deconstructing" their faith. Deconstruction as a descriptive term or critical process has been popularized and transcended its philosophical and academic origins. This paper seeks to explore the systemic and cultural context in which the popularized iteration of "deconstruction" is applied to one's faith. The presentation concludes by framing deconstruction as a social process of stewardship of relevant and meaningful questions through the lens of ambiguous loss and post-traumatic growth.

Marsha Vaughn, *Adler University*, "Relational Repair After Religious/Spiritual Abuse: Perspectives from Systemic Therapy Theories"
    Continuing the discussion on spiritual trauma and religious abuse from previous CSCs, this session will provide a more in-depth exploration of relational repair through the lens of several family systems theories and therapy models, such as attachment theory, Schwartz's Internal Family Systems therapy, Bowen's family systems theory, and Hargrave's Restoration Therapy. The emphasis will be on contrasting each model's

definition of a "self" and of healthy relationships, extending those definitions to a human's relationship with the Divine. We will also discuss the application of these theories to psychotherapy, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction.

Holly Catterton Allen, *Lipscomb University*, "How Can Congregations Respond to Generational Fragmentation?"
Congregations have become generationally fragmented over the past fifty years; that is, by building ministries based on age-specific developmental needs and by emphasizing the differences across the generations, we have isolated the generations. Age groups have become separated from each other and from the church family as a whole. This presentation, building on the premise that intergenerational Christian experiences especially and uniquely nurture spiritual growth and development across all ages, will outline key responses to the questions posed by generational fragmentation.

Earl Lavender, *Lipscomb University*, "Renewal and Congregational Growth: Application of the Divine Empowerment Model"
Having planted two churches, one in Italy and another in Illinois, and with my experience in teaching at Lipscomb and consulting with churches internationally, this paper will summarize my research, study and observation concerning the importance of offering creative participation to those who identify as followers of Jesus as the Christ. Using the model of divine empowerment reflected in Ephesians 4:1-16, this paper will demonstrate the potential of renewal and congregational growth based on a concept of ministry focusing on appropriately equipping all members to creatively explore their active participation in the body of Christ.

Early Career Scholars in Theological Disciplines

"Hope in Peril"
Location: Stone Chapel

Garrett Smith, *Wheaton College*
Robert M. Bugg Jr., *Liberty University*
Andrew Wong, *Dallas Theological Seminary*

Garrett Smith, *M.A. Theology, Wheaton College*, "A Hopeful Death: Dying Well in the Christian Community"
Western churches, imbibing the surrounding culture's medicalization of human flourishing, often forget that Christian dying is an art. Death is not a mere inevitability to be either despaired of or neglected in language and ecclesiastical practices. That is, we do not mourn as those without hope, nor do we ignore in our liturgy the grievous wages of sin. Despairing of death robs hope of its proper telos as a theological virtue of the church, while avoiding the reality of death diminishes the significance of resurrection. Either of these approaches to death threatens to cheapen the church's witness in the communal outworking of hope. Fortunately, the Christian tradition is rich with resources for dying well. Martin Luther's 1519 "A Sermon on Preparing to Die" represents a transition from the soteriological insecurity of late-medieval piety, epitomized in the ars moriendi literary tradition, to the assurance of salvation espoused by the reformers. Luther moves readers from the condemnatory images of sin, hell, and death to the christological images of salvation, mercy, and life. The result is a cruci-centric and, he would have hoped, cruci-formed vision of dying. This paper—also drawing from the work of Stanley Hauerwas—suggests that the church, as a cruci-formed community, ought to display an analogous movement from condemnatory to salvific images in its practices of dying. In reclaiming the art of dying, the church may develop the skills necessary to cultivate its witness of hope in a world marked by death.

Robert M. Bugg Jr., *Liberty University*
The Bible presents God's magnificent divine plan, executed by chosen people for a specific purpose. There are illustrations of those from various regions impacting those worldwide throughout the Bible. While much of the Old Testament takes place in ancient Mesopotamia, the magnitude of God's plan is global. This dissertation will

examine sub-Saharan people groups in Africa, particularly the Kushites and ancient Ethiopians. The discussion will include the history of Africans in the ancient world, their migration and development parallel to recorded biblical history, and their role in the Bible. Scholars utilize many different terms when referring to Kushites, depending on the particular historical stage. In the Hebrew Bible, the term Cush is consistently identified as the region and inhabitants of the area. At the same time, versions of the Bible sometimes replace "Cush" with "Ethiopia," leading to confusion. Nevertheless, this civilization was a significant force in the ancient Near East for many years, recurring throughout the biblical text. While physical characteristics, such as their dark skin, are evident in ancient art, and cultural elements can be extracted from early literature, the impact of specific Cushites in the Bible is the central focus. Biblical scholars acknowledge the presence of Africans throughout the Bible, as early as the book of Genesis. Therefore, scholars seek to open discussion regarding race in the Bible and God's divine will in using Africans as vessels in His redemptive plan. This study will serve as a reflection of hope for those underrepresented and a reminder of African value in the eyesight of God. Also, through proper examination of specific African characters, we hopefully will be able to glean the necessity of the inclusion of all. God willed His Church to be an accurate representation of God's love. Therefore, Africans are a vital part of His redemptive plan for humanity. The epitome of God's people is a multiethnic people, a mixed assembly of believers from various parts of the globe with the common goal of spreading the gospel.

Andrew Wong, *Dallas Theological Seminary*, "Paul's Great Hope: An Analysis of Hope in Romans from the Perspective of the Intersection of Greek Philosophy and Social Trauma to Address Contemporary Societal Perils"

This interdisciplinary study endeavors to develop an understanding of the theme of hope in Romans by exploring the intricate connections between hope in Romans with Greek philosophy and the trauma Paul endured through his faith journey. The study seeks to demonstrate that Paul's view of hope stands in dialogue with ancient Greek philosophers, informed by his trauma, articulating a view of hope that represents a departure from his contemporaries in its communal nature, perceiving hope not as motivation to action, but hope as action in itself, participating in the redemption of all things. To conclude, I reflect on how Paul's understanding of hope addresses social divisions, specifically between Christian traditions, addressing the Christian virtue of hope's role in healing social perils for individuals and societies. The paper accomplishes this by synthesizing the views of hope articulated by ancient philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hesiod, and Heraclitus. Following this synthesis, the study will uncover how the thematic thread of hope in Romans stands in dialogue with Greek philosophical schools of thought. Next, using modern psychological research, I explore how Paul's faith journey would have inflicted trauma, reflecting on how these social and physical traumatic experiences shaped his conception of hope in Romans. Existing reflections on hope often limit the scope of reflection to socio-historical, exegetical, or psychological. Through this multi-faceted approach, I aim to fill this gap, clarifying and contextualizing Paul's view of hope and, in doing so, offering a robust response to how Christians may suffer with hope amid social discord.

Hermeneutics of Unity in and after Scripture

"The Hermeneutics of Unity in and after Genesis 11:10–25:11"
Location: Malamat

J. David Stark, *Faulkner University*, Moderator
- **Daniel Oden**, *Harding University*
- **Jared Saltz**, *Smoky Hill Church of Christ, Littleton, CO*
- **Garrett Best**, *York University*
- **Kevin Burr**, *Kings Crossing Church of Christ*, Corpus Christi, TX, Respondent

This section explores the hermeneutics of unity involved in the reception of earlier texts by later ones within the biblical corpus, as well as by other authors and communities in Second Temple Judaism, early and medieval Christianity, and more contemporary periods. Across this literature, focused attention is given to the nature of the hermeneutic employed to foster and protect continued unity within each respective interpreting community. This year's sessions treat the reception of Gen 11:10–25:11 and

welcome explorations of the hermeneutics of unity, whether that unity moves toward positive or negative ends.

Daniel Oden, *Harding University*, "Genesis 22 and Interpretations in Judaism and Christianity"

Though the topic of child sacrifice figures prominently in the laws and narratives of the Hebrew Bible, there is little to no explicit connection of Genesis 22 to any text of the Hebrew Bible other than 2 Chronicles 3:1, in which Solomon's Temple is built on Mount Moriah. Yet within Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity, Genesis 22 invites interpretative expansions, as these communities wrestle with the profound theological questions raised by this provocative chapter. New Testament references to the ʿAqedah (whether explicit, allusions, or "echoes") do not seem merely to recapitulate the minimalistic narrative of MT Genesis, but show signs of dependence on later reworkings of Genesis 22, including LXX, Targumim, pseudepigraphical works, and haggadah (Robert Daly, Leroy Huizenga). Later Christian and Jewish interpretations of Genesis 22, despite clear differences, demonstrate continued dialogue between both communities, while maintaining within each community, a plurality of interpretive traditions. This paper explores this intersection in which unity is realized not in a singular text or interpretative strategy, but in community.

Jared Saltz, *Smoky Hill Church of Christ*, "Isaac Unbound: Abrahamic Faithfulness in Galatians"

Jews of the Second Temple Period, including Paul's opponents in Galatia, saw Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as an integral part of a triad of actions demonstrating Abraham's faithfulness. This Triad of Faithfulness included Abraham's conversion (Gen 12), his circumcision (Gen 17), and his sacrifice of Isaac to confirm the covenant (Gen 22). This triad is often explicitly cited (and otherwise implicitly accepted) in texts throughout the Second Temple Period, including the apocrypha, Philo, Jubilees, the Mishna, and others, but is absent in Paul. It appears that—for most Jews of the period—Abraham's three key actions are those that gave hope to the Gentiles and provided salvation in faith to the Jews. Paul, however, does not agree with this triad of actions. Instead, in the book of Galatians Paul accepts the first, transforms the second, and substitutes the third entirely. This paper will seek to identify this triad in Jewish literature, demonstrate its importance to Paul's opponents in Galatia, and thus demonstrate that the aqedah's absence in Galatia is conspicuous. Lastly, this paper will consider how Paul's transformation and substitution of this Abrahamic triad of faithfulness in his search for unity in Galatia may provide starting points for how we read key texts in our own tradition.

Garrett Best, *York University*, "Sodom and Sulfur: Allusions to Genesis 19 in the Book of Revelation"

There is perhaps only one universally accepted claim about the book of Revelation – that it is saturated in the language and imagery of Israel's Scriptures. John has creatively incorporated hundreds of allusions into the vision, making it difficult to determine the exact number. This paper explores John's allusions to the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative in Genesis 19. First, this paper will analyze Revelation's use of fire and sulfur in its depiction of judgment (9:17-18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). Second, this paper will explore the enigmatic reference to the two witnesses being killed in the city "called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (11:8).

Practical Theology

"Hopeful Models of Christian Formation"
Location: Lamb and Scroll

Deron Smith, Lipscomb University, Convener and Respondent
- **Ron Clark**, *George Fox University*
- **Drew Davis**, *Lanier Foundation, Lipscomb University*
- **William Sharp**, *University of the Cumberlands*

Research into human psychosocial development emphasizes that our formation as persons is as much a product of indirect factors in our social environment as direct efforts to teach or train us, as important as those are. Scholars who draw on that research to explore spiritual development likewise emphasize the profound impact that the health of the church systems of which we are a part have on our faith, an understanding that accords with the urgent attention the NT gives to the quality of the church's communal life. The papers in this panel reflect this understanding by exploring indirect ways that various structures of Christian community impact spiritual formation.

Ron Clark, *George Fox University,* "Lessons from Lemuel's Momma: The 'Eshet Chayil, Healthy Masculinity, and Guiding Young Men to Spiritual Maturity"

Proverbs 31, in which a king's mother instructs her son about the wife of noble character, reflects themes of leadership and justice. The Hebrew/Aramaic mah beri, emphasizes the mother's strong rebuke of her son, challenging him to remember his role in justice (31:8-9) while seeking sobriety and a strong wife ('eshet chayil). This strong wife complements his focus on justice in the center of the acrostic extolling her deeds in the community (31:20-21). As a minister working to address toxic masculinity, intimate partner violence, and misogyny, I find "Lemuel's Momma" to have important advice for males striving to live in harmony with females in cultures which devalue women. This paper explores Proverbs 31 as a text that challenges males to listen to the voices of females who seek partnership and provide wholeness to male development.

Drew Davis, *Lanier Foundation, Lipscomb University*, "Doubters Welcome: Francis and Edith Schaeffer's L'Abri as a Model of Christian Spiritual Formation"

Christian churches are witnessing a dramatic exodus, especially among young adults who find church to be unfriendly and irrelevant, disengaged from "real world" issues, and unwelcoming of honest questioning and doubt. This paper explores Francis and Edith Schaeffer's L'Abri ministry as a hopeful alternative for this present moment, focusing on how they welcomed young people into community and table fellowship and, in that setting, engaged questions with intellectual integrity.

William Sharp, *University of the Cumberlands,* "Servant Leadership in the Church: Nurturing Hope, Spiritual Growth and Community Impact"

Servant leadership, which centers on principles of humility, empathy, and stewardship as the foundation for healthy organizational leadership, has been widely studied in a variety of contexts, including business, nonprofit, and educational settings. This study focuses on the application and impact of servant leadership within a congregational context, focusing particularly on elders and senior ministers. It explores how the implementation of servant leadership aligns with church values and mission, fosters spiritual growth and unity among congregants, and extends positive influence to the broader community.

Theology and Philosophy

Explorations in Philosophical Theology
Location: Grand Hall

- **Andrew Wong**, *Dallas Theological Seminary*
- **Fidel A. Arnecillo, Jr.**, *California State University, San Bernardino*

This peer reviewed session offers two papers addressing theologically significant issues in connection with the discipline of philosophy; the first considering the ecclesiological problem of division and the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12 in connection with Socrates as presented in Plato's Republic, and the second applies analytic philosophical methods to questions about uniqueness and identity to question as they apply to God.

Andrew Wong, *Dallas Theological Seminary,* "Developing an Ecclesiology with Paul and Socrates: Reading 1 Corinthians 12 with Socrates to Find Hope in an Age of Division"

This paper endeavors to develop an understanding of Paul's ecclesiology in 1 Corinthians 12, using Paul's allusions to Socrates in Plato's Republic as an interpretive key. By placing Paul's development of the Church-as-a-body metaphor in conversation with Socrates, I argue that Paul's ecclesiology is best understood when read in conjunction with Greek philosophical visions of the ideal State. In doing so, the study offers a hope-filled vision of unity to the Church amid an age of division by contending that Paul's ecclesiological foundations are centered around egalitarian ideals of unity, maintained through well-defined relationships, present in all domains of society.

Fidel A. Arnecillo, Jr., *California State University, San Bernardino*, "Uniqueness and Identity"

Here's an intuitively true claim, which I call UI (i.e., "U" for uniqueness and "I" for identity):

UI: If each object in a pair of objects, x and y, is unique, then they are not identical.

Some theological claims affirm the uniqueness of each in a pair of entities and identicalness of the two. For example,

1. The God of the Bible and the God of the Quran are individually unique but identical.
2. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are individually unique but identical.

I argue that, despite UI, (1) and (2) can be coherently formulated.