

## 2017 Belmont Undergraduate Research Symposium

### Religion

Moderator: Mark McEntire, Professor of Biblical Studies

April 20, 2017, 7:00-9:00 p. m.  
JAAC 2142

7:00-7:25

#### **Prolonging Their Days: A Narrative Look at Ecclesiastes 8**

Will Potter

Faculty Advisor: Mark McEntire

Respondent: Judy Skeen

While the book of Ecclesiastes has generated much scholarship, the vast majority of this writing has been facilitated by dated paradigms of Old Testament theology. The result is much debate and little consensus. At the same time a new paradigm of Old Testament theology has arisen, narrative theology. This paper seeks to push the study of Ecclesiastes in a new, hopefully less gridlocked, direction through the use of a narrative approach. This paper first addresses the various tools at the disposal of the study of Old Testament theology, as well as their potential drawbacks, before taking up a narrative approach. This approach must accomplish two things: first, it must set the book of Ecclesiastes within the overall narrative of the Old Testament Canon; and second, it must explore the portrayal of the divine character found in Ecclesiastes with respect to his portrayal in other parts of the Old Testament narrative. This paper finds, by using the eighth chapter as a microcosm, an inactive divine character that orchestrates events but may not be apprehended in the midst of those events. That is, the divine character actively causes events but cannot be perceived as the agent behind those events.

7:25-7:50

#### **The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the United States' Duty**

Savannah Bobo-Bressler

Faculty Advisor: Andy Watts, Ph.D.

Respondent: Darrell Gwaltney

The war in Syria is a global issue that created thousands of refugees. The problem at hand: Where should these refugees be placed? Current refugees are living in poor conditions in camps near the border of their home country. Some European countries are accepting these refugees, but most are not. The current administration in the White House is trying to pass legislation to ban Muslim immigrants from entering the country, including refugees. Concerns range from job losses, a weakened economy, and increased threat to national security. However, research shows that accepting Syrian refugees will not hurt job opportunities for American citizens, and there is no increased threat to our national security, if refugees are integrated properly. Accepting refugees is supported by the Bible and the Catholic Church.

7:50-8:15

#### **Integrity and Imprisonment: Belmont's Paradoxical Mission Statement**

Mindy Braasch

Faculty Advisor: Andy Watts, Ph.D.

Respondent: Mark McEntire

Belmont University is a Christian learning community that seeks to imbue its students with a number of core values, including integrity and inquiry – values the university asserts are essential to intellectual, spiritual, personal, and corporate life. Belmont University also maintains ties to CoreCivic, the world’s largest prison company. Due to the unethical premise behind and actions of private prisons, it is hypocritical for Belmont University to maintain ties to a company that profits from the incarceration of human beings while maintaining a stance as a Christian organization with core values of integrity and inquiry. Because their bottom line depends on it, private prison companies have ensured that the incarceration rate stays high. Additionally, due to private prison companies’ efforts to cut costs and maximize profits, prisoner safety and health is overlooked. As a Christian institution, Belmont should not own stock in a company that continues the cycle of needless imprisonment, as well as enables the unethical treatment of prisoners.

8:15-8:40

**A Dream to Wake Up To: A Christian Perspective on an American Welfare State**

Collin Hanley

Advisor: Andy Watts, Ph.D.

Respondent: Beth Ritter-Conn

The United States currently fits the description of a Welfare State by having “education, healthcare, retirement pensions, libraries, poverty relief, and other ‘safety nets’ to ensure basic quality of life” (Kathryn B. Blanchard, *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 2011). While it may be clear that the U.S. is a welfare state, it can be argued that many improvements on its policies must be made for its version of a welfare state to align with Christian values. Although the First Amendment states that there shall be “no law respecting an establishment of religion,” the United States is a predominately Christian nation, with 70.6% of its population self-identifying as Christians. (“Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center) The United States is avoiding the major religious and moral obligation it has to its citizens, especially to the least fortunate. Christian support is warranted for a stronger welfare state by affirming that excellent education, generous economic assistance, and safeguarded workers’ rights are theological necessities.