



DR. JOHN HILL PRICE

This issue of *Ampersand* highlights a new academic paper, titled *Cultural Logics in Agriculture: A Critical Christian Perspective*, by University of Minnesota (UMN) faculty, staff, and graduate students whom Anselm House supported in thinking about Christian practice in the field of agriculture. Last month, I interviewed Dr. John Hill Price, one of the authors, who is now a research geneticist for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). John Hill is an alumnus of the Colin MacLaurin Fellows Program and was a key leader in the Anselm House community during his time at UMN. As a PhD student, he helped facilitate the Faith & Agriculture Working Group that produced this article, alongside former Anselm House staff Dr. Travis Pickell (now at George Fox University). The article which will soon be published in *Christian Scholar's Review* (CSR) proposes a taxonomy of the "cultural logics" shaping contemporary agricultural education in the research university and offers a Christian assessment.

I hope you enjoy this conversation with John Hill Price about the process of "thinking Christianly" about agricultural education. It provides a unique window into how UMN faculty, staff, and students are exercising Christian thought leadership across the university and well beyond.

—Andrew Hansen
Program Director

FAITH AND AGRICULTURE

With Dr. John Hill Price

Andrew Hansen: Could you tell us briefly about your time at the University of Minnesota, your involvement at Anselm House, and where you've gone since then?

John Hill Price: I started my PhD program in Applied Plant Sciences at UMN in 2015, taking on a project to help develop the sunflower relative *Silphium integrifolium* as a new crop for sustainable systems. I first came across Anselm House (then the MacLaurin Institute) through a C.S. Lewis reading group, and then became a student fellow the

following year. After that, Anselm House, alongside my department, became the community that defined my grad school experience. Beyond Fellows, I joined the Anselm House student board, edited the student journal of Christian thought *Between Cities*, and attended more lectures and book groups than I could possibly count. I cannot begin to describe how important and formative these experiences were for me! Prior to my time at Anselm House, I affirmed the beliefs of Christianity, primarily on an intellectual level.

Winslow Homer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



But I largely misunderstood and neglected the spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of faith. Anselm House, through friendship and community, helped me integrate all of these pieces and actively seek a deeper relationship with Christ. I also met my wife, Laura, through Anselm House. After she finished her PhD in 2022, we moved to Manhattan, Kansas, so I could work as a postdoc for the USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS), researching wheat. At the end of 2024, I was given the opportunity to lead the USDA-ARS's blueberry breeding program for the Northeast, based in New Jersey.

Andrew: What kinds of questions led to the creation of the article to be published in CSR? Who is it for?

John Hill: This paper originated in a book group on Norman Wirzba's *Food and Faith*, led by Dr. Eric Watkins (UMN). Most of the authors of the paper were in that group, and I remember we were so encouraged by the conversations it sparked that we wanted more. More than anything else, the reading group allowed for introspection. We became keenly aware of how rarely we were able to step back and reflect on the scholarship we produce for the university in light of our

Christian convictions. We narrowed in on the idea of "what particular responsibilities do Christians have in agricultural higher education," and formed a discussion group that met every few weeks, each time looking at a different topic and discussing a few readings. It felt a bit like we built a class for ourselves! Through that process, we realized that our discussion was generating insights that needed to be shared beyond our group, so we decided that an academic paper was the best avenue for opening the conversation to our entire field.

Andrew: Can you share about the landscape of agricultural education in the United States and its relationship to Christian thought? Is there much Christian reflection about agriculture happening in higher education?

John Hill: At the university level, agricultural education in the US is dominated by what are known as "land grant" schools (like UMN, and my undergraduate alma mater Texas A&M). This system of schools was founded in 1862, and is shaped by the scientific and industrialized approach to agriculture that came to prominence at that time. This approach continued to develop into the early 20th century and then came to dominate the landscape after World War II.

Industrialization is about breaking agricultural systems into parts, figuring out what makes each part tick, and then trying to make each part more productive and efficient. There's nothing inherently wrong with the industrial approach, but from a Christian perspective, it is incomplete. Two big reasons are that first, this approach doesn't always square with an understanding that creation is created by and for God, with humanity as its stewards rather than as its unaccountable lords. Second, it doesn't tend to tie agriculture into the whole of society (i.e., consider agriculture within a broader frame of cultural flourishing). These two areas are, broadly speaking, places that a Christian perspective can "leaven" the conversation. Despite the relatively high number of Christians in agricultural education (anecdotally, relative to other fields),

I and the other authors of the paper didn't really see that happening. I don't think there is anything unique to agriculture in the sense that in most fields, experts who are Christian will face the temptation or tendency towards myopia and not integrating their faith. Yet agriculture is unique because it is squarely located at the intersection of our responsibility to care for creation and our responsibility to feed and clothe everyone—this has been clear since the first chapters of Genesis. This gives Christians in agriculture a uniquely heavy responsibility and urgency to have their faith inform their work. So, we wrote the paper with the hope of helping other Christians in our field connect the pieces and see how the standard approaches of our field

don't tell the whole story. The paper is very much an application of the Anselm House mission, "connecting faith and knowledge with all of life."

Andrew: What contribution does this article make to Christian thought concerning agriculture? What role do Christians have to play in building awareness of moral concerns in agriculture? What do you hope readers take away, having read it?

John Hill: The main takeaway is that, as Christians, we need to be careful not to uncritically assume secular ideas about what is valuable and important. The paper is structured around the idea of "cultural logics," which are a kind of value system. They aren't as consciously held as, say, a worldview, but are unconsciously absorbed. The analogy that we use is that cultural logics are like ruts or trackways in a field, and as we navigate through our careers, it is like we are driving a carriage. We have somewhere we want to go, but if we aren't careful, it becomes very easy for our wheels to get caught in one of these ruts and have it subtly direct us somewhere we didn't intend. The unconscious nature of cultural logics, that they are often absorbed as "the way things work," is what makes them so powerful and so important

to recognize. The four that we focus on are the ones we see in academia—industrialism, technological utopianism, agrarianism, and ecocentrism. I won't go into detail, but each of these cultural logics has different ideas about what is important, and what is not. We want Christians to be able to navigate in and around these logics—taking what is good from them and leaving what isn't. But we want Christians to do this consciously, not unconsciously, so that we can weigh these values against what we know, as people transformed by Christ, to actually be important. We hope that once Christians know what kinds of questions to ask themselves, they can help others to do the same in ways that are appropriate to their own (often secular) context.

Andrew: How are the questions and reflections raised in this article influencing your current work with the USDA?

John Hill: In my work, I am tasked with developing new varieties of blueberry to help producers across New Jersey and the eastern US. As I settle into this role (I have been at it for just over a year), I am still trying to figure out what an authentic application of my faith, and specifically of the questions and framings we discuss in the paper, looks

like in my work. For me, the primary way I apply the article to my work is questioning my assumptions—mostly through my own personal reflection, but as appropriate, in conversation with colleagues. Why do I think certain outcomes are more valuable than others? Am I thinking about everyone who will be impacted by my work, or just some people? I really want to make sure I am serving everyone to the best of my ability, not just the farmers who will plant the blueberry varieties, but also the laborers who will pick them, the consumers who will eat them, and the environment around the farm. But, again, I am still figuring out exactly what this means in practice, and I suspect it will be an ongoing and evolving process throughout my career.

“We shouldn't compartmentalize our faith, because literally all things hold together in Christ.”

Andrew: Do you have thoughts about how the issues raised in the article might shape the choices of average people, who are generally consumers when it comes to agriculture?

John Hill: I think consumers who are tuned into environmental stewardship (even if they are still grappling with how to actually apply them to their day-to-day lives) are ahead of many Christian academics in our field! It feels to me like a case where it's harder to see something clearly the closer you stand to it. For consumers, I don't know if the issues we raise necessarily lead to different conclusions than those that come from broader movements that encourage Christians to care about environmental stewardship and social responsibility. I do hope our paper can be another voice asking Christians to think critically about what they value in their food and agricultural products. Is price always the only concern? Is "more, bigger, cheaper" always the goal? For some folks, price matters quite a bit, and I am very sympathetic to that. But I would hope that deeper questions would factor into everyone's purchasing decisions to a degree that is prudent for their financial situation. For example, do my purchases reflect my belief that all people are created in the image of God and that all creation is His? Or do they reflect an unconscious assumption that these concerns are less important than my own immediate desires? It comes back to a simple idea I heard expressed a thousand different ways at Anselm House: we shouldn't compartmentalize our faith, because literally all things hold together in Christ.

Andrew: What do you see as the potential for greater Christian presence in agriculture at UMN?

John Hill: During my time in Minnesota, I was fortunate to be engaged in several faith and agriculture events through Anselm House, as well as to lead a Christian discussion group in my department for a time. Invariably, I saw that these discussions were different. Through them, we were encouraged to bring our "whole selves to the table," in a way that is not the norm in academic contexts. This wasn't the result of any explicit pressure or stigma against Christian conversation, but rather a normal response to the environment.

School (especially grad school) has a culture that leads you to think and talk about a narrow set of topics, which means neglecting other parts of who you are and what you care about. Anselm House really excels at serving students and faculty at UMN by creating places for conversations that encourage participants to fully engage with every part of their identity. ☞

Cultural Logics in Agriculture: A Critical Christian Perspective will be published soon in *Christian Scholar's Review*. It will be available on christianscholars.com after publication.

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This interview was given by Dr. John Hill Price in his private capacity. The views expressed in this article do not represent the views of or endorsement by the United States Government or the United States Department of Agriculture.



The 13th Annual Anderson Lecture in Science & Religion
Seeking Trustworthiness in the Sciences
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Dr. Julia Wattacheril
 (Columbia University)

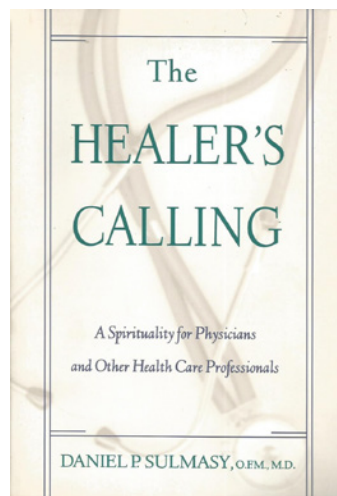
Thursday, March 26, 2026
 7:00–8:30 p.m.
 McNamara Alumni Center,
 University Hall

Modern healthcare is capable of doing more than ever before. Yet, for almost a generation, research has shown that healthcare professionals deal with intensifying levels of pressure and dissatisfaction. Dr. Daniel Sulmasy’s now-classic *The Healer’s Calling* speaks directly to healthcare professionals navigating this perilous tension by leading readers to see healthcare as a form of spirituality. “A career in healthcare can be a spiritual journey. It can lead to holiness just as naturally and with just as much difficulty as the life of any monk or nun.” Sulmasy, a former Franciscan friar, writes that the calling of Christian healthcare professionals is to, in fact, “cultivate a spirituality of medical practice.” Through his unique volume, Sulmasy develops a kind of Christian spirituality that operates with joy—even in the mundane, day-to-day practices of healthcare.

For nearly 30 years, *The Healer’s Calling* has helped awaken healthcare professionals to a deeper and richer view of their work and calling. It is a necessary reminder that physicians, nurses, dentists, techs, and researchers carry not only their personal journey of discipleship, but can rightly see their healthcare vocation as a work of Christian spirituality.

—Phil Letizia
 Healthcare Initiative Director

Dr. Daniel Sulmasy will be the keynote speaker at our upcoming Healthcare Symposium. View the symposium at anselm.house/healthcare-symposium



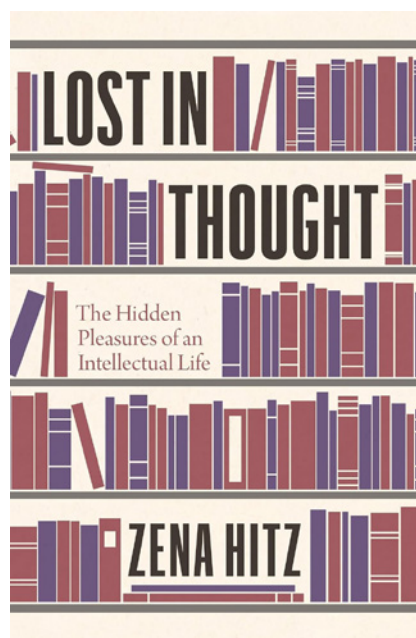
REBECCA SHIM
 CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
 CLASS OF 2028

Growing up, I rarely interacted with Christians outside of the Reformed tradition and I accepted the doctrine that I was taught without understanding why it matters. I never examined why I believed what I believed. Through the Fellows program, that began to change. For the first time, I encountered thoughtful Christians who held slightly different convictions, which led me to ask what truly distinguishes denominations. People often describe the differences as “trivial,” yet I realized I did not even understand what those differences were.

This process has helped me better understand what it truly means to be Reformed. I especially appreciate my tutors Rick and Ashlyn, who understand where my questions are coming from without overcomplicating the answers. Since they come from a Reformed background, they understand my inquiries well. It has been comforting to know that I can reach out whenever questions arise and trust that I will be met with patience rather than judgment. This kind of thoughtful hospitality helps me go deeper in my faith than I ever have before, not only understanding what I believe but also discovering why I believe it.

In *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Zena Hitz offers a case for learning “for its own sake,” by which she means “that we pursue it not because of external results but because of what it does for the learner” (112). Drawing from her own spiritual and intellectual biography (including her conversion from agnosticism to Catholicism), as well as from history and literature, Hitz shows us the fundamental human longing to know and learn more about ourselves and our world. Learning can’t be left only to “academics” or “scholars,” she argues, but is something that can and should be cultivated by all of us. By exploring the nature of the intellectual life, she helpfully challenges many of our dominant assumptions about education—e.g., that it’s primarily job training (and needs good return on investment) or that it’s a means for advancing social justice. Instead, she passionately points us toward older classical and Christian traditions that celebrate the liberating effect of learning on the human person.

—Andrew Hansen
 Program Director



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & COMMUNITY @ UMN

UMN-bound high school seniors and incoming graduate students are looking for Christian community that answers their deepest questions. *Colin MacLaurin Fellows* is a three-year program where students can receive transformative faith, virtue, and academic formation that takes them seriously as scholars and future leaders.

Register for our *Fellows Preview Night* on April 13, 2026:

anselm.house/fellows-preview

P.S. Can't make it to the Preview Night but still interested in finding out about Anselm House? Send an email to Kendra Sundeen (kendras@anselmhouse.org).



Short Courses are free, guided studies on theology and Christian thought, led by experts. There are no prerequisites and no homework, just good company, great food, and room to think.



A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CREATION FOR SCIENTISTS

This course will develop a theology of creation drawing from the entire biblical narrative, from Genesis to Paul. This course is open to all, but especially for scientists.

Facilitated by Dr. Jonathan Worthington, Director of Research for Training Leaders International.



HEAVEN, HELL, AND THE IN-BETWEEN: READING C. S. LEWIS'S THE GREAT DIVORCE

What can we learn by taking a bus ride from hell/purgatory to heaven? This reading group will tackle deep questions of the human condition through Lewis’s imaginative novel.

Facilitated by Dr. Philip Rolnick, Professor of Theology, University of St. Thomas.



GOOD NEWS FOR THE REST OF US: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

This course explores how the Gospel of Luke shows Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations and invites gentiles into the people of God.

Facilitated by Dr. Amy Anderson, Director of the Biblical Literacy Project. Hosted in partnership with the Biblical Literacy Project and Sojourn Campus Church.

Short Courses begin Monday, March 23
 Sign up today: anselm.house/short-courses

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEEKING TRUSTWORTHINESS IN THE SCIENCES: CALLING AND RESPONDING

Thursday, March 26
 7:00–8:30 p.m.

McNamara Alumni Center,
 Johnson Great Room

SPRING SHORT COURSES

Beginning Monday, March 23

View short course listings at anselm.house/short-courses

FAITH & BUSINESS DINNER FORUMS

A Founder’s Journey in Marketing with Jennifer Zicks

Monday, March 23
 4:30–6:00 p.m.

Carlson School of Management, Rm 1-135

Entrepreneurship for Human Flourishing with Robbie Burkhart

Monday, April 20
 4:30–6:00 p.m.

Carlson School of Management, Rm 1-135

FELLOWS PREVIEW NIGHT

Monday, April 13
 5:30–8:30 p.m.

Anselm House at Melrose Station

HEALTHCARE RETREAT: Spirituality and the Healing Arts

Friday–Saturday, April 24–25
 Mt. Olivet Conference & Retreat Center

HEALTHCARE SYMPOSIUM: Caring for the Whole Person in a Technological Age With Dr. Daniel Sulmasy (Georgetown)

Friday–Saturday, August 7–8
 Anselm House at Melrose Station

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PO Box 141007
 Minneapolis, MN 55414
anselmhouse.org

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