

# COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Spring 2024

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## Taking Off and Putting On

By Brian Julian

Before I became a tutor at Gutenberg, I taught in Boston at a variety of colleges. For one class I was assigned a classroom near the photography lab. On the walls outside the classroom hung a gallery of student photographs, an exhibition where the assignment was to take a self-portrait.

Students took differing approaches to this prompt. Some photographed themselves doing an activity, with the implication that it is one they love. Some put themselves in front of backgrounds that displayed the ideas they embraced. And some took photos where they posed in just their underwear.

This last group got me thinking. In the context of producing a self-portrait, the choice to wear very little indicates a clear line of thought: less clothes equals more me.

This way of thinking makes a lot of sense. We often use clothes to project a false image. We wear clothes that make us look thinner. We wear clothes to convey to others that we are rich, stylish, and have our lives together. We wear clothes to look older or younger, depending on which we feel we least are. And it is also the case that there are times in our lives when we remove clothes in order to be open about who we really are and what we are really like, such as with a spouse or in a doctor's office.

However, removing clothes is not inherently more truthful. I could be taking them off in order to lie. For example, I read many movie reviews, and when those reviews are of prestigious films containing scenes with unclothed actors, it is common for the reviewers to note those scenes and praise the actors for their vulnerability and daring. Given this, it is easy to believe that there are times when actors or models remove clothes not in order to be open about themselves but to project the image that they are bold, serious artists.

And on the flip side, wearing clothes is not inherently deceptive. For example, sometimes the truth about us demands clothes—we won't last long without them in the snow. Or, importantly, even when I choose my clothes in order to make a statement, sometimes what I am saying is true. When I wear a suit to a job interview, I *could* be doing so in order to project a misleading competence, but more often I am simply wearing the suit to show that I am taking the interview seriously. That is, my clothes are showing my commitment.

Showing the real me, then, is not simply a matter of stripping off external coverings. Those coverings can equally display who I really am. And in pointing this out, my goal is

not merely to provide advice for taking self-portraits. Rather, this discussion of clothing provides a reference point from which to think about one of the qualities most prized by our culture: authenticity.

Let me make two clarifications before going further. First, by “our culture” I mean at least the broader American culture, the culture of “stay true to yourself” and “you do you.” Perhaps you are outside this country or you identify more with a particular subculture in it, in which case, perhaps authenticity is not something your culture prizes. That said, I suspect its allure extends beyond the bounds of America, and I know it has seeped into some American subcultures, including ones that are Christian.

Second, I am interested in examining and critiquing our culture’s view of authenticity, but this is not because I see a simple binary of “Christianity is good” and “culture is bad.” Don’t get me wrong: I agree that the Bible presents the truth and anything contrary to it is false. But culture, as a human product, is not always contrary to the Bible. Like the humans who create it, humans who bear both the image of God and the stain of sin, culture is a mixed bag. American culture, for example, encourages caring for and educating children more than many throughout history, and while it may not always do these perfectly, the fact that it encourages them is good. Similarly, it is good that our culture recommends authenticity. I would just suggest, however, that it does not always identify what is truly authentic.

Authenticity is a quality worth prizing when it is contrasted with deception. Just as I can use clothes to project a false image, I can live a whole life disingenuously. This could be done via social media, where I create an elaborate self-image in order to make me look how I wish to be perceived. Or it could be less planned—I could simply refuse ever to bring up in conversation the fact that I am struggling or that my life is not going as well as I had hoped. Both of these are problems, since living in light of the truth should be a central concern of my life. To the extent that our culture’s discussion of authenticity is encouraging me to do this, it is a good thing.

I agree with our culture, then, that it is good to live authentically, to live truthfully. I begin to suspect disagreement, however, when we start asking “What is the truth about me?” Or to put it another way, when our culture exhorts me to be authentic, what is it asking me to do?

At least some of the time when our culture encourages authenticity, it means that I should be showing my inner drives, desires, and instincts. That is, the true me is what occurs in me naturally or biologically. Authenticity is, then, a kind of behavioral nakedness. The idea is, as in the case of the self-portraits, that the less adorned I am behaviorally—the more I show what is in me by nature, without coverings devised by myself or society—the more it is the real me, the authentic me.

Two illustrations of this cultural view of authenticity come to mind. The first is from my personal experience teaching ancient philosophy. I have had several opportunities to teach through Plato’s *Republic*, and a major theme of this book is the relationship between desires, emotions, and reason. Plato views the ideal for a human being as striving for virtue, which for him means that reason should lead, but desires and emotions should each play their proper role as well. Now, I don’t mean here to completely endorse Plato’s view of virtue. (I even criticized an aspect of it in my last article in *Colloquy!*) But the response of several students in my classes was striking. They disliked Plato because in their minds a person’s desires and emotions are who that person is, while reason is something imposed externally—either by society or as a self-imposition. The spontaneous, natural occurrences of desires and emotions must be upheld, while the reflective process of reasoning must not interfere and obscure them. To let it obscure would be living inauthentically, suppressing my true self.

You are likely more familiar with the second illustration. When sexuality is the topic of discussion in our culture—as it often is—people regularly affirm that one’s natural inclinations are paramount. This view is frequently on display in discussions of homosexuality or gender identity. But it can also appear in movies or stories about heterosexual relationships: if a person is married but passionately in love with someone else, it is presented as a tragedy. The implication is that something as naturally-occurring as the feelings of love

*(Continued on page 4)*



The Gutenberg Podcast brings the world of ideas to a broader audience. In each episode, Gutenberg alumnus and host Gil Greco and a “guest” tutor discuss topics and questions that have arisen in the freshman-sophomore “Great Books” class at Gutenberg College—Western Civilization. They explore these topics and questions from a Christian perspective, recognizing their complexity in the light of competing views.

Topics have included the following: Rhetoric and Dialectic; The Epic of Gilgamesh; Ancient Polytheism & Biblical Monotheism; Homer: The Story of the Cyclops; Greek Theater; Plato and Socrates; Aristotle, Friendship, and the Nicomachean Ethics; Lucretius and the Big Swerve; The Hellenistic Philosophies, Polybius and the Cycles of Simple Government; From Republic to Empire; A Millennium of Medieval Philosophy; Anselm and Proving God’s Existence; Genghis Khan; Boccaccio’s *Decameron*; The Science Curriculum; Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum*; Descartes Sets the Stage; Locke and Berkeley; Hume and the Limits of Understanding; Reading Reid, Reading Reality; Kant’s Epistemological Contribution; Road to the Revolutions; Rousseau’s *Social Contract*; The French Revolution and Napoleonic Era; an Introduction to Søren Kierkegaard; Auguste Comte and the Positivist Future.

Interested? The Gutenberg Podcast “drops” every-other Friday. (See our website for podcast platforms.) Give it a listen, and let us know what you think.



# Taking Off and Putting On

Continued from page 3

should not be stifled by the constraints of social institutions like marriage. Living via institutions is inauthentic.

“Authenticity” can mean, then, either striving to live without deception or embracing behaviors that occur in me naturally. I am proposing that these are very different ideas and that the former is a crucial attitude to adopt while the latter is problematic. In order to make this case and distinguish the two, it is helpful to ask this question: If I act in a way contrary to my natural inclinations, am I being deceptive or false?

The answer is “yes” if I am trying to pretend that my natural impulses don’t exist. I cannot one day decide magically to be a different person, and to pretend that I am is to put forward a lie. For example, if my natural impulse is towards anger—if my emotions run hot—I am being false if I constantly insist that I am cool as a cucumber.

But at the same time, this does not imply that the opposite of this falsity is embracing the truth. I should not simply declare “I am an angry person” and let my temper rage, because this, too, is embracing a falsehood. It is acting as though I have no control over my behavior, and this is false.

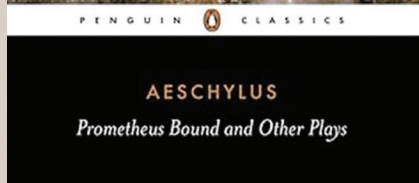
The truth about me is that I have emotions, impulses, and drives, but I also have the capacity to choose what I will do with them. This may look different in different situations. In some cases, I may be able to change my natural responses over time, so that I have a new “second nature.” (This is the ancients’ goal of acquiring virtue.) In other cases, I may never be able to change my natural inclination, but I am able to choose consciously to act against it. And even if the case is such that neither of these first two options are possible, I can always choose to apologize for things I do naturally that

I wish I hadn’t. In all three cases, I have a choice open to me that is different from simply running with the spontaneous products of my nature.

Our situation is analogous to the one with clothes described above. Just as wearing clothes does not automatically mean I am deceiving and hiding my real self, so too being false or inauthentic is not a mere question of whether or not I act contrary to my natural leanings. In particular, it is worth remembering the suit and the job interview. In that case, I was wearing the clothes that displayed my commitment to taking the job seriously. Similarly, when it comes to my inclinations, I could act against them because I am committed to doing so. Acting in this way is not being deceptive, for my commitments say what I value as most important. In a significant way, they define me. Acting in accordance with my commitments is being authentic. This means that, as with the clothes, authenticity is not merely about removing, about the actions I chose *not* to do. “Don’t hinder your natural inclinations.” Instead, an

## Great Book Review: *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus

Review by  
Tutor Naomi Rinehold



Why does God get to be God? Why can’t someone else be God instead? This question turned up in two different works the upperclassmen read this winter: Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*.

While Milton himself has a decidedly Christian answer to the question, the demons in his epic poem sound more like the ancient polytheists. They say that God is God because he is strongest and can smash everyone who rises in rebellion.

Prometheus, the title character of a fifth-century Greek tragedy, makes the same claim about Zeus. Why is Zeus the god most high? Because he is stronger than all the other gods and can smash anyone who rises against him with his terrible lightning bolts. Unlike the eternally reigning God of the Bible, Zeus overthrew his own father to attain his lofty position. Prometheus accuses Zeus of being an upstart, strong but unskilled at godhood. Though less powerful than Zeus, Prometheus resists him by saving mankind from Zeus’ destruction. He brings man fire and with it the crafts

of cooking and metalwork, and from those crafts descend all art and science and learning. For this act, Zeus punishes him. We find Prometheus chained to a rock throughout the play and are assured that he will have his guts torn out and eaten by a huge eagle every day until Zeus relents. Prometheus refuses to recant, despite the advice of the other characters, and maintains that he is in the right and Zeus is in the wrong. For Prometheus, Zeus’ might does not make him right. Milton’s Satan makes the same claim of God.

Reading these two works, we sympathize with Prometheus but reject Satan’s claims. Why is this so, when they make the same accusations based on similar evidence? Does God get to decide what is good because he is strongest? Does his might make him right? If so, what are the implications? Or is there some other explanation? *Prometheus Bound* raises more questions than it answers, but that’s one of the things that makes it a part of the Great Conversation.



important part of authenticity is what I choose *to* do. I must choose to act in accordance with my commitments.

For example, suppose I am married and see a person with qualities to which I am naturally attracted. In this situation, it is not being false to who I am if I choose not to dwell on these attractive characteristics. I am committed to being a particular sort of person—one who is faithful—so setting aside attractions to other people, however naturally they arise, is being authentic. It is being true to my commitments. But at the same time, this is not merely negating or suppressing all feelings of attraction. If I am reminded of an attractive quality in my partner, then it is appropriate, even good, for me to dwell and act on this. A marriage commitment is not simply one of shutting out others from the relationship. It is also about building up my partner and cultivating our connection. One of the ways I do this is by expressing to her that I am attracted, that she has positive qualities and I notice them. I am authentic not by embracing all my natural inclinations or by totally rejecting them, but I act authentically when I am true to my commitments. And in keeping with the analogy I have been using, in marriage we even mark this commitment with a piece of clothing: a ring.

I agree with our culture that authenticity is a valuable quality for a person to have. We should all be true to ourselves and avoid both self-deception and deceiving others as to who we really are. At the same time, I disagree when our culture says that this means we should embrace what comes naturally to us. I reply that my commitments define me more than my natural inclinations, so living authentically means living in accordance with my commitments.

I would also submit that this view of authenticity is one the Bible holds, and it even uses clothing language at times to convey it. English translations of the Bible may not use the words “authenticity” or “authentic”—at least, the translations I searched (ESV, NASB, CSB, NIV) did not—but being true to my commitments is an attitude commended throughout the Bible.

In the Old Testament, God commands Israel to offer sacrifices to Him. At the same time, however, He also will say,

such as in Isaiah 1, that He does not want their sacrifices. Why the seeming contradiction? Sacrifices are meant to show one’s commitment to God, but outside the times of sacrificing, the people of Israel were showing that they did not have such a commitment because they were not living according to God’s values. Isaiah declares that their “hands are full of blood” (1:15) and they need to “learn to do good” (1:17).<sup>1</sup> In other words, God wants true commitment, not a show of it. He wants authentic sacrifices.

Similarly, in the New Testament, it is clear that faith is central to our relationship with God. Yet James declares that “faith apart from works is dead” (2:26). The people to whom he says this can articulate correct beliefs about God, but this is not enough. Even the demons can do this (2:19). Instead, these beliefs ought to be held with such conviction that they are acted upon. This is true faith, authentic faith.

To follow God authentically is to commit our lives to reflecting the truth. And the Bible makes it clear that this does not mean, as it often does in our culture, the truth of my natural inclinations. This is because, since the fall, sin comes naturally to human beings. Some of our natural inclinations may still reflect our original creation, such as a parent’s natural love for a child, but many inclinations are towards what is sinful instead. So, I cannot just run with what comes to me naturally.


Rather, as I have been arguing, the Bible wants our actions to reflect our true commitments. Am I committed to God and His values, or am I not? Faking a commitment—putting on an external show—is not enough. My actions should be authentic.

At the same time, I should point out that authenticity is not all the Bible cares about. Yes, I need to be true to my commitments, but I must also do more than this. I must be committed to the right things. In particular, I must be committed to God. Perhaps one could say that if I authentically display my hostility towards God, then this is being more truthful than the alternative. Rather than going to church but ignoring God privately, I could openly declare that I hate what God represents and that I will live life on my own terms. While I would be

true to my commitments, this approach does not reflect larger truths about the world: that, as a creature, I owe allegiance to the good creator God. Living life on my own terms may be more authentic, but it is not better.

Finally, let me end where I started, with clothing. In the Bible, Adam and Eve start off without it. When sin enters the world, they are ashamed and start to clothe themselves. Based on this beginning, one might expect that in the end the picture would be one where God removes sin and, in the absence of shame, humanity once again removes their clothes. However, the Bible never describes a scene like this. Instead, in the last chapter of Revelation, the people who are allowed to enter the city of God are those who “wash their robes” (22:14). The emphasis is on the kind of clothes being worn, not on clothing being bad.

This is true elsewhere in the Bible as well. In Ephesians, Paul tells the readers to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires” (4:22). The former way of living no longer reflects the commitments of these Christians, so they need to stop living that way. It is as if they are wearing clothes inappropriate for the occasion and need to remove them. The alternative, however, is not to let uncovered nature show forth. Rather, they need to wear the clothes that reflect their commitments: “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).

Let us all, then, strive to live authentically. Let our commitments, and in particular our commitment to God, shine forth in our actions. Let our lives reflect the truth of who we are. But let us also remember that living authentically is about more than what I take off. It is crucial what I decide to put on. 

<sup>1</sup>Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**Brian Julian** is a tutor at Gutenberg College as well as an alumnus. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University. He writes (and cartoons) at [thinkinginthelight.com](http://thinkinginthelight.com), where he aims to make philosophical ideas accessible to a general audience.

# Major Gift to Gutenberg College

We are overjoyed to announce that Gutenberg College has recently received a donation of \$500,000! This unprecedented gift allows the college to build upon the good work it is doing in the lives of students and the community.

The board and staff are immensely grateful and excited to steward it in ways that enhance lasting maturity in our students and strengthen the long-term sustainability of the college. We will follow three paths:

**1) Recruitment & Outreach:** The college has the opportunity to extend our reach both locally and nationally in order to increase the number of students who can benefit from a Gutenberg education.

**2) Campus Upgrades:** We will invest in our campus. The beautiful building at 1883 University Street is an important component in our students' experience and the college's charm.

**3) Endowment Fund:** Finally, we aim to provide stability and longevity to the institution by launching an endowment fund. This fund will provide long-term financial support to the college to make sure that the education Gutenberg provides maintains its place in the world of higher education.

Gutenberg College is deeply grateful to the donor who has made this incredible gift and to all of our friends and longtime supporters for their ongoing faithfulness.



## A Thanksgiving Confession

Written on Thanksgiving 2023  
By Gutenberg President  
Chris Swanson

Gutenberg College exists through the providence of God. As president for these last seven years, I am keenly aware of that. There have been many times when I did not see a way forward for the college. Former teacher Ron Julian used to say that there are so many ways that the college could fail that trusting God is the only path that makes sense. I think his faith was stronger than mine.

I have been reading the book of Judges recently, and the stories there have been convicting me. The central theme of the book seems to be that the Israelites are unfaithful, but God continues to save them when they cry for mercy.

*<sup>16</sup>Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. <sup>18</sup>When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. <sup>19</sup>But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. (Judges 2:16-19. NASB, 1995.)*

In light of these words, let me tell you about some of my struggles with trusting God with Gutenberg College. Gutenberg went through a transition in the summer of 2016. In order for us to have any chance of moving forward, we needed to raise \$150,000. I had never raised any money, ever. I felt totally inadequate to the task, and I had grave doubts about our ability to find such a sum. By the end of the summer, however, God had provided gifts and donations equal to our needs. I lacked faith, but God provided.


A few years later, the college needed to find a way to refinance our mortgage. Given our financial situation, the bank was not interested in providing us with a loan. Through a “chance” encounter on an airplane, I met a man who referred me to a fundraiser. The fundraiser referred me to a company, Semble, that specializes in raising money for capital campaigns for non-profits. Semble specialized in a process where supporters could invest their retirement funds into a “Gutenberg House IRA” that would provide the capital we needed. Before knowing about Semble, I was worried and did not know what to do. But God provided the connections to this company. Then He stirred up investors to invest a total of \$850,000, the amount we needed for our new mortgage. I lacked faith, but God provided.

Later, when the pandemic hit, our student enrollment was down along with tuition income. We were facing a significant shortfall, and I did not know what to do. I did not

see how we could possibly overcome our shortfall or recruit students. Then our accounting firm told us of some federal aid programs for nonprofits that would provide support. Over the next few years, the COVID aid covered the shortfall and provided us with a small cushion of cash to move forward. I had lacked faith, but God provided.

This year, we again faced a financial shortfall. Our recruiting program was improving, and we all believed that things would improve, but this year was looking bleak. I was worried, and I did not really believe we could raise enough money to cover all our costs. However, God provided. In late November, we received a check from a person that none of us knew. We had never asked this person for money nor knew of her existence. There in the mail, however, was a check for \$500,000. This is the single largest gift that Gutenberg has ever received. Clearly it was not a result of our efforts. It was all God.

As I reflect on the Israelites, I have a better understanding of them, of myself, and of God. Obviously Gutenberg College is not Israel, and I make no pretensions that somehow God has made promises to us like He did to Israel. But nevertheless, He was faithful to the Israelites even in their rebellion and lack of faith. He has also been faithful to Gutenberg College. Every time there has been a challenge, He has provided. And yet despite all of this, each time I have worried and doubted.

I would like to say that finally I have learned my lesson. But I suspect that God is still working on my heart. Despite this, I can rejoice in his good gifts, as Deborah sang to God in Judges 5:3: “Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.” God is faithful, and I am thankful. 

## Teaching Independent Thinking in a Digital-Dependent World


### A Talk by Davies Owens at Gutenberg’s EDCON 2024

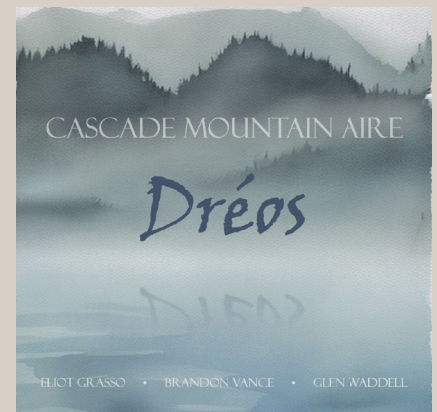
Davies Owens, the founder and host of the BaseCamp Live podcast, will be the keynote speaker at this year’s Education Conference: The Independent Mind. (See page 8 for more details.) Here is a preview of his talk:

For centuries, classical educators have taught students using time-proven methodologies and curricula. As a result, we have held to a reasonable confidence that what has always worked will continue to work. But are our students truly inoculated to what Lewis calls “the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age”?

Unfortunately, we have recently crossed the Rubicon, leaving behind Lewis’s polite press and microphones. We’ve entered a world where the digital barbarians are not simply at the gate but are firmly established in our homes. They dine with us, captivate most of our waking hours, and steal more than nine hours a day from the average young person in the form of glowing screens and competing narratives. These digital barbarians aggressively form dependent and soft minds lured by hours of carefully programmed algorithms tuned to the exact needs, interests, and wants. Even in the most Luddite homes, these influences leach through and captivate students, overriding a day of classroom-formed loves, affections, and knowledge with more tantalizing and delightful nonsense. These influences are not only from screens but from the accumulation of pressures reshaping the modern family driven by shifting economic uncertainty, over-consuming schedules, detachment from family and lack of generational wisdom, and a loss of church community and connections.

Can we form independent minds, resilient and thriving in our cultural moment, in the midst of the barbarians? Hope exists IF we are willing to pay attention and calibrate our schools and classrooms to the students before us and our modern parent partners. We can be confident, anchored in the Truth as purveyors of better stories and a love for deep thinking in an environment of more beautiful experiences and rich relationships. We can reassess a love of wisdom, over a love of opinion and self.

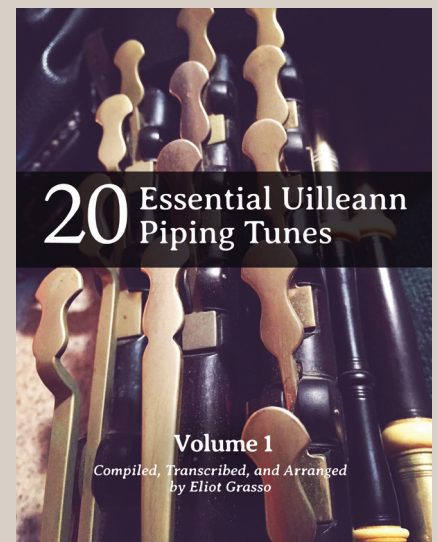
Just saying “no” to the barbarians isn’t enough; we have to say “yes” to something more alluring, which forms independent minds and is the heart of classical Christian education! 



Gutenberg’s vice president and tutor Eliot Grasso has delighted audiences with his music throughout North America and Europe—including here at the college. In addition to his work at Gutenberg, he is part of Dréos, a Celtic ensemble of performing composers.

Much has happened since Dréos recorded their debut album, *The Clearing*. Among the things that have changed little, however, are the majestic mountains, surging rivers, ancient forests, and rugged coastlines of the Pacific Northwest. Their newest album, *Cascade Mountain Aire*, invites the listener into musical moments of adventure and uncertainty, energy and reflection, peace and tranquility, inspired by the place Dréos calls home. Reviewer Seán Laffey had this to say about the album in Irish Music Magazine: “Impressive, infectious music on every track from three masters of the tradition. Their blazing music will warm the heart of any trad gathering.” You can purchase *Cascade Mountain Aire* at [www.dreosmusic.com](http://www.dreosmusic.com)

Eliot is also releasing a new collection of Irish traditional music in 2024:



COLLOQUY SPRING 2024



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Independent thinking isn't easy. We face pressure from all sides: pressure from our culture, pressure from our peers, pressure from our own desires and drives. When we try to step back from these influences, to gain perspective and make decisions that are truly ours, we still need something to stand on. This year's Education Conference will explore what it means to think independently from these pressures—while still being anchored in biblical truth—and how to pass these lessons to the next generation.



Amanda Butler  
Classical Conversations



Andrea Lipinski  
CiRCE Institute



Davies Owens  
BaseCamp Live



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Registration discounts end  
May 15.