

# AColyte

Opening of School 2016  
A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things  
at Austin College



O LORD, **HOW LONG**  
SHALL I CRY FOR HELP,  
AND YOU WILL NOT LISTEN?  
OR CRY TO YOU "**Violence!**"  
AND YOU WILL NOT SAVE?  
WHY DO YOU MAKE ME SEE **wrongdoing**  
AND LOOK AT **trouble**?  
Destruction AND **violence**  
ARE BEFORE ME;  
**strife** AND **contention** ARISE.  
SO THE **LAW** BECOMES **slack**  
AND **JUSTICE** NEVER PREVAILS.  
THE **wicked** SURROUND THE **righteous**—  
THEREFORE JUDGMENT COMES FORTH  
**Perverted.**

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## WHAT IS THE *AColyte* AND WHY DO I HAVE ONE?

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2016-17 school year.

This journal is intended to provide a forum for the Austin College community to discuss theological issues and keep up with what's going on in our various Religious Life programs.

We operate with a fairly broad definition of theology around here. As far as we're concerned, anybody who spends time thinking about which things matter more than other things is a theologian.

That probably even includes you.

The use of the term "*AColyte*" for our title is based on our hope that, like an acolyte who lights candles in a worship service, we can also be "bringers of light," or "bringers of flame," or instruments to help "lighten things up." If nothing else, we can promise to provide ample opportunities to practice the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

Feel free to reply if you have questions or comments or corrections.

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

America  
Summer 2016

*If you can't break your own rules,  
Whose rules can you break?*

--Tom Robbins,  
Still Life with Woodpecker

*Shout! Shout! Let it all out.  
These are the things I can do without.  
Come on! I'm talking to you!"*

--Thompson Twins

I'm doing something I swore I'd never do.

As I write this, I kind of feel like that overly serious Chaplain who's always ready to point out how nothing is ever really as good as people think it is.

The beginning of another school year is always great.

We're all fired up to be here together and charge into another year in #ROONation.

We've had comedians and musicians and games and toasts and service projects on campus to help welcome the Class of 2020.

It's really good to be us.

And I don't really want to be that Debbie Downer guy who looks at all our playfulness and joy and says, "Yes...but

Syria...

ISIS...

cops killing unarmed black men...

people killing cops...

Clinton...

Trump...

Zika...

debt...

how can you party at a time like this?"

But it's there.

We're not stupid.

There's plenty out there to complain about.

This summer, I found myself thinking a lot about a document that was written about 2700 years ago.

*(2700 years ago! Pause for a second and try to get your head around that.)*

When the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk looked around at the society where he lived, he had a lot to say about things that made him frustrated, outraged, or disappointed.

And I've been feeling his vibe as I've looked around this summer at the society where I live – where we live.

The Book of Habakkuk starts like this:

***O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not listen?  
Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?***

Did you know that since the Austin College Commencement service on May 15 there have been 535 recorded terrorist incidents throughout the world?

In Baghdad, Kabul, Istanbul, Nice, Orlando, and dozens of other places.

That's an average of almost 6 per day all Summer.

I don't think most of us would have any trouble imagining Habakkuk's state of mind.

"Everything's screwed up."

Habakkuk's grumpy prayer goes on:

***Why do you make me see wrongdoing  
and look at trouble?***

Roger Ailes was accused of sexual harassment and left his position at Fox News with a reported \$40 million payout and no public resolution of the charges against him.

Since Commencement last May, at least 4 unarmed black men have been shot by police in this country:

- Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge
- Philando Castile in Minneapolis
- Charles Kinsey in North Miami
- Paul O'Neal in Chicago

On August 6, Kouren-Rodney Thomas was shot and killed by a "Neighborhood Watchman" in Raleigh, North Carolina.

On August 12, Khalid Jabara was killed by his neighbor in Tulsa because of his religion and national origin.

***Why do you make me see wrongdoing  
and look at trouble?  
Destruction and violence are before me;***

Five Dallas police officers were killed on July 7 and 7 others were wounded.

Three police officers were shot and killed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on July 17.

***Why do you make me see wrongdoing  
and look at trouble?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.***

I'll just mention the Republican and Democratic National Conventions and leave it at that.

We've got our share of strife and contention.

***So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.  
The wicked surround the righteous—  
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.***

Freddie Gray was arrested by the Baltimore, Maryland police on April 12, 2015 and placed in a police van. While he was in the van, Gray somehow ended up in a coma.

He died on April 19, 2015 due to injuries to his spinal cord.

All 6 Baltimore Police officers who were charged with assault, manslaughter, or murder in Gray's death have been acquitted or had the charges against them dropped.

As I said, I've been feeling Habakkuk's vibe all Summer.

*(Wow. The Chaplain sure picked a jolly and cheerful passage for the first AColyte of 2016-17)*

Habakkuk is definitely pretty grumpy as his book begins. He argues back and forth with God for another 14 verses in Chapter 1.

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When we get to Chapter 2, a couple of really interesting things happen.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, Habakkuk says:

***I will take my stand to watch,  
and station myself on the tower,  
and look forth to see what he will say to me,  
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.***

After doing all that whining and complaining, and giving voice to what was probably legitimate outrage and frustration Habakkuk essentially says,

“Okay God, it’s on!”

“What have you got to say for yourself?”

“I’m ready to have this out.”

“Your world is a mess.”

I love that brashness.

(Parenthetically, it’s that same sort of brashness that makes me love the musical *Hamilton*. Those guys that wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution weren’t just two-dimensional white faces on money, there was an edge to them that we lose sight of when we treat them like gods—but that’s for another time.)



One of the interesting things about the Habakkuk story is that, in the midst of all his outrage and frustration, Habakkuk assumes that he's absolutely capable of complaining to – and even arguing with – God.

It is a significant feature of this story that, in chapter 2 verse 1, this individual from 2700 years ago who faces the same sorts of disappointments and social strife and outrage that we face today is presumptuous enough to ask for – and expect – an answer from God regarding what he sees as an unacceptable situation.

Particularly in the context of other ancient near-Eastern religions, that's a huge and unusual vision of the value and prerogatives of an individual human character.

We don't know anything else about Habakkuk.

The story makes no claims that he's special in any way.

As far as we know,  
he's not royal,  
he's not secretly divine,  
he's not magic.

He's just a grumpy, frustrated guy who has a bone to pick with God.

And then we get to verse 2 of chapter 2:

***And the LORD answered me:  
"Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.  
For still the vision awaits its time;  
it hastens to the end--it will not lie.  
If it seem slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come,  
it will not delay.***

It's huge that God answers Habakkuk.

One of my favorite features of the Hebrew scriptures – what we Christians call the Old Testament – is all of the accounts there of one-on-one, give-and-take conversations between God and individual humans.

Adam does it in Genesis 2 and 3.

Moses does it in Exodus 3.

It happens all over the Book of Job.

Jeremiah argues with God after God calls him to be a prophet.

Jonah does a stupid thing and gets himself into trouble. God saves him with a fish. Then Jonah does another stupid thing and God tells him to get over himself.

And then we've got Habakkuk's little self-pity party.

Different ones of us probably have different opinions about those stories, but they make great literature.

They're all ways to enter conversations about how things *should* be, and why they're not that way. They are great stories.

I like really like it that God answers whiny, grumpy Habakkuk.

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But the first time I looked at this passage I didn't necessarily like the answer that God gives to Habakkuk.

***For still the vision awaits its time;***

***it hastens to the end--it will not lie.  
If it seem slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come,  
it will not delay.***

“Wait for it?”

Is that really God’s best answer to Habakkuk? Or to us?

“Yeah, things might be lousy now, but they’ll get better someday.”

“Just wait.”

Reading that makes me feel like a Bernie Sanders supporter.

“Yeah, the Revolution is coming, not just not now.”

“Wait for things to get better” just doesn’t seem like an adequate response to the violence, trouble, strife, and contention that infect our lives and our world every day.

But that’s not all that God has to say.

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Before telling Habakkuk that the vision awaits its time and to wait for it if it seems slow, God tells him to “write the vision.”

And that’s the part of this story that I think is relevant for us as we begin this year together at this little Liberal Arts college out here on the Texas prairie.

Like Habakkuk, we all woke up today in a world full of

- Violence
- Wrongdoing
- Trouble

- Destruction
- Strife
- Contention and
- Injustice

But we're Austin College.

We're part of a community tells the world – and promises our students and their families – that we value

- Personal Growth,
- Community,
- Justice,
- Service,
- Intellectual & Personal Integrity,
- Academic Excellence, and
- Participation in Community Life.

Those are the seven values listed in our Mission Statement.

They could just be empty, pretty words.

Or...

They *could* really be the vision that we write together in the face of violence, wrongdoing, trouble, destruction, strife, contention, and injustice.

That's the vision that drives us as we strive together to create and be a community where we

- notice each other in all our magnificent diversity,
- cherish each other,
- hear each other,
- serve each other, and
- inspire each other.

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AC Psychology Lisa Brown has a poster on the wall in her office that says:

**IF YOU'RE NOT  
OUTRAGED  
YOU'RE NOT PAYING  
ATTENTION**

I get that.

Habakkuk would get that.

There are – and will continue to be – outrageous things in our nation and in our world and maybe even on our campus that must be named and contended against.

Violence, Wrongdoing, Trouble, Destruction, Strife, Contention, and Injustice are part of the world where we woke up this morning.

There's a lot to be outraged about.

But if we thought that was *all* there was in the world, none of us would be here.

We all believe there's more than that.

Let's spend this year working together to write a different vision of life together right here and right now.

It won't always be easy.

But that's who we are.

And that's what we do.

In exactly this place,  
at precisely this time.  
let's show the world that it can be done.

Go Roos!

Until Next Time, I Remain,  
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,  
Praying for Peace between Instinct, Mystic, and Valor—  
because if we can do that, we can do anything,

JOHN WILLIAMS  
Chaplain

# ACTIVATORS



The ACTivators are a group of Austin College students who work with the College chaplain to plan and lead regional Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) youth ministry events and other local ministry activities.

**We do things with Presbyterians because that's who we know.  
You don't have to be Presbyterian to be an ACTivator—  
You just have to be able to stand to be in a room full of Presbyterians.**

ACTivators work with host groups to choose scripture-based themes for youth events and then prepare keynote presentations, small group materials, music, and recreational activities for each event. ACTivators also act as partners with other program organizations, filling leadership roles and working with other church groups who work with children, youth, adults, and senior citizens.

Since its founding in 1995, the ACTivators program has involved 520 Austin College students who have traveled over 161,000 miles to plan and lead 604 local, regional, and national ministry events involving over 48,000 children, youth, college students, adults, and senior citizens.

The ACTivators program is based on the presumption that college students have something significant to offer the Church. The primary concern is not what students or the college can *get from* the Church. This program is about what students and the College can *offer to* the Church.

If you're interested in being part of the ACTivators program, there are 2 things you can do next week:

- Come to the Small Chapel in Wynne Chapel at **4:30pm on Tuesday August 30** to meet other ACTivators and do Energizers.  
(The Small Chapel is in the end of Wynne Chapel closest to the Wright Center)
- Come to the ACTivators table at the Opportunities Fair on **Thursday September 1 between 11:00am and 1:00pm** and sign up to get ACTivators notices.





# OPPORTUNITIES FAIR

**Thursday September 1, 2016**

**11am-1pm in the Campus Mall**

**(the big sidewalk that runs through the middle of campus)**

Come and learn about student  
organizations at Austin College

# **SUNDAY NIGHT WORSHIP**

**WITH COMMUNION**

**BEGINNING SUNDAY AUGUST 28**

**6:00PM EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT**

**in the Small Chapel**

(go in the Chapel entrance that's closest to the Wright Center—  
not the big doors under the bell tower)

followed by dinner in the home of John Williams or another  
professor or administrator.

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## **B.S. in the W.C.**

(That's "Bible Study in the Wright Center—get  
your mind out of the gutter)

5:30pm Tuesdays beginning August 30  
in the Moseley Room (next door to the  
Dining Hall)

BRING YOUR TRAY AND YOUR BRAIN—  
WE'LL PROVIDE THE REST

# **AUSTIN COLLEGE NON-PROFIT AND VOLUNTEER FAIR**

**Thursday, September 15, 2016**

**11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.**

**in the Wright Campus Center**

**Come learn about**

- **service opportunities,**
- **meaningful internships; and**
- **non-profit careers.**

# Great Day of Service!



**SAT. NOV. 5th**

**Cafeteria 8:30AM**

**Sign up with your cluster.....**

**RAs get first choice of sites!!!!**

**Sponsored by the Service Station**

