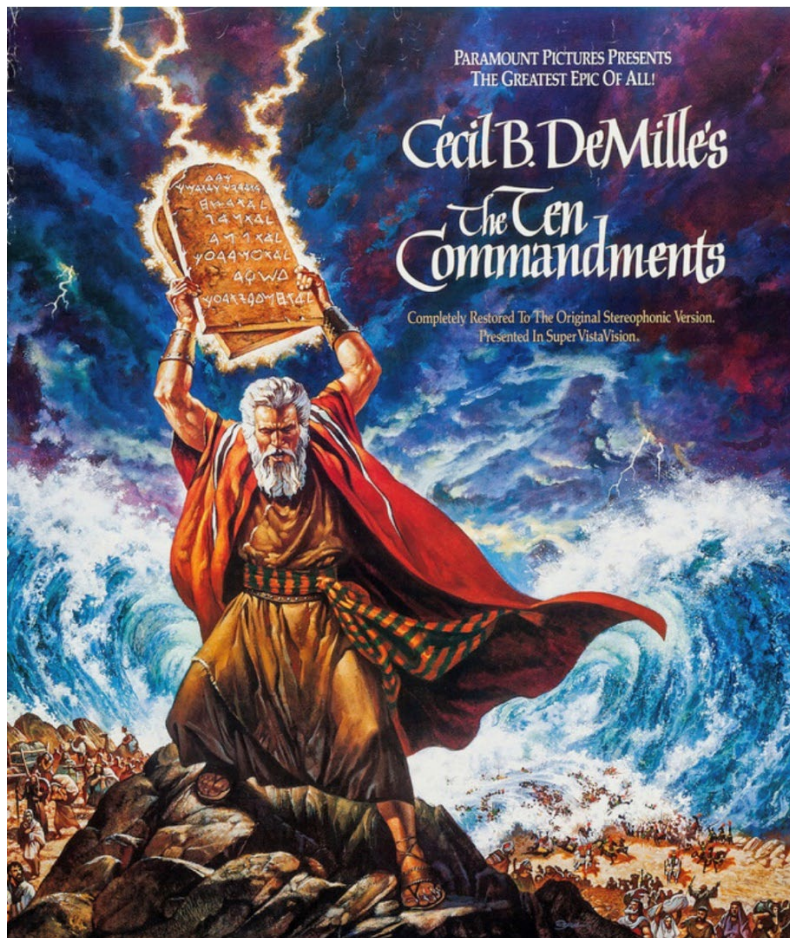


AColyte

September 2025

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



Seriously?

AColyte

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

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

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2025-26 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.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Jumping Into Another Academic Year at
An Unassuming Little Liberal Arts College
On the Edge of the Texas Prairie
September 2025

*Moses went up on the mountain
To see what he could see
He came back talkin' 'bout a burning bush
Said, "This is how it's gonna be."
He was scared to death.
You know the rest.
--Steve Earle*

*Thou shalt no God but me adore:
'Twere too expensive to have more.*

*No images nor idols make
For Robert Ingersoll to break.*

*Take not God's name in vain; select
A time when it will have effect.*

*Work not on Sabbath days at all,
But go to see the teams play ball.*

*Honor thy parents. That creates
For life insurance lower rates.*

*Kill not, abet not those who kill;
Thou shalt not pay thy butcher's bill*

*Kiss not thy neighbor's wife, unless
Thine own thy neighbor doth caress*

*Don't steal; thou'lt never thus compete
Successfully in business. Cheat.*

*Bear not false witness – that is low –
But "hear 'tis rumored so and so."*

*Covet thou naught that thou hast not
By hook or crook, or somehow, got*

--Ambrose Bierce

"Decalogue"

The Devil's Dictionary

(look him up)

I said this to a lot of Faculty and Staff on August 21.
But a lot of y'all weren't there, so I'm gonna say it again:

Let's talk about the Ten Commandments.

Seriously.

You can read the State-of-Texas-approved King James version of them
here:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2020%3A1-17&version=KJV>

In my experience, the Ten Commandments are often discussed as if there
were an "or else" at the end of every verse.

You know, like

- Don't worship graven images. ...or else.
- Honor you Father and mother ... or else.
- Don't bear false witness ... or else.

Through the years, these words have often been interpreted as Ten
Prohibitions, Ten Threats, or Ten Reasons you might get punished or get to
punish somebody else.

But there's another way to read and interpret these words.

Grammatically, the Ten Commandments are largely expressed in the future negative.

It's the "Thou shalt nots" that many of us associate with the Commandments.

Future Negative.

And people smarter than me have taught me that, in ancient colloquial Hebrew, the future negative was often the way that promises were expressed.

Imagine if I took you to lunch someday (it could happen). But instead of telling you "I promise to pay for your lunch" I might instead tell you "Thou Shalt Not have to buy your own lunch today."

The future negative is a way to articulate a promise.

Now read these famous verses as Ten Promises:

Promise Number One

You will have no other gods before me.

Imagine a world where everybody has a clear understanding of what really matters;

where nobody acts like there is nothing more important than money,
or nations,
or economic systems,
or religions,
or "people like us."

Promise Number Two

You will not make for yourself a graven image... you will not bow down to them or serve them.

Imagine a world where everybody takes the right stuff seriously;
where everybody is more concerned with helping people who need help
than with worrying about
 whether or how they worship,
 who they love,
 where they come from,
 or how they look.

Promise Number Three

You will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Imagine a world where everybody who talks the talk will walk the walk;
where nobody claims to act ethically or serve God
 and then abuses or diminishes or takes advantage of other people.

Promise Number Four

You'll remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Imagine a world where nobody ever works so hard it makes them sick;
 where "busyness" never gets in the way of loving neighbors
 or appropriate self-care.

Promise Number Five

You'll honor your father and mother.

Imagine a world where everybody has respect
 for the people who came before them
 and everybody who will come after them;
 where there is less selfishness and more concern for everybody else
 — past, present, and future.

Promise Number Six

You won't kill.

Imagine a world where people are champions of life in all its forms;

where it is not necessary to kill,
either in self-defense,
or in war,
or in capital punishment.

Imagine a world where those are just academic issues that are never relevant to real life.

Promise Number Seven
You won't commit adultery.

Imagine a world where everybody is faithful;
where everybody can be counted on,
all the time;
where nobody makes promises they don't keep.

Promise Number Eight
You won't steal.

Imagine a world where everybody is gracious and generous;
where all people recognize that they are beloved and gifted;
where everybody has what they need.

Promise Number Nine
You won't bear false witness against your neighbor.

Imagine a world where everybody has the courage
to tell the truth and to hear the truth —
even when it's inconvenient;
where it never occurs to anybody
to doubt the words of someone else.

Promise Number Ten
You won't covet.

Imagine a world where everybody pays more attention
to what they have

than to what they don't have;
where people think more about giving and sharing
than acquiring, protecting, and accumulating.

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Maybe, as some believe, God dictated the Ten Commandments directly
into Moses' ear.

Or maybe these verses are part of a story that a particular community
articulated as a way to describe how they hoped and intended to live
together in the world.

Either way, when we read these words as Ten Promises, we can see them
as aspirational words for a particular community – as one community's
way of saying

*This is who we intend to be
and how we hope to live together.*

I want to suggest to you that the Ten Commandments are not completely
irrelevant to our life together at Austin College.

I'm not gonna suggest that we hang them in every classroom on our
campus.

But those verses are relevant for our life together.

Particularly if we read them as aspirational language for an intentional,
distinct community.

*This is who we intend to be
and how we hope to live together.*

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Okay, here's a huge jump by a wobbly Chaplain with a keyboard.

Get used to that.
I do it a lot.

The Austin College Mission Statement is on our website.

Y'all are literate and I encourage you to read it sometime at your convenience.

<https://www.austincollege.edu/explore/in-words>

For now, I do want to point out that our Mission Statement includes Ten Articulated Values (more or less).

We don't call attention to it all that often, but we put our Mission Statement right out there for everyone to see.

It's who we say we are.

According to that language on our website, we aspire to be a community committed to

- **Personal Growth**

Which means we don't expect our students to be the same in May (much less in four years) as they are today.

We don't plan to be the same either.

- **We're committed to Justice**

Which means we cherish each student and intend to help them flourish regardless of the particular challenges, circumstances, and details of their lives.

Our commitment to justice means we meet our students where they are, not where we wish they were.

- **We value Community**

We understand that nobody can do Austin College alone.

We recognize that we all need each other.

- **We're serious about Service**

We think educated people should think about how their education – and their giftedness – can be good news for somebody else.

That's why we do "First We Serve" before classes begin in the Fall.

We don't make our students do service – we don't require it. But if they don't want to, they're going to have to tell us "No" a lot.

- **Academic Excellence**

We believe all of our students can do high-quality scholarly work and we know how to help them do it.

- **We value Intellectual & Personal Integrity**

We mean to be ethical and trustworthy people who engage, educate, and graduate ethical and trustworthy students.

- **Our Mission Statement says we value Participation in Community Life**

We want to be good neighbors and to graduate good neighbors.

On our website, we say we value

- Community members with **Multiple Perspectives & Backgrounds**
- **Access** for all students regardless of social, economic, racial-ethnic or religious circumstances and
- Free **Inquiry & Open Debate**

Of course that all could just be empty language from an old Chaplain.

But, together, you and I have the opportunity to give life to those words--to walk that talk.

This year.

Friends, make no mistake about it, we can actually be the place those aspirational words describe.

Our students and their world deserve our best efforts to live into that vision with courage and compassion.

It's not somebody else's job to make that happen.

It's up to us.

Right here.

Right now.

The world is full of cynical people who think that's a naïve dream.

But, as we begin another academic year, let's stand shoulder to shoulder and show the world it *can* be done.

Seriously.

Until Next Time, I Remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Ready to Dig In and Push,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain

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P.S.

If you're looking for more Biblical Top Ten Lists, we humbly offer:



Top Ten Ways the Bible Would Have Been Different If Napoleon Dynamite Had Written It

10. Isaiah 11:6 Would Say

*"Thus says the Lord: The wolf shall live with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling
together, and a LIGER shall lead them.*

**That's Probably my favorite animal.
It's bred for its skills and magic."**

9. Matthew 14:25-26 would say:

"And early in the morning, Jesus came walking towards the disciples on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking toward them on the sea, they were terrified. But he said to them, "Take heart. It is I; and I caught you a delicious Bass."

8. Acts 8:27-28 would say:

*Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home; seated in his chariot...so Phillip ran up to the chariot and said unto him, "**Dang! Shocks! Pegs! Lucky! Have you ever taken it off any sweet jumps?**"*

7. Luke 10:1-2 would say:

*After this the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "**We use the buddy system, no more flying solo. You need someone watching your back AT ALL TIMES!**"*

6. John 4:7 would say:

*A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "**I see you're drinking 1%. Is that 'cause you think you're fat?**"*

5. Mark 15:2 would say:

*Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "**Probably the best that I know of.**"*

4. Genesis 32:25-26 would say:

*When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he said, "**Geez I think you ripped my mole off!**"*

3. Ephesians 4:7-11 would say:

*Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would have **nunchuck skills, some bow-hunting skills, and others computer hacking skills.***

2. Genesis 1:27-28 would say:

*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "**It took me, like, three hours to finish the shading on your upper lip.**"*

1. I Corinthians 11:23-24 would say:

*On the night of his arrest, Jesus was at table with his disciples. And he stood and said to them, "**Are you gonna eat your tots?**"*

RELIGIOUS LIFE PROGRAM WEEKLY ACTIVITIES:

**6:00pm Sundays in Majors Chapel—
Worship with Communion
Followed by Talk-Back Dinner at the Chaplain's House**

**5:30pm Tuesdays in the Moseley Room—
BS with JW
(Bible Study in the Wright Center)
Bring your tray and your brain.
We'll provide the rest.**

**11:00am Thursdays in Majors Chapel—
Interfaith Midweek Prayer Service
A brief (@15 minute) Prayer Service
Incorporating prayers and music from the various
religious traditions represented in the Austin College**