

# ROBERT D. HEATON

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Friday, November 3, 2023

Dear Dean Willowby and the Anderson University Faculty Search Committee,

I am delighted to write in support of my application for the university's open New Testament faculty position. In this letter of interest and supplemental application materials, I believe you will find evidence of my commitment to blend the tenets of a vibrant, critical Christian pedagogy while also delivering innovative, engaging instruction in a liberal arts context of open and responsible inquiry. As to my credentials, I completed my doctorate from the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology in 2019, with a focus in Biblical Interpretation and New Testament and Christian Origins. Since this time, while pursuing an active research agenda related to my dissertation and publishing my first monograph, I have taught successfully in adjunct roles both at the University of Denver and Anderson University. While I cannot say that I ever expected or anticipated an opportunity like this to arise, I believe I am a strong candidate for the position thanks to my own formative history with the university, the teaching record I have accumulated dating back to my graduate studies in Anderson, my active involvement within New Testament scholarship and potential for further research, and my desire to participate in the thriving of Anderson University and its students.

First, although this surely would not be your primary consideration, my wife and I have a personal history with Anderson University and its local community. Not only are we both graduates of the institution, but we were also married on campus in 2010 (behind Decker Hall, facing the Valley) and envision Anderson as a place where we would happily set down our family's roots. More significantly, I found the Church of God a welcoming refuge in the years after my Christian beliefs were challenged by an undergraduate class on the historical Jesus. Mentor professors like Dr. Fred Shively helped me to reconcile my awareness of critical biblical studies—including its erosion of the façade of direct apostolic authorship of the gospels—with a life of faith, and thus I am indebted to the intellectual environment of Anderson University and the ways its ethos is informed, but not controlled, by the Church of God.

After fruitful G.T.A. experiences in both Indiana and Colorado, where my robust graduate studies continued after leaving Anderson, I have established a successful period as instructor of record both with undergraduates and grad students over a variety of course modalities, both residential and online/remote. Although course material varies and is often pre-determined by institutional needs, I have sought to complexify students' understanding of Christianities early and modern by introducing them to the diversity of belief and practice extant in nearly all periods of church history, a heterogeneity equally present in the New Testament, for seminarians learning about the composition of canonical texts, as it is among global Christianities today, for undergraduate non-majors who are exposed for the first time to different varieties of Christianity around our world.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, I have built each of my courses essentially from scratch with innovative syllabi, reading lists, online portals, and final projects that students have recognized for their creativity and comprehensiveness. While teaching both residentially and remotely, I have received consistent positive feedback from students for my visuals and lecture style, for my integration of their feedback into class sessions, and for my ability to explain complex concepts and historical developments for their comprehension. Even when studying Christianities in antiquity, I ensure that students discuss and see the relevance of religious tenets in the world around them, fulfilling the Barthian dictum to study theology by grasping both the Bible and current events. To my delight, I

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<sup>1</sup> While these are two examples from courses that I have offered recently, please see both my full teaching record and my other instructional specialties and competencies on pgs. 2 and 4 of my CV, respectively.

have frequently heard from students who regard my courses their favorite of the academic term, year, or even their undergraduate career. These successes have invigorated my confidence in the classroom, and I would be delighted to carry forth this same careful ministrations—not to mention the lessons learned in the process—to work for Anderson University and the students it serves.

My pedagogy is informed and improved by an active research profile on the New Testament and early Christianity, where I have recently published my revised dissertation on the reception of the *Shepherd* of Hermas as well as an article freshly evaluating the canonization of the New Testament late in the fourth century. Beyond these novel contributions to the field, I read widely within biblical studies and engage some scholars further through conversations about their significant new works on podcast episodes for the New Books Network. This work has fostered a series of valuable connections within the guild that did not exist when I was cloistered in heresiological studies or the Apostolic Fathers, but it has simultaneously strengthened and affirmed my research interest in early Christianities left behind on the march to a tenuous catholic unity. I am convicted, for example, that a narrow historical approach using only the canonical New Testament and the usual range of celebrated bishops and theologians does not reflect the historical diversities of class, thought, belief, and practice in the earliest church. To this end, I foresee more work to be done on Hermas and his network of connections and/or rivals in the churches of Rome, work that will broaden my focus from the *Shepherd* alone to *I Clement* and the Book of Hebrews (at a minimum). Meanwhile, I will always maintain interests in scholarship on the historical Jesus and the interpretation of Paul's theology and motivations, among other intriguing New Testament subjects.

The depths of this work will likely remain arcane to most students, and it is for their benefit that the institution exists to prepare them to act in the world as Christ's hands and feet. The Anderson University that I know and remember fondly is a thriving institution, and I believe that it can recover from challenges of enrollment and pandemic alike to excel once again, with exceptional instruction in critical biblical studies a key facet of its revival. First and foremost, I apply with confidence that my background and experiences qualify me to fulfill all expectations as outlined in the university's job description. I participate in the mission to educate students for a life of faith and service in the church and society, and I am a wholehearted advocate for women as leaders in ministry. I recognize the values of service and experiential learning, and I am keen to reintroduce them to my residential classes. I am committed to practicing an ethic of diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in the classroom and in all my academic activities, emphasizing the "warts and all" of religious history and providing students a framework and the exegetical muscle through which to critique all prejudice and discrimination. Secondly, I can visualize several initiatives that may be appealing to the university community, from the creation of a Biblical Studies Club, to offering New Testament research lectures for AU faculty and staff, to transferring my podcast experience with scholars for direct production or sponsorship by the university or the seminary. In short, I earnestly desire to immerse myself as an integral member of a thriving Anderson community.

Over the course of my doctoral preparation and while teaching Religious Studies in the interim, I have developed a genuine affinity for students who enter into our discipline, whether by requirement or by choice, with an open mind. To teach and to represent the university in the process are honors I do not take lightly. I have consoled students during times of great stress, prayed with them during times of great need, and celebrated their greatest joys. Therefore, I thank you considering my candidacy for this excellent opportunity to continue in service to Anderson's student body, and I invite you to view a permanent record of my application materials for this position at <https://robheaton.com/au-appdocs>. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any further needs or inquiries as you contemplate how to fill this position.

All best regards,



Robert D. Heaton