



8-2015

Between Two Worlds

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Recommended Citation

Haan, Emma Marie '19, "Between Two Worlds" (2015). *First-Year Summer Reading Program Essay Contest. 2.*

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Between Two Worlds by Emma Marie Haan

Originally I found myself slightly nervous to begin Kevin Roose's *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University*. I ignored the old adage to never judge a book by its cover (or summary, in my case) and found myself a bit skeptical. I felt it may incorporate my personal beliefs in a way that would alienate me from Roose's writing. In the end, I settled on opening up the book with an attitude of open-mindedness and neutrality that soon I found to be a common thread throughout the novel. I am a Christian. Although I consider myself to be more liberal, my grandparents were graduates of Bob Jones University and my upbringing is considered more conservative. As a kid, I found myself at Bible school and Christian camps. I can recite Bible verses, stories, and sing Christian rock music like any good Christian kid. I also love to watch *Game of Thrones* and listen to rap music. My favorite song is "Hotel California," by The Eagles. Slightly ironic, right? As a young teen, I made my faith my own, and set out to reconcile my desire to maintain ties to my secular life while adhering to my religious convictions. I did not want to let go parts of my personality as I strengthened my faith. Similarly to Roose, I encountered animosity towards my secular beliefs at my youth group. I struggled to bridge the divide between the two worlds in which I was living.

Little did I know at the time, reading Roose's novel would challenge me to accomplish this task. Although Roose's transition to life at Liberty University was not perfectly seamless, by the end of the novel he approached the religious and cultural divide with a unique attitude. As I embark on my college journey, I desire to embrace Roose's newfound knowledge. College is traditionally viewed as a chance to reinvent one's self. I plan to work hard to dissolve the duality found in my faith and culture. I wish to embrace other's traditions and views while holding to my own personal beliefs. I will ask questions and gain an understanding about not just my own

faith and beliefs, but also others'. Roose found commonalities between the two worlds he existed in and learned to appreciate some of the aspects of faith that I believe are the most rewarding. Just as Roose related to his new friends at Liberty and began to participate in worship, I desire to explore and connect with individuals of different cultures and faiths. The narrow lens that many tend to live their life through is truly so much larger. The two prominent aspects of my life are not black and white. Just because ideas are opposing, does not mean they lack valuable similarities and connections.

This book challenged me to think more deeply about lessons that will span much further than my college education. I wish to incorporate these ideas throughout the rest of my life. If Roose's experience reigns true on a broader spectrum, it supports the concept that knowledge tends to breed acceptance. If others genuinely took the time to learn about other institutions and ideas, connecting on a personal level would be infinitely easier. Learning about others gives rise to a greater display of grace and love, just as my faith asks of me. I will incorporate my beliefs, secular ideas, and desire to accept others into my life. Just as Roose put himself in an uncomfortable environment in order to challenge himself personally, I hope to bridge the gap in my own life. I want to challenge how I feel about my personal beliefs. I don't want to feel ashamed of my faith at school, and my liberal ideas at church. I want to feel confident in my beliefs so I can expand them, and respect differing values. Kevin Roose's experience is a wonderful model of the process of embracing people as multidimensional individuals. I believe that my college experience at Illinois Wesleyan will reflect my wish to learn about, and appreciate, other opinions and faiths.