

Keeping the Faith: The Christian Scholar in the Academy in a Postmodern World

[updated 24 August 2017]

Richard J Edlin

The original version of this article was published in Christian Higher Education, vol. 8 #3, 2009, pp. 203-224. The most significant change in this 2017 update is the new strategy – point 7: “Be Committed to a Faithful Pedagogy that Emanates from a Faithful Philosophy.”

Introduction

The issue of how to function effectively and faithfully as a Christian academic in either a secular tertiary institution or in a Christian tertiary setting is one that has exercised the minds of Christians for many decades and it shows no sign of diminishing today. In contemporary scholastic settings, the once universal commitment to scientism and logical positivism that emanated from the Enlightenment has come under serious question in the light of the frailty of the notion of rationality as a complete and progressive platform for reality. This development, associated with the rise of a postmodern hermeneutic, has meant that discussions at universities concerning alternative explanations of reality and paradigm foundations for research and teaching are becoming increasingly more politically acceptable. For example, a recent issue of the *New Scientist* (July, 2008) despite its dedication to the enlightenment project, admitted that “As for science itself, we may need to come up with a definition based upon comparing the evidence for rival theories rather than black-and-white falsification.... We risk never learning that some of the expectations of reason are just, well, unreasonable.” (p. 23).

How does the Christian academic stay true to both his faith and the academic enterprise in this challenging situation? Or, as Marsden (1997a) puts it, “Should a Christian scholar be forced to pose as something else, usually as a liberal humanist, to be accepted in the academy” (p. 15)? I suggest that some of the responses offered by Christian thinkers seem to be problematic. They risk hiding the hope of the gospel from the intellectual life of our culture and also stunting the growth and causing intellectual schizophrenia in the Christians who seek to live by them. On the other hand, there are some very illuminating insights offered by other Christians that resonate strongly with a biblically faithful metanarrative and which provide Christian scholars with a robust scaffold for engaging the academic mind. Rather than attempting to critique these many voices, this paper briefly acknowledges them but then focuses upon one particular set of presuppositions followed by an identification of faithful and fulfilling engagement patterns that it generates.

For the most part, this paper does not discriminate between Christian academics working in a Christian institution as against those working in secular (but still deeply religious) tertiary institutions. Though there are significant differences, the principal issues are similar—and it also seems to this author that many Christian academics, outside of chapel services, function in Christian universities just as if they were working in secular institutions anyway.

A Sampling of Perspectives

The list of references at the end of this paper indicates the significant range of attempts that Christian scholars (many in the last 20 years) have made to provide a faithful context for Christian engagement in academia.

Is it not still the case, as some argue, in most secular universities (at least outside of the philosophy department) that it is the kiss of death to tenure and respectability to publicly claim that something as anti-intellectual as Christianity with its belief in unprovable assumptions and fairy tale supernatural occurrences has any place in serious scholarly endeavour?

According to Charles Mathewes (1999), “It may not primarily be the university’s explicitly ‘liberal’ ideology that imperils Christian scholarship, but rather such mundane matters as the criteria for tenure and promotion” (p. 118).

Or is William Lane Craig (2004) correct when he argues that:

Most Christian scholars today fail to make a meaningful contribution because either they are intimidated by the hostile [secular university] environment or they have uncritically accepted a post-enlightenment liberalism where their faith at best provides only qualitative enrichment to secular ideas while ignoring the contradiction between the two? (p. iv)

If so, then J. Gresham Machen’s (1951) rebuke rings loudly in our ears:

We may preach with all the fervour of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation to be controlled by ideas which...prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. (p. 162)

Rae Mellichamp has long been an ardent champion of the Christian professor in the secular university. For many years a lecturer at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, he has written and spoken widely about how he thinks Christian academics can have an influence in the secular university. According to Mellichamp (2004), “There is no place at all in the [secular] university for Christian thought; and no place in the university’s research enterprise for Christian ideas” (§ 2). His suggestion is that an active weekly meeting of a Christian Faculty/Staff Fellowship is “perhaps the only hope for influencing the university for Christ” (One True Example section, § 7). Mellichamp (2004, One True Example section) speaks from a world of experience, and also documents a wonderful example of Christian witness in action when the local Faculty/Staff fellowship hosted a hospitality room stocked with soft drinks and cookies for delegates attending the National Gay and Lesbian Association’s annual conference that was being held on their public university campus.

As far as interjecting a distinctly Christian voice into the academic arena itself, Mellichamp (1997) is somewhat more ambiguous, believing that most Christian academics “who teach and do research in the university do so in disciplines that are relatively sterile with respect to spiritual content”.

John Cimbala, an award-winning tenured professor at Penn State University, is similarly convinced that the Christian academic has a key role to play in demonstrating a Christian lifestyle and in friendship evangelism/outreach. To a limited degree, Cimbala (2004) also believes that there is a place for Christian scholars to publicly acknowledge their faith commitment before their students, but that any exploration of this should take place primarily in voluntary, extra-curricular activities.

Other Christian scholars maintain that there is no place for a Christian scholarly perspective in the secular university because the agnostic perspective of the modern university is antithetical to Christianity. Darryl Hart (1997) acknowledges the possibility that the idea of a Christian academic in the contemporary secular university could be seen to be oxymoronic. “The very organization, products and purposes of that social structure undermine the community and culture that is crucial to developing and sustaining the Christian mind” (p. 114).

On the other hand, several Christians writing in this area advocate giving the Christian faith a more extensive and intrusive place in their scholarly activities. Catholic theologian and scholar Richard John Neuhaus (1996) reminds his readers that “A secular university is not a university pure and simple; it is a secular university. Secular is not a synonym for neutral. Not to say that Jesus is Lord is not to say nothing” (p. 1). On that basis, every subject—and in particular the philosophical and presuppositional foundations of every subject—emanate from a set of religious convictions which need to be exposed and critiqued as a necessary component of the university’s ultimate task of discovering truth (or some approximation thereof) and its implications for life.

Yet another important aspect of this issue pertains to the tertiary institutions that overtly declare themselves to be Christian. These are not limited to purely theological seminaries, and they exist for different historical reasons—though some have lost any significant Christian distinctive. There are many liberal arts colleges and other institutions of higher learning around the globe that seek to be overt expressions of a Christian worldview. According to Holmes (2003), Wesleyan varieties stress inner holiness; Mennonite colleges stress peaceable service; and Reformed institutions stress all-of-life embracing cultural engagement and shalom. What does it mean to be a Christian scholar in these halls of learning?

Confronting the Complexity: A Missiological View of Christ and Culture

Goheen and Bartholemew (2008) echo Wright and Wolters by advocating the concept of narrative as a means of describing reality. For western cultures, they identify the prevailing narrative as the Western story that is shaped by neohellenism and principles of individual autonomy, epistemological dualism, material prosperity, scientism and globalised, economic rationalism. Running across that story is the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, the church and fulfilment, with Jesus Christ and his kingdom purposes being central at every step along the road. Contemporary Christians find themselves at the intersection of these two incompatible stories. At this missiological crossroads, Christians must choose which story has priority—which one gives way to the other in terms of shaping one’s view of reality and life’s purpose. The decision that one makes will shape how the Christian lives in his or her own culture. Goheen and Bartholemew describe it as a crossroads.



Figure adapted from Goheen and Bartholomew (2008, p.8)

If the Goheen and Bartholomew image is considered alongside Richard Niebuhr's (1951) famous Christ and Culture typology, we may begin to get a coherent picture of why Christians take so many differing approaches to the issue of the Christian scholar in the 21st century academy¹. Few contemporary Christian academics are unfamiliar with Niebuhr's work which describes different ways that Christians deal with living at the crossroads—all of which, for Niebuhr, included elements of a faithful response to modern life. Each paradigm could also be used to encapsulate a cluster of responses taken by Christian academics to their scholarly lives. Each could be identified with different theological traditions. Let us consider just three of Niebuhr's five categories.

His "Christ against culture" pattern insists on complete disengagement wherein the Christian rejects every claim of allegiance that paganism seeks to make. A Christian has no place in secular institutions with the withdrawal and establishment of Christian institutions being the only alternative. The perspective referred to by Hart (1997) would fall into this category.

Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture in paradox" position enshrines dualism. The ontological division here is between private, sacred, faith-based perspectives on the one hand and public, scientifically valid and verifiable truths on the other. In this paradigm, the Christian academic should be active in soul saving and evangelism, but his faith has little relevance to the value-free [or spiritually contentless as Mellichamp (1997) calls it] intellectual enquiry that is the task of the university proper.

The last of Niebuhr's five categories is "Christ transforming culture". From this perspective, there is no neutrality. All of life is lived (i.e., culture is formed) under the direction of some collection of beliefs or other, and it is the responsibility of all Christians, including Christian scholars, to shape their vocational activities so that the resulting cultural patterns are consistent with this crossroads narrative. Scholars and thinkers such as Kuyper, Plantinga and Wolterstorff are typical of this paradigm, and institutions such as Calvin College and Dordt College are often quoted as examples. Though separate and distinct in their structures, institutions advocating this position exist not to remove students from the world but so as to equip them to engage the culture in all its areas as God's agents of shalom.

Intellectual Schizophrenia

There is another context in which the wide range of perspectives of Christian scholars on the Christian in the academy can be viewed. This has to do with post-Enlightenment and idolatrous prevailing cultural assumptions which have deeply infiltrated the church and which have provided erroneous signposts for contemporary Christians in all walks of life—including

the university. Although Plantinga (1984) may be right when he asserts that in philosophical circles verificationism has retreated into obscurity and is on the wane in some other quarters, in one guise or another logical positivism or modernity, as a legacy of the Enlightenment project's enthronement of reason as the only credible measure of truth, continues to deeply impact western Christianity. The view of the world nurtured within many Christian churches today is that the gospel of Christ and the work of the kingdom have to only do with personal salvation, moral uprightness, and a pious patience as we await death and our translation into a perfect eternity with Christ. Engagement with the culture is either as an especially called church worker, minister or missionary who carry our personal evangelism, or as laypeople who pray for these especially consecrated believers and who put money into the church offering week by week to support their full-time ministries.

It's widely assumed and believed in the Christian circles within which many scholars have grown up and in which they worship today, that the Christian faith is a personal, belief-based position that is divorced from the intellectual rigour and values-free investigation of daily life and vocation. For its part, western secular culture tolerates—even supports—religion as long as it remains in its private realm. It is assumed that religion should not seek to give direction to commerce or political structures or international relations—or scholastic investigation which it is claimed can only really be directed and measured in terms of an objective scientific paradigm.

Whilst such a dichotomy might be incomprehensible in many nonwestern cultures, it is a part of mother's milk in the west, and it has pernicious consequences. Lesslie Newbigin (1986) puts it this way:

Having been badly battered in its encounter with modern science, Christianity in its Protestant form has largely accepted relegation to the private sector, where it can influence the choice of values by those who take this option. *By doing so, it has secured for itself a continuing place, at the cost of surrendering the crucial field* [italics added]. In this way, the church can grow in its private sphere, and we can have government leaders defend religion in general, but at the cost of marginalisation. (p. 19)

Commitment to this perspective causes intellectual schizophrenia among Christian academics. On the one hand, their nurture and encouragement within the life of many churches has inbred a presuppositional commitment to dualism with its consequential belief that faithful Christian living for the Christian scholar is unconcerned with scholarly exploration outside of theology and perhaps philosophy. As Marsden (1997b) claims, until recently this view has been reinforced by supposedly objective educational institutions themselves: "The rule evolved that to be part of the mainstream academic profession one had to lay one's religious faith aside" (p. 28), whereas the reality is that Christian scholars often have been unwittingly coerced into adhering to a fundamentalist and fallacious ideology of objective scientism.

On the other hand however, these same Christians fervently echo Paul's earnest desire to bring their entire thinking processes into subjection to Jesus Christ (2 Cor 10:5) and to not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:2). It is likely that it has been the desperate attempt by Christian thinkers to reconcile these two antithetical but deeply held positions that has contributed to the explosion of sincere but at

times misguided thinking and writing on this subject by Christians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The suggestion of this paper, not new but often unheeded, is that the pathway to faithful Christian scholarly endeavour lies not in an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, but in a rediscovery of alternative foundational principals that emanate from a dynamic, biblical worldview and which celebrate the Lordship of Christ over all of life and therefore give empowerment and direction for Christian cultural engagement in all of life. Gloriously, in the twilight of modernity and the age of postmodernity, this perspective and its exemplars as outlined below may have a greater potential to impact the academy today than in any time since the nineteenth century. "Christians can more fully participate in contemporary academic life than they could ten or twenty years ago" (Mathewes, 1999, p. 118). It is to this creative possibility that we now turn our attention.

Two Foundational Principles for Scholarly Engagement by Christian Academics

1. No Neutrality

There are many aspects of a postmodern epistemology that are at odds with a Christian worldview. Fundamentally, for example, Christians believe that truth exists and is found most profoundly in Jesus Christ, whereas postmodernists repudiate any concept of an overarching metanarrative of any sort (which, in itself, is a contradiction in terms). Nevertheless, postmodernity in the academy provides an opportunity for Christians to follow in Paul's mould in Athens, as is recorded in Acts 17, by engaging the secular culture at points of agreement as an onramp to sharing a Christian perspective. And Paul's onramp solicitation is available to Christian scholars today as well. His entree point was the mutually accepted proposition that the Athenians were very religious. In postmodern terms, we could rephrase this statement by observing that, in the academy, there is no such thing as neutrality. This is the new orthodoxy and it cannot be overemphasised both as a context for academic intercourse and also as a platform for demanding that scholarship based upon a Christian worldview be recognised. A few examples of the recognition of non-neutrality from my own field of education may serve as examples:

- Secular scholar, Dinan-Thompson (2005), asserts that:

Curriculum...can never be neutral. Curriculum and curriculum change involves power struggles in, through and about curriculum interactions. As Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) define it, curriculum '...is intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological and international' (p. 145).

- Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1996), not known exactly as a friend of Christianity but many of whose insights indicate latent cobelligerency, in remarkably ecclesiastical language, acknowledged that "The teacher is the vicar of the culture at large" (p. 84).
- George Counts (1952), American educator and social reconstructionist, was ahead of his time when he claimed,

Inevitably, education conveys to the young responses to the most profound questions of life—questions of truth and falsehood, of beauty and ugliness, of good and evil. These affirmations may be expressed in what an education fails to do as well as in what it does, in what it rejects as well as in what it adopts.... Education may serve any cause...it may serve tyranny as well as freedom, ignorance as well as enlightenment, falsehood as well as truth, war as well as peace, death as well as life. It may lead men and women [children] to think they are free even as it rivets upon them the chains of bondage. (p. 3)

- Noted curriculum scholar Philip Jackson (1996) argues that even our definitions are not neutral but represent a part of our argument.

"So what?" one might ask. In response, we can identify at least two significant implications of this widespread acceptance of no neutrality.

First, if all scholastic thought and investigation is not neutral but is based upon subsurface beliefs and faith commitments, then scholastic enquiry from a Christian worldview perspective is as legitimate in university faculties as is scientific or any other enquiry which

are based upon their own belief assumptions. In fact, in true postmodern style, it should be inappropriate to reject a Christian academic articulation of ideas because this would restrict the opportunity of students to be exposed to all points of view—a core mantra of contemporary secular humanist enquiry. Stephen Evans (2004) reflects:

This new situation is favourable to a Christian presence in the academy. It makes it possible for engaged Christian scholars, as well as Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist scholars, to claim a seat at the academic table and seek to be part of a pluralist conversation without having to shed their religious identity. (p. 44)

No longer, for example, can a professor of history teach about the English Civil War as if religion (Puritanism, etc.) was irrelevant on the basis of the professor's claim that he is being objective. He should be compelled to acknowledge that his antipathy for Christianity and his attraction to working class politics was driving him to view history from a socialist perspective as per E. P. Thompson's (1963) *The making of the English working class*.

Second, this widespread recognition of no neutrality makes it possible for the Christian academic to encourage all scholars to reveal their faith commitments—not just to traditional religions, but to the equally powerful faith positions of economic rationalism or logical positivism as well. For, as Al Wolters (2007) reminds us, “All scholarly disciplines are shaped to a significant extent by foundational assumptions, and...those assumptions at bottom involve religious choices” (p. 60). Academic integrity therefore, demands that faith presuppositions, or what Marsden (1997) calls background beliefs, or what Wolterstorff (2004) calls control beliefs, be identified as influences that shape scholarly activity. In a postmodern world, it also is appropriate to provide students with the opportunity to examine and dissent from those beliefs if they conflict with their own belief paradigms.

It may well be argued that although the above position is logically consistent, the reality in many scholarly settings is that Christianity is still a poor cousin and is viewed as an intellectually barren paradigm. To a degree, we Christians only have ourselves to blame for this. Our inadvertent but potent denial of our faith in the academy has helped to reinforce its irrelevance. What this generation needs are Christian scholars who are adept at their craft—who like Paul in Athens, understand the contemporary philosophical forces, who discern appropriate onramps into contemporary intellectual discourse, who are unafraid to articulate their own faith assumptions, and who therefore can allow the academic enterprise to benefit from the formative and hope-filled perspective of a Christian worldview.

2. The Gospel at the Centre Provides Integrality and Purpose

We agree with Neuhaus (1996) that, for the Christian academic, the word “Christian” is not a peripheral notion or a limiting label but is the starting point, the end point, and the guiding principle all along the way. If philosophical neutrality is the fraud that this paper claims it to be, then Christians will want no part of it. “Gaining the secularist's approval is not possible,” claims Claerbaut (2004), “because at their cores, Christianity and secularism are incompatible” (p. 83). Instead, a biblically authentic approach to knowledge and the search for truth will be foundational for the Christian scholar.

One implication of this is that the Christian academic is capable of going beyond the mere exploration of technique that passes for scholarship in many universities today. “Academics face pressures toward specialization that obscure our vision of the academy as a whole and thereby facilitate disintegration.... Christian commitments can help resist the

compartmentalization of academic research” (Mathewes, 1999, p. 119). Robbed of a foundation for evaluating prime causes, it has been observed that much research enquiry at key universities in New South Wales for example, avoids questions of origin, and purpose. The profound question of “Why” often has been replaced by the more technical and superficial question of “How”. Christian scholars can return causal issues to academic investigation because they function from a worldview that goes beyond utilitarianism and sees integrality, purpose, and meaning in the disciplines of history, physics, business studies, psychology, and health sciences.

A Christian [scholar] will settle for nothing less than a comprehensive account of reality. Not content with the what of things, [he/she] wrestles with the why of things; not content with knowing how, [he/she] asks what for...the Christian [scholar] cannot evade the hard questions about what it all means. (Neuhaus, 1996, p. 3)

Towards an Alternative, Biblically Faithful, Intellectual Scaffolding

Perhaps one reason why Christians are uncomfortable with engagement in the intellectual arena has to do with our perplexity about an appropriate philosophical framework upon which to hang our ideas and scholarship. If it's true that modernity and postmodernity have both been exposed as inept foundations for belief and thought, then what alternative paradigm or scaffold is there that is true to Scripture and which provides a faithful platform for scholarship and academic engagement? Two possible frames of reference come to mind that could be profitably explored. On the one hand, they provide the potential for dynamic and rigorous Christian intellectual endeavour. On the other hand, thanks to the blessing of common grace, sufficient elements of these frameworks exist in secular academia to provide for sustained scholastic engagement with colleagues from differing faith perspectives. This paper can do no more than introduce these concepts as an appetizer for further exploration.

The first alternative is the ancient skill of rhetoric. Watts (2007) demonstrates that even Aristotle, an undoubted parent of modern science, paralleled analytical enquiry with rhetoric as an equally plausible means for explaining aspects of reality. Watts is excited by the possibilities of this alternative paradigm, particularly as it enables scholars to explore narrative as a means of understanding reality. This gives knowledge a unifying, cultural context without which it has little relevance. It also opens the door for Christian scholars to weave the Christian metanarrative through their studies rather than adopting the alternative attitude of pre-emptive capitulation that is practised by Christians who are defeated before they start when they accept the falsehood that Christianity and scholarship are at opposite ends of the intellectual spectrum.

The second possible scaffold that Christian academics could do well to explore is that of reformed critical realism. Critical realism, in the secular faith community, has been welcomed by many scholars as a last-minute saviour from western intellectual disintegration: “Critical realism rescues us from the postmodern nightmare and restores us to reality. We cannot manage without a concept of truth. There is (as most of us thought all along) a pre-existing external reality about which it is the job of science to tell us” (Caldwell, 2003, p. 3).

Secular critical realism, articulated by Marxist scholars such as Roy Bhaskar, contends that truth exists, but that our capacity to understand and represent it is shaped by our cultural context. Several contemporary Christian writers such as Don Carson, N. T. Wright and Brian Walsh espouse a form of critical realism in their writing. The attraction, of course, is this philosophy's acknowledgement that truth and reality do exist. This, plus the fact that the

characteristic of epistemic humility that accompanies this worldview also fits well with Scripture's notion of fallen humanity and Paul's contention that we see but through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12), makes critical realism a potent epistemological possibility.

Though it is a useful point of convergence and dialogue between Christianity and some other faith positions, critical realism of itself is still not a biblically faithful paradigm. According to Edlin (2006), it was Dirk Vollenhoven who pointed to the authority of the Bible and the gospel as the vital interpretive framework upon which a Christian, or re-formed, understanding of critical realism can blossom and become a sustainable platform for the Christian scholar.

Reformed critical realism celebrates the empowerment of Christians to revel in the authority of the Scriptures in a way that is liberated from the bondage of...idolatrous positivism...on the one hand, and the individualistic uncertainty of postmodernism on the other. (p. 102)

Where to From Here?

Readers will recognise that, using Niebuhr's typology, this paper affirms the "Christ Transforming Culture" paradigm as being a desirable philosophical stance for the Christian academic either in a Christian or in a secular faith-based setting. Before concluding, it might be worthwhile to identify some characteristics of what faithful Christian scholarship might look like in the life of the academy.

1. Know God

This is our starting point. Through Christ and through his Word, God has made himself known. Fundamental to living as a Christian scholar is a personal, pious, and living faith that is nurtured by fellowshiping with God's people, by studying God's word, and by humble prayer. Without this, and the guidance of God's Holy Spirit who is the inheritance of every believer, the wisdom, discernment, courage and fortitude that are necessary to be a faithful Christian scholar will not be found.

2. Highlight No Neutrality.

As Christian scholars claim, and as contemporary scholarship agrees, there is no neutrality. Every thought and scholarly endeavour presupposes certain beliefs about life, truth, and the academic task. Christians therefore should refuse to be embarrassed about the faith foundations of their scholarship as all scholarship is similarly founded. Rather, despite any hostility, we should champion the link between faith and learning, expose the fallacy of neutrality, and assert the universality of Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* or Plantinga's (1984) inconsolable secret which is that all humanity is seeking after God. To quote Plantinga (1984) again, "The Christian philosopher is within his right in holding these positions, whether [or not] he can convince the rest of the philosophical world" (p. 269). This also provides the platform for encouraging all colleagues to be open about how their own faith commitments shape their scholarship. This is consistent with the "civil public square" position that is championed in the *Evangelical Manifesto* that was released in 2008 and which has received (but not unqualified) significant support from inside and outside of the Christian community.

3. Resist Compartmentalisation

Academic specialities provide scholars with a context within which to explore a detailed analysis of particular areas. For the Christian, this has enduring value and is a faithful

pursuit only if it illuminates what it means to live honourably before God as stewards of His creation. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the claims of the gospel are just as important for the pagans as believers. Therefore, seeking the welfare of the city in which we live involves relating Christian scholarship to cultural formation. Research for its own sake becomes an idolatrous enterprise.

4. Understand the Philosophical Foundations of Your Specialty

All knowledge is based upon faith convictions. A person believes and therefore they know – not the other way around. Therefore, to be able to speak into contemporary academia and also to be faithful to a Christian worldview, Christian academics must understand what lies at the core of their disciplines. Says Craig (2004):

You really do need to read something on the philosophy of your field....
As Christian academics we cannot afford to be unreflective and simply absorb uncritically the common presuppositions of our discipline, for these may be antithetical to a Christian *Weltanschauung*. Nor should we allow ourselves to be cowed by the prevailing views in our field or afraid to march to the beat of a different drummer. (pp. 23-25)

More recently, Kitching (2008) has been vocal in his criticism of postmodernity in the academy, laying the blame for the ease with which postmodern thought has infiltrated universities at the lack of an awareness by students and scholars alike of the nature and impact of philosophical foundations upon the epistemological assumptions and products of the teaching and learning industry.

5. Grasp the opportunities.

These will be different in Christian institutions than they will be in secular ones. But when even the *New Scientist* (23 July 2008) uncritically publishes an article whose headline is “Reason is just another faith”, the door is wide open for Christians to contend for biblically faithful contours within their disciplines. Sometimes this can be done in language that declares an overt Christian foundation. At other times, as with Paul in Athens or in Notman’s (2008) more recent article on educational leadership, we can use commonalities as an onramp into public discourse without ever using “god” language. This is one example of true missiological scholarship.

Grasping the opportunities includes personal witness and the careful selection of research topics outlined by Bradley (2007). However, it goes beyond that. Since no area of reality is excluded from the Lordship of Christ, Christians as a scholarly community should equip themselves with the capacity to understand and engage with secular colleagues in the pursuit of truth in every specialisation.

6. Don’t be Trapped by Pagan Paradigms

If the Christian gospel is true, then it will emanate from, and generate, worldview positions and actions that are the very best for life—both now and for eternity. Rather than spending our time either denying or defending Christianity in the academy, we are called to be proactive, faithful stewards of our minds. With epistemic humility, we should attempt to construct and share holistically purposeful scholarship that honours God and reflects his creation order. Rhetoric or reformed critical realism might offer useful starting points for such an endeavour. Using Wolterstorff’s (2002, 2004) language these paradigms may well

provide Christians with the context in which to be God's agents of shalom in fractured and often disillusioned intellectual communities.

Avoiding inappropriate paradigms should not just be reactive, but proactive as well, and can be a process in which we find support from across the ideological spectrum. For example, Christians should be in the forefront of seeking just enrolment patterns that enable students from socially or financially deprived settings to study at the tertiary level. Also, we should be amongst the vanguard of those who seek to protest about the educational iniquity where first and second year undergraduate students are crammed into large impersonal classes where genuine teaching is almost impossible, being sacrificed for the higher good of sustaining more intimate student/teacher settings at the postgraduate level.

7. Be Committed to a Faithful Pedagogy that Emanates from a Faithful Philosophy

Wittingly or unwittingly, every lecture hall activity or online teaching strategy emanates from a set of beliefs about the purpose of education as well as about the ideal graduating student. But our interrogation and review of education from a Christian perspective must go beyond the "Why" of what we teach and the "What" of what we teach. Our belief assumptions must also shape the "How" of what we teach. It is important that our pedagogies are aligned with our philosophy, mediated by an understanding of our students and the cultural milieu in which they live.

"Higher education can no longer be owned by a community of disciplinary connoisseurs who transmit knowledge to students." (Henard and Roseveare, 2012, p.9) If it ever was appropriate, using only the method of the "sage upon the stage" – otherwise known as direct instruction or the didactic approach – does not work as a sole teaching strategy today. It fails to make full use of the teaching opportunities available to the effective teacher. Contemporary realities of readily available online lectures and reference materials, allied with the proliferation of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) mean that if a professor views himself primarily as the purveyor of information, he is fast becoming a superfluous encumbrance for the modern learner. The rituals and lifestyle expectations of current young students also mitigate against the acceptance of fossilised pedagogies.

What we need is creative or quality teaching, defined across the literature as a multidimensional suite of approaches that includes a variety of learning contexts; soliciting and using student feedback; informed and responsive institutional structures and employment priorities; both formative and summative evaluation; makes strategic use of ICT technologies and capacities; provides significant student support services; and employs reflective practitioners who are knowledgeable, passionate and relational. (Henard and Roseveare, 2012; Sharrock, 2014).

In 2014, the European Commission received a report (McAleese, M. 2014), building on the Bologna Reforms. The report recommended that, "All staff teaching in higher education institutions should receive training in relevant digital technologies and pedagogies as part of initial training and continuous professional development." (p.31) Despite good intentions, in most countries around the world, quality teaching rarely flourishes where academics have not been given the time and training to implement quality strategies. In a survey of over five thousand academics across twenty universities, Bexley, James, and Arkoudis found that, "37.3 per cent of academics have never undertaken training in university teaching, and 72.1 per cent indicate that training is not mandatory in their

institution.” (2011, p. 25) So great is the problem, that some institutions have established entire divisions that focus on explaining and enhancing quality teaching in higher education institutions. In my own city of Sydney, Australia, the University of New South Wales (Lee & Scoufis, 2014) is one example. The university provides a very useful and annotated list of sixteen parameters that must be addressed for quality teaching to flourish, and it mentors academics in these parameters.

In the light of this paradigm shift concerning pedagogical approaches that seems to be occurring among some in higher education, we need to ask ourselves what this means for academics who are committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over everything including how they operate on the Christian and secular college campus. David Smith and his team at the Kuyers Institute (Smith & Smith, 2011; Smith & Felch, 2016), and other Christian educators (Edlin, 2014, 2017) are unequivocal: we need to be much more deliberate and imaginative in connecting our philosophy to our pedagogy. They are right. Our educational philosophy points us towards a more creative and student-responsive pedagogy than just direct instruction alone. But it is sad to learn, as research among 2309 Christian academics across 79 Christian colleges has shown, that a significant majority of Christian professors appear to believe that their theological worldviews have no influence upon their pedagogies (Alleman, Glanzer, & Guthrie, 2016, p.108).

Though the biblical metanarrative rightly focuses upon Jesus as the messiah, nevertheless, as both perfect God and perfect human being, we see Jesus utilising many of the constructive pedagogies that we read about in the educational literature today. For example, we see cognitive dissonance or disequilibrium in his interaction with Nicodemus (“You must be ‘born again’”). We see him using a variety of instructional settings – think of the sermon on the mount or the Lord’s supper. In his use of parables, we see him using imagination and story-telling. Yes, he uses direct instruction as when his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray and he taught them the Lord’s Prayer, but his repertoire also included groupwork, modelling, cultural sensitivity, humility, discovery learning, and the Socratic method of questioning. Jesus was an imaginative and reflective teacher, and we should follow his example!

8. Restore Radicalism and Vision to the University

For those of us who are baby boomers, the student days that we remember are very different from those of the contemporary undergraduate. In our time, “going to ‘varsity’” was a total experience of which academic study was just one component. Either on our own campuses, or on those of other national universities or universities overseas, students expected to engage in big debates, to think about broader issues, and even to protest and be involved in the big “causes” of our day such as the Vietnam war or Springbok rugby tours. Though a few similar issues such as global warming energise some students today, for many, the university experience has become little more than the utilitarian provider a specialised set of information in preparation for employment.

Economic rationalism may be partly responsible for this lamentable development but perhaps an even deeper reason may be that, in the postmodern world, big picture causes rarely exist. What is the point of engaging in discourse about big events or protesting in favour of a cause when there is only individual opinion? There are no causes. Postmodern education has taught that there is only the mundane, that transcendence is a myth, and that commitment to an ideology is philosophically absurd. Consider music. Where is the

folk musical genre about overcoming, putting an end to war, giving peace a chance, and hammering out freedom that was such a powerful cultural force in the mid twentieth century?

But perhaps the light is dawning. Clive Hamilton (2008) claims in his book *The freedom Paradox: Towards a post-secular ethics*, that whereas even existence in a postmodern world is little more than an absurdity, an emergent 21st century post-secular ethics is beginning to allow for the rediscovery of the grand story of humanity. In this context, Christian scholars have the delightful task of joining with Hamilton in dispelling the cynicism of postmodernity. We should be in the intellectual vanguard heralding the case for a gospel metanarrative and the re-emergence of radical, “larger than me” causes that give life meaning and purpose. I recall that among our babyboomer peers, three young women a few decades ago in their ‘varsity years had a grand, radical vision for life and determined to equip themselves and grasp the opportunities that would bring that vision about. Though we may not agree with their radical socialist viewpoint, we can but admire their resolve and accomplishment so that today, those now not-so-young ladies hold some of the most senior offices in New Zealand—Prime Minister, Supreme Court Judge, and Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Of all people, Christians believe in the most profound metanarrative of all, which is not only the best explanation of reality but which also gives the best vision for life now and in the future. Christian academics need to be in the forefront in restoring this vision-based radicalism to the university. As Hamilton (2006), an unbeliever, has commented elsewhere:

The churches have attended to and represented the deeper aspects of life, those that transcend individualism, materialism and selfishness that so characterise modern affluent societies. It is in this transcendent concern that I believe we can find the roots of a new progressive politics – not in the institutions of the churches themselves but by [Christian academics] rediscovering those aspects of life that, at their best, the churches articulate and cultivate. (p. 1)

9. Work Hard at Christian Scholarship

We are not the first group of Christian scholars to be concerned about Christian scholarship. We should use the opportunities (and avoid the pitfalls) of postmodernity to explore our own disciplines, share our insights, and learn from the insights of fellow believers. Plantinga (1984) provides examples of what biblically faithful scholarship might look like in anthropology, ethics, and mathematics. After providing some helpful signposts, Goheen (2004, 2008) does the same for science, business, politics, education, sports, and the arts. Eisenbarth and van Treuren (2004) point the way in engineering. Gould (2007) provides direction with his concepts of “explicit” and “latent” across all disciplines, while Sinnema (2008) provides important insight into what not to do in Christian scholarship. Become familiar with these examples, and others, especially within your own field of enquiry. Contribute to these insights yourself. Though we may not agree with other of Mellichamp’s comments, he is quite right when he urges Christians on university campuses to form strategic interdisciplinary, supportive communities.

Conclusion

Ultimately, each individual Christian scholar will have to make up his or her own mind about what constitutes faithful living as a Christian scholar in his or her particular setting. In reaching that point however, it is suggested here that conclusions should be tentative whilst certain foundational principles in the nonneutral world of the academy must be clear. There will be opposition, and we will be misunderstood. But at times, when we project an image of the nonexistence of any relationship between our scholarly endeavours and our Christian faith, then we are our own worst enemies at perpetuating the myth that Christianity is an anti-intellectual wasteland. As Christians, we believe that this world is God's world and that all truth is God's truth. Therefore we have a sacred trust, a godly obligation, and a liberating context, in which to explore scholarship from a biblically faithful perspective that honours our Creator and seeks the welfare of the time and space in which God has placed us.

Perhaps the last word is best left to Dr Mike Goheen (2008), writing in a western cultural setting:

Faithful Christian scholarship will be characterized by both an acknowledgement of the insights of the Western cultural tradition of scholarship, and a critique of the ideological settings in which those insights are embedded... Scholarship, like all other aspects of human life, is on the field of battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Both powers vie to shape and direct scholarship for their own ends. This is a vital place for Christians to be involved in culture" (pp. 164-165).

References and Suggested Reading

- Alleman, N., Glanzer, P., & Guthrie, D. (2016). The integration of Christian Theological Traditions into the classroom: A survey of CCCU faculty. *Christian Scholar's Review*, XLV(2), 2016, 103–124.
- Balmires, H. (1997). *Christian mind: How should a Christian think?* Folkestone, Kent, UK: Vine Books.
- Bexley, E., James, R., & Arkoudis, S. (2011). *The Australian academic profession in transition – Addressing the challenge of reconceptualising academic work and regenerating the academic workforce*. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
- Bradley, W. L. (2007). On being a Christian professor in the secular academy. In W. L. Lane & P. M. Gould (Eds), *The two tasks of the Christian scholar* (pp. 109–126). Wheaton IL: Crossway Books
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Caldwell, R. (2003). How to get real. *Philosophy Now*, 42, 106.
- Carson, D. A. (2008). *Christ and culture revisited*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Cimbala, J. M. (2004). A "closet Christian" steps out: A Christian professor explains how he was motivated to begin sharing his faith with students and colleagues. Retrieved 8 July, 2008 from <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9601/cimbala.html>
- Claerbaut, D. (2004). *Faith and learning on the edge: A bold new look at religion in higher education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan
- Comenius, J. A. (2008). Retrieved 4 July 2008 from Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comenius>
- Counts, G. (1952). *Education and American civilization*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Craig, W. L. (2004). *On being a Christian academic*. Addison, TX: Lewis & Stanley.
- Dinan-Thompson, M. (2005). (Non)neutrality of curriculum in Queensland. In C. Harris & C Marsh (Eds), *Curriculum developments in Australia: Promising initiatives, impasses and dead-ends* (pp. 145–158). Deakin West, ACT: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Edlin, R. J. (2006). In pursuit of an authentic Christian paradigm: The place of reformed critical realism. In R. J. Edlin & J. Ireland (Eds), *Engaging the culture: Christians at work in education* (pp. 91–108). Blacktown, NSW: National Institute for Christian Education.
- Edlin, R. J. (2014). *The cause of Christian education* (4th ed.). Sioux Center, IO: Dordt College Press.
- Eisenbarth, S. R., & Van Treuren, K. W. (2004). *Christian worldview and the engineering context*. Paper presented at the Christian Engineering Education Conference 2004.
- Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee. (2008). *An evangelical manifesto: A declaration of evangelical identity and public commitment*. Retrieved 30 August from http://www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com/docs/Evangelical_Manifesto_Summary.pdf.

- Goheen, M. (2002). The organism of revelation. In J. van der Meer (Ed.), *Facets of faith and science: Vol. 4, Interpreting God's action in the world* (pp. 313–330). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Goheen, M. (2004). The gospel and the idolatrous power of secular science. In J. Ireland, R. Edlin, & K. Dickens (Eds), *Pointing the way: Directions for Christian education in a new millennium* (pp. 33–54). Blacktown, NSW: National Institute for Christian Education.
- Goheen, M. W., & Bartholomew, C. G. (2008). *Living at the crossroads: An introduction to Christian worldview*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Gould, P. M. (2007). The two tasks introduced: The fully integrated life of the Christian scholar. In W. L. Craig & P. M. Gould, *The two tasks of the Christian scholar* (pp. 17–54). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Greidanus, S. (1982). The use of the Bible in Christian scholarship. *Christian Scholars Review*, 11(2), 138-147.
- Hankins, B. (2007). "I'm just making a point": Francis Schaeffer and the irony of faithful Christian scholarship. *Fides et Historia*, 39(1), 15-34. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com>
- Hart, D. G. (1997). What's so special about the university anyway? In Kuklick, B., & Hart, D. G. (Eds). *Religious advocacy and American history* (pp. 137–158). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Henard, F., & Roseveare, D. (2012). *Fostering quality teaching in higher education: Policies and practices*. Paris, France: OECD IMHE. Available online at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/QT%20policies%20and%20practices.pdf>
- Henry, D. V., & Agee, B. R. (Eds), (2003), *Faithful learning and the Christian scholarly vocation*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Hoekma, D. A. (2003). Keeping the faith in the Christian college, past and present [Review of the books *Building the Christian academy* and *Quality with soul: How six premier colleges and universities keep faith with their religious traditions*]. *Perspectives Journal* (January 2003). Retrieved from <http://www.rca.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=3161&srcid=3467>
- Holmes, A. F. (2003). The closing of the American mind and the opening of the Christian mind: Liberal learning, great texts and the Christian college. In D. V. Henry & B. R. Agee (Eds), *Faithful learning and the Christian scholarly vocation* (pp. 101–122). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Hughes, R. T. (2005). *The vocation of a Christian scholar* (rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
- Jackson, P. (1992). Conceptions of curriculum and curriculum specialists. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 3–40). New York: Macmillan.
- Jeffrey, D. L., & Evans, C. S. (Vol. Eds.), (2007). *The Bible and the university: Vol. 8, Scripture and hermeneutics series*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- Kitching, G. (2008). *The trouble with theory: the educational costs of postmodernism*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Kok, J. H. (2004). *Celebrating the vision: The reformed perspective of Dordt College* Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press.
- Kuklick, B., & Hart, D. G. (Eds), (1997). *Religious advocacy and American history*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Lee, A., & Scoufis, M. (2014). Guidelines for learning that inform teaching at UNSW. Sydney, Australia: UNSW Learning and Teaching Unit. Available online at <https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/guidelines>
- Lennox, J. C. (2007). *God's undertaker: Has science buried God?* Oxford, England: Lion.
- Lopez-Otero, A. (n.d.). Be humble, but daring: A non-Christian professor offers advice and encouragement for Christian faculty. Retrieved 8 July 2008 from <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9702/adolfo.html>
- Machen, J. G. (1951). *What is Christianity?* Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans.
- Marsden, G. M. (1997a). Christian advocacy and the rules of the academic game. In B. Kuklick & D. G. Hart (Eds), *Religious advocacy and American history* (pp. 3-27). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Marsden, G. M. (1997b). *The outrageous idea of Christian scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mathewes, C. T. (1999). The academic life as a Christian vocation. *The Journal of Religion*, 79(1), 110-121.
- McAleese, M. (2014). *New modes of learning and teaching in higher education*. Luxembourg, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Mellichamp, J. M. (1997). Focused research/teaching. In *Ministering in a secular university: A guide for Christian professors and staff*. Retrieved from <http://www.leaderu.com/msu/chapter6.html>.
- Mellichamp, J. M. (2002). The Christian professor in the secular university. Retrieved 25 July 2008, from <http://leaderu.com/cl-institute/xtnprof/secintro.html>
- Mellichamp, J. M. (2004). How to restore Christian thought to the university. Retrieved 8 July 2008 from <http://leaderu.com/real/ri9702/mellichamp.html>
- Moroney, K. K. (1999). How sin affects scholarship: A new model. *Christian Scholar's Review*, 28, 432-451.
- Mouw, R. J. (1996). Tolerance without compromise: Christian engagement in an era of political rancor. *Christianity Today*, 40(8), 33-35.
- Myers, J. ([2004]). U.S. Supreme Court denies review of Bishop: Academic freedom stumbles in wake of 11th Circuit Court ruling. Retrieved July 8, 2008 from <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9203/court1.html>

- Neuhaus, R. J. (1996). The Christian university: Eleven theses. *First Things*, 59, 19-22. Retrieved from http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3799
- Newbigin, L. (1986). *Foolishness to the Greeks: The gospel and western culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Niebuhr, H. R. (1951). *Christ and Culture*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Noll, M. A. (1994). *The scandal of the evangelical mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Notman, R. (2008). Leading from within: A values-based model of principal self-development. *Leading and Managing*, 12(1), 1-15.
- Ogden, S. M. (2001). Academic freedom and Christian scholarship [Review of the book *Academic freedom and Christian scholarship*] *Academe* 87(3), 74-75. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com>
- Plantinga, A. (1984). Advice to Christian philosophers. *Faith and Philosophy*, 1(3), 253-271.
- Poe, H. L. (2004). *Christianity in the academy: Teaching at the intersection of faith and learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Raschke, C. (2004). *The next reformation: Why evangelicals must embrace postmodernity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Rouse, J. (2006). [Review of the book *Christianity in the academy: Teaching at the intersection of faith and learning*]. Retrieved July 3, 2008 from <http://www.amazon.com>
- Runner, E. H. (1982). *The relation of the Bible to learning*. Jordan Station, ON, Canada: Paideia Press.
- Scott, D. H. ([2002]). A vision of veritas: What Christian scholarship can learn from the puritan's "Technology" of integrating truth. Retrieved June 30, 2008 from <http://www.leaderu.com/aip/docs/scott.html>
- Sinnema, D. (2008). How to use the Bible in Christian scholarship. *Contact Academic Insert*, (June 2008). Retrieved from <http://www.iapche.org/insert194.pdf>
- Sloane, A. (2006). *On being a Christian in the academy: Nicholas Wolterstorff and the practice of Christian scholarship*. Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock
- Smith, D. & Smith, J. (2011). *Teaching and Christian practices – Reshaping faith and learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Smith, D., & Felch, S. (2016). *Teaching and Christian imagination*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Thompson, R. (2008). *God is one God: He wants us to live in community: Reflections on Deuteronomy and Ephesians: Vol. 1, Where elephants swim*. Whangaparaoa, NZ: Interact Curriculum Press.
- Watts, R. E. (2007). The restoration of rhetoric: Rethinking the categories of Christian education. Retrieved 25 July 2008 from <http://www.altavistaseattle.org/resources.html>

Webb, S. H. (2001). Academic freedom and Christian scholarship [Review of the book *Academic freedom and Christian scholarship*] *The Christian Century* 118(5) 64. Retrieved 30 June 2008 from ProQuest database.

Wolters, A (2007). No longer queen: The theological disciplines and their sisters. In C. G. Bartholomew & A. C. Thiselton (Series Eds.) & D. L. Jeffrey & C. S. Evans (Vol. Eds.), *The Bible and the university: Vol. 8, Scripture and hermeneutics series* (pp. 59–79). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Wolterstorff, N. (2004). *Educating for shalom: Essays on Christian higher education*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

ⁱ Niebuhr's model is not the only one that has been applied to an understanding of Christian scholarship. Claerbaut uses a paradigm derived from the language of crossculturalism including assimilation, and integration. Poe (2004) has his own schema. Whatever scaffold of understanding one uses, eschatological issues also impact beliefs in this area, because many premillennialists, with a separationist view of passages of scripture such as 2 Peter 3, might more easily adopt a "Christ against culture" perspective than they might a "Christ transforming culture" one.