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An Essay on Academic Disciplines, Faithfulness, and the Christian Scholar¹

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ABSTRACT: In this essay, it will be argued that an academic discipline is best understood as a social practice composed of guiding principles, a guiding methodology, a data set and a collective narrative (with characters, acts and various sub-stories throughout its history). Mission takes place at the point of intersection between the dominant western stories (scientific naturalism and postmodernism) and Christianity. Within the academic discipline, these intersections are at each level: the Christian professor will utilize her own set of guiding principles and methodologies (which might or might not agree with those of the dominant story within the discipline); she will approach the data set of the discipline from her own unique point of cognitive access, which may lead her to ask a different set of questions than those who embrace the dominant story of the discipline would ask; and she will look to her own set of Christian mentors and guides within the discipline (historical and contemporary) for leadership. As a missional professor who always has the progress of the gospel in view, she will seek “missional connections” within her academic discipline so that Christianity will be viewed as plausible and gain a hearing in the secular university and in culture.

Christian scholars inhabit two communities: the community of Christians and the community of scholars. Each community has its own distinctive set of beliefs, practices, and criteria for membership. To avoid incoherence, the Christian scholar rightly asks and seeks to understand the relationship between these two communities. What does faithfulness to Christ mean for the Christian scholar in the academy? Part of the answer has to do with the integration of faith and scholarship. Christian scholars who seek to

¹ This essay is an excerpt from Chapter 8 of *The Outrageous Idea of the Missional Professor*, by Paul Gould (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). The full essay was previously published by *Christian Higher Education* 13.3 (2014): 167–182 and is used by permission from the publisher.

integrate their academic vocation—their teaching, research, and service—with their Christian faith often find few clear models to emulate. This challenge is compounded by the fact that the scholarly life differs greatly across disciplines, increasing the difficulty of prescribing a universal approach to integrating faith and scholarship. In this essay, I engage the topic of integration by exploring the notion of an academic discipline, focusing primarily on the integration of faith and scholarship, and when appropriate, the implications for teaching and service. I discuss (1) an underappreciated motive for faith-scholarship integration, (2) the nature of an academic discipline, (3) the anatomy of an academic discipline, and (4) missional connections within an academic discipline.

The Christian Scholar and Mission of God

A missionary impulse runs throughout Scripture; God is on a mission to redeem and restore all of creation. As Christopher Wright has stated, “God himself has a mission....And as part of that divine mission, God has called into existence a people to participate with God in the accomplishment of that mission. All *our* mission flows from the prior mission of God”² Consequently, the Christian scholar will be guided by this missional impulse in developing a model of faithfulness. Christians are called to partner with God in his mission to redeem humanity and restore shalom to all of creation.

To integrate faith and scholarship, Christian scholars would be wise to pursue research that engages their academic discipline and, at the same time, engages the needs of the world. By taking this approach, scholars can provide the world with a plausible view of the gospel and their research can be directed toward meeting tangible needs, both physical and spiritual. Thus, any model of faithfulness within the university or an academic discipline must consider the missional calling of the Christian scholar. A key question, then, is this: How does the Christian scholar, guided by the missional imperative, faithfully serve Christ within an academic discipline? An answer to that question depends on one’s definition of an academic discipline.

² Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 24.

What is an Academic Discipline?

The language of “transforming the disciplines” is fairly commonplace among Christian scholars.³ Although a worthy goal, it should *not* be the primary aim of the Christian scholar. Rather, *faithfulness* or *authentic Christian commitment* ought to be the primary aim. As a result of this commitment, an academic discipline will be transformed so that it is more open to the things of God. The primary question for Christian scholars then is not “How do we transform our academic discipline?” but rather, “How do we faithfully live for Christ within our academic discipline?” An answer to either question, however, necessitates understanding the definition of an academic discipline.

Views on how an academic discipline can be understood generally correspond to ways that the notion of scholarship itself is understood. One prominent view, perhaps *the* dominant view of scholarship inherited from the western tradition, is that scholarship is the end result of an objective, unbiased cognitive process of discovery. According to this *naïve factualism* perspective, one engages in the scholarly process by leaving behind one’s biases, prejudgments, and values in order to focus only on the facts that are available to be discovered. Another view of scholarship, prominent of late, argues that there are no objective facts to be discovered—there is no ready-made world—hence, scholarship is the imposing of a perspective on ordinary experience. According to this *social constructivist* view, scholars engage in research as embodied human beings with various background beliefs, prejudgments, values, and practices that inform the process and influence the product of the scholarly enterprise. These two views of scholarship also can be applied to the way in which academic disciplines are defined, each with its own merits and shortcomings. Considering each view in some detail may prove helpful in charting an alternative understanding of an academic discipline, a view I call *perspectival factualism*.

Naïve Factualism

Naïve factualism as a view of scholarship finds self-conscious expression in Francis Bacon’s *The New Organon*⁴ and his discussion of the “idols of the mind”—that is, the various biases that prevent humans from being wholly

³ See e.g., D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

⁴ Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, eds. L. Jardine & M. Silverthorne (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

rational agents. Bacon's view is that scholars must eliminate these biases in order to conduct scientific research. From this perspective, an academic discipline is best viewed as a bounded collection of objective facts about a particular subject. For example, the academic discipline of physics is composed of the set of facts about elementary particles and atoms and how they interact; the discipline of biology is comprised of a set of facts about living organisms; the discipline of philosophy is a set of facts about the world and its structure, and so on. The scholar is a separate entity, distinct from the academic discipline. He or she engages in various practices with respect to the sets of facts as an objective dispassionate scholar who studies, critiques, and adds to the set of facts through discovery. From this viewpoint, the integration of faith and scholarship equates to bringing the offset of facts from the academic discipline into conformity with the set of facts that comprise a Christian worldview. Thus, authentic Christian commitment for the Christian scholar is in terms of the cognitive content of one's teaching, research, and writing. Scripture plays a normative role, but only in terms of cognitive content, and usually in terms of foundational principles.

There is much about this view of the academic disciplines that resonates. Each academic discipline has a body of knowledge that is studied, critiqued, and applied to practical problems. Authentic Christian commitment indeed requires that Christian scholars allow their belief-content to inform their theorizing. But naive factualism has its limits. First, it is not clear that the collection of facts that distinguish one academic discipline from another are clearly defined or that various facts necessarily belong to one set instead of another. Recent debates about whether or not intelligent design is considered science or philosophy or religion are illustrative. This debate assumes that there is an essence to science or philosophy or religion when in actuality, from the vantage point of the history of ideas, the set of facts belonging to each group has been fluid. From an historical perspective, many academic disciplines are relatively new. New subdisciplines continue to develop as human knowledge progresses (witness for example, the new field of study *biomimetics* which combines biology and engineering).⁵

⁵ For a helpful discussion on the origin and development of the academic disciplines, see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Disciplines in the Making* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a helpful discussion of the problem of how to define, or demarcate science from non-science, see Larry Laudan, "The demise of the demarcation problem," in M. Ruse, ed., *But is it Science? The Philosophical Question in the Creation/Evolution Controversy* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 337–350.

Naïve factualism omits critical elements that seem intimately connected to the academic discipline—namely, values, character, individual and collective narratives, and sets of practices and beliefs that form the culture of the academic discipline. By treating the academic discipline as a collection of facts and its practitioners as objective dispassionate researchers, many aspects of the academic enterprise and its interplay in accessing and interpreting facts are ignored. Moreover, for the Christian scholar, authentic commitment is more than assent to the correct set of facts. Specifically, the Christian scholar is called by God to be a witness, an agent, and evidence of God’s work of redemption and renewal within the academic discipline.⁶ As Wolterstorff has emphasized, the activities of the Christian scholar must contribute to the cause of “justice-in-shalom.”⁷ Such a contribution suggests a more robust understanding of an academic discipline and an awareness of other fruitful connections between faith and scholarship.

Social Constructivism

The social constructivist view of scholarship finds self-conscious expression in the words of Nietzsche who stated, “There are no facts, only interpretations,”⁸ and more recently, Derrida who, when speaking of propositions, noted “the absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of significations infinitely.”⁹ According to this view of scholarship, an academic discipline is best understood as an ongoing enterprise in which scholars take their place around a set of problems or phenomena to be studied from a particular perspective in which there is no universal truth. Because there is no objective world, the scholar or group of scholars is invited to find meaning and purpose within a particular narrative. From a social constructivist perspective, it is not possible to engage in scholarship without being influenced by one’s background beliefs, judgments, values, and practices that inform and shape the process as well as the end result of the scholarly enterprise. Thus, the academy is a vast constellation of interests

⁶ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2nd ed., 1984).

⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by W. Kaufmann & R. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Random House, 1968), 267.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 280.

contending for power, and an academic discipline is a social practice from a variety of perspectives, none of which are universally valid or binding.

Within this framework, faithfulness to Christ as scholars is understood primarily in terms of right living. The Christian scholar is expected to embody the values and virtues of Christ, such as love, humility, and wisdom; integration occurs as the Christian scholar grows to maturity in Christ and others are brought into and find meaning within the Christian scholarly community. Scripture has no transcendent import to the university or the life of the mind in general, but is a source of meaning, nourishment, and value for the Christian community of which the scholar is a part.

There is much to commend in the social constructivist view. The failure of the Enlightenment project points to the myth of unbiased, wholly objective rationality. The claim that humans are fundamentally embodied and cannot separate value judgments, background beliefs, and cultural norms from the scholarly enterprise also resonates. These observations are important epistemological points. They do not, however, justify the further metaphysical claims that there is no objective reality or ready-made world and that humans cannot know such a world.

Perspectival Factualism

Contra social constructivism, the actual practices of most scholars in the academy suggest there is a ready-made world. Thus, the scholarly task is fundamentally one of discovery, not world-making.¹⁰ *Contra* naïve factualism, the actual practices of most scholars in the academy suggest that learning and discovery are not merely disembodied activities of wholly rational agents.¹¹ Thus, the scholarly task is fundamentally social and perspectival. Perspectival factualism incorporates these insights in what I believe is a more accurate understanding of how an academic discipline is identified and defined. Academic disciplines are indeed factual. But the scholarly enterprise is one approached from a variety of perspectives that each provides unique cognitive access to the phenomenon to be studied or the problem to be solved. As

¹⁰ For a helpful discussion of the issues surrounding the realism/anti-realism debate in science, see the collection of essays in Jarrett Leplin, *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); for a helpful survey of the actual views of practicing scientists, including the religious views of scientists, see Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.)

¹¹ See Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

Wolterstorff has argued, individual narrative identities “enable, rather than obstruct, access to dimensions of reality.”¹² The advantage of this perspective for the Christian scholar is that because scholarship is inherently social and perspectival, it can be argued that various narrative identities, including a distinctly Christian perspective, ought to be welcomed within each academic discipline.

Given perspectival factualism and a missional approach to faith and scholarship integration, I find merit for adopting a transformationist vision (not strategy) as the likely outcome of faithfulness to Christ within the academy. In a fallen world, the idea that any existent academic discipline would or could ever achieve complete compatibility with the theory and ideal practices of the Christian scholar or the Christian community of scholars is absurd. Pluralism in the academy is a reality; hence, the compatibilist vision is not possible.¹³ Yet, a reconstructionist vision is equally unrealistic and even unnecessary. There is much within an academic discipline that the Christian scholar can affirm. The belief that all people are created in the image of God, the doctrine of common grace, and personal experience testify to the fact that non-Christians can and often do find the truth on any particular matter. In addition, there are many assumptions employed within an academic discipline that are not explicitly Christian, yet can be embraced by the Christian scholar. The Christian can provide a unique grounding for these assumptions (e.g., the uniformity of nature or the assumption that rationality is possible), whereas other scholars within an academic discipline might not be able to justify why such assumptions are valid.

Thus, the transformationist vision seems to be a middle view between two extremes. The Christian scholar can affirm that which can be affirmed, confront that which needs to be confronted, and address ideas that are antithetical to Scripture that may be held by others in the discipline. Given perspectival factualism, this transformative vision is not understood merely in terms of the integration of the subject matter of a discipline with the cognitive content of the Christian faith. As I will outline in the next section, an academic discipline is composed of much more, and the “much more” provides many additional points of gospel connection for the Christian scholar.

The Anatomy of an Academic Discipline

An academic discipline is comprised of four components (see Figure 1):

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom*, 239.

¹³ See *ibid.*, 214–215.

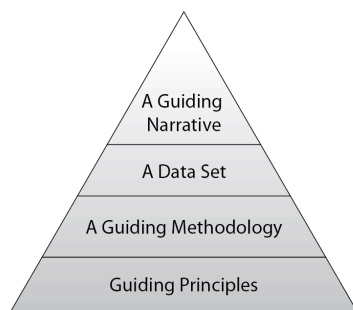


Figure 1: The Anatomy of an Academic Discipline

(1) at the foundation are guiding principles (2) which in turn inform the discipline’s guiding methodology, (3) which informs how scholars approach the data set, (4) and these combined components help give shape to the guiding narrative—the individual and collective narratives of the discipline.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are variously called “control beliefs,”¹⁴ “background beliefs,”¹⁵ (Marsden, 1997), “core values,”¹⁶ “faith presuppositions,”¹⁷ and “feasibility assumptions.”¹⁸ I define a guiding principle as follows:

Guiding principle: a belief held by a scholar that operates as a constraint on theory acceptance and a signpost for theory discovery.

Actual guiding principles within a particular academic discipline include beliefs about the logical or aesthetic structure of a theory, beliefs about the entities that can comprise a theory, beliefs about how the world operates, and so on. According to Wolterstorff,

[Guiding principles] function in two ways. Because we hold them we are led to *reject* certain sorts of theories—some because they are inconsistent with those beliefs; others because, though consistent with our [guiding principles], they do not comport well with those beliefs. On the other

¹⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion; Educating for Shalom*.

¹⁵ George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Harry Poe, *Christianity and the Academy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

¹⁷ Richard Edlin, “Keeping the Faith: The Christian Scholar in the Academy in a Postmodern World,” *Christian Higher Education* 8 (2009): 203–224.

¹⁸ Angus Menuge, “Against Methodological Materialism,” in R. Koons & G. Bealer, eds., *The Waning of Materialism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 375–394.

hand [guiding principles] also lead us to *devise* theories. We want theories that are consistent with our [guiding principles]. Or, to put it more stringently, we want theories that comport as well as possible with those beliefs.¹⁹

I suggest that within each academic discipline, there are various guiding principles that are well accepted within the discipline and form the culture of the discipline.²⁰ When pressed to justify why a belief functions as a guiding principle within an academic discipline, the scholar is often without an answer. It is possible, indeed likely, that some of the guiding principles held by a scholarly community are inconsistent or contradictory. Often for the Christian seeking admittance into the scholarly community, the acceptance of the guiding principles of an academic discipline occurs during their training period as a graduate student and with little reflection on whether or not these beliefs comport with the Christian faith.

An important lesson about the lack of neutrality in the university has emerged from this discussion. Neutrality is a myth. As Wolters has argued, “All scholarly disciplines are shaped to a significant extent by foundational assumptions, and...those assumptions at bottom involve religious choices.”²¹ Thus, every subject emanates from a set of guiding principles that need to be identified and critiqued as a necessary component of discovering the truth.²² This critique of assumptions is what, in fact, allows for the possibility of a foundation to learning in the academy that is both distinctly Christian and viewed as legitimate.

A Guiding Methodology

The methodology a scholar employs is informed by the guiding principles held within the discipline. For example, the materialism that dominates much of contemporary science has led to the postulation of methodological naturalism as the proper approach to true science, wherein science must proceed as if nature is all there is.²³ God’s creative activity can be

¹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 68.

²⁰ See also Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion*.

²¹ Al Wolters, “No Longer Queen: The Theological Disciplines and their Sisters,” in C. G. Bartholomew & A. C. Thiselton (series eds.) & D. L. Jeffrey and C. S. Evans (vol. eds.), *The Bible and the University: Vol. 8. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 60.

²² Edlin, “Keeping the Faith.”

²³ See Menuge, “Against Methodological Materialism.”

invoked in seeking to understand nature, but at that point the scientist has taken off her lab coat and ceased doing science. Part of the motivation for methodological naturalism is the belief that such an approach will allow science to unproblematically proceed free from religious bias or metaphysical dogma. Yet such a view is unrealistic, as there is no such thing as neutrality in methodology, either. Perhaps science in particular, and learning in general, would be better served if scholars wore their religious and metaphysical principles on their sleeves, since they employ them at every level of the scholarly process.

A Data Set

The data set of an academic discipline encompasses the specific domain of knowledge that is studied. In biology, it is living cells. In mathematics, it is numbers and their relations. The data set itself may or may not be explicitly religious or have explicit religious implications. It is important to note that Christian scholars do not arrive at their data set any differently than their non-Christian colleagues. In the same manner as other scholars, scholars who are Christian make observations and reflect on the world around them in accumulating data. However, even when considering a discipline's data set, there is no such thing as neutrality. Consider the debate within philosophy over the nature of causation. What is the *paradigm case*, or perfect example, of causation that is accepted as the data set to be analyzed? Since at least the time of the philosopher David Hume, it has been the white billiard ball impacting other billiard balls. Thus, an analysis of causation will be in terms of how one physical object affects another physical object. But, prior to the modern era, the paradigm case of causation was not the relation between two physical objects, but rather mental or agent causation. Contemporary discussions of causation typically proceed under the assumption that there is only one kind of causation to be analyzed, event causation; the presence of this assumption is due to the fact that even the data set of a discipline is shaped by its guiding principles and methodologies.

A Guiding Narrative

The guiding narrative of a discipline includes the history of the western mindset as well as the specific history of the discipline; it includes the various theories held at various times (historical and contemporary) and individual scholars (historical and contemporary) who develop, analyze, and defend them. For example, in philosophy there are notable scholars such as Thales, Plato,

Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Hume, Locke, Berkeley, Hegel, Husserl, Sartre, Plantinga, Chomsky, Searle and myriads of lesser-known figures. There is Platonism, Aristotelianism, Scholasticism, Empiricism, Rationalism, and many other philosophies. In astronomy, there is the geocentric model of Ptolemy and the heliocentric model of Copernicus; in physics, scholars have argued for absolute Newtonian space and time as well as Einsteinian relativity; in mathematics thinkers such as Pythagorus, Euclid, Cantor, Gödel, Carnap, and Tarski have advocated Logicism, Formalism, Intuitionism, and more. Each academic discipline has a history, a narrative full of intrigue, sub-plot, climax, paradigm shift, honest toil and ill-begotten gain. These individual narratives as well as the collective narrative of the discipline provide many points of contact for a missionary encounter.

Missional Connections within an Academic Discipline

The missional imperative suggests that part of the Christian scholarly task is to seek to make gospel connections within the academic disciplines. The goal is not a conversion of academic disciplines to correspond to a distinctly Christian perspective. Rather, Christian scholars should be principled pluralists in the academy—allowing, even encouraging various perspectives to compete in the market place of ideas for the mantle of truth. Such a posture requires the conviction that, ultimately, truth is found within a Christian view of reality and intellectual humility, as we admit our finitude and fallenness in theory construction and evaluation. Thus far, I have argued that an academic discipline is best understood as a book of facts accessed from a variety of perspectives. I have described the anatomy of an academic discipline in terms of a four-layered triangle (Figure 1). In this final section I will explicate the missional crossroads that can be discerned at all levels of the academic discipline, thus providing a truly holistic account of faith and scholarship integration. By highlighting examples of faithfulness in research, teaching, and service by Christian scholars, I hope to demonstrate the viability and possible applications of the model developed in this essay.

Guiding Principles and the Christian Scholar

There is both a negative and positive aspect to a missional encounter at the foundation of an academic discipline. According to Poe, “the first responsibility of a Christian scholar to his or her discipline is to offer the discipline a critique of its prevailing [guiding principles]”²⁴ A major task of the

²⁴ Poe, *Christianity and the Academy*, 173.

Christian scholar is to uncover the guiding principles that inform his or her academic discipline. There will be much that a Christian scholar can affirm about a particular discipline's guiding principles. However, there will be much that needs confrontation as well, and these provide an opportunity for missional engagement in the classroom, departmental hallways, and in research.

The responsibility of critical engagement with a particular discipline is an important and necessary task of the Christian scholar within the academy. However, although it might be the Christian scholar's first responsibility, it is not the only responsibility. There is also the scholar's contribution to knowledge. This contribution is best understood within the context of a larger kingdom and a more comprehensive framework of reality. This larger context informs the Christian's guiding principles. As Poe has noted: "Faith intersects an academic discipline at the point where it asks its most fundamental questions... Faith intersects where a discipline establishes its core values, upon whatever basis they are founded."²⁵ Wolterstorff asserted a similar view two decades earlier:

The Christian scholar ought to allow the belief-content of his authentic Christian commitment to function as control within his devising and weighing of theories. For he like everyone else ought to seek consistency, wholeness, and integrity in the body of his beliefs and commitments.²⁶

Plantinga, speaking to scientists, likewise argued that "a Christian academic and scientific community ought to pursue science in its own way, *starting from* and taking for granted what we know as Christians."²⁷

What are the guiding principles that a Christian scholar ought to employ? Mark Noll's suggestion is a good place to start: the reality of Jesus Christ is foundational to the "rationale, means, methods, paradigms, and telos"²⁸ of the Christian scholarly enterprise. According to Noll, the creeds about Christ are foundational to Christian scholarship. Christ is the source and telos of all things, including all truths that can be discovered.

²⁵ Ibid., 138.

²⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 76.

²⁷ Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49 (1997), 144.

²⁸ Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 148–49.

I propose to extend Noll's point by suggesting four principles that can serve as guides for the Christian scholar, grounded more broadly in the character and actions of the Triune God, as follows (see Figure 2).

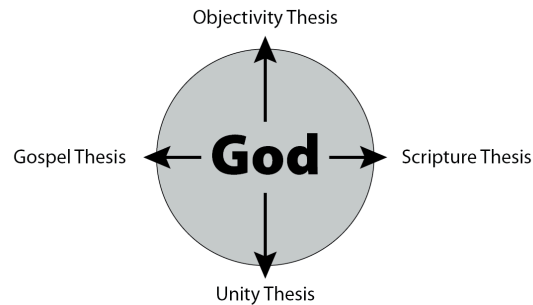


Figure 2: God provides the grounding for each guiding principle

Unity Thesis (UT): all truth is connected and unified.

Objectivity Thesis (OT): there is a mind independent reality that we can discover.

Scripture Thesis (ST): Scripture makes knowledge claims about the nature of God, the world and the self.

Gospel Thesis (GT): Humanity's greatest need is the gospel.

Many in the academy, not only Christians, affirm belief in a mind-independent world and the unity of truth. But it is the reality of God that provides a sufficient grounding for these two theses. As the creator of all reality distinct from Himself, God is the source of both the unity and diversity in nature. Further, as creator, all knowledge points to the divine. There is no area of inquiry that needs to be hermetically sealed off from another. Science and religion, faith and reason do not inherently compete. Since there is a unity to all things known, grounded in the triune creator God, the Christian scholar finds justification for Plantinga's claim that all one knows should be used in trying to understand a given phenomenon.

Regarding the Scripture Thesis, God has revealed Himself to humanity propositionally through Scripture. Hence the Bible is an authoritative source of knowledge that Christians ought to allow to guide research and constrain theory formation. However, Scriptural guidance of research does not entail that Christian scholarship always needs to be explicitly so. As I have noted elsewhere, Christian scholarship also can be purely vocational or implicitly

Christian, meaning that the guiding principles of Christian scholarship are operative but function more as the architecture of thought.²⁹

Finally, the Gospel Thesis also finds its justification in the nature and activity of God. The true story of humankind begins with creation and ends with the new creation. In this fallen world, humanity's greatest need is to find redemption through Christ. Indeed, all of creation "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8:22) to be redeemed and restored. Lovingly, God sent His Son to redeem and restore humankind and the world. God called His followers to participate in this mission to redeem and restore all of creation. This reality, encapsulated in the Gospel Thesis, informs the posture of the scholarly enterprise for the Christian. This thesis helps the Christian scholar to see that scholarship is both an end in itself (that is, the pursuit of knowledge is an intrinsic good in no need of further justification) as well as a means to an end (that is, scholarship justifies itself in terms of meeting the physical and spiritual needs of others). Further, the Gospel Thesis affects the kind of research in which Christian scholars might choose to engage, perhaps pursuing research programs that seem most pressing in terms of the progress of the gospel and ushering in shalom. For example, Walter Bradley's discussion of designing and building bridges in remote locations in Africa and his study of how to use coconuts to produce electricity in Papua New Guinea were both motivated out of a Christian concern to meet the needs of others.³⁰

Guiding Methodologies and the Christian Scholar

Sometimes, a Christian's methodology might be different than a non-Christian's methodology. For example, Christians ought not to be beholden to methodological naturalism when engaging in science, or more generally, scholarship. Sometimes, Christian scholars can and should operate as such as long as they allow the evidence to speak for itself. There is no reason for the Christian scholar to stipulate at the front end of inquiry that "only naturalistic explanations" are allowed. A guiding methodology that is supported by the four principles just elucidated is what Menuge has labeled "methodological realism." Menuge stated, "the antidote [to methodological naturalism] is a return to intellectually honest vulnerability to the truth about reality, whether it supports

²⁹ Paul Gould, "The Two Tasks Introduced: The Fully Integrated Life of the Christian Scholar," in W. L. Craig & P. Gould (eds.), *The Two Tasks of the Christian Scholar: Redeeming the Soul, Redeeming the Mind* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 17–54.

³⁰ Walter Bradley, "A Christian Professor in the Secular Academy," in W. L. Craig & P. Gould (eds.), *The Two Tasks of the Christian Scholar*, 109–126.

our expectations or not, in other words, a return to [methodological realism].”³¹ The idea is that the world is ours to discover and interpret, but not to be dogmatically anticipated.

The Christian scholar, guided by the Scripture Thesis, must wrestle with his or her understanding of God’s interaction in the world. After creating the world, does God intervene in the natural world both redemptively and creatively, or just redemptively? What is the role of secondary causes in a world created by God? The theological doctrines of creation, divine providence, and the place of chance in a world created and sustained by God will inform the Christian scholar’s methodology. What should be obvious is that there is room for disagreement among Christians. Further, no guiding methodology remains above critique. Faithfulness to Christ requires that Christian scholars be students of theology and allow their theology to inform their methodology.³²

Data and the Christian Scholar

Christian scholars approach the data set of a discipline from a distinctively Christian perspective. This perspective gives the Christian scholar a unique cognitive access point to reality. The Christian scholar will see things that others may not see. Guided by the four principles I have outlined, the Christian scholar will find motivation for further investigation, a foundation from which to ask critical questions, and a framework in which to interpret the data.

The conviction that God created the world in such a way that human cognition can apprehend it will fuel further discovery. For example, it is widely documented that, historically, Christianity led to the rise of modern science.³³ Belief in the uniformity of nature, the rationality of humankind, and the comprehensibility of the universe are truths brought *to* the data set of science, not truths deduced *from* the data set. One eminent scientist speaks of the

³¹ Menuge, “Against Methodological Materialism,” 393.

³² Both Alvin Plantinga in *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Gerald Rau in *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012) have offered helpful discussions of various models of God’s interaction in the natural world, including the resultant methodologies for the Christian scholar.

³³ See, for example, Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

“unreasonable efficacy of mathematics in the natural sciences.”³⁴ The Christian scholar will not be surprised that the world is significantly describable in the language of mathematics, for the world is created with order and purpose by a divine mind. As Plantinga has argued, there is deep concord between Christianity and the conclusions of mathematics and science. This deep concord can be expected within all the academic disciplines, given the reality of God as creator. The Christian scholar is pursuing God’s thoughts when engaging the data of the discipline, which can inspire hope, perseverance, and confidence that there is truth to be found.

The Christian scholar may also have a different set of questions and concerns than others, with the result that the Christian scholar may approach the data set differently. Poe has emphasized asking critical questions in exploring the implications of the data for theory construction.³⁵ In asking critical questions, one’s faith commitments play a key role. Examples of critical questions Christian scholars could ask from a faith perspective can easily be supplied: for example, in political science, “What is the role of forgiveness in international relations?”; in English, “What accounts for objective meaning in the text?”; in computer science, “What are the limits of artificial intelligence, given the physicality of computers?” Poe has provided an extended list of critical questions that can be asked within each discipline. Insightful questions from a Christian perspective help to advance understanding of the data set and can push students and colleagues to recognize error in their own ways of thinking.

Finally, a Christian perspective influences one’s interpretation of the data. For example, Niels Bohr became a Hindu and interpreted the data of quantum mechanics from that perspective. According to Bohr, the world only appears to be real, and in actuality, the world is constructed by observers. Alternatively, the Christian may hold that the wave-particle phenomenon is not so surprising in a world created by a Triune God.³⁶ Hence the discoveries and principles of quantum mechanics provide evidence in favor of Christianity. If the Christian scholar believes there is no place for chance in the world, the discoveries of quantum mechanics will be interpreted either deterministically or from an anti-realist view.³⁷ If the Christian scholar believes there is a place for

³⁴ Cited in Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, 284.

³⁵ Poe, *Christianity in the Academy*.

³⁶ As discussed in *ibid.*

³⁷ See for example, Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

chance in a world created by God, the discoveries of quantum mechanics will likely be interpreted indeterministically and realistically.³⁸ The guiding principles adopted by scholars influence how the data set is interpreted and the Christian is within his or her epistemic rights to bring Christianity to bear in theory construction.

The Guiding Narrative and the Christian Scholar

Because an academic discipline is composed of individual scholars and the narratives in which they find meaning, another important aspect of the missional encounter for Christian scholars is that they are called to be witnesses to their colleagues, administrators, and students within the university. Being a faithful witness includes, when appropriate, gospel proclamation, as well as Christ-likeness in moral character and being a member of good standing in the academic community. Faithfulness to Christ in the academy involves embracing the missional imperative and living a life of wholeness before all.

Missional opportunities are ever present, many of which can be naturally integrated into the normal activities of the academic life. For example, Ken Elzinga, Professor of Economics at the University of Virginia, applies the Biblical principle of servanthood to his teaching by mastering the material, setting aside substantial class preparation time, and regularly praying *for* and *with* his students when they visit during office hours.³⁹ Marc Compere, professor of mechanical engineering at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, models how a professor can serve students, the needs of others, and the university by applying his academic expertise to real-world problems. After a devastating earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, clean water was difficult to find. As a result, in many villages Haitian children suffered from coughs, runny noses, and chronic diarrhea. Without electricity, water purification systems were useless. When Compere heard about the need for clean water, he gathered together some of his students, built a solar-powered water purification unit, and in the summer of 2010 went with his students to Haiti to install the new purifier.⁴⁰ What a powerful picture of professors and students, both Christian and non-Christian, working together to make a difference.

³⁸ See for example, Peter van Inwagen, “The Place of Chance in a World Created by God,” in T. Morris (ed.) *Divine and Human Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

³⁹ Ken Elzinga, “The Academy and Jesus,” *Faith and Economics* 37 (2001): 31–35.

⁴⁰ See <http://daytonabeach.erau.edu/coe/mechanical-engineering/research/project-haiti.html>.

The narrative aspect of an academic discipline also points to a rich source of guidance and community for the Christian scholar. Within each academic discipline, there undoubtedly is a strain of Christian thinking as well as practitioners, both historical and contemporary, who can serve as guides and mentors for young Christian scholars. The existence and vibrancy of many Christian scholarly societies today provide a rich source of community, guidance, and resources for both seasoned and less-experienced Christian scholars. This alternative community, based on a shared Christian vision of life, and dependent on the grace of God, can serve as a powerful and attractive witness to the contemporary secular university. Faithfulness as Christian scholars not only entails concern for the product of scholarship, but also for those who create and consume the product.

Conclusion

The approach to faith-scholarship integration advocated in this essay is not an “add Jesus and stir” approach to faith and scholarship integration. Rather, faithfulness to Christ requires that the Christian scholar live a missional life in the academy by seeking a missionary encounter within each level of his or her academic discipline. In this essay, I have outlined what such an encounter might entail. Within the academy, the desirable result is the transformation of academic disciplines so that the gospel will get a fair hearing and lives will be changed. Beyond the walls of the academy, the desirable result of such faithfulness is the translation of ideas into tools that bring justice to the oppressed, nourishment to the poor, and shalom in all areas of life. As Wolterstorff has stated, “One’s following of Christ...ought to be actualized by taking up in decisively ultimate fashion God’s call to share in the task of being witness, agent, and evidence of the coming of his kingdom.”⁴¹ May it be so.

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⁴¹ Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 74.