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# *Koinonia* and Research: The Role of Community in Providing a Voice in the Academy

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**ABSTRACT:** The key activities of a university professor are generally viewed to be teaching, service, and research/scholarship. Christian business faculty members are thought to excel at the first two, but what about research/scholarship? The purpose of this paper is to address the obstacles that Christian professors may encounter as they strive to fulfill their God-given vocation of scholarship. The paper begins by examining the rationale for Christian business faculty members' involvement in scholarly activities and explores the role of *koinonia*, the community that is expressed through the love of God, in overcoming obstacles to their involvement.

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## INTRODUCTION

The key activities of a secular university professor are usually assumed to be three-fold: teaching, service, and research/scholarship (Price & Cotton, 2006). Should this also be true of professors who work at Christian colleges and universities? These professors are, without question, actively involved in teaching and service activities, but what about research? Does the vocation of "college professor" include the responsibility to be involved in the research academies?

The role of scholarship in the life of the Christian professor has been discussed extensively (e.g., Chewing, 1995; Johnson, 2005; Martinez, 2004; Marsden, 1997), but it is somewhat controversial. Some professors in faith-based universities have genuine convictions that the best

impact for the Kingdom of God is through teaching and service only. Others view scholarship and research as an integral part of their vocation. Still other professors desire to be active in research, but believe that they either do not have the time or the expertise to actively pursue research and provide a Christian voice in the academy.

This paper is based on the presupposition that research/scholarship is an essential activity of Christian college professors and that they should endeavor to provide a voice in the academy. Christians have the duty to bring the Word of Christ into all domains of life ((Dockery, 2003; Schaeffer, 1976), and that includes the academic academies (Mallard & Atkins, 2004)). In fact, Howell (2007) makes the point that the academy should welcome and, in fact, needs a Christian viewpoint because there are many topics that a Christian is uniquely gifted to address. The academy provides guidance and leadership in many sectors of

society. Consequently, a Christian voice in the academy is essential (Machen, 1951).

Although there are many forms that scholarship can take, a clear voice in the academy is usually created by publishing in peer-reviewed academic journals (Bauerly & Johnson, 2005). This form of academic legitimacy involves creating research or theory that is evaluated and approved by other scholars in the discipline (Cryer, 1996; Lambie, Sias, Davis, Lawson & Akos, 2008). For Christian professors, therefore, creating a powerful voice in the academy involves publishing in peer-reviewed journals (Lunt & Davidson, 2000; Moss, Zhang & Barch, 2007).

Nevertheless, some Christian professors view the process of publishing as striving for mystic heights that only a few can reach. This assessment is not correct. Publishing in peer-reviewed journals is not a magical process. It does not require any exceptional gifts or abilities. It can appear to be daunting to the research novice, however, and the obstacles can appear overwhelming.

The purpose of this paper is to address the obstacles that Christian professors may encounter as they strive to fulfill their God-given vocation of scholarship. Many of the obstacles are not specific to Christian faculty, but we suggest a Christian has a unique advantage in overcoming them: *koinonia*, the community that is expressed through the love of God (VanderVeen, 2011).

*Koinonia* is a Greek word meaning partnership or fellowship (Vine 1985). Wuest says that “the idea in the word is that of one person having a joint-participation with another in something possessed in common by both” (Wuest, 1973 [1952], p. 96). Community can play an important role in overcoming the obstacles to maintaining a productive research program (Gillespie et al., 2005). Some form of community is available to virtually any researcher, but a Christian with the vocation of scholarship has a unique advantage because of *koinonia* to find fellowship combined with partnership with trusted brothers and sisters in Christ (VanderVeen, 2011).

The paper begins by discussing reasons that Christian business professors should be encouraged to have a voice in the academy, that is, write for peer-reviewed journals. The paper will then become practical as we suggest specific ways to overcome the obstacles to doing so. In this “overcoming” we particularly examine the role of Christian community.

#### WHY PUBLISH FOR REFEREED JOURNALS?

Time is, arguably, the scarcest resource that professors possess (Mallard & Atkins, 2004). Why, then, should Christian professors use their God-given time and energy to write for peer-reviewed journals? Would they not better

serve God by spending their time teaching students and pouring their hearts and lives into God’s people? Writing is a solitary activity (Palmer, 1998). How can Christian professors further the Kingdom when they do not directly interact with others?

Interestingly, the same argument could have been made by the apostle Paul. Seemingly, his time would be best spent in sharing the Gospel and planting new churches. Yet, in the middle of a fruitful life of planting churches, God sent Paul to prison. There, the influence of Paul was magnified by his writing a significant part of the New Testament (Acts 22-28).

Clearly, Christian professors are not Paul and no research published in peer-reviewed journals will become a part of Scripture. Christian professors, however, have been placed by God into a profession where both teaching and scholarship are expected (Black & Smith, 2009; Moss, Zhang & Barth, 2007). This suggests that God thinks they have, or can develop, the abilities to become a voice in the academy.

The literature suggests many motivations for research and publishing (Silver, 2009), such as the psychological satisfaction of having one’s ideas validated by peers (De Lange, 2005; Lunt and Davidson, 2000) and the confidence and authority in the classroom that publishing brings (Hemmings, Rushbroom & Smith, 2007; Turner & Edwards, 2008). There is also the practical aspect: publishing helps in the promotion process and also provides a faculty member with the flexibility to change academic institutions if there is a need to do so (Black & Smith, 2009; Fogarty, 2009).

However, Christian professors have further motivations. When God places a person in a vocation, he does so for the common good (Romans 12:6). Research can be a “good work” that causes the “growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16, New American Standard Bible). There are also spiritual benefits to writing and publishing; that is, the process itself can develop Godly character traits in the writer. In the following pages, we will discuss these additional motivations in more detail.

#### Publishing is Part of the Scholarly Vocation — A Gift for the Common Good

God calls some individuals to the vocation of business professor and scholar, a vocation that deals with advancing theory in the business disciplines and conveying such theory to students in an engaging and applied fashion (Chewning, 1995; Price & Cotten, 2006).

Although teaching is commonly regarded as the primary activity of faculty at Christian universities, scholar-

ship is also an important undertaking (Chewning, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Tushman, O'Riley, Fenollosa, Kleinbaum & McGrath, 2007). While the proportion of time spent on research will differ across faculty members and institutions, Marsden (1997) argues that both teaching and research are necessary for the Christian vocation of scholar. Starcher (2010) calls this the Covenant of Scholarship, a covenant that challenges Christian professors to "love God with all their minds" (Matt. 22:37) as well as with all their hearts.

The vocation of business scholar is a gift "for the common good," as are all of the gifts given by Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12: 4-31) (Black & Smith, 2009). Arguably, this gift given by God is necessary for the health of the Church even though historically, academic research has been viewed as a "stepchild" at many Christian colleges and universities (Marsden, 1997). Whereas teaching plays an important role in challenging students by building their faith, research has the potential to reach individuals and sectors of society who may never set foot into a classroom at a Christian college or university. Research has the potential to play an important proclamation role as professors become more engaged in their academy.

The world looks for criteria to evaluate the voices that they hear. In today's over-communicated society, the mind searches for easy ways to assess the messages to which it is exposed (Ries & Trout, 1986). Therefore, the research publications of Christian professors can lend external credibility to Christian education in general. Although often not overtly expressed, an education at a Christian college or university is viewed by some in the world as second-rate. This evaluation is not based on the level of success received by students or other empirical measures (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006) but tends to be based on potentially questionable proxy measures, such as research output. Although a direct correlation between education quality and the research output of an institution's faculty has not been found (Stanton, Taylor & Stanaland, 2009), it is easy to use research output for comparisons. A healthy record of research publications, therefore, will affect how the world views Christian institutions of higher education. A record of research publications provides credentials that indicate to others that one has information which is worth listening to and that the message should not be dismissed.

### **Publishing is Part of the Scholarly Vocation — Spiritual Growth**

Besides demonstrating obedience to one's vocation, strengthening the church, and creating a climate conducive to Christian values, writing for publication can be good for the soul. The process of writing can prompt the development of personal God-honoring traits: quality in the vocation, perseverance, and humility.

*Quality for the Glory of God.* A Christian professor who desires to do "everything for the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31) soon confronts the issue of academic quality. Each industry has its own quality standards and the higher education knowledge industry (research) is no different. To do quality research means to create important or valuable ideas that extend current knowledge in the discipline and that are inherently interesting to other professors and the research community (Campbell, Daft & Hulin, 1982; Schwarz, Clegg, Cummings, Donaldson & Minor, 2007). Some professors extend knowledge by primary research others by finding creative ways to apply or disseminate knowledge (Tschannen-Moran & Nestor-Baker, 2004). Peers in the discipline judge whether an idea is "quality." Therefore, exposing one's idea to peers in the form of an academic paper is one way to find out if peers find the idea to have merit (Campbell, Daft & Hulia, 1982; Lunt & Davidson, 2000).

In addition to exposing ideas to peers, it is important to communicate these ideas clearly and accurately (Ferguson, 2009; Wellington, 2010). If the minds of Christian professors are going to reflect the mind of Christ by discovering God's creation and working with integrating his ideas into their disciplines, the quality of their thinking is important (Chewning, 2005). The quality standards faced by Christian writers should not be merely the minimum needed for publication. Instead, the work of Christian writers reflects not only upon themselves but also on the God that they profess to worship. Detail, depth, and accuracy of thought are all important when creating quality work in the knowledge industry (Black & Smith, 2009), and the discipline involved gives the person a way to "love God with all our minds" (Matt. 22:37).

Writing also forces professors to become more knowledgeable about the subjects they are researching. For Christian professors, integration writing forces them to relate what they are writing about to the Word of God and helps them think deeply about how the Bible relates to their discipline. As a consequence, research and writing help Christian business professors better understand society, the marketplace, and the business world from God's viewpoint (Black & Smith, 2009; Chewning, 1995, 2005).

Research, therefore, deepens knowledge which, in turn, deepens the contributions that can be brought to students. As a result of research activities, professors are able to share and lead students to a much deeper understanding of God and his world (Mallard & Atkins, 2004; Stanton, Taylor & Stanaland, 2009). Research done in the power of God can directly implement II Peter 1:5-8: "Make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self control...."

*Perseverance.* Furthermore, God can also use the writing and publication process to create or strengthen two important biblical character traits: perseverance and humility. Perseverance is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5: 22-24). Writing for peer-reviewed journals creates and develops persistence. Writing an article is a long and sometimes tedious process — a paper can take months or even years to complete and typically goes through four or five revisions before it is published (Hart, 2006). Cheerful and unfailing perseverance is not always easy in the face of yet another editorial request to change important parts of “my” paper or to deepen thinking. It often takes the Spirit of Christ to help authors remain gentle, kind, and loving and to patiently revise papers. Academic publishing allows perseverance muscles to grow and strengthen. As with other forms of exercise, the process may not always be pleasant, but the results are worthwhile and long-lasting.

*Humility.* Academic publishing also encourages humility (Matthias, 2008). This may seem counterintuitive to a person who has not published. An academic paper is a work of creation that takes time, energy, and passion to create, and authors can often find themselves emotionally tied to the final product. The peer-review process, however, requires that this creation be exposed to others who will evaluate it anonymously.

Rarely are papers just “accepted” for publication. Most papers do not survive the review process; they are rejected. Even lower quality journals possess acceptance rates significantly below 50 percent and the acceptance rates at top journals can be less than 5 percent. That means that 95 percent of papers submitted for review at these journals are rejected! Therefore, a positive result from the review process usually consists of a “revise and resubmit,” where significant portions of the paper will need to be reworked before it can be considered for publication. This is true even for the best or most prolific authors (Moss, Zang & Barth 2007; Wellington, 2010) because, given the anonymity of the peer-review process, there is no halo effect based on one’s past successes.

Furthermore, the review process is conducted by humans who are innately sinful as a result of the human condition (Moizer, 2009; Romans 3:23). Consequently, some editors may act like petty tyrants during the review process. Some reviewers might provide excellent reviews, but in a mean-natured, caustic fashion, or with an “axe to grind.” Occasionally, reviewers will even “trash” a paper without thoroughly reading it. Consequently, both novice and seasoned authors agree that feedback on writing is hard to take (e.g., Hemmings, Rushbrook & Smith, 2007; Turner & Edwards, 2008).

Humility, however, provides the grace to accept criticism and rejection and the strength to learn from it.

Indeed, McCloskey states, “To scorn listening to others is to commit the chief theological sin against the Holy Spirit, pride” (2006, p, 182).

## RESEARCH AND KOINONIA

If providing a voice in the academy is so beneficial, why do so many business professors at Christian institutions not write or publish in peer-reviewed journals? One possibility is that they have been overcome by the common obstacles to writing: lack of knowledge, fear, and limited resources (Hourcade & Anderson, 1998; Mallard & Atkins, 2004). In the following sections we will examine each of the obstacles, first by discussing the nature of the obstacle, then by suggesting practical ways to overcome it. We will suggest that *koinonia* and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 13:14) play a key role in overcoming these three obstacles.

Traditionally, individualism and isolation have been perceived as keys to success in the scholarly vocation (Gillespie et al., 2005; Palmer, 1998). However the empirical evidence suggests that this perspective is in error. It is important, and even necessary, for productive scholars to work in community (Gillespie et al., 2005; Silver, 2009). For example, mentoring and co-author relationships add to productivity (Bode, 1999). The beneficial effects of research circles (groups of faculty who encourage each other and jointly pursue research undertakings) have been demonstrated (Gillespie et al., 2005). It may take various forms, but the importance of community is undeniable.

A community of scholarship can be created by virtually all researchers, but for Christians, the importance of community and the benefits of community can be significantly greater than what exists in the secular world. Co-authors, mentors, editors, and reviewers are not just colleagues with similar interests. Instead, they are participants in *koinonia*, trustworthy, loving family, “brothers and sisters in Christ.” The ties can be much deeper and more productive — ties that can become even more powerful as research colleagues pray for each other.

Community is a consistent biblical message. Christians are not to be “lone wolves” but are to live in community with other Christians (VanderVeen, 2011). Christians gain encouragement and strength from others with similar faith, and the involvement of professors in research is no exception. The Christian vocation of scholarship is a social activity undertaken in community.

If community can be built with others on one’s campus, this is a great situation. If community is not possible



on one's own campus, community can be developed with professors at other campuses — a reality which has been furthered with advances in technology (Silver, 2009). The Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) provides an excellent opportunity for creating community. The knowledge and experience exists within CBFA to provide the community which its members need to overcome obstacles to pursuing research.

### OBSTACLES TO WRITING: LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

A first obstacle that many beginning researchers face is lack of knowledge, specifically lack of knowledge of the rules of the publishing game. Moizer (2009, p. 285) remarks that “publication in the social sciences appears to have evolved into a game, played by four parties: the author, the reviewers, the editor and the bureaucrats using the simple criterion that a quality researcher publishes in quality journals.” Bourdieu (1996) calls the implicit and explicit rules and logic of the writing and publishing game the “*illusio*.”

Not understanding the “*illusio*” can be a significant hindrance to an individual who desires a career as a scholar/writer. Newer researchers may not be sure what to write about, which journals to target, or how to “fit” those journals (Moore, 2003; Wellington, 2010). Thus, their initial attempts at writing are often dismissed by editors or reviewers, and the notion that they don't have “the stuff” necessary to write for publication is reinforced (Lunt & Davidson, 2000). This notion is, of course, completely incorrect.

### Overcoming Lack of Knowledge

If a Christian professor is convinced that developing a voice in the academy is important, there are several relatively simple and practical ways to get inside the “*illusio*.” We suggest three: read journals, follow instructions, find a guide.

#### *Read Journals*

There are a number of ways that the beginning writer can learn “the ropes.” Possibly the most obvious way is to read (skim) two or three of the peer-reviewed publications in the area of the researcher's interests (Silver, 2009). This helps the beginner become current in the discipline and also become acquainted with the types of articles that are published, their contents, and their organization. There is, for example, an implicit organization that empirical research articles in a particular discipline are expected to follow. Articles not conventionally organized are often rejected out-of-hand.

Reading journals also helps a developing scholar understand “fit” with a journal. When a manuscript is submitted, the first step for most journals is to give a manuscript a “desk edit,” where the editor or associate editor reads the paper to see if it fits the domain of the journal (Barley, 2008; Konrad, 2008). The level of article, the topic matter, and the mode of presentation vary among publications, often significantly. Becoming aware of these differences will allow researchers to better locate the journal that best matches their style and area of research or fit their style to the journals’.

#### *Follow the Instructions*

A second, obvious way to learn the rules is to follow the instructions. Most academic journals provide instructions, often called “guidelines for submission,” that explain the journal's domain and provide instructions for aspiring authors. This information can typically be found on the journal's website or in the back or front of the journal. If an author has done his or her best to follow the instructions, the editor and reviewers will take the manuscript more seriously (Hart, 2006; Moos & Hawkins, 2009).

This is similar to a professor giving an assignment. Students who follow the instructions for the assignment tend to get better grades. Following the journal instructions, such as providing references in a specific style, can consume significant amounts of time, but this is the same complaint that students give when required to follow instructions for their assignments. However, guidelines help students produce well-structured, readable papers. The same principle exists for journals.

#### *Find a Guide*

A third way to learn the “*illusio*” is to work with an experienced co-author(s). No one better knows the rules of a game than those who have successfully played the game (Bode, 1999). Lack of information can be overcome in an environment of trust and encouragement. As Ecclesiastes says, “a strand of three threads is not easily broken” (Ecc. 4:12).

The new writer who is a Christian has a special advantage because of *koinonia*. There is a certain arrogance among scholars and senior faculty members who are not always accessible. The likelihood of finding an experienced co-author who is willing to partner with a young professor is increased among a group of scholars who love each other (John 15:12-17).

However, we suggest a practical caveat. Because the writing relationship is not unlike dating, it may take several attempts to find a compatible co-author. Mutual research interests, writing styles, and timing must mesh. Indeed, we personally find that it takes, on average, five or six approaches to various people to find a good co-author.

Generally, it is the new writer who approaches the more experienced one to initiate a writing relationship. There are several practical ways to do this. A conference, such as the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) conference, is a good place for beginning authors to find co-authors. Attending sessions where people present the kinds of topics one enjoys and asking the presenters to join one in developing a paper for the next conference can be beneficial. The novice can also begin by offering to lend assistance to an experienced author with projects already started. Although this can be a humbling experience, since the role is similar to that of a graduate assistant, the experience can be invaluable.

Another possibility is for a beginning author to initiate a project and recruit a more experienced researcher as co-author or mentor. The experienced writer can provide valuable insight in positioning the paper, preparing it for submission, and interpreting editors' and reviewers' comments (Wellington, 2010). It should be noted that most seasoned writers are busy with their own projects. They will be comfortable showing a novice "the ropes" but will typically expect the newer author to be proactive in following through with the initial contact and to be ready to write most of the first draft of the paper.

### OBSTACLES TO WRITING: FEAR

A second prominent theme in the literature is that professors do not publish because of fear. Fear is a scholarship-killer (Lunt & Davidson, 2000; Singh, Haddad & Chow, 2007; Starkey & Madan, 2001). Two related aspects of fear tend to dominate the discussion: fear of not being adequate or perfect and fear of criticism and rejection. There is, however, an additional external fear that some professors face: a fear of a powerful subculture against research in the business school.

#### The Obstacle of Fear

##### *Fear of Not Being Perfect*

Some professors write very little because they have overly high expectations for themselves (Hemmings, Rushbroom & Smith, 2007; Hourcade & Anderson, 1998). Most professors understand what it takes to be successful teachers. Although it may be an illusion, they feel in control in the classroom. However, when one is beginning to get involved in research, there is little control, and early attempts are not always successful. A person who has overly high expectations for him or herself can view a conference or journal rejection as a personal failure and can be

completely discouraged from ever writing again.

Some professors are worried that they do not measure up to their colleagues in knowledge. They might feel almost like an imposter if they write their ideas for publication (Moore, 2003). This is exacerbated if a professor is in a small department or does not have the resources to attend academic conferences where he or she can interact with others and be exposed to others' research (Ferguson, 2009; Moss, Zang & Smith, 2007). Indeed, it is often a major "aha" moment when one goes to a paper session at a conference and thinks "I could do THAT."

##### *Fear of Criticism and Rejection*

Another fear that hinders scholarship is the fear of criticism or rejection. As we said before, attempting to publish is humbling. An academic paper is a work of creation. It takes time, energy, and passion and the author must be convinced about the value of the idea in order to endeavor to communicate it to others (Wellington, 2010). Therefore, to expose this passionate conviction to peer feedback is daunting (Cryer, 1996; De Lange, 2005). The simplest way to avoid such criticism is not to attempt to publish.

Furthermore, most of the time the best response that authors, including experienced authors, can hope to receive from a review of one's work is to be asked to revise the paper. Revisions take further time and often require further research or require that the author think more deeply about the subject (Hart, 2006; Lunt & Davidson, 2000). This is challenging, both intellectually and emotionally. Indeed, the process of revision often takes longer and requires more effort than researching and writing the original paper.

However, the revision process usually adds greatly to the development of an author's thinking. The result is almost always a significantly stronger paper (Ferguson, 2009; Moos & Hawkins, 2009; Moss, Zang & Barth, 2007). When it is published, the quality of the paper is usually such that an author can be proud to see the work in print.

Even when a paper is rejected and even if the reviews are seemingly without mercy, reviews can often provide insight that may make the improved article acceptable to another journal. It is not unusual for a paper to be rejected at several different journals before the quality is at the level that permits publication and it has been submitted to the journal with a good fit.

##### *Fear of a Subculture against Research*

Though it is seldom mentioned, some universities have a group of faculty members, sometimes senior faculty members, who are against research (Finnegan & Gamson, 1996; Hemmings, Rushbroom & Smith, 2007). A subculture against research most often develops at universities

that are in the process of changing from a dominant teaching agenda to a mixed or research agenda (a common situation at many Christian colleges and universities (Mallard & Atkins, 2004)). The dissenting faculty members were typically hired when the university stressed teaching. They might feel passionately that it is a “waste of time” to focus on anything but the students or might be engaged in outside activities, such as running their own companies, and fear that they will be expected to publish. If this subculture includes an associate dean or an influential member of the promotion and tenure committee, it can significantly influence a professor’s career. This is a direct violation of the principle of *koinonia*, but a professor who wants to publish should, justly, fear this subculture.

### Overcoming the Obstacle of Fear

The main way for Christians to overcome the obstacle of fear is to understand who they are in Christ. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear,” Paul wrote to his mentee, Timothy, “but of power and love and a sound mind” (II Tim. 1:7). “Love casts out fear,” John affirms (I John 4:18). The Holy Spirit who creates *koinonia* also helps us overcome fear. For example, fear of a subculture against research can be overcome by loving first God and by seeing one’s colleagues as neighbors (I John 3:21-14).

Besides praying and meditating on the Word of God, there are several practical steps the person who wishes to overcome fear can take. We suggest that beginners begin with the community found at conferences. Other ways to overcome fear is to write with co-authors and to understand that perfect papers don’t get published. We will discuss each in more detail.

#### *Begin with Conference Papers*

A good way to overcome the fear of criticism and rejection is to begin with conference papers. Conferences utilize the rules of publishing but tend to accept a higher percent of submissions than journals. Conference proposals do get rejected, but there are many choices of conferences. Writing for conferences is a good way to learn how to frame papers so that reviewers will accept them.

Also, conference papers are often expected to be “works in progress,” so conference presentations can be good places to get feedback. Some conferences are relaxed and friendly (like CBFA). At other conferences, presenters may feel like they are in a shark tank with the audience filling the role of sharks. However, if one’s paper is verbally trashed by a crabby audience member, who cares? The grades have “already been submitted” – i.e. the paper has already been accepted by the conference and the citation is already on the presenter’s vita. Authors should focus

on using the comments from conferences to strengthen the paper and revise it for a journal.

#### *Write With Others*

Finding co-authors helps overcome the fear of rejection and also the fear of not being perfect. When one is writing alone, the sting of the rejection that comes with research can be strong. *Koinonia*, the loving fellowship of others who have experienced the same rejection, can minimize the sting. Co-authors can help to place the rejection into context and begin plans for upgrading and resubmitting the paper to another outlet (Washburn, 2008). Both fears can also be minimized by understanding that research and publishing is not a one-time act; rather, it is an ongoing process. A researcher should endeavor to build a “pipeline” of research projects, that is, have several projects underway at any one time – papers under review, papers that are being written, papers that are being researched, papers submitted to conferences, and so forth. Simultaneously working on several papers means that if a problem is encountered in one paper, another can be focused on until “revelation” strikes. If one paper is rejected, it does not derail the writer. The goal is to produce a stream of research, not just a single paper.

Co-authors are the key to this process. Having a variety of co-authors helps the researcher create community, helps each person at the individual stage he or she is in, and allows for better papers as “iron sharpens iron.”

#### *Prepare a Good Paper, Not a Perfect One*

The fear of not being perfect can be minimized when authors do everything reasonable to increase the chances of a paper getting accepted. Having a manuscript “desk rejected” by an editor for such things as sloppy reasoning or poor grammar should be avoided (Rynes, 2008). A paper never should be submitted just to see if it “gets through.” Rather, it should be carefully written and follow the conference or journal instructions carefully. Academic editors and reviewers are volunteers, and reviewing takes valuable time. They do not appreciate an author who wastes their time, and an author’s reputation can be damaged (Barley, 2008; Konrad, 2008), not unlike the student who hands in sloppy work hoping the professor will not notice. The better the paper, the less likely it is that it will receive negative comments.

Therefore, before submitting a paper to a conference or journal, beginning authors should ask friends to read the paper. This is another example of the value of *koinonia*. This process can give significant insight into the clarity of one’s writing and arguments. The discernment of others can be invaluable in determining when a paper is ready to submit (Boice, 1990), and it may also be a way to make contact with potential co-authors.

This advice, however, should not be taken to an extreme. There is no such thing as a perfect paper. Perfection is not achievable in this life. There is a tendency for those with a perfectionist streak (a common quality of faculty members) to work on a single paper for years, always striving for perfection. But perfect papers are never published. Authors should do everything reasonable to develop a strong paper, act on the feedback received, and then submit it. Papers sitting on one's desk do not get accepted — indeed, the chance of getting accepted is zero!

### OBSTACLES TO WRITING: LIMITED RESOURCES

Possibly the largest hindrance to writing careers is the one that many scholars have mentioned — the lack of time and university support to do quality research and writing (Black & Smith, 2009; Mallard & Atkins, 2004). This is one of the most consistent complaints among academics (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Moss, Zang & Barth, 2007). Interestingly, this hindrance is alluded to by faculty members at all types of colleges and universities and across all teaching loads. Time and support are always scarce commodities.

The lack of available time to do research may be even truer for professors at Christian colleges and universities (Mallard & Atkins, 2004). Most Christian institutions are relatively small in size, and the time demands on professors are extensive (Martinez, 2004). Faculty members often have heavy teaching loads, mentor students extensively, and serve the university through a variety of ways. Mallard and Atkins (2004) call this the “overloaded plate syndrome.”

Furthermore, Christian professors often have additional time demands. They have the desire (and need) to be good parents for their children, be supportive spouses (if married), to spend time with God in devotion and worship, and to serve their local Christian congregation. How can all this be done by one person?

### Overcoming the Obstacle of Limited Resources

Time is often considered to be the most limiting resource for developing a productive research program (Mallard & Atkins, 2004). If Christian professors have so many responsibilities, how can they commit time to yet another activity? It is true that all of us tend to allot time to those activities viewed as important and necessary. How does research rank in the list of priorities? Is there a need to prayerfully reconsider priorities?

In addition to prayer, we suggest that co-authors can help mitigate the issue of limited resources.

### Co-Authors

The *koinonia* of believing co-authors can be a primary way to address the time pressure issue. This can also be an expression of the command to “bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:3).

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses when doing research and writing. Some may be gifted with developing interesting topics to research. Others may be adept at performing literature searches or quantitative analyses or have knowledge of a topic the researcher lacks. Working with co-authors with complementary skills can reduce the overall time needed to complete papers. By taking advantage of the strengths of each co-author, a stronger paper can be generated more quickly than working by oneself, and the burdens of humility and response to reviewers can be shared.

Co-authors do not need to be in one’s discipline or area. Many of the most interesting papers occur at the intersection between disciplines (Black & Smith, 2009; Von Oech, 1986). Often there are professors on a campus who have similar interests across a number of disciplines. For example, leadership or group dynamics can be taught in the business school, in the education school, or even in the seminary. Co-authors who approach the issue from different perspectives add depth to the resulting papers.

Access to the existing research data base is also essential for good research. With advances in technology, most Christian professors have access to research databases with instant (and free) access to most journals. If an individual college or university does not have the needed research databases, many others do — which is another reason for pursuing joint research with co-authors. By working together, many limited resource obstacles can be overcome.

### Conferences

Conferences are important, as was discussed earlier. However, travel budgets are limited at virtually all campuses, and that can limit access to conferences. Consequently, there is a need for each professor to be strategic about the choice of conference(s) to attend. What conferences are the most valuable to one’s needs? Is it necessary to attend the national conferences or are smaller, regional conferences available?

Researchers who find themselves paying at least some of the travel costs from their own pockets (which, unfortunately, is a common occurrence) must realize that a small investment can benefit them the rest of their scholarly life. Even so, community can help minimize conference costs. Are there possible roommates to split costs—and maybe become co-authors? Can travel partners share costs of renting cars? Can a co-author present the paper?



When attending conferences, researchers should focus on being as productive as possible while being in the conference community. It is wasteful to go to a conference and leave early or attend few of the sessions. The wise researcher will participate in many sessions and use the breaks effectively by networking, making contacts, and discussing research. Productive conversations with colleagues can take place during meals, while waiting in line, and even at the airport waiting for a plane. Resources are limited, but ingenuity and attention can significantly stretch the limited resources that are available.

### CONCLUSION

Christian voices are needed in all areas of society and the academy is no exception. Even though there are varying levels of involvement in scholarship, Christian professors still have a responsibility to bring a Christian voice to the academy. Indeed, there is a call in many business disciplines for research which critically addresses the social and ethical issues that are of particular interest to many Christian professors. If Christian professors are called to love God with all our minds, then we are also called to provide a voice in the academy.

There are definitely obstacles to establishing a meaningful stream of research. Many of the obstacles are not specific to Christian faculty, but a Christian with the vocation of scholarship has a unique advantage in overcoming them — *koinonia*, the community that is created and expressed through God's love.

*Koinonia* can help overcome each of the obstacles identified — lack of information, fear, and lack of resources. Lack of information is overcome by gaining information in an environment of trust and encouragement. Fear is overcome by loving God first and seeing one's co-authors, journal reviewers, and readers as neighbors (I John 3:21-14). Limited resources, such as time, can also be overcome by community. By working together in altruistic love, many obstacles can be overcome, allowing the Christian professor to actively pursue research and provide a Christian voice in the academy.

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