

# Spirituality in the Classroom: Two Integration Exercises For Management (and other) Classes

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**ABSTRACT:** *How can a professor intentionally create space for the Spirit in a business class? One way is to use exercises and assignments that integrate a spiritual dimension into class content. This paper presents two exercises that students have found to be beneficial in “learning in righteousness.” Teaching notes are included. The exercises have been tested in management classrooms but can be adapted for many business classes.*

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## INTRODUCTION

“The end of learning,” said John Milton, “is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him” (Milton, 1644). As I walked to my strategic management class, I wondered how to apply Milton’s lofty ideal. In order to have good skills, my students needed to spend the next few hours learning about resource-based distinctive competencies. How could I use that material to effectively encourage students to “regain to know God aright”?

Professors in Christian universities know that students need to graduate with appropriate knowledge and professional skills. We also know that our students have an additional responsibility. They are the light of the world. In their jobs they will reflect the light of Jesus Christ, and they will do so well or badly. The moral hope of the next generation sits in our classrooms.

Therefore, most Christian professors utilize the spiritual dimension in our classrooms. We pray, we teach and demonstrate integrity, we show love to our students. However, as Coe (2000) points out, few of us compel stu-

dents to practice spiritual disciplines as part of class content. A student at a Christian university usually practices his or her spiritual life outside the classroom — chapel, community projects, accountability groups. Even if a class has much spiritual content, many students find it difficult to see the connections between their spiritual lives and what they are learning.

Several years ago, I was challenged to create a class structure to help business students train in love and righteousness; to move my classes beyond talking about spiritual things and into practicing them. “This is the apex of integration,” says Coe. “It does not minimize the importance of knowledge, professional skills, and theoretical integration but rather sets them in their proper Kingdom context” (Coe, 2000B).

As a result of this challenge, I developed a number of exercises and assignments that were specifically designed to enhance students’ awareness of the spiritual dimensions in the subject matter. Over several years I tested them, discarding some and refining others. Below are examples that I found to be particularly effective.

The exercise The Power of Assumptions with original to me but was inspired by a paper discussing the assumptions

of the Puritans about business (V. Smith, 1997). The assignment *Soul Project* is adopted, with permission, from an example in Coe's paper (2000). I used these in management classes, but both of them can be adapted for other disciplines as well. They can also be used together in one class. Some suggestions for doing this, as well as additional resources, are incorporated in the "Additional Suggestions and Resources" sections found after each exercise. Some of these additional ideas are mine, some were suggested by others.

My goal in publishing these exercises is to assist any colleague who might also be interested in the grand adventure of spiritual-academic integration in the classroom. You are welcome to use these ideas and adopt them to your individual situation.

### EXERCISE: THE POWER OF ASSUMPTIONS

#### Suggested Classes

Introduction to Management, Introduction to Business, Organizational Behavior (OB), Business Ethics, any class where competing values is discussed.

#### Purpose

Assumptions are the key to an individual's value system, to his or her spiritual walk, and to his or her subsequent actions towards employers, colleagues, and employees (Rokeach, 1973; Zigarelli, 2004). The purpose of this exercise is to show the connections between assumptions, values, attitudes, and actions but most specifically to demonstrate experientially how different assumptions/values/attitudes lead to different actions. Most OB textbooks link assumptions, values, and attitudes but few emphasize how these things affect actions. The student doing this exercise often experiences an "aha" moment when he or she begins to understand how important his assumptions and values are in the ways they affect relationships with, and actions toward, stakeholders.

#### Exercise Step 1

The professor defines the following terms and explains how they interact with each other. The definitions below are adapted from the Dictionary of Psychology (Chaplin, 1985) and are compatible with most textbooks. Most of these terms and the links between them are in standard OB textbooks. I illustrate them by using an "onion skin" series of circles beginning with assumptions as the innermost circle. However, the key link for this exercise is between assumptions/values/attitudes and actions.

**Assumptions:** Presuppositions about life, the universe, and everything. These are largely unconscious and taken

for granted. They are very stable but can be changed by questioning and by new and compelling information.

**Values:** Global concepts that guide judgment, basic convictions about what a person sees as right or desirable. Values are the screen through which individuals make decisions. They are usually based on assumptions and are largely unconscious. They are very stable but can be changed by questioning and by new and compelling information.

**Beliefs:** Consciously tested, deliberately accepted, resolutions of questions about life, the universe, and everything. Beliefs are usually arrived at either through personal testing or by accepting the word of credible others, such as parents.

**Attitudes:** Decisions about how to respond to a particular object, person or event. An individual has an attitude about something. Attitudes are influenced by assumptions, values and beliefs, but also by personality, taste, interests and so forth.

**Actions:** What a person actually does. Actions are caused by and reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions.

**Reflection Question:** When a person becomes a Christian, which of these change?

A: Usually all of them, beginning with assumptions (the new birth begins with changes in our basic worldview) and working out to actions. This might take some time, so correct actions may not be seen immediately.

#### Exercise Step 2

The professor presents two completely different sets of assumptions about success.

**Assumption I:** The contemporary "American" view of success.

**Q:** If you would ask most of your neighbors or friends what "success" is, what would they say?

A: Students invariably answer with some version of the "American Dream:" a good job, plenty of money, a comfortable life, a nice family, a nice place to live. Most students understand this point without extensive explanation. However, if a professor wants to go in greater depth about the contemporary American view of success, there are some resources listed in "Additional Suggestions and Resources."

**Assumption II:** The Puritan view of success

**Q:** What would a Puritan say "success" was?

*A:* The Puritan view is that a successful person is one who glorifies God and treats his or her neighbor with altruistic (agape) love.

### Background on the Puritans

In the 16th and 17th century, a loosely affiliated group of people in Britain objected to the corruption and nepotism of the Anglican church. They called themselves Nonconformists but were interested in personal and liturgical reformation (purification) and so the press gave them the derisive name “Puritans” (Packer, 1990) in much the same way that our contemporary press calls conservative Christians “right wing fundamentalists.” However, over time the Nonconformist movement developed a distinct attitude toward life (Davies, 1948; V. Smith, 1997). That attitude was to, as far as possible, follow Jesus’ command to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, NAS)

As the Nonconformist movement became established, the British Industrial Revolution was developing. The British Industrial Revolution was one of the most radical frame-breaking changes in the history of commerce. Triggered by technological advances such as the spinning jenny, the steam engine, and the application of science to agriculture, and facilitated by the development of an effective central bank and credit system (Kreis, 2001), the British Industrial Revolution changed commerce from an agrarian community affair, participated in between neighbors, to an impersonal, complex, national and international trade system (V. Smith, 1997) driven by the invisible hand of the market (A. Smith, 1937 [1776]). The resulting changes shook society to its core.

Many of the Puritans became businessmen. Because they refused to sign an oath acknowledging the King as head of the Church, certain professions were closed to them. They could not join the government, be part of the judicial system, teach in any school, or preach in any national church. That left farming and business as occupations. Those who had little land, entered business (V. Smith, 1997). The Puritans, eager to bring every aspect of life under the control of God, created a theology, a belief-system, of business based on Scripture and the writings of Luther and Calvin. This theology focused on four major principles (Ryken, 1986).

1. Any honest work can be sacred. Honest work, done to and for the glory of God, is a sacrament to him. The worker can abide in Christ as he or she serves his neighbor.
2. God calls each Christian to a personal vocation. This

vocation is given to the believer as a way for the person to express love to his or her neighbor. This vocation, properly used, also brings glory to God.

3. The appropriate motive to work is to glorify God and to show love to one’s neighbor. Making a living, even making a living for one’s family, is under God’s control. In this way, it is incidental to the larger motive.
4. Poor work dishonors God and good work honors him. However, the Christian must be balanced. Work should be diligent, but the job should not become an idol.

### Exercise Step 3

Break students into groups and tell them the following:

“Pretend that you are a customer service representatives for a major brokerage firm. Three people report to you. Now create a model of how you might treat them and your clients.”

1. Begin with each assumption about success.
2. What are the likely values and attitudes toward clients and toward employees that this particular assumption would create? Why?
3. Based on those values and attitudes, what are the likely actions a person would display to clients? To employees? Why?

After the groups have worked this out, have each come to the front and explain their model.

### Comments About the Exercise

After this exercise, most students see clearly that different assumptions lead to different actions. That is the “take-away” from this exercise and to a surprising degree it is a new thought to students. It seems to have a significant impact. For example, after this exercise, many students are more careful to specify what they assume. They also see more clearly what assumptions lie behind what others say and do.

Students also begin to realize that there are different definitions of success and that they must choose one. They begin to understand the consequences of their choices.

As an additional benefit, students learn about a group of Christians who strongly integrated the Scripture into their business life. After this exercise some of my students became earnest readers of Puritan literature.

## Additional Suggestions and Resources

A variety of things can be done with this assignment. Below are several ideas and suggested resources. The following resources have documentation for the two ideas of success.

### Puritan Success

Davies, H. 1948. *The Worship of the English Puritans*. Westminster: Dacre.

Packer, J. 1990. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books.

### Contemporary American Success

Frank, R.H. and Cook, P.J. 1995. *The Winner Take All Society*. New York: Penguin Books.

Nader, R. and Taylor. 1986 *The Big Boys*. Pantheon Books, New York. Note: this is one of the scariest books I have ever read.

Wuthnow, R. 1996. *Poor Richard's Principle*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

The latest book by Donald Trump.

*Wired, PC World, Forbes, Business Week, The Wall Street Journal, Fortune.*

Segments from a hundred hit television programs or videos on YouTube.

This exercise can become part of a larger module focusing on worldviews. Lecture on worldview then have students see videos or read books by contemporary business leaders that contrast the worldviews. Have groups work out the assumptions/values/attitudes they see and then discuss the actions of the business leaders.

This larger module could also consider the dangers of individualistic interpretations of how assumptions relate to values/belief and subsequent actions.

### Suggested books

Naugle, D. 2002. *Worldview: The History of A Concept*. Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Bakke, D. 2005. *Joy at Work*. Seattle: Pearson Venture Group.

### Suggested DVDs.

Striking contrasts can be found in the current CEO Exchange series of DVD's. The series can be purchased on the PBS Web site (PBS.org).

## ASSIGNMENT: "SOUL PROJECT"

This assignment is powerful. The premise is simple: assign students to pray for a major assignment and their workgroup for that assignment. However, the reactions to this assignment are very complex. I have received a tumult of response from students and even other professors. Fortunately, I had experienced mentor to help me craft this project. He gave me tips on the pitfalls, on the best wording, and on what to expect.

### Suggested Classes

Any class that has group assignments or major projects.

### Purpose

Workgroups are becoming increasingly important in businesses that are driven by the need for innovation (Kleiner, 2003). Many businesses ask that students be taught how to work in groups. Accordingly, group assignments are given in many business classes. In the class I use this in, students are assigned to workgroups for a semester-long simulation.

This exercise asks students to systematically pray about two things: 1) a large assignment, and 2) their attitude toward their assigned workgroup members.

There are multiple purposes for this assignment:

- Students learn that the details of their academic work are important to God.
- Students learn to pray about "all things" including assignments.
- Students see that God takes care of them in academic as well as non-academic life. To God, all of life is "spiritual."
- Students grow in their prayer and spiritual life.
- God sometimes intervenes in otherwise disastrous work groups.
- Students fulfill Christ's command to pray for each other.

### Assignment

The full text of the assignment is in the Appendix. Below is a summary.

#### Instructions to Students:

A: Spend 15 minutes in the presence of God talking with God about how you doing the Capstone simulation can glorify Him. The simulation is a training in analyzing complex situations, making decisions about those situations, and coping with the results of the



decisions. There are also all kinds of group dynamics involved in the work for this assignment.

B: Spend another 15 minutes talking with God about how you can maintain integrity as a member of a work group in this class. In group work, what you do — or don't do — impacts other people significantly. It can make the semester great or awful for them. How does God want you to interact with the work your group has to do, and with the individual members of your team? Ask Him how you can bring glory to Him as you work with others.

C: Hand in a 1-2 page reaction paper discussing this assignment (typed, double-spaced, well-written). Please write only what you are comfortable sharing.

At the beginning of the paper state the amount of time you spent in prayer on each part, i.e. "I spent \_\_\_ minutes praying about how my doing the Capstone simulation can bring God glory. I spent \_\_\_ minutes praying about my integrity as a group member."

### Comments About the Assignment

**Student Frustrations** At the suggestion of my mentor, the instructions for the assignment discussed some of the common spiritual situations students run into and gave instructions on how to handle them (see Appendix). This turned out to be a great help for the students, because it defused some of their major frustrations.

When students pray for an extended period, four frustrations tend to arise.

**1. Feelings.** Students feel the assignment is not spontaneous and therefore is not "spiritual." They do not like the sensation of having to watch the clock while they pray. Some students feel bored, frustrated, or are plagued with a wandering mind.

The instructions state that the student is not to be concerned with how he or she is feeling but to accept the feeling as what our loving Heavenly Father chooses to give at that time. When we ask for bread, God does not give a stone (Matt. 7: 9-11). God is in control of the situation, including the feelings that we have while praying. Students are instructed to place these things in His hands and continue praying.

**2. God doesn't say anything.** Like most of us, students want a sign or a response from God when they pray. A spiritual exercise isn't "spiritual" unless there is something exciting to report. When God does not overtly respond, students are frustrated.

However, our sovereign God does not always choose to give us good feelings when we pray. Students need to learn that this is fine. God chooses when to talk to us. As long as there is no sin blocking our communication, it is not a measure of our spiritual life when he decides to be silent.

**3. Extended prayer brings up issues** in the life of the student. Students, as they open their spirit to God, sometimes find that tangential issues flood in, particularly if the issues are important or salient. The instructions tell the student to bring those issues to Christ and let Him deal with them. The student should leave the issue at the foot of the cross and quietly return to the subject.

**4. Stress, physical exhaustion, or trouble.** Occasionally a student is so stressed, tired, or fractured over life issues that he or she is unable to pray. In such a case, the student is instructed to relax and give the situation into the hands of God. Instead of praying, the student may spend the required time reading Scripture. If they report this, their grade will not be affected.

In my classes, any student who reported reading Scripture to fulfill this assignment got the full grade. It was my thinking that God would direct each person to the activity He found to be best for the person at that time. In practice, there were only four or five students who reported reading Scripture instead of praying. Six or seven others reported a combination of prayer and Bible reading. As long as they reported spending the required time, all got the full grade.

**Questions.** People have various questions about this assignment. Most questions fall into one of the two categories below.

**Q:** Should a professor give academic credit for students praying?

**A:** Yes, I think so. One goal Christian professors have is to help the students see that God is involved in every part of their life, including their academic life. Therefore, I see no problem with giving students academic credit for praying about their academic tasks — in fact I think it sends a strong positive message. It also helps the student internalize spiritual truth and integrity which is certainly one goal of our business schools.

Having said that, in my syllabus this assignment is worth about 15% of a test. In other words, it is a relatively minor assignment.

**Q:** How do students react to this assignment?

**A:** Students reacted to this assignment extremely —

most loved it, some hated it. Since each student put his or her name on the assignment I was able, in many cases, to tie specific reactions to types of students.

**Loved the Assignment.** This assignment received the most enthusiastic responses of any assignment I have ever given. More than 80% of the students said in their response that they really appreciated it. Students related how, for the first time ever, they had prayed about a major class project. They related how this assignment helped them have their best semester ever. This assignment helped workgroups develop cohesiveness such as the students had seldom seen. It also helped students solve problems. For example, one group covenanted to use the assignment to pray about a social loafer in the group. They came up with an appropriate and loving solution.

Students made comments such as:

- “I have never had a professor do this. It was very special. Thank you.”
- “As I prayed for my group, God did miraculous things. This was the best.”
- “I learned to pray about big projects for the first time in my life.”

**Hated the Assignment.** However, this assignment also received some of the meanest and downright nasty responses I have ever received for an assignment. The negative responses seemed to come from three types of students.

**1. Students who were habitual social loafers.** This assignment tended to make students who regularly did not do their share of group work feel guilty about taking advantage of their friends. Often that guilt resulted in extreme reactions. One or two students repented of their laziness and exploitation and became harder working group members. However, a significant number of habitual social loafers projected their guilt onto the professor and became angry at me. They displayed this anger in various ways during the semester.

**2. Students who were in rebellion against God and/or were practicing a sin they did not want to repent of.** Students of this type resented being required to be in contact with God for even a limited amount of time. Their resentment and rebellion spilled out toward the professor.

**3. Students who were self-centered.** A few students were so focused on themselves that they resented the professor “forcing” them to focus on others, even in this limited way. These types of students expressed their resentment in many ways but, broadly speaking, talked at

length about their “rights,” or how this assignment was inappropriate and I was being a “dictator.”

In a number of semesters to my direct knowledge, the nasty reactions carried into teaching reviews. In a small class even a few negative students can skew the average. Therefore if you are up for promotion and your Dean, Department Chair, or Faculty Personnel Committee do not understand the limitations of student reviews, you may want to think twice about adding this assignment to your syllabus. However if your colleagues do understand the limits of student reviews and support what you are doing, this assignment will be a powerful force for good.

There are many positive benefits to this assignment. For example, it can be a great encouragement for the professor. The strongest and most fun classes I ever had were those that did this assignment. But even in strong, cohesive classes, there were students who took out their anger and guilt on me. Spiritual warfare is a very real thing. Therefore if you choose to give this assignment, ask God for protection for your class and for yourself.

With students praying for each other and faculty members praying for their classes, God can unleash His power. With such an infrastructure, great things can be accomplished for the Kingdom.

### Additional Suggestions and Resources

This exercise can be expanded in many ways and below are several suggestions. However, I *strongly* recommend that you not use this or a similar exercise more than once in a semester or it will lose its impact.

1. Relate this exercise to the first exercise by asking students to pray about their assumptions of success in this assignment and how that might relate to subsequent values, attitudes, and actions. For example, success could be “beating the opposition” or it could be developing the Fruits of the Spirit in the group members or both. How would the individual and group act differently in the different circumstances?

2. Use this exercise to emphasize important character traits. For example, the professor could specify that the student pray about integrity: “What is integrity as it relates to my group work?” There are endless opportunities for different emphases.

3. The Christian classic *A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life* by William Law resonates with business students. The book has short chapters and I often assign it as a supplement in OB classes. I have used this exercise to ask the students to focus on one idea or issue in, for

example, chapters 4-6, and pray for a half hour about that particular idea or issue. The Holy Spirit leads people to choose issues that resonate personally.

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## APPENDIX I

### “Soul Project” as handed out to students

#### **BUSN 470: Soul project: Open the Soul to God Regarding the Capstone Simulation Assignment**

Find a quiet place away from people and distractions.

A. Spend 15 minutes in the presence of God asking God how doing the Capstone simulation this semester might glorify him. The simulation is a training in analyzing complex situations, making decisions about those situations, and coping with the results of the decisions. There are also all kinds of group dynamics involved.

God is in control of all things. It may be that he has something particular for you to understand because of Capstone, or maybe he just wants you to learn a necessary skill. Maybe he has something else in mind entirely. Open your soul to God and ask him.

B. Spend another 15 minutes talking with God about how you can maintain integrity as a member of a work group in this class. In group work, what you do — or don't do — impacts other people significantly. It can make the semester great or awful for them. How does God want you to interact with the work your group has to do, and with the individual members of your team? Ask Him how you can bring glory to Him as you work with others.

C. Hand in a 1 or 2 page reaction paper discussing this assignment (typed, double-spaced, well-written). Please write only what you are comfortable sharing.

At the beginning of the paper state the amount of time you spent in prayer on each part, i.e. “I spent \_\_\_\_minutes

praying about how my doing the Capstone simulation can bring God glory. I spent \_\_\_\_ minutes praying about my integrity as a group member.”

NOTE: Please remember this is an exercise in opening your soul to God about daily tasks. It may not feel natural or spontaneous, particularly since you have to watch the clock. Don't worry about it. As with any exercise, it takes discipline and time for it to flow.

As you pray you might find yourself feeling bored, frustrated, or plagued with a wandering mind. God may not choose to give you a clear answer to the questions you ask. Other issues may intrude. Again, don't be concerned, but accept this as what your loving Heavenly Father chooses to give you at this time. Place these things in His hands and place the issues at the foot of the cross. Then quietly move back to the subject.

Once in a while, a person finds him or herself so fractured or stressed that he is unable to even pray. If this happens to you, relax. Leave the situation in the hands of God who knows all things and spend the required time reading Scripture. Report this in your paper. Under those circumstances, if you spend the required time in this way, it will not affect your grade.

God be with you and with your spirit.

*Grading criteria:* You will be graded on how completely and fully you followed the instructions.