

EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE: THREE THORNY QUESTIONS

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I am honored to be the incoming editor for *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business (JBIB)*. In this role, I follow two distinguished colleagues, Dr. Sharon Johnson and Dr. Rick Martinez, who have both written profoundly about the scholarship of Biblical integration and of teaching (e.g. Johnson, 2005, Martinez, 2006) – two areas that are at the core of the vocation of the Integration Scholar (Black & Smith, 2009; Marsden, 1997). The CBFA has been fortunate to have such thinkers guiding the journal.

With a new editor, of course, comes a reframing of the vision of the *JBIB*. *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* is closely identified with the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) and many in the association, rightfully, want to know what to expect from “their” journal. With this in mind, in the following pages I will give my perspective on three thorny questions that involve the nature and the future of the journal.

These questions are:

1. What is biblical integration?
2. What is the position of the *JBIB* among academic journals?
3. What contributions should the *JBIB* make to the CBFA?

These questions are thorny and difficult because first, they are important and second, they are controversial. Most CBFA members have an opinion on these issues and the opinions vary. That means that answering these questions in print can be...a bit spiky.

Nevertheless it is necessary for me to answer these questions. Collectively, the three

questions summarize the assumptions that lie behind editorial decisions, namely, what the journal is about and what it should be about. In strategic terms these questions ask: What is the mission of the *JBIB*? What strategic group is the *JBIB* in? How will the *JBIB* serve its constituents? Every incoming editor must answer these questions and the answers will impact authors, reviewers and readers.

The questions are also controversial because each has both philosophical and practical implications. CBFA members are drawn together by the mission of the organization. The *JBIB* was the first journal published by the association and in that sense, “the *JBIB* ‘R Us.” This means that the *JBIB* editor is responsible to the community to keep the mission at the philosophical center of the journal. At the same time, the *JBIB* needs to stand for the highest aspirations of the CBFA and be an instrument of the best scholarship the association can achieve.

In the following pages I will answer each of the three thorny questions from my perspective, always acknowledging that it is only one perspective and possibly not the best one. I invite the *JBIB* community of scholars to enter the discussion and respond to any, or all, of these questions. Various perspectives, if they come, will be published in future issues.

THORNY QUESTION # 1: WHAT IS BIBLICAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS?

The mission of the *JBIB* is biblical integration in business (*JBIB* Statement of Purpose, 2006). This means that the *JBIB* is more than an academic journal. It incorporates into every article and every discussion the living Word that is “...powerful and sharper than a double-edged

sword” (Heb. 4:12). The mission adds a dimension found in few journals; articles published in the *JBIB* can add Life and Light to the writer and the reader. They do not automatically do so, but the potential is there.

What is biblical integration in business? To integrate is to blend different issues or perspectives into a unified functioning whole. In relation to the *JBIB*, the perspectives would be aspects of Scripture or theology integrated with theory or research in business fields.

Several years ago (Smith, 2005), I followed Clinton (1990) and defined the academic integration of scripture and business as,

the scholarly pursuit to interrelate chosen elements in the business literature/world to Truth given to us by God, primarily in the Bible but also in life and in church practice and history.

Steve VanderVeen and Dick Chewning in the *JBIB* demonstrates some of the complexity of the issues involved. In an article titled “Let’s Quit Thinking About Integration” VanderVeen (1997:8) argued that integration is not an intellectual exercise, “thinking,” but rather it involves life and behavior – the life of Christ being lived out. He stated that,

In short, the more we think [emphasis added] about biblical integration the less likely we will get integrative behavior... because we are ignoring what makes the Christian life meaningful.

Chewning (1997:19) responded by noting that God communicated to us,

in verbal, propositional form [but] it is only the Holy Spirit who can make the Word a governing reality in our

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But is this an appropriate definition of biblical integration for the CBFA?

One group of members would argue, as I did, that integration is the result of a distinct entity, Scripture, being blended with one or more other distinct entities, business theories or ideas. However, a different group of members would argue that the sentence above is misleading - that a Christian is a physical-spiritual hybrid indwelt by the living God, and that separating the word of God from our vocation as Integration Scholar is impossible. We live integrated lives, therefore our writing is integrated.

So, what is Biblical Integration in Business?

This thorny question has not yet been fully resolved by the CBFA. A dialogue between

lives. Truth can be communicated verbally and is knowable intellectually... but for God’s truth to govern [our] hearts [is a work] of the Holy Spirit.

Further complexities arise as we examine the Scripture itself. “In the beginning was the Word,” says John (John 1:1), “and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Henry (1991) notes that,

by the word of God we may understand either the essential or the written word. The essential Word is... the Lord Jesus Christ... The written word [is] the holy scriptures, which are the word of God.

Phillips (1959) paraphrases John 1:1,5 like this: “At the beginning, God expressed himself.

In him [that personal expression] appeared life and this life was the light of mankind.”

When considering biblical integration, therefore, a number of concepts must be kept in mind. Biblical truth is an expression of God. Truth is intellectually knowable (thinking) through Scripture and through Christ. It is also lived in Christ (expression/behavior). The Holy Spirit implants, explains, and engenders the Truth. These are all important ideas but how do they impact what we do in this journal? How do we balance these in a definition of biblical integration in business?

A Modest Proposal

In 2005, the CBFA made a major contribution to biblical integration scholarship when it affirmed a definition of Christian Scholarship.

Christian Scholarship is any scholarship done by a Christian to the glory of God. Christian scholarship is not defined by subject or analysis but is scholarship done for the sake of Christ and for the sake of uncovering His Truth. CBFA is directly concerned with how God's Truth informs the business areas and how our academic fields encourage new ways of looking at Biblical Truth. (Smith, Martinez, VanderVeen, Swicegood, Haskins & Babbs, 2005).

With the intention of formulating a statement for others to react to, I used the definition above to create the following definition of biblical integration:

Biblical integration in business is a subset of Christian Scholarship in which a scholar utilizes the Bible as one source of information and his or her business area as another and unites the two in a meaningful way. When this uniting is empowered by the Holy Spirit, it creates Life and Light by bringing the life of Jesus Christ into the mind and actions of the integrator and those observing or reading the integration.

This definition may not be complete or even reasonable, but it does emphasize that what we do in this journal is more than scholarship. When the Holy Spirit makes the words we use about the Word into reality, our articles become a reflection of His nature and they engender life - for ourselves, for our students, and for the church of Jesus Christ. As we pursue the vocation of Integration Scholar we allow the “life that is the light of mankind” (John 1:5) to shine in the darkness.

What is biblical integration in business? I just gave one tentative answer, but there are others. The challenge to the CBFA is to find and explore them. The field of Biblical Integration in Business is a continuum. One end of the continuum focuses on the practical application of integration - how faith is applied to the elements of the business disciplines. Most disciplines that develop interest in Biblical integration begin with application (DeVries, 1982) and the CBFA has followed this pattern.

However, before the field of Biblical Integration in Business can mature we must clarify our theoretical understandings. We must expand the theory and models behind the applications and explore their strengths and weaknesses. We must clearly state the assumptions on which our discussions rest, or at least clearly understand where the areas of disagreement are. The *JBIB* provides a forum for this discussion and welcomes all comers.

Here are some questions to consider:

- **Ontology**
 - What is the nature of biblical integration?
 - What are its fundamental properties?
- **Epistemology**
 - What is the basis of integration knowledge?
 - What roles do church practice and history have in biblical integration?
 - What role does theology have?
- **Authority**
 - When business theory or practice contradicts scripture, which takes precedence? Why?
 - What are the roles of opinion, belief, and fact in faith/business integration?
 - Whose opinions and beliefs and what facts?

Biblical integration in business is the mission of the *JBIB* and we must clarify what that means in order to move forward theoretically. The second thorny question an editor must undertake has to do with the context of the journal. What is the position of the *JBIB* among other academic journals?

THORNY QUESTION #2: WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE *JBIB* AMONG ACADEMIC JOURNALS?

The *JBIB* has been published by the CBFA since 1995. Its purpose was, and is, to relate the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the Bible, with academic theory and research in the business disciplines. Because this field is still young, articles range “from practical applications to philosophical models” (*JBIB*, Guidelines for Manuscripts, Fall, 2006). The *JBIB* accepts both empirical and theoretical papers.

But where does the *JBIB* stand among academic journals? This is a practical question for any person with the vocation of Integration Scholar who wishes to advance in his or her profession. Specifically, what can those who publish in the *JBIB* say to their faculty personnel committees about the journal?

If a business professor is a faculty member in a Christian university that prizes faith-integration work, the *JBIB* is one of the key journals to publish in. If, however, the professor works in a different type of university, the answer is more complex.

The *JBIB* can be viewed as a journal within the “spirituality” movement that is growing in many business disciplines. In addition, religious integration is considered a sub-set of the academically maturing field of Business Ethics. However, because of its emphasis on the Bible, the *JBIB* is possibly unique among academic business journals. Biblical principles are part of the assumptions of many western business practices and theories such as vocation, private property, individual and corporate justice, stewardship, balance of power, need for and types of control systems, servant leadership, and corporate citizenship. As a result, Biblical integration is a fertile and rewarding field for scholarship.

For promotion and tenure purposes, the *JBIB* can be considered to be a Tier II journal. According to *Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities* (*cabells.com*, 2010), Tier I journals are internationally recognized journals that shape an entire discipline. Tier II journals publish high-quality research in a sub-discipline or a niche. The *JBIB*, which publishes high-quality theory and research, dominates its particular niche. As editor, I will seek to maintain that quality by publishing articles that are academically appropriate and that extend knowledge. The goal is to help build a significant body of scholarly work in the field of Biblical Integration in Business.

At this point it must be noted that though in the past there were relatively few publication outlets for faith-integration writing (Martinez, 2004), this is changing. Increasingly, the business academies are realizing that more holistic orientations are needed for the overall advancement of scientific knowledge (Singh, Haddad & Chow, 2007; Stokes, 1997), and that cross-discipline integration is important for creativity and innovation (Campbell, Daft & Hulan, 1982; Schwarz, Clegg, Cummings, Donaldson, & Miner, 2007). Therefore, the *JBIB* is no longer as unusual as it once was. Integration and faith scholarship are becoming part of the mainstream in some disciplines (Dyke & Starke, 2005) as is demonstrated, for example, by the growing literature in the “Management, Spirituality, and Religion” area of the Academy of Management. Some journals, such as the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, are becoming friendly to cross-discipline and faith integration papers. Thus, the question “What is the place of the *JBIB* among academic journals?” can be answered with the response that the *JBIB* takes its place among the refereed cross-discipline academic journals in the faith-integration or spirituality streams of scholarship in the various disciplines.

A new *JBIB* editor must pick her way carefully through important and controversial questions and I have given tentative answers to two of them. However, the last question remains – given the answers to the first two questions, how can the *JBIB* best serve the CBFA? This last question has numerous practical implications for *JBIB* authors and readers.

THORNY QUESTION # 3: WHAT CONTRIBUTION SHOULD THE *JBIB* MAKE TO THE CBFA?

The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business has long served the members of the CBFA by providing a forum for Integration Scholars to live out their vocation. It has allowed authors to ponder and debate important integration questions, to formulate applications, and to communicate their thoughts in a disciplined manner. It has provided readers with good content and different perspectives from which to observe the beauty of Christ. In a practical sense, it has provided ideas for classes, readings for students and so forth.

These are core contributions of the journal and will not change with the change of editor. However as the environment changes and as the CBFA matures, the forms of the journal must also change. New times demand new implementations. Writers need new opportunities to develop ideas that will impact the future. Accordingly, in the next few years the *JBIB* will focus on one of the key reasons it was created (Call for Editor, 2009)—expanding and deepening the pool of integration scholars.

Such a focus is valuable for the CBFA. As faith based universities increase their emphasis on academic writing, spurred by accrediting bodies and the call to deeper Christian scholarship (Marsden, 1997), many mid-career professors desire to publish. The doctoral programs at Christian universities graduate excellent integration scholars. Christian professors at secular universities desire to deepen their intellectual and spiritual life by finding ways to integrate Biblical truth into their discipline. The *JBIB* is a natural publication forum for them all.

However, few people have the innate ability to do scholarly Biblical integration without practice. As editor, I seek to publish articles that extend knowledge. I also seek to create opportunities for colleagues to practice biblical integration in a variety of ways. Theory and practice must balance in the way the journal contributes to the CBFA.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Therefore, in addition to utilizing the blind peer review process to assist authors to craft excellent papers, the *JBIB* will encourage the following.

Reviewing

A good way to learn to write better integration papers is to review integration papers. However not everyone is qualified, or has the time, to be a member of the *JBIB* Review Board. Therefore, the *JBIB* has formed a junior review board called Review 2.1. An individual commits to be the third or fourth reviewer on a maximum of two manuscripts during one year (CBFA conference to CBFA conference) - hence the name “Review 2.1.” A person can join this board by sending the editor an email with a current vita. You are welcome to join the Review 2.1 board. Email me at ysmith@laverne.edu.

Dialogue

Members of the *JBIB* Review board, and occasionally the Review 2.1 board, are invited to respond to articles that have been accepted for publication. This is a long standing *JBIB* tradition that contributes to the community of integration scholars by fostering the give-and-take of debate. There is an excellent example of such a dialogue in this issue. The discussion created by the Dialogues is important to the development of theory and to finding ways that theory applies, appropriately, to the reality of life.

Research Translation

The author of a “research translation” takes a biblical integration research article, found in the *JBIB* or elsewhere, and translates it into language or exercises suitable for the classroom or for practitioners. This allows a further step of accessibility and usability for faculty, businesspeople, students, and other readers of the *JBIB*.

Living Integration

What does biblical integration in business look like when it is lived? This new section will tell the stories of people who are exceptional integrators of Scripture and business. It is inaugurated in this issue with a discussion of the life of Richard Chewning. Dr. Chewning has been influential in the formation of the CBFA, the development of the *JBIB*, and the individual lives of many of the readers of this journal. His story has lessons and encouragement for all of us.

A further example of Living Integration in this issue is the retrospective on Lisa Klein Surdyk. Dr. Surdyk was a member of the CBFA board that founded the *JBIB* and was president of the CBFA board during a time when the association grew from a small group of scholars into a larger confederation. She contributed numerous articles to this journal, and was the second recipient of the Chewing award, after Dick Chewing himself. Lisa battled colon cancer for several years and on December 9, 2009, she went to be with her Lord. Her life, lived before us and with us, is an excellent example of Living Integration. She will be greatly missed.

Media Reviews

Many communication methods are now available to faculty and students, and the *JBIB* is an excellent forum for evaluating them. The *JBIB* welcomes reviews of books, websites, simulations, Twitter addresses, Second Life cites, CD series and other media that *JBIB* readers would find helpful, personally or professionally.

All of the outlets above are ways for those with the vocation of Integration Scholar to practice the writing side of that vocation. They also create ways for the rest of us to understand the many ways that God works and to encourage us to participate more fully in the life of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I provided tentative answers to three thorny questions that every *JBIB* editor must consider – what is the mission of the journal, what is its place among academic journals and how can the journal best serve its constituents? Each editor must answer these questions in ways that are appropriate for the current life-stage of the Association and the journal. However, as anyone who has trimmed rose bushes knows, the bush might have three branches one day but by the next there will be three more. In the same way, each of these thorny questions engenders more, and then more. A more realistic title for this essay might be “Ten Thorny Questions.”

You have read what I think about three important and controversial questions. Would you

answer the questions differently? In what way, and why? What other questions need answering? Let us start talking about these things. Thorny branches, appropriately pruned and cleaned up, can grow beautiful roses.

Glory be to God.

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