

# A Teacher's Perspective; A Scholar's Passion

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*Dr. Johnson believes that Christian faculty can fulfill roles of both scholar and teacher. He sees scholarship, offering the exhilaration of original exploration and peer-level discussion, as essential to providing students with not only information but also a sense of excitement for the learning process.*

I entered the college professor ranks in 1976 in spite of myself. My real desire was to work in a corporate training position after completing my D.B.A. at Florida State University. After sending my resume to over 200 large companies and receiving about that many outright rejections ("Thank you for your application but we find that at this time we do not....") and coming to the end of my program, I decided that teaching at a college would be better than being unemployed.

As it turned out it was in fact far better than I could have imagined.

As I now enter my 21st year of full-time teaching at the college level, I find myself ever more excited about the possibilities of teaching and learning. New technologies have opened up great possibilities for designing teaching approaches that might more actively involve students. This year I will be teaching an organizational behavior course, and the textbook students will be using comes with a CD-ROM that contains the full

text of the book, custom video clips, animations and hotlinks to a special website which will have an interactive student guide, current articles, links to various company websites, and so on. Teaching has never been more challenging and rewarding.

And yet...

From the very beginning of my teaching career I have been drawn to the role of scholar. I have always found exploring and communicating ideas to be my greatest passion. In a sense I love teaching because it provides an outlet for sharing with students the questions (many) and answers (fewer) that arise in my own intellectual journey.

Because I have always chosen to work at smaller "teaching" colleges and universities, I have found myself somewhat reluctant to push my passion for scholarship as a public agenda. I have pursued many interesting research and writing projects but primarily as a matter of individual desire. The implicit understanding that I had was that teaching was what really

mattered and that scholarship (and its attendant publishing thrust) was applauded by some but not very loudly for fear that scholarly activity would displace teaching commitment. (“We don’t want to go the way of the Harvards and Yales who lost their focus on teaching and....”)

In 1986 my view of the rather separate worlds of teaching and scholarship was challenged.

Dr. Richard Chewning arrived at Baylor University to assume the Chavanne Chair of Christian Business Ethics. I was attracted to his commitment to “wed” scholarship and teaching. He did this in his own work (as was demonstrated by the groundbreaking, four-volume *Christians in the Marketplace Series* for Navpress, published between 1989 and 1991) and in his classroom (as he shared insights with undergraduate and graduate students, integrating biblical principles and philosophical positions). In later years I would have the opportunity, through a two-week workshop sponsored by the Pew Charitable Foundation, to meet and share with over 100 teachers from liberal arts colleges and be challenged again to see the necessity of defining my role as a scholar-teacher.

Attendance at a one week biblical-integration session for new faculty, sponsored by the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities, continued my

growth in this vein, particularly with exposure to wonderful Christian scholars like Arthur Holmes.

More recently I have completed reading George Marsden’s book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1997). Dr. Marsden has captured in this rather small book (142 pages) what has been a growing conviction of mine:

The proposal set forth in this volume...is that mainstream American higher education should be more open to explicit discussion of the relationship of religious faith to learning. Scholars who have religious faith should be reflecting on the intellectual implications of that faith and bringing those reflections into the mainstream of intellectual life....I am advocating the opening of the academic mainstream to scholarship that relates one’s belief in God to what else one thinks about (pp. 4-5).

Dr. Marsden uses the term “faith-informed scholarship” (p. 6). He suggests that making our faith “an explicit” in our scholarship will have profound effects:

Serious religious beliefs help shape not only our overt ways of valuing things, but also our priorities. What do we see as important to study? What is it

about the subject that makes it interesting? What are the questions we ask that will organize our interpretations of this topic? What theories do we entertain as relevant to our interpretations? What theories do we rule out? (p. 63).

Dr. Marsden advocates the creation of institutions and networks which can sustain the enterprise of faith-informed scholarship. His book provides examples from a variety of fields of the possibilities of such resourcing.

So, I am ready to finally live at ease with my self perception as a Christian scholar. For some, particularly at schools like mine where teaching and scholarship are seen by some as uneasy relatives living in the same house, the term "Christian scholar"

seems either pretentious or dangerous. Because of the reputation of "research

universities" as academic enclaves where teaching is disdained and narrow secularized publication is celebrated, claims to be a scholar can be seen as a self-aggrandizing claim to superiority and the right to special treatment (like lighter class loads). And, because many teachers at "teaching" colleges have never published at all (for

any number of reasons), they find the term "scholarship" to be a call away from the important role of teacher to which they have dedicated their lives, often at great personal and professional costs.

I believe that Christian colleges are increasingly drawing faculty with a new attitude toward their roles. These teachers, trained in doctoral programs emphasizing research, are arriving with expectations that they will continue their development as scholars who teach. They want to be involved in the process of both developing and delivering ideas. They want to spend time both on researching-publishing and teaching. While they appreciate the time tensions involved, they do not see any inherent conflict between their roles as scholars and teachers. Rather, they see

these as not only complimentary but necessary. Scholarship offers the

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excitement of original exploration and peer-level discussion essential to providing students with not only information but also a sense of excitement for the learning process.

The Christian Business Faculty Association and its publication, the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, provides one of Marsden's

“communities” of like-minded scholars. (We will be sending Mr. Marsden copies of this and our two previous issues of the *JBIB*.) In this, the third issue of the *JBIB*, we are celebrating the very best in Christian scholarship focused on business enterprise.

In each issue we have made dramatic progress toward establishing a “community forum” where ideas can be both shared and debated. In this third issue we explicitly encourage such debate by presenting two articles written by Dr. Richard Chewning and Dr. Steve Vander Veen, and then allowing these two Christian scholars to provide observations about each other’s work. Also, we present a follow-up analysis by Dr. Bruce Winston to an article focusing on Deming’s quality philosophy appearing in our second issue of the *JBIB*. I am very excited about this issue of our journal and pray that it will encourage you to see the possibilities of Christian scholarship in business.

In particular I want to encourage anyone reading this issue of the *JBIB* to join in the great process of Christian scholarship. George Marsden ends his book by asking some very probing questions:

...the question that has motivated this book is why Christian scholarship has such a low reputation in the rest of the academic

community. Why is such scholarship thought to be impossible, nonsensical, or non-existent? Why is it not practiced more widely in other Christian institutions that appear to have commitments both to Christianity and to excellent scholarship? Why do not more scholars who are Christian think deeply about the relevance of faith to their scholarship? (pp. 188-119).

I am pleased to be a part of an organization like the Christian Business Faculty Association which has been committed for a number of years to providing a forum (through annual meetings, paper presentations, and more recently through the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*) for Christian scholar-teachers in business to find encouragement and excitement in their growth as professionals.

This issue of the *JBIB* is dedicated to all those, like myself, who have found themselves captured by the hunger for knowledge and the grace of God. What a privilege it is to have been led by God to a position of service that allows us to love God with all our heart and soul AND mind (Matthew 22:37).