

**Christian Business Faculty Association,
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Christian Business Faculty Association:
How are we and how should we be preparing students for careers in business, and
what are the implications for how we organize and administer our programs?**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold
the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17, English Standard Version)*

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Abstract:

The Christian Business Faculty Association has an established history of helping Christian business faculty as they endeavor to teach business from a Christian perspective. What is the best way for the CBFA to build on this history, or alternatively, what course should the CBFA chart for the future? This paper adds to the ongoing discussion regarding this question.

“Christian” and “business” are both used to describe the faculty that comprise the CBFA. Which of these attributes is currently most prominent? Which of these attributes should be most prominent in the future? Questions such as these are explored in this paper.

While it is not easy to ask or contemplate questions of this sort, this is a necessary exercise for the CBFA to maximize its effectiveness in advancing God’s kingdom here on earth.

Introduction:

At the last Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) annual conference the future of the CBFA was a popular topic for discussion, with discussions ranging from the more to less formal. Along with being appropriate for a growing, maturing organization like the CBFA, these discussions dovetailed with the thoughts and conversations I have had as a business faculty member at a Christian college over the last eight years. Given the popularity of the topic at the last CBFA annual conference, I am not the only CBFA member who has been pondering this topic.

I have two goals for this paper: First, topics I have considered and perspectives I have developed over the last eight years may be useful to other CBFA members as they continue to ponder this topic. Presentation of this paper provides an avenue for disseminating these topics and perspectives. Second, presentation of this paper provides an opportunity for interested CBFA members to come together to discuss this topic. Ideally, this discussion will continue long after the twentieth CBFA annual conference concludes with formal and informal discussion groups growing out of the paper presentation and ensuing discussion.

Three features of my background combine to form my perspective on this topic: First, I have extensive academic experience in secular settings. I have earned masters and doctoral degrees in business from a Big 10 university with nationally ranked business programs. I have held tenure track appointments at a range of secular institutions, including a Big 12 university, where I taught at the bachelors, masters and doctoral levels; a branch campus of a Big 10 university, where I taught at the bachelors and

masters levels; and an elite private liberal arts college, where I taught at the bachelors level.

Second, my academic experience includes significant time both before and after I became a Christian. During my five years as a business graduate student and my first three years as a faculty member I was not a Christian. During my first five years as a Christian I was a faculty member at two secular institutions. The eight years since then have been spent as a faculty member at two Christian colleges. During my pre-Christian years my goal was to be an effective business faculty member. It was only after I became a Christian that it became important to be an effective Christian faculty member as well as an effective business faculty member. Thus, I continue to grapple with being an effective Christian business faculty member.

Third, I have formal training in theology culminating in a masters degree in theological studies. Including undergraduate foundation coursework I have over 100 credit hours of theology coursework. To the extent that I have made progress in being an effective Christian business faculty member, it is in large part due to this formal training in theology.

While I am sure there are other CBFA members with backgrounds that incorporate the above three features, I am equally sure that they represent a small portion of the CBFA membership. Note here that I am not suggesting the above as a career path for anyone desiring to become an effective Christian business faculty member. While not the only useful perspective, the above background does provide me with a relatively unique perspective for pondering what it means to be an effective Christian business faculty member.

Is formal training in theology as valued as formal training in business?

Given that all CBFA members have extensive formal training in business while relatively few CBFA members have comparable formal training in theology, should it be a surprise that we find it difficult to teach business from a Christian perspective? If someone was asked to teach accounting courses without the benefit of formal training in accounting, we would not be surprised to find that the person encountered significant difficulties. Indeed, we would not recommend that someone lacking formal training in accounting be hired to teach accounting classes. Why should it be any different for theology?

If we are serious about being effective Christian business faculty members, do we fail to properly emphasize and value formal training in theology? Using revealed preference theory, does the way that we currently organize and administer our business programs indicate that we value business knowledge and competence more than we value Christian knowledge and competence?

How is biblical integration different from faith integration?

Given the relative lack of formal training in theology among CBFA members and the difficulty of being an effective Christian business faculty member that goes with it, what is the likelihood of a Christian perspective morphing into a more general faith-based or spiritual perspective? In a discussion at the last CBFA annual conference concerning this issue one of the founders of the CBFA emphasized that the association's journal is *The Journal of **Biblical** Integration in Business* not *The Journal of **Faith** Integration in Business*.

Some participants in the discussion did not grasp this distinction. For them “biblical integration” and “faith integration” were interchangeable phrases. There are two possible explanations for this equating of biblical and faith integration: First, the participants lacked sufficient theological literacy to grasp the importance of this distinction. Second, the participants had sufficient theological literacy but they had adopted a more liberal or postmodern theological perspective instead of an evangelical perspective. Though the doctrinal statement of the CBFA is minimal, its content points to the first explanation as being the most likely.¹

Is biblical integration the same thing as a biblical perspective?

The phrase “integration of faith and learning” is commonly heard more generally on evangelical Christian college campuses and more specifically on the campuses of member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Taking this phrase as a starting point, it is not surprising that many CBFA activities focus on biblical integration in business. However, is this integration formulation the proper formulation for understanding Christian business education?

The integration formulation depicts two constructs being merged into one. More generally, all that one associates with faith is merged with all that one associates with learning. More specifically, all that one associates with the Bible is merged with all that

¹ Membership in the CBFA is open to college and university faculty members who agree with the following:

1. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God and through His atonement is the mediator between God and man.
2. That the Word of God expressed in the Bible is inspired by God and is authoritative in the development of Christian faith and practice.
3. That the Christian faith has significant implications for the structure and practice of business.
4. That developing Christian education for business practice should be undertaken as a cooperative venture of this organization.

one associates with business education and business practice. How does this formulation square with the biblical account of creation, fall and redemption?

When God created human beings, He created them in His own image.² One dimension of being created in God's image is seeing and understanding the whole of life from God's perspective. This is why the pre-fall Adam and Eve did not need the Ten Commandments. For example, the pre-fall Adam and Eve had no desire to covet, so they did not need to be instructed not to covet. To the extent they engaged in activities that fall within the boundaries of modern business practice³, Adam and Eve saw and understood business from God's perspective.

This capacity to see and understand the whole of life from God's perspective was contingent on Adam and Eve continuing to perfectly bear and reflect God's image. With their fall into sin Adam and Eve lost this capacity, as they no longer perfectly bore and reflected God's image. Their perspective was rotated 180 degrees, as they went from seeing and understanding the whole of life from God's perspective to seeing and understanding the whole of life from Satan's perspective.⁴ Such remains the state of all unredeemed human beings.

Redemption accomplished in and through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, however, can be thought of as a re-creation. As Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold,

² See Genesis 1:27. For commentary on this verse see Calvin (2000, pp. 91-96), Hamilton (1990, pp. 132-138), and Wenham (1987, pp. 27-32).

³ There is much in Genesis 1 and 2 to indicate that Adam and Eve did engage in activities that fall within the boundaries of modern business practice. This interesting avenue of exploration is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴ See Genesis 3:6. For commentary on this verse see Calvin (2000, pp. 151-157), Hamilton (1990, pp. 190-191), and Wenham (1987, pp. 75-76). For further amplification of the fall and its consequences see 1 John 2:16. For commentary on this verse see Calvin (1996c, pp. 187-188), Marshall (1978, pp. 144-146), and Smalley (1984, pp. 64-90).

the new has come.⁵” Thus, despite not being entirely sanctified this side of Heaven, redeemed children of God are reoriented to see and understand the whole of life from God’s perspective. It is no longer natural to see and understand the whole of life from the old, fallen perspective. Instead, it is now natural to see and understand the whole of life from the new, redeemed perspective. Paul makes the same point in Romans 12:2, instructing Christians that they, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.⁶”

Given the above, are redeemed children of God called to integrate Christianity and business, or are they called to see and understand business from a Christian perspective? Which coheres most closely with the biblical account of redemption? As faculty members can both our efforts to see and understand business from a Christian perspective and our efforts to teach business from a Christian perspective be thought of as exercises in applied sanctification? Whatever label we attach to these efforts, we know all too well that the worthiness of these efforts is matched by their difficulty.

Does an explicit biblical perspective conflict with institutional objectives?

As the institutions where CBFA members hold faculty positions mature, greater emphasis is placed on accreditation and other forms of institutional recognition. This increased emphasis on institutional recognition brings with it increased emphasis on faculty research productivity. Most of the outlets for business research have a secular orientation. Thus, the research most likely to be accepted for publication will have a

⁵ For commentary on this verse see Barnett (1997, pp. 296-299), Calvin (1996b, pp. 233-234), and Hughes (1962, pp. 201-204).

⁶ For commentary on this verse see Calvin (1996a, pp. 453-455), Haldane (1996, pp. 556-557), Hodge (1997, pp. 384-385), Moo (1996, pp. 754-758), and Murray (1968, pp. 110-116).

secular focus. Even those outlets with a business ethics orientation are most receptive to research that adopts a more general faith-based or spiritual perspective. Unfortunately, then, the research program that is most likely to lead to tenure may not be the research program most consistent with being an effective Christian business faculty member. In a similar fashion, conforming a business department to the requirements of external accrediting agencies may be at odds with maximizing the department's effectiveness in teaching business from a Christian perspective.

The above leads one to ask if a misplaced priority is being placed on institutional recognition from secular sources. If the chief goal of Christian colleges is to advance God's kingdom by preparing Christians for lives of service, does institutional recognition from secular sources contribute to attaining this goal, or can this become a distraction?

Given that both institutional and faculty recognition go with an emphasis on research as opposed to an emphasis on teaching, it is helpful to explore an ongoing debate taking place in a secular context. Authors such as Martin Anderson (1996) and Charles Sykes (1988) have questioned the value of much academic research. Anderson describes the misplaced emphasis on research as playing the glass bead game. One can become a skilled player of the glass bead game just as one can become a skilled player of the Monopoly board game. The approach employed by Anderson, Sykes and others to understand the behavior of faculty is virtually identical to the approach employed by public choice economists to understand the behavior of politicians.

If not the motive for Mark Noll's writing of *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), the above debate is helpful for understanding much of the reaction to Noll's book. Instead of understanding Noll's book as a call to thoughtfully understand the whole of

life from a Christian perspective, some have understood Noll's book as a call to strive for recognition from the secular academic world. Given that we live in a secular world, striving to thoughtfully understand the whole of life from a Christian perspective is fundamentally countercultural. This approach values formal theological study as an essential means to the desired end. This approach does not, and often will not, result in recognition from the secular academic world. In contrast, striving for recognition from the secular academic world exposes a given institution or individual to the risk of being swallowed by the dominant secular culture.

Given the above, Christian business faculty members must decide where to position themselves in relation to two factors: One factor concerns the extent to which business is understood and taught from a distinctly Christian perspective, as opposed to understanding and teaching business primarily from a secular perspective with occasional Christian supplements. The second factor concerns the extent to which effective teaching is understood as the primary calling of Christian business faculty, as opposed to understanding research as the primary calling of Christian business faculty. In understanding these factors note that they are continuous, more-less variables, not dichotomous, yes-no variables. The following chart depicts the interaction of these two factors:

The Optimal Position for Christian Business Faculty Members in Relation to Two Factors		Teaching-Research Emphasis	
		Complete Teaching Emphasis	Complete Research Emphasis
Christian-Secular Perspective	Intentionally Christian Perspective		
	Nominally Christian Perspective		

How can the CBFA be most effective in advancing biblical integration?

Given the content of the previous sections, can the CBFA be most effective in advancing God's kingdom by serving as a catalyst for countercultural change? The CBFA is both sufficiently established and sufficiently large that it could serve as an accrediting body for programs that understand and teach business from a distinctively Christian perspective. Currently, business programs at Christian colleges can choose among three secular accrediting bodies-the AACSB, the ACBSP, and the IACBE. CBFA sponsored accreditation would provide a distinctly different option.

The potential for CBFA sponsored accreditation also allows for alternative options for preparing and credentialing Christian business faculty members. Currently, a research doctoral degree in business from an AACSB accredited institution is the most desirable credential, with a doctoral degree of some sort often serving as an acceptable substitute. In this regard note the number of business faculty position announcements on the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities website that either require a doctoral

degree or prefer a doctoral degree. Contrast this with the number of positions that are ultimately filled with masters degree qualified faculty.

It is costly-in terms of time, money, and family disruption-to pursue and complete any sort of doctoral degree, let alone a research doctoral degree from an AACSB accredited institution. If the benefit in terms of improved effectiveness in understanding and teaching business from an intentionally Christian perspective justified the cost of pursuing and completing the degree, then the doctoral degree should continue as the desired credential. If, however, the doctoral degree is desired primarily because we have adopted secular standards for academic respectability, then we should reconsider the desirability of the doctoral degree as the desired credential.

Consider the following as an alternative option for preparing and credentialing Christian business faculty members. This approach combines formal training in both business and theology with the goal of optimally preparing faculty members to understand and teach business from a distinctly Christian perspective. The base level of formal training would include two masters degrees-a master of business administration (MBA) and a master of divinity (MDiv). Many potential Christian business faculty members already hold an MBA, and seminaries now offer a variety of alternative delivery formats for the MDiv.

Beyond this base level a second level of formal training would consist of a doctoral degree patterned after current doctor of ministry (DMin) programs. The DMin is pursued by pastors while they continue in their pastoral duties. Similarly, a DMin-like degree program could be pursued by Christian business faculty members while they continue their faculty duties. The doctor of business administration (DBA) program

offered by Anderson University may already represent this approach. The key feature for this DMin-like program will be the intentional manner in which it is integrative, requiring students to integrate what they bring to the program from their MBA and MDiv programs.

This alternative approach significantly differs from the approach one would follow in pursuit of a faculty position at a secular institution. Thus, it is an approach that is not conducive to gaining recognition from secular academic bodies. However, it is an approach better suited to prepare faculty members to understand and teach business from a distinctly Christian perspective.

Conclusion:

This paper builds on discussion from the last CBFA annual conference. While I believe that the ideas offered in the paper have merit, it is not my intent that these ideas be accepted and adopted in their entirety. Instead, my goal is to continue and advance discussion of this general topic through the presentation of this paper. Some of the ideas may be controversial, but that is not necessarily a bad thing, as controversial ideas may be more likely to promote and stimulate additional discussion. In the end, I will be satisfied if presentation of this paper contributes in some small way to the continued growth and development of the CBFA as an organization that effectively advances God's kingdom.

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