

# Defining and Developing a Space for Business Scholarship in the Christian Academy

by Richard J. Martinez

## Abstract

Perhaps surprisingly, despite scattered contributions in recent years, little progress has been made in developing a coordinated body of work in the business disciplines that reflects a Christian worldview. While Christian scholars in most academic disciplines face certain universal obstacles, Christian business scholars are particularly challenged in bringing their faith-inspired ideas to fruition. Many factors have contributed to this condition, and I explore in this paper some of the key difficulties, and the value, inherent in creating a space for business in the Christian academy. These factors include *defining* what we mean by “Christian” business scholarship (CBS), developing the *ability* to speak intelligently on issues of faith and theology in the absence of formal training, identifying potential *outlets* for the CBS product, the serious lack of *incentives* at the professional level for spending finite resources on such efforts, and our tendency to *compartmentalize* the faith and professional aspects of life. I then begin the discussion of general remedies for each of these difficulties. The paper ends with a call for scholars and administrators in Christian higher education to work in extraordinary fashion to overcome these barriers and create a space for business in the Christian academy.

# **Defining and Developing a Space for Business Scholarship in the Christian Academy**

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## Defining and Developing a Space for Business Scholarship in the Christian Academy

As marketplace activities, economic transactions, and organizational behavior constitute a significant portion of human activity, it is natural that Christian scholars ought to consider how their unique perspective might illuminate the study of these subjects. Surprisingly, despite scattered contributions in recent years, little progress has been made in developing a coordinated body of work in the business disciplines that reflects a Christian worldview. While Christian scholars in most academic disciplines face certain universal obstacles<sup>1</sup>, Christian business scholars are particularly challenged in bringing their faith-inspired ideas to fruition. Many factors have contributed to this condition, and I explore in this paper some of the key difficulties, and the value, inherent in creating a space for business in the Christian academy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wondered (several decades ago!) “(w)hether in our time Christ can still occupy a place where we make decisions on the deepest matters known to us, over our own life and over the life of our people.”<sup>2</sup> This question is one of central importance to business scholars who wish to be more overt in allowing their Christian faith to influence their choice of research questions and possible answers. As business scholars have long suffered from a legitimacy problem related to being considered a “soft” science, academic gatekeepers have labored to ensure an increasingly positivistic standard for scholarship in the business disciplines, despite the central role of human behavior in most business activities. There has been little room in this paradigm for any consideration of faith, belief, the metaphysical, or the supernatural. As business scholars, academic institutions, and gatekeepers increasingly favor “hard” science with its requisite neutrality (or hostility) toward religious or theological influence, little academic space remains for the ‘belief’ that creates and sustains sincere Christian scholarship.

If the existing scientific and academic paradigm is not conducive to Christian business scholarship (CBS), American society and the state offer no encouragement either. Stephen Carter describes how society offers great opposition to religious influence in education and academia, despite the fact that religion offers critical counter-resistance that is an important “source of diversity, of dialogue, and, ultimately, of change.”<sup>3</sup> Elimination of religious (more specifically, Christian) voices and perspectives in the world of ideas will “kill off the ability of the religious to create centers of meaning in serious opposition to the meanings of the state, [leaving us] without the possibility of future prophets calling us to righteousness.”<sup>4</sup> That is, creating a space for belief in the business academy has two benefits. First, it is a unique source of dialogue challenging and complementing a scientific paradigm that discounts or ignores the spiritual dimension of business and organizational activities. Second, it fills a unique ministerial need for academic constituents who have questions regarding how we should live out our faith in righteousness in the marketplace and in organizations.

I begin by first examining five factors that cause the greatest difficulty for business – oriented scholars attempting to develop quality scholarship with a distinctively Christian message. These factors include defining what we mean by “Christian” business scholarship, developing the ability to speak intelligently on issues of faith and theology in the absence of

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<sup>1</sup> See George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity,” *BOOK* (City, ST: Publisher, Year), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Carter, “Religion, Resistance, and the Curious History of America’s Public Schools,” *BOOK* (City, ST: Publisher, Year), 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

formal training, identifying potential outlets for the CBS product, the serious lack of incentives (or the presence of disincentives) at the professional level for spending finite resources on such efforts, and our tendency to compartmentalize faith and professional aspects of life. I then offer general and specific remedies for each of these difficulties. I end with a call for scholars and administrators in Christian higher education to work in extraordinary fashion to overcome these barriers and create a space for business in the Christian academy.

### **Barriers to Sustained Development of CBS**

These issues are not intended to be exhaustive, rather they are illustrative of the factors that make CBS such a challenge for willing scholars. The first issue to be considered is the confusion surrounding exactly what we mean by Christian Business Scholarship.

#### *Definitional Issues*

There has developed over several decades a great body of literature aimed at addressing the nature and usefulness of an expressly Christian scholarship. The more general questions of Christian scholarship have been addressed by the seminal work of George Marsden<sup>5</sup>. Closer to home, the idea of an explicitly Christian economics has been discussed in recently in *Christian Scholars Review*.<sup>6</sup> As we focus in more narrowly on the business disciplines, however, definitional issues remain ambiguous, thus creating difficulty in developing sustained cooperation across Christian business scholars.

Marsden. The general idea of Christian scholarship in the modern (or post-modern) academy has received explicit attention in the work of George Marsden and his colleagues. While the broader scope of Marsden's<sup>7</sup> arguments are not the specific subject of this paper, it is important to note the definitional conclusions regarding Christian scholarship to which this work leads us. Marsden finds room for a wide scope of *mainstream* scholarship that might be deemed "Christian", encompassing everything from that which is shaped by background religious commitments, to that which is made more explicit through conditional claims of special revelation (Biblical insights, etc.). Marsden, in essence, offers a strategy of how Christian scholars can bring their arguments to the public market of ideas, and engage in a pluralistic discourse in the language, and according to the rules, of common scholarship. He concludes, thus:

My idea for Christian scholarship is one that not only looks for the bearing of one's Christian convictions on one's academic thought, but also reflects some Christian attitudes that shape the tone of one's scholarship. Not only should Christian commitments lead one toward scholarly rigor and integrity, they should also encourage fairness and charity toward those with whom one differs.<sup>8</sup>

This is certainly consistent with the efforts of Christian business scholars who are working to develop scholarship for mainstream business journals of the sort that reflects how a Christian worldview might bear on questions of common interest. However, while the struggle of these mainstream academy scholars is mighty and worthy, this paper is concerned with a broader

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<sup>5</sup> Marsden, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> See *Christian Scholars Review*, XXIV, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> The following discussion stems from Marsden's culminating book on the subject, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54-55.

scope, which would also include those Christian business scholars who are aiming their ideas at a more explicitly Christian audience.

Finally, Marsden notes that certain points of common Christian doctrine serve as a launching point for defining what makes Christian scholarship distinctive. These doctrinal points include intellectual and theological commitments to the Divine creation, God's incarnation in the man Jesus Christ, a spiritual dimension that includes the Trinitarian Holy Spirit, and certain beliefs about human nature and the human condition after the fall into sin. Christian scholars in general, then are bound, and to a great extent defined, by a common faith in these points. If, indeed, these claims are believed, then everything changes for the believing scholar. The Christian scholar cannot help but be influenced by these commitments.

Economics. The similar, but narrower, question of delineating a Christian *economics* was explored recently in a special issue of *CSR*. Roland Hoksbergen asked, "Is there a Christian economics?" in the postmodern academy.<sup>9</sup> He observes that, "Christians have been discussing economic issues from their earliest day."<sup>10</sup> And this is true, as most of the great Christian theologians have at some point in their analyses addressed the issue of man's interactions in the marketplace. The various theological intellectual traditions have included consideration of *homo economicus* and his actions, including Roman Catholic encyclicals, Calvinist debate, and more recent evangelical work. Indeed, Christian Scripture has much to say about what we now term economic interaction. Yet, while there is a definite momentum towards establishing a uniquely Christian critique of the economics field,<sup>11</sup> Hoksbergen concludes that, "it would be unfair to characterize recent work [in economics] by Christians as a tradition."<sup>12</sup>

One difficulty Christian economists have encountered is bringing their fractured ranks together on the issue of what constitutes a Christian economics. On this subject, Hoksbergen cites the agreement among many economists to focus on common ground, such as stewardship (stewardship and redemption of the fallen creation being a central organizing issue in Calvinist thought) and justice (social justice and poverty being central issues in Roman Catholic thought)<sup>13</sup>. Ultimately, Hoksbergen concludes that the key, defining characteristic of a distinctively Christian economics is its normative focus.

It might be tempting, then, to simply conclude that the matter has been addressed, as economics and business are often seen as, if not interchangeable, then at least very closely related. The disciplines are indeed closely related; however, as fields of study, they are entirely separate undertakings. Economics informs much of business scholarship, but typically as a starting point. As business scholarship is defined herein, the sub-disciplines of management, marketing, finance, accounting, information systems management, production and operations management, etc., represent efforts to understand and inform the varied efforts of economic actors in an economic context. This effort is undertaken with certain areas of specialization in mind, most of which accept the economic context as given, and concentrate rather on other points of interest, such as human psychology, banking and monetary systems, sociotechnical systems, appropriate accounting standards, strategic planning, etc. As a result, most "business" scholars have little more knowledge of economic theory and method than the average

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<sup>9</sup> Roland Hoksbergen, "Is there a Christian economics: Some thoughts in light of the rise of postmodernism," *CSR* XXIV (1994): 126-142.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> Note the establishment and growth of Association of Christian Economists, and the 2002 Pruitt Symposium at Baylor University entitled, "Christianity and Economics".

<sup>12</sup> Hoksbergen, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.139.

undergraduate economics student.<sup>14</sup> Their intellectual and academic efforts are more narrowly focused on some aspect of the firm, and their outcomes are more generally aimed toward practitioners of business. As a result, business scholars who are led to develop scholarship from an expressly Christian worldview have many different questions and issues than those facing economists.

Definitional Issues in Business Scholarship. First, there is a tendency among business scholars, given the vacuum of work and thought from which to build, to default to a consideration of “business ethics” whenever the subject of Christian business scholarship is broached. This is, of course, an anecdotal claim, but I suspect that it elicits the nodding of many heads by business scholars who have been a part of such discussions. To be sure, there has resulted from this tendency a great, and useful, body of literature on the subject of business ethics, some of it Christian, some of it not. We have too long settled on a definition of CBS that centers on the question of ethics. While this subject matter is a great passion for many Christian scholars, others may not be so interested in that particular domain of Christian and/or business thought. While it is worthwhile that Christian business scholars have weighed in on the popular subject of business ethics, a richer CBS framework from which to draw will allow discussions among Christian business scholars to move beyond the “applied” vs. “theoretical” ethics debate. This richer framework will draw into the discussion those scholars who have been hesitant to join the ethics fray.

A second definitional difficulty arises when scholars consider both the audience and subject of their analyses. The need for and potential contribution of CBS varies according to which constituencies and audience one considers. In general, we may be writing to and about anything (anyone) from the theoretical economic man to a specific business leader. For instance, the Christian scholar may have in mind all of humanity when she considers the issue of God’s role in designing the social and economic tendencies of man that best support his pursuit of trade and other market activities. Or we may have in mind church leaders when we consider the role of the church in monitoring and prescribing marketplace behavior that is socially just. Many scholars have in mind these more universal levels-of-analysis as they consider research in a particular domain.

Other Christian business scholars will want to focus on a more narrow level-of-analysis as they pursue the academic calling. It is possible to develop CBS aimed at a practical application that is not typically the aim of philosophical and theological Christian scholarship.<sup>15</sup> For example, Christian business scholars may seek (or be called) to write about “the Christian in the marketplace.”<sup>16</sup> Most Christians in businesses struggle to reconcile their faith and the call to holiness with their role in a secular marketplace dominated by the call to maximize profits and shareholder wealth. While the two callings are not always mutually exclusive, it is not always clear to believers how they can act and live out their faith when their business activities at times involve moral ambiguity and a (not always) subtle compartmentalization of the faith and

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<sup>14</sup> We would suspect that the reciprocal is true of our economics colleagues, whose own specialization quickly removes them from the scholarship and literature of the various business disciplines.

<sup>15</sup> This is, of course, not at all to suggest that philosophical and theological scholarship has no practical application. Rather, it emphasizes the reality that business scholars must balance theoretical and empirical scholarship with an ongoing justification through the practical application of their ideas, models, claims, and prescriptions.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, see *Just Business*, Chewning, Eby, Roels as an example of this genre.

business aspects of life.<sup>17</sup> The Christian business scholar can explore the Christian charge in the business context in a way that is accessible to those who are called to the business vocation.

Further, many business owners and entrepreneurs who feel called to offer their enterprises to the glory of God often feel alone in their efforts to understand how this is possible in a marketplace that is typically hostile to any overt references to Christ or faith.<sup>18</sup> It may be possible for our Christian business scholar to offer help in this area by, perhaps, applying Christian principles, such as stewardship and servant leadership, to existing business models of entrepreneurship and leadership. Still other scholars may wish to examine the application of mainstream business models to firms in various Christian industries, such as Christian publishing, Christian music, Christian supplies, etc. For instance, one may question whether or not Christian musicians and record executives are constrained in their creative, competitive and marketing efforts by a narrower set of strategic options. Are accountants at Christian publishers called to a higher set of standards than those offered by FASB?<sup>19</sup> While these may be random questions in the context of this paper, they represent real potential contributions by Christian business scholars to Christians in the marketplace.

Thus, as Christian scholars begin to consider the vast array of possible questions in the business domain, there has yet to emerge a critical mass of research in any particular direction. As a result, it is not entirely clear whether Christian scholars will consider CBS to be that which extends existing philosophical and theological frameworks to universal business questions, or whether they may explore the plight of the Christian in the marketplace using mainstream business models.

Finally, Christian business scholars may have difficulty discerning an acceptable level of inclusiveness in defining CBS. Level-of-analysis and subject issues aside, Christian business scholars have not yet developed a consistent, common sense of whether the definition of CBS is confined to such activities as the application of scripture to business subjects, whether it extends to the more general issue of “spirituality in the workplace”, or if CBS might even include mainstream business research performed by Christians who, presumably, are at the least implicitly guided in their choice of subjects, methods, and prescriptions, even if their faith is not made explicit in their research products.

While definitional issues are present in all scholarship domains, they continue to slow the development of a sustainable body of CBS. Potential solutions to this problem are addressed later in the paper.

### *Issues of Philosophical and Theological Training*

Should business scholars resolve definitional issues, they must then contend with the monumental issue of ability. That is, the very notion of pursuing CBS, even if one feels called to such an endeavor, is quite intimidating for many business researchers. Business scholars are typically highly trained in the subjects, questions, and methods of their particular domain. They typically have advanced degrees from various schools of business, and most have some business experience from which to draw insights into their mainstream business analyses. The reality is

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<sup>17</sup> For an interesting perspective on this issue, see James I. Packer, “The Christian’s Purpose in Business”, in *Biblical Principles & Business: The Practice*, ed. R. Chewning (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), esp. pp. 22-25.

<sup>18</sup> Some more prominent examples of people who have labored in this direction include S. Truett Cathy, founder and CEO of Chik-fil-A, and William Pollard, CEO of ServiceMaster. Most of us can also name many relatively anonymous examples.

<sup>19</sup> Financial Accounting Standards Board – the main developer of standards for those in the accounting profession.

that it is difficult for any scholar to be excellent in more than one field, especially as the professions diverge ever more in a world of specialization. A similar difficulty would exist for philosophers and theologians who wished to publish in mainstream business journals. Thus, for want of a formal or foundational theological framework from which to build high-quality CBS, business scholars are very hesitant to start down that path.

To be sure, many Christian business scholars are well-read in terms of scripture, and have pursued spiritual maturity in the typical fashion – bible studies, seminars, Sunday school, college-level religion courses, etc. However, the ability to conduct high quality Christian research requires that non-theologians and non-philosophers be able to communicate intelligently in the language of theology and philosophy. Most Christian business scholars would be hesitant to wade into the academic fray at the risk of seeming ignorant or naïve (which, relatively speaking, they may be in this area). One’s faith is not a subject about which one ought to be cavalier in the offering of intellectual contributions and arguments.

As business-trained Christians consider the process and outlets for any ideas they may have regarding CBS, they see that they must compete for limited and scarce publication space with formally-trained and experienced theologians, philosophers, and religion scholars. While this difficulty is not insurmountable, it is not realistic to expect that a business scholar would have the time, resources, or freedom to pursue formal development of a Christian intellectual framework.<sup>20</sup> As a result, we have seen that much of the CBS that does exist has been pioneered by philosophers, theologians, and economists from liberal arts colleges. A non-scientific count of recent Christian scholarship conferences and edited volumes that included business issues indicates that roughly half of all contributions to CBS come from scholars whose disciplines lie outside the business realm. For example, a recent conference presented as part of Calvin College’s Seminars in Christian Scholarship series, entitled “Christian Scholarship...for What?”, provided a total of 56 (concurrent) paper and panel sessions. Only two of those sessions were directly related to business scholarship and approximately half of the presenters were from non-business disciplines. The presence of business scholars in the CBS domain likely depends much on the degree to which sophisticated theological frameworks are required for the analysis.

A second ability issue arises when we consider that many of the Christian scholars who may be most able and inclined to pursue this field of research are employed at small Christian universities and colleges. The ability to develop a stream of high-quality CBS is, like most academic exercises, dependent on the availability of various resources. These resources include (inexhaustively) time, money, books, journals, and like-minded colleagues. For instance, teacher/scholars at small institutions, such as those affiliated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, are required more often than not to teach three, four, and sometimes more courses per semester, with “the teaching load [being] so onerous that little time is left for the deep, rigorous, thoughtful reflection required for such an undertaking.”<sup>21</sup> These professors also must contend with an extraordinary amount of administrative and service activities. That some of them do manage to produce scholarship in the midst of these other responsibilities is a testament to their persistence and tenacity.

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<sup>20</sup> The author was recently sneered at by a well-meaning Seminarian who, in considering the author’s ability to engage in such work, noted (correctly), “So, you have no formal theological or Biblical training, other than Sunday School?”

<sup>21</sup> Bruno Dyck, “A Modest Proposal for a Bold Initiative: Reflections from a Public University,” *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, Fall 1999, 170.

Business professors at smaller Christian universities must also contend with a shortage of financial resources available for the development of good scholarship. High-quality scholarship, Christian or otherwise, requires a certain amount of travel (most times) in order to facilitate paper development at academic conferences and to meet with research colleagues. In general, relative isolation does not make good scholarship impossible, but it is less probable. The limitation on resources of smaller institutions also affects the availability of scholarly resources from which to build good work. The libraries (physical and electronic) of these schools will have fewer journals and books that scholars may require for their research. As a result, potential Christian business scholars will be working from a position of inferiority in terms of their access to complementary ideas and the dynamic, interactive thought found in published scholarship.

### *Scarcity of Publication Outlets*

Should potential scholars in the area of Christian business issues manage to define the appropriate scope of their efforts, and find the time and resources to pursue the work, they face yet another difficulty – finding an outlet for publication. In the first place, there are very few possibilities for explicitly Christian scholarship in the business realm. A few practitioner-oriented outlets exist for this work, such as *Life@Work*. However, given that many scholars face tenure and promotion requirements that include publication in refereed journals, they must develop scholarship aimed at academic targets. In fact, there currently exists only one peer-reviewed journal of which the author is aware that is dedicated solely to CBS, the Christian Business Faculty Association's *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*. This journal is published only once per year and typically includes 8-10 stand-alone articles and a number of "responses to" or "comments on" the stand-alone pieces.

As a result of the dearth of business-specific Christian journals, much of the work that has been done in this area has appeared in the form of short books and edited volumes. Again, one finds that a bibliography of this work is surprisingly short. Scholars who face time and resource constraints in their efforts to develop CBS aimed at journals are even less likely to have the resources necessary to attempt book-length work.

While there are few immediate outlets, then, for CBS in business-specific Christian journals, business scholars may be compelled to look at general or inter-disciplinary Christian journals as potential outlets. We are faced here again with the difficulty of trying to compete with well-trained Christian scholars for scarce publication space. Publication in the more general and inter-disciplinary Christian journals typically requires more complex theology than most business scholars are prepared to offer. While it is true that some journals, such as this one, have historically provided space for contributions from under-represented disciplines, they do not represent realistic opportunities for an *ongoing* stream of CBS. Further, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, it is not clear how publications in Christian journals will be accounted for in the institutional evaluation of a faculty member's scholarly contributions. As a result, the potential Christian business scholar realistically must consider mainstream business outlets for some or all of his/her Christian scholarship.

We find this also to be a daunting proposition, at best. Most mainstream business journals, like their non-business cousins in the wider secular academy, would not seriously consider publishing explicitly Christian scholarship, and likely would not even review such material. This leads Christian scholars to develop scholarship that is only tangentially associated with their Christian background beliefs, or to develop stealth research that is subject to claims of being the product of a "watered down" faith. Another strategy involves utilizing Christian

churches as the object of study in organizational research, an important subset of the business disciplines.<sup>22</sup> As discussed earlier, CBS may legitimately be defined across a broad spectrum of integration levels. Thus, some Christian business scholars are satisfied with simply being guided implicitly by their faith in their choice of subjects and academic domains, all in the secular mold.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Lack of (Extrinsic) Incentives to Pursue CBS*

To this point the paper has examined difficulties associated with developing and publishing CBS once the decision has been made to follow this calling. Realistically, however, the decision to pursue a scholarship agenda associated with CBS is a difficult one, given the lack of incentives to do so. It is true that any decision to develop CBS is inherently guided by intrinsic motivational forces. However, Christian business scholars must also have institutional incentives in support of their efforts. These are few indeed.

Evaluation. As mentioned briefly above, it is not immediately clear how Christian institutions should evaluate CBS in the tenure and promotions process. In relatively small Christian colleges and universities, where business disciplines may not be separated out from other academic disciplines, faculty may have more general scholarship requirements, or none at all. As Christian schools grow, however, many are developing either professional schools of business or have large “business”<sup>24</sup> departments that have incorporated scholarship expectations for their faculty that are oriented toward business-specific targets. The separation and “professionalization” of the business disciplines in Christian schools has led to efforts by these schools to enhance the academic reputation and legitimacy of their business programs. This typically means that business faculty are expected to publish research in mainstream business journals that are recognized by the constituencies that rank schools of business and liberal arts schools (where many business departments reside in Christian colleges). Christian business faculty who, then, consider spending scarce time and other resources on developing CBS must “count the cost”, as CBS is not likely to find an outlet in the mainstream business journals that the schools credit in the evaluation process. Further, administrators reviewing a scholar’s body of work have the difficult task of determining the quality level of Christian journals, with which most business scholars and administrators are unfamiliar. Further, administrators face the dilemma of either rewarding scholarship that does not enhance the school’s academic reputation (as defined by the secular academy and media), or blatantly discouraging the very type of scholarship that makes a Christian institution distinctive in the marketplace of ideas.

This, of course, becomes an entirely different problem for Christian scholars who are living out their calling at secular institutions. Naturally, publications in Christian journals are viewed as having little value at these institutions, and any efforts by Christian scholars in that direction must be wholly extra-curricular. Even worse, the Christian scholar may suffer negative reputational, inter-personal, and professional effects from secular colleagues and administrators

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<sup>22</sup> Examples by Christian scholars in this area include the work of Bruno Dyck, Kent Miller, and others.

<sup>23</sup> A recent trend in business academics is consideration of “spirituality in the workplace,” which has attracted an eclectic and ecumenical following at national and international conferences. One major business journal has recently published an article entitled “Religiosity and Ethical Behavior in Organizations: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective (Gary R. Weaver and Bradley R. Agle, 2002, *Academy of Management Review*, 27: 77-97), although the authors’ model is based on the concept of religiosity, and not Christianity. Further, the paper’s discussion is centered on a subject with which most secular scholars are comfortable, that being ethics.

<sup>24</sup> These come in many forms, such as “business”, “business administration”, “business and economics”, “business and management,” etc.

who are skeptical of (or hostile to) the idea of faith-based scholarship. CBS that appears on these scholars' vitae is not likely to enhance tenure and promotion chances, unless the work appears in valued secular business journals, a rare feat. Indeed, to the extent that administrators view that the Christian faculty member has used institutional time and resources to pursue "inappropriate" efforts, a certain amount of resentment is likely to emerge.

Junior Faculty and Path Dependence. Because many (most?) Christian scholars face tenure and promotion requirements that are inconsistent with pursuit of a CBS agenda, junior faculty learn quickly that the reward and incentive system favors (in many cases, requires) mainstream research aimed at secular journals. These scholars, having emerged from secular Ph.D. programs<sup>25</sup> lasting 4-6 years, are already somewhat secularized in their research trajectories. As they travel another 5-7 years down the road to tenure, the incentives that lead them to continue their scholarship efforts in the secular direction lead to the development of a certain path dependency<sup>26</sup> for scholarship efforts in the future. That is, as scholars develop skills and knowledge about secular subjects (which certainly may have value in their own right), publication processes, and research outlets, they will be less eager to abandon these skills post-tenure in favor of CBS, about which they may know little. Thus, current incentive systems in Christian colleges and universities that encourage junior faculty to concentrate on mainstream journals and secular subject matter until *after* they are tenured may indeed make it almost impossible for them to build a CBS agenda from scratch later in their careers.

Stigma of inferior quality. Finally, with regard to incentives to pursue a CBS agenda, Christian scholars often struggle with the stigma that such scholarship is of inferior quality. CBS has been almost exclusively theoretical in nature, and usually in book form. Very little CBS is positivistic and most CBS bypasses the relatively rigorous review processes to which most business scholarship is expected to be subjected. This is, of course, not unusual, given the metaphysical nature of faith, God, and most of the central tenets and background beliefs from which the Christian scholar would work. As a result, the work, while deserving of note in the underrepresented CBS domain, varies greatly in quality. Even high-quality CBS may be viewed as suspect by those who are not in a position to judge it on its merits.

One often hears CBS being dismissed as overly-simplistic Biblical application. In this case, Christian business scholars may be hesitant to pursue scholarship that is perceived to be of little value to anyone other than undergraduate students in small Bible colleges. The fact that CBS includes work that is extremely sophisticated in its intellectual framework is often overlooked.

#### *Tendency to Compartmentalization*

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to overcome in developing sustained CBS is the general tendency in Western cultures to separate those aspects of life that are faith-based from those that are professional. The internal motivation required for the Christian scholar to pursue CBS is necessarily a calling of the Holy Spirit, contrary to the call in secular society for ever wider separation of Church and state, Church and business, and Church and the professions. Even among Christian scholars, it is not apparent that a sense of vocation is understood or strongly shared. In Christian colleges, the professional schools and disciplines face marketplace pressures

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<sup>25</sup> It is good to note that Anderson University implemented in 2001 a Ph.D. program in Business aimed at developing professors specifically for service in the Christian academic environment.

<sup>26</sup> Path dependency refers to the dependence of a present set of decision scenarios and courses of action on past decisions and historical actions.

that compel them to establish their legitimacy as “quality” programs, something more than Bible schools<sup>27</sup>. As a result, the few Christian business professors who have the ability, time, and resources to conduct CBS still labor under an academic and professional paradigm that assumes and encourages the compartmentalization of faith and scholarship.

The compartmentalization of the faith life from the professional academic life can be understood best in the light of competing influences on the post-modern person’s sense of self. There exists a great ambiguity surrounding the appropriate relationship between person and place in the search for modern identity (Taylor, 1989), and nowhere is this ambiguity greater than in the world of business<sup>28</sup> and business academics. We are called, it seems, by the forces of social construction to be different persons in different places, pursuing often contradictory purposes. The formation of our different selves in society is influenced by a myriad of factors, not the least of which is the historical narrative surrounding our being<sup>29</sup>. As noted by Reuben, the historical narrative shaping the modern academic is one based on facts as opposed to values, on the objective as opposed to the subjective.<sup>30</sup> For example, in espousing a vocational perspective of the sciences, sociologist Max Weber recognized the simultaneous elevation of the scientific method and the marginalization of theological explanations of earthly phenomena. Weber lamented that, “the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’”<sup>31</sup>

While post-modernism has recently lashed back against hard-core objectivism, there still remains little room for religious faith or belief in the academic community. Echoing Reuben’s emphasis on recent scientific paradigms, Benne writes that Christian faculty are socialized in both their academic training and institutions to focus on the more “scientific” aspects of their disciplines and less on meta-physical explanations, noting that:

Faculty underwent a formation process in their universities and the learned societies they joined that made it unlikely that they would be able to hold up Christian intellectual criteria as they moved into their colleges.....Even Christians among them don’t quite see how faith in its intellectual forms can relate to different fields of secular learning, mainly because they see little or no intellectual content to the Christian faith.<sup>32</sup>

It is in this setting that CBS must be considered or rejected. The tendency to compartmentalize the faith and secular aspects of lives, and to place “work” into the secular camp is especially strong in the professional academic disciplines. As a result, only a small minority of Christian business researchers is likely to even consider CBS a legitimate intellectual pursuit.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Benne. *Quality With Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith With Their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> M. L. Brownsberger, “Christian Faith and Business: A Story.” In (Max L. Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann, & Shirley J. Roels, eds.) *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995, pp. 667-671.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Taylor. *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Julie Reuben. *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” (pg. 16 of 17), last accessed 15 March, 2002 on World Wide Web at: <http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/DSS/Weber/scivoc.html>; published as “Wissenschaft als Beruf,” *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tubingen, 1922), pp. 524-555.

<sup>32</sup> Benne, *ibid*, pg. 29.

## **Remedies and Call for Action**

While the preceding examination is not meant to be exhaustive of the factors that contribute to the difficulty in developing sustained, coordinated CBS efforts, I believe it goes far in beginning the discussion about how to develop the under-represented space for business in the Christian academy. The next logical step, of course, is to consider possible courses of action aimed at diminishing the height of the wall that these difficulties represent. The author of this paper certainly does not have all of the answers, but some possibilities are offered as I wish to encourage others to join me in addressing these specific challenges. It seems that the process of developing CBS efforts must begin with at least the following steps:

*Administrative commitment to Christian scholarship across the university.* As is obvious by the nature of the difficulties discussed above, sustained, high-quality CBS will not be possible without the support of administrators in key Christian institutions. The nature of this commitment includes resource support of institutional faculty, valuing through (tangible) demonstrated appreciation the CBS efforts of Christian scholars, development of institutions and centers aimed at developing Christian scholarship, and support of inter-institutional exchanges and conferences that promote CBS efforts.

*Development of journals in various niche spaces.* Administrative support of CBS will ultimately result in the development of journals at various institutions that allow for the publication of CBS aimed at various constituencies. These include journals that are accessible to a general academic audience, journals aimed at the specifically Christian academy, journals aimed at church and para-church organizations (such as *Journal of Ministry Marketing and Management*), and journals aimed at the working Christian, including a Christian leadership journal.

*Vocational training.* Further, administrative support will lead to serious efforts to offer willing faculty the opportunity to develop their theological and Christian intellectual potential, as it may apply to their CBS efforts. A laudable example is the Horizons Project recently implemented at Baylor University. This Program provides funding, structure, and opportunities for faculty to attend seminars, conduct research, travel to conferences, and engage in other activities that assist in the development of scholars as they seek to better integrate their faith and learning efforts.

*Cross-disciplinary collaboration.* Finally, administrative support will increase the level of commitment to cross-disciplinary scholarship, as it is not realistic to expect that Christian business scholars will be able alone to integrate faith issues into their scholarship as well as might be possible with the inclusion of theologians and philosophers into their projects. Cross-disciplinary scholarship is difficult in its own right. However, it is not clear that excellent CBS is even possible without some element of cross-disciplinary cooperation. The many parts of the body work best as a unified whole.

*Call for Action.* No discussion of CBS would be complete without a call for scholars to challenge themselves and their institutions in an effort to overcome the difficulties discussed herein. Scholars called to this type of work will no doubt recognize the immediate and eternal value inherent in such a vocation. Christians in the business world cry out for guidance. In the

vacuum that exists, Christian businessmen and women either muddle through ineffectively, with great frustration, or they default to the secular framework that is readily available to them. We, as Christian business scholars, must develop new and better frameworks to be used by those called to the business vocation. At the same time, we must work with Christians in the marketplace to learn more about their difficulties and possible solutions. The difficulties we face as Christian business scholars must be overcome if we are to be faithful to the calling with which we have been entrusted.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has been an examination of certain factors that contribute to the paucity of Christian scholarship in the business disciplines. More specifically, the difficulty has been identified as one of creating space for business scholarship in the Christian academic world. This is, of course, only a start, as the scholarship of Christian business researchers must be made available to the wider audience outside of Christian intellectual circles. Creating a space for Christian scholarship in secular (i.e. business) academy is a similarly daunting task, with many different challenges. However, with regard to the immediate problem of developing sustained CBS, five particular difficulties have been identified. These include issues of definition, lack of ability to incorporate theological and philosophical frameworks, scarcity of publication outlets, institutional dis-incentives for CBS, and the tendency to compartmentalize faith and professional aspects of life. No doubt others may have experienced (or can imagine) other difficulties.

Finally, a number of suggestions have been provided to begin the discussion on how to build sustained CBS efforts across Christian faculty. These include administrative efforts to provide critical resources, the development of Christian journals in the various business-related niches, enhanced vocational training for scholars interested in CBS, and cross-disciplinary collaboration with non-business scholars who are likely to have the theological and philosophical training that business scholars lack. In terms of kingdom building, we have too long left to their own (or worldly) devices those who have been called to a vocation of business and economic activity. As Christian scholars, we have to date failed to effectively utilize our God-given gifts for this noble purpose.

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