

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 5 | Number 5

Article 8

2005

Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation

Jim Ferreira
Bethel University (MN)

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferreira, Jim (2005) "Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*: Vol. 5 : No. 5 , Article 8.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol5/iss5/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation.

Douglas Jacobson and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobson;

A Review Essay by Jim Ferreira

Jim Ferreira is Dean of Students at Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota.

In *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, the authors and contributors undertake to “enlarge the dialogue” about the nature of Christian scholarship in the academy today. The book is addressed to Christian scholars in both religiously affiliated schools as well as those who pursue their scholarship in secular settings.

The format of the book is engaging. The authors present their viewpoint on the topic in the first five chapters. Each of the first four chapters is followed by an essay by a Christian scholar, which illustrates or highlights the salient points made in that chapter. The contributing scholars represent education in both Christian and secular settings, both in their training as well as their current work settings. The format of the book itself exemplifies the kind of dialogue that the authors call the Christian community of scholars to engage in.

The premise of *Scholarship and the Christian Faith* is that the long-standing model of Christian scholarship, the “integration of faith and learning” (integration model), is an insufficient paradigm to fully understand the richness of diversity within the community of Christian scholars. Noting the differences in church background, spiritual tradition, academic discipline, and work setting represented in Christian scholarship today, the authors propose to “explore the diverse ways in which Christians as individuals and members of their communities of faith understand their faith to be connected with their scholarship and their scholarship with their faith” (153).

In the prologue, Rodney Sawatsky, President of Messiah College, suggests that many individuals today hold the view that Christian scholarship is in decline and he challenges readers to begin to develop a new perspective. Noting the traditional viewpoint, often framed in the terms of the “integration of faith and learning,” Sawatsky offers a broader view suggesting that Christian scholarship must also include perspectives of “hope and love”. Focusing on the concept of hope, he challenges Christian scholars to refrain from holding too dearly to the past as the only standard for what it means to be Christian scholars or a Christian college and, instead, to look to a future where we develop new meanings of the concept of Christian scholarship. He challenges the reader to be a part of an “enlarged dialogue” about these meanings, inviting other perspectives and moving toward a scholarship based in the hope of moving toward wisdom.

On this foundation, the authors begin their treatment of the topic by examining the widely held perspective of Christian scholarship advanced by scholars including Arthur Holmes (1975), Nicholas Wolterstorff (1976), and more recently George Marsden in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (1997). Their examination includes a brief review of the history of the “integration model” and then highlights the benefits the model offers to the conversation concerning Christian scholarship, as well as its

limitations. While the “integration model” offers important ideas for consideration in this discussion, the limitations of a single-perspective, deeply rooted in reformed theology and a strong philosophical foundation, diminish its usefulness for the full spectrum of individuals who bring differing Christian traditions and disciplinary perspectives to the work of Christian scholarship.

In chapter two, the authors further explore their thesis by considering the lives and scholarly work of two Christian scholars -- Ernest Boyer, commissioner of education under President Jimmy Carter and head of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and Nancy Murphy, professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary. Through the writing and lives of these scholars, the authors conclude that the Christian scholar cannot separate their personal lives from their scholarship; scholarship is intimately and inseparably a part of who they are as scholars. In the words of Robert Wuthnow (1993), Princeton University sociologist, these scholars exemplify “living the question”. Drawing upon these examples, the authors conclude that our work as scholars emanates from who we are as Christians; our faith provides the foundation for our scholarship.

Chapter 3 expands upon concepts introduced in the previous chapter and offers another lens through which to understand the similarities and differences that characterize the ways in which Christian scholars approach their work. The authors observe that scholars rarely reflect deeply upon the ways in which their personal faith relates to their approach to scholarship in the area of their discipline. The chapter considers various theological, spiritual and political traditions that Christian scholars bring to their work and briefly reflects upon the potential impact these dispositions may have on the way faith and scholarship are related. The authors use a paradigm offered by Richard Foster in *Streams in the Desert* (1998) to explore six spiritual traditions from which most Christians, and therefore Christian scholars, engage their faith. They offer a seventh tradition to this list suggesting that it might be more descriptive of many modern Christian scholars – “the seeking tradition”. They frame their discussion of political dispositions in the work of H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ in Culture* (1951) considering the ways in which scholars perceive the relationship of faith to the culture in general. They conclude this section by suggesting that “our scholarship as Christians will be formulated and better received if we are more aware of the subtle ways in which our theological, spiritual, and political dispositions affect our work” (97).

In the next chapter, the authors discuss the difficulty of developing a single definition that broadly defines scholarship in the academy, but to frame their discussion, they offer the following definition: “Scholarship is disciplined and creative reflection on the natural and humanly constructed world disseminated for the benefit of others and judged by appropriate standards of excellence” (123). The authors examine a paradigm proposed by Ernest Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), which suggests that four types of scholarship are present in modern academia -- discovery, integration, application, and teaching. They also consider Howard Gardner’s work on “multiple intelligences” (1983) as they build a conceptual framework for their proposal of three modes of scholarship in the present-day academy: analytical scholarship (sometimes seen as a more traditional mode of scholarship), strategic scholarship, and empathic scholarship. While scholars generally lean toward one of these modes as their predominant style, they suggest that good scholarship generally reflects a balanced use

of each mode. The authors conclude this section of the book by reflecting on “morals, manners, motivation, and vocation” (129), which they see as essential elements of the scholarly endeavor that must be weighed by every Christian scholar.

The final chapter discusses the difficult position in which Christian scholars often find themselves as they navigate between two very real, yet at times very different, worlds – the Church and the academy. They note that Christian scholarship will always be a “two-way street” with scholars struggling with the balance between the “influence of faith on learning” and the “influence of learning on faith.” Christian scholars generally find themselves in one of these two camps, but are always influenced by the other. Their primary mode of influence profoundly affects the role their faith plays in its relationship to learning in their lives and in their scholarship.

The book closes with an epilogue by Kim Phipps, Provost of Messiah College, who challenges readers to remember the community nature of the university and the “interrelatedness” this community endeavor necessitates. It is through this quest for true community that the “conversation” described in this book will emerge. Phipps challenges administrative leaders – the roles often held by student development educators – to remember that they are leaders of learning communities. She suggests that “Administrators ought to see themselves – and faculty and students out to perceive them – as scholars with a unique role within the community, a role that often defines the nature of the institution” (179).

The authors set out to “enlarge the conversation” about Christian scholarship. In the pages of *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, they have begun the conversation in a thought-provoking way. The content and format of the book will challenge the reader to reflect more deeply on what they bring to their own scholarly work. While it is not the kind of book that student development professionals are likely to run to amidst the many demands of the practice of our work, maybe it should be. The book is written to Christian scholars. As Kim Phipps suggests in the epilogue, each of us who values our work as student development educators should see scholarship as at least a part of our work. The authors challenge Christian scholars to be reflective about the paradigms with which they evaluate their approach to the relationship between their faith and the learning that is so deeply a part of their lives and work. The content of this book will stimulate this kind of reflection.