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## EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

### **What's Wrong with the Christian Business Faculty Association?**

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*As I take the reins from my friend Sharon Johnson at JBIB, I know these are big shoes to fill. Dr. Johnson grew the journal from birth to its current state in a little more than ten years. While Sharon certainly had extraordinary help from reviewers, writers, the CBFA Board, and Cedarville University, he has been faithful in doing the Lord's work. As I have worked with reviewers and writers to put this 2006 issue together, it has been no small comfort that Sharon's office is less than twenty feet from my own. I know you will join me in saluting Sharon for his time as Founding Editor of the Journal of Biblical Integration in Business.*

In a recent issue of *The Chronicle Review* ("What's Wrong with the Society of Biblical Literature?"), Jacques Berlinerblau (2006) made some interesting claims about the Society of Biblical Literature, our cousins in the theological realm. Berlinerblau suggests about the SBL that, "as far as academic societies go, the SBL is about as unthreatening and placid as they come." He, of course, meant that in the most pejorative sense possible, noting that, "edgy,' 'controversial,' or even 'relevant' are not terms that spring to mind when trying to describe [SBL's] activities." Now, I am not

necessarily suggesting that we in the CBFA (or through *JBIB*) ought to strive to be edgy, controversial, or threatening.

Or am I? If we are to be relevant, our activities and ideas must be edgy and controversial, and even threatening, at least as far as a post-modern, secular world is concerned. As Berlinerblau notes, we live in a time when the Bible is enjoying much readership and interest. There are great evangelical opportunities afoot. We must reflect in the CBFA whether we are up to the task of moving beyond the comfort of our course schedules and classrooms in order to use

the gifts we have been given to engage a curious culture. Are we ready to join the fray where Christ meets business in the post-modern world?

In calling out the SBL, Berlinerblau opined four “points of malaise” intended to be a wake-up call. While the CBFA is not completely analogous to the Society of Biblical Literature, we are indeed the most significant representation of evangelical Christian thought on business matters. It is perhaps useful that we consider Berlinerblau’s four points in the context of our own state of affairs. Below I list Berlinerblau’s “points of malaise” regarding the Society of Biblical Literature and consider their application to the context of CBFA.

1. *“Consider that the most popular and widely discussed books about the Bible are almost never written by Biblicists.”* Likewise, most of the well-known publications on business from a Christian perspective are not written by members of the CBFA. Rather, we see books from practitioners and other non-academics (non-business academics) carrying the torch for

faith-business integration. It is true that we welcome the good work of our brothers and sisters who step out of their valuable experience to chronicle their journeys and to share their insights. Kudos to the likes of Bill Pollard and John Beckett. Well done to Ken Blanchard, John Maxwell, and Dennis Bakke. (Indeed, in this issue we include a re-print of Mr. Bakke’s fabulously-written “Postscript: Enter Into the Master’s Joy” from *Joy at Work*.) And we note that there are interesting offerings from some among our CBFA flock, especially those of the Economist persuasion. But where are the Dick Chewnings and the Alex Hills of the next generation?

The fact is the typical members of the CBFA have much to offer to the understanding of business from our unique perspective. We consider questions and possibilities and connections and ideas that are not likely to come from other sources. As an academically-oriented organization, we will always struggle with questions of “relevance,” and we must always heed the pressure to work with, through, and for the believing practitioners whose

labors we hope to enrich and enlighten. At the same time, however, great applications arise from great ideas, and great ideas must be fostered in the realm of possibility and insight. This is what we have to offer. And it is important.

2. *“Consider that ‘biblical studies’ as a college major is not exactly a booming industry.”* Our related reality is the fact that most business students and practitioners — Christians and non-believers alike — are not introduced to business and economic thinking that incorporates Christian thought. Within the CBFA and CCCU institutions, it is easy to remain focused on an integrated view of business and economics. Outside of our “bubble,” however, faith-guided business is a tough sell to a skeptical world. We continue to have much work to do to present ideas that are not only useful to our brothers and sisters in the marketplace but also are interesting to all business thinkers. Some of those ideas are best developed and discussed in explicitly Christian outlets such as *JBIB*, while others may find an interested audience at the table

of mainstream academic publications. The important point is that we in the CBFA have an obligation to present well-thought-out, interesting, and relevant ideas about business issues to an unbelieving world. Faith integration in business is not a booming industry, but we can represent Christ well as we analyze and explain the business disciplines in light of the truths of general and special revelation.

3. *“Consider that many secular universities don’t even have a full-time position in biblical studies.”* Two related challenges emerge for the CBFA. First, it would be an understatement to note that few (if any) secular universities hold a spot open for business thinkers representing an explicitly Christian perspective. Second, even within the “safe” haven of Christian academic institutions, business faculty are likely to be appreciated more for their contributions to maintaining the cash cow than they are for any academic or theological thinking they may contribute. These factors make it difficult to generate a critical mass of Christian thinking in the business arena. However, we certainly

do not want to suggest that believing scholars at secular institutions cannot contribute to the body of knowledge that CBFA seeks to develop. In this issue, we find a very interesting reading of the Parable of the Shrewd Manager from Bruno Dyck, Fred Starke, and Calvin Dueck, all of the University of Manitoba. Outside of such exceptions, however, most of the contributions to faith-business integration are going to come from faith-oriented institutions. CBFA members face the added challenge of convincing their institutions to provide the support and resources necessary to do the good work to which we are being called.

4. *"Consider that in nearly half a century...not a single biblical scholar has emerged as a public intellectual either nationally or internationally."* I believe it is safe to say that we in the CBFA have not generated nationally- or internationally-renown scholars either, at least not in terms of renown for biblically-based scholarship. It is not entirely clear that we labor for the sake of such renown. Nonetheless, it is likely our ability to have an

impact on business practice at the national level will evolve from our ability to impact business thinking at the highest levels. To this end, the Editor and Review Board of *JBIB* have dedicated ourselves to encouraging, soliciting, supporting, developing, and producing the type of scholarship that will continually illuminate business practice. If we are allowed a larger stage or forum than CBFA and *JBIB*, then to God be the glory.

### **What next?**

Be all of that as it may, what are the types of issues we ought to be considering? Among the many things that may come to minds other than my own, I offer up a few areas of consideration that ought to raise the contributions of CBFA and *JBIB* to the next level as we move forward.

**Business implications of genetic and molecular discoveries** — Sharon Johnson and I presented at the 2006 CBFA meeting in Dayton a discussion of the trends toward the molecular economy stemming from scientific and technological discoveries. Among other conclusions, we stated that

we believe that this is a fertile and fruitful area for exploration among Christian scholars. The developing cultural implications of this new economy will result in a clash of worldviews from which Christians cannot shrink. The molecular economy and the genetic industries it creates will form around a Darwinian logic and ethic that must be challenged where appropriate according to the light of biblical truth. I hope to see in *JBIB* many discussions of the nature and implications of the coming molecular economy. There is much to celebrate in discovery and innovation. There is much to anticipate in science and technological advancement. And there is too much at stake to allow the business environment and its impact on culture to evolve without insight, critique, and commentary from those in the Christian camp who speak to business issues. We are that camp.

#### **Intelligent Design —**

Related to the genetic and molecular developments in our modern economy is the cultural and scientific battle over Darwinism and Intelligent Design. As George Marsden noted in

his classic, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, a distinguishing tenet of practically all Christians is the truth of the creation. If we believe that Intelligent Design is a viable scientific representation of creationist theology, then the implications of such a truth ought to be explored in all realms of culture, including business and economics. Already most business processes are understood solely in Darwinian terms. We speak of organizational ecology to model firm birth, growth, and demise. We employ evolutionary psychology to explain motivation, teamwork, and other organizational behavior phenomena. Evolutionary economics is a fundamental model of innovation. I believe that it is imperative that we seek to better understand the logic underlying Intelligent Design (ID) theory and work to build scripturally-sound ID models of business. Such an agenda will allow us to know better where Darwinian models are weak, and how creation-friendly models might better explain business phenomena. Well-crafted thinking and scholarship places our ideas in

the best possible light in the public arena.

**Applied scholarship** — *JBIB* continues to be one of the few publication outlets for business-oriented applied scholarship from a Christian perspective. As Stacy Jackson and his colleagues at Calvin College remind us in their article, “Engaging Ideas: Can Christian Business Scholarship Inform Business Practice?” our scholarship ultimately must be of value to the Christian practicing business in the secular marketplace. Not only must we provide answers to their questions, we must provide encouragement, truth, feedback, and ideas. We must be engaged with practitioners in order to understand their challenges. While we are not the same as practitioners (despite the fact that many of us in CBFA came from “industry”), we are their partners in ministry. As we continually seek relevance, our practicing brothers and sisters are a key constituency in our work.

**Business as missions/tent-making** — In laboring to understand the faith-business intersection, it seems as though the whole “business-as-mission”

movement snuck up on us. While there are now arising books and articles on the subject, the idea has not yet “been explored in much depth, especially in regards to how this movement affects Christian business education and scholarship. A notable exception is Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen’s (2003) book, *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions*, and Rundle’s earlier piece in *JBIB*, “The Christian Business Scholar and the Great Commission” (2000). Most of us in CBFA know someone who is engaged in the trenches establishing missions opportunities through business engagements. This is difficult work, and we owe it to these brave missionaries to develop a better understanding of how to make such ventures more effective. *JBIB* is not, in reality, a “practitioner” journal. Nor is it a “missiology” journal. Nonetheless, as CBFA and the Christian academy have no other outlets for scholarly examination of applied scholarship or missions-related scholarship in business, *JBIB* must continue to serve this function until other

publication outlets are developed — from CBFA or elsewhere.

**Demographic and socio-culture trends impacting business** — It is impossible for us to anticipate all of the demographic and cultural trends that will affect businesses and businesspeople. And yet each one of us sees a piece of the puzzle, a part of the elephant, so to speak. It is critical — if CBFA and its members are to be a relevant source of ideas in our cultural domain — that we engage the trends we see around us. Our analysis should begin with early pieces of commentary on trends we encounter, move eventually through carefully crafted theoretical development, and ultimately produce practical applications of eternal biblical truths to temporal cultural contexts. Several examples can be easily considered. The rapid acceptance and integration of homosexual life into Western culture has many implications for business. Naturally, Christians have staked positions all over the social spectrum on this subject, but little has been said about the Christian *business* perspective on gay rights. It is likely that CBFA

members would mostly adhere to a relatively conservative position on this issue, but what does this mean for business? I won't presume to answer this question here, but I pose the challenge.

Another trend is the “Hispanicization” (to coin a phrase — or mangle the Spanglish language) of America. Our readers and contributors in other nations will recognize this in terms of their own immigration challenges. In the U.S., Hispanics represent the fastest growing demographic segment of society, a result of both legal and illegal immigration. While Americans grapple with the problems inherent in illegal immigration, Christians need to weigh in on the consideration of business implications of this trend and on the implications of reversing the trend. Many sectors of society rely heavily on Hispanics as a source of cheap labor. What do we think about this? Illegal Hispanic immigrants exact a heavy toll on U.S. public resources. Is there a social justice angle that makes sense to us?

A third trend that warrants a Christian business academy (CBFA) response is the aging of

the American population. This is closely related to advances in the molecular and genetic sciences, as discussed earlier. What areas of business are most affected by this trend? What ethical concerns does it raise? As our friends in the marketplace encounter issues related to the aging population, how should they respond? Again, I don't have these answers (yet). However, if we in the CBFA are to rise to the challenge of becoming relevant, we must develop intelligent and interesting responses to the forces in our society.

## Conclusion

Whether or not Jacques Berlinerblau was right to call out the SBL is for its members to decide. Nonetheless, we in the CBFA face a unique historical opportunity. Christianity, religion, and spirituality are all topics on the post-modern table of discussion. They are vastly popular subjects, and the unique insights of CBFA members in matters of business will receive no greater appreciation than is now the case. Can we answer the call? Can we say (in the words of the great theologian,

John Fogarty), "Put me in, Coach; I'm ready to play today"? I look forward to working with abandon and fury with my friends and colleagues in the CBFA and elsewhere to bring good, God-glorifying ideas to the table, and to the pages of *JBIB*. Thanks for letting me be a part of this. Now go write something.

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