

## Special Section

### ***The JBIB* and the State of Faith/Business Integration: Accomplishments and Gaps<sup>1</sup>**

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Occasionally someone says something that seems straightforward until you start thinking about it — then the implications shock you. Several years ago, Dr. Sharon Johnson, editor of *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* (*The JBIB*) gave me a jolt like that. At a conference session, he said that *The JBIB* is the *only* [emphasis added] academic journal in the world with a mission of integrating biblical faith with the business disciplines. The implications of that shocked me and still do. What a high calling.

*The JBIB* is now a decade old. Since an anniversary is a time to reflect, Dr. Johnson graciously suggested that *The JBIB* review board members might like to write down their reflections and send them to him. As I started to write, the topic expanded until I found I was considering the entire area of scriptural integration in the business disciplines. Therefore, this modest retrospective will

cover more than *The JBIB* itself; it will also include thoughts about the current state of the field of faith/business integration.

My reflections took two forms which shape the two parts of this discussion. The first set of reflections and the first part of the paper have to do with the contributions of *The JBIB* to the field of faith/business integration. I will argue that without the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) and *The JBIB* there would be no such field in any systematic form. Their contributions and accomplishments have been significant.

The second set of reflections and the second part of the paper have to do with what has NOT been accomplished. There are significant gaps and weaknesses in the field of faith/business integration. In Part II, I will discuss three gaps in particular that must be addressed in order to reach the next levels of scholarship: meta-theory, testing

theory, and looking at other Christian faith/business integration traditions.

But first we must clarify terms. For faculty and students in Christian business schools, the phrase “the integration of faith and learning” is familiar, even clichéd. Many Christian institutions see “integration” as their distinctive, a reason students come to their school, the value they add. However, as is true of many familiar terms,<sup>2</sup> the meaning of the phrase is less clear than it might seem. Five different business professors would likely define this phrase in five different ways.

For example, “learning” is generally taken to mean the academic field of the integrator, but the term “integration” can have meanings ranging from personal wholeness to reconciliation of racial tensions (Faw, 1990). Likewise, the meaning of “faith” is confusing. Even if we assume the integrator is a Christian, “faith” could mean using Scripture, spiritual thoughts, systematic theology, the integrator’s church traditions, or some combination of these as the central element of integration.

Therefore, for purposes of this discussion I will follow Clinton (1990) and define the “integration of faith and

learning,” or more specifically, “faith/business integration,” as the scholarly pursuit to interrelate chosen elements in the business literature/world to Truth given to us by God, primarily in the Bible, but also in life and in church practice and history. The purpose of faith/business integration is to bring glory to God by permeating the business disciplines with a Christian perspective and to help ourselves and others grow into a fuller understanding of God and of the disciplines we teach. Personally, I find that integrating the elements of my discipline with God’s Truth allows my daily work to be incarnated with the Spirit of God. In other words, my small efforts become, as Luther aptly puts it “the work of our Lord God under a mask, as it were, beneath which He Himself alone effects and accomplishes what we desire” (Fienberg/Luther, [1524] 1979, 60). Faith/business integration is valuable.

### ***The JBIB and CBFA: Contributions to Faith/Business Integration***

The history of the field of academic faith/business integration as we know it began with the CBFA. The CBFA is, to my knowledge, the only organization in existence that does regular

scholarly integration of God's Word in the business disciplines.

In the early 1980s, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities received a grant to gather business professors from Christian colleges for fellowship and discussion. Those professors eventually formed the CBFA and developed an annual conference.

This group created the foundations of the scholarly faith/business integration field. In the early meetings professors shared ways to bring scriptural Truth into the classroom. Later they began to think about how biblical faith integrated with different business theories and practices. When I joined CBFA in the mid-1990s, the conference program had expanded from one paper in 1985<sup>3</sup> to a full program of papers applying integrative scholarship to both theory and pedagogy. There was a sophisticated foundation of integration work to be drawn upon.

I was a member of the second generation of integrators, part of a large influx of new faculty into Christian business schools in the early 1990s. Our institutions valued integration, and we were hired with the expectation that we would write and publish in that field. The CBFA conference provided us with an outlet for our work, a place to learn integration

from veterans, and a place to find companions in the journey. As the proceedings of the times show, there was some proof-texting in those papers and some naive conclusions. But we continued to learn.

At conference after conference, Dr. Richard Chewning instructed us in integration and the role of Scripture. "Read the Bible and read it again," he would say, "then pray." *The Law of Requisite Variety* (Ashby, 1956) from cybernetics states that "the amount of appropriate selection that can be performed is limited by the amount of information available" (Heylighen & Joslyn, 1993). As we read the Bible and prayed, our amount of information available expanded and several things happened. First, the Holy Spirit used Scripture in our personal lives. Next, increased biblical information helped us see more clearly how spiritual principles applied to the topics we were teaching in the classroom and writing about in the office. Finally, we began to relish how the richness and complexity of God corresponded to the richness and complexity of our academic disciplines. The more we knew about Scripture, the more we could control and discipline our fields of study.

In 1995 the CBFA launched *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* (*The JBIB*) to publish faith/business integration articles. Dr. Sharon Johnson was the founding editor, and under his guidance *The JBIB* has continued to mature. The journal was crucial to our growth in integration sophistication. The CBFA conference was held once a year; it was a good forum to present new ideas to the scrutiny of one's peers and look for co-authors. In contrast, *The JBIB* provided a year-round, peer-reviewed publishing outlet. Reviewers took their jobs seriously and held papers to high academic standards. A few papers in the early journals were "integration lite," but looking back, I am impressed at the continuously high quality of work *The JBIB* has published.

Having a journal created a valuable feedback loop. People interested in integration scholarship were able to submit papers to the conference, become experienced in this type of writing, and eventually publish in *The JBIB*. Interesting articles in *The JBIB* encouraged others to think about faith/business integration, and they began to submit papers to the conference, thus continuing the loop.

By the late 1990s there were many more conference submissions

than sessions available. Conference reviewers became selective. I received my first conference rejection and learned to be clearer in showing how my paper fit the conference and why participants would be interested in it. Currently, the conference paper sessions present an exciting mix of first-time authors and veterans. The paper acceptance rate is approximately 30-50%, on par with other academic business conferences.

Other happenings have stimulated the growth of the faith/business integration field. For example, since 2000 there has been an upsurge of interest from Christian scholars who teach in secular universities. Adding their perspectives and strong academic standards into the mix has strengthened integration scholarship for us all.

In addition, the CBFA has recently articulated some integration principles on a community-wide basis. For example, the association affirmed that Christian scholarship was scholarship done by a Christian for the glory of God, regardless of topic or venue (CBFA Scholarship Vision, 2005). The association also utilized the Martinez model (Martinez, 2004) to begin thinking about the different domains of faith/business integration. This

model allows each scholar to specify the area of faith integration in which he or she is working.

Therefore, at the end of the first 25 years CBFA stands as an association with a critical mass of good scholars interested in the issues of biblical faith/business integration. At the end of the first 10 years, *The JBIB* is established and has a well-articulated mission and a seasoned editor. The CBFA has recently launched a second journal, the *CBAR*, to focus on pedagogical and administrative integration. The association has a clearer view of what faith/business integration is and which domains members are targeting.

What have CBFA and *The JBIB* contributed to the field of faith/business integration? Almost everything. It is hardly overstating the case to say that the articles and cases included in the CBFA conference proceedings and *The JBIB* are most of what the Protestant arm of the Church of Jesus Christ has disseminated in scholarly integration of faith and business in the past 100 years. The contributions of these two entities are without parallel.

### **The State of Faith/Based Business Integration: Gaps**

Currently, the area of faith/business integration is established

and flourishing. We have done significant work in applying God's Word to all sorts of business topics and in answering the question: "If this is so, how then shall we live?" We have applied our faith more and more skillfully to the elements of our disciplines.

However, the field of faith/business integration has three significant gaps and the field will not progress beyond the current level unless two of the weaknesses in particular are addressed. Those two gaps are 1) the development of integration meta-theory, and 2) the testing of current applications and principles. The third important gap in our field is the lack of exploration and utilization of other Christian traditions that have done work in faith/business integration. In the following pages, I will examine each of these weaknesses in detail.

### ***Gap # 1 — Lack of Integration Meta-Theory***

Faith/business integration scholarship is a continuum. One end of the continuum focuses on the practical application of integration, that is, how we apply our faith to the elements of our disciplines. At this pole we ask questions about how Scripture and Christian thinking apply to accounting control systems or

aspects of business to business marketing or leadership theories.

The other end of the continuum deals with the theoretical understanding of integration and integration processes. This pole focuses on the meta-theory of integration: what integrates with what and what happens in the process? Here we ask questions such as: What is the nature and task of faith/business integration? What are different taxonomies or models of integration? What outcomes do we seek for integration? Why?

DeVries (1982) suggests that most academic disciplines begin the faith/integration process with application. It is clear from *The JBIB* and conference proceedings that the business disciplines follow this pattern. There are many articles on topics like the entrepreneurship of Jesus or complexities of vocation and organizational structure, but few on integration methodology or models. This tendency is augmented because application is culturally compatible with business scholars. Business is an applied science, and the applied end of the integration continuum fits our taste and training.

However in order for the area of faith/business integration

to develop and endure, we must take the necessary next step and develop integration theory. How, for example, do we collectively deal with epistemology: the basis of knowledge? When business

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theory seems to contradict Scripture, which trumps? Why? Virkler (1982) argues that “our perceptual experiences are affected by both our sinfulness and our finitude; God’s Word is not.” Do business scholars agree? Do we assume that the Bible as a source of knowledge has priority over human experience as a source of knowledge? Why or why not? What are the roles of opinion, belief, and fact in faith/business integration?

Examining questions such as these helps develop clarity and consensus about the nature of the integration relationship — or at least help establish where the disagreements are. Only when we have explored such issues and created models to guide research will we be able to accurately assess the quality of our current integration and advance beyond the present level. In short, a

meta-integration discussion — an exploration of what we mean when we talk about integration — is a necessary prerequisite to fruitful future research (Bouma-Prediger, 1990).

Those interested in this area might consider looking at the work done in integrative psychology. Many of you will have noticed that I have cited psychologists frequently in this paper. There is a reason for that. For about 25 years, the Christian schools of psychology have discussed the meta-aspects of integration. They have developed extensive theoretical models and taxonomies of faith/psychology integration. Since psychology is also an applied science, business scholars might benefit in looking at those models and taxonomies.

One place to begin is with the fundamentals of faith/psychology integration. For example, Bruce Narramore has done still-relevant foundational work.<sup>4</sup> His book with John Carter (Carter and Narramore, 1979) continues to be widely cited. Plantinga's articles on ontology are also worth exploring, and his book with Wolterstorff (1983), *Faith and Rationality*, is particularly recommended. These and other works in faith/psychology integration will assist business

scholars exploring theoretical integrative issues.

### ***Gap # 2 — Lack of Testing of Application, Principles, and Theory***

While it is vital to develop meta-integration theory in the business disciplines, there is also important work for integrators who prefer more applied scholarship. Specifically, there is a critical need to test the integration applications and principles that already have been developed.

Few of us would argue that issues involving faith are beyond testing, but few of us have tested the ideas and principles that came out of our integration. Therefore we do not know if our ideas are valid and generalizable or just lovely thoughts. For example, if an author in *The JBIB* suggests that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life resembles the principles of chaos theory (Black & Smith, 2003), that suggestion should be tested. Scripture is true, but when we apply it to a human construct, testing is necessary to find out if the application is correct, if there is a better application, or what (if anything) faith adds to the construct under consideration. So far, very few articles published in *The JBIB* test application. This is something we

need to do on a more systematic basis if the field of faith/business integration is to develop beyond the rationality of “because I think so.”

A modest change in our approach might help. We could simply require that any paper submitted to the CBFA conference or to *The JBIB* would have to include at least one testable proposition or hypothesis. The management academy and journals started doing this approximately 30 years ago and now have a significant body of tested theory. This might not be practical in all situations, but it is a place to begin.

Unfortunately, systemic challenges hinder our theory testing. Good research design is a developed skill and requires practice. At the same time, many of our universities do not have the resources to allow professors to do primary research, and many of us teach extensively. On the other hand, there are now many Ph.D.s at Christian universities, people trained in research methods and statistics. Furthermore, we are at the beginning of faith/business integration testing and have the opportunity to deal with the less complicated propositions — to pick the low-lying fruit. In addition, some hopeful

developments encourage primary testing.

- Christian universities are beginning to develop Ph.D. programs. This will accelerate the development of trained researchers interested in faith/business integration.
- CBFA is now financially able to fund some integration research projects. This could help provide the necessary release time and funds for some professors.
- The Internet makes it less expensive to do survey testing. I personally have received three different Internet surveys from CBFA members in the past few months and commend my colleagues for their ingenuity and enterprise.
- The tools for joint ventures and co-authoring are now in place and convenient. Wikis, Web sites, and e-mail mean that joint ventures between faculty from different universities and with different skill sets can be done with relative ease.



Testing theory is never easy and testing integration theory is not easy, but it is possible to do now, in ways unthought of even five years ago. I pray that God will continue to raise up people interested in this disciplined and unusual way of glorifying Him.

### ***Gap # 3 — Lack of Perspective on Other Christian Faith/Business Integration Traditions***

There are other gaps in this field. As has already been stated, the CBFA, with *The JBIB* as its publishing outlet, does scholarly faith/business integration in the Protestant tradition. However, other Christian groups have also developed strong integration streams, and we might benefit by exploring their work and conclusions.

One such group is the 20th century Catholic Church. In a recent book, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,

Michael Novak (1993) describes the nuances of the Church's efforts to

find the practical links between faith, business, justice, and economics. Novak himself has done an outstanding job of faith/business integration from a

Catholic perspective. The Acton Institute, now tangentially linked with Novak, presents seminars to seminary students (both Catholic and Protestant) on capitalism and a free society.<sup>5</sup> Many of the ideas these scholars have developed resonate with the integration ideas developed in the CBFA and *The JBIB* but have enough differences to create interesting tensions and spurs to creativity.

In addition, history is a rich mine of Christian groups that actively brought their faith into the business arena. During a time of shattering economic and social change, not unlike the 21st century, the English Puritans and their American cousins utilized the thinking of Martin Luther and John Calvin to understand practically how to do business while loving the Lord their God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves. They created a systematic theology of

work and commerce that matured over two centuries (Smith,

1997). Even now we are familiar with some of their ideas, such as the sacredness of every kind of honest work and the calling of God to a personal vocation.

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However, many other Puritan ideas could be utilized by the contemporary business scholar. For example, the Puritans had a strong view of the appropriate motives for work. A Christian should not work to gain wealth, use work as a means for gratifying selfish ambition, or even work to make a living for his or her family. The Puritans said that the appropriate motivations for work were spiritual and moral: work was a stewardship, and the purpose was to glorify God and benefit society. Wealth or even income was the by-product, not the goal (Packer, 1990; Ryken, 1986). Principles such as this would create interesting discussions in papers and cases.

Other Christian groups used economic models to bring the gospel to their generation. The Moravians, for example, were a community of Christians from Saxony who in the 18th century deliberately created businesses in order to fund their missionary efforts. The idea was that a Moravian would work in the group's economic endeavors for a time and be a full-time missionary for a time (Danker, 1971). In the next century, the Swiss-based Basel Mission Society used trade as a tool to build and strengthen the church in India and Africa

(Danker, 1971). The writings of these groups make for exciting reading and are a rich source of inspiration for faith/business integration scholars.

## Conclusions

The CBFA and *The JBIB* have been critical in the development of the faith/business integration area in this century. Because they exist, there is a growing group of scholars interested in this method of glorifying God. Because they exist, there is a strong body of developed work that can be built upon.

There are gaps of course. Many faith/business integration applications have been developed *ad hoc*; there are critical areas that need work. The larger issues of integration theory must be addressed before the field can move to the next level of consensus scholarship. Another gap that must be filled is the testing of current work so that principles and ideas already generated can be generalized and built upon. Another rich field of exploration is other Christian faith/business integration traditions. It is always enlightening and humbling to see what others have done in one's field of expertise.

Thank you, *The JBIB*, for 10 years of integration publication;

and thank you, CBFA, for 25 years of integration discussion. Happy birthday, and may you have many more.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Special thanks to Dr. Virgil Smith, who tore an earlier version of this paper to editorial shreds, to the benefit of all. All mistakes remain my own.

<sup>2</sup>For example, there are no simple definitions for concepts such as competition, justice, or love.

<sup>3</sup>At the regional conference at Northwestern College, St. Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Narramore, B. (1973) Perspectives on the integration of psychology and theology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 1, 1-16.

<sup>5</sup>[www.acton.org](http://www.acton.org)

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