

THE *JBIB* JOURNEY

Sharon G. Johnson
Charleston Southern University

I have long called the combination of “Christian” and “Higher Education” a “zany” idea¹ (Marsden, 1997). I have worked in three very different Christian universities and have seen how the “marriage” of substantive Christian faith and substantive higher education has produced a variety of tensions which led to various compromises. While some have argued that there “should” be a natural affinity between the Christian heart and the academic head, I have often seen both spiritual heartburn and scholastic headache.

In 1994, I was privileged to be tapped to be the first *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* editor. By God’s grace, and the invaluable help of a number of reviewers, the generosity of a variety of writers (many first-time writers), and the forbearance of a rotating set of CBFA Board members), the *JBIB* was “birthed” with its first issue in 1995. Like all births, there was a long period of “carrying” the *JBIB* “baby.”

Let me share some remembrances of this journey to the 1995 “birth day,” some of the story of the “growing” years of the *JBIB* under myself and other editors, and some reflections as both the *JBIB* and the CBFA move into their “adult” years. (I promise not to stretch this analogy too much longer or thinner.)

The Birthing Process

Before there was a *JBIB*, there was a CBFA. And, before the CBFA there were many Christian teachers and a few Christian scholars.

Arthur Holmes, Charles M. Marsden, and, yes, my mentor, Richard Chewning, were part of a group of pioneers who made the case for both the appropriateness and necessity of exploring the intersection of faith and business.² In books, articles, conferences, campus lecture series, and journal articles, these authors argued that all business and economic understanding was

premised on presuppositions that included moral as well as monetary ideas.

Out of this beginning grew the CBFA, especially grounded and “announced” in *Business Through the Eyes of Faith* (still a very relevant text and still used in many Christian-business contexts).

After *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, another book series, *Christians in the Marketplace*, published by NavPress and spearheaded by Richard Chewning, was published between 1989 and 1991. This series of four books brought together the ideas of 50 scholars to work through both the philosophy and pragmatics of ministry at the crossroads of faith and business.

My own involvement in this stream of publishing began with a Bible project for Thomas Nelson, *The Word and Life Study Bible* (1993, 1996, Thomas Nelson). Richard Chewning invited me to explore and develop some Bible notes related to management. It was out of that involvement that, I believe, Richard may have determined to encourage me to “apply” as *JBIB* editor. This occurred after my move to Cedarville University in the Fall of 1993. By the Fall of 1994 I sent in my “perspective” about the basic form and mission of the *JBIB* to the CBFA Board.

The Proposal for the *JBIB*

My proposal was relatively simple. *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* would provide a scholarly (blind, peer reviewed) faith-friendly environment where both experienced and aspiring authors could explore the Biblical connections with their business expertise. The accepted articles would have to meet a dual standard: Biblical faithfulness PLUS academic field integrity. Authors would be challenged to exhibit both a deep understanding of the Bible (as well as the faith traditions in which their understanding of the Bible was rooted), and a deep understanding of the stream of research “flowing” through their academic fields.

The First Steps

I thought, naively as it turned out, that we would receive a “flood” of submissions to be published in the inaugural issue. We received almost no submissions, and the few we did receive were more devotional than scholarly; some even appeared to be notes from class presentations by professors. As precious as these were as sincere efforts to achieve a degree of Biblical integration, they were not sufficiently “academic” to include.

So, I asked several people if they might submit an article for that first issue – among those was Richard Chewning. Richard would in many other issues graciously share his profound views in a variety of different articles during the years of my editorship. After a pretty fair degree of nervous misgivings, and with the help of the publishing staff at Cedarville University (generously donated pro bono), the first issue of the *JBIB* was published in time for the Fall, 1995 CBFA meeting. I was able to announce then, and each year, that my role was chiefly to decide the color of the *JBIB* cover! While my involvement was a bit more substantive than that, it was true then, and remains true, that the *JBIB* was the product of the CBFA community, a community of scholars, reviewers, behind-the-scene staffers at CU, Board members, and numerous others who prayed for this effort and encouraged me.

Growing Up (Slowly)

As the impact of the *JBIB* began (slowly) to be felt, more manuscripts were received (although the manuscript flow has never been “abundant”). We would discover that while many Christian teachers would have “liked” to become academically-faithful writers, they often were very busy teaching multiple courses, frequently across multiple business disciplines (which remains the case at many Christian universities).

During my time as editor we published about 30-35 percent of the manuscripts we received, almost all after going through at least one revision. Interestingly, more manuscripts were critiqued because of their perceived business field academic weaknesses than their Biblical weaknesses. I always assumed this reflected the limited amount of time most Christian teachers in business had to devote to remaining current in their own academic

fields – and the unfortunate effect of significant teaching loads and limited resources provided for scholarly activity (For some, this would mean only partial funding of their participation in CBFA conferences and payment of CBFA dues).

I must admit that my favorite years were these pioneering years. I have always enjoyed being on the front end of innovations. We were creating new procedures, exploring new ideas, and being involved with a whole new variety of publishing process issues (ranging from the size of the journal issues, to costs, to printer contracts). As the *JBIB* was growing, so to was the CBFA. That growth would eventually lead to the need to establish the *Christian Business Academy Review (CBAR)*, under the capable editorship of Kent Saunders (at that time at Anderson University in Indiana). The first *CBAR* issue was published and distributed to CBFA members in 2006. Its focus was essentially pedagogical (curriculum development, cases and research in Christian education) and professional (the role of business programs and faculty in assessment, accreditation, teaching loads and professional development).

The work of the *JBIB* and the *CBAR*, and the growth of the CBFA annual conference participation, would be aided by the growth of doctoral programs at several Christian universities including Regent and Anderson (IN). I had the privilege of “adjunct” teaching at the Anderson program, and there began my growing realization of just what challenges faced those who would now begin their own individual academic journeys. These students would later submit papers to present at the CBFA conferences and would begin to submit articles. What a privilege it was to witness God’s work in joining their passion and the place established by the publication that first published their work in the mid-1990’s.

In 2004, I was led (somewhat over Richard Chewning’s objections) to step down as *JBIB* editor (and Director of Publications, as I had come to be designated by the CBFA Board). While I was neither tired nor bored, I was convinced that a “fresh pair of eyes” would help the *JBIB* itself stay fresh, and continue its growth. Fortunately Dr. Yvonne Smith was ready to assume the responsibility and, indeed, carried the journal to even greater heights as an academic journal while maintaining a heart for Biblical faithfulness.

Let me share some of what I have learned about the adventure awaiting those who stand at the cross-roads of faith and business.

(1) **There is much more to be explored and discovered.** While the connections between faith and business (work, careers, calling) has been explored for some time in both Catholic and reformed thinking, the evangelical “voice” has been neither strong nor consistent. The *JBIB* has sought to “fill” this arena, but there have only been about 150 articles published over its twenty year history. There are many issues to be explored and questions to be asked and answered – some of them very fundamental:

- a. Should Christian faculty speak to both the opportunities and threats of capitalism as an economic “solution” to the challenges of creating and distributing wealth? If so, what is the appropriate balance? Are we called to be promoters of capitalism’s benefits or prophets warning against capitalism’s costs (both economic and moral)?
- b. Has the flood of information technology enriched or impoverished our students (and professors)? Is the power of electronic mediation in all of its forms helping to deepen and broaden our dialogue with each other, or has it made that dialogue ever more shallow?
- c. What does it really mean to be a servant leader? Is it found in developing a caring environment or a challenging environment? Is its aim to develop more worker satisfaction, or greater worker productivity? In education, does a teacher exhibit a heart for serving students by expecting (and grading for) excellence, or by seeking to understand the pressures students face that may lead them to choose to submit less than meritorious work?

d. Are there legitimate Christian-based perspectives in accounting and finance beyond being ethical? That is, should Christian faculty be advocating the inclusion of people as definable assets (with definable depreciation and/or appreciation)? Or, what might be a Christian perspective on appropriate financial risk for banks and individuals?

- (2) **Christian universities need to discover more robust ways to support the pursuit of scholarship by their faculty.** While there have been some efforts to fund travel, most Christian institutions still place heavy teaching loads on their faculty, and undervalue scholarly work in terms of both promotion and tenure. Some Christian universities have inaugurated both masters and doctoral programs without providing for a significant increase in faculty.
- (3) **Christian faculty must learn more effective ways to help their students learn how to engage in faith-business integrative thinking.** While the *CBAR* has performed a very effective service through faith-based cases and examples of curricular innovations, many Christian faculty still wrestle with how to move faith integration from a peripheral to a primary “space” in their courses. While faculty are clearly seeking to further their own faith integration capabilities, many of our students are spectators to our efforts rather than participants in their own efforts.
- (4) **Many academic fields need to create their own academically sound and Biblically faithful publication spaces.** I have long believed there should be both other Christian “XXX” Faculty Associations and other Journal of Biblical Integration in “XXX”³ journals.

Finally, let me share some thoughts about the future of the CBFA:

- (1) **We have thrived because we have built and sustained enough common ground to fellowship with each other without becoming narrowly doctrinaire.** This has allowed us to build a “space” broad enough to be inclusive but narrow enough

to be meaningful. Thus we are not a “historically Christian association,” nor one that believes that it is enough to have a “Christian environment” (whatever this means). We believe that a faithful Christian life and perspective are essential rather than peripheral to a meaningfully holistic Christian professional and personal life.

- (2) **I believe one of the most significant shared values we have (and that the JBIB has faithfully pursued) is our shared respect for the “authority” of Scripture.** I believe that God “speaks” through His Word to ALL the academic disciplines – business and economics included. While we may differ (hopefully passionately but respectfully) about what God is saying, and how to apply His voice to the challenges of business enterprise, we should remain faithful to the necessity of beginning with God’s perspective rather than human theories. While we may honestly disagree about what God is saying to the workplace, we stand together affirming that He speaks to the workplace.
- (3) **The CBFA has grown under the influence of baby boomers – we must find ways to encourage a younger generation of teacher/scholars to begin assuming responsibility for “carrying the baton” of faithfulness into the 21st Century.** I was one of the early baby boomer generation (born in 1946 – please, act surprised)! While I anticipate a continuing academic career, there will come a time when a new generation of business teachers and scholars will carry the primary responsibility for the good work begun in the early 1980’s. That will mean new ideas and the need for continued adaptation to new practices while remaining true to the founding CBFA principles. Resilience to change and respect for historic truth CAN (and should) exist side-by-side.

ENDNOTES

¹ I credit George M. Marsden for the inspiration of this idea. In Marsden’s book he stated his fundamental proposal: “That mainstream American higher education should be more open to explicit discussion of the relationship of religious faith to learning. Scholars who have religious faith should be reflecting on the intellectual implications of that faith and bringing those reflections into the mainstream of intellectual life.” (pp. 3-4) He cited a professor of history as saying “the notion that scholars’ personal beliefs are compatible with their academic interests is ‘loony’ and reflects a ‘self-indulgent professoriate’” (p. 5). Marsden stated that “Even though many academics are religious, they would consider it outrageous to speak of the relationship of their faith to their scholarship” (7).

² The late 1980’s and beyond saw the publication of a number of important books discussing faith-integration for scholars. These included: *The Idea of a Christian College* by Arthur Holmes (1975, revised 1987), William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan; *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life*, Edited by Max L. Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann and Shirley J. Roels, with Preston N. Williams (1995), William B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan; *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* by Alexander Hill (1997), InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois; and the four volume *Christians in the Marketplace Series*, edited by Richard Chewning, which included *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations* (1989), *Business Principles and Economics: The Foundations* (1989), *Biblical Principles and Business: the Practice* (1990), and *Biblical Principles and Public Policy: the Practice* (1991), NavPress, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

³ I recently (September 28, 2015) examined titles indexed in the *Christian Periodicals Index* for academic journals in various disciplines. Beyond business I was able to identify the following areas as having area-specific journals: education (K-12 and higher education), literature, archaeology, psychology, leadership, public affairs and international affairs.

REFERENCE

Marsden, George M. (1997). *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.