

**Institute for Christian Teaching
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Integration of Faith and Learning: The Teacher's Role

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The best profile of a university professor

Probably the most complete description of the current academic work of a university professor was presented by Ernest Boyer in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990). “Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students. Specifically, we conclude that the work of the professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping, functions. These are: the scholarship of *discovery*; the scholarship of *integration*; the scholarship of *application*; and the scholarship of *teaching*” (Boyer, 1990, p. 16)

Based upon Boyer's description of the work of the professoriate it is possible to analyze a desirable profile of an Adventist professor. A closer look of each of the four elements may be explored from a Christian perspective

Discovery. The *scholarship of discovery* is described as what we most often think of as scholarship, which is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the discovery of new knowledge. At its most successful discovery, is seen by Boyer to play a major role in stimulating and engendering the intellectual climate of the institution.

Professors must be involved in pushing the frontiers of knowledge looking for new horizons. In doing so, teachers have a fresh discourse to students, otherwise, they will be involved in a academic routine that undermine the academic life of their specialty and the institutional academic life.

It is quite common to diminish the work of Christian researchers due to the fact that they usually present their philosophical worldview as a frame of reference. However, several authors defended their position. Sterk (2002) compiled different perspectives of the relationship between religion and scholarship in higher education. Roy Clouser (1991) presented a reinterpretation of the relationship among religion, philosophy and science. Scientific and philosophical theories are

founded in religion presuppositions. There is not religious neutrality in the academic disciplines. Therefore, a scholar that believes in the Bible should clearly state his beliefs as a base for his research and teaching.

One of the important tasks of the Christian scholarship of discovery is to find the basic presuppositions that support the subjects. It is a search of discovery of the truth. Christian teachers should study the different fields of their discipline from a biblical perspective to be able to overcome practices in the search of theories and presuppositions, to go upriver in the streams of truth that come from the Word of God.

Integration. The *scholarship of integration* is proposed by Boyer (1990) in order to give value to work done which makes connections and draws insights from discrete facts and findings, which brings a multi-disciplinarily to the pursuit of learning: "what we mean is serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research" (p. 19). Therefore, integration is the "articulation" between research and the rest of the academic task. It encompasses interpretation of the personal or community research and wider intellectual patterns. It means to go beyond the traditional frontiers of the disciplines to include other fields of knowledge. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship are the result of the intellectual duty of integration.

For an Adventist professor, integration reaches beyond academic articulation. It goes beyond the academics to touch all the aspects of life. Not only in looking for an integral development of the spiritual dimension through a saving relationship with God, but also includes the social, physical, and cultural dimensions. This perspective includes the divine design of the human being through the capabilities to think and to do. The physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of the human being allow interpreting and articulating the subject matter with the diversity and complexity of the whole human experience in the light of the divine purpose of God in the human being.

Application. Boyer sees the *scholarship of application* as related to the service role of the academic in that it is concerned with questions such as "How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems? How can it be helpful to individuals as well as institutions?"

Can social problems themselves define an agenda for scholarly investigation?" (p. 21). In order for service activities to be seen as scholarship, he argues that they need to be fundamentally concerned with one's field of knowledge and professional practice, and be characterized by rigor and accountability.

During the last decade, following Boyer's proposal, the new definition of higher education for the XXI century includes a strong emphasis on service. At the beginning, the concept of service was unclear and hard to measure; therefore, it was not included in course plans as a requirement. During the last years, service has acquired an important dimension of scholarship. Professors came out of the ivory tower to reach the world with the application of their knowledge. The scholarship of application can be defined as a two way path. Professors not only apply their knowledge to solve problems of society, but they interact with the midst and learn from it.

For a Seventh-day Adventist professor, service is the main filter of all their experiences, because the true object of education is formation for selfless service. The final result of Christian education is service to God and human being. The impact of the application of professional, spiritual and social knowledge in selfless service will land on a more complete development of the student character as a preparation for this life and the thereafter.

Teaching. Boyer finally weights the activity of *teaching* by proposing it as the fourth form of scholarship. In doing this, teaching is no longer seen as a merely technical or routine activity, but is positioned as a highly complex activity involving deep knowledge and understanding of the subject on the part of the teacher; a dynamic, shifting relationship between the learner and the teacher; a professional practice needing constant reflection and review; a need for the teacher to remain a learner in their own practice; and a role for the teacher as inspirer of future scholars.

Should the professor reveal his religious beliefs in his teaching? This question was asked by Jean Bethke Elshtain, compiled by Sterk (2002). She answered this question by explaining that the issue is not if he should or shouldn't, because the teacher always reveals his religious

beliefs in his teaching. Not that the teacher uses his teaching stage as a pulpit, but that the beliefs are so imbedded with his teachings that they give meaning and impulse to his knowledge.

For the Seventh-day Adventist teacher, scholarship in teaching has a more complete dimension. Professors not only teach by what they say, but with modeling. Professors are models in relationship with God, models in intellectual growth, and models in health, and balanced lifestyle. “There is no Christian education without Christian teachers” (Gaebelein, 1968).

The four dimensions of scholarship by Boyer are difficult to be reached. However, Christian education sets a higher standard for teachers.

The best picture of a university professor

What the best college teachers do is the title of Ken Bain’s book, published in 2004. What were the findings of the author, the Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence in the University of New York?

In order to identify the best practices, Ken Bain answered three basic questions:

1. What is teacher excellence? “professors... that achieved remarkable success in helping their students learn in ways that made a sustained, substantial, and positive influence in how those students think, act, and feel” (p. 5).
2. What counted as evidence that a professor profoundly helped and encouraged students to learn deeply and remarkably? “ We insisted on evidence that most of their students were highly satisfied with the teaching and inspired by it to continue to learn... that the teacher had reached them intellectually and educationally, and had left them wanting more” (p. 7).

3. What did the students learn? “Teachers who showed strong evidence of helping and encouraging their students to learn in ways that would usually win praise and respect from both disciplinary colleagues and the broader academic community... Teachers who had a sustained influence on their students” (p. 9).

Bain identified teaching excellence in two areas: a) success in helping students to learn in a sustained, substantial, and positive way in how student think, act, and feel and b) success in student learning, according to the respect from colleagues and the academic community.

After a deep study of the teachers with the characteristics mentioned above, six major conclusions can be drawn from the study.

What do the best teachers know and understand? “Without exception, outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well. They are all active and accomplished scholars, artists, or scientists” (p. 15).

How do they prepare to teach? “Exceptional teachers treat their lectures, discussion sections, problem/based sessions, and other elements of teaching as serious intellectual endeavors, intellectually demanding, and important as their research and scholarship” (p. 17).

What do they expect of their students? “The best teachers expect more... They avoid objectives that are arbitrarily tied to the course and favor those that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life” (p. 17, 18).

What do they do when they teach? “While methods vary, the best teachers often try to create what we have come to call a natural critical learning environment. In that environment, people learn by confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality” (p. 18).

How do they treat students? “Highly effective teachers tend to reflect a strong trust in students. They usually believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can. They often discuss openly and enthusiastically their own sense of awe and curiosity about life” (p. 18).

How do they check their progress and evaluate their efforts? “All the teachers we studied have some systematic program to assess their own effort and to make appropriate changes. Furthermore, because they are checking their own efforts when they evaluate students, they avoid judging them on arbitrary standards” (p. 19)

In summary, Bain said that good teachers know that they always have something to learn. Teachers don’t blame their students for any of the difficulties they face. Outstanding teachers “had a strong sense of commitment to the academic community and not just a personal success in the classroom” (p. 20).

Boyer presented the ideal profile of what a university teacher should do. Bain presented what actually outstanding professors do. Is there something missing in both proposals from a Christian perspective?

An analysis of the best profile and the best picture from a Christian perspective
Boyer and Bain’s presentations are incomplete from a Christian perspective. Although Ellen White never wrote a book on pedagogy, between 1872 and 1915 she presented a compilation of counsels on education that may conform an educational model regarding specifically to the work of a professor.

Taken from her writings on education, a summary of the profile of a Christian professor encompasses four main dimensions:

Spiritual dimension. The most important quality of a Christian professor is a saving relationship with Jesus. Professors must live the life of Christ to be ready to nurture others in their spiritual life. Christian education is not a mere human activity; it is a relationship with God.

This relationship with God is revealed through a life in harmony with His will and a model for their students.

Mental dimension. The development of the mental qualities are not less important than their secular colleagues. But because they are inspired by wider goals and motifs, they go further than the mean of other lecturers and the accrediting associations' requirements.

Social dimension. Social relationships with students are as important today as it was when Christ was on this earth socializing with his disciples and other people. But it is expected more from a Christian professor: patience, tact, sympathy, comprehension of students' problems, the ability to obtain respect and confidence from students, flexibility and consistency. Thus, the development of social skills and attitudes are crucial en the formation of the student's character.

Physical dimension. Health is very important for a Christian professor. A balanced life style will provide for a professor not only better physical health condition, but happiness and contentment in his work.

The key is the equilibrium between these four dimensions. Looking for this balance professors not only will reach the restoration of God's image in their own lives, but will transmit this message to their students. The standard is too high to be reached. Only the Holy Spirit can enable a Christian professor to work toward this goal.

The importance of beliefs for a personal profile of a Christian lecturer

"A major question confronting a school like ____ is the degree to which faith and learning should be related. (For example, should religious beliefs influence the choice of topics teachers explore in their classes, the way they teach material, or the way they do their research?) Please provide a brief explanation of your perspective on faith and learning" (Ream, Beaty and Lyon, 2004, p. 353)

How would you answer? Ream, Beaty and Lion (2004) asked this question to professors of four major research Christian Colleges and Universities. The responses where classified in a

typology that may represent a range of beliefs of Christian teachers. The categories are the following:

Pattern 1. Faith and Learning are separate and independent. Teachers believe that there is no relationship between faith and learning. “No relation” is a common response.

Pattern 2. Limited integration: Integrated in Campus environment but not curricula. Teachers affirm that there is a desirable environment that nurtures the faith of students. But it is clear that this faith is nurtured in extra curricular dimensions

Pattern 3. Limited integration: individual and private, but not curricular. Teachers limited the relationship of faith and learning to their private lives. They believe that learning is corporate and faith is personal.

Pattern 4. Limited integration: individual and public but not curricular. Teachers understand that faith is both a public and individual matter. The focus of these responses is that faith is essentially about living an exemplary Christian life in relation to colleagues and students.

Pattern 5. Limited integration: the place of faith in the curriculum—very limited. Teachers agree that faith has a role in the curriculum, but it is restricted to a very few courses. These courses should be elective to preserve the voluntary nature of religion.

Pattern 6. Limited integration: the place of faith in the curriculum is limited and specified. Teachers perceive that faith has connection in religion, theology and philosophy courses. These courses may be required by the institution.

Pattern 7. The place of faith in the curriculum: virtually unlimited because it is ethics. Teachers believe that the proper sphere of faith is the ethical dimension. Each course has moral and ethical dimensions.

Pattern 8. Complete integration. Teachers believe that separation of faith and learning is artificial. Both domains are inextricably related in a Christian university.

The responses of professors vary from pattern 1 to 8, and from institution to institution. This study shows at least two findings: a) integration of faith and learning is not secure at Christian universities, and b) faith and learning “share a tenuous relationship in the minds of faculty members at selected religious research universities” (p. 369)

The importance of deeds on the personal picture of a Christian

Korniejczuk (1994) developed an operational paradigm that presents the stages of deliberate integration of faith and learning in the formal curriculum. It is structured in seven levels of implementation of integration of faith and learning in the subject matters. The first three levels shows no deliberate implementation and the last four levels show deliberate implementation. A description of the levels follows.

Level 0: No knowledge, no interest. Teacher has little or no knowledge of IFL in the formal curriculum and is doing nothing to be involved in IFL. Teacher is not convinced that IFL can be carried out in the subject, and thinks that the subject he/she teaches is not related to faith. Common responses are “IFL is only extracurricular; cannot be implemented in the curriculum”. “I do not know how to implement IFL”. “I have other priorities in mind”. “I cannot do it in my subject”. “I know how to do it, but I do not have institutional support”.

Level 1: Interest. Teacher has acquired or is acquiring information of IFL. S/he is aware that IFL should be incorporated in his/her classes and is looking for ways to deliberately implement IFL. Teacher thinks that it may be worthwhile to include IFL in future planning. Common responses are “I know very little about IFL”. “I do not like superficial integration, thus I am looking for appropriate ways”. “I am looking for information on how to implement IFL”.

Level 2: Readiness. Teacher knows how to implement IFL in at least some themes. Teacher is preparing to deliberately implement IFL at a definite future time. Common responses are “I am going to incorporate some integration I have tried in my course plan”. “I have decided to systematically introduce some things I know”.

Level 3: Irregular or superficial use. Teacher deliberately integrates faith in the subject, but generally in an unplanned way. There is no coherent Christian worldview. Implementation

may be irregular: only some themes are integrated throughout the general context of the subject. Implementation may be superficial: use of spiritual content for secular purposes without meaning. Management concerns disturb IFL. Common responses are, “I know that what I am doing is not the best, but this is a Christian school, and I have to do something”. “I do not know how to plan IFL”. “I only feel confident with two themes: Creation and Evolution”. “I do not like planning IFL. I do it consciously but spontaneously”.

Level 4: Conventional. Teacher reaches a stabilized use of IFL, but no changes are made in ongoing use. Syllabus and objectives show IFL in at least some themes. IFL is based on teacher’s talking rather than students’ response“. Common responses are, “I include IFL in my unit planning so I can remember to do it”. “It is not often that I change what I have planned”.

Level 5: Dynamic. Teacher varies the implementation of IFL to increase impact on students. S/he can describe changes that s/he had made in the last months and what is planned in a short term. Change of strategies and themes according to student needs or interests. Students draw conclusions of IFL. Common responses are, “I just look at their [students’] faces and know what they are thinking. I encourage them to draw conclusions”. “I vary my IFL strategies according to the needs of my students”.

Level 6: Comprehensive. Teacher cooperates with colleagues on ways to improve IFL. Regular collaboration between two or more teachers increased impact on students. The whole school (or at least a group of teachers) provided a coherent Christian worldview and emphasized student response.

Conclusion

Christian faculty members generally understand the idea that religious commitment and learning can pull them in various directions. Many know what it is like to be under suspicion from the church community because of our scholarly learning. Many know what it feels like to be under suspicion in an academic community because of the religious commitments that

compromise scholarship. Although these tensions and pressures are real, it is possible to combine genuine religious faith with a genuine commitment to excellence in the educational task.

Christian professors need to describe a clear desirable profile of their complex task that involves the tension between attention to students' needs and research. This profile, sustained by well articulated and consistent beliefs on the role of integration of faith and learning may be compared with a real picture of the implementation. As a result, Christian lecturers can self evaluate their work and develop strategies to improve their comprehension and conviction on the topic, and to implement an integration of faith and learning plan for all areas of their scholarship. The Christian teacher-scholar is the heart and soul of Christian higher education. A Christian professor committed to a vision that allows him/her to work integrally in the academic world as a Christian.

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