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ABSTRACT

This paper on infusing a Christian approach into college teaching argues that the traditional definition of teaching is narrow and harmful, that the methods a teacher uses are content themselves, that some methods are more consonant with Christian principles than others, and that Christian teachers in a Christian post-secondary institution should use methods that represent Christ's model. In a section that looks at why this issue merits attention, the paper points out that teachers in Christian institutions must respond to the societal anxiety over change and fragmentation to offer a strong presence to their students. The argument goes on to look at the practicality of teaching and the powerful role Christian teachers can play in helping students confront their questions. In particular the paper urges Christian teachers to model Christian content by: building a sense of "family" with students; remembering that students have lives and connect teaching and content with their lives; placing the teaching vocation in the context of the world and acting on it by helping students to see the political questions beyond content; and accepting and recognizing personal gifts and limitations. In conclusion the paper notes that the calling of a Christian teacher requires responsibility, spiritual qualifications, and honorable action. (JB)

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ED 393 364

The Christian Post-Secondary Teacher's Vocational Task

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He who wishes to ac us a truth should not tell it to us, but simply suggest it with a brief gesture, a gesture which starts an ideal trajectory in the air along which we glide until we find ourselves at the feet of the new truth.[1]

José Ortega Y Gasset (1883-1955)

Usually, any serious discussion of the job of a teacher and the role of teaching is broken into two broad categories -- content and methods. Most people, including most educators, talk as if they believe that the task of a teacher is to teach content (usually thought of as subject-area knowledge -- the facts, concepts, and generalizations of a particular focus of study, like sociology, New Testament Literature, or Educational Psychology). The educational task of a teacher in teaching this content is to employ methods (usually thought of as ways of "getting the content across"). Within this definition of education, the task of teaching is to use methods which "carry" the content being taught to the students who are learning it.

The point of this paper is to break down this narrow and harmful definition of teaching. The main thesis of the paper is that content and methods are artificial distinctions. Content includes methods, and methods include content. Although the artificial distinction between content and methods has some pragmatic utility in describing the actions of teaching, partitioning the job of teaching into these two categorical activities masks the importance of the content that students learn from the methods that teachers employ.

[1] Gasset, J. O. Y. (1914). Meditations on Quixote, "Preliminary Meditation."

Certainly, thoughtful teachers understand that, in classrooms at the post-secondary level, there is subject-area knowledge. This knowledge, or content, is shaped into modules to be "transferred" to students, who are "instructed" to learn it and are then graded in relation to the amount of content they learn. But, what about the "other" content -- the content implicit in the " methods" that teachers use?

In the time we have worked in teacher education, we have come to appreciate and understand the content of methods. It is, for us, Jesus content when he taught the woman at the well, Zaccheus, Nathaniel, or Nicodemus -- always attending to the people's "felt need" and then dealing with their "spiritual need." The content of Jesus' message was also carried in methods, methods that considered and accepted the learner as well as passing along subject-area knowledge about the Kingdom of God.

The central points of our paper are (1) that the methods a post-secondary teacher uses are, in themselves, content , (2) that some methods are more consonant with Christian principles than others, and (3) that our tasks as Christian teachers in a Christian post-secondary institution is to use methods that represent Christ's model to us as teachers. In other words, the task of a Christian teacher at the post-secondary institution is to "teach Christianly." We believe that the ways a teacher talks, shapes and collects assignments, evaluates learners, organizes the physical environment of the classroom, builds relationships within the classroom, and even how a teacher greets students have their own content. We hope that our paper contributes to the thoughtful consideration of the content of teaching methods by Christian post-secondary teachers.

Why Focus on Teaching Christianly?

Christian post-secondary institutions have a mandate. Their task is, at least in part, to educate Christian young people to take their places in the world and, in these places, to represent the love of Christ to the world's neediness. The Bible talks of this Christian vocation in phrases like "spreading the good news of Christ" or being "the salt of the earth." By accepting a teaching position at a Christian post-secondary institution, we believe the teacher accepts this mandate.

Teaching young people to become the salt of the earth is not an easy task. We suppose that Christ never intended it to be. As a friend says, "You can't sharpen a knife on a pillow." Still, the world is a tough place in which to live and work, and students need all the help they can get. To offer students only the content of the subject-area without considering the content of those Christian methods used to teach that content is incomplete; it falls under the New Testament admonition "they asked for bread and we gave them stones."

The task of teaching Christianly is especially important because students in post-secondary institutions like Concordia College today face a society experiencing the seductive ascendancy of an unrelenting anxiety attack. The late-20th century world in which students are preparing to live is scattered and volatile. Explosions in innovation and the increasing secular focus on consumerism encouraged by the drive for successful competition in a global economy has manufactured a rhetoric of empty urgency. Students are seduced into believing that they must "hit the ground running" or they won't keep up. Panic merchants would have young people believe that they must learn to live in chaos and continuous change: it would be fruitless, they say, to search for stability and commitment. Meanwhile, young people

experience the fragmentation around them in their communities and in their individual identities. Cultural products celebrate the banal. Workplaces, churches, families, as well as institutions of higher learning are splintering. Their world is experiencing a crisis in meaning. Proliferating and competing discourses threaten to destroy one another in annihilistic relativism.

How do they respond to these pressures? Without strong moral voices crying in this alienating wilderness, young people -- sometimes called Generation X because they seem to lack "selves" -- have little alternative except to become more and more accepting of this postmodern view of the world without considering the truth of this view. The seductiveness is so powerful that often young people don't even realize they have a choice. Yet, their implicit actions seem to cry out for answers to age-old questions: Where is truth? Where is hope? Where is loyalty? Where can a person dwell, in faith and spiritually grounded morality, in such a world?

Yes, there is a need for the strong presence of Christian teachers at post-secondary institutions.

The Practicalness of Teaching

The purpose of teaching is always practical. We believe that, as Christian teachers, we can play a powerful role in helping young people confront their questions. We can do this in part by being explicit about the choices that compose our teaching. These choices, when shown in their explicitness, have the power to affirm and develop the faith of young Christians. We hope our paper offers practical suggestions -- the nuts and bolts -- that would help Christian teachers consider their choices in teaching, modeling, and thoroughly living Christian teaching methods.

Before we begin, we offer a caveat. We believe in the unique calling of teaching. Implicit in this belief is that the Holy Spirit has given each Christian unique gifts to use in God's service. What that means specifically is that Tara's gifts and Jim's gifts are, thankfully, not the same. And, while we believe that there are certain principles that all Christian teachers should follow, we also believe that Christian teachers will work out the principles of Christian teaching in their own, spirit-given, unique ways. In other words, our paper describes how we have considered the principles and how we are developing them in our own teaching lives. We believe that principles can be true; but, at the same time, we believe that what is right for one Christian teacher, in the living out of a principle, will not necessarily be right for another.

If Christian post-secondary institutions are to address the practical, biblical principle of being the salt of the earth, those of us who teach within these institutions should be grounded in Christian "ways." We are traditionally called professors, and among the things we profess is our Christianity. Although some Christian post-secondary institutions ask us to sign a pledge, noting our adherence to Christian principles and our vow to act in accord with these principles, within Christian post-secondary institutions we have academic freedom. Among the unique freedoms we have in a Christian post-secondary institution is the freedom to liberally address our Christian beliefs openly in the course of our classes. This freedom is valuable and liberating. However, if our walking the walk does not go with our talking the talk, the content of these method falls short -- or, worse, there is a content to the method, but it is not what the content we want to teach. As Christian

teachers, the most powerful way we can profess our Christianity is in the everyday, day-to-day, common activities of our teaching -- our methods[2].

Christian Principles in Post-Secondary Teaching

We believe the following principles can help Christian post-secondary teachers model a Christian content in their methods.

1. Build "family" relationships.

Many African cultures believe that the treasures of life are embodied not in the collection of material possessions but in shared human relationship. The stories of Mary and Martha and of community within the community of Jesus' disciples show the importance of human relationships to Jesus. It does not seem out of Christ's character to suggest that building relationships is a keystone activity of Christian teaching. In fact, not building strong teacher-student relationships would seem a violation of Christian principle.

The Bible notes a variety of points about the task, importance, and responsibility of families. What separates a family from any other "institution" is the magnitude of the relationships within it. Obviously, post-secondary teachers can not build the same powerful relationships that live within the home; still, accepting the possibility of teacher-student relationships is a valuable first step. Allowing the relationship to develop is a second.

[2] We believe that some methods of teaching are more Christian than others. The task of this paper is to critically and practically address some of these ways. The evidence to support this contention is gathered from our reading of the Bible and our own experience working out our teaching methods in fear and trembling. We are quite aware of the possibility of proof-texting, which we define as selectively choosing particular Bible passages or verses to promote a position that originated outside the tenants of the Bible. And, while we are utilizing Biblical passages to support points or encourage actions, we have tried to always be careful that the idea we are supporting makes good sense given the entire body of Biblical text -- not just the particular verse we are using.

Anyone who has earned a Ph. D. degree has been "schooled" in a particular way. We have necessarily submitted ourselves to the rigorous development of a deep and abiding relationship with a subject matter. And, we have become an expert in at least one part of that subject matter -- our research thesis. We immerse ourselves in the often lonely pursuit of this research; we complete it; we struggle to write it; and, we defend it. Then, we accept a teaching position. But, teaching calls us to act in ways very different than the ways we have been working as we have completed our research thesis.

Although it is difficult, we must ask: Have we, as post-secondary teachers, built stronger relationships with our subject areas than we have built with our students? It's an important question. One undergraduate student we spoke with recently talked of the best course he had taken in years of university. When asked why this course was so good, he stated simply, "It's *the first course* where I ever talked to the person next to me." The class, he went on, had become a sort of "home" for him. Is it possible that we have not created homes for our students?

We all learn better in the comfort of our homes. The Old Testament clearly notes that the first and most effective place of teaching was the home. In thousands of years, little has changed. Home is a human metaphor of great power. Many of us assert the power of the home in the education of children, but how many of us see the possibilities of building small-scale homes in our post-secondary classrooms? Home is also a powerful metaphor for good teaching. What is there about the home, and not another place, that make teaching more effective there? The answer is that the lessons learned in the home are never abstract; instead, they are always personal and always relational.

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Applying the concept of home to teaching at the post-secondary level is not so difficult. The best teaching at the post-secondary level is not divorced from human emotions. Good teaching at any level is both relational and personal. The point is so obvious that it hardly seems worthy of mention; however, we have listened to students lament that teachers seem more interested in their subject-area content than they are in teaching their students. To be a good teacher, one can never abstract teaching from the learner. One can, we suppose, be an effective scholar without learners, but hardly a good teacher.

How does a teacher create a sense of home and family in the classroom? A first step is to listen to our students, not waiting for them to finish so we can add our expert voice -- but, really listening. Really listening means offering students un-interrupted time. It means asking questions to help extend their thinking, not waiting for chances to cut conversation off. Really listening means getting to know students well enough to attend to and respond to what may be stumbling probes into the meaning of what they are learning, even though these probes are not yet well thought out or not yet quite deep enough.

Building a family relationship also means not rejecting students' beliefs that we hold a special position, based on status and wisdom gained by study, experience, and even age. Students invest their post-secondary teachers with a great deal of responsibility -- often fearfully unwanted and sometimes accompanied with the feelings of undeservedness. Letting students see our reliability as well as our vulnerability to the issues and problems they are often struggling with -- the very ones we sometimes seem to have forgotten we had long ago -- can help.

Finally, slowing down enough to be present to students as they engage us is a key. Good parents put their children first. Good teachers share this trait. Sometimes we must simply put aside the grading, the lesson planning, the committee tasks, the latest deadlines for articles, and the seemingly endless series of academic pressures that have us hurtling past students. When Jesus was caught up in competing demands, even when he had already made a decision and his disciples were pushing him forward, he would stop to talk with one person, to heal a woman with a flow of blood, to bring a synagogue leader's only daughter back to life, or to heal and make a disciple of a screaming blind man. Jesus loved people enough to change his plans. We must ask ourselves: "How much do we love our students?"

Recently we attended a two-day conference where a wonderful, well-read and scholarly theologian spoke about his work. His scholarship on lower and higher Christology, his notes about the shared meaning of the major world religions, and his insights into exegesis were instructive. But, his attention to and understanding of the lives of those in his audience was absent. For example, in talking about meditative prayer, he gave a rich explanation of how Christians could meditate on the scriptures. Specifically, he suggested that one could find a number of commentaries written by theologians who had studied the same scripture passage and read them each carefully and thoughtfully. To him, sharing the meanings that thoughtful people had made was a rich way of approaching the scriptures. We believe him. It was a glorious suggestion for those in the audience who lives in close proximity to a theological library that housed the number of commentaries that he suggested. But, few members of the audience seemed to fall into that category. Second, he attended to laying out the truths he had discovered about the

scriptures in a wonderful and helpful manner. But, he never left the position of a researcher-scholar of books. His audience, however, was full of teachers. Unfortunately, he failed to address how as a teacher whose vocation is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ should understand humans of the day. One can not teach the world without a sense of what the world is.

Teaching Principle #1: Build relationships. Consider the students. They are people with people needs, one of which is authentic dialogue with a teacher. Teaching a class attending only to the sharing of subject-area content, without attention to the students who live in that class, is a lost opportunity to build a relationship. If we follow the example of Jesus as we teach, relationships are a treasure of our lives.

2. Get real

There's a wise old saying that some Christians "are so heavenly-minded they're no earthly good." When we, as Christian post-secondary teachers become lost in abstraction, forgetting to ground what we say and believe with who we are and how we live, we are heaven-gazing. One of our most important responsibilities as post-secondary teachers is to make the subject-area content relevant to our students. We need to help students answer their age-old question: "What good will this be to my life?"

Imagine the expansive power and the connection to real life if every one of us Christian post-secondary teachers connected all the subject-area content we taught to the important questions that students asked as they lived their lives. Why is archeology important to you? How can the study of the New Testament change your lives? Why is understanding the technological impact of the computer a key theoretical framework for understanding

numan life? How does the history of drama, or the grammar of a sentence, or the laws of the physical world change your perception of reality?

We believe the questions young people have asked from the time they first spoke -- "So what?" and "Who Cares?" -- are key questions. Sadly, we have heard students say that, if they ask questions in class, teachers assume they are being rude. But, these questions are not rude questions: they are as legitimate as the answers Christ gave to those who were all too willing to condemn him for healing on the Sabbath, calling his actions "work" and making it, therefore, righteous to help people on some days and sinful to help them on other days. The essence of Jesus' answer was "Get real!"

The concept of healing is abstract, meaningless until the healer heals. The content of courses is abstract, meaningless until the teacher makes it real for the student. As Christian post-secondary teachers, we too should "get real!" We should work to make the content we teach relevant to our students. We should consider our "audience" and their needs. We should get to know our students.

"Who is the best teacher you have ever had?" is a question we ask students who take our fourth-year undergraduate course in curriculum and instruction at the University of Alberta. Fortunately, students usually have little difficulty naming good teachers. What's interesting are the reasons students give for naming good teachers. A real, and not untypical, story is: "Mrs. Brown was the best teacher I ever had. Once my dog destroyed my homework, and I was so scared. She said, 'bring it in on Monday.' She was so nice!" We won't dispute Mrs. Brown's niceness, but the story makes us appreciate how little it really takes to make a student feel special. For most

students, it's the teacher who took the time to care. It's not the dynamic, funny, or well-researched lecture that effects their eternity.

For Christian post-secondary teachers, part of our getting real is remembering that there is life outside our classrooms. We are all tempted to fall prey to the human predilection that the way we see things is the only right way to see things. For post-secondary teachers, many of us who commit our entire energy to our work, it is hard not to believe that what we are doing is not the only thing going on in our students' lives. We are not being critical of this passion; indeed, we honor it and suggest that students need to see Christian academics celebrating their vocations through the ethical activity of their work. Still, it is possible to get lost in our work and to be blinded by our personal passions.

Recently we heard the story of a teacher who, during a particularly busy time for her students, said to the class, "Listen, I understand that there is a lot happening right now in your other courses. Let's put off the assignments that are due for this week until the end of term. You'll still do them, but there's no reason to kill yourselves right now." The students who told the story were befuddled. One's response was "We've never heard a teacher say that before."

It doesn't take much to accept that other things are going on. The Bible notes that a Christian should be gentle as a dove and wise as a serpent. How different from the teacher who, in the old movie Up The Down Staircase, receives a distress note from a young student and responds by correcting the grammar. This teacher did not take the real life of that student seriously. Jesus' example is powerful. There was not a time in his teaching where he did not start with what the person felt was needed. Nathaniel needed to be

recognized as a deep thinker; the woman at the well needed to be appreciated as valuable, not marked by her uncleanness. Only after Jesus connected with a person's condition in the here-and-now, in the present "moment of real," did he nudge them to transcend the limits of their own thinking.

Christian teachers need to work to accept, serve, and promote others. The Bible ties the role of teaching with the act of serving. Servant-teachers seek opportunities to help others become larger. If this is so, the task of the teacher is to become small while the student becomes big. In any classroom, there is only room for one big person. It can easily be the teacher, who can direct the entire activity -- pulling power to himself or herself. Or, the teacher can work to promote and to build the student.

Being a servant leader can be difficult. Service does not always mean doing what the student wants. Sometimes the best service a Christian teacher can offer a student is loving admonishment. Servant leadership should not be confused with being a pushover. For example, what would Jesus do if he were confronted by students who habitually came to class late or unprepared? How would he talk to the student who claims that her work is being judged unfairly, and goes on to name and criticize other students whose work was worse than hers, but who got higher grades? These are difficult questions, but necessary if teachers are to wisely serve.

Christian teachers must encourage the students to gain a Christian voice and must help students create a vision of themselves engaged in "salty" Christian service. One of the most powerful tasks of the Christian teacher is to help students create a moral vision for themselves as successful and prosperous, so strong that no one can knock them off stride when things go wrong. It is that

Pauline-like vision of the man from Macedonia that will keep students working, even when things are not going according to their plans.

Teaching Principle #2: Christian post-secondary teachers should remember that their students have lives. They should also remember that the subject-area content they are teaching is made even more powerful by connecting it with the real lives of their students. One task of the Christian post-secondary teacher is to make teaching real. This includes helping students aspire to gaining their own visions as Christian learners and actors, affirming the learners' sense of themselves as strong Christians, using classroom activities that help liberate and activate learners' imaginations, and teaching as modeling a Christian faith that integrated with real-world practice.

3. Politicize the world.

Following from "Getting real" is the active connection of subject-area content with the world from which that content comes and into which that content can actively be given spirit. While Teaching Principle #2 (Get real) spoke mostly about the need of Christian teachers to consider the lives of their students, Teaching Principle #3 (Politicize the World) speaks to the need of the Christian teacher to place his or her vocation within the context of the world. The job of the teacher is not simply to talk, but to act.

The Bible is filled with admonitions about faith without works, about knowing Christians by their love, about taking care of orphans, about the possibility of entertaining angels with hospitality, and about answering questions like "Who is my neighbor?" in active, loving, life-affirming ways. As Jesus taught, content absent from reality is meaningless. As Christian post-secondary teachers, our job is more than simply teaching abstract subject-area

knowledge. The vocation of the Christian teacher is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ by acting, by seasoning, upon the world, like salt.

Christian post-secondary teachers should help students see that there are political questions beyond content. A political question is a question that focuses humans toward acting within the world, not from abstracting oneself from the sinfulness of the world. Political excursions can take place in any subject area. For example, when studying the Good Samaritan, a set of non-political questions might ask: "Jesus shows that a number of men passed by the wounded man. Who are these people? Why do you think he uses them as examples?" These questions are helpful prompts to study and understand the text, but they do not politicize the world -- they do not call or encourage the student to action. Using the same text, the teacher can ask the following political questions: "What 'wounded' people do you know? What can you do to 'help bind their wounds?' What long-haul commitment can you make to someone that would really be a help to him or her? Are you willing?"[3]

Another way to help students politicize their world is to help them critically question the world's assumptions. The purpose in this critical activity is not to encourage anarchy, but to season academic discussion with a Christian world view. We started this paper by saying that students can be seduced into believing worldly concepts that have no basis in the light of biblical truth. As an example, we cited the dominant mythology that the world is rapidly changing. The God of the Bible, however, has created a world where He is the solid rock that will not be moved. He is the "I AM." A Christian worldview would critically maintain that the world is not, according to biblical truth,

[3] Parsons, J. B. (1995) Developmental discussion. in Wilhoit, J. C. and Deltoni, J. M.) Nurture that is Christian. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 203-213.

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rapidly changing -- at least not the fundamental truths of creation. A logical set of questions for students is: "Which is it? Does the world change or not?" Different answers to these questions spur different actions within the world.

As Christian post-secondary teachers, we need to help our students challenge these dominant, yet biblically questionable, ideologies. Too many times we let these and other assumptions go untested. Are we willing, for example, to tackle the assumption -- even within our own Christian post-secondary institutions -- that the world is competitive? Some of our Christian colleges even advertise the competitive advantage they offer their students or, in other ways, encourage students to "fight" for grades. There is a corresponding assumption that we also often leave unchallenged in our Christian post-secondary institutions; this assumption is that the collection of things is the true definition of success. Is this idea biblical?

Even we Christian teachers can be seduced into believing that these prevailing mythologies are, indeed, the truth. Captured by world's mythologies, the true hegemony is our own unbelief that we can act differently and survive. It takes an act of conscious courage for us not to buy into a postmodern agenda. One of our tasks as a Christian post-secondary teacher is to render the mythologies of the world exposed for criticism and to encourage, through opportunity and affirmation, the assignment of this criticism.

A third way to politicize the world is through storytelling. Odd as it may seem, telling stories reveals the drama of character in circumstance. The character is the person, especially if the stories are personal. The circumstance

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is the environment in which the story takes place, the world. The drama is that action by which the person engages the world.

Storytelling may seem like a strange thing to encourage, but there are several valuable reasons to tell stories. First, Jesus told stories. Second, humans have always been storytellers; storytelling is a natural human activity. There is a magic in the story that engages the audience. Third, stories instruct in at least two ways. Hearers gain personal power in the interpretation and understanding of a story; they gain even greater power as they present their own stories. The presentation of their own stories contracts students into the creation of their own vision. As they hear their own stories, they gain greater insight into the actions they value in their present lives and the values they hope to live in the future. Like creating a covenant with themselves, students can go forth to engage the world -- living their own stories -- with a clearer understanding of the impact of their own lives. Fifth, stories build and reinforce community values that involve students. Stories help students gain a communal language of action.

Stories also help us as Christian teachers gain authority. We all need to work authoritatively. Our students know that it's easier for us to talk than to act. As Christian teachers, we need to make sure to practice a consonance between what we say and what we do. We need to both talk the talk and walk the walk. This includes our own commitment to excellence, hard-work, and scholarship. To be truly effective and honorable, we must both know our stuff and live our stuff with authority. We must work to become stronger educational leaders. The most important question being put to us is not "What do we know? It is "How do we live?"

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As Christian teachers, we must model effective learning. This Christian modeling can take place in both programming and in personal ways. For example, if our program goals are to encourage creativity and openness, we should make sure there are opportunities in the program for creativity and openness. We must remember that it is almost impossible to live one way and to learn another.

Some of the ways we can model Christian teaching are by demonstrating openness, love, patience, consideration for the ideas of others, hard-work, and space where our students can discuss first-draft thinking without fear of looking foolish. Sadly, it is easy enough to recall the impact of Christian teachers whose actions did not measure up to their talk. One vivid memory was as a young college student working for a work crew that cut brush in the woods. The self-confessed Christian foreman would send the young men on the crew out into the bush to work while he sat in his truck and read the Bible. Looking back, we can speculate that the Christian foreman truly believed he was modeling his Christian commitment by reading the Bible in the open where his crew could see him. The young men on the crew saw it differently. To them, the foreman was lazy and unwilling to work with them. They noted that, if Christians were like this, they would rather not be around Christians. In retrospect, a better model would have been a solidarity in work between the foreman and the young laborers. Only then, in their minds, would the Christian foreman have "earned the right to be heard."

These young men had a point that makes sense in the world of post-secondary teaching. Thankfully, teachers no longer can simply demand an audience because they have "position." Authority comes hard; as Christian teachers we must earn the right to be heard. Our labor becomes successful as

students see that there is harmony between the oral "profession" and the profession that comes through the attention to the ethic of work, scholarship, gentleness, approachability, and care.

Teaching Principle #3: It is valuable to share subject-area content; it is a greater treasure to reconcile and to help students reconcile this subject-area content with the content. The treasure lies in the promise that such reconciliation can help students put their faith into action in practical and powerful ways. The promise is that Christians can impact and season the world. The double promise is that the world can change for the better and, at the same time, all Christians who act can grow to be more Christ-like through their actions.

4. Accept and recognize your gifts and your limitations

True or False: From the fullness of God's creative wisdom and in the building of His Kingdom, each person is given spiritual gifts. If this statement is true, it follows that each person needs to recognize and develop these individual gifts.

As Christian teachers, we are no different. To faithfully carry out our vocation, we need to recognize our gifts, to name them honestly, and to practice them openly. Some of us have been called to be teachers. For us, we are not teaching by accident. To successfully work in the vocation we have been called into, we must work to honestly appraise what gifts we have been given, who and where we are, what we can do, and what we have been called to do.

If we accept God's grace, we accept working within God's framework. Then, even the lack of gifts is itself a gift, and we can turn it into a positive. For example, in our own lives, this has meant turning shyness and stuttering into an opportunity to create teaching methods that give greater voice to students through cooperation, individual and collective research, and presentation. It means accepting the cruelties of others and the problems of our own lives as God's loving gifts of instruction so that we, in more ways than we can presently imagine, can learn compassion, and can grow in active human solidarity with others.

As Christian post-secondary teachers, we can help our students become more academically mature. Although maturity differs for each person, within the environment of our classrooms, students can "hone" their gifts through the process of sharing with each other. In such classrooms, both teachers and students can benefit from the practice of strengthening their own spiritual gifts.

The Bible notes that most teaching takes place through conversation, example, and imitation or training (Proverbs 22:6). It is a logical step to suggest that good teaching must therefore include conversation between teachers and learners, the use of personal examples by the teacher, and the imitation by students of actions we take as teachers. Is this necessary to say? Sadly, there are many of us who do not have a close enough relationship with our students to converse with them, nor do we talk with our students in such a practical manner as to give examples -- instead, our talk is lecturing

about a third-person, abstract to the lives of their students, universe -- the subject matter[4].

A final activity in accepting our own spiritual gifts is to celebrate. There is a wonderful attractiveness to see others' celebrations of praise in the active acceptance of their vocations. Who says that teachers can't have fun? The engagement of the spirit of humor is a joy. As Christian post-secondary teachers, we are doing what we want to do. We must learn to enjoy it. The Bible encourages us to be ready to tell of the joy that is within us. As Christian post-secondary teachers, we can actively spread the good news of joy by our actions in building a creative and joyful classroom community and by the ways we initiate and sustain caring relationships with and among learners.

Teaching principle #4: We believe that the best Christian post-secondary teachers are those who actively celebrate their vocation. They celebrate by the acceptance of their gifts and by their active worship by faithfully using these gifts. They celebrate by recognizing the gifts of their students and by creating classroom environments where their students can mature, through thoughtful consideration and protective practice. One of our first tasks of Christian teachers is to recognize and develop our own personal skills as a teacher. We need to actively practice servant leadership. We need to remember that our teaching is a calling -- a vocation -- not a job.

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[4] It was my (Jim's) experience in more than a decade as a post-secondary student to remember only one teacher who attempted to make the subject area content relevant to my personal life. I'm not saying that it didn't happen, just that I recall only a single incident where it did. Instead, my teachers came to class on time and left class on time. No doubt it was my fault for not making contact, but I honestly never felt invited to make contact. The Bible talks of learning through imitation. Were I to imitate the majority of my post-secondary teachers, I would only know how to come to class on time and end class on time.

Conclusion

We have thought about and resolved the issues of this paper in our own unique ways, influenced by our different life experiences, faith journeys, and teaching-learning philosophies. Our paper draws from examples in our own classrooms. Although the paper is written as one voice, within its words each of us has described how we strive to create a pedagogical practice that attempts to affirm and develop our young student's confidence in living their faith through their work in an anxious world.

We live faithfully. When young people see models integrating faith, work, and everyday life, and are given the opportunity to practice their faith in the action of the classroom, we believe they can discover -- even in the world of work -- the grounding of peace and commitment, as well as the possibilities for joyful living that so many of them seek. This grounding and these possibilities provide the dwelling-place of hope that we believe help us to transcend the anxieties of today's work world. We believe that being a teacher is a calling and a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1943) has noted:

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.[5]

[5] Jung, C. (1954), The Gifted Child (1943; reprinted in Collected Works, vol. 17, paragraph 249, ed. by William McGuire, 1954). from The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations. New York: Columbia University Press (1993).

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The calling of a Christian teacher requires responsibility, spiritual qualifications, and honorable action. When we, as Christian teachers, accept the vocation of teaching at a post-secondary institution, we have accepted the opportunity to work with maturing and creative expressions of God's love -- our students. We believe that the pathways of grace and knowledge can be lit more brightly if we accept the vocational task of enabling hope in our students. We believe that the task requires us to actively work to build strong, family-like relationships with our students; to reconcile our subject areas with the reality of the world that our students are experiencing; to remember that the purpose of our scholarship is best made real as we work to change the world by politicizing our work; and by recognizing and working out the spiritual gifts we have been given.

If we can prayerfully and faithfully carry out these activities, the opportunities that we have to spread the Good News to an anxious world are almost immeasurable. Although he might not have anticipated the theological aspects of his statement, as US historian Henry B. Adams (1838-1918) has said, "A teacher affects eternity."