Faith and Scholarship:

An Incarnational Model for Teaching and Research

In a question-and-answer session at Huntington University in the spring of 2008, the historian Mark Noll was asked if he is comfortable with "faith-learning integration" language. His answer was "no." The dualism of the faith-learning construct, he explained, presupposed an inherent antipathy between religious faith and scholarship. If scholarship is the pursuit of truth, he said, then scholarship should not be seen as foreign to faith but as a natural part of faith—a way of loving God with all one's mind through the scholarly pursuit of truth.

In the same session, Noll was asked to describe how he saw Christ-centered scholarship in relation to non-Christian scholarship: Could non-Christian scholars arrive at truth if they did not know Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life? His answer was generous in tone: non-Christian scholars discover truth in their research, he said, and Christians should gratefully regard what those scholars have contributed to the body of human knowledge. He also noted that scholars of religious faiths other than Christianity bring unique perspectives and questions to their scholarship that Christians should consider and learn from. But, he added, the "Enlightenment side of me" believes that "what's true is true for all-- and so I must take the imperial step" of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the final truth. Scholars, he concluded logically, cannot grasp truth fully without recognizing Christ as the center of the created order.

These two provocative points raised by Noll form the basis for the following reflection on how I understand the relationship between faith and scholarship, both in general and in my academic discipline of communication studies. They raise two questions for me: First, with Noll, I ask is "integration" the best way to understand the relationship between faith and scholarship? And second, are there ways of relating faith to scholarship that don't entail the "imperial step" Noll felt compelled to take as a believer in Jesus as the Lord of all?

To answer these questions, this paper tacks between the near shore of specific lived moments in my teaching and research as a scholar in communication studies, and the more distant shore of theoretical and theological considerations on the nature of truth and its apprehension in scholarship. I use as my guide the twentieth-century German theologian and ethicist Dietrich Bonhoeffer, drawing analogically from his paradigm of a "religionless Christianity" explored in his letters and papers written in the 1940s from a Nazi prison cell. In contrast to the "faith-learning integration" paradigm, I propose the rough outlines for a "religionless scholarship" as the most truly Christian approach to academic teaching, research and scholarly discourse. Like others in recent literature on the question of faith and scholarship, I interrogate the "integration" concept of faith and learning for what it both implies and occludes, especially in regard to Noll's dilemma that the knowing of truth leads finally and inescapably to an "imperial step" that positions Christian scholarship as, at least conceptually, theoretically superior to atheist or other theistic scholarship. I propose and try to practice instead a scholarship grounded in incarnational humility and prophetic meekness—a scholarship that inherits the earth not through the coercion of superior argument but through standing in solidarity with all scholars in their efforts to construct truth statements and evaluate their merits. In the second section of the paper, I review the case Klassen and Zimmermann (2006) make for an incarnational model of faith and learning. And in the third section I give an example of what an incarnational approach to scholarship looks like in the classroom. But first, a short "prelude"--an email reply to a student of mine.

An Email Exchange and a Question

Does the following answer to a student's email to me, which grew out of a classroom discussion on racial jokes, constitute faith-learning integration? Do I think Christianly in my reply?

Dustin,

I grew up Amish Mennonite and we laughed about Amish idiosyncrasies, much as you described laughing at Mexican ones. A big question to me is who is telling the joke to whom. When an outsider says it to outsiders, then it serves to make the teller group "normal" and the told-about group "different" or even inferior. But if an outsider says it in the presence of an insider, it can be a way of exposing a stereotype and belittling it (the stereotype) by showing that it is obviously untrue or inaccurately totalizing. OR it could be told with the intended purpose of belittling the insider group to their face.

When an insider says it to an insider, however, it often then serves a therapeutic purpose-- of recognizing the shared stigma the insiders hold that falls upon them like acid rain from the social typecasting in the air of a society. By "owning" it, insider members begin to control and transform the meaning of the aspersion. Think of young black men and women calling each other "nigga," or of young HU women calling each other "hos," or homosexual men employing the disparaging moniker "gay" (too happy for a man). When insiders "catch" an aspersion tossed at them and then start tossing it around themselves, they have commandeered the term, and in the process usually subtly transform the term's meaning in a positive connotative direction. This serves to keep the stigma of the term from hitting them full force in the face and become something manageable, like handling a psychic hot potato. It's not unlike an overweight kid admitting (and even "joking" about) how he IS fat when teased, thereby robbing the teasers of power since the teasing no longer elicits the desired effect of the teaser putting someone else down (the overweight child has put himself down, a kind of tactical relational tae kwon do).

So what does this mean about joking? I've concluded it comes down to doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. But this is more complicated than it at first sounds, because if I have power over someone, it is easy to say, "I don't mind if women (or blacks) make jokes about men (white people)." Why? Because the barbs hidden within a joke don't penetrate through my tough (protected) skin the way those same "innocent" barbs would tear into someone with less power (who is already in a stigmatized position). Me punching my young son Gregory in the arm

with all my might "just as" he punched me in the arm with all his might is not the same thing. We

have to do unto others as we would have them do unto us if we were in their position with their

history of experiences.

 Perhaps Wednesday we should watch the Guess Who dinner joking scene and discuss it in

this context. What do you think?

--Kevin

Practicing Religionless Scholarship

A basic concern when I consider relating faith to scholarship is to ask to what purpose, finally, am I

relating the two? I propose it is this: I use scholarship to construct and establish the theoretical and

intellectual conditions for the possibility of creating communities and societies of justice and peace on this

earth. I want to argue paradoxically that to create these conceptual conditions of possibility is to reject

thinking *Christianly* in our scholarship but instead to aim to think *humanly*. Parallel to Bonhoeffer's (1943;

published 1971) call for an "unconscious" or "religionless Christianity" ("Letters," p. 380), this proposal

calls for an unconscious Christian scholarship--a religionless scholarship, so to speak. To aim to think

humanly rather than Christianly in our scholarship, I contend, is incarnational scholarship, and is thus a

truly Christ-honoring scholarship.

 I propose that an incarnational scholarship may encompass within it the option of what is often

called the "faith-integration" model, but it operates from a broader humanistic set of presuppositions of

Christology and anthropology. The various authors in *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the*

Conversation (Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen, 2004) trace the history of the integrationist model, which

they say took its present form in the second half of the twentieth century among American evangelicals, as

following a Dutch Calvinist discussion of the spheres thinking of Abraham Kuyper of the previous century.

It followed a logic based on the premise that all truth belongs to God, and therefore the Christian scholar

engaging in scholarship is faced with a twofold task: critiquing the premises of modern thought to see at

what points it conflicts with Christian truth and discovering how modern learning might reinforce or refine

Christian truths (p. 18). As such, it is binary, even bilateral, in its outlook and defensive in its posture. It makes faith the focus in all scholarly disquisition. Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen define the integration model as

> the philosophical task of comparatively analyzing the ideas and theories (i.e., doctrines and theological systems) of Christian faith in relation to the ideas and theories of the various academic disciplines. The goal is to examine the deep philosophical presuppositions of the disciplines (or of different subfields within the disciplines) in order to see whether and to what degree those philosophical presuppositions may overlap, inform, or conflict with the truths of Christian faith expressed in propositional form. (p. 27)

By contrast, the incarnational model that I propose makes the created order and especially humanity the focus. Bonhoeffer provides a roadmap for engaging a secualar scholarly world come of age.

In a theme reappearing across his various writings and lectures—in his *Ethics, Christ the Center, Papers and Letters from Prison, Act and Being,* and *The Cost of Discipleship*--Bonhoeffer emphasizes the point that God did not become human so humans could become gods, but so humans might become at last truly and fully *human* (see, for example, *Ethics,* 1955, p. 296). The incarnation—Emmanuel, God with us--models and makes possible true humanity for us as Jesus broke through the estrangement we experience with each other and that we experience with God because of sin. In this light, true Christian scholarship creates solidarity with others by becoming one with others seeking and constructing knowledge about social and physical reality. The incarnation of the Word shows that God values humans *as* humans and nature *as* nature. Scholars who make the aim of their scholarship exposing Christ in nature or society, I believe, objectify Christ by depreciating the created physical and social orders for what they are in themselves. (I would read Karl Barth's emphasis in "Church Dogmatics" on the utter otherness of the Word of revelation as supporting this contention). The goal of scholarship becomes ultimately merely apologetic rather than a positive act of worship using the mind. It reduces Jesus to an idol of proof rather than the revelation of God.

What does incarnational scholarship look like? I see it as containing the requisite quality of prophetic meekness—a speaking to all that violates what is properly human, but a speaking to these ills

while in solidarity (in "kind"ness or oneness) with those one is speaking against. Jesus as the Word in flesh (*in carne*, John 1:1) did not impose knowledge of himself—not on his disciples, not on the hundreds of thousands living at the time of Jesus in China, the Americas, and around the world. He came humbly, Philippians 2 tells us, and grew in knowledge and in relationship with God and others even as the disciples he gathered around him grew in knowledge of this rabbi until they could call him, in faith, the Christ. As rabbi, Jesus educated his students in the sense of the root meaning of the word "education"—by *educing* from within those who would hear him a fuller knowledge of God and God's kingdom and of himself as the anointed one. Educing, in contrast to the coercion inherent in indoctrination of others, stands in opposition to the obstetrical equivalent of a Caesarian section. It is not the forced imposition of the delivery of knowledge but the skillful drawing out of knowledge in the student in the *kairos* of time. Any philosophy of education worthy of the name *education* does not impose itself but sees the potential for the student to attain and form knowledge from within. It is a meek approach (Matthew 5:5) to scholarship, and thus one that will, paradoxically, inherit the world. For me, this approach is restful in its trust in the sovereignty of God to establish the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven--even with the yawning students I am teaching on a Monday morning at 8 a.m.

The posture of meekness in scholarship is theologically supportable. Incarnational scholarship, I contend, recognizes that we live on this side of the final eschaton, not in the consummation of all things in which we shall know even as we are known. It recognizes that, truly, we do see through a glass darkly in our respective fields of study and as a whole epistemologically. It thus rejects the pretension of a special gnosis for scholars who know Christ, even as Christ Jesus emptied himself and became fully subject to the frailty and temptations and limited knowledge common to all humanity. All too often what is called "Christ-integrated scholarship," by contrast, subtlety shifts its practitioner to a privileged point of view, seeing the practitioner's research as proceeding from a superior vantage point. It begins with a Christology from above (which I see as equivalent to indoctrination) rather than from below, where coming to know Jesus *as the Christ* happens through a dawning recognition (education) of the human Jesus as the living and reigning Logos of God, through whom all things were created and hold together (Colossians 1).

The problem with "Christian scholarship" as a proper noun is that it cannot engage secular or other religious scholarship on its own terms but must baptize secular findings and methodologies by subjecting them to "Christian" interpretations and criteria. An example of this would be those evangelical historians (I studied under one—Dr. John Woodbridge from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) who advocate writing history from a providentialist point of view--by adding God's guiding hand in a causal sense into the narratives of social revolutions or movements for which historians have found economic, social, or other causal explanations. The same could be said for most forms of the intelligent design movement on the question of the origins of the physical universe. These approaches impose the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Author of nature into the methodologies and explanations of the natural and human sciences. To use the categories in Nicholas Wolterstorff's helpful typology of knowledge, "data beliefs" in this model must be submitted to Christian "control beliefs" with all their interpretive criteria and constraints (Jacobsen & Hustedt Jacobsen, 2004, p. 21).

By contrast, a Christology from below—which starts with Jesus the human and leads to a growing realization of faith in Jesus as the promised Christ who will return again to the earth--serves as the model for my scholarship. I, as a Christian, do not hold the Christ in common with the world, but the historical Jesus I do, even if a Muslim or an atheist assesses who Jesus is and what his role in history is differently than I do. But beyond the fact that Jesus was a human accessible to historical inquiry, the teachings of Jesus are publically accessible and, centered as they are on the kingdom of God and what living in right relationship with each other and with God, they are centered in ethics. The emphasis Jesus places on this kingdom being one of peace and justice ("I have come to free the prisoners and the oppressed") and on loving one's neighbors and especially one's enemies presents the gospel first at a moral, human level, albeit a radical, upside-down one. In Jesus' teachings and the story of his life we find solidarity with the world community in his core values of meekness, peacemaking, poverty, and the other attributes of the beatitudes Jesus said would be hallmarks of his followers. These are human qualities where they exist, and thus a "common grace" to all humans as living, existential beings. The author of 1 John asks how can we love God

whom we don't see if we don't love the brother or sister we do see. Then the point is driven home: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (2:6).

Bonhoeffer's search for a way to re-imagine Christianity in "a world come of age" that knows itself better than we as Christians can know it remains a pressing issue for Christians in scholarship today. The incarnation shows us that God chose to make the gospel human and this-wordly. If we who are Christians in scholarship are to be worthy of the gospel and of being heard by the broader scholarly community, our scholarship must likewise be human scholarship rather than "Christian" scholarship, not just in the sense of labels but in our methodology. Bonhoeffer warned that when we offer God at the "boundaries of the unknown" because *at least there the world doesn't have answers,* we have fashioned a God of the gaps rather than having recognized God at the center of our scholarship. But if we "by the Holy Spirit" can say Jesus is Lord (I Cor. 12:3), we can rest in confidence that this Lordship extends to the entire created order. In his *Papers* from prison, Bonhoeffer (1971) writes:

> God is no stop-gap; he must be recognized at the center of life, not when we are at the end of our resources; it is his will to be recognized in life, and not only when death comes; in health and vigour, and not only in suffering; in our activities, and not only in sin. The ground for this lies in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. He is the centre of life, and he certainly didn't "come" to answer our unsolved problems. . . . In Christ there are no "Christian problems." (p. 312)

In CCCU discussions, this idea of Jesus as Lord over all finds an (attempted) equivalent formulaic expression as "All truth is God's truth" (a good example is Arthur Holmes in *The Idea of a Christian College,* p. 7). But this dictum is not the same as saying Christ is the center. I would further argue that it instead frames "truth" using a nonbiblical category (the Enlightenment philosophical category of the "universal" is insinuated in the little word "all") and, I argue, is not incarnational in its worldview. It reduces truth to universal, objectively neutral propositional truth rather than retaining the relational, personal dimensions of truth that the sense of Hebrew and Christian scriptures imparts to the idea of truth. The clearest New Testament definition of truth comes from Jesus himself, who proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me."

Why has the axiom "All truth is God's truth" become a virtual statement of faith for evangelical Protestant Christian universities? I suspect it is because it serves as handy shorthand for naming and justifying faith-integration approaches to scholarship. I want to ask in reply: Why do we not instead find ourselves instinctively and reflexively proclaiming, "Jesus is God's truth"? For as Bonhoeffer contends:

> Truth is not something in itself, which rests for itself, but something that happens between two. Truth happens only in community. . . . Christ as Word in the sense of address is thus not timeless truth. . . . It is not universally available idea, but Word, which is heard only when he allows it to be heard. ("Christ the Center," p. 54).

Incarnational scholarship questions the impulse to define truth propositionally rather than relationally. It is suspicious of universal, timeless categories of any type, especially given the historical geopolitical manifestations those grand narratives have taken on historically in societies where monotheistic beliefs have flourished.

Incarnational scholarship instead asks this about truth: What does it mean to speak this researched truth in love? If I speak truth *without* love, is it still truth? In the Introduction to Communication class I teach, we learn that every act of communication has two levels of meaning—the content level and the relational level. (A test case I ask my student's to work out: even a simple offering of "hi" to a stranger in passing, which has the content level of a recognized verbalized greeting, also contains the relational level of, at the least, acknowledging the humanity of the other person—we don't say hello to the trees we pass by as we walk.) In a discussion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School a few years ago, the late missiologist Paul Hiebert once noted that "truth" is conceived in the biblical literature (and in modern eastern cultures today, including in the Middle East where the Bible was written and in much of India, where Hiebert was a missionary before teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary and the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) primarily as *loyalty* (which I would connect to the relationship level of meaning) and secondarily as *honesty* (the content, factual level of meaning). In Western culture, we tend to see honesty as the primary definition of truth. Thus, Western Christian students are naturally puzzled when they read in the Bible that Rahab the harlot is commended in the "roll-call of faith" (Hebrews 11) for protecting the Hebrew spies by *lying*. But

from a Hebraic perspective, Hiebert would argue, she was truthful because she was *loyal* to the righteous

(the Hebrew spies). Tellingly, even the Decalogue (Exodus 20) does not command "Thou shalt not lie" but

instead, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor in a court of law." (This kind of rhetorical

analysis practiced in communication studies leads to applications that sometimes surprise students further.

Take, for example, a Christian in Germany in 1940 answering "no" to a Nazi officer at the door inquiring

whether the Christian is hiding Jews in the house. This factually wrong answer could be conceived as a

truthful answer since that answer demonstrates loyalty to the oppressed rather than the oppressor. This

again is an exercise in thinking biblically rather than in the Enlightenment category of the Kantian

Categorical Imperative).

Changing our habits of language away from the general formula "All truth is God's truth" to the

more biblical phrasing of "*Jesus* is God's truth" may seem a splitting of hairs. But adhering more closely to

the biblical language reminds us that truth is personal and relationally consequential. It also prompts us to

interrogate received truths (or those we generate) for their social consequences—all concerns for me in a

discipline located in the social sciences and for me as a scholar working to find solidarity with scholars

around the world who may look with suspicion at my faith in Christ but who naturally, because of our

common humanity, share the same human questions that drive my research. There is a certain attendant

vulnerability in incarnational scholarship. "Jesus" language is more offensive than "God" language, for one

thing. But it keeps us humble. It focuses us on this world, deflating our pretentions to insider knowledge.

"Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven

and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

To conclude this section, I believe that the relationship between faith and scholarship must be

modeled on Jesus, the incarnational Word. This means the scholarship done by Christians should be, in

Bonhoeffer's words, "participation in the powerless of God in the world" (p. 361). A religionless

scholarship, it might be said, chooses inductive over the deductive methods of knowing. (It would argue,

contra Neo-Platonism, that Aristotle was more incarnational in his thinking than was Plato!) It starts not

with Word but with words. But it believes—by faith--that behind the words is the Word in whom we live

and move and have our being. It toils with humility, "seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness" (Bonhoeffer, *Papers*, p. 360). It does scholarship with the belief that the one who took up our infirmities (Matt. 8:17) is Christ, and, in Bonhoeffer's words, "that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering." He adds—disconcertingly-- that the God who is with us also forsakes us (the glass is still dark). Thus, we "live in the world without the working hypothesis of God" since "God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross" (p. 360).

A Postmodern Rereading of the Faith/Learning Dualism

In the first section, I attempted to undermine binary and dualistic ways of categorizing faith and scholarship. From René Descartes on, modernism has shaped our views to see the world through such dualisms and bifurcations. Two philosophers of language I read in my graduate studies in communication, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Emmanuel Levinas, have sought to sew together what modernism has sundered apart. In their book *The Passionate Intellect: Incarnational Humanism and the Future of University Education,* Klassen and Zimmermann (2006) summarize the critique of modernism brought to bear by these two philosophers. They do so for the purpose of clearing a philosophical space for an incarnational model of humanism that overcomes modernist dualisms. They see these two twentieth-century philosophers, following the path of Martin Heiddeger's groundbreaking work before them, as arriving at three conclusions: (1) the Enlightenment belief in the solitary thinking mind is myth, (2) truth is always already interpreted truth, and (3) concepts and structures of any kind that are totalizing are unethical and should be rejected. I contend that these propositions support the mode of incarnational scholarship I argued for in the first section.

Gadamer's famous idea of a "fusion of horizons" seeks to avoid the modernist anthropology of the person as an isolated, knowing self (*cogito ergo sum*) by situating the self in social relationship. Klassen and Zimmerman argue that "Gadamer's view of the self is more in line with the biblical idea that the self is determined by tradition and story and that ultimate self-certainty and clarity are illusory because the self is ultimately unknowable, to be known only by God" (p. 127). According to Gadamer, humans are situated in

and formed by language. It is also this socio-linguistic characteristic of human beings that allows for translation between "worldviews." Since our horizons of understanding overlap, they make communication possible. In terms of scholarship and education, the task Gadamer bequeaths us "is to find a common language that would allow us to understand one another so that our different perspectives are fused" (Klassen & Zimmerman, p. 128). It is this insight into the incarnational nature of truth in culture and history that Klassen and Zimmerman find promising for reviving humanism in an incarnational mode and which I attempted to explicate in the first section of this paper.

Klassen and Zimmerman draw on Emmanuel Levinas to ask a different question: Can a ground for human dignity can be found that transcends culture and tradition? Enlightenment anthropology, with its rejection of metaphysics, also brought into question human worth since it could no longer be assumed that humans were created in the image of God, as medieval metaphysics supposed.

> Levinas insists that neither Heidegger nor Gadamer was radical enough in his Enlightenment criticism. He believes that we will only recover humanism if we focus uncompromisingly on human beings. . . . Philosophy does not come first in our reflections but the ethical relation to our fellow human being, and such a beginning is not Greek but Hebraic. It is in the Bible, argues Levinas, that we find the true ethical grounds for humanism: responsibility to one's neighbor. It is the ethical demand of the other human being that limits one's self-centered impulse for control over nature and others. (p. 129)

Contrary to the claim that the mind is the starting point of knowledge, Levinas argued that the foundation of all knowledge and all knowing was ethics—the claim of the "other" incumbent upon me.

Klassen and Zimmerman are historical in their definition of humanism, calling for a postmodern humanism that recovers the holistic beginnings of the humanist movement of the Renaissance before the Enlightenment propensity for dualisms re-defined humanism. These dualisms included sharp divisions between reason and faith, fact and value, mind and body, thought and emotion (p. 19). They define dualism as "the separation of essential elements of our humanity" (p. 147). Exploring John's Gospel in this light,

they see the narrative of the incarnation as intentionally undermining both the Greek and Jewish dualisms of

the day:

> The incarnation remedies Greek dualistic thinking by fusing the realms of history and pure
>
> rationality. Moreover, since the incarnation means that the fullness of God dwells in the person of
>
> Jesus, it also goes beyond the Jewish notion of divine transcendence as unapproachable otherness.
>
> In the God-man the wholly other divine nature, so radically different from us, has become human
>
> sameness (humanity, history, language). (p. 149)

The incarnation of the Word, according to Klassen and Zimmerman, establishes the basis for

incarnational scholarship in three ways. First, God becoming human affirms the value and worth of human

beings *qua* human beings. Second, the affirmation of our human dignity in the incarnation is also an

indicator of the intrinsic worth of the creation, since to be human means to be environed and since all

creation also awaits (with groans) the day of redemption (Rom. 8). And third, the incarnation points to the

linguistic, interpretive nature of truth. Klassen and Zimmerman maintain that "God does not exist for us in a

vacuum but communicates himself to us linguistically and historically," and in so doing gives us a model

for truth as embodied and in need of contextual interpretation (p. 154). They add one more important

implication of this incarnational model of truth: "Not only is all truth interpretation; all interpretation also

requires personal involvement and imagination" (p. 155). They elaborate: "We are social beings destined

for communal living in righteousness, justice and unity, and the method for promoting these kingdom

values that frame all knowledge is suffering rather than conquest. In this way, the first great commandment

flows naturally into the second: love your neighbor as yourself" (p. 161).

The relationship of Christianity to scholarship in an incarnational mode should be conceived of as

learning to think humanly. It means to see economic poverty or the biochemistry of a flower or the

communication dynamics of a marital argument for what they are at the level of our shared humanity (and

even broader, in terms of our shared creatureliness with both animate and inanimate creation), and only

secondarily, for specific, intended theological purposes or for interpreting them through theological grids.

It does not mean avoiding disagreement, but it means being ready to disagree while seated at the opposing

scholar's table, speaking the lingua franca of common humanity. Not that my eyes of faith are closed, but because they are eyes that are learning to see the world as Jesus did, they see a word—or even the Word--incarnated in that Muslim or agnostic scholar across the table, which is to say, they see the humanity in that person that is common to myself and that was common to Jesus of Nazareth.

In conclusion, I do not reject out-of-hand and in all cases the construct of faith-informed scholarship (the integration model). But I am committed to it being of a type that I can practice without distancing myself from a Muslim scholar who may also be studying, say, the identity effects of race-based joking even as I do. And I hope that Muslim scholar is using faith-informed scholarship in a similarly generous manner. Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen add a second, parallel and corrective category to "faith-based scholarship," which they term "academically shaped faith." The first approach fixes as a point of reference the Christian faith in order to critique or examine a disciplinary topic, such as, for example, rhetorical theory on race talk. There is a place for such perspective-taking. But there is a danger in it too when it is elevated to the modus operandi of Christians in scholarship since the "faith side of the relationship will by definition remain relatively unaffected by the encounter" (p. 154). In contrast, in the mode of "academically shaped faith," my scholarship and the issues of my communication discipline and even its methodologies become the fixed point of reference against which my faith can be critiqued.

So back to the opening of this paper: Was my letter to Dustin an instance of thinking Christianly because I incorporated the teachings of Jesus into my response? Yes, but not so much because I cited the Golden Rule. It is Christian primarily because I was thinking humanly at an ethical level that corresponds to the ethics that Jesus—the new-and-restored Adam--lived and taught. It is Christian because I was human-focused and, paradoxically, not Christ-focused. It was motivated by the subjective passion I feel in my bones to help the oppressed and the imprisoned in our society. Ironically, as I focused not on Christ but the oppressed, I am surprised to hear the voice of Jesus saying to me, "I was in prison and you visited me." It was with this human focus in mind when Jesus instructed his followers to do unto others as they would have

others do unto you. And in the case of my email response, it was through a secular scholarly critique[1] of racist rhetoric that I was able to make sense of a common student objection to why some African Americans use the "n" word and why an unqualified reading of the Golden Rule is in itself inadequate as an applied social ethical guide. We cannot serve Christ in scholarship by focusing on Christ, but by serving other scholars and focusing on the larger scholarly endeavor of constructing and deconstructing truths from a standpoint of our common human condition.

Incarnational Scholarship in the Classroom

In this last section, I take one of the points from the Klassen and Zimmerman (2006) model of incarnational scholarship and give an example of how that principle is applied in my classroom teaching. They state that God becoming human affirms the value and worth of human beings *qua* human beings, requiring that as a Christian I take humans as humans as the focus of my scholarship. Here is one exercise assignment I have students do when we are studying the role of communication in creating identities. In the syllabus, I write:

> Why would someone who wants to be sensitive to others not use the following phrases? For each phrase, explain why it could be interpreted as derogatory. (If you have never heard a phrase before, ask around until you find someone who has and ask that person what it means). [Write in paragraphs, please, not lists.]
>
> > He gypped me.
> >
> > She is an Indian-giver.
> >
> > You're retarded!

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[1] Emerson & Smith's (2000) *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America,* Fox-Genovese & Genovese's (2005) *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview*, Goldenberg's (2003) *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* Haynes's (2002) *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery,* and Jacobson's (1998) *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race.*

That car is all pimped out.

Asking a little girl, Do you want to be a mailman when you grow up?

I got jewed on that car purchase!

If you need to, nigger-rig that gate until we get the proper hinges.

That's gay!

Islamofacist.

You're wishy-washy as a woman.

Lastly, discuss--in an insightful, enlightening manner and perhaps drawing from your own experiences and observations--how language can frame other people or people groups in a negative light or exclude them without appearing to do so.

Many of the students will realize for the first time that saying someone "gypped" them frames the "gypsy" people as essentially untrustworthy thieves and swindlers. Just as often a student (who is not of the Roma people) will write, "This is offensive to a gypsy person." In turn, I ask in the margins, "Only to them, or also to you? If not, why not?" Nothing in this exercise is *uniquely* Christian. But it is *also* Christian. That is, it is not unique to Christian faith in that every major religion as well as most secular and atheist ethical positions provide the moral basis undergirding the point of this exercise: that we should recognize the ethical connection between identity and communication. But it is *also* Christian. In class discussions on this exercise, students invariably question the need for this exercise, dismissing it as another example of "political correctness." At that point, knowing the vast majority of my students are Christians, I may bring up the story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan in answer to the question a Jewish lawyer in Jerusalem asked Jesus (Who is my neighbor?). I point out that just a few chapters earlier in Luke's Gospel Jesus had come up to Jerusalem by passing through Samaria, where he and James and John were kicked out of town. The disciples are rebuked by Jesus when they ask Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven. In Jerusalem, Jesus tells a story that places two Jews (a Levite and a Pharisee) in a morally unfavorable light, but places a Samaritan, whom the New Testament makes clear the Jews despised for their compromised religion (a temple in Samaria instead of in Jerusalem) and their

miscegenation of the Jewish race (by intermarrying with Gentiles), in a good light. The Samaritan becomes the good Samaritan, even though Samaritans had just rejected Jesus the day before. I ask the students if they can even think the word Samaritan today without thinking of the adjective "good" with it. Again we discuss the power of words to frame whole people groups for the good or the bad. I ask again if they don't think the repeated and widespread use of the verbed form of the word for "gypsy" doesn't demean or dehumanize the gypsy people.

The idea for this exercise came from a secular textbook. The textbook idea, in turn, grows out of the kinds of critiques made by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school in the first half of the twentieth century. The Frankfurt school, in turn, derived from Marxist theory. Marx was an atheist. So have I integrated faith and learning in this exercise on how words frame people groups negatively? I find the binary of faith and learning a stumbling block to a full answer to the question. To draw on Bonhoeffer's point described earlier in this paper, this is a case where secular atheists form a scholarly "world" that is come of age and which knows itself better than a "Christian" reading of it does. For me to try to baptize the Marxist conception of identity formation would be to make it a uniquely Christian answer, and thus a uniquely "Christian problem." But secularists here have led the way toward justice before (and often in spite of) Christians. I instead conclude that if Christ is the center of the created order--including the social order formed through the communication practices that my students and I explore--then it would be to de-center Christ to make this a *Christian* exercise. The world has taught us this truth, not Christians the world.

What about my use of Jesus' story? Admittedly, the use of this Lucan narrative is a move toward an explicit Christian reading of the communication dynamic at hand. Even so, it falls short of being explicitly Christian in that I could tell the same story in a secular university, even as I could recount an incident in the life of Buddha or Gandhi to make a similar point at Huntington University, a Christian school. Jesus and the Samaritans are historically accessible figures. But more importantly, the moral of the story Jesus told is a felt moral issue at a basic human level (even if some groups, such as racial supremacists would answer the moral issue in the opposite direction by saying, for example, that they are

sub-human and thus are less than worthy of human treatment). So I see this as an example of my teaching that is "unconscious" (Bonhoeffer) of explicit Christian doctrine or worldview. It is religionless scholarship. It is an example of what Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen call "academically shaped faith." That is, to give weight to the truth adhering in this critical exercise, I bent the discussion back toward the students' Christian orientation so they could feel the import of how language and identity work together for good or ill. I used this--the social theory of Marx—to shape and sharpen my faith and the student's faith, meaning our Christian faith. Thus I chose to reference Jesus, not Buddha. But the direction of influence in getting us to read the Good Samaritan story with new lenses and deeper understanding is from the secular to the sacred, and not the other way around.

Note that thus far I have also practiced an inductive teaching methodology, both in allowing the students the chance to arrive at the principles by themselves and in allowing the ethical principles in the lesson to become deeper for them as they see them in light of the teaching and example of Jesus. I have not started with theology and worked on down to ethics and the role communication plays in it all.

That, however, is also a legitimate alternative approach, depending on one's goals. Jacobsen and Hustedt Jacobsen would call this "faith-based scholarship." I, in fact, do exactly that sometimes with the Good Samaritan story (when? when the Spirit leads me to). Using Miroslav Volf's (1996) theological distinction between "justice" (getting what is deserved) and "justification" (being treated not for what we are but for what we can become in Christ Jesus), I lead the students through a discussion of how Jesus was practicing his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that true love is loving the enemy. I ask the students if they would be likely to gossip with others about how *good* someone is who has the day before dissed them as Jesus did when he made the Samaritans "good" (justification) after they had just kicked him out of town. Or, I ask, does your gossip leave the person who has offended you the "Bad Samaritan" instead (justice)? The theology of Christian faith, in this case, sheds fresh light on the ethical import of such identity communication.

Here, then, I hope is an example of both humility and speaking prophetically in my teaching and my research. The two are mutually dependent. The ability to speak *prophetically*, I believe, derives from the

humility of not imposing any worldview on anything or anyone. It is instead a realizing, as the philosopher

of science Nancey Murphy from Fuller Theological Seminary puts it, that because knowledge is essentially

communal, it is not "ours" alone to construct or discern. Further, she believes that engaging the other while

rejecting the will to power that is so often imbricated with acts of knowing is "not only the key to ethics . . .

[but] it is also the key to knowledge. Renunciation of the will to power is a prerequisite for seeking truth"

(as cited in Jacobsen & Hustedt Jacobsen, 2004, p. 59). This epistemology-as-ethics and the ethics-as-

epistemology is nowhere better stated than by St. John when he claims that in Jesus the *logos* became flesh

and *dwelt* among us. In a less than perfect way, that is my intended approach to education—to nurture logos

among us.

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