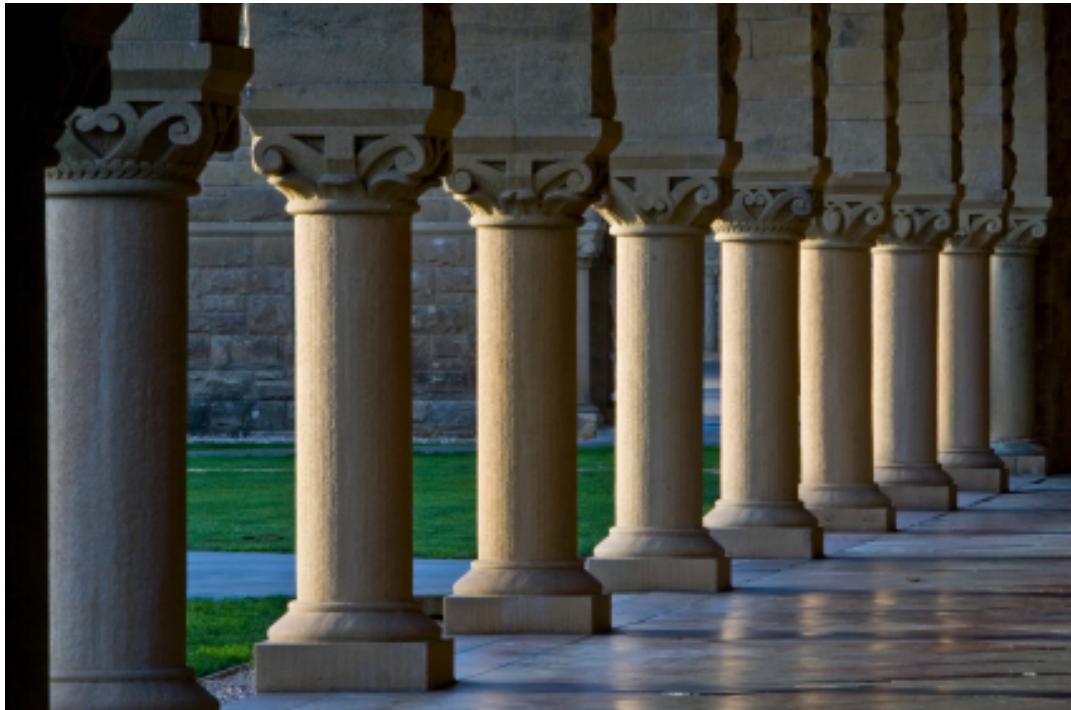


A C A D E M I C C O N N E C T I O N S

White Paper Report

PEER-TO-PEER

PEER-TO-PEER JOURNEY GUIDANCE AMONG ACADEMICS



UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATING THE BARRIERS

Introduction

Roots

In the fall of 2007 while serving on the Faculty Ministry Leadership team for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship I was asked to prepare a white paper report on the roadblocks to peer to peer evangelism in academe and propose workable solutions for those problems. It was a daunting task because at the time, though I had quite a bit of experience in evangelistic efforts in academe, I knew little more than anecdotal information as to what were the problems and even less about the so-called “target” audience of professors at the university. With the help of some recent studies aimed at revealing the religious attitudes of faculty, that task (the paper) was completed and presented to the leadership team. From that we began to create resources and field-test our recommendations.

Since founding Academic Connections in July of 2010 we felt the need to upgrade that work for Academic Connection’s ministry and associates. Our desire is to keep growing and improving the gifts and strategic advantages that God has given us.

Vision for the Paper

The aims of this paper are: 1) to review the best sociological and empirical information we can find about university faculty to better understand their sub-culture (for a myriad of reasons); 2) to draw conclusions from those studies which will help us in shaping an approach to peer to peer (life) journey guiding for faculty (particularly evangelism); 3) provide resources to help committed Christian faculty to wisely engage their colleagues in discourse about the great things of the gospel.



Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people for their advice and counsel. I see this project as a continuation and advancement of what I prepared for the Leadership Team of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s Faculty Ministry. Those people included: Kenny Benge, Nan Thomas, Tom Trevethan, and Howard Van Cleave. I am especially grateful to Stan Wallace who was then the National Director of the Faculty Ministry who asked me to take on the task of putting together a paper on the barriers that faculty face when they try to do evangelism with their peers. However, any deficiencies or outright mistakes in this report are mine.

Jim Cook, *Academic Connections*, Louisville, CO

2010

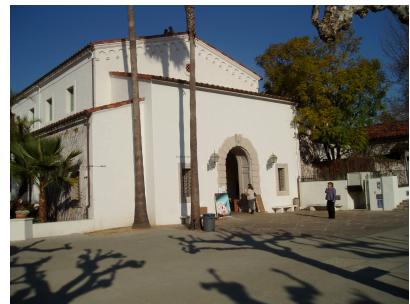
Approach for This Report

What Were We Looking For?

We began by doing a literature search of periodicals, studies, articles and books that we thought would give us the kind of information we needed. We needed to understand a) university faculty as a sub-culture; b) faculty attitudes toward religious things and especially Christians and the gospel; c) faculty religious (and non-religious) beliefs and behaviors.

Where Did We Look?

We were initially drawn to the articles "How Religious are America's College and University Professors" and "The Social and Political Views of American Professors" both by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons. We also initially looked at Lauren Helper's article which helped us understand the value of noting political contributions made by faculty. Finally, to get us started, we looked at *Volume II: Religious Beliefs and Behavior of College Faculty (Profiles of the American University)* published by the *Institute for Jewish and Community Research*. As you will see below, we expanded from there...



Photos by JAC

What Were Limitations of Our Work and Conclusions We Made?

We lacked the means to do our own independent empirical studies. It would have been great to have the funding to construct our own instruments (with questions that were smithed by us) and to have the infrastructure to carry out the study--but we just didn't have those kinds of resources at this time. Second, although what we looked at were fairly recent studies and could compare them somewhat to older ones, because of methodological differences between them, we were not confident we had the kind of data which would allow for longitudinal trends and conclusions. With these caveats we still think that what we have found can be useful for faculty and other people who wish to do work with faculty as they blaze the trail in the 21st century. It is all about involving themselves in conversations with their colleagues about the great things of the gospel.

Academic Connections Report on Peer-to-Peer Faculty Evangelism

It has been said that people have lined up to speak about their faith in Christ to the down-and-outers of society, but there were very few in the queue to do so for the up-and-outers. While such remarks seem to rely mainly on anecdotal support, it does seem representative of an attitude many religious believers feel toward reaching out to university faculty. Faculty are considered to be up-and-out and, in part because they are sophisticated and because they are also thought to be disinterested in or even hostile to religion, they are considered hard to reach and therefore few volunteer to reach them. Believing as we do that each faculty member is one for whom Christ died and that university faculty can best be reached by their peers we endeavor to learn how to do that more attractively and effectively. This report is aimed in helping Christians (especially insiders in academe) better understand the academic mind, heart and social context so that we might respond to those who live and breath in academe in the most redemptive way possible.

In the first section of this paper we will highlight the findings of empirical research focused on university faculty attitudes. We are mainly interested in their religious stances but because there is evidence that political outlook is relevant to religious attitudes, we will include some data on that as well. We do so because we believe that knowing these sorts of things about our audience puts us in touch with their deeply held beliefs, values and worldview. Such knowledge is intrinsically valuable, but can also help us in a number of instrumental ways: it might help us avoid touching “hot button” issues unwisely that can take a conversation in a direction that can generate more heat than light; it can help us better think through how their interests and various facets of the gospel might provide legitimate opportunities for engagement and conversation; and it can better help us use words and stories that might be better understood by our audience and thus contextualize the gospel message.

In the spirit of giving credit where it is due we want to be clear that we are accessing and assessing data from other people's published work and what we summarize here is **not** at all our independent findings. So we will endeavor to footnote our sources and we wish to point out up front that our analysis of their data and work is likely not the use for which they intended. Further, the authors may also strenuously disagree with our interpretations of it or how we suggest those interpretations of their work should be put to use. After we recount and highlight some of the findings of their work, in a following subsection we will try to put some perspective on their findings as it relates to our concerns: the sort of dialogue we wish to see about the gospel.

In the Section 2 of this report we will continue by exploring a variety of tensions and other hurdles and hindrances that we believe can have a major impact on engagement effectiveness; we will subdivide that discussion into two main categories. That is, identify and discuss these issues as being: a) "within our direct control" (and therefore something we should take concrete steps to implement) or b) "outside of our direct control" (but worthy of note) for faculty doing peer-to-peer evangelism. Here we will begin to take a look at such things as the received tradition in the history of ideas (without endorsing it) and what the academic mind's spin on that currently is and what that can mean to our conversations.

In Section 3 we will briefly talk about some of the directions we might take regarding the development of resources to fill needs identified in this paper.

Section 1: Reviewing Empirical Studies of Faculty Attitudes

There are 4 main sources of empirical information that we will review and highlight; some of the data we look at from these studies have the same authorship (three of the four articles were written by the same persons and basically rely on the same data) and some of their material is redundant.¹ We will endeavor to minimize recounting redundant information and therefore on one occasion treat similar

¹ We have looked at more and here's an on-line sampling of that material: [Discussables Academic Connections](#)

work by the same authors under one heading. Having said that we begin with that very case where we treat two articles written by the same authors under the same heading: **A1)** A 2007 summary of their 2006 research entitled, “How Religious are America’s College and University Professors?”² (hereafter HRACUP) by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, 2007; and, **A2)** “The Religiosity of American College and University Professors”³ (hereafter RACUP) in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, 2009; **B)** “Religious Beliefs & Behavior of College Faculty,”⁴ (hereafter RBBCF) by Gary A. Tobin and Aryeh K. Winberg of the *Institute for Jewish and Community Research*, 2007; **C)** “The Social and Political Views of American Professors,”⁵ (hereafter SPVAP) also by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons, 2007. We will take a look at their major findings and in some places drill down a little deeper into their work to get a sense of what the academic community’s mind is like regarding its attitude toward religion, evangelical Christianity, politics and more.

Our instrumental interest in highlighting both the empirical studies and giving our interpretive spin on the results of their studies at the end of this section are relevant to what our ministry calls “journey guidance.” That is, for example, while we might find interesting relationships between religious beliefs and political beliefs, our focus is hardly aimed at making political converts. Rather, we are interested in a person’s political beliefs mainly as they disclose to us (in general terms) something about our audience, what they would likely be open to talk about and things of that nature. With this knowledge we can then ask, what are some legitimate ways to engage people like that in conversation? And, in those conversations and engagements if there is an expressed desire for spiritual guidance it helps to know where people are coming from.

² You can access the article at: [How Religious are America’s College and University Professors?](#)

³ You can access the article at: [The Religiosity of American College and University Professors](#)

⁴ You can access the article at: [Institute for Jewish Policy Research: Profiles of the American U: Volume II](#)

⁵ You can access the article at: [The Social & Political Views of American College and University Professors](#)

Articles A1 & A2:

Both the 2007 HRACUP article and 2009 RACUP article by Grigg and Simmons rely on research they did in 2006. The earlier HRACUP paper was "...designed in response to a number of recent studies, many with explicitly ideological aims, purporting to show that the contemporary American professoriate is not simply dominated by liberals, but a site of discrimination against conservative professors, students and ideas."⁶

It is explicit in the HRACUP article that the authors are responding to the claims of other studies whose methodology did not include surveying community colleges, which according to Gross and Simmons, "...skewed their sample" by failing to do so and engaging in what they considered "poor" phrasing in the questions they asked their respondents "...including key measures of political attitudes."⁷ They admit of this work, "...the focus of the survey was professors' political attitudes, we included a number of standard measures of religiosity as well..."⁸ and it is apparently from those standard measures they are drawing their religious conclusions about the professoriate.

By contrast, in the 2009 RACUP article they try to suggest how their research impacts "secularization theory" and what they consider to be "the implications of our study for future research." Besides the difference of focus between the two articles, we find in RACUP an additional and we think quite valuable discussion of the themes around which previous research about the beliefs of professors revolved. We think the inclusion of this discussion is extremely worthwhile because it allows the reader to get a larger sense of the research work that has been done in this area. Those areas discussed were: 1) the themes of the growth of the research university, 2) the changing ethno-religious composition of the

⁶ Gross, Neil and Simmons, Solon. "How Religious Are America's College and University Professors," in cited on-line article. Page 2.

⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

⁸ Ibid. p. 2.

American professoriate, 3) what they call religion and the intellectuals, and 4) research on the religiosity of the American college and university. We feel this summary on the research is so important (but too lengthy to put into this report) that we recommend you access the article for your own background information.

However, a caveat about their spin: the conclusions they make in some of those sections can be read differently. For instance, they seem to suggest that the conflict in academe in the late 19th and early 20th century was between the old shared article of faith "...that science, common sense, morality and true religion were firmly allied" (quoting from Marsden) and the rising tide of science. That is their spin on things--but it is arguably not so much a direct conflict between those two things, but a superficial conflict between science and religion made more opaque because of the similarities and ambiguities of methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism. We think it is easy to conflate the two and because of the apparent success of the former there is a tendency to think it confirms the reliability of the latter. That is simply a mistake. Again, because of length considerations we leave to you the homework of carefully reading and critically evaluating their discussion of the areas of research, pages 3-8, to get a sense of the current received tradition.

Since the data from which they drew their conclusions were from the same 2006 source and were nicely summarized in the earlier 10-page article HRACUP, it is to that article we now turn. Some of their findings included things like: a) on the whole professors are "...indeed less religious than other Americans"⁹; b) there is substantial "variation in religiosity from discipline to discipline and across types of institutions, and it is hardly the case that the professorial landscape is characterized by an absence of

⁹ Ibid. p. 2.

religion.”¹⁰ Space will not allow us to review their methodology, so we encourage you to read the article where they discuss that.¹¹

Rather than quoting all of the numbers from their findings (we refer you to their illuminating response chart on page 5 of their article), we nonetheless wish to highlight some of the more salient findings most closely related to assessing our faculty audience. Since they included religiously affiliated colleges and universities (compromising 13.9% of their respondents) with non-religiously affiliated schools, it is noteworthy to see that those who say they believe despite their doubts or without doubts about God’s existence were 68.9% in the former compared to 50% in the latter. Another type of institutional difference was found within the range of elite doctoral universities to community colleges. They found the highest number of atheists or agnostics to be in the elite doctoral universities (36.6%) compared to teachers in community colleges (15.2%). Also, their other findings on this subject suggest that there is a strong correlation between the academic status of the institution and these numbers, which reflects the range between these two extremes. They hasten to add, “[C]ontrary to popular opinion, atheists and agnostics do not comprise a majority of professors even at elite schools, but they are present in much larger numbers there than in other types of institutions.”¹²

They found in the disciplines that psychology and biology have the highest proportion of atheists and agnostics (61%) followed by mechanical engineers (50%), and a gaggle of disciplines coming in at about 40% including “...economics, political science and computer science,...”.¹³ The tables were turned in other disciplines: “...63% of accounting professors, 56.8 percent of elementary education professors,

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹² Ibid. p. 4.

¹³ Ibid. p. 5.

48.6% percent of professors of finance, 46.5 percent of marketing professors, 46.2 percent of art professors and professors of criminal justice...say they have no doubt that God exists.”¹⁴

Gross and Simmons also found in their measuring that “...while many professors themselves are religious, most are secularists who believe in a strict separation of church and state, and who would resist efforts to blur the boundaries between religion and science.”¹⁵ In our judgment this is a significant finding because it is important to see that the majority of “religious” professors that are found in academe have ideological leanings toward privatization and separation when it comes to religious expression at the university. Our experiences at the university make this easy to believe, but it also can present a substantial hurdle to religious conversation with professorial colleagues since (for whatever reasons) they generally don’t like public religious expression at the university. (Some of those reasons will be discussed in the second section of this paper.) This state of affairs is problematic from our viewpoint because we believe the seminal ideas found in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics can be legitimately informed by religious beliefs. To have have social and legal pressures which inhibit healthy integration, engagement and debate is discouraging. And we believe the pressure at this level for separating that interaction from the public square has profoundly negative existential, religious, and philosophic implication for Christians at the university. We are not seeking a theocracy, but we do want a place at the table of public discourse.

Article B

We now turn to Tobin’s and Winberg’s article, “Religious Beliefs & Behavior of College Faculty”. This was a lengthy article with many major findings. We will highlight what we think were the most salient points and then say a few things about what might be their relevance for peer-to-peer evangelism.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

lism. Here's a list of the most salient points: 1) most faculty believe in God, but atheism is significantly more prevalent (over five times more prevalent) among faculty than the general public, 2) faculty are much less religious than the general public (in terms of self-identification), 3) ***religious beliefs of college faculty are highly associated with political identity and behavior*** (emphasis ours), 4) faculty feel warmly about most religious groups, but felt coldly about Evangelicals (this is the only religious group about which a majority of non-Evangelical faculty have negative feelings) and Mormons, 5) faculty are almost unanimous in their belief that evangelical Christians (but do university professors have a clear and correct understanding of who they are?) should keep their religious beliefs out of American politics while at the same time many faculty endorse the idea that Muslims should express their religious beliefs in American politics (71%).¹⁶

Other of their data suggested: 1) faculty are religiously diverse, but 54% were broadly speaking of the Christian tradition (Catholic 18%, non-Evangelical Christians 25% and Evangelical Christians 11%); 2) 80% of the public self-identify as Christian, only 56% of faculty self-identify in the same way (they think the drop is due to the lack of representation of evangelicals who are three times more numerous in the general population than in academe; 3) most faculty believe in God (65% indicated they either had a personal relationship with God-46%-or didn't have a relationship but believe in God-19%; 4) a minority of faculty say that religion is very important in their lives (36%); 5) however, 75% wanted their children to have some religious training; 6) faculty are twice as likely as the general public to identify as liberal; 6) political party self-identification among faculty and a belief in God are linked (74% of Republicans answered that they have a personal relationship with God while only 4% said they do not believe in God and by contrast, 36% of Democratic faculty said they have a personal relationship with God, while 26%

¹⁶ Tobin, Gary A. and Weinberg, Aryeh A. "Volume II: Religious Beliefs and Behavior of College Faculty," in cited online article. See "Major Findings," pp. 1-2.

do not believe in God); and 7) political ideology is highly associated with attendance at religious services.¹⁷

Article C

Our next article, “The Social and Political Views of American Professors,” is another written by Neil Gross and Solon Simmons and like the other two (above) depends on research they did in 2006; nevertheless this part of their research (as their title suggests) was focused more on the social and political views of the American professoriate than on their religious views. According to Gross and Simmons, previous to their work there have been two waves of research on the political and social attitudes of professors. The first wave of research followed World War II, in the late 50s. Following and perhaps motivated by the McCarthy hearings the researchers were alleged to have had as their core agenda the advancement of the social sciences.

The second wave of research came in the 1990s and beyond and as alleged by Gross and Simmons, “...had as their goal simply to *highlight* the liberalism of the professoriate in order to provide support for conservatives urging the reform of American colleges and universities.”¹⁸ Enter Gross’ and Simon’s work, which sought, to move the study of professorial politics “...back into the domain of mainstream sociological inquiry.”¹⁹ While such a claim seems to be overstated given their seeming admission of wanting to set the record straight by countering work in the second wave before their own results were in, we see no reason to discount all of their work given their methodology.

In their 76 page “working paper” their analysis found: 1) with regard to social and political attitudes even with “different substantive domains” within academe that, “...socioeconomic issues, attitudes

¹⁷ Ibid. See “Data Summary,” pp. 3-12.

¹⁸ Gross, Neil and Simmons, Solon. “The Social and Political Views of American Professors,” in cited on-line article, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

toward race, gender and so on—cluster together”²⁰; 2) looking only at political orientation, “...the biggest change over the last thirty years involves not a growth in the number of professors on the far left hand side of the political spectrum, but rather a substantial defection away from the right and movement into the moderate ranks;²¹ 3) they found that a “...slightly higher proportion of liberals is to be found on the faculties of liberal arts colleges than on faculties of elite, PhD granting schools, while liberal arts colleges and non-elite PhD granting schools also contain the fewest conservative faculty members.”²² 4) they found the youngest age cohort (aged 26-35) “...contains the highest percentage of moderates and the lowest percentage of liberals. Self-described liberals are most common within the ranks of those professors aged 50-64...while the largest number of conservatives is to be found among professors aged 65 and older...”²³; 5) with regard to gender they found “...few differences between male and female professors in terms of their tendency to describe themselves as liberals, moderates or conservatives...”²⁴, but that significant gender differences exist within fields...”²⁵ They found in “...the physical/biological sciences, more men than women are liberals, and more women than men are moderates. In the social sciences, more women than men are liberals. There are few significant gender differences between liberals and moderates in the humanities, but more men are conservatives. In computer science and engineering, twice as many women as men are at either extreme of the distribution, while in business, there are many more conservative women than conservative men.”²⁶

²⁰ Ibid. p. 4.

²¹ Ibid. p. 28.

²² Ibid. p. 29.

²³ Ibid. p. 29.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 30.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 30.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 30.

Relevance of Research to Evangelism

Gross and Simmons describe two waves of research on attitudes of the professoriate. The alleged problems of the second wave were in their estimation the tendentious motives of the researchers and poor methodology. Whether this is completely the case is not our concern because in some cases Gross and Simmons found the arguments and results of the second wave satisfactory. Their research broadened the sampling to include non-elite colleges (for example community colleges, which in terms of students taught was about 40% of American students). They also felt (speaking to the earlier methodology) that in some cases earlier work used "...ad hoc, nonstandard question wording that raise concerns about construct validity and render difficult systematic comparisons to the general population."²⁷ While their research does give greater balance to generalizations about the beliefs of the professoriate because it is more institutionally inclusive and nuanced, it also seems to gloss over the fact that the zeitgeist of American academe trickles (perhaps even flows) down from the elite universities and not the other way around. Such an oversight seems to unfairly discount the allegations of the liberal hegemony of the second wave of research. In spite of that, what do we gather from their studies and the more credible work of others?

We see that professors are systematically much more politically liberal than the general population, even though the recent trends indicate that instead of increasing numbers of far left professors, what is seen is a substantial reduction of conservative political representation in academe and an increased tendency for professors to self-identify in the moderate political category. The tilt toward liberalism is institutional, that is, the less elite the institution the less the tilt toward liberalism, the more elite the greater the tilt. This may mean faculty at elite universities are less open to conversations (which is our main concern) than their non-elite counter-parts; yet at the same time the tendency to moderation

²⁷ Ibid. p. 21.

Academic Connections

White Paper

of political views may be correlated with a softening attitude toward dialogue about religious things, especially in the younger faculty who seem to be less ideological.

Atheism is more represented in the professoriate than in the general population, and the results were skewed toward atheism in elite colleges versus the non-elite. Despite this state of affairs at every kind of institution, there were still a majority of professors at those institutions who believe in God's existence (though some did not see themselves as having a personal relationship with that God). Generally university professors who hold religious beliefs tend to hold them in a privatized way and with some exceptions tend to encourage that and discourage religious views from being expressed in the public arena. This attitude is possibly also reflected in the data when you consider faculty attitudes towards evangelical Christians, which by the way is the **only religious category toward which the majority of professors studied harbored ill feelings toward**. They were most favorable toward Jews and Buddhists. There was very little evangelical Christian representation among faculty and almost none at elite colleges and universities. This is indicative of a great deal of spadework that needs to be done by the evangelical Christian community both in terms of encouraging evangelical Christians who are qualified to enter the academic community and in terms of those who are already there, seasoning their speech with salt so as to not be tuned out of a conversation too quickly.

Another important set of insights indicates that younger professors tend to have the largest percentage of political moderates and the lowest percentage of liberals. They also found significant gender differences within fields: in the physical/biological sciences, more men than women are liberals and more women than men are moderates. In the social sciences, more women are liberal than men. In computer science and in business there many more conservative women than conservative men. These age, gender and differences within academic fields indicate we need to be nuanced, savvy and aware of the social context where we engage.

Finely distinguished results like these should be of mixed concern to Christians who live and breath in academe. Evangelical Christians are few in number in academe, their peers do not like their political views and wish they would keep their religiously influenced political views to themselves and not enter the public arena with them. There is some encouragement in that there is a more recent tendency toward political moderation among younger faculty and there is a majority of believers in God at every institution including the elite universities. That latter fact means there should be a noteworthy number of non-evangelical religious types of people who might be more open to conversation. This should be an encouraging fact for insider evangelists who wish to engage.

Further in light of the recent phenomenon of “the new atheism” there has been an encouraging tendency for public debate and dialogue between atheists and Christians. No doubt the “new atheism” has emboldened many closet atheists to come out of their closet and engage believers with the confidence that the majority of the best and brightest in academe are sympathetic to their ideas. But the good news is that the Christian responses to this challenge at the highest levels has been encouraging and credible; Christians have gotten good opportunities for public representation and have had a similarly good public response. It is not always a slam-dunk win for the atheist when she challenges the Christian to a public debate.

What this indicates to us is that while the academic culture in America has relatively recently (from the 18th century and especially the 19th century on) become more liberal (philosophically, politically and religiously), there are still signs that indicate there are presently many opportunities for qualified and mature Christians who live out their faith in credible ways to open up dialogue with their colleagues. (This is a very encouraging finding from this research.) We believe grace and the blessing of God are needed in that sort of endeavor. Also necessary are articulate and qualified spokespeople for Christian faith who have done the homework to understand their colleagues philosophically, politically and reli-

giously and who can use that knowledge persuasively but in a non-manipulative way when they enter into dialogue about the great things of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Section 2: Further Tensions and Hindrances Relevant to Faculty Doing Evangelism

In this section we will subdivide our discussion into two main parts wherein we will list and address hindrances we have identified that are to some degree either a) “within our direct control” or b) “outside our direct control” for our faculty doing evangelism.

A. Hindrances Within Our Control

In the following separate subsections, we will survey a number of things that create barriers to fruitful evangelism for Christian professors who choose to share their faith with their non-Christian colleagues. This survey of concerns will include mentioning sociological problems (discussed in some detail above), important spiritual barriers, the contours of some philosophical issues that cause so much ado, key theological questions, and evangelistic training difficulties that we must face and overcome. In each subsection we will do our best to identify and define these barriers, some in greater detail than in others. In some cases where we think it is appropriate we will offer some analysis.

Since the form of this part of the report is mainly an essay (and not a list), space does not allow us to say something about everything that could be listed here; the specific proposals we make in the third section will begin to fill in more details. However, we will maintain a list of barriers separate from this report so we can check that our analysis is very complete (see attachment, TBP). It is also important to say at the outset that the barriers mentioned below do not apply seamlessly to all of academe. It is likely that some of the characteristics we generalize about enjoy a wider application than others, but by working through these issues thoughtfully we believe we will be more fully prepared for them as they present themselves on the field.

Sociological Roadblocks

There is a tension between considering the individual particulars of each member of academe and the broader, more general categories of faculty members in the disciplines and departments, colleges, and academe as a whole.²⁸ Simply put, we don't want to over-generalize about our target audience. Still, the university in myriad ways exemplifies a ***social unity*** despite its claim to diversity. That is, at least, there is widespread allegiance to a certain notion of rationality and a widely shared set of behavioral norms and values.²⁹ For instance, the concept of "political correctness" as an academic value is broadly distributed in academe, with some pockets of exception. And we don't think we are exaggerating to say that (historically) before "PC" there was "RC"—religious correctness.

Part of that RC, we're inclined to think, is a more generalized expression of hostility towards conservative Christians and conservative Christianity. The research cited in the first section suggests this is particularly focused towards evangelical Christians who do not privatize their religious beliefs. While much of that hostility is directed in name towards "fundamentalists," which would make one think this is directed to the most conservative of the conservative Christians, in practice it is not limited to that because one finds, as a practical matter in academe, the definition of fundamentalism and fundamentalists is quite broad so as to include just about everybody to the right of non-religious³⁰. This broadly shared value in academe is a sociological barrier to having a "good" hearing to the gospel and something we

²⁸ We should not be surprised that we suffer here between the tyranny of the individual cases and the tendency to over-generalize. However, just as in science there is a desire to generalize wherever possible to make things simpler (or explain things more simply) and at the same time being careful to avoid over-generalization. We should follow suit.

²⁹ We are thinking of things like eschewing plagiarism, valuing peer review of research, advancement in career based on achievement of scholarly benchmarks and the like of that.

³⁰ We are not suggesting that some criticism of fundamentalism isn't valid, indeed it is. We have the challenge of separating ourselves from their (many) mistakes, avoid making our own, and navigate this in such a way we minimize collateral damage to the fundamentalists who can change, and to our other audience.

need to navigate. Here are some other obvious things we could say sociologically about members of academe:

- They are highly educated relative to many other social groups
 - There is selection for professors in many (but not all) areas within academe who are **individually** productive and that tends to foster a higher level of independence and communitarian avoidance
 - There are large pockets of individuals in academe that find Christianity at best an opiate and at worst the meta-narrative that needs to be subverted before a more reasonable and more humanitarian one can be substituted
 - There are rules of fair play in engagement within academe that need to be learned and observed where possible.
 - Academe as a whole has many “good” things (both people and ideas) about it from a Christian point of view that should be preserved; it would be worth our time to include a list of these things in our training to help with our perspective of redemption and creativity rather than merely condemnation.
 - Academe is hierarchically structured and there is a pecking order within it. That pecking order may affect with whom our faculty may comfortably talk and how they communicate the gospel
- Further, our challenge will be to find and continue to find reliable and up-to-date sociological research on the academic community and build that knowledge into our audience analysis training. The purpose of that research would be to increase our sensitivity to our audience and to use that knowledge to, “....[b]e wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your con-

versation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”³¹ Our long run success depends in part on our careful attention to these sorts of details and skillful interactions. The amount of information to be mastered and the social skills necessary to maneuver adroitly suggests to us there is both an art and a science to being effective.

Spiritual Barriers

There are two sorts of barriers that we want to highlight in this section. We will classify them as either internal or external to our community.

Internal to our Community

What we want to address are some of those spiritual barriers to doing evangelism in academe within our control. Not everybody in the body of Christ has the same abilities and motivation to do evangelism regardless of the target audience they seek to reach. So besides the many barriers idiosyncratic to academe, evangelists in academe must still deal with issues that all who seek to do the work of an evangelist must face. They can become discouraged because of their lack of giftedness in this area, or the gifted might become frustrated by learning evangelism from people who do not have that gift.

We do know that Evangelists—that is, people—are listed as among the *gifts* Christ gives to the church (Ephesians 4:11ff), and His intention in giving these gifted individuals to the church (those mentioned in that passage) was: “...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”³² So, it is fair to say that gifted evangelists (cf. Acts 21: 8) play a part in helping equip saints for their work of service (cf. 2 Timothy 4:5) and according to Ephesians 4:11, in doing so they play a part in bringing the Christian community to unity and

³¹ Colossians 4:6, NIV.

³² Ephesians 4:11, NIV.
Academic Connections

maturity. (Seen in that sense, evangelism is not an “add on” assignment, but rather an integral part of what it means for the body of Christ to grow in Christ. It is part of spiritual formation.) A barrier we face is to find these gifted people who can contextualize the gospel to the academic community and enlist them in our training early on.

Even though the Christian community in academe does not experience the level of persecution of much earlier Roman times, a Christian faculty member’s job can be threatened and thereby his or her family can be threatened by doing their duty in this matter. This raises moral and ethical issues regarding how Christian faculty can properly fulfill their ministry in a community that is hostile and where certain laws may be seen as prohibiting the free exercise of their constitutional rights. Sadly, this dissonance has a dampening effect on just what faculty feel they can and cannot do—and that amounts to a hurdle with which we must deal.³³ Further, proclaiming and/or explaining the gospel in academe can take a great deal of personal courage and the collaborative and communitarian nature of academe can and does intimidate many believers. That intimidation keeps them from sharing their faith; all this amounts to a spiritual battle going on internal to our community. Our challenge will be to equip and inspire our faculty to take on this challenge in a way that wisely uses our resources and training to maximize their effectiveness.

External

We are currently unaware of any good study characterizing the current openness of the university to the gospel. We do think that certain philosophical and theological issues play an important part in adequately addressing the academic mind. Surely there is a spiritual battle that goes on as the “City of

³³ Though we are discussing spiritual barriers we want to underline our need to help our faculty determine whether they are obeying laws that do not exist, being unfairly intimidated by their colleagues, and help them seek non-legal and legal recourse where appropriate.

God and the City of Man” (as Augustine spoke of) clash and our faculty would best be served by their understanding the facets of this conflict in its many forms and how it impacts “successful evangelism.”

Philosophical Issues:

It can be argued that some philosophical issues are logically prior to theological issues and whether or not this is the case is *not a problem we want to settle here*. However, we begin by defining some important philosophical issues³⁴ that are widely thought to impede “successful or fruitful” evangelism. We list only two here—naturalism and what Plantinga calls creative antirealism—even though we know that there are more that could be cited.³⁵ Let us begin by saying some things about naturalism and the barrier it presents to our faculty in communicating their faith to their colleagues.

Metaphysical Naturalism

A key philosophical problem for faculty evangelists in contemporary academe (hereafter, CA) is the influence from what has been called perennial naturalism—here we are thinking mainly of meta-

³⁴ For the sake of clarity we might need to explain that the sort of philosophical issues we are thinking of are ones that provide alternative ways of seeing the world as a whole. That is, a general alternative to theism in terms of what it means to be a human, what to make of our art and music, our love and our intellectual life. In a sense, when these alternatives are seen as true, they present a barrier to effective evangelism because in some sense they undermine the credibility of the gospel and make communication of the gospel to our audience a greater challenge.

³⁵ We began working first on metaphysical naturalism before we remembered that we had read Plantinga much earlier on this topic and his account of other philosophical “adversaries” to the Christian faith in his “On Christian Scholarship,” see: http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/on_christian_scholarship.pdf and we might have been influenced by that unconsciously; but, we deem that influence to be good even though we developed it here in our own way. And, having realized that, we have subsequently consciously chosen to follow his general but not complete outline of what constitutes the most important philosophical challenges to theism from that article.

physical naturalism (hereafter MN).³⁶ In this report we will speak of naturalism as containing MN along with some of its philosophical cousins. Metaphysical naturalism, roughly speaking, is the view that there is simply no God or gods or spirits and that whatever exists are physical objects and their properties. In certain more complicated configurations naturalism includes (more controversially) emergent properties.³⁷ The roots and shoots of naturalism and how it came to gather its influence demand careful and complicated analysis that cannot be done here. However, because of its importance, we feel obligated to make a gesture in that direction.

“Naturalizing” (understanding and explaining effects and properties in the disciplines—including emergent ones—**only** as a part of the natural causal nexus) just about every aspect of the disciplines is all the rage on the current scene, but it’s not a completely new idea. The history of the influence of this juggernaut can be traced as far back as some of the pre-Socratics; its legacy was certainly given impetus by the work of no less than Aristotle, especially when it resurfaced in Europe following the Dark Ages. Naturalism’s influence would be further extended, for various reasons, by the success of the scientific revolution, which began in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. It was also further advanced with the emerging 15th, 16th and 17th century European Renaissance and the 18th century Enlightenment period in the western history of philosophical thought. These influences formed a multi-pronged, undermining

³⁶ It should not come as too great a shock to think that a “target audience’s” understanding and response to the gospel is shaped in part—maybe in large part—by their background beliefs. Further, it should not be a surprise to think that an academic community’s background beliefs are greatly shaped by the prevailing methodology upon which it builds its theories and carries on its research. (See also footnote #5)

³⁷ We want to also say something about **methodological naturalism**, a somewhat distant philosophical cousin of MN, as part of the general naturalistic barrier, but not because it is, *per se*, logically incompatible with theism or Christian theism like MN is. Rather, this methodological *convention* of science enjoys so wide an acceptance and produces such stunning results it is often thought of as the only reliable way to know. Its results are often misunderstood as confirming metaphysical naturalism, which it cannot. But, since this state of affairs exists (*the confusion about the ability of its results to support MN*), it does present problems for our audience hearing and accepting the gospel as true and that’s something we will have to deal with in our training.

attack on certain philosophical theses that had supported many of historic Christianity's most cherished doctrines and played a role in the demise of the medieval consensus.³⁸

One prong of that attack began in northern Italy in the 16th century and spread to the continent. At that point we find an increasing humanistic sensitivity that was emerging in large part from intellectuals who had been reading classical pagan literature that began to resurface in Europe. This spirit placed greater emphasis on the plight and condition of humanity *here and now* on earth and a de-valuing of eternal rewards and the afterlife.³⁹ As the humanism **became increasingly secular** in its flavor over the next centuries, it found the Christian religion a hindrance to the "progress of man" rather than a beacon pointing to the good life. In various ways many of our target audience sees Christianity through those lenses and therefore as the enemy of humanistic values and something of which to rid from the market place of ideas and themselves.

Another prong emerged during the period of so-called Enlightenment. It was especially due to Hume's critique of religion as *non-empirical nonsense* that there seems to have been a tipping point for naturalism in terms of its growing influence on the 19th century academy. A desire to avoid that sort of perceived philosophic embarrassment and the apparent successes in the natural sciences motivated a

³⁸ We realize, of course, that the term "historic Christianity" is vague, and whatever it was construed to be, it has undergone some changes over time. There is ongoing debate on just how great those changes really are, how ambiguous our text is regarding its doctrines (central and not so central doctrines), and how much theological tradition should influence our sense of what constitutes theological orthodoxy. For the sake of truth in advertising, we are asserting that as problematic as this discussion may turn out to be, there are orthodox and unorthodox views of Christianity. There are also, we think, serious theological issues that do not rise to the level of orthodoxy or heterodoxy but are nonetheless important because they may lead to views that significantly stray from the historic Christianity of which we're thinking. Also, since we are describing the unraveling of the medieval consensus which was largely Christian, we feel the need to clarify that we do not think of it as a philosophical or theological golden age to which we necessarily need to return, but rather an age from which we can and should learn a great deal as our faith seeks understanding.

³⁹ Some historians, for example Eugen Weber formerly of UCLA, consider the growing merchant class and growing wealth in Europe from the 11th century on another important factor in the growth of humanistic values. We concur.

trend towards the supposed more solid empirical. That, for various reasons, supported the re-emergence of MN, nominalism and epistemic empiricism amongst the intellectual elite of those times. Nuanced progeny of that heritage have continued to find widespread expression in our own contemporary period.

It is worthy of note to say that Hume's critique of religion became the proximate root of logical positivism in the west, which began to blossom in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in Europe and America before it was decisively defeated by Christian philosophers in the latter half of the 20th century. Despite the knock-down-drag-out defeat—about as bad a conceptual defeat as one comes across in the history of philosophy—positivists and positivism remain embedded in parts of the academic culture to this day.⁴⁰

It was during the Enlightenment period in response to the rationalistic philosophers like Descartes that the empirical philosophers, Locke and especially Hume moved many later thinkers further towards empirical epistemology and metaphysical nominalism. This was despite the strains of skepticism that can be found in Hume which should have moved them further into skepticism. When Kant entered the philosophical fray with his attempt to resolve the dispute between the rationalists and empiricists

⁴⁰ Logical positivism, we think, reached its zenith expression in the work of A. J. Ayers', *Language, Truth and Logic*, but its problems were legion. There was difficulty in defining its criterion for meaningful propositions either too narrowly, restricting desirable things or defining it too widely and allowing in too many things. But maybe the *coup de grace* came when it was realized the criterion itself was ruled out as meaningful—it was nonsense—by its own standard. It was self-referentially incoherent and despite the attempts to fix that problem its prospects haven't improved any.

and give a firm philosophical footing for science, he took the process in a revolutionary (but still empirically bent) direction.⁴¹

Without going into all of the subtleties of Kant's thought, his division between appearances (the phenomenal) and their essences (the noumenal) tended to move us away from a common sense assumption of the senses (and science) as having direct access to the world as it is in itself and toward a "knowledge" of material objects as *only* the phenomena or appearance. These appearances were seen to have been mediated by the mind's contribution to the senses and thus led to agnosticism about things in the world as they are in themselves. This non-essentialist (and we would argue proto-antirealist) view has deeply influenced contemporary thought, nuanced by the various spins and reactions to this pivotal Kantian analysis.

In other words, there has been a profound shift since the collapse of the medieval consensus in the way western culture thinks about how we know things, what is considered to be true and what the proper vision of the good life is. This amounts to a sea change. There are multiple and subtle causes for this, but the movement could be characterized as having emerged most prominently in the conversation between the rationalist and empirical philosophers during the Enlightenment period. The total affect of these movements was to tilt things in the intellectual culture towards the adoption of a secular humanism that places man as the measure of all things and a shift toward skepticism of the non-empirical. The

⁴¹ It is important to see that more than one thing happened during the Enlightenment and all of it is open to some interpretation. Our abbreviated take is that on the one hand the Enlightenment conversation can be seen as the undermining of both rationalist and empirical epistemologies, with agnosticism being the proper conclusion. Such a conclusion does not offer support either for metaphysical theism or metaphysical naturalism! On the other hand, after Hume's and especially Kant's analysis, it could be argued that what would (and could) be properly developed, would be some sort of pragmatic epistemology of appearances rather than of essences. Hume argued that empirical things *impinge* on us more strongly than the supposed non-empirical impingement and Kant argued that the categories of appearances do not apply to things in themselves—literally do not apply to the metaphysical and we should remain agnostic about its nature. Acceptance of these sorts of theses tilted things towards the empirical even if empirical and natural are understood pragmatically in terms of appearances rather than the "old" common sense view of direct acquaintance with nature through our senses.

results of that shift present themselves in today's intellectual milieu but often in more nuanced forms.

Not to make too fine a point of it, from these more widely endorsed perspectives, the gospel *seems* irrelevant, unbelievable and downright harmful to the intellectual and moral sensibilities of many in CA.

Such a state of affairs is obviously a barrier we face in communicating the gospel, but I want to begin to close this section by saying a few things about the subtlety of its influence. Our faculty live, breathe and work in the shadow of this legacy and its direct challenges to Christianity. But it has also unconsciously influenced us in many ways that maybe are hard to recognize. Its tentacles run so deep into our way of way of life that many of us no longer think of it as a lens through which we see, but rather as just what rationality is. The reign of naturalism is so broad in our culture, it seems to enjoy the benefits of being seen as the default perspective, which needs no support itself and shoulders no burden of proof. Therefore, it is not a simple task to take on this juggernaut of a world-view. Nevertheless, our goal is to proactively work to shape our culture's plausibility structures⁴² so that Christian ideas—especially the gospel and the concepts which support the gospel—are viewed with intellectual respect; it would seem naïve to think this is an easy task. There are at least two reasons for thinking this: first, the “outside” academic community is sophisticated and doesn't suffer what they consider to be fools very well. Second, we haven't come to a consensus inside our own community about how best to think about our faith and the academic disciplines—whether we should join the tribe and naturalize the disciplines (or even to understand Christianity itself as naturalized) or whether any of our religiously inspired ideas belong in academe. So we have our work cut out for us if we wish to deal with this philosophic barrier.

⁴² Leslie Newbegin uses the term “plausibility structure” in a sociological manner to identify what ideas are *plausible to a given community*. If your ideas are not plausible to the community with which you want to interact, you have a problem!

Anti-Realism

Another important philosophical barrier to the content of the gospel is one that faculty evangelists face about the *nature* of Christianity's truth claims. I hinted about this issue when I spoke, above, about Kant as something of a proto-antirealist.⁴³ The emergence of this anti-realist critique forces us to decide whether our truth claims were *discovered* rather than *constructed* by (the "categories") in our minds. It presents us with a conceptual contest in which one contestant sees truth (either *tout court* or only within certain domains) as existing independent of minds (realism) while the other sees it as existing only dependent on minds and concepts created by minds (anti-realism).

Hume's skeptical arguments led in various ways to the adoption of the view that the empirical world was the world of facts and that the world of the religious was of subjective feelings, or just subjectivity period. This is the view that has dominated much of CA for the last century and a half. By contrast, the emerging post-Kantian view, which is sometimes called the "post-modern critique," shockingly holds, in some of its forms, that **both** the empirical *and* the religious are subjective. Since Christianity makes both religious and empirical claims we have to be able to respond to people who hold views that find their roots in Hume' and Kant's perspectives.

As we said, Christianity makes several different sorts of truth claims. Let me narrow the field to just two. Some truth claims are of a historical or empirical nature and some are of a religious nature. Certainly the Bible contains many assertions of a historical and factual nature and narratives that can be reduced, at least in part, to propositional claims. We should hasten to add there are also biblical materials like parables that are apparently **not** primarily meant as historical claims, but are literary devices that

⁴³ Kant did think that the categories of the mind contributed to construction of our awareness, but those categories were universal and, therefore, fixed. So in the former of those two things he sounds proto-antirealist. The later antirealists rejected the universal and fixed nature of the categories and claimed things like environment, historical age and the like shaped them.

are used as a means to teach certain profound lessons about the Kingdom of God. But devices of this latter sort *are not* what I'm primarily concerned with here.

We are concerned first to deal with the nature of Christianity's *religious* claims to truth, some of which seem to have historical or empirical parts. For instance consider these two propositions:

- 1) Jesus was the incarnation of God—He was God in the flesh.
- 2) Jesus' death on the cross atoned for the sins of mankind.

Now, the above statements are pretty closely related, but they are also paradigm examples of propositions that contain ***religious truth claims*** that cannot be settled by appeal to **mere** empirical facts. That is, in some sense historical or empirical inquiry can only confirm necessary but not sufficient conditions for their truth. The implicit empirical claims here might be ones like Jesus' incarnation implies that he was once, at least, "alive and kicking." This could be empirically verified (in principle) at that time or should we be so situated as to observe his crucifixion we could have, at least in principle, verified that there was a cross, that he was nailed to it and that he physically died.

The Humean legacy, what we call the "early modern" scientific/empirical realist view which emerged from the Hume analysis, held that claims like these had an objective empirical part, but the religious part of the claim was merely subjective. The empirical part of the claim perhaps could be confirmed, but it was a necessary and not sufficient condition for the truth of the religious claim. The Christian religion, from this point of view, would be divided along the lines of what Hume called the fact/value distinction. This distinction held that "facts" from the empirical realm were facts because they could be empirically verified, but religious claims could not be (empirically) verified and were a matter of subjective (roughly) personal values and taste.

Current forms of anti-realism take this subjectivity a step further. The anti-realist view would hold that ***both empirical and religious claims*** are subjective. That is, both claims have come under sophisticated attack by a variant of Kantian relativism (the sort of anti-realism I speak of here). So, some important necessary and sufficient conditions for historic Christianity's essential truth claims are at stake.

If this anti-realist critique is successful (either generally or more narrowly with respect to religion or Christianity), it will undermine the unique central claims of Christianity. This is because it makes whatever those claims propose (at best) as "true" *only* for Christians (or those who share in some way certain relevant propositions with Christians); but accordingly those claims are irrelevant to other (apparently) contradictory claims which emerge from differing world views. This way of thinking about Christian truth claims seems to be profoundly at odds with the overall thrust of the Bible and historic Christianity.

This metaphysical move motivates a profound reinterpretation of historic Christianity. For instance, if we were to take this anti-realism seriously (either in its plenary or in its more narrowly construed religious boundaries), then it would follow that there are no such things as "Truths" that transcend philosophical or religious perspectives.⁴⁴ In the broader construal of this doctrine, anti-realism is self-referentially incoherent. It claims a big "T" Truth that is true regardless of philosophical perspective while at the same time (at least implicitly) claiming there are no such "Truths." That's no small philosophic embarrassment.

⁴⁴ Mike Murray speaks of what might be called **forms** of an epistemological anti-realism and **forms** of a metaphysical anti-realism. According to Murray, it is typically the metaphysical anti-realism that is the most serious problem. That is, the claim that we **create reality** is a stronger claim than we **create symbols, concepts and language** in an attempt to describe the reality that exists independent of us. It doesn't follow from our creating symbols, concepts and language that all of reality is the way we want to make it be. While perhaps the symbols, concepts and language at best cannot fully understand, grasp or express reality, it doesn't follow that language cannot have *some* understanding or grasp of it and to give that position up is too costly for Christianity to do. For more details, see *A Reason for the Hope Within Us*, edited by Michael Murray, Michigan: Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999. See Murray's "Reason for Hope (in the Postmodern World)" essay pp. 1-19 and especially pp. 6-8 and 15-19 where he addresses the challenge of a number of forms of anti-realism.

In the narrower interpretation, Christian “Truths” are still translated as Christian “truths”; they apply only for those who share the Christian world-view. But, still this translation portrays Christianity’s claims to “Truth” in a way that is so profoundly at odds with the biblical text and theological tradition that one wonders where to begin. A majority of the New Testament and especially the book of Acts (Luke-Acts is widely regarded as a literary whole) are about how Jesus’ followers took the gospel to other cultures (which did not share their philosophic or religious perspectives) in a manner that did not compromise those parts of the gospel that were considered “True,” independent of cultures. At the same time, His followers worked hard (sometimes failing) to distinguish which Christian idioms were culturally transcendent and which were not.

If Christians were to accept either the plenary view of anti-realism or the narrower elucidation of anti-realism aimed at religion, would not faculty evangelism (or evangelism *tout court*) be at best naïve and at worst imperialistic, because from this perspective there is *no truth independent of minds or perspectives to be discovered or known?* From this perspective, truths are personal or community constructions and aren’t big “T” truths. Therefore, wouldn’t all evangelism from this perspective be a paradigm example of stupidity, malignant bias, or worse? Who among us would want to share their faith in Christ motivated by that sort of impetus?

The problem is that Christianity involves **objective** claims in both the empirical and religious factual worlds—as well as subjective claims which do not have the same purchase, so how does one **effectively** communicate and persuade folks who do not accept this view? Doesn’t this make the communication problem just that much more difficult?

Finally, we need to say that there is a range of views on how best to do this. One suggestion, which we consider the most subjective, seems to hold that we should abandon “propositional” evangelism (and/or philosophical apologetics) and engage in social interactions with outsiders and bring them

into our community. It is from being in our community, it is alleged, that one comes to understand what Christians mean when they speak of following Christ. Those who take this position would hold that Christ is better communicated (some could argue *only* communicated) by this sociological experience within the Christian community.

Another suggestion we would label more objective (conceptually speaking), seems to suggest adopting ministry forms within the Christian community that are invitational to the post-modern outsider (similar to the above example). The difference here would be that somewhere along the line the outsider would hear and have explained in a friendly way what Christians mean by their *objective* truth claims and what are their implications. This ministry form would hold that both the propositions and the community itself communicate following Christ and that they supplement each other in important ways. This would be something of a middle-ground position between the first and the last suggestion, to which we now turn.

Finally, a third position we would label the “most objective,” might be to make the philosophical discussion on the matter of anti-realism and realism a matter of *first* priority. This course of action would be based on the thinking that people cannot really understand the gospel even when socialized into a community or make a healthy conversion to Christianity—again, really understand Christianity—until these profound issues are confronted, understood and accepted. This view, I believe, would still value the community’s help in making the ideas of the gospel understood on more than one level, but it would hold that a person can become a follower of Christ independent of a community—not unlike the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion in Acts.

So, an ancillary problem presented by this anti-realism perspective has to do not so much with conceptual clarification, but rather what sort of ministry path do we take to most effectively work with this issue? Which style and philosophy of ministry should we adopt and *why*? If we take the position of

rejecting both the plenary and narrowly construed anti-realism (as I assert we should), are we not still out of sync intellectually and sociologically with some of our target audience? The answer seems to be yes and that is not a good thing for a communicator of the gospel (or communicator of just about anything). Dealing effectively with this snag is a sophisticated task and yet it must be done carefully and thoughtfully to maximize the fruitfulness of our evangelism.⁴⁵

Theological Issues:

Theological Acuity

As we ponder the nature of the evangelistic task at hand and how we are going to help prepare our faculty for it, an over-arching theological consideration should be the importance of theological acuity. By this I mean that our staff and faculty leadership will be well-served to walk that fine theological line between conserving our theological legacy which is reflectively determined to be “good” and keeping an open mind toward contemporary biblical scholarship which does not undercut the truth of the gospel.⁴⁶ That implies, at least, openness about ambiguities in the text, openness about the fact that good people can and have come to disagreements about what the text says and means, and an appreciation for seeking what the biblical material intended to say to the audience for which it was written. It may mean we need to give consideration to understanding our theological traditions and the history of theology to determine orthodoxy standards. The work needed to reach this level of sophistication for our staff and for our faculty leaders who are engaged in evangelism would require no small effort.

⁴⁵ Let us say parenthetically, that while we think we can learn some limited number of things (including a mitigated epistemic humility) from people who have been socialized into this view or who have come to reflectively embrace this view, we must, in summary, steadfastly seek to translate and contextualize the discovered truths of the gospel to those outside our community. However, we dare not passively accept or self-consciously imbibe the forms of anti-realism that are a lethal dose (in either form) to Christianity...or so we say.

⁴⁶ For an interesting discussion of the relevance of issues like *sola Scriptura* as it pertains to orthodoxy standards, canonicity, and theological ambiguities see Michael Murray’s article, “Theological Acuity,” in the *Faculty Newsletter*, InterVarsity Graduate & Faculty Ministries, Fall 2007, pps 1ff, (part 2 forthcoming).

Biblical Reliability

A major theological issue we must consider for faculty-to-faculty evangelism to flourish is to properly gauge what level of historical and religious reliability needs to be established for the Bible given our audience. It's true that not every part of the Bible needs to be defended every time one engages in an evangelistic conversation about Jesus, but the topic inevitably comes up in any extended tête-à-tête with highly educated unbelievers—especially in the humanities. While certain rhetorical techniques can be employed to keep conversations on track with just the gospel, it is important for an evangelist to be able to explain just how reliable the Bible must be to come to faith in Christ and whether the Bible, as we have it, meets that criteria. Our audience in certain parts of academe can be quite sophisticated about these issues and there seems to be a standard critique of biblical literature (SCBL). Therefore, we need to acquaint ourselves with what SCBL is and how to credibly respond to it and to answer these sorts of questions without making it the *sine qua non* of the conversation.

Theological Clarity & Justification for Evangelism

A third theological concern points us in a different direction. We have come to believe that many of our faculty have not formed a clear enough doctrine of just what the gospel is and/or a compelling and satisfying theological justification for involvement in evangelism as a way of life. It is true that many folks just need to see someone doing evangelism and to get involved in some way in that experience (observing and contributing to the conversation), but it also seems reasonable to think that unless one sees a fairly steady stream of converts to Christ, our professors may from time to time wonder if they should continue to be faithful in doing evangelism given the (idiosyncratic) lack of results and potential volatile sociological repercussions. Paul and the other apostles took the work of evangelism seriously, as we can see by their example and teaching. Communicating this thoughtfully and carefully to faculty who follow Christ seems challenging and important.

Defining the Gospel

Finally, in order to make the issues of the gospel clear we need to define just what the gospel is in terms that reflect theological acuity and sophistication. Currently there is a reaction to what is labeled as reductionist views of the gospel, but just the fact of the logical possibility of a reductionist view of the gospel implies at least the logical possibility of inflationary views as well.⁴⁷ (That is, in regard to an inflationary view it is at least possible to demand we need to know too much--like a full understanding of how Greek and Hebrew culture interacted--to understand the gospel. Nobody I know does that, but we should at least see the possibility we can go overboard.) And ,what should we say about an implausible claim that nobody is a Christian until they know and understand the full counsel of the scriptures? These sorts of problems indicate to me we need to take the time to do our homework on just what the gospel is before we start our training program and that will take some time and work. We just can't afford to get ahead of ourselves on these theological issues.

B. Hindrances Outside Control

Just as it is a very difficult task to choose your biological grandparents, the current receptivity of the gospel by our target audience is an inheritance with which we must work. The same could be said of our historical age and context, the legacy of earlier Christians (for instance: the early church, the martyrs, the philosophical and theological heritage of Augustine and Aquinas, the Crusades, the Religious Wars of the 16th Century, the Reformation, the Spanish Inquisition, the New England witch-trials, 19th century and early 20th century Fundamentalism, the evangelical “legacy” and TV evangelists.). However, as bad as some of this is, it is typically exaggerated by the “new atheists” especially with respect to their own his-

⁴⁷ For instance, an often-cited example of a reductionist view is Campus Crusade for Christ's *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet. Scott McNight argued against what he characterizes as reductionist views of the gospel, in part, because of the *kind* of Christians this method produces; see (hear) his talks to IV Graduate & Faculty Staff at Mundelein 2007. Academic Connections

torical sins, which they like to either sidestep or distance themselves from. We have a duty where we can to clear up caricatures and misinformation and yet take responsibility where it lies.

To varying degrees, all of this inheritance shapes the receptivity of our audience to us and to our message. Not that entire heritage helps us communicate the gospel easily or clearly and we need to honestly face that “baggage.”

Section 3: Creating Resources to Improve Our Individual and Corporate Witness

If these are the main problems and issues we must face, what are ways we can address them? Academic Connections believes that the best way to address this problem is to see it in the larger context of the history of the Church, sacred history (including its Jewish biblical roots), and in the larger context of the meta-narrative of what God has been doing from the beginning. Such a vision demands a contemporary manifold of possible responses that need to be explored and tested. We need not wed our plans to any particular strategy, tool or method, but rather aim at a comprehensive response to this need by taking steps as required.

As a first step in this process of envisioning and instituting resources we desire to build on-line resources that are widely available and can be used in an ancillary way to our training and other opportunities. We sense a leading to develop a family of websites around the theme of “Journey.” It will have at least two major sub-sites: 1) one devoted to ancillary resources for the part of life’s journey before Christ and 2) one devoted to ancillary resources for the part of life’s journey after becoming a follower of Christ. These proposed resources can be used in creative ways by our staff to supplement and provide follow-up capabilities for our fieldwork.

Addendum to an Earlier IV Report

I suggested in the report that FMLT, at least, needs to do some hard work on defining the gospel—the good news. Further, it was both suggested that 1) Tom Trevethan lead our team in the discussion and then produce a paper, and 2) that I would do some initial spadework on the issues.

The purpose of this addendum is to do that initial spadework by identifying *some* of the issues that arise when one tries to define the gospel. Length considerations keep me from listing everything and speaking exhaustively on each subject, but I will do my best to highlight some of the important issues. To do that I will organize this section in the following way: a) theological and theoretical considerations and b) practical considerations.

A. Theological and Theoretical Considerations

a. The nature of the atonement

- i. Substitutionary, penal view?
 - 1. The justice versus mercy problem
 - 2. The primitive nature of sacrifice
- ii. Example view?
- iii. Triumph view?
- iv. Eclectic view?

b. Heaven and Hell

- i. What does eternal separation and suffering have to do with redemption?
- ii. How can a perfectly good God allow that some will suffer for eternity?
 - 1. Do they not understand the consequences?
 - a. Are they defective?
 - b. Can they not change their minds?
 - c. Do we have a full picture of what hell is going to be like?

c. Reductionist versus inflationary views of the gospel

- i. Where if any is the line to be drawn between evangelism and post-conversion spiritual growth?
- ii. How do we handle those who do not have a clear conversion experience?

iii. How do we start in our training with where our non-Christian faculty friends are (intellectually, culturally, etc.) and introduce and explain the gospel?

1. Bible study only?
2. Conceptual issues: relativism, skepticism, and anti-realism?

B. Practical Considerations

- a. Do we construct some sort of gospel tract?
- b. If we do, do we standardize the presentation?

If we do not, how do we train our folks in a consistent way so as to produce consistent results in terms of the gospel message?