Critical Realism, Christian Higher Education, and the Study of Persons

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The distinctive concern of Christian higher education is the connection between faith and learning. For me, this concern has focused particularly on the connection between psychology and faith. My basic orientation is quite simple. I am convinced that the psychological study of human beings and the experience of the Christian faith are congruous activities, i.e., "good" theology and "good" psychology will be naturally, though not always obviously, compatible. In a similar way, I believe that the more theoretical and the more practical dimensions of both learning and faith can and ought to be seen as mutually reinforcing endeavors. All of us have experienced those serendipitous moments when moments when theory and practice, theology and piety, have become so melded together in our own lives that they have become essentially indistinguishable.

The integration of who we are and what we know takes the form of bridge-building between analytically separable aspects of our existence. But, the integration of faith and learning at a place like Messiah College also pushes us one step further to consider the inter-personal dimensions of integration. For a teacher, this means paying particular attention to pedagogy as part of the course content. At a school that explicitly values the Wesleyan tradition, this is
especially appropriate. Wesley's respect for "experience," and his attempt explicitly to integrate experience into his theological method, provides us with a model of how we too should seek to build an affective dimension into both our disciplines and our pedagogy. Such an affective teaching style will both respect current student experiences and will seek critically and constructively to shape the way students will experience life in the future.

My philosophy of higher education has been shaped in large part by my experiences at Messiah College, and the educational philosophy of Messiah College has been shaped significantly by the work of Ernest Boyer. In his very influential Scholarship Reconsidered (1990), Boyer broadened the definition of scholarship to include not just research/discovery, but also integration, application, and teaching. The four parts of this paper roughly correspond to each of those parts of scholarship. In the first section I defend critical realism as the best model for research in all fields of study. Boyer's "scholarship of integration" refers to the interpretation and connection of knowledge, especially across disciplines, and the second section of this paper discusses human nature in light of both theological and psychological perspectives. The third section discusses the practice of counseling and parallels Boyer's "scholarship of application." In the fourth section I argue that Messiah College and other Christian institutions of higher learning are places where a unique kind of pedagogy can occur, thus focusing on Boyer's "scholarship of teaching."

1. Critical Realism: A Model for the Scholarship of Discovery

It is not sufficient simply to assert, as I have above, that Christian faith and psychology are compatible. Individuals ranging from the televangelist Jimmy Swaggart to sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson seem to relish reminding us of their dissenting views. My resolution that the Christian faith and learning in psychology are compatible is based on certain assumptions about "good" ways to read the Bible and on a particular view of what constitutes "good" psychology.

Like most fields of science, the discipline of psychology is currently torn with arguments about how the field should be defined. Issues of focus (what is the "subject" of psychological study?) and of method (how do we get at that subject?) have combined to produce a range of opinion in the discipline that is broad indeed. At one end of the continuum are the "scientificators" of the field—scholars who would like to model the study of psychology after the model of the so-called "hard" sciences, like physics. In this approach the human subject is rendered almost pure "object." Located at the other end of the spectrum are the radical humanizers of the field. These people tend so to emphasize the subjectivity of what it means to be human (whether this takes the form of an over-emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual and of the individual's experience or of a quasi-mystical perception of common human experience) that the objectivity of the discipline almost totally dissolves into mere subjectivity. The physical sciences, à la Thomas Kuhn (1970), have acknowledged that theories may change, that theoretical paradigms do indeed shift. But, the admission that our theories may be temporary does not imply that all things are relative. So, between the scientificators at one pole and the humanizers at the other, a space exists for a via media of what I would call "good" psychology.

The term "critical realism" is sometimes used as a label for this kind of middle ground position. Critical realists expect that good research will yield genuine advances in understanding, while they also recognize that conclusions are always limited and revisable.
Whatever the label, this middle ground approach seeks to develop: (1) a mediative path between scientific and humanistic approaches; (2) a systematic eclecticism in research (demonstrated by an openness to the insights of many complementary sources of knowledge); and, (3) a constructive anti-reductionism that refuses to judge in advance the illuminating potential of any particular avenue for discovering truth.

Use of critical realism is not limited to science or to psychology. Critical realism seems to me the most appropriate stance of the scholar in any field, including biblical studies and theology. Therefore I view my faith through critically realistic terms as well. One of the clearest articulators of this view is Arthur Peacocke, Dean of Clare College, Cambridge University, and Director of the Templeton Science and Religion Workshop at Oxford University.

In *Theology for a Scientific Age* he writes:

Critical realism recognizes that it is . . . only the aim of science to depict reality and that this allows gradations of the 'truth' of scientific theories. . . . Only gradually does confidence in theories (and models . . .) increase, as a result of success in explanation, eventually to the point where the entities, structures and processes referred to in them are ascribed some degree of reality. . . . and since this can be only an aim, the critical realist has to accept that this purpose may well be achieved by scientists with but varying degrees of success. . . .

Critical realism in theology would [similarly] maintain that theological concepts and models should be regarded as partial and inadequate, but necessary and, indeed, the only ways of referring to the reality that is named 'God' and to God's relation with humanity. Metaphor obviously plays an even wider role in religious language than scientific. . . . The metaphors of theological models that explicate religious experience can refer to and can depict reality without at the same time being naively and unrevisibly descriptive, and they share this character with scientific models of the natural world. We may reasonable hope to speak realistically of God through revisable metaphor and model. (1993, pp. 12, 14-5)

In a similar manner Ian Barbour—whose book *Religion in and Age of Science* has been widely adopted in courses devoted to the study of religion and science (including my own)—acknowledges that in matters of religious and scientific understanding "humility before the given is appropriate" because "constraints on our theorizing arise from structures and relationships already existing in nature." He continues: "While the history of science exhibits no simple convergence or 'successive approximation,' it does include a body of well-attested theory and data, most of which can be considered trustworthy, even though any part of it is revisable" (1990, p. 44). He asserts that the same holds true in matters of faith.

Understood in the terms of Peacocke and Barbour, critical realism asserts that the best insights of any discipline, including psychology, should influence my understanding of faith, just as the best insights from the Christian faith will influence my understanding of psychology. Each is "revisable" in terms of the other. It is possible then to have a meaningful dialectic between faith and learning in the field of psychology, and as a result the "control beliefs" of faith (Wolterstorff, 1976) will find either confirmation or reinterpretation in dialogue with "good" psychology. Similarly, the reigning theories of psychology can be either confirmed or critiqued on the basis of the insights of faith.

Critical realism is thus both a via media within the discipline of psychology and it is a bridge-building philosophy with regard to other "ways of knowing"—in this case especially religious ways of knowing. As such, it opens a very natural door to the consideration of how psychology and religion might offer different but compatible ways of understanding what it means to be human.

Openness to this kind of interdisciplinary dialogue is no longer anathema to the community of psychological scholars. In 1994, a lead article in the American Psychological Association's flagship journal, *American Psychologist*, addressed the issue of relating religion and psychology. Its thesis is that an emerging mutual respect between religion and psychology
is allowing for exciting new methodological developments and breakthrough research in
understanding humankind; its author is Stan Jones, former chair of the Wheaton College (Illinois)
psychology department and newly appointed provost of that college. To have such an article
appear in this academic venue would have been unthinkable not long ago. In summarizing his
article, Jones recognizes that intentionally connecting psychology and religion is "unprecedented"
in academic psychology.

My main objective in this article has been (a) to demonstrate that no hard
barrier separates the domain of religious thought and commitment from that
domain of human activity that we call science, although at the same time I have
argued that science and religion are quite different and should not be confused or
overidentifed; (b) to stimulate a greater awareness within the psychological
community of the importance and pervasiveness of religious beliefs and
commitments to the scientific and professional objectives of contemporary
psychology; and (c) to encourage an increased awareness and unprecedented
explicitness in discussing the part that religious beliefs (broadly defined) play in
our scientific and professional activities. (1994, p. 197)

II. Human Nature: Integration of Psychology and Theology

Espousal of critical realism provides a theoretical justification for taking both religion and
science seriously. Critical realism pays close attention to the reality of the "organism" under
scrutiny, but it also focuses on the study of persons in their larger "ecological" habitat. It
acknowledges explicitly the most humanly significant dimension of that habitat, our relations with
other human beings. But, what does such a "critical realist" approach look like when we move
from the theoretical level actually to apply it to the study of persons?

Human Nature as Unitive. Central to psychology is an ongoing discussion about the
fundamental make-up of personhood. Are we "mere" creatures, to be understood in simple
materialist terms? Is there something special about human beings that sets us apart from other
animals? Do we have a spiritual dimension? These are crucial questions for all psychologists,
not just those in the Christian community, and of course there is no standard answer to them.
Still, a consensus of sorts does seem to be emerging in the scientific/psychological community
that favors a unitive understanding of persons.

Several non-unitive (largely reductionistic) options still exist. Behaviorism with its
essential denial of any significant human dimension beyond the body still has its followers. On
the other extreme, there exists an "X Files" fringe (one that is really sub-scientific, but quite
prevalent nonetheless) that is quite happy with a dualistic view of humanity—one that allows for
disembodied souls to transmigrate here and there wreaking havoc or doing good. But, more and
more, reputable psychologists are opting for a middle ground view that acknowledges the realities
of both bodies and minds/souls and recognizes that these two dimensions of human beings are
connected in some way. No one has a very good way of explaining how this human body-mind
unity works. But, some kind of holistic model seems the only way to make sense of the
multiple facets of our being.

Because I am a Christian, the epistemological conclusions embedded in my espousal of
critical realism must be balanced with an anthropology that squares with Biblical data. There
are many ways to read the Bible with profit, but for the purpose of understanding what it means
to be human I believe that the Bible is to be read not primarily as a book of doctrine, but as a
book of life. I do not mean to disparage the theological task of deducing doctrine from the
narrative of the biblical text, but I do mean strongly to assert that the Bible does not present us
with a full-blown and complete Christian psychology or Christian theology. My hunch is that
we ought not to read the Bible in order to search for "scientific" factuality regarding the
psychological composition of human beings, but for its broad-brush sketch of what it means to be human. The Bible stories reveal to us something of the story of human existence—including our diversity, our deformities, and our potentialities. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, the Wesleyan theologian, makes much the same point: "When we seek to elaborate a Christian doctrine of man, we become aware that the Scriptures say very much to man, but so little directly about him. In deducing something 'Christian' about man, it will be necessary to catch 'on the run' those things said to him, and interpret as well as we can what kind of creature it would be that could make sense out of the things said to him" (1972, p. 104). What Wynkoop finds when she has examined all the evidence of the Bible is that the Bible presents the human condition in terms of personal responsibility and social relatedness. The Fall has disrupted this picture of what we ought to be, but the Gospel calls us and empowers us to regain a proper sense of responsible personhood and to repair relations that have been bent in hurtful or harmful directions. For the purposes of developing a Christian psychology, then, it seems best to understand the Bible narratively, but I do not want to be reductionistic on this point of faith any more than I would be in my academic discipline.

While the Bible may not provide much in the way of ontological description of the human condition, and while most of what the Bible says about people may be relationally-oriented, the Bible does include metaphysical assertions about humanity. Do the metaphysical assertions of the Bible square with the "unitive" understanding of persons proposed by contemporary psychologists? Some conservative American Protestant believers would say "no" and would talk of human beings as divided into two or three separate entities: body and soul, or body, soul and mind. Others argue that such dualism is more a Greek philosophical belief than a Biblical one, and assert that both the Old and New Testament reflect a holistic understanding that connects body, mind, soul, and spirit together as aspects of one indivisible organism. Two of the strongest proponents of this view are David Myers and Malcolm Jeeves, authors of Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith, the supplemental text produced under the auspices of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities. They write: In the Hebrew view, we do not have nephesh (a soul), we are nephesh (living beings)...The Greek word psyche parallels the Hebrew nephesh and is clearly not that of an immaterial soul... Like the Old Testament, the New Testament sees human nature as a psychophysical unity. (1987, p. 27)

Because the biblical picture of the human organism is somewhat ambiguous, this perhaps is not an area where the Bible is trying to teach us anything. Or, perhaps this is an area where certain biblical hints about human nature need to be completed with scientific knowledge we can glean about the human organism. All in all, the greatest overlap between the "best" psychological opinions and the various possible readings of the biblical texts seems to me to favor a unified understanding of what it means to be a human organism. We are not minds that inhabit bodies, nor are we bodies that just seem to produce "minds" as byproducts of their other activities. We are embodied souls. We are persons—mind, body and soul all rolled into one. To affect our bodies is to affect our minds and souls. To affect any part of who we are affects the whole.

From a Christian perspective, belief in a unitive human nature underscores the importance of a bodily resurrection. From a psychological perspective, belief in a unified human nature helps us to affirm the simultaneous importance of the biological and behavioral and cognitive and affective dimensions of who we are. We are not merely biological organisms that can grow to
a predetermined genetic maturity without outside, social input. Nor are we free floating, creative personalities that can grow and flourish with no thought to our very real bodily limitations. We are by nature interactive creatures, and that interactivity includes our entire embodied selves.

*Human Nature and the Imago Dei.* A second area of concern arises from the theological notion that while humans are clearly "creatures," they are also creatures created in the image of God. Christian psychologists must try to understand the implications of what the *imago dei* means in the context of systematically seeking to understand people. For example, I believe that requires that we are to respect unconditionally the people with whom we work and whom we study. Whether this is articulated in the minimalist terms of Kantian respect for human volition, in the terms of Rogerian humanism, or in the fuller, proactive terms of "justlife" for all as coined by Ron Sider, Christian psychologists are surely called to respect the integrity of the people they study and counsel.

The *imago dei* is not the only word of faith to us, however. We must also remember that the image of God has been stamped on a creature. We are animals—albeit animals of a very special kind: we are able to worship the Creator. In our study of humanity, Christian psychologists ought not to shy away from the implications of the fact that as creatures we are dependent. Large aspects of who we are have been determined by our animal and social natures. We are not gods, and unconditional respect for people must be balanced with a realistic understanding of the creaturely limitations that adhere to humanity.

The issue of how to connect our creatureliness with our *imago dei* nature is further complicated by the issue of the Fall. Christians have long debated the degree to which our fallenness has affected our ability both to understand the created order and to act properly. The psychological community of the past generation tended to ignore the notion of sin. More recently, however, feminist psychology has begun to discuss the warped nature of gender-stereotyped human existence, community psychology has pointed out the need for societal renewal, and individual psychologists have begun to confer about the need for a sense of "shame" in western culture. Perhaps the foundations are being laid in these discussions for a new rapprochement between psychology and Christian faith on the issue of sin.

One of my assumptions is that the topic of sin (or shame or forgiveness or love) can be fruitfully discussed by those outside the Christian community as well as those who share our faith convictions. While I acknowledge the importance of Christian conversion, I am not attracted to the view that conversion results in persons with natures different from the rest of humanity. The imperfections in me, my church, my family, and my friends seem to make this quite obvious. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen argues for a common psychology (i.e., one that is equally valid in the Christian faith community and the academy) because of "our common humanness, God's common grace, and our common frailties" (1985, p. 61). Her analysis "rings true" in my own experience.

This does not mean that the content fields of theology and psychology currently fit all neatly together into a fixed and complete picture of humanness. Psychology is an open-ended field of inquiry, as is our attempt to understand the message of God to us enounced in the Bible. The integration of faith and learning is an ongoing process. It has not resulted in a definitive statement of what it means religiously and scientifically to be human and, indeed, it will likely remain an always-in-motion enterprise. These are areas where we can make progress, but it is unlikely that we will ever arrive at one final and complete picture of reality.
III. Compassionate Counseling: Applying Faith and Psychology to Life.

My reflection on faith and learning, on the Gospel and the created order, has never been limited merely to the theoretical level. To be fully honest, I should probably say: "My reflection on faith and learning has at times taken a theoretical bent, but that certainly is not where my concern is, or has ever been, first rooted." In the parlance of the field of psychology, I have always found the "practitioner" side of things as attractive as the theoretical. I have always wanted to test the theory by trying it out in the real world. The same applies to faith. My concern with faith and learning has been shaped by a history of interaction with real people: first and always by my family and friends, next by my co-workers and the students I counseled at an Illinois high school, and now in addition by my colleagues in Christian higher education. This orientation toward lived experience is obviously not antithetical to theoretical reflection, at least not in psychology where we are ourselves what we study. But, it does provide a different entry into the issue of faith and learning. In particular it forces one to think about the doing side of the discipline: what is psychology (and faith) good for?

When we talk about "integration of faith and learning" in Christian higher education we frequently assume that means an analytic approach, where we compare the strengths and weaknesses of various "models" of integration. For that reason, some people are more comfortable when we state explicitly that we are concerned with the integration of faith and learning and life. The danger with that phrase is its implication that "life" is somehow distinct from "learning." My own preference is to broaden our understanding of learning, and to recognize that the analytic approach is undoubtedly helpful, especially as it relates to "discovery" research, but that it does not represent the totality of what constitutes "learning." Equally legitimate in the classroom are approaches which stress application (e.g., ethics and practical issues) or an exemplar model (e.g., biography and social commentary).

At Messiah, a practical and applied approach to matters of "learning" seems especially appropriate. The Anabaptist, Pietistic, and Wesleyan traditions of Christian faith that have informed the history of this college all make room for life and experience—indeed, they demand consideration of life and experience—alongside of our more abstract discussions of theology and science. The ethical imperatives of the Anabaptist tradition and the pietist exaltation of experience are clear, but perhaps our greatest help here can come from Wesleyanism.

Rather than simply asserting the need to take experience and life seriously, Wesley developed a theological method that made these concerns integral to any adequate articulation of the Christian faith. In particular, he included "experience" as one part of his four-part understanding of the sources of theological reflection. The resulting Wesleyan "quadrilateral" of the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience provides a holistic model for seeking to discover truth about the realities of human existence.

Use of the Wesleyan quadrilateral has been a helpful way to move my senior seminar students beyond their fixation on theology as a useless mind game far removed from real living. Donald A. Thorsen, the theology editor for Christian Scholar's Review, has noted that Wesley "explicitly included experience with tradition and reason as sources of religious authority complementing the primacy of scriptural authority. He saw a personal, experiential dimension in all knowing processes. . . In particular he felt that theology and even our interpretations of Scripture rely on a certain element of subjectivity that cannot be completely rationalized" (1990, p. 249). Wesley viewed experience as "the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to heirship with
Jesus Christ" and as "a link with tradition...the Holy Spirit's continued life and direction in the church" (p. 251).

Ironically, the one person who has most helped me to develop a "Wesleyan" notion of the integration of faith and psychology is the Roman Catholic theologian/counselor Henri Nouwen. His work is not overly analytical, but it is both thoughtful and experiential. Nouwen's image of "the wounded healer" seems to me an apt description of the task of both faith and psychology. His model wonderfully reinforces a unitive, body-and-soul-together understanding of human nature. He also assumes that an accurate understanding of human existence will both ring true to our experience of the world, and it will help heal the "wounds" (of sin, of fallowness, of pain) which we all experience as a part of life.

The ideal of the wounded healer is developed by Nouwen as an ideal of ministry. But, ministry as Nouwen defines it is not narrowly construed in "spiritual" terms. It is the living of life in humble service to others. The model of this ideal for the Christian is the life of Jesus. That is, the life of Jesus narratively models a way of life for all of us. And, the path laid out is a path both of suffering with others and suffering for others—and of healing.

Nouwen recognizes that mental health is not salvation; nor does salvation necessarily bring about psychological health. But he recognizes that it is Christian to suffer with and for people, and it is the task of the "good" counselor to do the same. Ultimately, what delimits "Christian" counseling, or for that matter, any "Christian" ministering or thinking or living is not the task at hand, but that the Christian has personal hope based in the promise of the Resurrection. Nouwen says it well: "Leadership therefore is not called Christian because it is permeated with optimism against all the odds of life, but because it is grounded in the historic Christ-event which is understood as a definitive breach in the deterministic chain of human trial and error, and as a dramatic affirmation that there is light on the other side of darkness" (1979, p. 76).

What Nouwen so movingly presents is stated more analytically by Robert Coles, the well-known child psychologist and freelance moralist from Harvard. He writes in his book on The Moral Life of Children, "We must nudge theory toward human experience, hoping that the latter brings the former to life, and the former helps [us] arrive at a persistent, comprehensible aspect of the human scene" (1986, p. 120). This mutual nudging of theory and experience sounds a lot like the dialogue of science and faith in critical realism. But, here the tone is different. It is not that we want merely to deepen understanding (although that is certain one goal that we ought rightly to pursue); it is that we want to deepen the quality of life itself. When science and faith come together with the experienced, affective realities of life critical realism is transformed into constructive realism. And, that is the true goal of integration.

IV. Constructive Realism: The Pedagogy of Christian Higher Education.

George Marsden, a recent commencement speaker at Messiah College, published The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief in 1994. While noting the advantages of voluntary disestablishment of religion, he also argues persuasively that traditional religious viewpoints need to be heard in the academy. Interestingly, his book was reviewed very positively in Academe: Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors. The reviewer, a former executive director of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, went so far as to say that "There are serious lacunae in the current
self-understanding of the major American universities; it may be the moment for 'lesser' institutions to make a significant contribution to the character of the American university as it moves into the twenty-first century" (Gallin, 1994, p. 93).

This picture of the academy opens a space for Christian colleges to succeed in areas where major research universities cannot go. Ernest Boyer's broadened definition of scholarship has highlighted for the entire academy the fact that scholarship is not limited to traditional research and discovery. While it is not likely that Christian colleges would ever be able to compete with the large universities at the level of "discovery" research, they can play a different, but perhaps equally important, role within the larger academy. One of the areas in which schools like Messiah can make a contribution is surely in the kind of integrative scholarship described in the second and third sections of this paper. Since we do not experience anything like the pressure to be engaged in research and publishing that exists at a major research institution—pressure that seems invariably to push researchers into more and more specialized fields of inquiry—we have the luxury of reflecting on the ways things in general fit together and especially on how faith and academic disciplines fit together. In this regard, Christian academicians in fields like history and philosophy have already demonstrated their effectiveness in bringing "the Christian mind" to bear on scholarship, and other fields like psychology are beginning to follow suit.

However, successes in this kind of integration—especially in its more theoretical manifestations—still exist largely in what Jurgen Habermas would call the "systems" dimension of modern life. And, this may not be the place where Christian colleges can contribute the most. "System" refers to the realm of more-or-less objective knowledge and technical expertise. But, another side of modern life exists alongside of this systematic and technical zone. Habermas calls this other dimension the "lifeworld." (Habermas, 1987) Lifeworlds are not determined by the laws of disciplinary methodology or logical inference. They are, instead, subjective zones or, perhaps more accurately, inter-subjective zones, where we seek to integrate our cognitive, bodily and affective experiences of the world with the cognitive, bodily, and affective experiences of those around us in an attempt to fashion a common sense of the world we share.

Christian colleges, along with small liberal arts colleges in general, are rooted as much in a sense of lifeworld as they are in Habermasian structures of system. Ideally, we care for our students as persons as much as we care for them as receptacles for learning. Because this is the case, it is likely that the greatest gift we can provide both our students (and the academy at large) is a model of pedagogy that connects the necessarily systematic dimensions of modern life and learning with the lifeworlds in which our students actually live.

In the field of education, this concern is frequently labeled "active learning," and pedagogical experts these days are calling more and more frequently for the infusion of active learning practices in all classrooms. Active learning refers to the kinds of activities that help the student connect the new academic subjects they are learning with other things they already know or have experienced. As institutions, Christian colleges are already committed to this understanding of pedagogy to some degree. In addition to stressing the academic discussion of faith and learning, we are committed to connecting the classroom experience in various ways with the lived life of faith of our students.

It is my belief that our practice of connecting the systems of education with the religious lifeworlds of our students Christian colleges can serve as a model for colleges in general. My
assumption is that many undergraduate students, whether at Messiah, Harvard, or Penn State, have had their most basic understanding of human nature shaped by their religious nurture and associations. Therefore, one important kind of active learning can occur when insights from religious faith are brought constructively into the curriculum. In this area, the work we do at places like Messiah College can serve as a model for other kinds of schools. Because of our explicit faith commitment, our "critical realism" can become a "constructive realism" where we challenge each other to think, to live, to serve in ways that are consistent with the best insights of the academy as well as the best insights of our faith.

The incorporation of "constructive realism" into our curricular programming does not mean that an "experiential" component will lighten the demands of learning, any more than including "experience" in our theology lightens its demands. In fact, including experience makes the task of teaching even more demanding. The process of learning can be painful, and the teacher is not always a comforter even if that teacher respects the experiences of his or her students (and the communities in which those student experiences are embedded). Active learning can also be awkward for the teacher for it forces one constantly to deal with questions which are not one's own.

Let me give an example from fairly close to home. My father-in-law phoned me shortly after I began teaching at Messiah, concerned because he had heard that it wasn't a safe place to send Christian kids: they teach Marxism. After my predictable (and intentionally cowardly) response about the need to teach about some things which we may not believe ourselves, he asked, "Why teach it if some people are going to be upset?"

It is not just my beloved father-in-law who asks questions which are not my own: our students raise them, too. Earlier in this paper I described the chapter in the supplemental text by Myers and Jeeves which suggests monism as a plausible option in the mind-body debate. One of the students in my Introduction to Psychology class asked after reading that particular assignment, "May I burn this book?" Amazed not so much by the request as at the immediate enthusiasm of other students, I asked what the problem was. It wasn't that the book was hard to understand, or too long, or boring; the problem was that it brought up possibilities which did not coincide with the explanations for faith that they had learned as children. They wanted the book simply to affirm their inherited picture of reality, and the text I had chosen for the course intentionally challenged that black and white worldview.

While respecting student experience, a good teacher can never be dominated by those experiences. Teaching involves a critical dimension as well as an affirming side. In my teaching I hope that students will discard rote, easy answers, and will come to more meaningful, personal answers. For this to happen, we need to establish a rapport with each other and a sense of mutual respect. This is not only an individual endeavor, but also an outgrowth of the culture created on campus. At best, the institution as a whole nurtures a sense of community—a certainty that we are all ultimately pulling in the same general direction even if it sometimes looks on the surface like we are heading off on nearly opposite routes. Students and faculty know they are free to speak based on their personal experience and to seek truth where they think it most appropriate, but that they will be called to give an account of their experience and to explain to others where the search for truth has led.
The challenge for the Christian teacher is gently to expose students to the depth and breadth of current scholarship while simultaneously helping those students nurture their own faith into maturity. In this process I find myself as much a fellow traveler as a guide or model. There is a delicate dialectic to teaching Christianly. But, as a Christian educator, I am called to respond with wisdom and compassion as each student learns—and I am called to recognize that at many levels we are learning about the world together. It is this dynamic understanding of learning—this mutual enlivening of theory and practice, of reality and hope, of understanding and healing—that finally delineates the core of the integration of faith and learning.

References


