

An Academic Spiritual Autobiography

Terry Halliday

Introduction:

It is a great pleasure to be with you this afternoon.

Many of you I met previously at the annual conference of Grad and Faculty Ministry staff in Mundelein last year.

I've greatly enjoyed working with Kathy Cooper in preparation for the staff training.

I am here in two capacities:

--as an academic

--as an academic volunteer with IFES where we are constantly trying to learn together as the body of Christ worldwide

I. Two Sets of Premises

a. God is everywhere in the university.

- Everything exciting going on in the university derives ultimately from God, reveals the living, working engagement of the creator God through minds, imaginations, etc.
- The university and its endeavors derive ultimately from God, whether acknowledged and unacknowledged. We need merely to show where He is and what He is doing.

If we begin with this premise, it changes me, it changes my work and mission, and it may change you.

b. God has given us a rare calling to work with Him in the university

We are called to stimulate students, faculty, and university staff – the *whole* university:

- To be light—shining in darkness, in dim places (“see thru a glass darkly”)
- To be salt – giving a special flavor -- [salt invisible, but heightens taste . . .

Put the two premises together – Christ in the university, our distinctive mission – and this adds up to a high calling = *engaging the university*

How? We can engage the university powerfully when we enter into its **conversations.**

II. My Context

- I am a sociologist at an institute of advanced studies focused on interdisciplinary study of law, legal behavior and legal institutions.
E.g., my research asks:
 - Where does law come from (GLOBAL LAWMAKERS, Cambridge University Press, 2017)
 - How does law work in practice (CRIMINAL DEFENSE IN CHINA, Cambridge, 2016)
- My 2 main lines of work on globalization and law:
 - Globalization of law and markets

- Globalization of law and politics
- Hence – my working environment, my working career, is saturated with most (not all) going on in universities – in scholarly societies – academic publishing – graduate teaching – mentoring, etc.

III. An Autobiography

Today I am asked to speak about a small personal drama—my own trajectory of scholarship and faith and how they intertwine. Looking back, I think of it as a time of hope, of struggle and failing, of redemption and renewed call. Ultimately, like many Christian academics, it is a struggle to avoid the *schizophrenic* life.

Chapter 1: A Spiritual Grounding: New Zealand

My father – a great student of the Bible. His study was packed with books. I was surrounded by scholarly materials on the Bible and faith from my earliest days.

My church, the Open Brethren – had a very strong doctrine of “priesthood of all believers”

Personal Breakthrough 1: The Joy of Bible Study

YET

My church community was cut off from world – “in world, not of it” – no connections intellectual/practical with society, markets, politics, arts, science . . . except defensively

Chapter 2: An Intellectual Adventure

When I went to university it was a site of Intellectual Imagination and Spiritual Liberation

It was punctuated by two complementary excitements:

1. The joy of scholarship
2. The excitement of a learned faith.

Personal breakthrough 2: InterVarsity

I discovered the fellowship of fellow students

Perhaps, more importantly, I discovered the reflections on faith and scholarship by notable academics, especially through British InterVarsity Press.

I learned – My mind mattered to God

Personal breakthrough 3: Discovering Hermeneutics

In my Sunday School and high school days we read the Bible one way. We were caught in a biblical tradition that in effect made much of scripture irrelevant

At university, I discovered hermeneutics, esp., through Bernard Ramm’s book, [*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*](#)

It multiple interpretive traditions within the broad evangelical tradition.–

At my home church, we had talked lots about *inspiration*

Now I discovered that *interpretation* was equally as important.

Personal breakthrough 4: Discovering the Whole Bible

Now I re-read the whole Bible as if it ALL had salience

Hugely liberating – I found the Bible has something to say about every social situation – politics, economics, social relations, immigration, race, gender, empire, power

For a sociologist, someone concerned about social processes and social institutions, this was very exciting.

Chapter 3: A Letdown

I went to the University of Chicago to do my Ph.D. I was very energized by the high octane intellectual atmosphere of the university.

As a Christian, however, the U of Chicago was a great letdown.

I discovered that the IFES-affiliated group on campus met only for prayer and Bible study, no different from my local church or high school youth group.

The Christian group had no contact or conversation with the great research, writing, and debates going on all around them.

I attended only once.

Fortunately, through God’s grace, a network of Christian graduate students formed a small group we called Christian Forum.

Each of us committed to writing a paper on some aspect of our current studies and faith.

I recall I wrote one paper on the sociological theory of functionalism and I Cor 14 and Paul’s discussion of gifts in the church.

We had stimulating, rich and encouraging times together.

Personal breakthrough 5: Discovering graduate students who wanted their faith to encounter their scholarship.

Chapter 4: A Bifurcated Life

After I received my Ph.D. I encountered personal and family struggles.

I was active in my career.

I was active in my faith communities Bible studies, teaching, mission, etc.

Never did the two meet. Sadly, I had learned, like so many other Christian academics, to live a bifurcated or schizophrenic Christian life.

Personal breakthrough 6: How to live a Schizophrenic Christian life

Chapter 6: A Redemption

Through God’s grace, I experienced a renewed calling

My faith had been invisible to my scholarship, to my research institute, to my teaching.

God intervened:

I became part of a men’s small group where all the other members were ministers or theologians or both

I developed encouraging and illuminating relationships with Dr. Vinoth Ramachandra, Secretary for Social Engagement, IFES, and Dr. K.K. Yeo, Professor of New Testament at Garrett Seminary and Northwestern University.

Personal breakthrough 7: Discovering Biblical Contexts

From my early days, I knew the value of studying the contexts in which the Bible was written. I knew something of Biblical literature, its many genres, and the way theology and theological ethics grew out of social/political/religious situations. Now I was brought to the same question in the contemporary world. And to ask, how to think about those sociologically in relation to my social situation? E.g., parallels between the Israel of the Minor Prophets and contemporary societies?

Personal breakthrough 8: Discovering Cross-cultural Theology

My prolific friend, Dr. K.K. Yeo, became my coach on cross-cultural theology. The biblical revelation unfolds across time and place. It is a miracle of the universal church – centered on Christ – that it is also diverse in its modes of worship, understandings of Scripture, interpretations of the great Christian doctrines of the Trinity, God, Holy Spirit, Ecclesiology, and the like. Within the parameters of the great Christian confessions, the church in every cultural and geographical context brings new understandings to the Bible, faith, and theology. This has special resonance for IFES.

Chapter 7: A Latter-Day Adventure

Now I swing back, renewed and re-energized, to where I was 40-50 years ago. Now I have many more resources to discover a Christian mind about every aspect of university life, including my own research and writings.

I experience:

- A call within my scholarship to integrate faith and learning
- A call to the witness of Christ in the university – worldwide

Personal breakthrough 9: Discovering the Pleasure of Integrating Faith and Learning

My personal journey translates into a global vision

- That my personal failures not be followed by others
- That my original calling AND current calling be joined by others

IV. My Lessons

- *All* of the university life can and must be brought into engagement with faith
- *Our mission* – for InterVarsity and IFES movements around the world

To bring the consciousness of the university *to* Christ – in the broadest sense
personal conversion, yes, but far more

To equip students/faculty so they do not fall away *from* Christ

All those bright excited persons who come from high school to university

All these persons must be surrounded by students, staff, and faculty who show them how it is possible to be a *thinking* Christian. And, in thinking Christianly, how to redeem the university.

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