

Conference Summary

What are the Major Themes of this Conference?

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We asked ourselves the question, “How should our Christian faith influence our choice of research problems?” Every presentation and each discussion revolved around that concern. Here, in outline form for ease of interaction, are distillations of the weekend’s conclusions and development of further questions. Please refer to the various talks to further develop these perspectives.

I. What guidance can we find to direct us to answer our question?

A. General

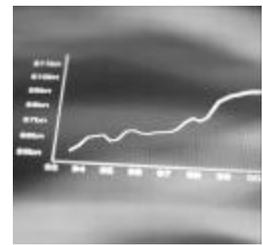
1. The essential being of God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit united in love, action, and knowledge—is caring for and involved in the creation. Since God is our Savior and lives in us, of course, he cares what we, his children, do and what is done with his cosmos. To most effectively experience this care of God for us and his creation, we must work to develop fully Christian minds (cf. Suppe, p. 221).
2. Of first importance is to grapple with the call of God, for our lives and our research. There is the general call to love God with our all and to seek his kingdom before all else. But all were agreed that we can know that he called us into science and to our particular place in it, even including our current work site (cf. Harper, p. 225).
3. Arthur Holmes said, “If all truth is ultimately God’s truth, then we

have no reason to denigrate some areas of learning by regarding them as either worldly or beyond help, or as having little or no importance. On the contrary such learning needs to be restored to the wholeness of God’s truth from which it is torn.”

B. Specific guidance

1. Colin Russell gave us seven “determinants of choice” derived from his survey of the history of this question and from his own experience.
 - a. Fascination for the topic.
 - b. To the greater glory of God.
 - c. Social benefit.
 - d. The intentions of the research supervisor or director.
 - e. Personal ambition.
 - f. Financial gain.
 - g. Is it ethically objectionable?
2. Many addressed the issue of permitting the possible availability of funding to solely or largely determine what we study, indicating that this was not the appropriate motivation for Christians (cf. Eden, p. 263) but funding agencies do have two mandates that direct our action and we find them appropriate: Does the research promise societal benefit and/or does it have high potential intellectual impact?
3. We must always ask of any proposed research effort, “Is this a

“Did we provide a set of steps by which we can determine the right research question infallibly?”
“No!”



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good stewardship, before God and his values, of my days and years and of the talents and experiences he gave me? (cf. Keister, p. 270 and Eden, p. 263).

4. Many pointed out the need for collaboration in research and for life as a Christian researcher:
 - a. With experienced, more senior members of our research discipline, fellow believers and/or nonbelievers.
 - b. With researchers in more difficult circumstances, where we may serve by our joint efforts, e.g., Christians in developing country universities or in non-research oriented Christian colleges here in the U.S.
 - c. In prayer and searching the Scriptures with small groups of believing fellow researchers at our own institution or in our own disciplinary national groupings.
4. We can ask very specific questions of potential research areas such as those given by Mark Foster which he called his "five sieves":
 - a. What fundamental areas of research do I think would be of interest?
 - b. What kind of technology driven research do I think would be of interest?
 - c. What sorts of research might I do that would have obvious components of service to others, not necessarily from a Christian point of view?
 - d. He looked at the question of naturally occurring materials and asking what areas of interest are there for me there?
 - e. Are there materials science research topics that are peculiarly Christian?

II. What are some of the barriers we may face as we seek right directions?

A. There is often an anti-science prejudice to be found in evangelical/

fundamentalist churches. For biologists in particular, this is a tricky issue. How do we find support and encouragement for our vocational discipleship from those at our own church families?

- B. So many at the conference complained of isolation from other Christians in science. How can we get informed discussion of these issues on a more regular basis with fellow believers?
- C. There is often opposition, covert or overt, from the non-Christian culture around us. It may take the form of an unhistorical dismissal of Christian faith as "disproved by science" or it may be an unwillingness to consider certain issues because they could lead to affirmations of God's being. Some believers in the university have experienced discrimination in hiring and promotion etc. because of the open character of their faith.
- D. One of the great weights upon us is the fear that our discoveries may be used for ends we find to be unethical and counter to God's values. We fear that we cannot control the application of what we believe God led us to.

III. In light of all this, what recommendations can we make?

- A. Try to discern the future, yours and that of your discipline and the larger culture around you.
 1. Will there be opportunities opening up which you could take to use your research to benefit others? For instance, the poor?
 2. Think deeply about potential developments in your own field, as was modeled for us by Brent Seales as he looked at issues in computer science.

Issue 1—Privacy

Issue 2—Data providence

Issue 3—Virtualization

Each of these are major areas for research and development in computer science but also each will have significant impact on our culture and probably on believers.

"Did we provide helpful insights, suggestions, and models to help in this process?"
"Yes!"

B. Be sure to do your work in the right spirit, as Cal DeWitt counsels. Be sure you are doing what you love and loving what you do—or get out! He also urged us to do our work as a “psalm we are singing to God.” Someone else referred to it as “doxological work.”

C. Use the ideas of C. Stephen Evans as quoted by Loren Haarsma to look at your own work. Evans talks about “*explicit* Christian scholarship where Christianity obviously affects your choice of topic, *implicit* scholarship where Christian faith shapes your choice of issues and the hypotheses you test and *vocational* Christian scholarship, which he described as Christians doing excellent work in their disciplines, contributing to the development of new knowledge, furthering the general good and also demonstrating that it is indeed possible for a thoughtful and educated person to live as a Christian in today’s world.” This may help you see the why of your research more clearly.

D. A number of speakers pointed out how necessary it is to know ourselves well; our calling, giftedness, talents, experiences and hopes. Write out an inventory and consult with others.

E. Susan Drake Emmerich urged us to be radical in the sense of living by values that go right down to the root of reality and to live by a bold faith sustained by lots of prayer.

So, did we provide a set of steps by which we can determine the right research question infallibly? No! Did we provide helpful insights, suggestions, and models to help in this process? Yes! There are lots of next steps for many of you in this collection of papers. We had a great time together in this conference. We would love to do it again, and we all know there is a lot more to be done. Join us in growing in these areas. Feel free to comment either to Roman Miller, editor of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (millerjr@rica.net), or to me (tmorrison@ivcf.org).



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