

## **Narrow is the Way: Christian Discipleship and the R1 University**

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### ABSTRACT

Previous efforts to discern whether Christian scholars have a place in the university have focused on orthodoxy—whether professors can speak and write according to their faith. This article focuses rather on orthopraxy—whether professors’ lives as a whole can take the shape of discipleship while being carried out within the R1 university. The first section of the article sets out a biblical understanding of discipleship as the practice of following Jesus Christ in proclaiming in word and action to and with the poor and the wicked that God loves them. The rise of “conflict of commitment” policies at R1 universities severely delimits the amount of time faculty have for activity outside of university jurisdiction, making all the more necessary discernment about the possibility of discipleship within the ambit of the universities. This article surveys the policies of Duke, Emory and Notre Dame to show the limitations placed on faculty time outside of university activity. It then addresses the possible objections that writing for other scholars and teaching in such settings are in themselves adequate for discipleship. Finally, the author narrates his own efforts to navigate his home institution. The article suggests that ethnographic fieldwork, especially that done locally, can possibly provide room for discipleship among the marginalized within the constraints of the R1 university.

In the 1990s, the concern (re)surfaced as to whether it is possible for a Christian to be an academic. George Marsden led the way by arguing that modern universities had moved from “Protestant establishment to established nonbelief,” thereby becoming spaces that were a threat to the free exercise of religion.<sup>1</sup> Others concurred with the secularization thesis as it applies to colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup> More recently, in the last decade or so, analyses have posited that the problem is more that of fragmentation than secularization stifling the Christian voice in academia,<sup>3</sup> with one volume arguing that universities are now

in a “postsecular” age.<sup>4</sup> Still, even with these later volumes, the concern regards primarily professors’ ability to *speak* and *write* religiously, with chapter titles like, “Why Faculty Find it Difficult to Talk About Religion.”<sup>5</sup>

As important as it is for religiously-oriented faculty to talk freely about their beliefs and, particularly, to integrate those beliefs into their lectures and writing, there is another threat to the possibility of being a Christian in the academy, and it comes into focus when we shift our concern from orthodoxy or right belief to orthopraxy or right practice. That the orthopraxy of Christian academics has slipped from view is, I suggest, in large part due to the nature of our profession: we are trained and paid to talk and write, and so that is the first direction of our gaze. However, if, following the gospels’ concern with wealth and poverty, we pay attention to the social and economic matrices of our craft, we find that there are structural obstacles to our living Christian lives in this regard, too.

My focus will be on R1 universities for two reasons. First, there is a premium on publication production in this setting, and the nature of the activity of writing is that it physically moves us to solitude and away from our neighbors, rich or poor, whom we are to love.<sup>6</sup> Second, the students whom we are to teach in R1 universities in the United States tend to come from families that are already well-off. In the case of my own university, Notre Dame, the median income of the families of undergraduates is \$192,000 a year. At Emory University, it is \$139,800; Duke, \$186,700.<sup>7</sup> A professor can spend her entire career at an R1 university and, other than the cafeteria servers and the buildings and grounds crews, rarely encounter a poor person. If book-production and teaching relatively well-off students are the primary activities of the professor, what scope is there for an academic to practice discipleship in a faith whose center and inspiration says, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40)?<sup>8</sup> I have previously made a case for fieldwork in Christian ethics on theological and epistemological grounds,<sup>9</sup> but it is clear now that another argument, this time within the ambit of Christian practical reasoning, is also necessary: Can a professor maintain fidelity to the Gospel while working for an R1 university?<sup>10</sup>

To set the context of this discussion, in the first part of this article I do a brief scriptural analysis to limn the vision of Christian discipleship in the gospels. Here, discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ in proclaiming in word and action to and with the poor and the wicked that God loves them. Then, I analyze the rules—now overtly manifested in “conflict of commitment” policies—that govern the lives of faculty at Emory, Duke, and Notre Dame. The formalizing of such policies is in keeping with the general trend of the corporate bureaucratization of American universities, and threatens to turn such universities into what sociologists call “greedy institutions.”<sup>11</sup> In Notre Dame’s case especially, we will see that that policy makes official the view that the university has claim on excessive amounts of the professor’s time and energy, such that little is left for being present to “the least of these.” In the section after that, I attend to two possible objections: Does not academic book-writing ultimately benefit the poor? And what about the role of teaching? Here I argue that in R1 universities, the primary audience of the books written is other similarly placed scholars and teaching (again, to undergraduates whose families have a median income of \$192,000 a year) has a subservient role in professional advancement.

So, can professional advancement in a university that prioritizes book-production and claims jurisdiction over virtually all of the professor’s time be squared with a faith that prioritizes face-to-face encounter with the poor and the wicked? My wager is that such an alignment is possible if the discipleship

amidst the poor and the wicked becomes the subject of the professor's research. This is where ethnographic fieldwork plays a critical role. Fieldwork brings the researcher face-to-face with her research subjects. Discipleship brings her face-to-face with them in the context of a particular kind of encounter, that of letting the poor and wicked know in word and action that, although they may be rejected by the bulk of humanity, they are loved by God. Writing up these encounters in articles and books—preferably with prestigious university presses—is the only way to make such discipleship count in the professional context of an R1 university. Ethnography is a way for a Christian to practice her faith and remain a scholar.

In the last section of this article, then, I describe how I came about to combine my work as a recovery coach for persons with opioid and methamphetamine addictions in northern Indiana with my given role as a professor at Notre Dame. Getting to this point took a lot of trial and error regarding how to serve both the university and the marginalized. Here, I discovered that what is critical is to discern the shape of one's discipleship *first*, and then build one's research project around that. My research question for purposes of our Institutional Review Board is, "Does recovery coaching reduce rates of relapse among people with opioid and methamphetamine addictions," but the discipleship is much more than that, and the stakes—if scripture is to be believed—are high. Jesus in Matthew 25 goes on to say to those who do not practice face-to-face discipleship with the poor and the wicked, "Depart from me into the eternal fire . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." (Mt 25:41 and 45). I suggest that ethnography done locally is somewhat better-placed to succeed in an R1 university than that done afar because the former does not have some of the encumbrances of the latter and the R1 university requires prompt production.

Throughout, I focus on three cases, Duke University, Emory University, and the University of Notre Dame (In part because Notre Dame is my home institution, I am able to elaborate somewhat more on its practices). I do so because all are R1 universities, yet each has a different relationship with the religious tradition that founded it. While Trinity College, which was to become Duke University, was founded by Methodists and Quakers, there is no mention of this in the university's mission statement.<sup>12</sup> Emory's mission statement on its part refers to the religious founding obliquely, as translated into a generalized "strong moral force": "The university, founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church, cherishes its historical affiliation with the United Methodist Church. While Emory's programs are today entirely nonsectarian (except for those at the Candler School of Theology), the university has derived from this heritage the conviction that education can be a strong moral force in both society and the lives of its individual members."<sup>13</sup> Notre Dame's reference to its Catholic inspiration and identity is direct: "The University of Notre Dame is a Catholic academic community of higher learning."<sup>14</sup> What we will find—perhaps counterintuitively, perhaps not—is that the more direct the connection claimed between the school and its religious beginnings, the more detailed and overtly demanding the claims on the professor's time on the part of the school, with the threat of "severe sanctions" for noncompliance. First, however, we need to get clear on the demands of discipleship.

### ***FOLLOWING JESUS: DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPELS***

Jesus frequently calls upon those who would become his disciples to "follow" him (usually *akoloutheo*,

but also *deute*; see Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23; Mt 4:19), and to follow him means first and foremost to undertake the life project of learning to imitate him so as to be able to act in his name.<sup>15</sup> Discipleship, so understood, is reenactment of the Gospel. The call from Jesus to be like him is clear: “A disciple is not above the teacher . . . *it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher*” (Mt 10:24–25, emphasis added). Biblical scholar James Dunn states that this passage is evidence of “a clear strand of *imitatio Christi* in the New Testament itself.”<sup>16</sup> And being like Jesus involves carrying out his mission. In this regard, Dunn states forcefully, “*It was only as they shared in his mission that his disciples shared in his authority and charismatic power.* In short, as Jesus did not live for himself but for the kingdom and others, so it had to be with his disciples. . . . Those who gathered around him did so to share in that task, to follow him in his mission, and for no other reason” (emphasis in original).<sup>17</sup>

The question arises as to whom the mission is directed. Liberation theology has long foregrounded a “preferential option for the poor,” in the gospels, and such preference is evident in passages from the Magnificat (Lk 1:51–53: “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”) to the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”). Some other scholars counter that if there is a preferential option at all, it is for the wicked, and a range of passages backs their argument as well. All three synoptic gospels witness to Jesus’ proclamation, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mk 2:17; Mt 9:13b; Lk 5:32).<sup>18</sup> The Sermon on the Mount/Plain in Matthew and Luke admonishes us to love our enemies (Mt 5:43–48; Lk 6:27–36), and to forgive the debts or sins of others (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4). Luke follows the call to love our enemies immediately with the specific command not to judge or condemn, but to forgive (Lk 6:37). And Jesus’s words on forgiveness extend to the parables. Both Matthew (18:12–14) and Luke (15:1–6) tell the parable of the lost sheep, and Luke, once again, spells out its implications: “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (15:7). Luke takes the message of forgiveness all the way to the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing” (23:34). Scholarly debate tends to set up the missions to the poor and the wicked as a zero-sum game—Jesus had to be for only one or the other<sup>19</sup>—but the biblical evidence does not support such views. Jesus had particular missions to both populations.<sup>20</sup>

And just what is that mission? Jesus tells his disciples in the same commissioning passage quoted from earlier, “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near’” (Mt 10:7). To say, “The kingdom has drawn near,” is to tell the listeners in other words, “God has not forgotten you; God loves you.” The evidence of that love is practical: Jesus heals them. It is no surprise, then, that when he sends out the disciples, he tells them that when proclaiming the kingdom, “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (Mt 10:8a). Modern biblical scholarship is often at a loss with regard to how to interpret the healing accounts, and often descends into debates about whether the miracles “really” happened. For our purposes, the key point is that God’s love manifests itself in practical ways, most often in response to specific requests from the people encountered. Peter’s mother-in-law (Mk 1:29–31), a leper (Mk 1:40–45), the servant of a centurion (Mt 8:5–13), a paralytic (Mk 2:1–12), a hemorrhaging woman (Mt 9:20–22), blind men (Mt 9:27–31; Mk 8:22–26), a demoniac (Mt 9:32–34), the daughter of a synagogue

leader (Mk 5:21–43) and many others (Mt 8:16–17; 12:15–21; 15:29–31; Mk 3:7–12; 7:31–37) all request—or have others request on their behalf—specific practical responses to their ailments.

If we are to sum up the gospel understanding of discipleship, then, we can say that it is an ongoing effort to follow and thus imitate Christ in his going out to the poor and the wicked to announce God's love for them in both word and practical action. Unlike Jesus and his immediate disciples, I am unable to perform miraculous works of wonder. I, and most people like me, are left with things like becoming recovery coaches who help people with addictions get health insurance, find housing, and otherwise rebuild their lives. These are all activities that, if we take them seriously, require significant time and energy. It is not a once-a-month or even once-a-week thing. The presenting problem for the academic is that the R1 university also demands considerable time and energy, and claims that time and energy directed elsewhere constitutes a “conflict of commitment.” To understand just how serious such universities are about the matter, it is helpful to turn to the specific instances of the conflict of commitment policies at Duke, Emory, and Notre Dame.

### ***REGULATING THE LIVES OF PROFESSORS: CONFLICT OF COMMITMENT POLICIES***

The tenure-track professional development structure found in R1 universities has its origins in a medieval apprenticeship model: one apprentices oneself for a certain number of years, and then is allowed into the guild. Performance measures are based on production quantity and quality. For the most part, R1 universities continue to take this approach, with the granting of tenure requiring the production of a certain number of books and articles placed, as a sign of quality, with esteemed presses and journals. Two forces have placed pressure on this model. The first is that modern market competition between schools coupled with a tight professorial job market have escalated the productivity demands, both pre- and post-tenure. Second, modernity has, according to Max Weber, brought with it the increased bureaucratic regulation of human life in its totality through formal policies. It is no longer sufficient to measure productivity in terms of numbers of books and articles; it is necessary also to govern the professor's use of her time, both on and (seemingly) off the job.<sup>21</sup>

The result of these changes in the university settings is the rise and formalization of the “conflict of commitment” policy, which requires not just a certain amount of production, but that the professor not spend over a certain amount of time *away from* production for the university. Such regulations are different from conflict of *interest* policies, which pertain to whether the professor can do her job *well* in light of interests—say, significant stock ownership in a company one is researching—that may sit crosswise with scholarly inquiry. Conflict of interest policies are concerned with the integrity and thus *quality* of the work; conflict of commitment policies are concerned with the *quantity* of time put into it.

Duke University's conflict of commitment policy is straightforward, and involves little elaboration:

A conflict of commitment can be said to exist when a member of the University community has an outside relationship that requires a commitment of time or effort to non-University activities, such that an individual, either implicitly or directly, cannot meet her/his obligations to the University.<sup>22</sup>

The lack of detail in the Duke policy leaves much open to interpretation with regard to whether the professor is meeting her “obligations” to the university or not. Presumably, however, as long as such obligations are met, there is no strict time limit on “non-University” activities. The remainder of the policy discusses consulting and government activities as outside activities, suggesting that the policy concerns activity that is professional and remunerated as opposed to personal and non-remunerated. The total policy statement is only 125 words long.

Emory’s policy begins with the statement that faculty “owe their primary *professional* allegiance to the university” (italics added), suggesting again that the focus is on professional, not personal activity.<sup>23</sup> Most of the policy focuses on “teaching, research, or service at or on behalf of another institution,” again indicating that the concern is over professional activity. However, the fact that faculty must provide an “overview of all compensated and non-compensated activities” to their deans suggests a wider scope of activity. Importantly, activities considered “outside” the university must be reported to the relevant dean *prior to* that activity, giving the dean the juridical right to override the professor’s desire to participate in the activity even before it commences.<sup>24</sup> The policy statement is 926 words long.

If Emory’s policy leaves questions of scope ambiguous, Notre Dame’s does not. At 2,059 words, it is over twice as long as Emory’s and sixteen times longer than Duke’s. As such, it is far more specific than the other two, and provides a more detailed look at the implications of this genre of policy. Though the preamble to the policy states that the university respects faculty time with family and other “outside” activities, and indicates a desire for “dialogue,” the policy itself severely delimits outside time and grants administrators plenary power to prohibit any activity that is not activity for the university. Notre Dame’s policy requires that all faculty report to their department chair or dean any activity of one day a month, whether paid or unpaid, that is not directly in service to the university. Faculty must report any activity of five days or more to the provost. This includes weekends. The document is quite broad with regard to the disallowed activities, which involve all, “Activities not normally defined as a faculty member’s responsibilities to the University. For example, such activities may include paid or unpaid arrangements as an advisor, advocate, arbitrator, consultant, counselor, expert witness, board member, principal or co-principal investigator, or any other arrangement whereby a faculty member agrees to use his or her professional or other capabilities to further the interests or agenda of an outside activity or organization.”<sup>25</sup> Paid or unpaid. Professional or other capabilities. *Any* other arrangement. With regard to the “other capabilities” that are to be monitored by the university, one of the members of the policy-generating body gave me the example of someone involved in her parish council.<sup>26</sup> In short, the university is functionally asserting jurisdiction over the entire scope of the faculty member’s life. The policy gives the administrator the juridical prerogative to forbid non-university activity, with threat of “severe sanctions”—including dismissal from employment—if the professor continues in the activity.<sup>27</sup>

The detailed nature of Notre Dame’s policy allows us to quantify, and so not leave ambiguous, the extent of the university’s presumed scope of jurisdiction. Again, the policy requires reporting of outside activity of one to five days per month to the department chair or dean and of five or more days per month

to the provost. Assuming at present an eight-hour workday, this means that the employee must report eight hours of outside activity to the chair or dean. The quantitative implications are easy to determine. There are 720 hours in a 30-day month. If we figure 8 hours per day for sleep and four hours for other activities such as personal hygiene and the preparation and eating of meals, this leaves 360 hours per thirty days. Given that the faculty member must report any activity of 8 hours or more, the university therefore lays claim to 352 hours per month of the employee's time, or 11 hours and 44 minutes per day with no days not under university jurisdiction. Even if we take as the sample case that which lies at the boundary between accountability to the dean and accountability to the provost—5 days or 40 hours per month—this still calculates out to the university claiming 320 hours per month, that is, 10 hours and 40 minutes per day of the employee's time with no days not under university jurisdiction.

Such demands contrast sharply with the widely accepted view that that an employer may justly claim only 48 hours of regular time and request, but not demand, 12 hours of overtime per week, for a total of 60 hours of employer-claimed time per week. In the widely accepted view, the amount of time that an employer can claim from a worker per month is 208 hours (four weeks plus two days). This is the measure that the University itself signed onto when it became a member of the Workers' Rights Consortium, an organization that monitors conditions in which licensees produce university goods.<sup>28</sup> Any claim to more than 48 hours of an employee's time formally constitutes—according to the university's own standards when applied elsewhere—a “sweatshop” condition. We can debate whether we want to call the present situation for professors at Notre Dame a sweatshop condition—there is a literature on “white collar sweatshops,”<sup>29</sup> yet there are vast differences between the situation at hand and the conditions of factory workers in developing countries—but it remains that the 208-hour threshold for justifiable claims on time by an employer is far below the numbers (320 to 360 hours) claimed, under threat of “severe sanction,” by the university. The conflict of commitment policy indicates that the university lays claim to between 74 hours, 40 minutes and 82 hours, 8 minutes per week of a faculty member's time. Such a claim is itself in conflict with Catholic social teaching's longstanding position against excessive demands on employees' time on the part of employers.<sup>30</sup> One of the ironies of the policy is that it states that one of the activities that can trigger a “severe sanction” is the “continual significant disregard for the Catholic character of the University,” a disregard that the policy itself, despite the intentions of its authors, appears to embody.

Even more deeply, the problem with the university's policy is not simply that of the number of hours it requires from its faculty. If we move to a qualitative and not merely quantitative standpoint, we see that the “conflict of commitment” policy begins at the opposite end of the question than is the norm in calculating work hours: most determinations of the work week begin with the idea that the worker's time is *hers* to sell; but the policy begins with the idea that *all* of the faculty member's time is under the *university's* purview and that it is the *university's* prerogative to determine how much the professor can keep for herself.

It might be objected that while the policy claims a certain amount of the professor's *time* for the university, it does not formally require the faculty to be *working* all of this time; it just rules out working—or any other activity—for an entity other than the university. However, the ratcheting up of production demands on the part of universities that serves as the precursor to such policies indicates that the policies do not

constitute a call for increased faculty leisure time. On the contrary, a more probable interpretation comes to light when we consider these policies against the background of the disciplining—in the Foucaultian sense of governing persons’ bodies—of the lives of junior professors.<sup>31</sup> Up to tenure, academic life—acceptance into a prestigious program, passage of exams, completion of the dissertation, the offer of a tenure-track position, promotion, and ultimately tenure itself—takes place within an all-or-nothing structure: fail at any one of these points and one is often, perhaps usually, shut out of academia altogether, or at best is cast into the academic version of limbo, adjunct status. This structure reduces all of the junior scholar’s activity, professional and personal, to a zero-sum game: *any* activity that is not activity *towards* tenure is activity *against* tenure; it is time that could and (according to the institutionally structured ethos) should be spent on behalf of the university. There is no need for a conflict of commitment policy for junior professors; it is already built into the tenure system itself. The dynamic changes after tenure, and many associate professors use their newfound status in part to seek better life balance.<sup>32</sup> Against this backdrop, the conflict of commitment policy functions to re-institute the pre-tenure discipline for post-tenure faculty: the policies (Notre Dame’s in particular) re-describe virtually all activity that is not *for* the university as sufficiently *against* the university to merit the threat of “severe sanctions.” More broadly, the policy, with its threat of the severe sanction of removal from employment, functions to override the medieval apprenticeship model of tenure and replace it with a modern industrial time-card structure that maximizes production time on behalf of the employer, with the significant twist noted before that the conflict of commitment policy begins with the assumption that the employer, not the employee entering into the contract, has jurisdiction over virtually all of the employee’s time.

The question, then, is that of how the call to follow Jesus Christ to meet the poor and the wicked face-to-face and proclaim God’s love for them in word and action—a calling that demands significant time and energy—fits with employment at a university that claims all of the professor’s time as its own and only then gives back a few hours here and there for “personal” use. One reply might be that there is already room for such discipleship in the academic context as presently structured. It can be argued that the writing and teaching required for advancement provide sufficient space. I take up these arguments in the next section.

### **REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS**

One anticipated objection is that academic writing, especially that on important social issues, is adequate in and of itself and, through some unarticulated social process, the poor will benefit. What this objection misses is that academic writing, even more so now than, say, fifty years ago, is set within institutional structures that obstruct any outside impact. That this is the case came forward in a debate that ensued when *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote that academics write in a “culture of exclusivity” that “glorifies arcane unintelligibility while disdain[ing] impact and audience.”<sup>33</sup> A wide range of academics replied swiftly and forcefully. They argued that they were indeed involved in wider public debates, much of it taking place in the blogosphere and social media, about such issues as the gap between rich and poor. What those critics of Kristof glossed over, however, is the question of whether such writing is counted

as professional production by their home institutions. At Notre Dame, keeping a public blog, no matter how academic its reasoning may be, is not an academic activity and therefore must be reported to one's chair, dean, or even provost as per the conflict of commitment policy.

The most thoughtful response to Kristof came from Joshua Rothman of *The New Yorker*, who was once an academic. Rothman writes that the academic system discourages writing for anyone beyond a small circle of other academics, and his response—in keeping with the trend of narrowing what counts as academic writing—makes the distinction between a professor's academic writing and other writing that she may do on her own time.

The system that produces and consumes academic knowledge is changing, and, in the process, making academic work more marginal . . . All the forces are pushing things the other way, toward insularity. As in journalism, good jobs are scarce—but, unlike in journalism, professors are their own audience. This means that, since the liberal-arts job market peaked, in the mid-seventies, the audience for academic work has been shrinking. Increasingly, to build a successful academic career you must serially impress very small groups of people (departmental colleagues, journal and book editors, tenure committees). Often, an academic writer is trying to fill a niche. Now, the niches are getting smaller. Academics may write for large audiences on their blogs or as journalists. But when it comes to their academic writing, and to the research that underpins it—to the main activities, in other words, of academic life—they have no choice but to aim for very small targets. Writing a first book, you may have in mind particular professors on a tenure committee; miss that mark and you may not have a job. Academics know which audiences—and, sometimes, which audience members—matter.<sup>34</sup>

Especially now, if not before, the argument that theory-weighted scholarly books and articles will eventually have an impact, however indirect, on the lives of the poor and the wicked amount to an invisible hand trickle-down theory of academic capital, with about the same impact as its namesake theory in the field of economic capital.

Another objection that might be raised is that teaching can be and often is a form of discipleship. Stated this generally, there is no difficulty with this claim. There *are* colleges and universities that emphasize and—this is important—reward good teaching. More, there are colleges and universities that take it as a central part of their mission to admit and teach students from the lower end of the economic spectrum. Neither is the case, however, with most R1 universities. They may *award*, but they do not *reward* exceptional (as distinct from passable) teaching.

It is also not the case that teaching people from the lower economic strata is functionally a significant part of the mission of the R1 schools we have been addressing. As indicated above, the median income of the families of the undergraduate students at Notre Dame, Emory, and Duke is \$192,000/\$139,800/\$186,700 a year, according to a 2017 study on the role of colleges and universities in intergenerational economic

mobility.<sup>35</sup> Notre Dame and Duke are two of 38 colleges and universities—13<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> overall—that have a greater proportion of admitted students in the economic top 1% (15.4% in Notre Dame’s case and 19.2% with Duke) than in the bottom 60% (10% Notre Dame and 16.5% Duke). Only Emory reverses this pattern, with 14.9% from the top 1% and 27.7% from the bottom 60%. In terms of admitting and enrolling students in the bottom economic quintile, Notre Dame, Emory, and Duke rank 2,383<sup>rd</sup>, 1,805<sup>th</sup>, and 2,140<sup>th</sup> of 2,395 schools measured. Therefore also, when the focus is on the number and percentage of students who move from the economic bottom 40% to the top 40% as a result of going to a school, the three schools come in 2,190<sup>th</sup>, 1,785<sup>th</sup>, and 2,080<sup>th</sup>.<sup>36</sup> If discipleship involves going out to the poor in word and practical action, then the admissions policies of Notre Dame and Duke—and to a somewhat lesser extent, Emory—make it difficult for faculty to carry out their calling. Teaching students from well-off backgrounds can be a *part* of discipleship—Jesus’ own words are sharp, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry” (Lk 6:24–25)—but the One we are to follow makes clear that the primary focus of His ministry is to the poor and those socially marginalized under the rubric of the wicked. For discipleship, then, the primary focus of time and energy must be with these persons. I have tried to move my own activities in this direction, and I narrate these efforts in the following last section.

### ***NARROW IS THE WAY: A PILGRIM’S PROGRESS?***

My own efforts at discipleship in the R1 context are riddled with trial and error, but perhaps because of that they can serve as a kind of fractured object lesson. After fifteen years of teaching and writing on war, peace, and human rights, in 2005 I decided that I could no longer ply the trade with any integrity unless I placed myself in a warzone where there are significant human rights violations. I went and lived in Internally Displaced Persons camps in northern Uganda during and immediately after the Lord’s Resistance Army conflict. I did this in part for epistemological reasons: most Christian ethicists in the United States adhere to some form of the sociology of knowledge, the idea that where we are socially located shapes what we know, and yet virtually no such ethicists writing on war ever go live in conflict zones. We needed, it seemed to me, to follow through methodologically what our epistemologies told us about the world and our knowledge of it. My reasoning was also theological: Jesus Christ went out to meet the poor and marginalized where they are, and if we are to take on the designation “Christian,” then so should we. I wrote about this effort in terms of “crossing the road,” like the Good Samaritan.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the Good Samaritan, however, I was not doing anything practical on behalf of the people I met. This was a mistake. To be sure, the people in the camps often told me that my presence there as a Western white person gave them hope that they had not been entirely forgotten by the “world” in what was, “the world’s most forgotten humanitarian crisis.”<sup>38</sup> Still, others made clear to me that this was not enough. One man put it to me bluntly about my research, “What are you going to do for us? You come and steal our knowledge. You steal our culture. You come and talk to us about our knowledge and our culture and then take it all back with you. And we have nothing left. Look at us. You see how we live. What are you going to do for us?” He was telling me that unless it is converted into something that they themselves can use,

academic research on the poor is simply another instance of colonial extraction, no less so than mining for minerals for its being the culture that one collects and takes away. Without shaping our research in a way that directly serves the subjects of that research, scholarship conducted in such settings is mere plunder, another “scramble for Africa.” He was right.

I asked him and others in return, “What do you need?” A frequent answer: “We need oxen.” The war had reduced livestock ownership to 2% of what it was before.<sup>39</sup> In 2008, I audited a course in non-profit management, trained as an ox drover, and co-founded PeaceHarvest, a (very) small non-profit organization that combined livestock provision with training in agriculture and peacebuilding. We did ten one- and two-week trainings. I formed the organization in light of Catholic social teaching—my main teaching and frequent writing subject—with its emphasis on positive peace as “right relationship with neighbor,” and Pope Paul VI’s observation and dictum, “Development is the new name for peace.”<sup>40</sup> I also consciously designed PeaceHarvest to apply and follow Catholic social teaching’s principle of subsidiarity—we used local practices as well as best practices drawn from other regions of the world; after the first two trainings, we used only local trainers. In other words, I took intellectual skills and insights that I learned through graduate school and eighteen years of university teaching, and combined them with listening-oriented fieldwork to convert my academic capital and co-create something that contributed to the wellbeing not just of humanity abstractly considered, but of specific people. The results were concrete and measurable: each two-week training brought five teams of oxen. Each team served five families. Each family, on average, has six people. So each two-week training helped 150 people feed themselves ( $5 \times 5 \times 6 = 150$ ). With five two-week trainings (the one-week trainings were follow-ups), we helped 750 people to feed themselves. Catholic Relief Services invited our Ugandan manager to present on how PeaceHarvest combines agricultural development with peacebuilding at a special in-service on the topic.

I knew that such activity does not receive any acknowledgment as academic productivity at Notre Dame, despite the university’s commercials about its service to the poor. Such commercials and the activities displayed in them promote the university, but not, given the narrow account of what constitutes scholarly activity, the professor within the university. The academic field does not recognize such activity as a form of currency. In the meantime, founding and directing PeaceHarvest slowed the completion of my book project by three to four years, which has delayed my becoming a full professor, with the bump of salary that that involves, by the same amount of time. I have made the calculation, and the total loss over the remainder of my career of being three to four years behind in salary each year runs into the six figures (and this leaves out the money I invested directly into PeaceHarvest). Using academic capital for other than academic purposes narrowly conceived has literal cost. I knew this going into the project.

But I made another mistake. I knew that PeaceHarvest would not count for my professional advancement, but I did not know that it would count against it. However, after I told administrators about the non-profit as part of a general reporting on my work in Uganda (this was before the formal conflict of commitment policy was articulated, so I did not know better in telling them), my salary was frozen—no cost of living increase—for seven years until my book was out. This was far from a “severe sanction” like tenure or job revocation, but the message was clear: in founding PeaceHarvest, I had, according to the university,

misappropriated what it felt was its time. I had to discontinue PeaceHarvest. Not long after, the university issued its conflict of commitment policy, formalizing an institutional ethos that was, as I found out, already in place in practice. The sanctioning in my case indicates that such policies are not mere window-dressing, but are meant to be applied. They are specifications of a particular practiced ethos. My mistake was that I was carrying out what I thought of as my discipleship alongside my research, something not permitted in a setting where virtually all activity outside of the university is forbidden. The way is indeed narrow (Mt 7:14). What I needed to do was to discern the shape of my discipleship first, and then build my research around that, and that is what I have done with my current research project among persons with opioid and methamphetamine addictions in northern Indiana.

What I have found in this present work is that there are distinct advantages to focusing locally as it pertains to Christian discipleship in an R1 university. Research among the marginalized in far-off locales has multiple complications that make it difficult to complete books on the timeline drawn up by the university, a timeline that is based more on the kind of research that requires little more than a library.<sup>41</sup> There is first of all the matter of simply getting to the field site. It took two days of red-eye flights and two days more of overland travel—mostly on pothole-riven and bumpy, unpaved roads—to get to my primary site of Lokung Internally Displaced Persons camp. In one roundtrip, then, eight days is taken in travel. The physical demands of the travel point to a second factor of such research generally—it is hard on the body. Even once on site, “rustic” accommodations—no running water, pit toilets that require deep squatting, small animals in one’s room—and motorcycle intra-site travel on corrugated dirt roads all add to the toll. Care of the body takes time. Care of the soul does too. Seeing and being with persons who have been mutilated by machetes and who then unfold their stories for you requires downtime, and sometimes more than a shot of whiskey. Secondary trauma is real. I returned from one trip with PTSD. Research in such locations also requires learning the local dialects of languages that cannot be found in any Rosetta Stone or university course. When I began fieldwork in northern Uganda and South Sudan, the only English-Acholi grammars and dictionaries were written by early twentieth century Comboni missionaries, and even these could not replace the required on-the-ground, sentence-by-broken-sentence learning of the local language. Much of my “research” time was spent with language tutors.

Another factor typically not taken into account by universities is that sabbaticals for an ethnographer working on the edges of war-torn developing countries are for research more than writing. We need big blocks of time—remember, it takes eight days just to get there and back—and going only in the summer misses all of the rest of the seasonal cycle in what are largely agrarian or itinerant pastoral economies. Finding the time to be in the field in a way that is adequate to the lives of the people living there is difficult. Sabbaticals provide that time. Ethnographers—or at least this ethnographer—write when they get back. The problem is that the university expects a written product upon return. The first thing this ethnographer does upon return is get to know his family again.

Then the writing begins, and it involves converting a loose array—sometimes coherent, sometimes not—of observations, “thick descriptions,”<sup>42</sup> and semi-structured interviews into a narrative with a more or less clear trajectory. Unlike in quantitative social science, the evidence does not come back in the (somewhat)

neat categories that the researcher sets out in advance. And unlike in library-based research, there is no clear point at which one has “read” all of the relevant sources and can proceed on to writing. Much of the surprise is in the writing itself. I have written in both library-based and field-based forms. With the former, virtually all of the thinking takes place before the writing; I know what I am going to say. Not so with the latter, and the result is many more drafts than would otherwise be the case. In the meantime, the expectation of production continues as before.

Going local helps ameliorate some, but not all, of these factors. I chose working with persons with opioid and methamphetamine addictions because they are—at least in the gaze that is from Notre Dame—the marginalized of the marginalized in northern Indiana. I am what is called a Certified Addiction Peer Recovery Coach. The field of addiction recovery services began developing the option of the peer recovery coach after it realized that it had driven out peer-based recovery—that is, recovery built upon relationships with people who themselves are in recovery. Though it was not a conscious reason at first, I am sure that it was in play when I began this research that I battled active addiction myself 38–40 years ago. I am sure that had my recoverees been my age back then, we would have gotten high together.

I began by working in the Indiana state prison system, meeting with who I call “my guys,” because I cannot bring myself to call them “my patients” or “my clients,” while they were incarcerated and then continuing to work with them once they were released. I went through both Notre Dame’s and the Indiana Department of Correction’s IRBs so that I could do the research and thus the work. Word that I was doing the work quickly spread in the region, and I have both initiated and been called upon to develop recovery coaching in our hospital emergency rooms, which encounter people who are overdosing on a daily basis. I have written a successful six-figure grant proposal for training recovery coaches for the hospital emergency room. The hospital grant already permits me access to the data for research; now I just have to write it up for Notre Dame’s IRB to make it official academic research so that I do not get sanctioned for conflict of commitment like I did when I founded PeaceHarvest.

The work is still emotionally difficult. One woman started heroin when she was 13; she is hepatitis C positive because her parents shared their needles with her. One man’s father had him sniffing fentanyl—which is as much as 50 times more powerful than heroin—when he was 12 years old. He is now thirty, and last week when we were driving along in my car, he pointed out the window at a man filling up his car at a gas station: “That’s my dad’s heroin dealer.” The vast majority of the recoverees with whom I am working had childhood traumas resulting from things ranging from physical and sexual abuse to a parent being murdered. Those who had whatever might be called “normal” childhoods contribute trauma of their own. I meet with mental health professionals to track my own psychological wellbeing. There is always grief work to do.

Still, when the day is done, I see my family and sleep in my own bed. The farthest I have to travel to see one of my recoverees—I do home visits in part because many of them do not have their driver’s license or a car and in part because it allows our meetings to take place on their “turf”—is somewhat over an hour. The nearest recoveree is minutes down the street. With no four-day, thousands-of-miles buffer, the main difficulty now is in maintaining physical and psychological boundaries. None know where I live because

the first persons someone with an addiction often steals from is persons he knows and even loves. I have changed my Facebook name so that the recoverees I work with cannot readily track my personal life. Still, if I need a break from my work, I do not have to wait weeks for the opportunity.

Reduced travel, less toll on the body, perhaps less psychological stress, no foreign language to learn, less need to spend large amounts of time to acquire travel funds, sabbaticals than can be used for writing as well as fieldwork: perhaps following Christ in going out to the poor and wicked locally can combine with a rate and mode of publication that meets the requirements of an R1 university. There is still the difficulty of converting the messiness of life, particularly life on the margins, into a book with a narrative trajectory. And there are still certain requirements of self-care that are not in play with library-based research. But the practical reasoning I have performed in this article suggests that going local can increase the chances, whatever they might be, of a Christian also succeeding as an academic. It is a survival tactic made all but necessary for discipleship in the R1 university.

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#### NOTES

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1 George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

2 See, for instance, James Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

3 Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan E. Alleman, and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Grover, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017).

4 Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Jacobsen, *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

5 Mark U. Edwards Jr., “Why Faculty Find it Difficult to Talk About Religion,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 81-98.

6 R1 universities are, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, doctorate-granting universities with the “highest research activity.” See “The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,” at [http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification\\_descriptions/basic.php](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php).

7 For easily accessible data, see, “The Upshot: Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60 Percent. Find Yours,” *The New York Times* (January 18, 2017), at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=Trending&version=Full&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article>; and “The Upshot: Economic diversity and student outcomes at Notre Dame,” *The New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/notre-dame>.

8 All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version.

9 Todd Whitmore, “Crossing the Road: The Case for Ethnographic Fieldwork in Christian Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2007): 273–294.

10 R1 universities are, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, doctorate-granting universities with the “highest research activity.” See “The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,” [http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification\\_descriptions/basic.php](http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php).

11 For the corporatizing trend, see, for instance, Gaye Tuchman, *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); On “greedy institutions,” see Lewis A. Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1974); and Marianne Egger De Campo, “Contemporary Greedy Institutions: An Essay on Lewis Coser’s Concept in the Age of the ‘Hive Mind,’” *Sociologický Časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 49/6 (2013): 969-987.

12 “Mission Statement,” Duke University, <https://trustees.duke.edu/governing-documents/mission-statement>.

13 See, “Mission Statement,” Emory University, <http://emoryhistory.emory.edu/issues/character/mission.html>.

14 See “University of Notre Dame Mission Statement,” University of Notre Dame, <https://dulac.nd.edu/university-mission-and-vision/mission/>.

15 For a classic statement of the discipleship versus imitation thesis, see Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 56–78. For a critique of the Campenhausen interpretation, see Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 20–23.

16 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 13.

17 Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 81–82.

18 I use the term “the wicked” rather than “sinners” (both are used in the gospels) because of the tendency, following Paul, to water down what constitutes a sinner by proclaiming that we are all sinners. When Jesus refers to his coming not for the righteous, but sinners, he is highlighting that he is going out to a specific subset of people who have been singularly condemned and marginalized by the community, not the whole community.

19 See, for instance, John P. Meier, “The Bible as a Source for Theology,” in The Catholic Theological Society of America, *Proceedings of the Forty-Third Annual Convention* 43 (Louisville/Chicago: The Catholic Theological Society of America, 1988), 1–14.

20 For the argument that Jesus had missions to both the poor and the wicked, see Todd Whitmore, *Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology* (London/New York: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2019), 213–220.

21 Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London:

University of California Press, 1978).

22 “Chapter 5: Research-Organizational Structure for Sponsored Projects and Research Related Policies,” *Faculty Handbook 2019*, [https://provost.duke.edu/sites/all/files/FHB\\_Chap\\_5.pdf](https://provost.duke.edu/sites/all/files/FHB_Chap_5.pdf). The entirety of the rest of the policy simply provides some qualifications: “In addition, the distribution of a faculty member’s effort among, for example, research, teaching, committee responsibilities, and outside consulting or other activities may raise issues of conflict of commitment. Any faculty member planning to do research for the government under a stipulation that a specified fraction of her/his effort will be devoted to the research should check with the Office of Research Support or the Office of Research Administration regarding procedures to ensure demonstrable compliance with the indicated requirements.”

23 “Chapter 13: Conflict of Interest and Commitment,” Emory University, <https://provost.emory.edu/faculty/handbook/conflict-of-interest.html>.

24 Ibid.

25 “Conflict of Commitment Policy,” University of Notre Dame, December 2012, [https://policy.nd.edu/assets/185214/conflict\\_commitmentpolicy.pdf](https://policy.nd.edu/assets/185214/conflict_commitmentpolicy.pdf).

26 More, the policy defines academic activity narrowly: while “writing books and articles” constitutes activity that does not have to be reported, “holding office in a scholarly or professional organization” and “editing a learned journal” do constitute activity that must be reported. Professors, according to the policy, are above all and almost exclusively to be book-generators. See, Ibid.

27 Ibid. This part of the policy reads, “Whenever an activity is deemed to compromise a faculty member’s ability to carry out his or her University obligations, the faculty member’s chair or dean has the authority to intervene. . . . If a faculty member disagrees with his or her Department Chair’s or Dean’s determination regarding a compromising activity, the faculty member may appeal the decision in writing to a three-person peer review *ad hoc* ‘Conflict of Commitment Committee.’ This committee’s determination shall be final. The timing and management of the appeal process will be as articulated in the ‘severe sanctions’ appeal process.” For severe sanctions including dismissal from employment, see Section 3, Article 8 of the Notre Dame *Faculty Handbook*, at [https://facultyhandbook.nd.edu/assets/276034/academic\\_articles\\_effective\\_october\\_1\\_2017.pdf](https://facultyhandbook.nd.edu/assets/276034/academic_articles_effective_october_1_2017.pdf).

28 The university also signed onto the code of the Fair Labor Association, which allows overtime to be demanded, thus allowing a required 60-hour workweek. Even here, the numbers come to 260 hours a month (four 60-hour weeks plus two ten-hour days), still far below the 320–360 hours that the university policy demands.

29 Jill Ayanski Fraser, *White Collar Sweatshop: The Deterioration of Work and its Rewards in Corporate America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002).

30 The church’s teaching recognizes that humans are multi-dimensional beings who realize their dignity in a variety of social spheres—familial, religious, political, and cultural, as well as economic. When activity in the remunerative economic sphere overextends into the other spheres in its time requirements or ethos, this violates the dignity of the

human person. Thus *Rerum Novarum*, as one instance, warns that the employer “is bound to see that [the employee] has time for the duties of piety . . . and that he not be led away to neglect his home and family” (15). In addition, the employer must not interfere with each person’s obligation, in John XXIII’s words, to “contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled” (*Pacem in Terris*, 31). Yet another basis for limits on the time and energy that employees put into remunerative work is related more directly to the capacity of the worker: “The employer must never tax his work-people beyond their strength” (*Rerum Novarum*, 15).

31 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

32 See Robin Wilson, “Why Are Associate Professors So Unhappy?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3, 2012, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Are-Associate-Professors/132071>.

33 Nicholas Kristof, “Professors, We Need You!” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2014, [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html?_r=0).

34 Joshua Rothman, “Why is Academic Writing So Academic?” *The New Yorker*, February 20, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/why-is-academic-writing-so-academic>.

35 Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, Danial Yagan, “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility,” [http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll\\_mrc\\_paper.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll_mrc_paper.pdf).

36 For easily accessible data, see, “The Upshot: Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60 Percent. Find Yours,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/18/upshot/some-colleges-have-more-students-from-the-top-1-percent-than-the-bottom-60.html?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=Trending&version=Full&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article>; and “The Upshot: Economic diversity and student outcomes at Notre Dame,” *The New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/notre-dame>.

37 Todd Whitmore, “Crossing the Road,” 273–294.

38 There are several close versions of this quote from Jan Egeland, then UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, indicating that he said it several times in slightly different forms. See, for instance, Reliefweb, “War in northern Uganda world’s worst forgotten crisis: UN,” November 11, 2003, <http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/war-northern-uganda-worlds-worst-forgotten-crisis-un>; and “Northern Uganda “World’s Biggest Neglected Crisis,” *The Guardian*, October 22, 2004, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/22/2>.

39 See Kirsten Gelsdorf, Daniel Maxwell and Dyan Mazurana, *Livelihoods, Basic Services and Social Protection in Northern Uganda and Karamoja*, Feinstein International Center, Working Paper 4 (August 2012).

40 National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1983), pars. 27 and 32–33; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 76 and 87.

41 Quantitative research in sociology or political science typically involves a flock of research assistants to undertake the surveys and sometimes do some of the writing; ethnography is most often a solo venture.

42 On “thick description,” see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–32.