

# **The Clear and the Thick:** *Teaching & Learning as an Act of Faith*

**Scott H. Hawley, Ph.D.**  
**New Faculty Orientation, Belmont University**  
**Aug 9, 2019**

*Sponsored by a grant given by Bridging the Two Cultures of Science and the Humanities II, a project run by Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford, the UK subsidiary of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, with funding by Templeton Religion Trust and The Blankemeyer Foundation.*

# Intro

**Me:** Theoretical physicist / songwriter, hired to teach acoustics & electronics to audio engineering technology (AET) majors:

- Service courses: applied, developing skills for practical AET
- No questions of origins, 'our place in the universe', no real 'deep questions'
- Not a lot of opportunities for 'awe of nature', science-as-worship, etc.
- No discussions on opinion / philosophy / ethics, etc.

**Typical orientation:** "I'll try to conduct myself as a Christian teacher"

- Care for students
- Diligence, integrity

**Two additional orientations,** re. the content & course...

# Thick and Clear

“We may [reverently] divide religions, as we do soups, into ‘thick’ and ‘clear’. By Thick I mean those which have orgies and ecstasies and mysteries and local attachments: Africa is full of Thick religions. By Clear I mean those which are philosophical, ethical and universalizing: Stoicism, Buddhism, and the Ethical Church are Clear religions. Now if there is a true religion it must be both Thick and Clear: for the true God must have made both the child and the man, both the savage and the citizen, both the head and the belly.”

– C.S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God on the Dock*

# Clear & Thick in Education

## The Clear:

- logical consistency
- compelling philosophical positions
- inspiring a vibrant world of ideas, (Platonism? / Aristotelianism?)

## The Thick:

- real-life experience
- embodiment
- Blood (sacrifice)

# The Clear

e.g., Theoretical Physics

Emphasis is on ideals, abstraction, both concepts & math, reductionism, idealization

*The factual course content itself*

Skill acquisition

Preparing for standards (e.g. GREs, MCATs)

*This is where I (have) live(d)*

# The Thick

e.g., Experimental Physics -- “stuff breaks”

‘Real Life’,

Teachers & students are...

- *embodied, social, living & working in historical and social contexts*
- *are limited, fallible, emotional, who ‘struggle with questions’*

***Interdisciplinary***; Involves *narrative*

Students appreciate...

- going “off topic”, beyond content-specific focus
- biographical info about teachers; **“Lead with your weakness”** - Pastor Jeff Dollar

# The Thick p. 2

Studies of teaching effectiveness show:

Didactic lectures ('the clean') are inferior to

- Letting/helping students find the answers themselves
- Asking students what they think before revealing an answer (e.g. 'clickers')

# Our Model: Jesus

Was able to debate with theorists, but was sensitive to the struggles of the inquisitive, got involved corporally, emotionally, holistically

*“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”*

(I find this *easy* at the start of the semester, and very hard by the end)

**Encouragement:** He is compassionate & sensitive to *your* growth as a compassionate & sensitive teacher.

# Plug: Darwin Play, Saturday Oct. 26

[Non-preachy, non-cheezy] Play about the life of Charles Darwin, his struggles with science & religion, his family

By acclaimed playwright Murray Watts

National tour of U.S. colleges, coming to Belmont Oct 26

Discussion & class visits by theologian & actor

