

CCCU Disciplinary Faculty Development Workshop Math / Computer Science

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Project Description

Introduction

As a new faculty member teaching computer science, I have discovered the need for articulating a comprehensive view on how my faith influences my discipline. How does one teach computer science from a Christian perspective? Can one's faith be integrated into the technical subject matter without being artificial? How does our faith address issues in computer science?

In *Principles of Sacred Theology*, Abraham Kuyper wrote about the difference between believers and non-believers and how belief transforms society:

“...but one is inwardly different from the other, and consequently feels a different content rising from his consciousness; thus they face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses. And the fact that there are two kinds of people occasions of necessity the fact of two kinds of human life and consciousness of life, and of two kinds of science...”

But does the Christian faith result in a “new kind” of computer science? If it is not a “new kind” of computer science, in what ways is it different? Does our faith really affect our study of computing?

Suppose two programmers set out to write a computer program, one a Christian, and one an atheist. Both use the same programming language, the same compiler, the same operating system, and both apply the same software engineering techniques. Can the end user discern the religious convictions of the programmer? If not, what difference does our faith make in our work and our discipline?

One thing is clear: Our aim is not to be different for the sake of being different; any differences that arise should be as a *consequence* of our beliefs. This naturally leads to the question of whether there are any differences that should arise in our studies and in our teaching as a consequence of our beliefs.

The consequences of faith are more evident when teaching an “Issues in Computer Science” course. Here, the consequence of one’s faith often leads to differences regarding issues such as:

- Intellectual property
- Privacy
- Professional ethics
- System safety and reliability
- Computers and community
- Video games and addiction
- Filtering and censorship

Unfortunately, this can still be a difficult task since the Bible does not specifically address all the issues that arise from modern technology. In these cases, we must rely on applying Biblical principles to these new situations. These questions are an important part of the computer science curriculum.

Nevertheless, the discussion of such issues comprises only a portion of the total training of a computer scientist. *How is the teaching (and study) of Computer Science in a Christian College different from a secular college?* What consequences does our faith have on the training of a computer scientist without artificially “spiritualising” the discipline?

Preliminary References

J.E. Hull, “Aiming for Christian Education, Settling for Christians Educating: The Christian School’s Replication of a Public School Paradigm”, *Christian Scholar’s Review*, Volume 32, Number 2, winter 2003.

N. Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, Eerdmans, 1976.