

What's Faith Got to Do With it? A Response to Philip L. Tite, *Teaching with Faith Crisis*

Henry W. Spaulding II, Ph.D.

Dean, School of Arts and Sciences

Director, Graduate Program in Religion

Professor, Theology and Philosophy

Trevecca Nazarene University

Philip Tite raises a bold and useful question: What's faith got to do with it? This is a question that people involved in Christian education too often assume is too obvious to ask. It is also a question that people in secular universities assume is irrelevant. Therefore, Tite challenges the professor in a Christian context and in a secular context to re-examine the importance of faith crises. This is a question worth considering whatever our context.

Tite puts it very clearly, "I would suggest that our discourse emerges within a reductive framework". He goes on to suggest that this reduction "is not ontological reduction but rather a type of methodological reduction". He rightly suggests that the methodological claim to delimitation allows the normative claims of knowledge to be considered. Tite adds to this "Such a delimitation of knowledge to knowable knowledge construction is what is meant by methodological reduction". While this method is most appropriate to scholarly concerns, it is most useful for "fostering critical thinking". What Tite seems to see very clearly is that all education arises from intellectual and perhaps, religious conviction. Whether one calls this bias or even prejudice it seems clear that all education arises in the context of a set of presuppositions/convictions. It is important to state these and submit them for consideration and possible re-consideration. It is because of this that hiding them can amount to intellectual hypocrisy. This is the place from which Tite begins his essay and it is an appropriate place.

The next section of the essay attempts to connect cognitive development with faith crisis. Tite indicates that as one teaches it is highly important to be sensitive to the faith development of students. Since these crises will inevitably occur it is important to face these situations as genuine opportunities for learning. Toward this end Tite recommends a collaborative model of education. He feels that it is just this kind of environment that will open the door to faith development. According to Tite, "For those students who decide that developing critical-analytical skills is important, we as instructors should be actively involved in helping them to move through this process, to encourage them to engage those moments, to take them seriously as opportunities of profound growth and moments of luminal discovery". Here Tite puts the issue in the clearest possible light. First, education in whatever context takes place within the cognitive field of person who are in transition. All education takes place in time and as such it "happens" in a momentary process. While it is not possible to separate moment and process, it is important understand the difference. Lifting the crisis/moment above the process will lead to a misunderstanding the larger context of education or anything else for that matter. It is clear that students, especially those between the ages of 18 and 22, are in a significant time of transition. There will be moments of profound insight, frustration, and growth. These moments need to be cherished, but not sought. They need to be affirmed, but not lifted to a point of self-justifying truth. It appears to me that it is the horizon that makes the crisis important. A single emphasis upon the moment can lead a student to miss the opportunity to understand. This seems to be the point of education.

A second issue that Tite raises is one that all professors need to hear loud and clear. Namely, faith represents the delicate connection between God, person, and world. It always happens in a particular place and for good or ill it colors the way everything else is understood. Charging into this reality with no respect for the sensibilities of the student can have extremely negative consequences. Tite rightly sees this and calls all involved in education to recognize the importance of faith implications for education. At some point in the future Tite would do well to consider this insight in a more nuanced way. For example, where is the precise line between respect for a student's faith and the appropriate challenge? After all as one's faith matures, so one's life and understanding will rise to meet the horizons of a faith seeking understanding.

What's faith got to do with it? Tite's answer is both clear and compelling – everything. He right is to suggest that faith is not a marginal question, rather it goes to the heart of the matter. Whether in a secular or a non-secular environment the faith crisis will inform all quality education. Of course the deeper insight might just be that there is no such thing as a truly secular space. In fact,

secular space is the bad idea of modernity. It is one that makes Tite's concern real. It is the very attempt to erase spirituality, theology, and God from the "public square" that makes some nervous when faith crises occur. This means that faith is the question, whether as crisis or the normal way in which reality presents itself.

What's Faith Got to Do With it?
A Response to Philip L. Tite,
Teaching with Faith Crisis
By Henry W. Spaulding II, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Arts and Sciences
Director, Graduate Program in Religion
Professor, Theology and Philosophy
Trevecca Nazarene University