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Guest Editorial: Teaching Spiritual Engineering

Dominic M. Halsmer
Oral Roberts University

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Teaching Spiritual Engineering

by Dominic M. Halsmer, Ph.D.

Being an engineering professor, perhaps I'm biased, but recently I've been profoundly impacted by findings from modern science that suggest God's preeminent roles as engineer and educator. The 20th century began with Albert Einstein's discovery of a beginning for the universe (Theories of Relativity along with confirming observational data) and ended with an abundance of evidence for the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life. Surely all generations think that they have made great progress compared to their ancestors, but those living and learning at the start of the 21st century have seen a huge increase in our understanding of the nature of the universe. This remarkable productivity of science and engineering is largely taken for granted. But Einstein (2002) recognized that this fruitfulness need not be the case when he said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible."

Not only do we see overwhelming evidence that the cosmos was engineered and deployed specifically to nurture human life, but we also discover features of our world that appear to give us especially good opportunities to learn about our privileged place in the universe. It seems as though God is trying to teach us something very important, without being heavy-handed about it. He still remains hidden to a large extent, and yet He instills wonder and awe through the magnificent beauty and functionality of His creation. What do we learn from such a marvelous masterpiece of engineering?

We learn that extraordinary provision has been established on our behalf. Somebody really cares about us, somebody with tremendous skill, wisdom, and resources. But the human condition teaches us of our need for a remedy that will allow us to be the kind of people we desire to be. The exquisite engineering prevalent throughout nature should instill confidence that the Creator is quite capable of perfecting what was started with the "big bang." We're in good hands with the Almighty Engineer if we are willing to submit to His designs. We learn that God loves us, or as my Dad used to say, "He has *designs* on us."

The challenge for educators at Christian institutions is to pass this kind of information along to students in such a way that they become inspired and motivated to learn more. I would argue that this is exactly the kind of information that is not only good for skeptics to hear but also good for believers to ponder. Our devotion to God will be strengthened as we continually attend to the evidence of God's faithfulness. His faithfulness is certainly expressed in supernatural deeds and the redemption of our souls, but it is also exquisitely expressed in his glorious provision for us revealed in the natural world.

Christian students of science and engineering see the creation as God's marvelous handiwork. The study of these subjects from a Christian worldview produces excitement and hope for the future as we anticipate the additional wonders God has in store for us. If our graduates leave campus filled with such hope, then they will stand out as an attractive light in this darkening world. As a result, people without hope will be drawn to them to ask them the reason for their hope. Of course, this is all part of God's plan; hence, the Scriptural exhortation for believers to be ready to answer such questions.

Among scientists and engineers, these discussions should highlight the findings of natural theology, which is currently experiencing resurgence in light of modern science. Our engineering graduates are taught that stewardship involves not just resources, but also knowledge and information. In this sense, being a good steward of knowledge means being ready to give a gentle and respectful answer to sincere seekers. In this way, the general revelation of God's faithfulness in the natural realm may open the door to considering God's special revelation in the person and work of Jesus.

It is good for students to practice such interactions with skeptics, but sometimes genuine skeptics are hard to come by on a Christian campus. In the [Engineering and Physics Department](#) at [Oral Roberts University](#), we are investigating various ways that such interactions could take place. Last semester, students and faculty were invited to make science related presentations at a local public high school. We took advantage of this opportunity to present evidence from science that the world had been engineered for a purpose. After the presentation, we allowed time for students to ask questions regarding this purpose, and we did our best to provide honest answers.

Recently, we are trying out a new approach involving the Internet. Students have created personal blogging sites that invite skeptics to dialogue on the question of whether or not science "confirms" God. We're just getting started on this project, so I don't have any results to report yet, but I'm confident that God will not only use this dialogue to better equip our students to be effective apologists, but also to reach skeptics with the truth of the Gospel. I challenge other Christian educators to consider how they might transfer to students their excitement about what God is doing in their fields. God has intentionally spread His glory across all fields of study, and we would do well to regularly and creatively bring this to the attention of our students.

Dr. Dominic M. Halsmer is the Dean of the School of Science and Engineering at Oral Roberts University. He has been teaching engineering courses there for 15 years and is a registered professional engineer in the state of Oklahoma. He received B.S. and M.S. degrees in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from Purdue University in 1985 and 1986, and a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from UCLA in 1992. His current research interests involve contributions from the field of engineering to the current science/theology discussions and the preparation of scientists and engineers for missions work within technical communities. He may be reached at dhalsmer@oru.edu.
