



August 26, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"How do you justify your existence? I mean, what do you mean by advertising yourselves as Christians AND Statisticians? What does being a Christian add to your being a statistician?" This was the leading question of a 40 min. conversation with a Danish statistician named Kietel at our CSIDG table at JSM. My thanks to Dan Fitzsimmons for putting together the backdrop that drew Kietel and others like him. Last year, Dan solicited names of math and stat-oriented Christian Scientists from history to display. He put the name, dates, and images of 39 of them on photo-cloth and stitched them to a cloth hung on the backboard to our table. To help frame the display, the words, "Some Who Inspire Us to Excel in Both Science and Faith" was displayed at upper left. The thinking is that there is a diverse array of Christians in history, Catholic and Protestant, with various theological differences. We used only those who appeared to have a true Christian faith, as opposed to mere cultural acquaintance. Ron Wasserstein, a devout Protestant, gladly provided the image we used of him and gave an encouraging remark after JSM. Here's a link: [JSM 2014 Photo](#). Dan will be permanently attaching the images into a quilt this year, so if you have any feedback for him, please send it to <dan.k.fitzsimmons@boeing.com>.

Perhaps the most-eye catching backdrops of all any table, it generated more and varied conversation than past years. In my 2.5 hours at the table there was hardly a free minute, and the few others I talked to had a similar experience. Perhaps more importantly, it seemed to draw more skeptics -- like Kietel -- who were not convinced that God exists, let alone sent His Son Jesus. After answering his question from several angles, we moved on to other topics and I saw that, although he attended church three times a year growing up, he didn't seem to have personal acquaintance with the gospel and I was able to share it with him in a relevant way, in the context of our conversation.

In responding to Kietel's question, I found that the most helpful thing turned out to be opening up the CSIDG brochure and reviewing the four purposes of CSIDG, which really do capture what we're about:

1. To promote interaction and fellowship among Christian statisticians.
2. To articulate the relevance of the Christian faith and world view within the statistical community.
3. To encourage Christian statisticians to become more articulate in sharing godly principles and a Christ-centered lifestyle.
4. To encourage Christians in Statistics to explore the relationship of their faith to their discipline.

If the second purpose was fulfilled at the table, the other three were fulfilled in the meeting on Monday night. We had 23 present, a mixture of new and old friends. To open, we took about 30 min. going around the room, with each person sharing a recent statistics-related "God-story", something they saw

God do recently within the purview of their statistical life. It was rich. After that I publicly thanked some of our members for service:

- Andrew Hartley, Aric LaBarr, Alexia Makris: New website, off of the main ASA website (coming soon, see Aric's new logo at top)
- Andrew Hartley: CSIDG list-serve administrator
- Dan Fitzsimmons: Scientists of Faith backdrop
- David Bristol and Sam Whitlock for buying and transporting the Bibles for the table (all of which were taken!)

There was a brief affirmation of Dan's work, with an envelope passed to reimburse his \$100 cost for materials. We collected \$123, the remainder of which went towards replacing some of Dan's display books on the table that disappeared. After that, we spent the remaining time discussing the topic, *Big Data in Christian Perspective: What's Good, What's Bad, and What Should We Do About it?* The springboard for discussion was the article *Big Data* by Kirby Anderson of Probe Ministries (the article has been taken down from their website as of this printing, but here is a link to handout: [Discussion Materials-2014](#)). Both the group and corporate discussion times were thoughtful and engaged. Insights included the need for humility in handling Big Data, an awareness of the dark sides of Big Data such as government surveillance and criminal use, and the importance of a biblical and moral foundation to undergird Big Data discussions in the academy. Afterwards, eleven of us went to the No Name Restaurant (seriously) on the Boston wharf, which was both beautiful and delicious, and enjoyed memorable conversations.

Looking forward to this year, we have not received any statistics-and-the-Christian-faith type of material for a newsletter. Given our website capabilities, we don't need a full newsletter to put something out. If anyone wants to submit a piece, I can find a volunteer to review it, at which point we could post it on the website in order to add new material to our collection. If anyone has any ideas in other areas, or would like to volunteer for anything, please let me know.

After my heart-to-heart conversations with unbelievers over out table, I am all the more thankful for your fellowship and your presence in our broader statistical community. It is my prayer that the LORD blesses you, and keeps you; that the LORD lifts makes His face shine on you and is gracious to you; that the LORD lifts up His countenance upon you and gives you...

Shalom,

Jason

Numbers 6:24-26

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