

The Shift: Why I Am Returning to the Academy

A new chapter for my writing, the TINS Framework™, and the future of this Substack

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My friends,

Tonight, I want to share a significant shift in my work, my ministry, and the future direction of this publication.

This Fall, I will begin PhD (Philosophy) studies at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, affiliated with the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

I am very grateful for this opportunity and deeply honored that my doctoral supervisor will be Dr. Neal DeRoo, whose work in phenomenology and the philosophy of religion has influenced scholars internationally. Under his guidance, I hope to strengthen the philosophical foundations of the TINS Framework™ and deepen its contribution to integrative negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution, and human decision-making.

Some may wonder why a former roster mediator for court mediation, ordained pastor, and author would return to the demands of doctoral research.

My answer is simple.

The challenges facing individuals today are not merely practical. They are intellectual, relational, spiritual, and philosophical. If we hope to serve people well, we must understand not only what people do, but how people experience, interpret, and make sense of the world.

For many years, whether in tense mediation rooms, pastoral counseling settings, churches, or everyday conversations, I have watched individuals make choices that damaged marital relationships, weakened families, fractured communities, and limited their own futures.

Most of these choices were not made because information was unavailable. Information has never been more abundant. The deeper problem is that information alone does not produce wisdom.

Human beings do not simply respond to facts. They respond to the meaning they perceive within those facts. That observation eventually led me to develop the TINS Framework™ (Theory-Grounded Integrative Negotiation Strategies). For details, you are welcome to visit my website at www.accessagree.com.

Following the completion of my LLM in Alternative Dispute Resolution at Osgoode Hall Law School in 2016, and through years of handling court-assigned mediation and ministry-related marriage and family mediation experiences, I became increasingly aware that people often respond not simply to facts, but to how those facts are perceived, interpreted, and understood. The TINS Framework™ emerged from that realization. At its core, the framework seeks to help people recognize how perception, interpretation, bias, blind spots, inherited assumptions, and limited perspectives shape decision-making.

Over time, however, I became increasingly convinced that the framework required a deeper philosophical foundation. I needed a way to understand more carefully the lived human experience that stands behind conflict, communication, relationships, and decision-making.

This search led me toward phenomenology—the study of human experience as it is lived, perceived, and interpreted.

That connection became especially meaningful to me on May 28, when I attended the launch of Dr. DeRoo's new book, *Material Spirituality*, at Knox College, University of Toronto. While I had been exploring phenomenology as a possible philosophical foundation for the TINS Framework™, that evening marked a turning point in my thinking.

For the first time, I could see more clearly how phenomenology might provide the intellectual scaffolding needed to deepen the framework's understanding of conflict, decision-making, and lived human experience.

One of the insights I take from DeRoo's work is that our deepest orientations are not detached ideas floating above everyday life. They shape how we perceive, interpret, and engage the world around us. Changes in orientation can profoundly affect how reality is experienced and understood.

For me, this insight confirms something I have observed for many years in both court and pastoral mediation: before people make decisions, they interpret experiences. Before conflicts escalate, they assign meaning. Before relationships heal, perceptions often need to change.

This doctoral journey therefore represents more than an academic pursuit. It marks a new phase in the development of the TINS Framework™ and in the purpose of this publication.

Going forward, this Substack will increasingly become a place where lived experience, mediation practice, philosophical reflection, integrative negotiation, and everyday decision-making meet. My goal is to explore how ideas from phenomenology, conflict resolution, integrative negotiation, mediation, and human experience can help us better understand ourselves, our relationships, and the decisions we make.

Together, we will examine personal life, marriage relationships, family relationships, workplace challenges, leadership, community life, corporate environments, and the many situations in which human beings struggle to understand themselves and one another.

My hope is that these conversations will help us move beyond quick opinions and surface-level solutions, toward deeper reflection, wiser decisions, stronger relationships, and a more thoughtful way of living.

Thank you for walking this road with me.

A new chapter begins tonight.