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The Integration of Faith, Learning and Life

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Integration of Faith, Learning and Life

This paper will deal with the concept of Biblical integration. Biblical integration can be compared to painting a beautiful picture that uses exquisite colors of various oils. Individually, each color is attractive and alive, but integrated into a whole by the hand of the master artist, the colors cry out with the beauty of a coherent, unified image. So it is, that integrating the colors of faith, learning and life under the Master's hand has the potential for creating a stimulating and attractive picture that reflects the splendor of the great Master Artist. According to I Corinthians 10:31, it is, after all, the primary purpose of man's existence in the universe to glorify God. The purpose of this paper is to show how He can be magnified through the integration of faith, learning and life.

There are three specific goals of this paper. The first goal sets forth a Christian world view that covers four major areas: God, creation, man and epistemology. The second goal is to apply the concept of the integration of faith, learning and life to the discipline of education. The last section will reflect on how integration is demonstrated specifically in the Early Childhood Education Science Methods II course of study.

Christian Worldview

God

The beginning point for a Biblical worldview is the existence of God who is the center of all things. As stated in Deuteronomy 6:4, there is only one God. Scripture does, however, indicate that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead: God, the Father (John 6:27), and God, the Son (John 1:1). The third person is God, the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). The term "trinity" refers to these three and was first used by Tertullian to describe this one of a kind phenomenon. Charles C. Ryrie (1999) refers to it as "a mystery" (p. 63).

God's attributes are multiple and include the following: He exists eternally. He was not created and He existed before man. He is independent and needs no one. He is holy, unchanging, all powerful, all knowing, and present everywhere. He has no limits. He is love, is

righteous, and is sovereign. He is not a compound being. He is truth and unified.

Robert B. Fisher (1994) states:

“The biblical concept of God is not at all that of a God-of-the-gaps useful only to fill in whatever blanks may exist in human scientific knowledge at a particular point in time. Rather, the God of the Bible is sovereign, and nothing is exempt from his sovereignty....” (p.191).

Creation

Fisher (1994) cites John M. Templeton and Robert L. Herrmann. They state that God is The “... Creator and Supreme Ruler of nature, one who had not only brought the cosmos into being, but governed it by laws that reflected his faithfulness and consistency” (p. 190). All that is in the universe, except for God Himself, is God’s creation. Therefore, “The starting point for a Biblical worldview is the existence of a God who is personal and moral; and the creator of all else that exists” (Anderson, 1999). Anderson (1999) further notes that “an on-going perspective for a biblical world-view, however, can be found in this: that God’s interest in his creation – which includes nature, society and persons – is of a basically relational kind” (p. 38). God’s concern is for all that He created. His concern includes bringing man into a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The universe was created “ex nihilo”, out of no pre-existing materials. It was created in six, twenty-four hour days and, as written in Genesis 1:1-31, was spoken into existence by the very word of God.

Angels, with their various orders, are also His creation. They exist in large numbers (Hebrews 12:23) and have various rankings (Jude 9). Angels worship and praise God (Psalm 148:1-2). They were involved in Christ’s ministry (Matthew 1:20), and they protect Israel (Daniel 12:1). Angels are also instruments of judgment (Acts 12:23) and minister to believers (Hebrews 1:14).

Satan is one of God’s created angel beings. Sin was found in Him (Ezekiel 28:15). His sin affected other angels and, in fact, affects all people (Ephesians 2:2). Ryrie (1994) says, “...it positioned him as ruler of this world, which he uses to promote his Kingdom and to counterfeit

God" (p. 165). Satan is not alone in his efforts at evil. He has an enormous host of demons who are also fallen angels. Satan attempts to use these demons to promote his purposes and thwart God's plan.

Man

Man is a special creation of God. He was made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Man reflects God in that he is living, intelligent, and sensible. He has the ability to function socially and is able to make moral decisions. He is creative, analytical and capable of communicating. Genesis 3 accurately describes the fall of man, who before the fall, was in fellowship with God. He was morally pure, and free to make choices (Genesis 2:19-23). He was free to exercise dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28) and able to enjoy the fruits of that dominion (Genesis 2:16-17). Man was faced with a question of obedience to God. Satan, as tempter, appealed to man and presented the idea that God's restrictions were unfavorable and eating of the fruit would indeed make Adam and Eve like God (Genesis 3:6-7). The consequences of this sin were severe. Sin produced guilt (Genesis 3:7), pain for the woman in childbirth (Genesis 3:16), woman's desire would be toward her husband, a curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17-24), death, expulsion, and separation from God.

Adam's inherited sin affected the human race in its entirety. Every child that is born is therefore an object of the wrath (Ephesians 2:3) of God. Every aspect of man's being is affected. His intellect is blinded (II Corinthians 4:4). His understanding is darkened and he is separated from the life of God (Ephesians 4:18). Man's emotions are degraded and defiled (Psalm 1:21) and his will is enslaved to sin. He now stands in opposition to God (Romans 6:20). Because of man's sin, he is totally depraved. It is impossible for man to merit God's favor or to gain salvation.

Jesus Christ is God's redemptive salvation to the problem of man's sin. Jesus existed in eternity with God the Father. Jesus is God. Christ became a man, born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He came to reveal God to us (John 1:18). He came to be a substitute, a sacrifice that died on

the cross to make atonement for the individual's sin and the sins of the world (Hebrews 10: 1-10). His death was sufficient to bring mankind back into a relationship with an alienated God, if, by faith, Christ is personally appropriated as personal Savior (John 3:16). "God's desire for his creation, then, is that it should be unified through relations exhibiting justice, love and fellowship with himself; the first two qualities being the fruit of which fellowship with him is the root." (Anderson, p. 40)

The resurrection of Christ is proof positive that He is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do. He says that He is the way to God (John 14:6). He also says there is no other way! When an individual understands this "good news" and is drawn by the Holy Spirit to personal faith in Jesus, he is set on a path that is so radical that it can only be referred to as a new birth (John 3:7). The result of that initial and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit is to lead a person on a journey with new purpose in mind; "...for me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). This new journey has as its passion deepening faith, growing knowledge and a purpose driven life. The culminating goal of the journey is an eternal face to face encounter with the object of our devotion and passion, Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:21).

Epistemology

The final component of this worldview deals with epistemology. The source of knowledge is God. Charles Walker (2001) calls God "the Masterful Designer of all knowledge" (p.1). Knowledge can be acquired through diligence in reading and studying Scripture as God opens the heart of man through His revelation. Scripture is authoritative, and in its original manuscript, it is the plenary verbally inspired source of knowledge. Scripture does not reveal all knowledge about God or the universe, but where it speaks, it is what Ryrie (1994) refers to as "true truth" (27). Figure A pictorially describes the relationship between subject content, the filter of God's Word for that content and true truth.

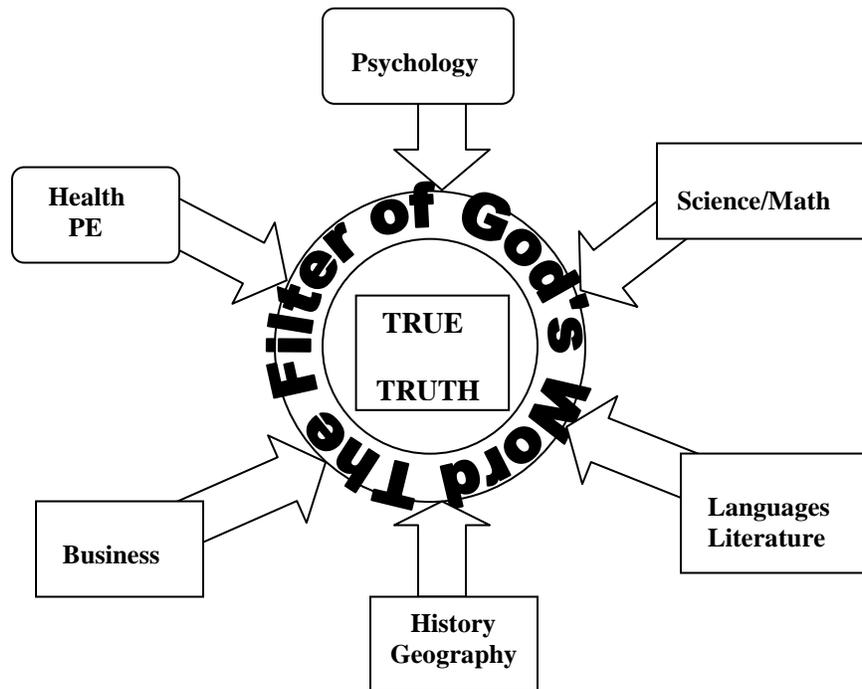


Figure A

Knowledge can also be acquired through the observation and study of God's organized and systematic world. Because man is made in the image of God, he can think, evaluate and ponder the world's systems of operation. He can discover laws that are true even though they may never be mentioned specifically in Scripture. Mathematical formulas are one illustration of this kind of discovered knowledge.

Knowledge can also be acquired through human life experiences [history]. The image of God allows man to think, share, be in relationships and use creativity. Because mankind has been given the ability to communicate and evaluate, he is able to gain knowledge from personal experiences and the experiences of others. This knowledge must always be held up to the filter of Biblical principles and truth. It can be of great value to those in relationship to God who desire to know Him more intimately. It can also be of pivotal value to those who are in search of the source of the universe.

It is important to emphasize at the end of this brief section on epistemology that all knowledge must in the end be subject to the truth revealed to us in Scripture. Where Scripture and apparent truth seem to clash, we are compelled to opt for the position of the Word of God for it is the truth that man can stand on and live by.

Application to the Discipline

Mark Eckel (1990) defines Biblical integration as "wholeness" (p. 1) as opposed to fragmentation, separating or eliminating God from the subject. He further states, "Everything from the arts to zoology should be studied Christianly" (p. 1). The basis for his presentation of this integrated view of knowledge is the belief that God is the source of knowledge. The Bible is the basis for all knowledge relating to the subject. Subject matter examined in view of its Creator affords the student the opportunity to intellectually and spiritually comprehend the relationship between academia and God. Science, then, finds its fullest meaning and application when examined in light of a theistic worldview, taking its approach from God's point of view. As Walker (2001) says, "education cannot exist in a vacuum. Philosophical neutrality is impossible. Either a theistic world view or a humanistic world view will permeate the teaching of academic facts and concepts" (p. 2).

The *Student Handbook for the Teacher Education Program* at Cedarville University states:

"The mission of the Cedarville University teacher education program is to prepare professional Christian educators who are able to demonstrate a Biblical world view by integrating faith, learning, and life. This core value is supported by an understanding and foundation in Biblical studies, a liberal arts background, the mastery of a teaching specialization, and a research based professional education core. Teaching effectively and serving compassionately in diverse settings, Cedarville students are ready to contribute to the community through their service and their students' lives" (p. 4).

Throughout the four years of their program, Early Childhood education majors are involved in curriculum that is structured to encourage and monitor the integration of faith, learning and life, so that a Biblical worldview will be demonstrated in every aspect of their teaching. An example of the utilization of designed curriculum can be found in the activities of Methods II clinical field

experience. Within the context of the experience, students are asked to read, write and reflect about their own character development and how they have demonstrated their Biblical worldview in teaching. They also have opportunities to practically apply their faith and learning in life. After a more extensive time of student teaching, the final portfolio reflection paper affords education majors an opportunity to examine their own growth as it relates to the integration of faith, learning, and life.

Not only is the structure of curriculum important, but as their professor, I play an important part as a role model for my students. In *The Pattern of God's Truth*, Gaebelien (1968) says:

"It is one thing to take for ourselves the premise that all truth is God's truth. It is another thing to build upon this premise an effective educational practice that shows a student the unity of truth and that brings alive in his heart and mind the grand concept of a Christ who 'is the image of the invisible God,' by whom 'all things were created,' who 'is before all things,' and by whom 'all things consist, or hold together'" (p. 23).

Gaebelien presupposes that the student will have a model to demonstrate that all truth is God's truth. Sharing Biblical insights related to your own teaching experiences as you communicate Christ within the course content provides a model by which students can compare and contrast their learning experiences.

Mentoring tools that stimulate the integration process in the student's personal and professional discipline include treating students with dignity, respect and patience. Investing in their lives in and out of class communicates that they are of value. Opportunities to develop Biblical attitudes through personal interaction with students cannot be reserved for the classroom only. I am responsible to also challenge the students to apply their Biblical lifestyle in the classroom. In his article, "The Heart of a Teacher" Parker Palmer (1968) states, "After three decades of trying to learn my craft, every class comes down to this: my students and I, face to face, engaged in an ancient and exacting exchange called education" (p. 14). Engaging students requires time, effort and a conscious decision to reflect on my experiences in

such a way that they can be used to benefit the student. Christ, the Master Teacher, was identified as “a teacher come from God” (John 3:2). It is to this model that I, as their professor, am compelled to direct students.

Application to Pedagogy

In the specific area of teaching the course, Methods II Early Childhood Curriculum and Science Methods, the foundational approach is toward Jesus Christ as the Creator and Author of all truth and toward living according to His principles (Acts 17:22-31; I Thessalonians 5:21; and II Corinthians 10:4-5). Walker (2001) says, “Teachers should attribute every area of academia to Christ, who has attributed it to His Father” (p. 2). As the creator of all knowledge, God, His Word and the universe are united.

In Eckel’s book, *Biblical Integration – Understanding the World through The Word*, (1990), he cites five general Biblical principles for integration in science. They are: recognizing supernatural creation (Genesis 1; Psalm 33; Romans 1; Colossians 1:15-17); recognizing God as the source and unity of knowledge (Psalm 19:1-11; Colossians 2:3); recognizing that God allows us to comprehend His created world (Nehemiah 9:6; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17; Matthew 19:26); recognizing that many leading scientists such as Bacon, Pascal and Newton discovering the knowledge of God’s creation resulted in a new-found reverence and worship of God (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6); and recognizing that the literal and historical Word of God reveals His creation (Matt 19:4-6; Acts 17:26; Romans 5:12-19) (p. 54). These guidelines give students a basis on which to build their Biblical world view.

Presupposing that the Bible speaks to all of life (“The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it”; Psalm 24:1), education students are encouraged to become competent in consistently searching and locating Scriptures that will apply to life situations and speak to the subject that is being examined. Believing, based on Genesis 1:28-29, that man has been given the responsibility to bring the created earth and all that is in it under his command, the Methods II curriculum includes opportunities for students to integrate

God's Word with the study of early childhood topics. For example, when planning for the subject content, "Animals", students need to possess an understanding of Old Testament examples cited in Genesis 1:28-30, Psalm 104:10-30, and Deuteronomy 22:6-7. Genesis 2:5, 8 and 15 instruct man in his responsibilities for protecting and preserving what has been given to him. Such principles as nurturing the earth to produce food for people and animals and the protection of animals can be found in these scriptures. The goal is to understand the subject in the light of God's Word and use creative methods that will allow it to become applicable for everyday use, specific problems and life situations. Directing students to filter their knowledge through God's Word is an ongoing goal.

"Students are confronted in their lives by many things which are often taken for granted and unexplained. For example, 'why are there rainbows?' 'why are they curved?' 'what causes the colors to be separated?' or 'what makes some foods healthy and others unhealthy?'" are rich resources for teaching science as it applies to everyday life (Gauld, p. 29).

Helping students reflect Biblically on their subject matter is of utmost importance. For example, the imprint of God is reflected on nature. The universe is designed so that His wisdom is displayed. Jeremiah 33:22 is a reminder that the stars cannot be numbered, and in Ecclesiastes 1:6, the wind follows a cyclic pattern. The extent of creation reflects His omnipotence, and as the giver of life, God provides for all of creation.

In his article Simonds (1989) presents four guidelines to assist teachers in maintaining the special challenge of the integrity of science in their classroom. These guidelines can be creatively introduced to pre-service teachers as they develop their own worldview. The first guideline is to encourage teachers to take advantage of every opportunity to insist that scientific creationism should be presented along with the theory of evolution. Simonds says that many parents and school officials believe in God as the Creator of the Universe, but fail to insist on presenting the Biblical view of creation. Secondly, teachers need to make themselves aware of as much information on scientific creationism as possible. Thirdly, know the legal rights of teaching scientific creationism. Simonds (1989) reports that one clarification, in a 1987 U.S.

Supreme Court decision, stated that "Teaching a variety of scientific theories about the origins of human-kind to school children might be validly done with the clear secular intent of enhancing the effectiveness of science instruction" (p.4). Last, teachers can become involved in helping to promote information, such as lectures, on scientific creationism (p. 1-4).

Thinking "Christianly" about the development of character is interwoven into the curriculum. During Methods II devotions each week, early childhood majors examine such character qualities as responsibility, compassion, wisdom, and effective time management in the light of God's truth. They are encouraged to use this time to set new goals for building their character on the basis of the Word of God. In *The Student Handbook for the Teacher Education Program*, Domain D, Teacher Professionalism, encourages early education majors to become involved in self-reflection. Sarah Gaynier, Cedarville student, stated (personal communication, October 28, 2002);

"After a weekend of being a bit under the weather, I was back at school again today trying to stay ahead of my students. I am learning how important it is to be in the right mind set on the way to school and when you get to school. I need to be prepared when I leave the day before and when I walk into the classroom. I am also learning how important it is for a Christian teacher to have an attitude of prayer for my students as I begin my morning..."

Sarah further said, (personal communication, October 29, 2002);

"This morning I really focused on getting in the right mindset for school and asking the Lord to lead me through my day. I spent my car ride to school praying for my cooperating teacher and my students. It amazed me to see how different my attitude was throughout the day. I remembered what I prayed earlier, and I was able to see things in a different light."

The Student Handbook for the Teacher Education Program further states that the goal of teacher education preparation is for students to leave Cedarville University prepared for "teaching effectively and serving compassionately in diverse settings". (p. 4)

In conclusion, the integration of faith, learning and life is the belief that God is the source of all life and all knowledge. The Bible is the basis for all knowledge relating to the subject, examining subject matter in view of its Creator, so that students can intellectually and spiritually comprehend the relationship between academia and God. "And he (Jesus Christ) is the head of

the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he (Jesus Christ) might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). Science, then, finds its fullest meaning and application when examined in light of a theistic worldview, taking its approach from God's point of view.

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