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Integrating Faith and Learning

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INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING

ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN INTEGRATION

(1) THE BIBLE

God intended Scripture to be a book both for theology and salvation as well for principles of day-to-day living. It contains precepts and principles relating to the problems people encounter, provides factual information useful to multiple life domains, and in many instances applies a grid through which natural revelation is to be understood.

Consequently, the acquisition of biblical knowledge is an important part of the integration process in a Christian liberal arts institution.

(2) RESEARCH

God has revealed Himself through nature and designed mankind with an innate curiosity for discovering this truth (John 1:9). Since all truth ultimately comes from the mind and hand of God, studying natural events, when conducted from a Christian world-and-life-view, eventually will point the researcher to the Designer of the truth being studied (Psalm 19 and Romans 1: 17-32). In short, Christian education should acknowledge Augustine's all-truth-is-God's-truth maximum from centuries ago, pursue research endeavors, and be assured that the apt results will not take them to conclusions contrary to God's special revelation.

(3) PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS

Apart from empirical research, Christians also should engage in understanding the philosophical ideas generated by intellectual speculation. These notions are not necessarily provable or testable in laboratory settings. They may be creative works or treatises that reflect deep thought or heuristic theories. At all levels, great works are worthy of attention and Christian scholarship.

In this context, Christian students should be made cognizant of five possibilities:

- (a) The Bible actively teaches that the concept is true;
- (b) The Bible actively teaches that the concept is false;
- (c) The Bible is silent regarding what the concept proposes;
- (c) Part of what the concept proposes is Biblical and part of the concept is unbiblical;
- (d) Part of what the concept proposes is Biblical, and the Bible is silent regarding part of the concept.

Christian faculty should help guide students to carefully discern constructs across the above continua of possibilities. Worthy biblical integration seldom involves simple black/white, right/wrong assertions. Rather, quality integration typically is complex and Christian faculty should help guide students through the nuances and implications at all the above levels.

A Christian college helps students to “think Biblically” about secular thought. In domains where ideas are abiblical, then Christians should apply good analytical and critical thinking to constructs proposed. The Bible was not designed by God to be an exhaustive encyclopedia of all He knows. Where the Bible is silent on matters, then our Christian prudence, discernment, wisdom, and maturity should guide our conclusions.

Students must be trained to recognize sound research design and results, and to critique research before incorporating data into their respective paradigms, beliefs, or life practice. They must also be able to filter the conclusions that researchers draw from data through a Biblical world-and-life view. Further, both faculty and students should actively generate research which will broaden the knowledge of their field(s) and help to confirm empirically that what they believe to be Biblical practice. As such, truly valid empirical findings will not contradict but, rather, will be in harmony with Biblical principles and teachings.

SOME PRACTICAL WAYS INTEGRATION OCCURS IN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

(1) TEACH DIRECT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

There are occasions when subject matter in a college course is addressed in Scripture. It is completely appropriate for instructors to teach such principles, showing the direct relationship to the course content under discussion.

(2) LEAVE-OUT BLATANTLY ANTI-CHRISTIAN, OFFENSIVE, OR
SENSUAL MATERIAL

All teaching, by its nature, is selective and biased by one’s own values. That is, no one can teach *everything* on a given topic in a single course. Thus, while all knowledge has some potential value, instructors are forced to rank-order priorities with respect to class material. This is not true just in Christian college classrooms. Secular university professors must be selective in what they include and do not include in given classes. The scope of most contemporary courses contains far more material than can adequately be covered in a 15 week semester. In sum, there are times when a Christian instructor may choose not to cover some material related to a course due to its blatantly slanted nature (e.g., pornography).

(3) TEACH IDEAS WHICH ARE ANTI-BIBLICAL, THEN CRITIQUE THEM

Christian students should be exposed to the great minds and ideas of civilization. Further, while some shielding may be warranted on occasion, there are far more occasions when critical and/or Biblical analysis of secular ideas is the best means of integrating in a Christian classroom. Instructors should be sure to provide a thorough understanding of the concepts, not straw persons or straw ideology, then lead students to a Biblical or Christian understanding of the constructs under study.

(4) SHOW HOW SOME MATERIAL IS ABIBLICAL OR OVER-LAPS WITH BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Some ideas or research can neither be supported nor refuted by Scriptural understanding. In those areas, Christian students must be led to use discretion and wisdom in coming to apt comprehensions of the ideology in question. Applying a distinctively Christian world-and-life view toward subject matter over-arches study at a Christian college, but this does not imply that there are Biblical references that relate to all subject matter (also avoid mere proof texting as a normal protocol for integration).

(5) PERSONAL EXAMPLE & LIFESTYLE

Christian instructors teach in many ways. Some include articulated words, verbally and written. However, students also learn from their instructors' lives. Since, everyone, when they are full-trained will be like their teachers (Luke 6:40), it is imperative for Christian instructors to live lives exemplary of Christian character and spirit. Students in Christian colleges will learn from the modeling process in addition to the didactic one.