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A Whole-Person Model of Biblical Integration in Business

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### Abstract

This paper presents a whole-person model for doing biblical integration in business with applications in the field of information systems. The proposed model consists of five questions arranged in a circular fashion, starting with the identification of an ethical issue and the secular worldview associated with it. The model then asks, “Who is God?” in the context of the ethical issue. This is followed by the question, “What biblical principles/commands apply?” Then, the model asks for a decision of whether we accept, reject, or redeem the secular worldview. The model then continues the process to bring the question back to “Who is God?”, but this time it asks the question in the light of who God is to me, and what I must change to become more like Him. This model allows the Christian to develop a greater love and respect for God, while arriving at a biblically based answer to an ethical dilemma, and then growing closer to God as life changes are made to conform to the newfound understanding of who God is.

*Keywords:* biblical integration, model, whole-person, information systems

### A Whole-Person Model of Biblical Integration in Business

Smith (2005, p. 155) outlines the dual purpose of faith/business integration as, “bring[ing] glory to God by permeating the business disciplines with a Christian perspective and to help ourselves and others grow into a fuller understanding of God and of the disciplines we teach.” This paper contends that a whole-person model of biblical integration should include a third purpose that reconciles a fuller understanding of God with a fuller understanding of the discipline to transform the way a person lives out their faith in the discipline. Johnson (1996, p. 4) agrees that our understanding of Scripture should “help us respond to business issues in Godly ways.”

As such, a whole-person model of biblical integration must occur at the intersection of faith, life, and learning. Biblical integration at this intersection provides a powerful opportunity to transform the mind, heart, and hands of the individual to become more like Christ (Ephesians 5:1). The mind (learning) is transformed by renewed understanding of the discipline. The heart (faith) is transformed by a renewal of faith through the study of God and His Word. The hands (life) are transformed by a clearer understanding of how we must behave in the discipline as guided by our study of God and His Word.

### **Literature Review**

Current models of biblical integration appear to focus on broader concepts of integration. For example, Johnson (1996) outlines a broad process of Apply, Develop, Clarify, and Enrich for using biblical sources, such as parables, proverbs, and profiles of biblical characters to better understand business issues to develop insights into how to respond to those issues.

Chewning (2001) describes 12 styles of biblical integration, but all of the styles described focus on the alignment of scriptural principles with the subject matter. A few styles attempt to get the learner to adjust their worldview to bring it into alignment with biblical principles. However,

none of the styles that Chewning describes seeks to incorporate all three areas of faith, life, and learning.

In his review of 21 models of biblical integration, Roller (2013) classifies each method of integration in a two-dimensional matrix with the first dimension being the focus of integration (student, professor, etc.) and the second dimension being the intentionality of the integration (natural, intentional, or strategic). None of these 21 models individually included all aspects of a whole-person model of integration. They either focused on growth in faith, life, learning, or a combination of two of the three areas, but not all three areas.

While current models of biblical integration tend to focus either on broad principles of biblical integration or drill down into one specific area of integration, there appears to be a gap in the extant models two ways: first, no model appears to provide a specific process that can be followed to do biblical integration, and second, no model appears to address all three areas of integration that would be necessary to transform the whole-person.

What is needed then is a model that is more holistic in nature that takes into account not only the biblical principles, subject matter, and mind of the learner, but also the heart of the learner, as well as provide a more specific process that can be followed to do integration. This paper seeks to fill that gap by presenting a whole-person model of biblical integration that begins and ends with a reflection on God's character. The proposed model seeks to fulfill the three-fold purpose of biblical integration discussed earlier by bringing glory to God by: 1. bringing a Christian worldview to bear on a business issue; 2. encourage the learner to develop a fuller understanding of God; and 3. encourage the learner to grow in their desire to imitate their heavenly Father's character, as they live out their faith in their discipline.

This remainder of this paper is organized as follows: 1. The next section presents the development of a whole-person model of biblical integration and describes each of the steps in

detail; 2. The following section provides three examples of how the whole-person model can be used; 3. The paper finishes with a discussion of limitations, recommendations for further study, and some concluding thoughts.

### **Model Development**

Litfin (2004) includes a powerful illustration of the interaction between our responsibility to properly steward our intellectual ability and the centrality of Christ in our search for truth. Litfin tells the story of a man exploring a dimly lit barn, who notices a crack of light coming through the roof of the barn illuminating an object on the ground. The man bends down to examine the object, which is clearly visible in the narrow beam of light. The man then picks the object up and maneuvers the object in the light in an attempt to see the object as completely as possible. The man, satisfied by his discovery shifts his attention to the beam of light itself, and looks along the beam out the crack in the roof. He first notices the tall trees swaying in the wind, and eventually, his gaze falls on the sun—the source of the light. In the same way, we must *begin* the study of our field by knowing the Source of truth, and what He has revealed to us through creation, through His Word, and through Jesus Christ. We must then hold the knowledge gained from our field of study to the light of God's truth to verify the truth claims made in the field. When the truth of God's Word validates those truth claims, we can be confident to affirm them. Whenever those truth claims are shown false by exposure to the true light, we must then refuse those claims, or when possible attempt to redeem them. We must also allow the source of the true light to constantly shift our focus back along the beam to rest on Christ, who is the creator and sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:15-17). This shift in focus on Christ should regularly result in a deeper knowledge and understanding of Christ, His character, and His power. The truth discovery process therefore originates in Christ, is illuminated by Christ, and culminates in a greater understanding and worship of Christ. In this way, Christ is central to the discovery of truth in any discipline.

**Error! Reference source not found.** (see Appendix A) depicts this process of biblical integration by first examining the issue or scenario at hand in the light of who God is. From there the process proceeds to examine the principles or commands relevant to the issue/scenario. With sufficient evidence from both God's character and principles or commands from His Word, the response is identified as one of three outcomes: accept, reject, or redeem. The chosen outcome then determines how the individual will respond to the issue or scenario. The final (and arguably the most important) step is for the individual to review once again the character of Who God is, but this time with a reflection on how the individual needs to change in order to become more like Christ.

### **Identify the Issue/Scenario**

The whole-person model begins with an examination of the issue or scenario at hand. The important task of this step is to identify what is at the core of the issue. Some helpful questions that can be asked to accomplish this include: What is the secular worldview being promoted? What is the root cause of the issue? The point of these questions is to narrow the scope of the issue down to only one question at a time. For larger, more complex issues, it may be necessary to break them up into separate issues, and then follow the steps of the model for each issue individually.

### **Who God Is**

The step of identifying God's characteristics is central to the model's efficacy. With the core issue identified, it is essential to ask, "Who is God?" in the context of that scenario. An example of how this might be done is provided by the dialog between Chewning (2000) and Carson (2000). One of the scenarios that Chewning (2000) addressed was that of how we should respond to bankruptcy protection. He began by looking at the character of God in terms of his immutability, and he used that argument to make the case for why bankruptcy protection was not appropriate for a Christian. However, Carson (2000) responded with an interesting argument based on an additional characteristic of God's mercy in that although God never changes, He does provide mercy in cases

of repentance. This dialog suggests that it is important to not take this question of Who God is lightly. To complete this step requires a serious study of all of the applicable characteristics of God.

### **Principles/Commands**

The identification of biblical principles or commands is often the step where models of biblical integration begin. While this is an essential step in the process, it is important to precede this step with an identification of God's character. It is through a deeper understanding of who God is that one begins to understand the rationale for why God has instituted his principles and commands in Scripture. This understanding then begins to develop a motivation for obeying these principles and commands.

The key questions that can be asked during this step in the process include the following. What principles from Scripture guide us (Psalm 119:105)? What commands in scripture tell us what we must do? How do the attributes of God identified in the previous step relate to these principles/commands? It is the answer to this last question when the act of integration truly begins to take shape.

### **Our Response**

Armed with a better understanding of God's characteristics as they relate to the issue, a knowledge of God's principles or commands related to the scenario, as well as how God's characteristics and His principles align, one can proceed to identify how they should respond to the issue. To simplify the process, the model prescribes a response that falls into one of three possible outcomes: reject, accept, and redeem. By examining Who God is and the biblical principles involved, it may often be the case that the only right conclusion is to reject the secular worldview that was identified at the core of the issue. Other times, the secular world may indeed be in alignment with scripture and can be outright accepted. Often, the secular world view is only partially in alignment



with God's character and biblical principles. In these situations, it is not necessary to reject the entire worldview at the core of the issue but to redeem it to bring it in line with biblical principles.

### **Who God is**

Most models of biblical integration will end with the response, content with leaving the learner on a path of right action. As indicated earlier, however, a final reflection is needed in order to transform the heart to become more like God (Ephesians 5:1), based on the attributes identified earlier in the process. Coming full circle, the learner must ask the question of "Who is God?" once more, but this time, the question is asked from the perspective of "What must I change in my life to become more like God?" The key questions to ask during this step of the process include the following. What has this process taught me about who God is to me? How can I emulate the characteristics of God to bring Him glory in my life? In what way has my relationship with Him been strengthened? What do I need to change in my life to become more like Him?

### **Application of the Biblical Integration Model**

The following sub-sections provide specific examples of how the model developed earlier can enable a Christian to critically evaluate current issues within the Information Systems discipline, while simultaneously growing as a Christian. The discipline of Information Systems exists at the crossroads of three distinct areas of study: the management of people, the organization of information, and the application of technology. We seek to demonstrate that a Christ-centered approach provides fuller and more satisfying answers than any of the secular research to these commonly occurring situations in the Information Systems discipline.

#### **Example 1: A Biblical P of Information Privacy**

**Step 1: Identify the issue.** Mason (1986) wrote one of the earliest treatises on the need for privacy protections within the broader Information Systems discipline. Mason recognized, for example, that while an individual may give permission to one vendor to store his personal

information and give permission to a second vendor to store different personal information, he does not give permission for the two vendors to combine what they know about him. Yet that is exactly the type of integration that Information Systems can provide to businesses. In one sense, the protection of consumer privacy comes down to a choice by each guardian of customer data, of whether or not to protect the privacy of each customer. A critical question then is, “what motivates the guardian of the data to make the right choice?” Mason answers that question by linking the data about each customer to the person’s dignity, such that the data about each person reflects their dignity, and so to safeguard their dignity, it is important to keep the data private. At the core of this issue then is what determines a person’s dignity? The secular worldview indicates that the answer to a person’s dignity lies in the information about him or her.

**Step 2: Who God is.** Privacy is one attribute of God’s image. Consider the description of God in Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV), “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” This description of God implies that God both holds secrets and reveals them at the appropriate time and place. In many other places in scripture, God is described as revealing mysteries but only to His prophets and those who are saved (e.g., Amos 3:7, Ephesians 1:9, Colossians 1:26, I Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 3:9). We also know that God purposefully withheld information from Daniel and John regarding the events of the end times, which suggest that there is information that God holds private even from the saints (Daniel 12:4 and Revelation 10:4). Furthermore, consider that even before the fall of man, God withheld information from Adam and Eve regarding what it meant to be naked (Genesis 3:7). This consistent withholding of information from before the fall until the end times suggests that it is in God’s nature to value privacy.

**Step 3: Biblical principles/commands.** We recognize that each and every human being, regardless of their salvific state has been created in the image of God, and therefore represents the

infinite value imputed by God. The motivation to protect privacy becomes a matter of protecting an infinitely valued soul, which is a completely separate issue from the content of the data.

One example where we see a violation of privacy in scripture is when king Hezekiah showed all of the contents of the treasury, armory, and storehouses of Judah to the visiting Chaldeans (II Kings 20:12-20). This information would normally have been kept private, but perhaps due to a moment of pride, Hezekiah showed everything to his visitors. As a result of this violation of privacy and his spirit of pride, Isaiah conveys God's judgment on Hezekiah that everything would eventually be taken away.

**Step 4: Our response.** Mason's conclusion that we should be considerate of the data representing other people is correct, but without a biblical origin to his claim, Mason's approach is misguided, causing his conclusion to lose its effectiveness. For example, what if the data we hold suggests that the person may be a high credit risk? Relying on the data as a representation of the person's dignity in this case would seem to demean the individual's dignity in our eyes, and thus bring doubt as to the value of protecting his or her privacy.

Knowing that it is in God's very nature to value privacy, but that he also values revelation of mysteries at the appropriate time and place and realizing that as His image bearers, we also bear that aspect of his character, gives us the motivation we need to seek the protection of not only our own privacy but for those with whose data we come in contact. Thus, we can *redeem* Mason's desire to protect the privacy of others by re-directing the motivation from that of simply protecting each other's dignity to recognizing the intrinsic value of every man and women as image bearers of God.

**Step 5: Who God is.** Furthermore, the study of privacy using a Christ-centered approach should bring us full circle to a greater appreciation for who Christ is. We begin to realize how unsearchable his wisdom must be for Him to be able to withhold information and yet make things known at just the right time and place. This knowledge then gives us insight into areas in our own

life that may need to be changed in order to become more like Christ (e.g., areas where we need to grow in wisdom, grace, and mercy).

### **Example #2: A Biblical Perspective on Maintaining Data Accuracy**

**Step 1: Identify the issue.** A student does not have to go far in his or her technology education before he or she hears the phrase, “garbage in, garbage out.” The implication of course is that if the system contains inaccurate data, then the reports generated by that system will also be inaccurate. Information quality (i.e., accuracy) has long been recognized as an important aspect of information systems’ success (DeLone & McLean, 1992). From the secular worldview then, the accuracy of an information system is vital to the system’s success.

**Step 2: Who God is.** Looking at accuracy through a Christ-centered lens should begin with an understanding of the nature of God, that He is “...the exact representation of His nature...” (Hebrews 1:3). In other words, God is accuracy personified, and He expects us to follow His example (Matthew 5:48).

**Step 3: Biblical principles/commands.** It is clear from scripture that accuracy is important to God (Deuteronomy 25:15; Proverbs 20:10; Proverbs 30:5). Given that His very nature is accuracy personified, this also gives us motivation to want to obey these principles. Not only does He command us to do them, but He does them Himself.

**Step 4: Our response.** Based on the very character of God as accuracy personified and the importance that God places on us being accurate, we can safely affirm the need to maintain data accuracy. In fact, we can see more clearly *why* accuracy may have such an important impact on the success of information systems.

**Step 5: Who God is.** Knowing that accuracy is an attribute of God gives us the motivation to pursue excellence in how we handle data and information, as well as build a deep appreciation for

His perfection, as we reflect on our own inadequacies and failures to build perfectly accurate systems.

### **Example #3: A Biblical Perspective on Hacking**

**Step 1: Identify the issue.** Hacking is an attempt to gain unauthorized access to a computer network, whether successful or not (Fitzgerald, Dennis, & Durcikova, 2012). The typical motivations for hacking typically include: curiosity, thrill of the hunt, fraud/identity theft, or intentional destruction (Fitzgerald, Dennis, & Durcikova, 2012). A common secular worldview held by hackers is that hacking is perfectly fine, because you are not actually hurting anyone.

**Step 2: Who God is.** One of the key aspects of God in relation to the issue of hacking is that He is the real owner of all things and people in this universe (Psalm 24:1). That means that all of us are ultimately only stewards over that which is entrusted to us.

**Step 3: Biblical principles/commands.** Several biblical principles come to mind in the context of hacking. Scripture is clear that theft violates God's law (Exodus 20:15), but it is also not appropriate for modern Christians (I Corinthians 6:10). Contentment is another biblical principle often seen in scripture (Philippians 4:11-12; I Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5). Recognizing that others are to be valued above ourselves is also a relevant command (Philippians 2:3). Scripture is also clear when it comes to acting out of malicious intent (Romans 12:19). Each of these principles/commands has a direct connection to God's attribute of owner. As the owner of all things, He is the only one who has the right to delegate how intellectual property should be distributed and governed.

**Step 4: Our response.** It should be fairly obvious from a biblical perspective that by definition, the act of hacking violates the principle of theft. It is also important to address the heart motivations behind the desire to hack and confront each of those motivations with the light of scripture. Curiosity itself is not a sin, but the real issue is where we go to find answers. For example,

there is nothing inherently sinful about asking your parents how much money they make each year. The parents of course have the right to deny that information and ask their children to be content with not knowing. If the child breaks into the parents' files to discover the information, the underlying heart issue is a lack of contentment with not knowing. Though we are often curious, we must be content with the information we get from the proper source. It is also not inherently sinful to experience exhilaration, but the real issue is whether we value others as more important than our own desires. The motivation behind fraud or identity theft is typically a lack of contentment, selfish pride, and a misunderstanding of biblical stewardship. The one who steals is not content with what they have, and they do not value others above themselves. Finally, the heart attitude behind intentional destruction is one of vengeance, and as we indicated earlier, scripture is clear that vengeance belongs to the Lord. Given that the act of hacking and all of the identified motivations for hacking violate scriptural principles/commands and the very character of who God is, we must reject this secular worldview.

**Step 5: Who God is.** Knowing that God is owner of all things gives us freedom to explore the unknown, but places boundaries around intellectual property that is outside our purview. This knowledge should also bring us to a greater appreciation for how powerful Christ must be to literally own everything and how wise He must be to perfectly entrust the right property to each person. This causes us to ask what areas in our lives need to change to bring our lives under submission to Christ's ownership and rule over us.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

One of the limitations of this paper is that it has applied the model in only one discipline, and it has only provided a small sampling of issues within that one discipline. Future research may wish to consider building a dictionary or wiki of key issues within each business discipline

demonstrating how this model could be applied. This could become a very helpful resource to faculty who are new to doing biblical integration in their field.

Another limitation of this paper is the lack of data collection and validation to demonstrate the efficacy of this model as compared with existing models of integration (e.g., Johnson 2000). Future research may wish to have students use this model to conduct their own integration assignment, and have a control group use another model, and then compare the quality of the finished assignments as well as a survey assessing characteristics of the student's life, learning, and faith.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a five-step, whole-person model of biblical integration that can be applied to business. Specific examples have been provided within the field of Information Systems, showing how each of the three response types (accept, reject, redeem) may result. This model is founded on the fact that we can know the truth claims in our disciplines as it is revealed to us by God through His general revelation and illuminated by the light of His Word. That knowledge must be critically evaluated in the light of scripture so that we can more accurately know our discipline and so that we will more accurately know Christ. Since the knowledge of Christ is eternal life (John 17:3), it is essential for all of us to develop a thirst for Christ as we explore our various disciplines.

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Appendix A

Figure A1: A Whole-Person Model of Biblical Integration

