

INTEGRATING FAITH AND LEARNING

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It is not sufficient for a Christian college to identify itself simply as a liberal arts institution; it is also an extended arm of the church. We have laid aside various inadequate attempts to justify the combination. A Christian college does not exist to combine good education with a protective atmosphere, for Christians believe that the source of evil is ultimately within the heart, not without. The Christian college does not exist only to offer biblical and theological studies, for these are available in other kinds of institutions, and could be offered through adjunct programs at state universities without the tremendous expense of offerings in the arts and sciences. The distinctive of the Christian college is not that it cultivates piety and religious commitment, for this could be done by church-sponsored residence houses on secular campuses. Rather the Christian college is distinctive in that the Christian faith can touch the entire range of life and learning to which a liberal education exposes students.

In principle Christian perspectives are all-redeeming and all-transforming, and it is this which gives rise to the idea of integrating faith with learning. I say "in principle" because often in practice faith and learning interact rather than integrate. Integration is an ideal never fully accomplished by anyone but God himself. Public relations material sometimes states that faith and learning are integrated on campus, as if a stroke of the pen makes it an accomplished fact, but there is many a miss and fumble and bungle between the purpose and the achievement. Interaction differs from integration. In interaction the two sit side by side in real contact with each other and engage in dialog on a variety of particulars. Yet we need more than this if we are going to relate faith and learning as a coherent whole from the ground up.

Sometimes even interaction has been repressed in favor of indoctrination, as if prepackaged answers can satisfy inquiring minds. Students need rather to gain a realistic look at life and to discover for themselves the questions that confront us. They need to work their way painfully through the maze of alternative ideas and arguments while finding out how the Christian faith speaks to such matters. They need a teacher as a catalyst and guide, one who has struggled and is struggling with similar questions and knows some of the pertinent materials and procedures. They need to be exposed to the frontiers of learning where problems are still not fully formulated and knowledge is exploding, and where by the very nature of things indoctrination is impossible.

Sometimes interaction between faith and learning has been at little more than a defensive level, an apologetic against challenges to the faith from the world of thought, or a Christian critique of its competitors. Apologetics undoubtedly has a place, but the Christian college has a larger and more constructive job than this. Integration is concerned not so much with attack and defense as with the positive contributions of human learning to an understanding of the faith and to the development of a Christian worldview, and with the positive contribution of the Christian faith to all the arts and sciences. Certainly learning has contributed from all fields to the church's understanding and propagation of its faith, from the early church to the present day, and the Christian college can contribute signally in that way. But it must also grasp what is not as often recognized, that faith affects learning far more deeply than learning affects faith.

Integration should be seen not as an achievement or a position but as an intellectual activity that goes on as long as we keep learning anything at all. Not only as an intellectual activity, however, for integrated learning will contribute to the integration of faith into every

dimension of a person's life and character. In what follows, I shall propose four approaches to the integration of faith and learning.

THE ATTITUDINAL APPROACH

There are some areas in higher education where Christianity seems at first glance to make no evident difference. Performance fields are a prime example: the vocalist, the pianist, the sculptor, or the gymnast, even the research chemist or the mathematician. It hardly makes sense to speak of "Christian piano" or "Christian gymnastics." Admittedly, the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd refers to "Christian mathematics": yet he is thinking not of proofs and procedures but rather of the foundations of mathematics and the fact that God and the law-governed nature of his creation make mathematics possible at all.

Especially in performance areas and in the disciplined development of skills (although certainly not only there), the attitude of the teacher or student is the initial and perhaps most salient point of contact with the Christian faith. If I were teaching symbolic logic, which is as close as a philosopher comes to mathematics, my Christianity would come through in my attitude and my intellectual integrity far more than in the actual content of the course. A positive, inquiring attitude and a persistent discipline of time and ability express the value I find in learning because of my theology and my Christian commitment.

A positive attitude toward liberal learning is not always evident among Christians. From time to time in the history of the church as in history generally, a kind of anti-intellectualism or a cultural escapism has erupted. But the Christian faith rightly understood creates a positive attitude toward liberal learning because in God's creation every area of life and learning is related to the wisdom and power of God. All truth is God's truth. The same positive attitude affects more than the pursuit of truth. In his famous *City of God* Augustine proposes a Christian conception of a just society in place of Cicero's pagan view: justice is giving to each his due, including God, and that ability, like every good and perfect gift, comes from God. It therefore takes reverence and love for God to motivate us adequately toward justice. The same attitude should affect aesthetic values like beauty and creativity. All beauty is from God no matter where it is found, the artistic creativity of people is God's good gift, the potential of physical materials for being formed and fashioned into objects of art is God's doing. Some writers have even developed an aesthetic argument for the existence of God, based on the correlation between human creativity in the arts and the adaptability of the world to this creativity. In God's creation every area of the liberal arts has to do with God.

Elton Trueblood has said that the Christian scholar is likely to be a better scholar for being a Christian than one would be otherwise. The comparison is not between the Christian and the non-Christian scholar, because there are other variables involved when you compare two people, but between the one individual as Christian and the same person as non-Christian. The reason, says Trueblood, is motivation, for the Christian faith is the sworn enemy of all intellectual dishonesty and shoddiness.¹ The Christian believes that in all that she does intellectually, socially, or artistically, she is handling God's creation and that is sacred. Shortly after World War II Arnold Nash wrote that one of the main tasks of the Christian scholar in higher education is to discover the meaning of Christian vocation.² I submit that a genuinely Christian attitude finds meaning in the vocation of a chemist or a sociologist, a historian or a

¹ *The Idea of a College* (Harper, 1959), p. 19.

² *The University and the Modern World* (Macmillan, 1944), p. 292.

psychologist, a mathematician or an artist. The scholar's love of truth becomes an expression of love for God, just as the citizen's love of justice in society can be an expression of hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the artist's love for the creative and the beautiful expresses love for the Creator.

This is where the Christian college student must begin. The first task of integration is at the personal level of attitude and motivation. In an overtly Christian college, Christian teachers dealing with Christian students have a point of appeal that is not available elsewhere. Admittedly, motivating students is difficult. Adolescents have a tendency to intellectual sloppiness and their characteristic self-interestedness comes out as much in the life of the mind as anywhere. Enthusiasm for liberal learning often runs against the peer-group attitude that general education is a necessary evil to be gotten out of the way as soon and as painlessly as possible, rather than an alluring window on God's creation. It also runs against the suspicion with which many have been taught to regard the intellect and imagination, and against their cultural isolation. Yet if our highest end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, we must pursue this end here and now by exploring and enjoying the richness of his creation, and we can do so in Christian liberal arts education.

Somehow or other the student must realize that education is a Christian vocation, one's prime calling from God for these years, that education must be an act of love, of worship, of stewardship, a wholehearted response to God. Attitude and motivation accordingly afford but a beginning; this personal contact between faith and learning should extend to disciplined scholarship and to intellectual and artistic integrity.

The college must therefore cultivate an atmosphere of Christian learning, a level of eager expectancy that is picked up by anyone who is on campus for even a short while. It must sell the idea from the point of student recruitment and admission through freshman orientation into the residence hall program, the curriculum and individual courses. The chapel program must exemplify this attitude rather than the unthinking disjunction that is all too frequent between faith and devotion on the one hand and what goes on in the classroom on the other. In campus publications, in the counseling program, a perennial salesman's job has to be done on the idea that liberal education is the Christian vocation of students as well as teachers. And required general education courses must present not narrow specializations in isolation from each other, but ideas that stretch the mind, open up historical perspective, enlarge windows on the world, and reveal the creative impact of Christian faith and thought.

The most important single factor in the teacher is the attitude toward learning. By virtue of what a teacher is, his students can stand on his shoulders and peer further in their day than he did in his. From the teacher the alluring contours of a Christian mind begin to emerge.

THE ETHICAL APPROACH

Ethical issues arise in the college admissions process, in matters of equal opportunity, and in distributing financial aid. They arise in how we approach learning, in the use of materials, of research methods, and of computers, in experiments involving human subjects, in respecting copyrights and crediting other peoples' work. (Plagiarism is perhaps the college student's most common form of stealing, akin to the commercial espionage that steals crucial information by sifting through a competitor's garbage.) Ethical issues also arise in the uses society makes of its knowledge, in what we do or do not do to our environment and with nonrenewable resources, in genetic research and over nuclear wastes, with management techniques and manipulative advertising, in economic policy and international politics. Questions of justice and mercy haunt

us continually, calling for active integration of factual understanding with moral values rooted in the Christian faith.

For some years we heard talk of value-neutral education and of value-free science. The underlying assumption is that we live in a world of bare facts, that empirical knowledge bears no intrinsic relation (only a coincidental one) to moral or social values, and that value judgments are purely relative expressions of subjective feelings and conventional attitudes. Facts are value-neutral; education and science are concerned with facts, not feelings.

While these positivist assumptions are extremely doubtful on both philosophical and theological grounds, the education of responsible agents in any case requires attention to values and value judgments. World War II, Hiroshima, and the Holocaust awakened many Western educators to this, and especially since Vietnam and the activist '60s it is virtually impossible to keep social issues and value judgments out of the classroom—even where relativist and subjectivist ethical theories still prevail. Indeed, language itself is so value-laden as to render value-neutrality almost impossible. Growing up in England I was introduced to the American Revolution by a *footnote* to colonial history about the *revolt* of the American colonies. Word choice and the organization of material gave the game away.

Language is loaded in other ways too, so that it is not enough to label things “right” or “wrong,” “just” or “loving.” The word “love,” for example, is used promiscuously today, but it means something different in a Christian context than in pop psychology and most popular lyrics. Confused values often ride piggyback on identical terms. We must sort them out and be clear about what we mean to say, what others mean too.

In teaching, value judgments should not be moralizing tacked on at the end of a supposedly factual recital, nor should they be pontificated. Rather an evaluative process can run through the structure of a course, in the selection of topics, in the assumptions stated at the outset, in assigned readings and papers. It may be true that a social science does not as such make Christian value judgments, but the Christian social scientist is still not a schizophrenic. If she is a Christian, her values will somehow or other show themselves, consciously or unconsciously, in her work. It had better be conscious and well reasoned rather than unconscious and unreasoned, or else it will likely appear dishonest and be confused.

The ethical approach to integration, in other words, must explore the intrinsic relationship between the facts and the values of justice and love, a relationship that goes beyond the question of consequences. The key to the fact-value relationship lies rather in what ethicists call “middle-level concepts.” Relating the factual circumstances of a business to ethical questions about wages and prices is the middle-level concept of work, its meaning and its purposes. Relating facts about crime to questions about sentencing is the middle-level concept of punishment and its purposes. Relating the facts about Richard and Mary, their feelings for one another, to the obvious question they are facing is the middle-level concept of marriage, its meaning and its purpose. The ethical approach must focus on the meaning of and God’s purpose for work, punishment, and marriage, drawing on both biblical teaching and theological reflection related to these particular areas.

Middle-level concepts are necessary but not sufficient. We must also be clear about the overall biblical principles of justice and love. In addressing ethical issues, three questions are essential if we are to integrate Christian principles into ethical discussion.

1. What are the facts in the case, including contributing causes and possible consequences? Here the relevant sciences are important.

2. What middle-level concepts are involved? What are the purposes God intended for this area of human activity? Here theology and philosophy come into play.

3. What policy or action is called for in this kind of case or situation? How can we pursue proper purposes with justice and with love for all those involved? Here all the above considerations and disciplines come into play.³

THE FOUNDATIONAL APPROACH

Both the attitudinal and the ethical approaches uncover various assumptions with which Christians and others approach learning. The assumptions are part of the history of ideas, and particularly in the West that history shows the interplay of conflicting theological and philosophical traditions. This is true in every area of learning, for each of them has historical and philosophical foundations. “Foundations of Mathematics” and “Foundations of Education” are even common course titles. Curriculum studies in a number of major universities identify history and philosophy as “foundational disciplines,” and in Christian colleges theology becomes a third foundational area. These three are the focus of a “foundational” approach to integration.⁴

History is strategic in this regard when it is studied not just as a factual chronicle of rulers and wars and dates, but more as cultural and intellectual history. In that perspective it reveals the significance of ideas and values out of which people (reflective and valuing agents, that is) have acted. It becomes a history of governing ideals, and it includes the creative and redemptive influence of Christianity in the shaping of our culture.

What, for instance, about the origins of modern science? The philosopher and scientist A. N. Whitehead suggests that early modern science developed because of the encouragement given to it in the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages. This thesis has been challenged, but if it is not overstated I think it can be substantiated. The atmosphere of the Middle Ages was pervaded by the theistic conviction that because God is the rational and wise Creator, his handiwork is therefore intelligible to beings in God’s image. This theistic atmosphere which expected the natural order to be amenable to rational inquiry was the natural birthplace of scientific inquiry. Fifty years ago, the British philosopher Michael Foster published a series of articles arguing that the Greek conception that eternal forms determine the course of nature led the ancients to rationalistic speculations rather than to empirical observation, until the theistic insistence prevailed in science as in theology that nature is contingent on God. There is no intrinsic necessity that it exist or that it be the way it is. If it is God’s creation, it is contingent on God, and the scientist can no longer operate on an a priori basis but must be more empirical if he is to find out how nature does in fact behave. The result, according to Foster, was the growth of Renaissance science.⁵

The historical approach has considerable merit in the humanities. In introducing students to philosophy, one obvious way to expose the effect of Christian perspectives is to include readings from first-rate philosophers of the past who were themselves Christian theists. That is usually far more effective than a teacher’s own half-baked, underdeveloped notions. One might include Christian philosophers of different sorts: Augustine’s Christianization of Cicero; Aquinas’s use of Aristotelian ideas; Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and Berkeley and their attempts to justify and limit human reason in dependence on God, while avoiding dangers inherent in the

³ See further my *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions* (InterVarsity Press, 1984), chaps. 6-8.

⁴ See chap. 1, note 4. Also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Eerdmans, 1976).

⁵ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Mentor Books, 1948), p. 14; M. B. Foster in *Mind* 43 (1934): 446; 44 (1935): 439; 45 (1936): 1.

current mechanistic view of nature and of man; Kierkegaard's criticism of Enlightenment epistemology and ethics. Christian philosophers as different as these reflect the pluralism within a Christian worldview, yet they share the common belief that God created all things and that man is uniquely in God's image, and they develop the creative impact of these ideas on the problems they wrestled with and in the positions they set forth.

Be it the history of science or of philosophy or of art or whatever, we have available historical samples of faith in creative contact with learning. They give us precedents on which to build, a tradition in which we too stand. They underscore the fact that God is at work in the history of the arts and sciences, as well as in the church and the nations, and this history continues today in our own efforts at a constructive relation of faith and learning.

Philosophical foundations are every bit as important, whether they be in philosophy of science, or philosophical psychology, or aesthetic and critical theory, or whatever. What one assumes about the nature and limitations of scientific explanation affects not only what explanations are proposed and how they will be evaluated, but also whether other kinds of explanation (religious ones for example) are to be accepted. Theories of literary criticism in similar fashion determine what sort of meaning a piece may have, indeed for Derrida and the deconstructionists whether it can have any public meaning at all. Philosophies of history, and theories of human personality underlying them, speak to questions of historical causation: the Marxist, the Freudian, and the Christian therefore read history quite differently, as they do sociology and literature and everything else. Philosophical foundations concern methods of knowing and interpreting (epistemology), conceptions of reality (metaphysics), and basic values. Every discipline has such foundations, and they are utterly strategic for Christian integration. Disagreements about other particular interpretations and theories are often rooted here.

This is partly why theological foundations are essential too, for Christian theology has philosophical implications. The Christian revelation claim puts limitations on the scope of scientific knowledge. Its understanding of the human person runs counter to much in Marxist and other forms of naturalistic thinking. One must be alert to such tensions—as well as to commonalities—if one is to think with integrity as a Christian. By the same token, theological foundations should underly a Christian ethic, a theory of social change, an aesthetic—not that they answer all the philosophical questions, but rather that they point constructive directions on foundational issues. The Christian in philosophy needs to be theologically informed, if integration is to proceed, but by the same token the theologian must be philosophically informed if he is to contribute to foundational thinking. In fact an entire Christian college faculty might fruitfully work through the major topics of systematic theology, asking how each topic touches the foundations of its disciplines.

The greatest effect of Christian theology is undoubtedly in the humanities, because there we find explicit views of human nature, of God, of morals, and of life. Yet paradoxically Christians have frequently exhibited least interest here. The next greatest influence is in the social and behavioral sciences, where the concern is with human behavior and institutions. The least far-ranging impact of Christian theology is in the natural sciences, despite the fact that more has probably been written about the relationship of Christianity to science than to other areas. Evangelicals have stressed the “how” of creation, yet the biblical teaching has more far-reaching essentials—one is in the essential character of theism as against Gnostic dualism and pantheism and naturalism. As Langdon Gilkey well shows in his *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, creation *ex nihilo* speaks to the problems of good and evil, freedom and individuality, and meaning in life. Another essential is the uniqueness of people in the image of God. The effect of these items on

the content of natural science is much less than their effect in the social sciences and humanities. In addition, the doctrines of sin and grace, biblical conceptions of history and of social justice, and the whole range of doctrines need exploring.

Unfortunately the gaps between our disciplines too often prevent the benefits of interdepartmental interaction. The scientist or literature teacher can come out of the best graduate school with little more than an eighth-grade theology, and perhaps less philosophy. Too often the psychologist is unacquainted with the philosophical limitations of empirical methods or with recent philosophical work on the nature of mind. And the sociologist is often a stranger to ethical theory and so a novice at arguing on other than dogmatic or utilitarian grounds, or is unacquainted with Old Testament social ethics. Nor do philosophers and theologians necessarily help. Too many of them are content to insulate themselves within their analyses and exegeses, rather than interacting with the arts and sciences their work should affect.

Somehow this syndrome must be broken. Interdisciplinary courses are premature before the teachers involved know enough about each others' fields to construct and conduct a unified course. Time must first be found for interdisciplinary dialog among faculty. Meanwhile it would help if every student were required to take not only a course in Christian theology and a general introduction to philosophy that stresses the nature of philosophical inquiry and selects from the heritage of Western thought, but also a course that bridges either outward from another discipline toward religion and philosophy or inward from philosophy to another discipline. Philosophy of science or of mind, social ethics or aesthetics, philosophy of history or religion, of politics or law—these are the courses that address the foundational questions with which other disciplines contact philosophy. At least a requirement in these areas would help the next generation of college teachers to do what the present generation has not always been able to accomplish in interpreting scientific and scholarly findings.

THE WORLDVIEW APPROACH

The most embracing contact between Christianity and human learning is the all-encompassing world and life view. The Christian faith enables us to see all things in relationship to God as their Creator, Redeemer, and Lord, and from this central focus an integrating worldview emerges. The contemporary university tends to concentrate on the parts rather than the whole and to come away with a fragmented view of life that lacks overall meaning. Arnold Nash calls this tendency “intellectual polytheism,”⁶ to underscore that it is as much a commitment to a worldview as is Christian theism. The influence of intellectual polytheism has been calamitous. When a multitude of studies is conducted with no interrelationships the university becomes a multiversity. In theory the university rejects attempts to teach anyone conception of the world but in practice it teaches a fragmented view of life. Even to take a “neutral” position is to take some position. The worldviewish issues cannot be avoided.

More recently Robert Brombaugh, professor of philosophy at Yale University, stated in his Presidential Address to the Metaphysical Society of America,

We are doing an increasingly brisk and precise job in secondary school science in demonstrating the case for a world of fact that admits no glimmer of caprice, freedom, or change in its causal order. We are doing an increasingly more crucial job of awakening a sense of responsibility in our students. Sometimes they feel this responsibility toward society, sometimes toward their own authenticity. But we are doing nothing at all to explain this schizophrenic change in the conception of reality that varies with each move

⁶ *The University and the Modern World*. pp. 258ff.

between classrooms. We are upset by the attempts of our students to retain some intellectual integrity: by apathy, by indiscriminate activism, by distrust of an intelligence and authority that has set them a puzzle they must solve, with pieces that cannot be fitted together into any solution.⁷

It is a sad paradox that on the one hand the scientific outlook declares that nature is intelligible and rationally ordered in both its macroscopic and its microscopic aspects, and on the other hand the pessimist tells us that life is devoid of any intrinsic meaning and intelligible order at all. Ours is a schizophrenic day that desperately needs an integrated understanding, a worldview that can stick fragmented pieces together. The Christian is obliged to develop a Christian worldview, believing as he does that the Christian message heals.

But what do we mean by a worldview, a *Weltanschauung*? The notion needs unpacking, and I suggest four characteristics.⁸

The first and most obvious is that a worldview is holistic or integrational. It sees things not just as parts but also as a whole. It is a systematic understanding and appraisal of life, and none of the academic disciplines is exempted from contact with it.

Second, a worldview is exploratory, not a closed system worked out once and for all but an endless undertaking that is still but the vision of a possibility, an unfinished symphony barely begun. It explores the creative and redemptive impact of the Christian revelation on every dimension of thought and life, and it remains open-ended because the task is so vast that to complete it would require the omniscience of God. To begin requires an intelligent understanding of the Christian revelation, and from this first glimpse of truth as a whole endless inquiry grows. We should not expect the Christian college to propound a definite and complete Christian view of things, for it is premature to finalize all the details of a Christian view of this, that or anything. Christian perspectives are possible, but not a complete and definitive system. Who are we bungling, stuttering creatures to exhaust any subject? Now we see through a glass darkly; we know in part.

Third, a Christian worldview is likely to be pluralistic. If it is an open-ended exploration you cannot expect complete unanimity—not that there is much virtue in human unanimity anyway. Even within a particular Christian tradition, say the Reformed, there should be room for pluralism in the development of various perspectives each equally loyal to Reformed theology. Historic Christianity taken as a whole has been even more pluralistic. Diversity exists not only because of theological difference but also because we explore Christian perspectives on the world of thought at different points and by different paths and with different concerns and backgrounds. This is why academic freedom and intellectual honesty are so essential.

Fourth, a worldview is confessional and perspectival. We need not proceed deductively from universal and necessary truths, from either axioms or scientifically demonstrable propositions, so I prefer not to call the starting point “presuppositions.” Rather we start with a confession of faith, with an admixture of beliefs and attitudes and values. Good and sufficient reason may be given for what we believe, but ours is still a confessional stance and from the perspective of this confession we look at life. We see things from a Christian point of view.

A world and life view is not the same as a theology: Christian theology is a study of the perspective itself as disclosed by the biblical revelation. It looks within, whereas a Christian worldview looks without, at life and thought in other departments and disciplines, in order to see these other things from the standpoint of revelation and as an interrelated whole. Integration is

⁷ “Applied Metaphysics: Truth and Passing Time,” *Review of Metaphysics* 19 (1966): 650-51.

⁸ For a fuller statement see my *Contours of a World View* (Eerdmans, 1983).

ultimately concerned to see things whole from a Christian perspective, to penetrate thought with that perspective, to think Christianly.

The four characteristics of a worldview, then, are that it is (1) holistic, (2) exploratory, (3) pluralistic, and (4) perspectival, and the four approaches I have suggested to integration are (1) the attitudinal, (2) the ethical, (3) the foundational, and (4) the worldviewish.