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Integrity and Integration: An Exploration of the Personal, Professional, and Pedagogical in the Professoriate

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the connections between the concepts of integrity and integration within the professoriate in Christian higher education. Specifically, it examines commonalities and intersections in the definitions of terms, the gaps between rhetoric and reality, and the reasons for those gaps. Implications for a professor's inner life, scholarship, and teaching are also discussed, and suggestions for closing the gaps are offered.

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Laurie Matthias and Ruth-Anne Wideman

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the connections between the concepts of integrity and integration within the professoriate in Christian higher education. Specifically, it examines commonalities and intersections in the definitions of terms, the gaps between rhetoric and reality, and the reasons for those gaps. Implications for a professor's inner life, scholarship, and teaching are also discussed, and suggestions for closing the gaps are offered.

Introduction

In 2007, Matthias conducted a qualitative study to explore the exemplary integration of faith and learning among seven professors at Wheaton College. Participants were chosen deliberately for their maximum variation in age, gender, experience, academic discipline, and denominational background. One of the key findings was that all participants demonstrated and articulated a desire for integrity or wholeness. In other words, they could not separate their identities as Christians from their identities as academic scholars and teachers. A participant in the study, Tim Larsen, McManus Chair of Christian Thought and professor of theology, commented that "integrity" and "integration" derive from the same root and are therefore logically connected. If Larsen's contention is true, then it provides an impetus for professors of education in Christian institutions to explore those connections further, particularly as they relate to professorial influence upon students who seek to spend their lives as classroom teachers.

Connections Between Integrity and Integration

Definitions of Terms

Integrity. Although several predominant themes emerge as scholars explore the concept of integrity as it relates to leadership, we have chosen a more foundational definition of the term in order to make

a logical connection to integration. The Oxford American Dictionary defines integrity as "wholeness, an unimpaired moral state, and freedom from moral corruption, innocence, fair dealing, honesty, and sincerity" (Jewell, 2002, p. 431). Dr. Henry Cloud confirms this definition when he states that integrity is "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness," "the state of being whole and undivided" and "internal consistency" (2006, p. 31). Thus, we view the concept of integrity in the professoriate as including both morality as well as wholeness. Additionally, we believe that separating the two definitions is virtually impossible.

Integration of faith and learning.

In the seemingly endless theoretical discussion of the integration of faith and learning, there is widespread agreement that the phrase implies an underlying presumption that at least in the current American cultural climate, faith and learning are separate spheres in need of being reunited (Fischer, 1989; Wacker, Pavlischek, Charles, & Wuthnow, 1995; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Wilhoit, 1987; Wolfe, 1987). According to Arthur Holmes who popularized the phrase, the integration of faith and learning is "a lifelong struggle to see things whole, to think and become more consistently what we profess" (2003, p. 112). If faith is defined as both a body of doctrine and a way of life, and learning as both a body of knowledge and a process, then the integration of faith and learning "could imply any four combinations of these elements" (Badley, 1994, p. 28). Thus, it is both a scholarly activity (Hasker, 1992) as well as a lifestyle (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004; Morton, 2004). For the purposes of this discussion, the integration of faith and learning is defined as any attempt of professors to discover, interpret, and/or articulate the various ways their faith impacts their learning or their learning impacts their faith. Thus, in a myriad of ways, professors

who seek to integrate are also those who seek wholeness within themselves. In short, based on the definitions of these terms, the pursuit of the integration of faith and learning is the pursuit of integrity, and vice-versa.

The Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality

Despite the fact that the mission statements of most Christian college and universities include an emphasis on the integration of faith and learning, theorists have concluded that the rhetoric far exceeds the actual practice more often than not (Claerbaut, 2004; Gill, 1989; Heie, 1997, 1998). According to separate studies conducted by Burton and Nwosu (2003), Korniejczuk (1994), and Lyon, Beaty, and Mixon (2002), most professors admit that while they agree that the integration of faith and learning is important, they are unprepared to practice it themselves. Generally, few professors are exemplary in both the academic as well as the spiritual realms. In other words, some are known for their passionate faith in the classroom and others for their scholarship in their respective disciplines. However, not many have a strong reputation for doing both well. Even more significantly, while some professors do excel in both realms, even fewer practice the integration of the two.

Just as there is a gap between what ought to be and what is in the area of integration, there is a similar gap in the area of professorial integrity. Rare indeed would be the professor who is not fully aware of what he should be doing on a daily basis in terms of his teaching, scholarship, and community service. Yet for various reasons, faculty members often act differently than their values would dictate that they should act. Professors of higher education Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) suggest that “the essence, substance, animating principle” (p. 33) or actuating cause that brought professors to the calling of the professoriate in the first place is out of tune, and therefore they are in need of reclaiming their professional souls if they seek to address the current culture. Holmes (1986) brings this indictment upon evangelical professors in Christian institutions when he states that “very few [professors] will put their jobs on the line for conscience sake” (p. 12). Dennis Dirks (1988) further explains: “It is more difficult . . . for faculty to encourage student moral growth beyond levels to which they themselves have developed” (p. 329). This latter statement is especially pertinent for

education professors since they have an added responsibility to serve as role models for their students who will in turn serve as role models for their students. The domino effect of professorial integrity and integration (or lack thereof) cannot, therefore, be overstated.

Reasons for the Gaps

Certainly it can be argued that there are as many reasons for these gaps between rhetoric and reality as there are personalities and backgrounds of professors. However, there are several common reasons that can be gleaned from the literature.

Ignorance. First, writers on the integration of faith and learning have agreed for decades that often the reluctance of faculty members to pursue integration can simply be attributed to their secular educational backgrounds (e.g., Beck, 1991; Coe, 2000; Gaebelien, 1968; Hong, 1960). In other words, because most of them have pursued post-graduate degrees in their fields at secular institutions, they have seen few if any examples of integration in their own backgrounds. Education professors in particular have the additional struggle of spending perhaps an entire career in the American public school system wherein it was mandated that they separate their personal faith from their teaching. Entering a Christian college or university as an education professor and being asked to then integrate the two can seem in many ways like a foreign concept to them. Therefore, while they appreciate the opportunity to speak about their faith in the classroom, they may truly be ignorant of how to genuinely integrate the two. Similarly, while some professors may desire to live lives of integrity, they may not fully understand what such wholeness or morality looks like in their roles as professors. Depending on their backgrounds, they may never have contemplated how their beliefs as Christians can and should impact the daily choices they make as professors.

Fear. Second, as is so often the case, fear can prevent us from both integrity and integration. In separate articles, Adrian (2003), Beaty, Buras, and Lyon (2004), and Wacker et al. (1995) identified professorial fears of being labeled as anti-intellectual fundamentalists as a key barrier to the integration of faith and learning. Additionally, the familiar writings of Parker Palmer (1993, 1998) remind professors that fear is often a barrier to their

effective teaching and to living lives of authenticity and integrity in front of their students. Although perhaps Christian professors would like to consider themselves exempt from such fears, they are human like anyone else. Fears of not being promoted or tenured and fears of opening themselves to criticism from colleagues, students, and administrators often contribute to a reluctance to pursue either integrity or integration.

Pride. Closely related to fear is another enemy of integrity and integration: pride. A plethora of writers have stated the obvious: that pride can be insidious in academia, and that unfortunately it is not limited to secular institutions (Adrian, 2003; Coles, 1988; Hatch, 1987; Holmes, 1977; Poe, 2004; Williams, 2002). Such pride can seriously prevent the genuine integration of faith and learning because an openness to change is vital to such integration. A professor cannot actively allow her faith to impact her learning or her learning to impact her faith if she is convinced that she already has all of the answers within her academic field and her personal faith. Similarly, a professor who is convinced that he is above moral and ethical struggles is setting himself up for serious failure in his own personal integrity.

Implications of the Connections

Personal: The Inner Life of the Professor

Obviously, the only way to overcome pride, the dangerous enemy of the genuine integration of faith and learning, is honest humility. This statement is not unique or original; it has been proposed and affirmed for five decades by many theorists on the issue of integration (e.g., Coles, 1988; Elshtain, 2006; Holmes, 1977; Litfin, 2004; Palmer, 1993, 1998; Trueblood, 1957). As Christians, evangelical scholars must be willing to engage in self-reflection (Beyer, 2003; Rosebrough, 2002), to abandon their egos, and to surrender themselves before the cross of Christ (Anderson, 2004; Coe, 2000; Hatch, 1987). This kind of humility is a crucial characteristic of faith and thus offers a starting point for a professor's personal integration of faith and learning (Dirk, 1957; Haroutunian, 1957) as well as the impetus for meaningful dialogue within the intellectual community (Harmon, 2006). When faculty members practice humility, they can acknowledge that sometimes their learning will lead them to alter their religious convictions and at other

times their faith will lead them to alter their academic convictions. When these changes are necessary, humility will allow the Christian scholar to make them (Heie, 1997; Wolterstorff, 2004a, 2004b). In short, according to Schwehn, "the rhythms of intellectual life at a Christian university include both a relentless questioning of what [one believes] and a believing of that which [one questions]" (1999, p. 29).

Perhaps not surprisingly, such authentic and humble self-examination is also what is necessary for genuine integrity in the professorate as well. Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006) recommend that striving for integrity—where word and deed are consistent with a personally owned value structure, over time and across varied contexts—is critical for spiritual integrity and growth. One's character and purposes configure one's life. In this way, a professor's interdependencies rely upon his capacity to identify with something larger than his own self-interest. Thus, the most central tenet of strengthening authenticity in higher education is that each and every faculty member must be willing to share her own orientations, motives, prides, and prejudices.

Additionally, Smith (1999) emphasizes that without personal integrity, it is impossible to have integrity in leading others. Acknowledging that living a life of integrity can be difficult, he states that it is nevertheless part of our vocation.

Leaders with strong character have power, dignity, and integrity. Christian character is built around these divine cardinal virtues. Character develops when the mind and heart instruct the will in accepting these controlling virtues, out of which come Christ-like values and actions. (p. 46)

Again, the impact that education professors have on the next generation of teachers makes this principle especially significant.

Professional: The Scholarship of the Professor

Integrity in the area of scholarship moves beyond the obvious moral issues of avoiding plagiarism and exerting honest effort in research. Flowing from personal integrity, the Christian professor engages in the intellectual virtue of critical curiosity where critical thinking drives truthfulness to dominate research and discourse with students and colleagues alike. For example, in the study conducted by

Matthias (2007), professors who exemplified the integration of faith and learning at Wheaton College demonstrated this critical curiosity in their passion for their own academic disciplines, their intentional pursuit of theological and philosophical knowledge, and their hunger to discover how all of these areas intertwine.

Additionally, the personal morality of the professor reaches to the sphere of intellectual honesty and accountability as they present concepts, ideas, and pedagogy that align with secular institutions but are also congruent with integrity, honesty, and ethics as reflected in the biblical model. Once again, they are meant to be an integrated whole. Ivy George (1992) challenges the Christian professoriate by suggesting that faculty members should actively and respectfully dialogue with colleagues in secular institutions and “agree to share common ground when they concur with our Christian perspective” (p. 306). However, she also cautions that “we should at the same time reserve the right to debate and dissent when our religious and rational belief systems are in opposition to particular social policies and systems that thwart the discovery and establishment of God’s image in us” (p. 306). Such pursuit of a scholarship that does not sacrifice a Christian professor’s personal faith honors his attempts to pursue integrity as well as integration.

Pedagogical: The Teaching of the Professor

Perhaps it is only natural that educators who educate educators find in their teaching the clearest fusion of personal integrity and the integration of faith and learning. Here the virtues of humility, authenticity, and trust merge in a symbiotic relationship to produce a life of integrity. Gushee (1999) describes authentic piety as a genuine devotion to God, a living, on-going relationship with God. It is in this relationship that the corresponding principles, practices, and disciplines find their roots. The relational virtue of covenant fidelity follows and calls Christian professors to a place where students are allowed to get close enough to them to see how their relationships engage community living in a coherent manner. According to Sullivan (2004), to be a true servant leader, the professor must be a builder of community by caring for her followers and encouraging them to care for others. As Parker Palmer reminds us, “community begins to emerge as we seek our inward nature” (1993, pp. 90-91),

and it is as we are in community that humility calls us to pay attention to the other, whose integrity and voice are central to knowing and teaching the truth. This comes full circle in the life of the professor as the teacher does not give ultimate reverence to the words of self, students, or subject; rather the teacher reveres the living word that comes from that loving source who made us in community and calls us back to obedient life together.

Thus the Christian professor must display personal integrity that is ethical and consistent in word and deed while operating in the community of scholars and students. When teachers are in touch with their own spiritual journeys, they engage learners in ways that encourage them to explore various dimensions of a topic. According to English and Gillen (2000), recognition that spirituality permeates one’s entire being makes compartmentalization a less viable way of engaging subject matter and students. And avoiding such compartmentalization is, by definition, engaging in the integration of faith and learning—in the professor’s inner life, in scholarship, and in pedagogy.

Once again, one of the most significant concerns for education professors is that the students they teach, who will then become teachers themselves, model integrity before their own students one day. It is therefore a professor’s hope that as she establishes a covenant based on trust with her students within her classroom, her modeling a life of integrity and personal integration of faith and learning will impact their lives and encourage them to do likewise as future teachers. Telford and Gostick (2005) contend that integrity is indeed what inspires trust and that without integrity, one cannot be trusted and consequently followed. If a Christian education professor agrees with Telford and Gostick, then his ultimate goal is to follow the recommendation of Parker Palmer (1993) in firmly establishing and maintaining a covenant of trust with students. Palmer states that: “Truth requires the knower to become interdependent with the known. Both parties have their own integrity and otherness. . . . But truth demands acknowledgement of and response to the fact that the knower and the known are implicated in each other’s lives” (p. 32).

Suggestions for Closing the Gap

If it is true that professors should be pursuing both integrity and integration in their lives as professors

in Christian colleges and universities, then what improvements can be made in order to proactively close the gap between rhetoric and reality? While these ideas are not necessarily original, nor are they comprehensive, they do provide certain steps that can and should be taken by those who are serious about integrity and integration.

Institutional Hiring Practices

There is widespread agreement among experts in Christian higher education that because faculty are so vital to the mission of evangelical colleges and universities, hiring those who are capable of integrating faith and learning has become an important aspect of avoiding secularization (Adrian, 1997; Beck, 1991; Marsden, 1997; Shipps, 1992). Ultimately, of course, hiring decisions rest with administrators of institutions. However, current faculty members typically meet with prospective candidates and are allowed at least some input in the decision making process. Therefore, they should learn to ask questions that probe a candidate's desire for integrity, personal humility, and ability to integrate faith and learning in scholarship and in teaching. Admittedly, such questions can and have been answered in a perfunctory manner that might allow a candidate to be hired even though she may not be qualified in these areas. Yet perhaps those who are patently unwilling to learn how to live with integrity and integration can be eliminated.

Professional Development

Attempts to provide professional development for new faculty members in the integration of faith and learning have been made on most Christian campuses with varying degrees of intensity and success. Continuing this practice and improving it is vital to the pursuit of this practice; in fact, the participants of the study at Wheaton College name their institution's deliberate focus on integration and opportunities to pursue it as instrumental in their own efforts to integrate. While any attempt to educate faculty members broadly on issues of integrity and integration is laudable (Hatch, 1987; Longman, 1999; Marsden, 1997; Nwosu, 1999; Opitz & Guthrie, 2001), academic departments should also offer professional development related more specifically to their fields. For example, education professors should be exposed to the practice of examining the underlying philosophical and theoretical assumptions or trends in education

in light of biblical principles. Although faculty members may have a natural reluctance to being too prescriptive in such sessions, there are ways to teach a new professor how to attempt such integration without laying out a formulaic approach. Additionally, there may be some issues of integrity unique to education professors, such as the residual effects of making so many exceptions for students who are struggling that they end up with a disastrous experience in student teaching.

The Importance of Theology

Theorists purport that a thorough understanding of theology is vital for genuine integration (Beck, 1991; Claerbaut, 2004; Goldsmith, 1994; Masterson, 1999). In fact, Carmody (1996), Carpenter (1999), and Ramm (1963) go as far as insisting that every professor be a lay theologian. Although this may be a lofty goal, realistically, professors are so busy trying to keep up with their own areas of research and teaching that they simply do not have time to become theologians. Therefore, beyond professional development, other opportunities that should be provided for professors who seek to pursue integrity and integration would be formal and informal discussions with theology professors within the institution. Several participants in the study at Wheaton College indicated that they made deliberate attempts to befriend theology professors so that as they explore an issue in their discipline, they can ask what would be good to read that might impact how they view that particular topic (Matthias, 2007). Such friendships would encourage a deeper understanding of how one's theology impacts the practice of personal integrity as well.

Mentoring

Five of the seven participants in the study conducted at Wheaton College identified the influence of mentors as essential to their own exemplary integration of faith and learning (Matthias, 2007). Undoubtedly, there are numerous positives and negatives associated with any attempt to mentor in an academic setting. However, unless a professor has someone with whom he can share his struggles regarding integrity and integration, genuine growth and change is far less likely to occur. Many institutions establish formal mentoring relationships for new faculty members in order to facilitate their adjustment to the institution and/or

the life of the professoriate. These mentoring relationships should be expanded in order to provide encouragement, feedback, and accountability regarding the integration of faith and learning as well. Depending on the strength of the relationship and the authenticity of its participants, integrity issues can and should also be explored.

Conclusion

Pursuing a life of integrity and attempting to integrate one's faith and learning are inseparable goals for the Christian professor. Although the barriers of ignorance, fear, and pride are at times seemingly insurmountable, practical ways of overcoming them do exist. Essentially, those faculty members who are a few paces ahead on this journey should serve in mentoring roles with new faculty members who then engage future teachers to be models of integrity and integration. Ultimately, the desire to be men and women of integrity who also practice integration must be both genuine and primary for education professors. Truly, the future integrity of Christian higher education depends on integration remaining at the core of our institutions and the professoriate within them.

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