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An "Integrality" Model for Teaching

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Abstract

For Christian educators working in secular institutions, or for those who are required to teach curricula based on secularist philosophy, it can be confusing as to how to faithfully integrate faith and learning. This essay suggests an appropriate and biblically-grounded way to regard this problem and effectively use knowledge from secular sources. This process starts with a reconsideration of the definitions for *integration*, *faith*, and *knowledge*. It also entails the purposing of all truth, which belongs to God, within the classroom.

Keywords

integration, faith and learning, knowledge, integral, integrality

From the Integration of Faith and Learning to Integrality

Geoff Beech • *Elizabeth Beech*

Abstract

For Christian educators working in secular institutions, or for those who are required to teach curricula based on secularist philosophy, it can be confusing as to how to faithfully integrate faith and learning. This essay suggests an appropriate and biblically-grounded way to regard this problem and effectively use knowledge from secular sources. This process starts with a reconsideration of the definitions for *integration, faith*, and *knowledge*. It also entails the purposing of all truth, which belongs to God, within the classroom.

Introduction

The integration of faith and learning has attracted much attention in Christian education circles in recent years. The integrationist stance does not appear to be a problem for secularists who live and teach in a natural way out of their particular beliefs and assumptions. For Christians, however, the issue appears to be much more of a problem as we endeavor to live out of a different story from that accepted by secular societies. As Newbigin (1989) wrote:

> The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story. What is the real story of which my life story is a part? … In our contemporary culture, as exemplified in the curriculum of teaching in the public schools, two quite different stories are told…these are two different and incompatible stories. (pp. 15–16)

We have heard of integrating faith and learning as the ongoing work to answer the question, "How can we faithfully incorporate what we believe to be true regarding our relationship with God, his

Word and his Creation, with everything we teach?" Considering the Newbigin (1989) quotation above, a distinctly different way of expressing this would be to ask, "How might we integrate God's metanarrative with a metanarrative derived from other sources, such as secular humanism?" There is often confusion between these two questions, however, and we may read or hear attempts to answer the first question by referring to the second.

In this article, we contend that these are the wrong questions and that, instead, we should look to the meaning we give to the terms *faith, learning*, and *integration*. In the education debates, we believe both the Church and the secular humanists have misunderstood these terms as they have been applied in Christian education. This is particularly significant in the secular humanist society we find in Australia. This has had a significant influence on society and the earliest establishment of education in Australia deemed that it must be "free, compulsory and secular" (Campbell, 2014). Many in Australian society continue to insist that there be a separation of what they deem to be religious from what they claim to be neutral and secular (Maddox, 2014). The result is that any claims to anything that may be linked to faith are supposed to be relegated to spaces designed specifically for religious purposes and kept outside the public square. While the claims of secularism are illogical, education is expected and required, to be neutral somehow. This exerts a profound influence on Christian

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education at all levels. As Christian educators, we are called by God to be faithful to him and his revelation, but at the same time, secularist governments and societies press us to pedagogy and curricula to promote their expectations, values, and beliefs.

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Consideration of these distinctions is not new. Writing nearly 2000 years ago, the theologian Tertullian wrote the much-quoted questions: "What then hath Athens in common with Jerusalem? What hath the Academy in common with the Church? What have heretics in common with Christians?" (Tertullian & Bindley, 2016, p. 46). This quotation paralleled the Church or Christian orthodoxy (Jerusalem) with what he saw as the secularist, education of the academy (Athens). Tertullian (2016) added the following:

> We have no need of speculative inquiry after we have known Christ Jesus; nor of the search for the Truth after we have received the Gospel. When we become believers, we have no desire to believe anything besides; for the first article of our belief is that there is nothing besides which we ought to believe. (p. 46)

This raises the question of Christianity being anti-intellectual, a position that seems to be evident to some extent in fundamentalist circles of today's church—where faith consists solely of believing in Christ and rejecting the need for any other speculative inquiry involving academic pursuits. The supposed integration imperative for this comes from the relationship we have with God and an educative obligation to secular curricula, government regulations, parents, and students. So, we see a need to integrate Athens and Jerusalem to at least some degree. We need to either force

our Christian beliefs to merge with a secular education context, or force education to merge with Christian belief. In either case, the result for which we might hope would be a single entity called "Christian education"—an education that is pleasing to God and for his purposes, as well as pleasing to the secular education authorities.

This oil and water integration project, however, has always proved difficult and requires unsatisfactory compromises. As Esqueda (2014) pointed out, the idea of integration "conveys a false dichotomy" (p. 91) and the end result of this confusion is that we tend to function at a practical level as agnostics or atheists (Naugle, in Esqueda, 2014). In an attempt to provide a corrective, this essay proposes a rejection of the integrationist model. While proposing a reconceptualization of integration to integrality, we also suggest that we need to reconceptualize the common understanding of faith as blind trust in something or someone, or adherence to a set of beliefs, and replace it with the biblical idea of faithfulness. We also propose reconceptualizing learning, or knowledge attainment, as the unhiding of God's knowledge given to us in various forms.

Integration

When we consider the integration of faith and learning, these questions arise: Are they really separate? If so, then who separated them? The idea that as Christian educators we are trying to deal simultaneously with two distinct entities such as these creates significant dissonance for us. We know we are committed to the Creator and Sustainer of "all things" (Colossians 1), which ought to be reflected in our vocation. This may lead us to believe we are only able to accomplish this by personalizing our faith and privatizing it—because dualistic separation is an easier path than integration.

This Benedict option (Dreher, 2018) of withdrawal concedes that secularist claims to knowledge are so strong, they must be allowed to stand. We have been trained in this through education systems and the media for all of our lives, so in some ways this may seem a reasonable conclusion. It is just the way things are and we accept the status quo as normal. Yet there remains a disconnect between what we may see as the

Christian part of our lives and secular-owned knowledge. As with other complex issues, we can even become adept at constructing confabulations that help us live with an apparent confusion (Haidt, 2015). One popular version of this is the unstated acceptance of the Deistic thinking of William Paley who spoke over two hundred years ago of the clockmaker God who wound the universe up and allowed it to function by itself.

Another very well-known accommodation for the tension of integration is that of a "God of the gaps" (Plantinga, 1997). In this argument, God is only required where there are gaps in our understanding of life and the universe. As our understanding grows, then the role of God becomes less and less. While this may sound nonsensical, it is something that is very deeply ingrained in human beings and has been particularly apparent since the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment and ensuing scientism and modernism, along with improved communication, led to a substantial increase in the human knowledge database. One common factor in the separationist-integrationist arguments that we may consciously or subconsciously make to ourselves, therefore, is the wealth of good material available in the secular realm. Can Christian education claim academic rigor if certain material is ignored? In order to skirt this argument, we may take a number of approaches. Opperwal (1985) described some of these:

> In one meaning of integration, the academic disciplines are left in place and the teacher, with the assistance of Christian textbook and other resources, adds a Christian interpretation or assessment to such subjects. Locating in God the order and beauty of mathematics and the intricacy and design of the physical world in science are given as the way that the integration takes place. So too in history and social studies Christian assessment of cultural practices or forms of government can occur in teacher resource or textbook talk. Thus, the same academic subjects as in secular education are baptized by sprinkling with evaluations or interpretations, thus effecting an integration of Christian faith and subject matter. (pp. 12– 13)

Additive approaches such as these have been described by John van Dyk (2011) as "tacky" because they "tack on" biblical perspectives to material that we are told is secular in origin. Of course, for time-poor educators, finding integration points in curriculum material as well as the time and effort required to understand the appropriate biblical perspectives to tack on is asking a great deal. This is one of the reasons why "the integration of faith and learning is typically more popular in theory than in practice" (Lyon, Beaty & Mixon, 2002, p. 337). Another reason for this involves the popular concession, unconscious as it may be, that there is truth that lies outside God's ownership. This is a persistent assumption, resulting in an inherently strained juxtaposition between two truth-source claims.

Instead, we need to practice blending God's truth as revealed in his Word with his truth as revealed in his Creation. That is a very different exercise. While not equating our perceived revelation in Creation with the revelation of the Scriptures, this practice draws together God's revealed truth in the Creation-oriented curriculum areas and demonstrates its embeddedness in a biblically-grounded metanarrative. This requires a depth of understanding of God and his purposes through a knowledge of his Scriptures and faithful obedience to his calling. When considering this, we may need to seek a deeper understanding of faith and faithfulness.

Rethinking our idea of faith

As Christians, we are familiar with the word faith. The word may be used generally or specifically to refer to religions (for example, the Christian faith). As Wolterstorff (2009) and others pointed out, the word may also refer to any type of ultimate commitment. Therefore, it may also be used to refer to a belief or system of beliefs, but it is often thought of as a form of blind trust we may have in someone or something, something we believe to be true even though we cannot prove it empirically. Yet, as Dooyeweerd (1997) pointed out, all of life is religious, and we all have faith in ideas relating to our origin, our purpose, and the source of truth. This applies to all religions including humanism, atheism, Marxism, Confucianism, secularism, consumerism, or any other -ism.

For Christians, Scriptures point to the idea that faith really relates to faithfulness, as Matthew Bates (2017) reminded us. In this sense, faith is not a religion, as it is neither a set of ideological beliefs, nor is it a form of blind hope. Instead, it is an allegiance: allegiance to the King and Creator of the Universe, Jesus the Christ (Bates, 2017). The question then is not, "Do we have faith?" as a religion or a blind hope, but, "Are we, as Christian educators, living our lives in faithful allegiance to the King?" Given this definition, the integration question takes on a different flavor: "How might we live integrally-faithful lives in allegiance to the King with regard to knowledge and teaching?"

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Rethinking epistemology

Having considered faith, we now turn to learning. Much of our education practice is devoted to conscious or unconscious ideas pertaining to knowledge and knowledge acquisition. The theory of knowledge, or epistemology, is concerned with trusted truth, or "how to go about knowing something so that you can trust the results of the knowing process" (Bartholomew, 2015, p. 475). Every religious tradition has a particular notion of truth and its source, as well as the trustworthiness of different sources, and these notions infiltrate our education systems. We do not often think about them, though they "are generally at work unconsciously and thus powerfully shape a discipline uncritically and undetected" (Bartholomew, 2015, p. 476). For educators, this not only concerns the trusting of curriculum content, but the ways it shapes our understanding of appropriate pedagogies.

For example, we may consciously recognize that the knowledge from a textbook written from a secular humanist perspective may not be trusted or may be harmful, but we can either try to be

selective regarding the content used from the book or add some Scripture references to baptize it in some way. But in order to accurately critique the textbook material, there must also be biblical as well as content understanding. Additionally, these understandings must rely on the application of wisdom in order to determine its appropriateness or use. We may feel that these understandings might give numerous points for injecting biblical principles that may be seen as integration points in the whole learning process involving supposedly neutral content. Many educators and philosophers coming from a Reformed perspective, however, have noted that there is no neutrality with regard to knowledge (Clouser, 2005; Dockery, 2012; Edlin & Thompson, 2014). It points out whether knowledge is in the service of God or of a substitute for God. The important term here is "in the service of" to help one determine the end to which knowledge is being used.

If we are to use knowledge in God's service, then we would affirm the aphorism attributed to Augustine, that "all truth is God's truth." As Abraham Kuyper (Kuyper & Bratt, 2010) said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (p. 461). Further, Paul clearly described Christ's lordship over all in Colossians 1:15–20. That being the case, we must accept our omniscient God's ownership of all true knowledge. Out of his knowledge, God has given us truth—true knowledge— by Common Grace to humankind. Since the Fall, humans have striven to claim that the knowledge is their own and have used knowledge to serve other gods. As Augustine wrote:

> [Humans] did not create these things, but excavated them, as it were, from the mines of divine Providence, which is everywhere present, but they wickedly and unjustly misuse this treasure for the service of demons. When a Christian severs himself in spirit from a wretched association with these people, he ought to take these truths from them for the lawful service of preaching the Gospel. (Harmless & Augustine, 2010, p. 183)

For integral Christian education, this implies taking God's truth, wherever it may be found, and

acknowledging God's ownership and his purposes for it, first for ourselves and also for our students. This repurposing of truth involves taking from sources such as textbooks that would claim that the knowledge in them is owned by secularists, and reclaiming it. As Dockerty (2012) argued,

> We need an effective response to secularized thinking, one that questions the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous reason and recalls Augustine's model of faith seeking understanding, recognizing that wherever we find truth, it is the Lord's, even as we struggle with issues and carry on debate in the pursuit of truth. (p. 5)

The struggle that humans have when we try to relinquish knowledge ownership has been evident since the temptation in Eden, when we began seeking knowledge for ourselves. This desire is built into human beings and we are very reluctant to give credit to God. It may be hard to see in ourselves but we can see it in others, such as the secular humanists: a clutching to knowledge with Gollum-like determination. It is our, or their, "Precious." Helping our students to grasp this idea will provide for them a different world and life perspective as they engage with all forms of learning throughout their lives.

From integration to integrality

Given a reconceptualizing of faith to faithful allegiance and of learning to the acquisition or reclaiming of God's truth, we should also reconsider what we mean by integration. The meaning we give to the word integration may vary within contexts. Within faith-learning contexts, integration usually invokes images of joining, assembling together, appending, interlacing, intertwining, or weaving together. If, however, we reject the need to integrate truth and un-truth, but accept the need to bring together biblical and Creation-derived truths (our curriculum), this leads to an "anti-synthetical" approach that may be labeled "integrality." Van der Walt (2011) referred to the Dutch philosopher Vollenhoven in this regard saying that he "thought anti-synthetically; he was against any kind of synthesis of biblical and unbiblical ideas. And his anti-

synthetic thinking was not of a secular nature (ignoring God's revelation), but Christian (obeying God's revelation)" (para. 99).

This integral approach accepts the Lordship of Christ over all things, and sees all truth as being a seamless whole, while also recognizing his specific and general revelation. The different forms of truth therefore are seen to relate to each other, "because all truth has its source in God, composing a single universe of knowledge" (Dockery, 2012, p. 5).

Considering Christian higher education in this regard, Fernhout (2017) wrote of the significance of this integral approach to Christian education:

> Integral says something very important about the seamless identity of Christian higher education [we strive] to foster globally. Integral has the same Latin root as integrity, a highly admired human trait. A person of integrity does what is right in a reliable way; he or she has a spiritual and moral compass that does not waver. You can count on such a person to be true to their deepest identity and commitments. What you get on the outside is of one piece with what's on the inside. By analogy, integral Christian higher education shows a similar wholeness of character. It, too, is guided by a deep spiritual compass that points unwaveringly in the direction of service to the reign of Jesus as Lord. (p. 2)

Ever since the Fall, our fallen nature has struggled with integrity and integrality but we see the fallen state of the world and fear the contamination that may occur if we try to align what we see as sacred and profane. We know all too well our capacity to make errors. As George Pierson (2009) wrote, "As sinners our most basic heart-indwelt spiritual commitments, pre- theoretical in character, are capable of twisting and distorting our God-given structures, especially our noetic structures apart from Christ" (p. 38). So, integrality, based on integrity, requires a concerted effort on our part to be more obediently allegiant to God. We must also acknowledge that biblically-grounded reality insists that our lives are not about God being in our story, but we are in his story. This is not beyond reach, as we rely on God-given abilities to access and process with integrity, new, integral

knowledge in meaningful ways. This can inform our classroom practice as we claim back the knowledge he has given and re-purpose it for his Kingdom purposes. From personal experience, we have known the profound influence that being convinced that we live in God's narrative has had on our lives and we long for our students to also experience this conviction. Living and teaching with intentionality in this regard leads to a different approach to classroom practice.

Re-purposing for integrality in the classroom

Given the reasoning above, we suggest five approaches that may help to underpin integral classroom teaching and reflect the biblical grounding of our education. These are not additional pedagogy techniques as such, but call for teaching that flows out of an integral, biblically grounded life. These approaches involve reclaiming, unhiding, redeeming and relating knowledge, and accessing the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit.

Reclaiming. Instead of separating supposedly secular and God-sourced truth, the process of reclaiming knowledge consists of taking truths that have been made available to human beings by God's Common Grace, and ensuring that we, and our students, understand that these truths belong to God, that he is their origin, and that they are to be used for his purposes. This includes truths as defined, for example, by mathematics, but also truths as they are unfolded in the evolving theories of the sciences, in true observations of God's created images as portrayed in literature or history, and in truths that may be interpreted from pieces of art or fiction. As students understand the relationship between God and true knowledge, education becomes for them an integral, theological pursuit.

Unhiding. Integral education is concerned with the unhiding of God. A common Greek word for truth that is found in the New Testament is *aletheia*. At its core, this word contains the idea of un-hiding, or uncovering, and can carry the notion of clearing away to reveal something. In John 14:6, Jesus refers to himself as the truth, the *aletheia*—he is the unhiding of God for us. Throughout Scripture, God tells us that if we want to know

about him, we should look at what he has done and as well as looking to the saving work of Christ. This applies also to the observable Creation which is the focus of most of our education. The understanding of God as un-hidden in his works means that all education that is concerned with the teaching and learning of truth, will be marked by the integrality of knowledge, and is therefore deeply theological.

Redeeming. Strongly connected to the reclaiming and unhiding processes in integral education practices is the redemption of knowledge—using what others believe to be theirs for God's purposes. An interesting example of this is evident in Acts 17 in Paul's speech in the Areopagus. Paul quoted first from the Cretan pagan poet Epimenides ("For in him we live and move and have our being"), followed by the Cilician Stoic philosopher, Aratus ("We are his offspring"). Neither of these men were Christians, or even believers in the true God; they were referring to the Greek god Zeus. Paul, however, quoted their words, giving them a new context and a new reference point. Truths were redeemed for God's purposes. This form of integrality is an important point, given our current requirements in most education circumstances to teach a government-mandated, secular curriculum and use secular humanist inspired textbooks with content that requires reshaping for Kingdom purposes.

Relating. Integrality implies relationship. The Old Testament Hebrew word (yada) that is translated into English as "knowledge" implies entry into relationship with our experienced world. "This specialized meaning has to do with relationship, and primarily a relationship that is based upon the making of a covenant" (Hegg, 2014, para. 1). Key to education are the covenantal forms of knowledge relationships that exist between the student, the teacher, the learning object, others (textbook writers, etc.), the Creation in general . . . and, of course, with the Creator of all things. This provides a context for an education that is holistic and integral. That said, it must be recognized that the knowledge relationship network of many students may include another supposed creator rather than The Creator and non-Christian texts and resources will endeavor to build a concept of integrality around a God-substitute.

Inspired teaching. God-sourced integrality requires his inspiring intervention. Inspiration in education functions on different levels. As teachers, we seek to be inspired by God who is the source of truth. A second level of inspiration pertinent to an integral teaching/learning interface is the recognition that God's Holy Spirit is the Revealer of "all things" (John 14:26). His work is not only to inspire us as teachers but to inspire our students, as well. An implication of this is that instead of perceiving our teaching as pushing knowledge towards students, we may see the Holy Spirit as drawing truth into our students—inspiring them. The Holy Spirit's work therefore may be recognized as a medium through whom truth is transmitted. Some years ago, when referring to communication media, the philosopher, Marshall McLuhan (1994) argued that "the medium is the message." The implication of this for our teaching is that as we ask the Holy Spirit to inspire us and our students, he becomes part of the message and truth that is being taught. As students learn truth, in any subject, they will be learning of God. This divine intervention provides a level of integrality that is impossible for us to achieve without him.

Conclusion

Secularists do not need to speak of the need to integrate faith and learning. For them, teaching and learning are integrally bound to, and naturally flow out of, their belief in their ownership of knowledge and their allegiance to one or more God-substitutes. For Christians, however, an integrality model of education does not attempt to merge or blend two different metanarratives but sees all truth flowing from the God who owns all things. The intent of this essay has been to show that the so-called integration of two supposedly distinct entities such as faith and learning should be reconsidered. By acknowledging God to be the source of all truth, we also acquiesce to his purposes for unhiding his truth by reclaiming it from secularists and other religions for redemption and restoration. Integral teaching and learning can thus be viewed as tools for unhiding the knowledge of God. This yields activities that are not additive exercises but ones that flow out of a biblical epistemology, in recognition of our students and ourselves as co-allegiants made in

God's image. Therefore, our educative work does not awkwardly and dualistically with feet in two different kingdoms, because we claim one King and one Kingdom. Biblically-grounded integrity, and integrality of thought and purpose, can guide us as we faithfully seek to fulfil our God-appointed roles as educators in God's grand drama.

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