Embracing Faith-Learning Integration in Christian Higher Education
By Dawn Morton*

Introduction

Understanding and developing teaching with intentional integration of faith and learning is a critical issue in Christian Higher Education. Some would suggest it is a challenge for institutions and professors. The original intent of establishing colleges and universities was to train ministers and promote evangelical thinking (Ringenberg 1987, 79). Institutions are challenged because they have left their origins of proclaiming truth and now embrace half-truth or truths that have been twisted to fit all the lifestyles in our culture (Duduit 2002, 1).

Many institutions have stepped away from their historical roots of religion in order to embrace and not offend anyone in our culture, declaring that the role of religion is a personal issue, not a public one (Monsma 1996, 75). Universities have separated themselves from faith and pursuit of "truth." There are many "truths" that are sought in knowledge but ultimate truth is laid aside (Lewis and Smith 1994, 133). Yet, without this distinct issue of faith applied to learning, Christian institutions become like other institutions within our culture (Dockery 2000, 1). Lacking of the foundation of faith, academics becomes merely an educational process instead of a life changing process meant to impact and embrace the whole person. We need to face the challenge of defining the terminology, declaring the purpose of faith – learning integration, and determine to apply the concept within Christian higher education.

Definition and Description of Terminology

One problem involved in achieving faith-learning integration is a proper definition of the terminology. Faith-learning integration has become merely a cliché or a buzzword in the Christian education circle (Holmes 1999, 161). Definitions must be developed before a professor can accomplish the task. The words "faith," "learning," and "integration" need defining, as lack of definition presents lack of goals and means for accomplishment. Without proper understanding of terminology, the possibility of faith-learning integration can be laid aside in the process of education.

Faith can be described as "'life of faith' or 'body of doctrine'" (Badley 1994, 28). Understanding the issue of faith is of essence because of the com-

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plexity of the subject. "Faith reflects: one's understanding and sense of the supernatural (believing); one's level of trust and commitment, relationship to the supernatural God (trusting and worship); and ethical and moral behavior, and interpersonal relationships (doing)" (Roy n.d., 2). Faith involves understanding of God, one's trust in and relationship with God, and how that plays out in relationships. Faith is built and made complete when there is an understanding of the creation that God has produced in the world (Harris 2000, 1). Faith involves the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. It is an expectation that "something good can happen because of one's faith in God's goodness and power" (Rosebrough 2002, 283).

Learning can be described as "'process of learning' or 'body of knowledge'" (Badley 1994, 28). Learning in the true essence is "making a connection, seeing patterns and wholeness, seeing a 'big picture,' and finding meaning" (Roy n.d., 4). Learning is not only knowing the information, but also being able to process, make connections to one's life, and essentially finding meaning to life itself. It is looking beyond the information to see the connections to life.

The term "integration" is diverse and needs to be clarified with proper terminology (Badley 1994, 24). Integration is the combining of the elements of faith and learning. Throughout history faith has been the foundation of learning, intermixed with the disciplines, applied with critical thinking about the world. Integration could be described as "reintegrating a union that was broken apart in the course of history" (Holmes 1999, 161). What is being reintegrated? Historically, Christian colleges were founded on education and faith interacting together (Holmes 1999, 161-165). Today's colleges are not founded on faith. There has been a separation of education from faith, which has greatly affected the issue of critical thinking. Theology has been removed from the educational process. God and the concept of faith have been removed, even from "Christian" colleges. Today's universities offer education with "the ability to develop critical thinking skills, but seldom provides them with a way of relating one thing to another" (Matties n.d., 1). This type of educational process produces brokenness in education. There is disjointedness in connecting disciplines with faith and with other disciplines (Dockery 2000, 11). Integration, or reintegration, means: faith and learning are connected. Both need to be understood as complimentary. They are not in competition with each other but working side by side.

Faith-learning integration is described in a variety of ways: "a way of life and being...beyond the course content and affects the entire life of an individual...more than just familiarity with the subject...and bringing Christ

into the classroom" (Nwosu 1999, 44-45). A description of faith-learning integration could be "a scholarly project whose goal is to ascertain and to develop integral relationships which exist between the Christian faith and human knowledge, particularly as expressed in the various academic disciplines" (Hasker n.d., 1). Combining faith and understanding the connections to academics is the process of faith-learning integration.

Declaration of Purpose

With a definition formed, we can discover the purpose of faith-learning integration within Christian higher education. Where does the process take us and in what form do we proceed? "Integration is a *process* as well as a *product*" (Estep 1998, 68). "Integration is a process, that must take place every day, because we are presented with new claims, new facts, new interpretations every day" (Harris 2000, 3). The process and product are intertwined and mingled with the purpose. One must declare the purpose with clarity and intent, in order to begin the process to achieve the product and end results.

"The ultimate aim of faith-learning integration is not merely to complete the integrative task within each separate discipline, but to enhance our overall vision of reality in the light of Christ" (Olthuis 1992, 5). Remembering there is a larger goal than merely the task of integration is vital for the professor. Molding students into leaders who will impact their culture and society with a Christian worldview is the purpose of faith-learning integration. This molding and shaping takes place with Christ at the center of all that is accomplished in the learning process. When integration has occurred in the student, it will affect "values, choices, decision-making, and ethics" of the student's life (Harris 2000, 3). "Education that integrates faith and learning, that establishes and shapes a Christian worldview, can help restore the loss of morality and loss of accountability. It can help us be better people, better citizens, better employees" (Dockery 2000, 14). It is a life-changing agent.

Christ-centered classrooms, as well as colleges and universities are essential to faith-learning integration. It is not a matter of being "church-related" but one of being "Christ-centered" in all areas of the college or university" (Duduit 2002, 2). It is not *affiliation* with a denomination or tradition, but *adoration* with a living Christ that will impact our culture and society. Training others in education without faith and theology integrated into the studies, merely trains future faculty members that lack the understanding and knowledge of how to integrate faith and learning (White 1998, 616). Faith and learning ultimately restores humankind to the One who created and formed their being, which

involves "redeemed thinking that properly honors Jesus Christ" (Holmes 1999, 167).

Emphasis of a Christian world-view should be a concern among all Christian faculty members (Olthuis 1992, 6). Communication among faculty and students promotes a "contract" that facilitates faith-learning integration. It is an understandable "contribution to the Kingdom of God" (Hasker n.d., 2). The professor and the student are in the process of learning so that the Kingdom of God can be built, lifted up, and expanded for His purposes. Christian minds need to be developed and formed which is the ultimate goal for faith-learning integration. The student will begin to think "Christianly" (Gangel 1978, 108). This Christian mindset will shape and form character creating integrity for the student" (Matties n.d., 1). Faith becomes the foundation for learning and it is connected to forming and shaping a Christian worldview (Gill 1979, 1009). The student will be impacted in his or her "views of truth" and will form a "well-grounded faith versus a blind faith" (Harris 2000, 3).

Determination of Application

Determining how to apply faith-learning integration means there is not one single pattern for integration but rather a selection of methods that will produce results when applied in a proper manner (Olthuis 1975, 4). It is not an issue of what approach to use, as much as an issue of application of the faith and educational theory in any approach used. Different approaches of integration can be useful for the professor and the student.

Faith-learning integration is an area in which the Christian scholar must take initiative. Does one merely introduce faith-learning or is it a part of the personal core values of the instructor? Core values of an institution influence and affect the professor. The professor's personal core values influence and affect the faith-learning integration process. A Christian scholar must have a core value of faith-learning in the process of instruction, or the material that is taught merely becomes information for the sake of the educational process. If the professor values the Christian faith, then the professor must have a way to introduce the subject of faith and maintain the openness of faith-learning within the classroom. The professor must have a passion for integrating faith into the academic part of learning.

What are some practical ways of integration within the classroom setting? The professor needs to have a plan of action in order to continually develop areas to enhance the faith-learning process and not merely teach the subject (Agee 1999, 202). "We must integrate our understanding of Scripture and theology with what we learn from other sources, relating biblical revelation

to general revelation" (Holmes 1999, 167). This understanding must be conveyed to the student. The word *INTEGRATION* becomes practical and more than a possibility when the following areas are considered for the application of faith-learning integration:

Identify the "course's foundational idea, issues in the field, aspects of character and virtue needed by Christian professionals to address the issues, and needed leadership qualities" (Scarlato 1999, 2).

Nurture pastoral skills such as taking prayer requests, implementing designed devotions that are appropriate for the subject taught then can be led by students and faculty, establishing individual prayer times appropriate for the class, asking students to reflect upon particular Scriptures throughout the week, but go beyond into "truth-searching" opportunities, always concerned with "pursuit of truth" (Coe 2000, 85; Gangel 1978, 107; Matties n.d., 2; Scarlato 1999, 3; Schmidt 1987, 272).

Target a world-view of Christianity in the process of faith-learning integration and relate it to academics in order to produce solid Christian thinking. "Christian thinking does not just happen but is deliberately designed by the effective Christian teacher" (Gangel 1978, 107). We must be intentional about integrating faith and learning with disciplines, as it is foundational to seeking and committing to truth (Dockery 2000, 13).

Establish personal times of prayer for guidance of creating the lesson planner and enhance personal spiritual formation through retreats and seminars (Moore and Woodward 1997, 303; Matties n.d., 2; Scarlato 1999, 2).

Grasp a good theological background in order to teach and allow the student to think critically through theological aspects (Gangel 1978, 105-106).

Require activities and produce questions that will assist the students "to link Scriptural ideas with class content" (Scarlato 1999, 3).

Approach to the integration process should be taken with "reverence, relevance, and relaxation" (Gangel 1978, 108). "The beginning point for thinking, learning, and teaching is our reverence before God the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth" (Dockery 2000, 12). "Education is a sacred calling" (Holmes 1999, 167).

Teach the subject along with a list of Scriptures that will deal specifically with the discipline, specific Scriptures will help shape the devotionals (Scarlato 1999, 2).

Inspire critical thinking skills to enhance students to analyze critically the issues of faith intermixed with the disciplines and personal areas of the student's life. "Education will therefore be an exploration that is critical, constructive, personal and relational" (Matties n.d., 2).

Open mindedness should be kept in the process of education yet keeping doctrine true to the Word of God always committed to "searching for truth" (Gangel 1978, 108; Matties n.d., 2). "One implication for teaching is the need for a safe place to explore the truth and openness to cultural and ethnic diversity as modeled for us by Jesus' ministry in Galilee" (Pazmiño 2002, 69).

Navigate a variety of ways to integrate faith and academics such as using the Bible and Scriptures in class for activities, sharing personal stories of your own faith journey, living out one's faith before the students and "add quotes from writings of various Christian authors" (Garzon 1999, 4; Rosebrough 2002, 296; Scarlato 1999, 3).

Although these areas can definitely be developed by any Christian professor, one may feel overwhelmed at the responsibility of teaching to not only inform, but to assist in transformation of the student, directing the student towards God's will. "Our world needs leaders who dare to walk with God, seeking his mind and his leadership in every dimension of life, seeking to please him and to live out his will and purpose for their lives and for their world" (Agee 1999, 202). Professors are needed who are competent in teaching truth, yet able to have caring relationships with their students (Dockery 2000, 13). A professor needs to reflect upon his or her own teaching methods and styles as well as how to incorporate faith-learning integration into the classroom of the college, university or seminary that he or she serves. Beginning with one area of development will be a step in the direction of seeing faith-learning integration in process.

Conclusion

No doubt, the terminology is not always clear and tends to be muddy depending on the context it is used. There are many understandings regarding faith-learning integration, but it is understandable in the context of a worldview of Christianity. All that we are in Christ flows out of us into the teaching experience. We relate ultimate truth in various ways to our students intermixed with the academic discipline, in hopes that the student will expand their thinking to impact their world not only in knowledge but also in faith. "A Christian world view shapes our view of education, pedagogy, and the social sciences, for all must answer the question: what is it that motivates humans" (Dockery 2000, 13)?

An understanding of faith-learning integration is necessary and possible for any Christian professor to attain, but the ultimate outcome falls in the lap of the student. "Curriculum developers and classroom teachers can do what they like to help the cause of integration, but ultimately, for integration to occur, the student must make connections between the various parts of the curriculum; in doing so, he or she also makes that curriculum meaningful and coherent" (Badley 1994, 25-26). When the professor has fulfilled the commitment to faith-learning integration, and implemented it within the learning environment; the student must be willing and able to connect it to their personal life and the world in which he or she lives. "It is this educational experience that confronts the inner needs of man as well as the needs of his society" (Burtchaell 1998, 760). "Learning shaped and formed by faith results in living that is shaped and formed by faith" (Dockery 2000, 14). When "learning shaped and formed by faith" transforms the student, then faith-learning integration, in its truest form has occurred. It is long lasting and affects the student throughout his or her lifetime and the world in which he or she lives.

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