

Faith Integration: What Does It Really Look Like?

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Abstract

Beginning with the excellent treatment of faith integration by Patrick Allen and Kenneth Badley (2012), based on the seminal work of Boyer (1997), this article delves into the issue of faith-learning integration on a discipline and classroom level. There are two major categories of integration that are considered: the single application, intended primarily for that day's lesson, and focused on technical terminology or concepts; and the series that deals with larger issues beyond just those of the particular class being taught. Examples are provided for each, as well as the thought processes behind their generation. Resources are included at the end of the article that can aid readers in development of their own faith-learning applications.

Introduction

I have been fascinated with the issue of faith integration since I arrived at my university, primarily because I was coming from a public university background and I knew nothing about it. I would spend whole meetings with my Provost talking about nothing but this, and I really enjoyed it. So, I have been attempting to integrate my faith into my curriculum for about seven years, which admittedly is not very long.

It was not until a bi-annual meeting of the International Community of Christian Teacher Educators (ICCTE), that I had encountered anything that might be called systematic on the subject. In fact, the speaker at the session, Kenneth Badley, had just finished a book on the subject with Patrick Allen, called *Faith and Learning: A Guide for Faculty* (Allen & Badley, 2014). I have found this book to be extremely helpful on this subject, and so I will refer to it as a way of introducing my ideas on faith-learning integration.

The Connectedness of All Things

In their book, Allen and Badley (2012) refer to something called the "scholarship of integration" (p. 120), which comes not from them but from a man named

Ernest Boyer who passed away in 1995. In Boyer's model of this kind of scholarship, one phrase stood out, and that is what I would like to pursue in this paper. The phrase is "the connectedness of all things" (Allen & Badley, p. 74). He says that in universities we "affirm differences, but fail to capture commonalities," and a result, "Students are hunkering down in their separate interests failing to find the relationships that bind" (Boyer, 1997, cited in Allen & Badley, p. 75). This flies in the face of Scripture, which tells us that "in him [Christ] all things hold together" (Col. 1:17, emphasis added) and that we must "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5, emphasis added).

As we will see shortly, faith-learning integration requires no small amount of effort and dedication, yet, beyond the requirements of it for promotion and tenure, the potential outcomes speak to much of what we are supposed to be about as faculty. Allen and Badley (2012) note that, "...scholars who engage carefully in the scholarship of integration move naturally 'from information to knowledge and even, perhaps to wisdom.' That, for Boyer, is education's pearl of great price" (p. 121).

A Personal Perspective

Let me state my own personal perspective up front. First, I find great pleasure in, and in fact I seek out, connections between disciplines. It is classic INFJ, if you are familiar with Myers-Briggs. I understand not everyone is like this, but it is what keeps me interested in life. I want to see the threads that run from Genesis to Revelation, I want to connect those big ideas with the big ideas of my discipline, to somehow distill out some essential characteristic of Scripture and of the Christian life that applies broadly to my own and my students' academic and personal lives.

Second, I am not a big fan of canned devotions, and am not satisfied with merely taking prayer requests

and praying in class, as important as those things are. I do not want students ever to have the impression that they can segment out their spiritual life from their academic life; I want them to see those things as fully integrated.

Third, and this is a lynch pin of the whole faith-learning integration question as far as I am concerned, I know my Bible. When I teach a major concept in my academic field, I can think in spiritual terms about that concept because I know Scripture. I have not found a substitute for this. We have to know our Bible, we have to know the major stories and parables and teachings, we have to know the key passages of Scripture. Without this, we will always and only be dependent on others for ideas.

Categories and Examples of Faith-Learning Integration

I teach both undergraduates and graduates, and I also teach both mathematics and education courses. So, I have a real diversity of curriculum that I need to consider as I think about how to integrate faith and learning. I began my time at my university speaking about faith issues at the beginning of the class, as a kind of devotion before class began. I now put no such restrictions on myself; they can pop up anywhere in the class period. In particular, I have found that if I am introducing a technical term in the day's lesson, and that term is really the focus of the lesson, then I ought to give the students as much information about the academic side of that term before trying to apply it in other contexts like faith and living.

There are two major categories I have identified in my own teaching where I have actively tried to integrate faith and learning. One is the single application, intended primarily for that day's lesson; and the other is a kind of series I develop that deals with larger issues beyond just those of the particular class I am teaching.

Let me begin with the simpler situation, of trying to meld faith and learning in the context of a particular class or a particular concept. To do this, let me take you on a journey through my mind, so you can understand how I think about these things. A huge challenge for me has been faith integration in calculus. Previously, I had taught calculus at a public university. So, the first semester I taught calculus at my current university, I would sometimes spend as long in think-

ing about how and where faith meets calculus as I did on the lesson I was preparing. Yet, as the runner says in *Chariots of Fire*, "I sense God's pleasure" when I plan like that. He has opened up some subjects for me in ways I had not considered before, and we actually have some interesting class discussions as a result.

One of the things I have noted over the years is how the same term can have different meanings as you go from discipline to discipline. The term "power" means something vastly different in mathematics and in sociology, the term "derivative" means something very different in mathematics and in business. So, of course, we have to be careful about what exactly is meant by the term we are using and how it applies elsewhere. This is why I said earlier that students need to have a base of knowledge about a concept in our discipline before attempting some kind of faith-learning integration.

In calculus we cover inverse operations and inverse functions. The term "inverse" may have different meanings in different academic contexts, but in the context of mathematics it means an operation that undoes another operation, such as adding 2 and then subtracting 2, or squaring and then taking the square root. In very loose language, we could say these operations are opposites. When I thought about that word "opposite," I remembered a quote by Elie Wiesel where he said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference." So, I thought about that in a spiritual context. Does indifference really undo love? That idea did not ring true for me.

So I then thought, what does the Bible have to say about the opposite of love? And what came to mind was I John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." I thought, yes, fear undoes love, and further, love undoes fear; it literally cancels out its effects. So, at the end of my lesson on inverse operations and functions, I asked my students what they thought undoes the operation of love in our lives. Predictably, one person said hate, but there were actually many answers given, some of them very thoughtful. I then presented I John 4:18, which was an answer that had not been given, and I simply encouraged them to live their lives in love, and not in fear.

I endeavor to do this for every class, which is a monumental undertaking. Does it make a difference? I hope so. A student had to drop calculus after the first couple of weeks of the semester because she did not have the prerequisite knowledge. She said the thing she would miss most about my class was what she called the “devotions.” I had another calculus student tell me she wrote down every one of my faith integration thoughts I gave them. Not everyone has been affected in that way, but those words are enough to keep me pursuing the integration of faith with concepts from my courses.

So, there is the kind of integration of faith and learning at the level of an individual class or topic. There is a second kind as well. In education courses, we also have the opportunity and the expectation to speak with our teacher candidates about our conceptual framework, which in my university’s case is Christian ethic of care. The advantage of this kind of conceptual framework, which is revisited over and over again in a semester, is that we get to look at the idea from a lot of different angles, pulling in a wide range of Scripture and experience to enhance and develop the concept. Two possible ways of thinking about Christian ethic of care in education are through Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and through Jesus’ model of teaching. For shepherding, I draw heavily from John 10, both about how the shepherd relates to the sheep and the sheep to the shepherd, and also the difference in attitude between the shepherd and the hireling. This takes multiple class periods to develop with students. For Jesus’ model of teaching, as it is appropriate for what we are covering in class, we look both at teaching strategies and the different contexts in which Jesus’ teaching took place, focusing on the use for instance of different size groups for teaching (e.g., the crowd, the 72, the 12, the three), as well as different learning strategies (e.g., inductive vs. deductive).

As I said, I also teach graduate classes in Education. One of those classes is research, which I like to motivate through a consideration of a Christian ethic of care toward self, learners, colleagues and community. First, we talk about what research is and what it can accomplish. Then I give a warning about the misapplication or abuse of research. For this, I use a passage from John 7:37-42:

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood

and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Others said, “He is the Christ.” Still others asked, “How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” (emphasis added).

Some of the people misapplied Scripture and as a result came to the wrong conclusion about Jesus. I go on to tell the class that people will always try to use research to make a point or advance an agenda, sometimes blatantly misquoting it, sometimes using it in ignorance. Even the best research is vulnerable to abuse in this way. We cannot prevent this from happening to our own research (just as the prophets could not prevent it), but we can consciously avoid this kind of abuse in our own work. This is part of demonstrating a Christian ethic of care. I then go on to apply research to each aspect of Christian ethic of care:

- Toward self – acting with integrity in the research process
- Toward students – implementing research with fidelity in the classroom
- Toward colleagues – recommending methods and procedures that are valid and reliable
- Toward community – becoming a productive member of the research community

Conclusion

Allen and Badley (2012) recommend the incorporation in our teaching of what they call the 5 E’s: engage, enlist, enlarge, enable, and encourage. That is, we should develop a deep connection with our students, we should enlist them to become part of something much larger than our course we are teaching them, we should enlarge our own vision of our course and the expectations we have for our students, we should resource students with whatever they need to be successful, and we should provide them the courage (literally, encourage) to act, or what I call, giving them just one good idea. In a word, we should encourage students to take what they have learned and apply it outside the four walls of the classroom. Field experiences and internships are a tremendous way to do this, but even these experiences can fall flat if the view of the con-

nectedness of all things has not been instilled. That is one of my primary challenges as a faculty member at my university.

I will also add one other thought to this, and it comes from a book called *From Growing Up Pains to the Sacred Diary* by one of my favorite authors, Adrian Plass (2002). *Growing Up Pains* is his non-fiction and very serious account of growing up, while the *Sacred Diary* is the fictional and uproariously funny account of his adult life as a Christian. The phrase “Nothing is wasted” is pointedly included below the title on the cover. That is how I think about faith and learning integration: nothing of my life and experience as a Christian is useless when it comes to relating faith to learning and making it real for students. Nothing of the joys and heartaches and successes and failures and hours spent studying Scripture is lost, because of the connectedness of all things. I just have to ask and allow the Lord to show me what those connections are.

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