

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V, Ph.D., Ed.D.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Holy Scriptures are the written Word of God—inspired, trustworthy, and authoritative.¹ Although Christian education does not appear as one of the twenty-seven fundamental doctrines, it is nevertheless viewed historically by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church as a core ingredient in the fulfillment of its mission. This may be evidenced by the prolific writings on the subject of education by Ellen G. White,² a co-founder of the denomination, as well as by the extent of the SDA educational system, now one of the largest sectarian educational organizations, with over five thousand schools, colleges, and universities, and nearly one million students.

A core concept in the Adventist philosophy of education is the “integration of faith and learning” (IFL). Many Adventist educators, in fact, see this construct as a distinctive ingredient of SDA education that must be nurtured in an assertive, on-going manner. Evidence of this position, for example, may be found in the frequent sessions of the International Faith and Learning Seminars, sponsored by the Institute of Christian Teaching since 1988. Essays developed at these conferences are published in the scholarly series *Christ in the Classroom*.³

¹Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1988), 4.

²These include the following works, among others: *Counsels on Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1968); *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943); *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952); *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub Assn., 1923).

³Humberto M. Rasi (compiler), *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning* (Silver Spring, MD: Education Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1991-2001). Over two hundred of these essays are available online at <http://online.aiias.edu/ict/>.

Given the centrality of Scripture in Adventist theology and the importance of the IFL principle in SDA educational philosophy and practice, it stands to reason that such a concept should find substantial support in the Scriptures. This essay seeks to examine this biblical foundation and provide thereby a defensible rationale for the integration of faith and learning in Christian education. It should be understood, however, that this work does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of all biblical passages relevant to Adventist education. Rather, it endeavors to highlight exemplary passages from Scripture that undergird the integration of faith and learning, and that can serve as a point of departure for further research and reflection.

The Christian Mind

Although the integration of faith and learning can be approached from various perspectives, perhaps the most basic Scriptural concept is embedded in Phil 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”⁴ Set in the context of the incarnation, this passage proposes, first of all, the existence of the Christian mind. Furthermore, it maintains that believers must undergo a personal, transformational process—the receiving of the mind of Christ. Finally, it affirms that as Christians, we must think “Christianly”—endeavoring to view life from God’s perspective.

According to 1 Cor 2:14-16, there are two types of individuals: (1) the natural man or woman, who has no discernment of spiritual things, and (2) the spiritual person, who discerns all things from a spiritual point of reference, having received the mind of Christ. The passage indicates that the difference lies in the mind. Rom 8:6-7 corroborates this view: “To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.” There are thus two kinds of minds, the carnal mind and the spiritual mind. The carnal orientation runs counter to God and His truth. It is a secular mind—a temporal, world-oriented, fragmented perspective (see figure 1). By contrast, the spiritual mind is a Christ-like mind, in harmony with God’s plan for life and the universe at large. It thus incorporates an eternal, supernatural, wholistic perspective.

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, the texts of Scripture quoted are from the NKJV.

<p style="text-align: center;">The Secular Mind A temporal, world-oriented, fractured perspective</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Christian Mind An eternal, supernatural, wholistic perspective</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Living for the present Just do it! Enjoy it while it lasts! Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (1 Cor 15:32).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">An eternal orientation Every decision, every action in this life has eternal consequences (1 Tim 6:12).</p>
<p>Assuming that this world is all there is Decisions and behaviors are limited to the criteria of “this world” (2 Cor 4:4).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A supernatural focus Seeing life from God’s point of view. Making value judgments based on God’s character (Mic 6:8).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Segmenting existence One’s life is reduced to a fragmented collection of ideas and activities (Jas 1:8). Often a spiritual/secular dichotomy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A wholistic worldview Not dichotomized or compartmentalized. Rather, Christianity embraces all of life (1 Cor 10:31).</p>

Figure 1. The two minds (Rom 8:6-7).

Often, individuals seem to assume that the mind is analogous to a suit of clothes—something one puts on and off at will, depending on the season (perhaps the basis for the oft-heard expression, “I just changed my mind”). The Christian mind, however, requires a faith commitment. James states,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it will be given to him. But let him *ask* in *faith*, with *no doubting* [KJV: “nothing wavering”], for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (1:5-8)

Note that there are three conditions to receiving wisdom: commitment, faith, and petition. By contrast, a “double-minded” person, oscillating perhaps between a secular and a spiritual perspective, is caught in a mental dichotomy and cannot receive anything from God—much less the mind of Christ and its consequent wisdom. Whenever there is a living spiritual commitment to God, however, evidenced in singleness of mind and purpose, there is born the prayer of faith, which results in wisdom, the gift of God.

This unwavering faith commitment, evidenced in a singleness of mind, lies at the heart of the Christian experience. Christ Himself declared, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (Matt 12:25,30 NIV). In essence, the Christian mind is either completely Christian, or it is not Christian at all.

Comprehensiveness of Life and Learning

Singleness of mind brings about a comprehensive, holistic, Christ-centered view of life and learning. This is in direct contradiction to a dualistic perspective.

In ancient Greece, the Gnostics divided mankind into matter (evil) and mind (good). Today we have also tended to fall into dualistic forms of thinking, setting up false dichotomies such as soul/body, piety/action, world/church, mercy/justice, liberty/responsibility, love/authority, theory/practice, student/subject, and faith/learning. The result is fragmented thinking and a compartmentalized, polarized life.

Perhaps the most dangerous dualism for the Christian, however, is to think that some aspects of life are spiritual and others, secular. Sometimes, in fact, we begin to think secularly even about sacred things—such as baptisms, offerings, and Christian education. We emphasize facts and figures more than persons; budgets and policies more than our spiritual mission. The word of God, however, emphasizes that we must “put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised . . . , slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:10-11). Such a comprehensive view of life precludes the creation of a spiritual/secular dichotomy.

This pervasiveness of Christ in every aspect of life is echoed in other passages. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). What are the implications for education? First of all, it would seem that all aspects of life—even such common activities as eating and drinking, teaching and learning—must glorify God. Teaching, furthermore, is a matter of both words and deeds. To teach “in the name of Jesus” means to act as His official representative—to say what He would say, to act as He would act. Paul highlights this imperative: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5 NIV). Curricular programs are made up of courses, courses are comprised of topics, topics of concepts, concepts of ideas, and ideas of thoughts. Thus, if every thought is captive to Christ, it implies that every class period, every subject area, and every educational experience must be anchored in Jesus Christ.

How do these conditions come about? Rom 12:2 admonishes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In the very beginning, mankind was formed “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26-27). Tragically, however, man chose to be *conformed* to this world, to take the distorted shape of sin, pressed into the thought mold of this secular age. As a result, man was *deformed*—he began to lose the original form, the likeness to his Creator. The good news is that, by the grace of God, human beings can be *reformed* by a

renewing of the mind—a spiritual rebirth. This reformation brings about a change—a metamorphosis, a radical *transformation* in which the image of God is restored in men and women, who form the family of God (see figure 2).

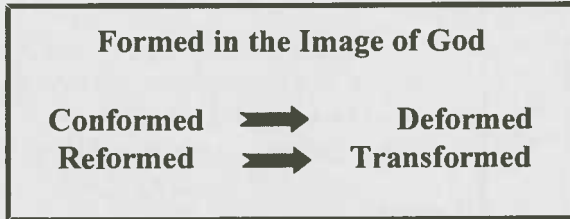


Figure 2. Processes of change (Rom 12:2).

As the Apostle Paul aptly summarized, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world [a secular worldview], but the Spirit who is from God [a Christian worldview], that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).

Integrating Faith, Learning, and Life

According to Scripture, faith, learning, and life are closely intertwined. Paul states, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). And the apostle James declares, “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:20, 26; cf. 1:22-25; 2:17). It seems evident that faith and learning have been intimately joined through the power of the word (see figure 3). It is not sufficient, however, to merely know, nor even to believe. Rather, there must be a life response. “In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5 New Century Version). Christians must thus translate faith into practice and grapple with the implications of learning for their lives. Let us consider briefly each of these components from a biblical perspective.

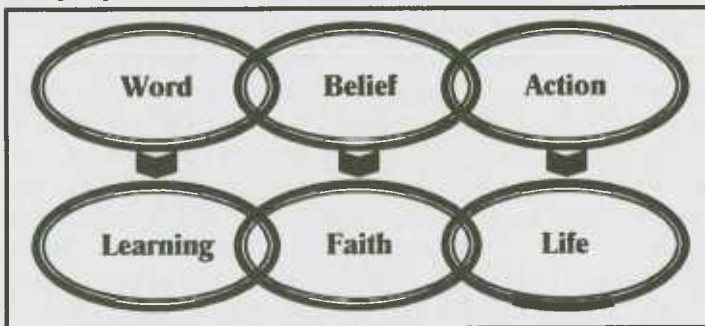


Figure 3. Linking faith, learning, and life (Rom 10:17; Jas 2:17).

Faith. Christ asked his disciples, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Faith is not blind devotion or lame belief. Rather, faith is a reasonable commitment, based upon evidences of God’s trustworthiness. Christianity, then, is a matter of significant acts and facts, not simply vague theories or interesting speculations.

Furthermore, faith does not exist in isolation, in a vacuum. It must have an object. One must have faith in something or someone. What type of faith then is needed? (See figure 4.) The overarching tier in the faith paradigm is faith in God, based on an understanding of God that is both theological (knowing

Faith

- *In God—both theological and relational*
- *In divine revelation—of His truth, His character, and His plan*
- *In persons—the potential of others and of self, by the grace of God*

Learning

- *To think Christianly—a change in mind*
- *To live by faith—a change of life*

Life

- *Eternal—a gift of God through Christ*
- *Productive—transforming knowledge into practice*
- *Meaningful—filled with love toward God and man*

Integration

- *Faith and learning fuse within the context of a Christian life.*

Figure 4. Integrating faith, learning, and life.

about God) and relational (knowing God personally). This faith is complemented by confidence in God’s revelation of His truth, His character, and His plan. The third type of faith—sometimes the most difficult to attain—is faith in persons, in the potential of others and of self, by the grace of God.

Learning. To learn is to change. It is a transformation of heart, mind, and being. It represents a change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or values. From a Christian perspective, this change is brought about by a personal encounter with Jesus. Christ invited His listeners, “Come unto Me . . . and learn from Me” (Matt 11:28-29). What type of learning is needed? First of all, there must be a change in the mind—learning to think Christianly. This is followed by a change of life—learning to live by faith.

Life. Life is more than mere existence. Christ declared, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Life then goes beyond simply coping and surviving; it goes beyond self. In its fullest sense, life is God-centered, for God is the Source of life. He is the Sustainer of life. He is the ultimate Focus of life. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3). What type of life is to be desired? Eternal life, a gift of God through Christ; a productive life,

transforming knowledge into practice; and a meaningful life, filled with love toward God and fellowmen.

Integration. Referring to the marriage union, Christ stated, “They are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6 NIV). This covenant is analogous to the concept of integration. The integration of faith and learning in life is more than a mingling or chance encounter. Rather, it is a dynamic union, a bringing together of fragments into a living whole.

- **Focus:** God (4)
- **Dynamic:** Love (5a)
- **Scope:** Comprehensive and wholistic (5b)
- **Source:** The Word—written, illustrated, and living (6a)
- **Instrument:** Committed teacher (6b)
- **Process:** Diligent and excellent, receptive and active (7a)
- **Setting:** Prime moments for learning, linking theory and practice (7b)
- **Dimensions:** Physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social development (8, 9)

Figure 5. *The Integrated Curriculum (Deut 6:4-9).*

What then is the integration of faith and learning in life? It is when

Christian beliefs and values provide the focus and core of the academic endeavor; which, in turn, seeks to relate Christianity to the entirety of human existence and culture.

An Integrated Educational Program

One of the most significant passages in Scripture to delineate the features of a Christian curriculum is found in Deut 6:4-9. This passage begins by declaring, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” The “SHEMA ISRAEL!” injunction, considered by many Jews to be one of the most sacred passages in the Torah, identifies God as the focus of the educational program (see figure 5). This emphasis is reiterated throughout Scripture: “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:6). “My purpose is that they may... have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2-3 NIV). God, in essence, is the core curriculum.

The next verse (Deut 6:5) describes the dynamic and scope of the curriculum. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” In Christian education, love is to be the prime motivational component. Truth, in fact, must always be spoken in a context of love (Eph 4:15). Further, the scope of the educational program must be comprehensive and wholistic.

The source and instrument of the curriculum are next identified. “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart” (Deut 6:6). The words of God include His written word, the Holy Scriptures (Rev 1:1-2); the illustrated word, as

seen in God's created works (Ps 19:1); and the living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:14). These divine words constitute the great unifying factor in Christian education, the foundation of its curriculum. They bring about a transformation in learning and life. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Note, however, that Deuteronomy stipulates a condition: the words must first be internalized in the instrument, in the teacher's life. One simply cannot share what one does not have.

Deut 6:7 specifies the curricular process and setting. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." To teach diligently suggests that effort, perseverance, and excellence are required. Such instruction incorporates both receptivity and activity ("sitting" and "walking"). It takes place both in the teacher's house (the classroom) and along the road (through real-life learning encounters), thus linking theory and practice throughout an on-going spiritual learning experience. Furthermore, certain prime moments for learning seem to be identified—"when you rise up" and "when you lie down" (the beginning and end of one's day). Given that the most important dimension of life is one's relationship with God, this may suggest setting aside prime segments of the day (including the school day, as well as the class period) for corporate devotional and worship experiences.

Finally, in vv. 8-9, the passage addresses the curricular dimensions of the educational program. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Although many Jews interpreted this command in literal fashion, utilizing phylacteries, for example, to attach God's word to their foreheads and wrists (Matt 23:5), it seems that ultimately each of these four components refers to a spiritual aspect of life. God's words are to be on the hand, guiding one's actions and physical development. They are to be before the eyes, directing one's thoughts and intellectual growth.

What about the doorposts and the gates? These words were originally spoken to the Israelites who had recently left Egypt for the Promised Land. The "doorpost" concept would quite readily bring to mind the Passover experience. On that last night in Egypt, they sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their doorposts in evidence of their faith commitment. In ancient times, as in many places today, the gates of one's courtyard were considered to be the avenue of contact with the larger world. Messages, in fact, would often be posted on the gates to announce important events—a form of communication, of witness. The "doorposts" and "gates" could thus suggest that God's words are to guide the student's spiritual as well as social development.

These four dimensions of the Christian curriculum seem to be of particular significance. Luke 2:52, for example, states that Jesus Christ developed in four areas—"in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (see figure 6). But

perhaps even more important is the understanding that God's word is to serve as the foundation for each dimension. In essence, every aspect in the Christian educational program must be Christ-centered, Bible-based, student-related, and socially-applied.

	Spiritual	Intellectual	Physical	Social
God's People	Writing upon the door posts	Frontlets between the eyes	Sign upon the hand	Writing upon the gates
Jesus Christ	Favor with God	Wisdom	Stature	Favor with man
Metaphor	Heart	Head	Hand	Humanity

Figure 6. Dimensions of the Christian curriculum (Deut 6:8-9; Luke 2:52).

Role of the Instrumentalities

The Scriptures identify the *paraklēos* (the Comforter), parents, priests, and pastors/teachers as the principal instruments in the teaching/learning process. Of these, the Holy Spirit is paramount. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV).

Although the Holy Spirit can speak directly to the mind of the student, He also mediates through the other divinely appointed instrumentalities. Paul, for example, stated, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor 2:12-13). He also noted that the changes brought about in students' lives were the result of the Spirit of God operating through human instrumentalities. "You are manifestly an epistle of Christ," he wrote, "ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Cor 3:2-3).

In the biblical model, the first educational agency is the home. Consequently, parents are to assume a significant, ongoing role in the education of their children. Ps 78:1-7, for example, highlights the intergenerational teaching relationships.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God. (NIV)

This sentiment is echoed in other scriptural passages such as Ps 34:11; Isa 38:19; 2 Tim 1:5 and 3:15; and Eph 6:4. The latter passage, for example, enjoins fathers to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (KJV).

In OT times, the role of parents was supplemented by that of the priests. "For

the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty” (Mal 2:7 NIV). In the NT period, the church functioned as the extended family of God and every leader of the faith community was considered a teacher.⁵ These leaders included apostles, prophets, bishops, elders, and deacons. Elders, for instance, were enjoined to teach by example and to see themselves as “shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:1-3 NIV).

There were, however, individuals who were especially commissioned for the work of teaching. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also ” (2 Tim 2:2). Paul further observes that God “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13 NIV). It is important to note that, based on the Greek text, the passage refers to four groups of people,⁶ with the function of pastor and teacher considered to be one and the same gift. Thus pastors are to see their role as teachers of their congregations, while teachers are to understand their calling as shepherds (i.e., pastors) of their students. Notice that the ministry of these pastors-teachers results in the development of faith, knowledge, and service; in essence, an integration of faith, learning, and life.

In the biblical paradigm, however, teachers are but representatives of the Master Teacher. “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11 NIV; also 2 Tim 2:15). In the ultimate sense then, God is the teacher in biblical education. As the prophet Isaiah points out, “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isa 54:13 KJV). The passage denotes something more than merely learning about God. Rather, students are to be taught by God, through His human instrumentalities.

⁵K. Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1989).

⁶D. L. Hocking, “The Theological Basis for the Philosophy of Christian School Education,” in *The Philosophy of Christian School Education*, ed. P. A. Kienel (Whittier, CA: Association of Christian Schools International, 1978), 21.

Perspectives on Content and Method

From an integrational perspective, divine truth and values form the bedrock of the educational experience. An understanding of God's truth is mediated through His word (John 17:17), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (16:13). It is also illustrated tangibly through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (14:6). Given that all truth in any subject area is ultimately God's truth,⁷ students must be led to relate the truthfulness of every topic they study to the ultimate Source of truth.

The integration of faith and learning also emphasizes the importance of moral values in the formation of the character. "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8). Teachers, for example, are to help students understand "the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek 44:23 NIV). This is best accomplished through a process of values formation and maturation that involves analysis, reflection, and action. The apostle Paul portrays that vast value-laden agenda for Christian education:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble [KJV: honest], whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9 NIV)

This perspective regarding God-derived truth and values-oriented learning permeates every subject area. In the sciences, for example, students must be encouraged to integrate the words and works of God. The basis for this integration is found in the fact that the living Word formed nature (John 1:1-4); that God set aside a day of rest in which to view His handiwork from a spiritual perspective (Exod 20:8-11); that Christ derived spiritual truth from natural settings (e.g., Matt 6:28-30; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 12:6-7); and that in the New Earth, the redeemed will continue their study of God's creation (Isa 11:6-9).

An integrated Bible-based approach to language and literature might incorporate the understanding that it is God who gave the gift of creative expression (Gen 2:19). While sin has distorted language (Gen 11:4-9), God has taken the initiative to bridge the communication gap (Acts 2:7-12), ultimately restoring and reuniting language (Rev 7:9-10). This approach may also consider the concept of the study of quality literature as a Christian mandate (1 Tim 4:13), as well as the existence of literature that is worthless or injurious (1 Tim 6:20). It may further help the student realize that there are God-given standards for Christian literature (Phil 4:8), and that life is

⁷Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977).

either uplifted or debased by what we read (2 Cor 3:18).

In the arts, an integrational approach might seek to help the student to develop Christian criteria for evaluating musical renditions, as well as other art forms. This might include an analysis of the following considerations, among others:

1. Is it in harmony with divine values? (e.g., Phil 4:8)
2. Does it direct attention toward God, or does it exalt self? (e.g., Isa 14:12-14)
3. Does it glorify immoral conduct? (e.g., Exod 32:15-19)
4. Can it be listened to, played, or sung to the glory of God? (e.g., 1 Cor 10:32)
5. Does it mingle the sacred and the common? (e.g., Lev 10:1-2)
6. Is its effect to bring one closer to God, or does it make God seem irrelevant? (e.g., Matt 7:20)

Similar Bible-based approaches might be developed in any subject area—technology, history, psychology, research, social studies, and manual arts, to mention a few.

Illustrations of IFL in Practice

Having sought to establish from Scripture a conceptual framework for the integration of faith and learning, we should also note that the Bible also provides multiple examples of these concepts at work. We consider, in chronological order, a representative sample.

Abraham, father of the faithful (Rom 4:16), instructed his extended family to adhere to a God-centered code of ethical conduct. “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19 KJV).

In later years, the priests and Levites were charged with educating both adults and children in the divine precepts (Lev 10:10-11). This was to be especially performed at the yearly feasts and during the sabbatical year (Deut 31:9-13).

During the time of the kings, some, such as David (Pss 119:12; 143:10), endeavored to understand God’s revealed will and transmit that to their people. Most, however, failed to instruct the nation in the ways of God, with resulting apostasy and national ruin.

For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law. . . . In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. One nation was being crushed by another and one city by another. (2 Chr 15:3-6 NIV)

There were moments of revival and reformation, however, and these were brought about largely through education. A case in point may be found in Jehoshaphat’s reform.

In the third year of his reign he sent his officials . . . to teach in the towns of Judah. With them were certain Levites. . . and the priests . . . They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people. (2 Chr 17:7-9 NIV)

The result was felt in both political and economic prosperity:

The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat. Some Philistines brought Jehoshaphat gifts and silver as tribute, and the Arabs brought him flocks: seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred goats. (17:10-11)

The reformation influence was seen in the case of Daniel and his friends. Although studying at a secular institution, they continued to integrate faith and learning on a personal level. They stood firmly for divine principle (Dan 1:8-16), turning to God as the source of wisdom and understanding (2:18-23). The result was remarkable.

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. . . . In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. (Dan 1:17-20 NIV)

After the exile, another reformation took place, prompted through the teaching/learning process. Ezra, a scribe who “had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10 NIV), read the word of God before all the people. He was joined in this work by the Levites. “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God, and they gave the sense, and helped [the people] to understand the reading” (Neh 8:1-8). The responsibilities of these educators were threefold—proclamation, explanation, and exhortation.⁸ The response of the learners involved listening, understanding, obedience, and worship. The outcome was a revival of godliness among God’s people.

Jesus Christ, in His ministry, taught multitudes and individuals, children and adults. But His focus was invariably God-centered, values-oriented, and anchored

⁸R. W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

in the Scriptures. Consider these passages:

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:1-3 NIV)

Now so it was, as the multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God, that he stood by the Lake of Gennesaret And he got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. (Luke 5:1-3)

Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God” (John 3:1-2 NIV)

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 19:14)

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself And they said to one another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:27,32)

In the early Christian church, Philip, one of the seven deacons, was directly involved in a Spirit-led teaching/learning situation.

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man [an Ethiopian official] reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. (Acts 8:30-31,35)

Timothy, one of Paul’s fellow workers, received Bible-based instruction as a child from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). The church later recognized in him the gift of teaching and commissioned him for this ministry. Paul refers to this singular event.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. (1 Tim 4:13-14 NIV)

Similarly, Titus, a Gentile convert supervising the work of the church on the island of Crete, was appointed to teach various groups of individuals according to their distinct needs and responsibilities (Titus 2:1-10,15). These groups, which included older men and women, younger men and women, and slaves, were to be given a Bible-based, values-oriented education.

Finally, all Christian believers are called to teach the word of God in whatever context they find themselves:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. (Matt 28:19-20 KJV)

It is perhaps significant that the word “teach” (NKJV: “make disciples”) is the only imperative in this verse in the Greek, thus constituting the thrust of this gospel commission.

Conclusion

The concept of the integration of faith and learning in Christian education seems to be biblically defensible. The Scriptures present evidence regarding the importance of receiving the mind of Christ; the comprehensiveness of Christian life and learning; as well as the interrelationship of faith and learning in the life. Furthermore, the Bible delineates the parameters of an integrated educational program, describes the role of divine and human instrumentalities in the educational process, and provides spiritual perspectives for both content and method. Finally, the word of God presents an array of real-life examples of the integration of faith and learning in practice.

Through the integration of faith and learning, Christian education remains distinctive—in the world, but not of the world (John 17:15-6). It enables students to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). Such education represents a challenge, a high calling for teachers, administrators, and all other involved constituencies. It is, nevertheless, attainable.

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (Deut 30:11-14 NIV)

Today, we must choose whom we will serve—whether the gods of traditional education that our mentors served on the other side of the river, or the gods of this secular age in which we now live—or the one true God (adapted from Josh 24:15). May our faith commitment affirm, “But as for me and my house, as for me and my classroom, as for me and my school, we will serve the Lord!”