



Faith and Learning: A Dynamic Restoration

by Cynndie Hoff;
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What makes a Christian university Christian? Ties to a particular founding denomination? Public profession of adherence to certain doctrinal tenets? Number of religious offerings? Though certainly compelling manifestations, one elusive aspect seems to hover above the rest when differentiating Christian colleges from their secular counterparts – the purposeful and thoughtful integration of faith and learning across disciplines.

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What makes a Christian university Christian? Ties to a particular founding denomination? Public profession of adherence to certain doctrinal tenets? Number of religious offerings? Though certainly compelling manifestations, one elusive aspect seems to hover above the rest when differentiating Christian colleges from their secular counterparts – the purposeful and thoughtful integration of faith and learning across disciplines.

A deceptively simple concept, this issue grips the attention of university presidents throughout the nation. APU's own President [Jon R. Wallace, DBA](#), gives the matter highest priority. "We integrate the scriptural principles of our faith with our academic discipline, cocurricular activities, and all dimensions of the APU experience," he said, "for the purpose of being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) in order that we might be salt and light to transform culture." Wallace's unswerving dedication to this cause, as well as that of his predecessors, protected Azusa Pacific from the tragic secularization process many of its counterparts experienced (see "The Faithful," *APU Life*, Fall 2004). Of the institutions that stayed the course, many still struggle with a gap between observed truth and revealed truth, searching for ways to effectively present both in the classroom. By default, some fall back on the bookend approach of opening and closing class with prayer, hoping that what comes between somehow qualifies as Christian education. In fact, it does not.

Faith integration extends beyond the introduction of prayer into the curriculum and the use of spiritual illustration in academic courses. Rather, this approach includes a scholarly project whose goal is to ascertain and develop integral relationships which exist between the Christian faith and

human knowledge.¹ Giving teeth to the notion, Provost Michael Whyte, Ph.D., ensures that application goes hand in hand with the theory. "It is easy to say that scriptural tenets and academic pursuit belong in the same realm; it is another matter altogether to intentionally meld the two together seamlessly," he said. "At APU, we work deliberately and prayerfully to create a cohesive education. From administrators to faculty, from staff to students, each member of the community is immersed in the knowledge that all truth is God's and cannot be separated from Him."

Scripture Verses that Point to the Goal of Integration*

Psalm 19:1 – "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

We seek to celebrate God's glory and greatness seen in creation. Integration satisfies the human quest for joy and to praise.

Matthew 22:37 – "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

With all our mind means we submit our reason to the Lordship of Christ. In addition, Christian education must be intellectually challenging, or it is not Christian.

*Adapted from "Why Integrate Faith and Learning?" by Andy Chambers, Ph.D., Missouri Baptist University

Some reject the very notion that an effort toward integration of faith and learning is necessary at all. Given that all truth is God's truth, why does this need exist? The rub comes in the varying methods of knowledge acquisition. For instance, scientists gain knowledge through experimentation, while theologians find truth through Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in God's revelations. This perceived disconnectedness gnaws away at the effectiveness of any Christian university.

A Case for Integration

Learning, shaped and formed by faith, results in living shaped and formed by faith.² Christians are commanded to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Such a calling demands a unique way of thinking – one certainly not recognizable to the world. And is that not the goal? To offer students more than programs and activities, but a way of thinking Christianly that permeates all areas of life and results in distinctly different actions? This process impacts homes, businesses, healthcare agencies, schools, social structures, recreation, and even churches.³ This is the Christian university: rejecting the compartmentalization of faith and academia, embracing God's Lordship over all, equipping students with deep-rooted beliefs that stand strong in every aspect of thought and deed.

Starting Point

Decades of propaganda espousing the incompatibility of head knowledge and heart knowledge muddy the terrain of faith-learning integration in higher education. Indeed, many of the finest Christian professors trained at secular universities receive no guidance for how to relate their faith to their discipline. So, at what point does a Christian university start to tackle the problem? "With the faculty," said [Marsha Fowler, Ph.D.](#) "Faculty cannot help students understand this complex integration of faith and learning issue unless they first understand the concept themselves. If our goal is to strengthen our students, we must first fortify ourselves."

Running with that truism, Azusa Pacific University addresses the preparation of faculty from every angle. Backed by a \$2 million Lilly Endowment Inc. grant, APU implemented the "Vocation as Ministry, Ministry as Vocation" initiative which provides for faculty development in the area of faith integration. In December 2002, two new courses designed for current APU faculty appeared on the class schedule. Though strictly optional, the incentive of a three-unit load reduction or overload pay enables professors to make the transition from teacher to student at the end of the day. Unequivocally suited for the position with degrees in both nursing and theology, Fowler teaches the courses to her colleagues with great passion.

[1] Hasker, William, "Faith-Learning Integration: An Overview," *Christian Scholar's Review*. March 1992.

[2] Dockery, David S., "Integrating Faith & Learning in Higher Education," presented at The Research Institute of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. September 20, 2000.

[3] IBID



Faith and Learning: A Dynamic Restoration

The first course, Faith Integration and Curriculum Development, begins with a deep exploration of each participant's own spirituality and faith history. "The starting point is self-understanding," said [Fowler](#). "Once the faculty understands the history and theology of their own faith tradition, they can then approach the spiritual needs of their students." Phase two of the course guides the faculty through formal research, Church history, biblical interpretation, and Christian doctrine to inform and develop their teaching, and whet their appetite for the second course. For those who opt to continue, Theological Research Across Academic Disciplines immerses them in rigorous scholarly, theological research.

"Each class member assimilates the material differently," said [Fowler](#). A fact reflected in the varying fields represented in her class such as art, physics, physical education, music, political science, and nursing. The overriding theme is that all learning and truth find their origin in the Creator.

"Mathematical fractals, for instance, call for us to explore concepts of beauty and order. If you are teaching research methodology, concepts of order and chaos become essential; without order there is no research, no mathematics," she said. While there is no Christian algebra, there is Christian truth at the root that makes it possible to make mathematical calculations.⁴ The goal is not to be a mathematician who also happens to be a Christian, but makes no connection between the two. Instead, faith integration calls for a Christian mathematician who intimately understands why the order exists, can articulate the contribution of mathematics to the understanding of the created world, and can also address the fact that some events seem to defy mathematical analysis. Here, the two identifications inform and encourage one another, under the umbrella of one identity. Teaching through this philosophy breaks the barriers of narrowly defined subject matter and enters the realm of a deep and comprehensive Christian education.

The faculty development courses energized veteran professors. "By the end of the fall 2004 semester, 61 APU faculty will have completed the first of the two courses, and 29 of those will have completed the second course as well," said Tamsen Murray, Ph.D., director of the Office of Christian Leadership and Vocation. "We are well on our way toward

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Ecclesiastes 12:12-13 – "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Knowledge and devotion to books for its own sake is tiring, because that is not the ultimate duty of man. To fear God and obey him is.

Romans 12:2 – "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

We refuse to have our minds pressed into the world's mold. We seek to be changed by renewing our minds according to the Christian world-view in order to think Christianly about life. There is true truth.

*Adapted from "Why Integrate Faith and Learning?" by Andy Chambers, Ph.D., Missouri Baptist

APU's newly hired instructors also receive a decided advantage in this arena. From the first day of service, the institution immerses them in support and guidance to facilitate faith integration throughout each program and every course. Last fall, 36 new faculty members attended an all-day orientation that included an hour-long overview of faith integration. "Each school and college has its own faith integration mentor to help establish a general plan for each discipline to follow," said David Colachico, Ed.D., director of the Office of Faculty Development. "Each new faculty member meets monthly with his or her mentor to discuss the role and responsibility of a Christian professor on APU's campus. It's a great exchange net."

Supporting this effort, an all-day seminar each semester brings in speakers from various fields who illustrate creative ways to effectively present Christian beliefs as inextricable components of all knowledge. Before the semester ends, each speaker returns for special luncheons, giving new faculty members the opportunity to follow up with more in-depth questions and discuss practical application issues.

In addition to overseeing this program, Colachico also serves on the Committee on Faith Integration Task Force, initiated by the [provost](#) more than three years ago. The team's charge: recommend to the president and Board of Trustees specific strategies to effect a complete and successful integration effort across campus, thus addressing a key component of [President Jon R. Wallace's](#) Vision 2014 plan. The committee comprises representatives from distance learning, the sciences, psychology, education, staff, and administration. Their monthly meetings keep a finger on the pulse of current efforts and establish assessment strategies to measure progress.

In the Trenches

Professor William Catling, MFA, chair of the [Department of Art](#), approached the courses as a point of personal spiritual growth. "I have wrestled with this issue for years, and have been searching for a framework," said Catling. "During the last 150 years, there has been a deliberate separation of art and intellect. Though, I recognize that because God is Creator of all, the two are divinely entwined. The task before us is actually the re-integration of faith and learning." Catling's research has led him to amazing revelations of biblical artists and their uncommon obedience to God. "We learn from our 'dead mentors' that God's direction for artists is both specific and open-ended. We, as Christians, must determine both the boundaries and the freedoms we have as Christian artists." Though the research is rigorous, implementing these concepts into his curriculum comes naturally to Catling. "Art students are starving for this connection," he said. "My goal is to present to them the whole picture and educate the whole person, giving them the tools they need to live healthy and successful lives in the art community."

[4] Dockery, David S., "Integrating Faith & Learning in Higher Education," presented at The Research Institute of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. September 20, 2000.



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Faith and Learning: A Dynamic Restoration

While Catling enrolled in the courses seeking an understanding on a personal level, [English](#) professor, [Joe Bentz, Ph.D.](#), came expecting practical application for his classroom. Each found both. "I was surprised to find how meaningful the course was to my own spiritual life," said Bentz. "[Dr. Fowler's](#) expectations are high and the work is demanding, but the reward is deep and meaningful growth with benefits for the students that surpass expectation." Bentz's research focused on the retelling of stories throughout literary history, revealing reiterations of biblical events such as Lot and his wife (Genesis 19:26). "By studying biblical literature and comparing it to modern versions," he said, "my students can compare authors, cultures, and time periods as they analyze the narrative, including the study of symbolism, point of view, conflict, plot, and character. With this type of training, they become equipped to identify other parallels between their faith and modern literature and life." Bentz presented his research paper, "Lot's Wife: Adding a Pinch (or Pillar) of Salt to Introduction to Literature" at the Western Regional Conference on Christian Literature at Westmont College in January 2005.

Similar success occurs in APU's online programs, surprising those unfamiliar with the concept of distributed learning formats. It helps to understand that at APU, all programs begin with *God First*. "I created the [Online Master of Arts in Educational Technology](#) because I have a heartfelt desire to expand APU's mission beyond our physical facilities," said [Kathleen Bacer, Ed.D.](#), program director. "It has been my experience that students open up their hearts online in ways that do not always happen in the face-to-face classroom." When Bacer developed the program, the faith component became an integral part of each curricular piece blended with technology. She examined the curriculum through a nontraditional lens and aligned each course with biblical truths that coincided with the theme of each piece of their course work. For example, she weaves the concept of prayer throughout the telecommunications course, and the themes of wisdom, obedience, victory, and praise are key topics in Practicum for Educational Technology.

Nothing describes the effectiveness of Bacer's approach like the testimonies from students in the program: "APU provided the perfect balance between spirituality and technology. I

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Matthew 5:16 – "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven."

We humbly allow people to see the evidence of God in both our work and our character that compels them to glorify God too. Excellence is a must for the Christian scholar.

*Adapted from "Why Integrate Faith and Learning?" by Andy Chambers, Ph.D., Missouri Baptist University

found myself excited about both parts of my education." "Each graduate course included a spiritual component, and each gave me occasion and incentive to explore and deepen my faith in God. The initiative to analyze my faith was continuous." "Throughout the whole program I have been challenged with the question, 'How do you promote truth in a world which doesn't want to hear it?' The answer I have come to hold onto is: live by example." "Not since my days as a Sunday school teacher can I remember learning so much about God's Word in a single year. Virtually every week, I rediscovered meaningful Scripture." "I was most impressed with the infusion of biblical teachings throughout the course work. Integrating Scripture, applying biblical principles, and encouraging prayer and spiritual growth was one of the highlights of this program." "The significant component of this degree program is the development of spirituality integrated with family, education, and work. Integrated, surrounded, encircled, hemmed in, wholly embraced is what I experienced through the readings, activities, and journey of study during the past year."

Each APU professor, in a very personal way, incorporates spiritual truths into their syllabi. In so doing, they fortify the backbone of the unique education Azusa Pacific offers. From creationism to humanity's fall, from the indwelling Spirit to salvation, every aspect of Christian doctrine holds a legitimate and central place in all disciplines. Professors continually ask themselves, "How can the things I know and teach point to God's existence?" "How do math, art, music, teaching, nursing, business, psychology, history, etc., contribute to a greater understanding of the created world?" "How can I provide my students with more than neutral tools and skills to examine facts, and empower them instead with the ability to think as Jesus would about design and purpose?" This intentional approach not only establishes connectedness between Christianity and individual disciplines, but it also accomplishes the greater goal of integral Christian scholarship across disciplines, transforming students' vision of reality and arming them as active and effective ministers in every vocation under Heaven.

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PAGE [1](#) • [2](#) • [3](#) • [4](#) | < [BACK](#)

[< Return to In Focus Archive](#)