

Introducing **Integrative Thinking**



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The stated mission of Christian Pharmacists Fellowship International is to help pharmacy professionals grow spiritually and to promote fellowship among pharmacists. By establishing groups of Christian pharmacists, and by identifying areas of service for pharmacists in missions and evangelism, CPFI has addressed several areas of critical need for Christians serving in the world of pharmaceutical service and practice.

As an observer from outside of the discipline of pharmacy, I would like to suggest an additional challenge for CPFI, and to present a framework from which this challenge can be approached. The vision and goals of CPFI parallel closely the emphases of Christian scholars in other disciplines who seek to integrate together the content of the Christian faith, their various academic disciplines, and application to life. Within the published literature on integrative

thinking there are resources that can provide a solid theoretical basis for what CPFI is already endeavoring to accomplish. In addition, the work of Christian scholars in other fields can provide instructive examples and pertinent motivations for thinking with a Christian mindset about all aspects of the profession of pharmacy.

1. The Definition of Integration

In our culture, the word “integration” is typically used in one of three ways. In sociology, it refers to bringing together diverse social groups, such as using cross-city busing to achieve racial integration in the public schools. In psychology, it speaks of having emotional health as the total person is functioning smoothly as an integrated whole. In mathematics, integration describes the process of measuring the area under a curve. What do Christian scholars mean when they speak of integrative thinking?

Christian educators employ the term “integration” in a technical sense. They have taken the general notion of integration as an incorporation of two or more elements into a larger unity, and used this term to speak of the linkage of pieces of knowledge derived from various sources.

There are three predominant models for integrative thinking in Christian higher education. The integration of Scripture and knowledge model explores the explicit linkages between biblical data and knowledge from outside the Scriptures. The emphasis in this model is upon developing explicit connections between the biblical text and the various academic disciplines. Examples of this approach have been proposed in theoretical fields such as psychology and educa-

tion, but to my knowledge this model has not been employed much in more technical disciplines such as engineering, accounting, or pharmacy.

The integration of faith and learning model is broader than the integration of Scripture and knowledge model. In this context, faith refers objectively to the whole system of Christian theology, and learning speaks of the comprehensive corpus of thought found in the academic disciplines. In this model, it is granted that in some areas of thought, such as mathematics, it is difficult to produce explicit linkages between biblical texts and significant aspects of the discipline. This model, however, maintains that all of knowledge is encompassed within larger theological categories such as creation, general revelation, the image of God in humans, and the unity of objective truth. Among Christian colleges and universities, this is the most prominent model for integration, and it has produced many excellent studies, including the *Through the Eyes of Faith* textbook series sponsored by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

In Christian higher education, the term integration is typically the shorthand form of a more complete phrase, “the integration of faith, learning and life.” This model builds upon the integration of faith and learning model, but then it adds particular emphasis to the necessary life-changing applications of knowledge. These changes affect every dimension of life, ranging from our personal ethics to the largest public policy issues. Thus, this model seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, knowledge and action, learning and living. It seeks to honor God by bringing the Christian

faith to bear on every aspect of life. This view of integration, then, lies in stark contrast to the prevailing misconception that separation of church and state means that faith must be privatized such that it is allowed no place in the public square. Rather, the integration of faith, learning and life is the compelling rationale that obligates us to engage every area of our culture for Christ.

As soon as we speak of integration, we quickly move into some difficult, and at times contentious, issues, because we cannot talk about integration without addressing the subject of truth. This requires that we enter into the philosophical domain of epistemology and the theological subject of revelation. In speaking of truth, we need to acknowledge at the outset that the semantic range of this term includes several different and overlapping concepts. In the realm of science, truth refers to what is held to be true by the consensus of the scientific community at a point in time, but what may well be altered or overturned by additional empirical evidence. In a dogmatic sense, truth is what a particular ideology or system of thought regards as axiomatic. This could be an economic system such as Marxism or free market capitalism, a form of government such as democracy or monarchy, or a theological system that has been accepted as the final and complete understanding of what actually is. The relativistic notion of truth is closely linked to individual perspective. Thus, for the adherent of social constructivism there is no universal, absolute truth, but only various constructions of knowledge that are regarded as equally valid by different communities.

Truth is often used in a qualitative sense for individual items that possess truthfulness or veracity. Thus, to say

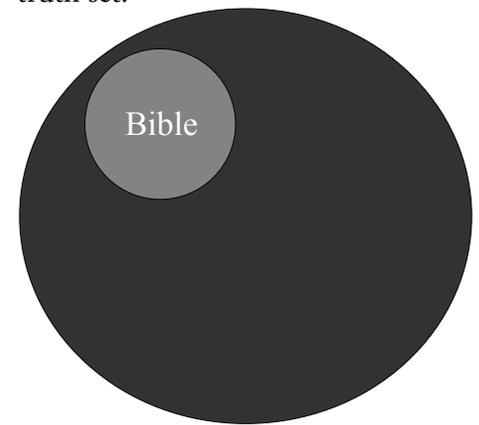
that $2 + 2 = 4$ is the truth is not to claim that it is a comprehensive statement of all that is true, but only that it is an example of a truthful proposition. In its ultimate sense, truth can be defined as the sum total of reality known to the all-knowing God; that is, truth equals the omniscience of God. It is this ultimate sense of truth that provides the necessary starting point for speaking of the integration of faith, learning and life.

2. The Biblical Basis for Integration

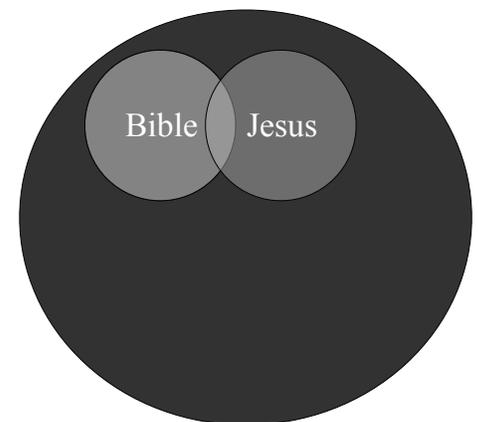
The Bible has much to say about truth, and therefore about integration. Psalm 119:160 states: “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.” In Psalm 19:1-6, however, it is clear that the natural world pours forth divine revelation as well. The gospel of John records several sermons and signs of Jesus, so that the reader will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. But then John concludes his gospel with these words: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25 NIV). The clear implication is that the words that Jesus spoke but which are not included in the text of Scripture are also true, even though they are not available to us today in the Bible. In Deut 29:29, Moses distinguishes between the things that have been revealed by God and the secret things that belong to the Lord alone. Job exclaims in Job 26:14 that he can see only the outer fringe of God’s works, and at the end of the book Job has to admit that he cannot know exhaustively the ways of the Lord.

When all of the scriptural evidence is taken together, an epistemological model emerges that provides the basis for the integrative enterprise.

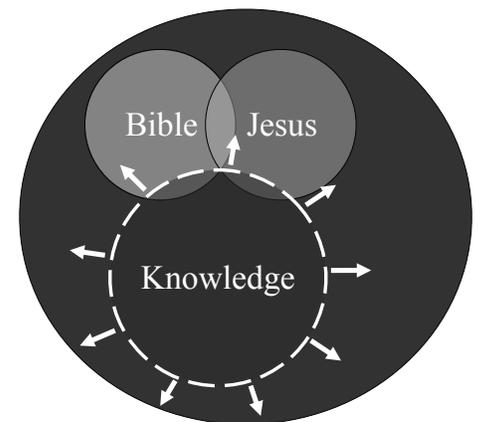
Viewing truth in the ultimate sense of God’s omniscience, the Bible [Figure 1] is a subset totally within the truth set.



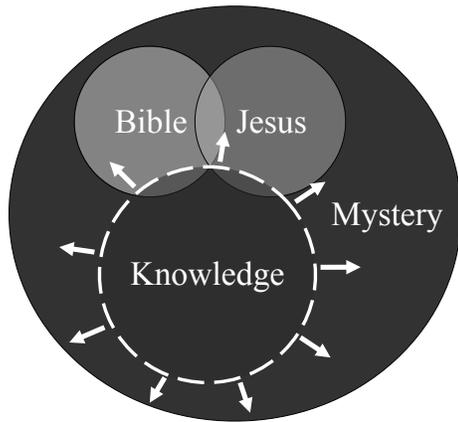
Partially overlapping with the Bible subset is another [Figure 2] subset representing the words and deeds of Jesus, only some of which are included in the biblical accounts.



Also within the truth set is the subset [Figure 3] of knowledge that has been derived from general revelation and accessed through human discovery.



The boundary of this subset is expanding as scholars push back the frontiers of knowledge in their laboratories and libraries. The remaining portion [Figure 4] of the truth set is labeled as mystery, because at the present time God has not chosen to make these aspects of His omniscience knowable to humans.



3. The Process of Integration

How, then, does the process of integration work? As we proceed with the integration of faith, learning and life, we need to acknowledge three limitations that constrain our efforts. Our first limitation is finiteness. The content of what we can know is finite, because God has not revealed everything that He knows either in the Bible exclusively, or in the combination of the Bible and other modes of revelation. To compound the problem, as created beings we are finite in our ability to comprehend the truth that God has revealed. Even given the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, our human minds are not wired for omniscience. This is part of the reason why good and godly people, equally intelligent, equally pious, and equally surrendered to the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God, may still disagree in their understandings or emphases.

Our second limitation is fragmentation. Like separate pieces of a jigsaw

puzzle, truth as it is presented both in the Bible and outside the Bible typically comes as fragments that must be linked together into meaningful combinations. For example, theologians cannot go to a single biblical book to study the doctrine of salvation in its entirety, but they must synthesize data found throughout the entire biblical corpus. When a foundational question, such as “What does it mean to be human?” is posed, fragments of truth from nearly every book of the Bible as well as from virtually every academic discipline must be identified, analyzed, and then synthesized, but even then the picture that is reconstructed falls far short of a complete portrait as God sees it fully.

A third complication is due to our fallenness. When our human parents disobeyed the command of God, numerous consequences followed. Along with spiritual estrangement from God and physical sickness and death, the human mind is now corrupted so that it cannot perceive precisely even what is knowable. From the time of the fall to the present day, the human propensity is to distort and misconstrue what has been revealed. And because regenerated Christians still retain their original sin nature together with its effects on their thinking, they need to acknowledge that they may not understand all that they think they understand.

Even though a biblically-informed approach to integration realizes the inherent limits to human knowledge, this should not be confused with full-blown skepticism. Skepticism questions all assumptions until they can be confirmed, usually by empirical means, and in its extreme form it asserts reductionistically that knowledge is impossible, so the search for truth is pointless. By contrast, the Christian faith teaches that we can

know, but we know in part; we can see, but we see through a glass darkly. This is a far cry from skepticism that maintains that we cannot know and we do not see.

Working within the parameters of these limitations of finiteness, fragmentation and fallenness, the task of the Christian scholar is to seek God’s truth wherever He has revealed it. Integration endeavors to link together the various data of God’s truth in a coherent whole to the extent that it is humanly possible at this point in time. In a partial way, integration works toward reconstructing the picture of the whole as only the omniscient God sees it perfectly.

4. The Practice of Integration

Several principles guide this task of integration. First, integration seriously considers both special revelation and general revelation. Both secularism, with its rejection of the Bible as a source of reliable knowledge, and biblicism, with its exclusion of knowledge from outside of the Bible, rule out by definition a source of divinely-revealed truth, but integration looks for God’s truth both within the Bible and outside the Bible.

Second, integration uses critical thinking to scrutinize all truth claims to discern if they can be demonstrated to belong to the truth set. Because the Bible as the Word of God resides totally within the truth set, it can serve as a measure for evaluating some truth claims, but first the Bible itself must be understood accurately. It is not sufficient to use a cursory level of biblical understanding as a surrogate for precise analysis of the biblical text. To complicate matters, there are many truth claims that cannot be measured directly against a biblical text, because the Bible does not speak specifically to them, and in

these cases a more indirect standard of coherence with the biblical data is warranted.

Third, integration endeavors to articulate how the pieces of truth link together. For example, Psalms 32 and 51 speak about how sin produces both objective and subjective guilt, but in Macbeth Shakespeare elaborates on the devastating consequences of guilt as he traces the profound psychological ruin that came to Macbeth and his wife as a consequence of their murder of Duncan. Reading these texts together leads to a level of understanding of sin and guilt that goes beyond what either text individually communicates. Because this kind of integrative thinking requires expertise in multiple fields, it emerges best from scholarship in community.

Fourth, integration in looking for promising linkages must resist the temptation to tamper with the pieces. Too often, a popular theory in an academic discipline is attached to a biblical text that it does not truly fit. This kind of purported integration is inauthentic, and though it may impress from a distance, closer examination of it leads to disappointment.

Fifth, integration treats received truth claims from the past with respect, but as the Bereans who evaluated the teachings of Paul by the standard of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), it examines all things and only then believes and conserves that which is demonstrably true. At the same time, integration exercises intellectual daring that prompts it to keep probing the mysteries of God's truth.

Sixth, integration manifests a spirit of humility in refusing to make assertions or to form judgments that go beyond the evidence that God has now made available. With a resolute commitment to integrity, the Christian scholar should be courageous enough to stand for what (s)he does know, humble enough to admit when (s)he does not know, and wise enough to know the difference.

Seventh, integration values the whole above the parts. At the present time, specialization dominates the academic world. In fact, it is not too far off the mark to say that the further we go in education, we learn more and more about less and less, until we know everything about nothing, and we can speak to no one. By contrast, when we integrate faith, learning and life, we

are seeking to see the whole, unified picture of knowledge rather than focusing on the separate, discrete details. This attention to the whole presents a powerful impetus for scholarship, and at the same time it compels us to view life from God's perspective rather than according to the limited agendas of our personal preferences or of the current disciplinary hot issues.

I am greatly encouraged by what I see being accomplished in the field of pharmacy by CPFI. It is my hope that you will continue to build upon this solid foundation. At the same time, I challenge you to enter more fully into the ongoing discussions among Christian scholars about the integration of faith, learning and life. And I welcome the insights and encouragements that you will bring to those discussions.

Daniel Estes PhD has taught at Cedarville University for 28 years, where he is currently Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Director of the Center for Biblical Integration. His PhD is from Cambridge University, and his major areas of research are in the Psalms and the Old Testament Wisdom Literature. Dan and his wife, Carol, have three adult children and two grandchildren.