The integration of faith and learning is regarded to be a primary distinctive of Christian higher education, yet this terminology conveys a false dichotomy. The frequent call for integration suggests that the Christian faith and learning belong to different areas of knowledge and practice; consequently, there is a need for bringing the two realms together. In this article, a biblical worldview is presented as the unifying factor for the fusion of faith and learning. The biblical narrative provides a solid foundation for a comprehensive worldview, offering implications for the Christian faith and Christian higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Within North American culture, a tendency exists to reduce the Christian faith to mainly religious activities and practices. The resulting gaps in a fuller understanding of the Christian faith have direct implications for Christian higher education. For example, across the broader field of higher education is the assumption that faith and learning are to be kept separate; these represent different spheres of knowledge and practice. Some institutions regard faith and learning as distinct but equally important domains whereas others attempt to complement them by merely encouraging their faculty to address ethical values during their instructional activities (VanZanten, 2011). In recent decades, the term integration has become popularized to describe the interaction of faith and learning. In fact, the integration of faith and learning is considered very much the heart of the mission of Christian higher education (Dockery, 2007; Holmes, 1987).

Although the integration of faith and learning is central to Christian higher education, other gaps have also produced a fragmented Christian faith. Naugle (2004), a philosophy professor at Dallas Baptist University, has identified 15 major dualisms in Western Christianity:
Four metaphysical dualisms (sacred/secular, eternal/temporal, spirit/matter, heaven/earth), two anthropological dualisms (soul/body, spirit/flesh), four epistemic dualisms (faith/reason, fact/value, head/heart, freedom/authority), and five ethical-political dualisms (private/public, belief/behavior, individual community, church/state, Christ/culture). (p. 12)

As a consequence of these dualisms, many people can live fragmented lives with different areas coexisting independently of each other and without any apparent relationship. This disintegration affects people from all cultures in different ways. In Western societies that emphasize individualism as a core value, the tendency is to reduce religion to a personal, private, and individual faith (Rah, 2010). In such cultural contexts, Christianity can be perceived as a faith without a direct relationship to learning or to higher education in general.

Furthermore, Western individualism fosters isolation from others and a disconnection from many social structures (Putman, 2000). In their seminal book *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Steward and Bennett (1991) argued that the social life of most mainstream Americans lacks both permanence and depth. Therefore, individuals seek to gain emotional benefits from their personal relationships, while at the same time attempting to preserve their independence and avoid obligations (p. 89). Steward and Bennett also acknowledged that an American pattern of relationships has an inclination to be depersonalized and this behavior, “along with the values of achievement and equality, nurtures competition as a mode of social interaction” (p. 105). Notably, this pattern of individualism and isolation is clearly evident in the academy, where the faculty of different schools and departments typically function independently from one another with minimal interdisciplinary interaction. This lack of integration and relationship across colleagues and disciplines is symptomatic of the separation of faith and learning in general.

The social and religious compartmentalization described above has a detrimental impact on the Christian faith of many people and, consequently, in Christian higher education. Spiritual compartmentalization can relegate the Christian faith to merely church involvement without influence in the world and public discourse. According to Naugle (2004), it is possible that many devout Christians involved in higher education as professors or administrators, although active in the faith in their “private” life, for the most part function in their academic endeavors as “practical agnostics or atheists” (p. 2).

There are also historical reasons for the separation of faith and learning in colleges and universities. During the colonial era of U.S. history, most higher education institutions in the United States were established under Christian principles and many trained clergy as their primary mission (Ringenberg, 2006). Over time, however, the Christian faith was gradually relegated to religion departments and seminaries (Adrian, 2003). Many colleges and universities in the United States that were established by denominations with the intention to proclaim Christian values have lost their Christian identity for a variety of reasons, as Burtchaell (1998) described in *The Dying of the Light*.

A compartmentalized life produces a distinction between the sacred faith and the secular profession, and between private faith and public scholarship. Therefore, some faculty and administrators in Christian higher education institutions could potentially pursue their academic vocations without any practical distinction from those serving at nonreligious institutions. This article identifies a biblical worldview as the foundation for the integration of faith and learning and the unifying factor to combat religious compartmentalization.
A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW PROVIDES A MODEL FOR INTEGRATION

A biblical worldview is essential for complete understanding and living according to the Christian faith (Dockery, 2007; Huffman, 2011; Sire, 2009). A worldview is a conceptual framework of our view of the world, a belief system that guides individual behavior (Nelson, 2011). A Christian worldview is especially important for Christian faculty in higher education institutions, because all educational enterprises convey their values and ideas to their students, and consequently, guide their behavior (Romanowski & McCarthy, 2009). All of us live, and teach, according to our core beliefs, as Willard (1998) noted: “We always live up to our beliefs—or down to them, as the case may be. Nothing else is possible. It is the nature of belief” (p. 307). Professors who believe in Christ and allow him to become the center of their lives would naturally express their faith in their teaching and academic activities. As Parker Palmer (1998) has succinctly stated: “We teach who we are” (p. 1).

There are different approaches or schools of thought regarding biblical theology and one of them is to read the Scriptures as a worldview story (Klink & Lockett, 2012). A worldview story combines what VanZanten (2011) believes are different ways for addressing the integration of faith and learning as worldview on the one hand and narrative on the other one. From this perspective, the biblical narrative provides answers to life’s most pressing questions: Who are we? Where are we? What is wrong? What is the solution? (Wright, 1992). The biblical narrative provides a solid foundation for a comprehensive worldview that addresses these questions and helps to resolve the potential compartmentalization in our lives.

The Bible tells of the triune God who personally relates to his creation and serves as the unifying factor for everything that exists. God is the creator and sustainer of the world. The biblical narrative starts with the story of creation, characterized by everything being integrated in the creator God, continues with the fall of humanity that results in disintegration taking place, continues with the story of redemption in which Christ unites everything in him, and concludes with the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth.

Creation (Complete Integration)

God exists and reveals himself to all of creation in many ways, but especially through his word, both the incarnate Word (Jesus Christ) and the written word (the Bible). The biblical story starts with God’s creation of everything that exists. The basic metaphysical question for humanity is: Why is there something instead of nothing? The Bible immediately answers this basic interrogation with its opening words: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1, NASB). The entire universe exists because God created it out of nothing (ex nihilo; Graham Ryken, 2013).

God is the creator and thus the creation bears God’s name and reflects God’s character. When God saw all that had been made, it was pronounced to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Because everything that exists came from God, there is really no distinction between sacred and secular; everything is sacred. Life was not compartmentalized, but had the creator God as the foundation for its complete unity (Is. 45:18). Therefore, what some have viewed as a dichotomy between sacred and secular has no place in a coherent philosophy of education (Gaebelein, 1968).
The New Testament also proclaims that Christ, the incarnate Word of God and the second person of the Godhead, is the creator and sustainer of the world. The Gospel of John opens with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1–3)

Acknowledging this foundational message, compartmentalization in life and the academy is contrary to the common origin and goal of everything in the incarnate Word of God, Christ.

The letter to the Colossians provides another description of Christ as the creator of the world. Christ is identified as the foundation for the complete integration of faith and learning; in him, all religious dualisms are countered because everything points back to him. Christ is the Lord of the world and the unifying factor for all creation:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15–17)

Christ is both the source and sustainer of the world. A complete understanding of life and creation necessarily starts with the creator God. This passage in Colossians reminds us that there is no separation between the Christian faith and research attempts to better understand the world.

The triune God is central for all matters related to life, as human beings created in God’s image. The God revealed in Scripture is the same who revealed himself through his creation. Everything exists for him and by him. Everything in life and in Christian higher education should become sacred because it points to the creator of the universe. Therefore, all Christians, in a general sense, are theologians who consciously think about God; our theology directly influences the way we live and think (Esqueda, 2008). As Tozer (1978) has summarized, God is indeed essential in our lives:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God. (p. 1)

Our understanding of God necessarily influences our behavior and our service to Christ. Thus, our worldview must place God at the center of everything.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) provides a good example of how careful scholarship flows from an accurate understanding of God as the creator of the world. Edwards, a Puritan minister, has been labeled as the most prominent thinker and one of the greatest minds in Christian evangelical history (Noll, 1994; Sweeney, 2009). Edwards held prominent roles as a pastor, theologian, missionary, and during a short period, as president of Princeton University. Edwards emphasized that since God created the world ex nihilo, all creation reflects Him. God’s fingerprints
are everywhere and nature proclaims and reflects God. Edwards (1993) was committed, as all involved in Christian higher education should be, to see God in all creation: “I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a language is of words” (p. 153).

Edwards emphasized that the story of creation points us back to the creator of the universe as the source of reality. Dockery (2012) accordingly emphasizes the importance of those serving in Christian higher education to:

meditate on the unity of knowledge as a seamless whole, because all true knowledge flows from the one Creator to His one creation. Thus, specific bodies of knowledge relate to each other . . . because all truth has its source in God, composing a single universe of knowledge. (pp. 4–5)

The foundation for a Christian worldview is not merely an idea, but the existence and character of the triune God (Graham Ryken, 2013). The God of creation is the unifying factor for our lives in general and for the integration of faith and learning in Christian higher education.

Fall (Complete Disintegration)

In the third chapter of Genesis, the biblical narrative introduces sin as the main problem of humanity. The story of the fall is the tragedy of humanity attempting to live contrary to the creator and in opposition to God’s will. Sin affects our lives completely and negatively guides our thinking and behavior. In Ephesians 2:1–3, Paul painted a dark picture of sin and its consequences and emphasized a problem that is both personal and universal (Hoehner, 2002). In the story of creation, God is the center of everything that exists; in the story of the fall sin negatively disturbs everything, resulting in a world that is not the way it is supposed to be (Plantinga, 1995).

Sin is contrary to God and involves placing “something or someone in God’s rightful place or supremacy” (Erikson, 2000, p. 579). The natural integration of life rooted in the creator of the universe has been challenged, disturbed, and alienated by sin. Sin disrupted the human relationships with God, oneself, one another, and creation (Morgan, 2013). God is still at the center of everything, but sin obscures our understanding and in many ways leads us to live compartmentalized lives, leaving God marginalized from his proper foundational place.

Sin and spiritual warfare are acknowledged as elements of a biblical worldview. The devil and his forces play a vital part in the cosmic struggle between good and evil in this world (Page, 2013). Naugle (2002) argued that:

. . . (a complete Christian worldview) implies the catastrophic effects of sin on the human heart and mind, resulting in the fabrication of idolatrous beliefs systems in place of God and the engagement of the human race in cosmic spiritual warfare in which the truth about reality and the meaning of life is at stake. (p. 274)

The historic bifurcation of faith and learning is indeed a spiritual issue and a consequence of sin. The influence of sin runs counter to God’s desire for human flourishing, wholeness, and delight. Plantinga (1995) brilliantly summarized the effects of sin as the vandalism of shalom. He also stressed that sin prompts us to attack, evade, or neglect our divine calling (p. 10). However, modern U.S. culture has a tendency to minimize the role of sin and its consequences; the same could be said of Christian higher education. Our sinfulness and need for God’s grace and guidance
in all areas is infrequently recognized, including within the context of teaching and learning in Christian higher education. God’s plans for human flourishing or shalom is frequently missed in the midst of focusing on our own desires rather than acknowledging our dependence on divine grace.

Although all people are sinners, God’s image remains in us and we should strive to live according to our vocation, which is a gift from God to be received and not a goal to be achieved (Palmer, 2000). God’s desire is that we live for him and that we honor him by striving to fulfill our divine calling. As Holmes (1987) has advocated, professors and students in Christian higher education must realize that “education is a Christian vocation . . . an act of love, of worship, of stewardship, a wholehearted response to God” (p. 49).

Redemption (Complete Reintegration)

The Bible is primarily the story of redemption. After the fall in Genesis 3, the biblical narrative through the 22nd chapter of Revelation focuses on the divine redemption of humanity. The Old Testament describes God’s promises of redemption through his covenants with his chosen people. These covenants are the backbone of the redemption story that is finally consummated in Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Jesus Christ came to this world to save us from sin by His grace (Jn. 3:16). Although sin is the great destroyer, Christ has the power to redeem all (Eph. 2:4–10). Thus, Christians have the opportunity to be proclaimers of the good news:

Even though sin affected all areas of our lives and destroyed our most precious relationships with our Creator, with our neighbor, with ourselves, and with our world, Christ restores all those relationships by His grace. In Christ, we can enjoy the “shalom” God intended for us. If sin produced the vandalism of shalom, God’s grace overflows shalom. Therefore, Christian teachers are heralds of shalom. (Esqueda, 2011, p. 173)

Jesus Christ not only created the world, but also redeemed it from the terrible consequences of sin. Christ is the answer for all apparent dualisms related to faith and learning. Christ is the foundation, focus, and end of everything, “for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

Thus, a primary goal of Christian higher education is to reintegrate faith and learning, based on scriptural truths and focused in Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all, as Kuyper proclaimed during his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton University: “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’” (Dockery, 2007, p. 47).

Christ’s Lordship and redemption establishes the foundation for Christian higher education. Yet historian Mark Noll (1994) expressed in his well-known book The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind the concern that “there is not much of an evangelical mind” (p. 3). In contrast, Noll (2011) has recently highlighted in Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind that the life of the mind must be centered in Jesus Christ, and evangelical Christians should be at the forefront of learning and the academia:

If what we claim about Jesus Christ is true, then evangelicals should be among the most active, most serious, and most open-minded advocates of general human learning. Evangelical hesitation about
scholarship in general or about pursuing learning wholeheartedly is, in other words, antithetical to the Christ-centered basis of the evangelical mind. (p. x)

According to Scripture, Jesus Christ is both the God of creation and the God of salvation. The redemptive work of Christ applies to every area of human existence. Christ’s death and resurrection brought reconciliation to everything sin had affected; indeed, Christ is the creator and redeemer of the world. Although cultural individualism pulls us apart from each other, the final restoration of community and interdisciplinary endeavors is found in Christ. Christ has initiated the complete reintegration of the world, but his work is yet to be completed in the future.

Consummation (Final Reintegration)

The biblical narrative concludes with the final restoration and renewal of the universe as the new heavens and new earth after the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to Naugle (2004), this final integration “testifies to the unlimited scope of God’s creative and redemptive purposes and the boundless nature of biblical faith and its impact” (p. 24). The biblical narrative starts with the story of creation and concludes with a description of the new creation, when God finally destroys the consequences of sin and reconciles the new creation in right relationship with himself.

Therefore, hope is a Christian virtue that should direct the lives of believers and also offer a compelling perspective to Christian higher education endeavors and aspirations. Christian hope is not pessimistic, believing that our best efforts are irrelevant; rather, hope is optimistic and reminds us that the sovereign who controls the universe can be trusted completely. Hope gives us encouragement and a complete outlook for our faith; according to Moltmann (1993), “Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God” (p. 20).

Jesus Christ, who promised to come back to this world again, is the blessed hope of believers. This eschatological hope was summarized by Daley (1991) as “the hope of believing people that the incompleteness of their present experience of God will be resolved, their present thirst for God fulfilled, their present need for release and salvation realized” (p. 1). Admittedly, even our best efforts for the integration of faith and learning are incomplete and constitute a work in progress. Yet this recognition is a reminder to proclaim with anticipation the same words that conclude the biblical narrative: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the common perception in higher education in general, the Christian faith is based in rational knowledge because God is the center of all creation. There should be no distinction between the Christian faith and academic endeavors, because when each is rightly understood and practiced, knowledge of and obedience to God is their raison d’etre. Because faith is based in knowledge of God, it should not be viewed as merely a personal and subjective preference that cannot be objectively understood. Willard (2009) argued: “Only when ‘faith’ is understood to deal with things that can also be known, only when faith is at home with knowledge, does the project of integrating ‘faith and learning’ have a manageable sense” (p. 208).

Similarly, Claerbaut (2004) suggested that Christian higher education should make God the independent rather than the dependent variable in all areas of research (p. 98). Claerbaut also
argued that all aspects of faith and learning must begin with God and, consequently, Christian beliefs should form “the structure, the context, and the perspective in which we engage our areas of inquiry” (p. 102).

In order for Christian higher education institutions to remain loyal to their mission of integrating faith and learning, both curricular and cocurricular, education must be rooted in a biblical worldview. Additionally, hiring criteria should include the expectation that faculty members are committed to think and live for Christ, since there is no Christian education without Christian faculty (Gaebelein, 1968). For true integration to be successful, “What we need is not Christians who are also scholars but Christian scholars, not Christianity alongside education but Christian education” (Holmes, 1975, p. 7).

Thus, the faculty is the key element and the greatest influence for authentic Christian higher education. An institution is as strong academically as its faculty and also as Christian as its faculty (Benne, 2001). Naugle (2004) stressed the importance of a biblical worldview for Christian professors: “If Christian educators are to avoid compartmentalization and recover personal and professional integrity, then that worldview perspective that undergirds their academic work must be solidly biblical and deeply Christian” (p. 22).

The foundation for the integration of faith and learning in Christian higher education is God and the pattern of his truth in all creation (Gaebelein, 1968). Living and teaching from the basis of a biblical worldview is of vital importance for faculty across all disciplines, as Romanowski and McCarthy (2009) have advocated:

Christian educators must blend the principles of a biblical worldview into their academic discipline regardless of what the discipline is. Physics, history, political science, the humanities, business and law, all come under the lordship of Jesus Christ. If all truth is God’s truth, then all disciplines are his. (p. 46)

Consequently, an essential implication for those working in Christian higher institutions is that faculty members must live and teach according to a biblical worldview. Many professors come to serve at Christian colleges and universities without bringing with them any formal theological training. These institutions will better fulfill their Christian mission as they invest in the theological training of their faculty members.

Finally, educational leaders and scholars in Christian higher education should promote two essential collaborations that flow from a biblical worldview. First, interdisciplinary teaching and research is important to better interact with the complexities of God’s creation. This interdisciplinary contact will facilitate faculty and students to perceive the world in a more holistic way that points back to its creator. Second, more intentional collaboration with other Christian institutions globally will help faculty members to discern which aspects of their Christian faith are merely cultural rather than truly adhering to a Christian worldview. It is through this kind of interaction that cultural patterns emerge and cause individuals to think more critically about their assumptions and beliefs.

Faculty and administrators at Christian higher education institutions have the great privilege of representing the Lord of the universe through their work and scholarship. This honor also carries an important responsibility. A biblical worldview helps educators to better understand God’s plan for humanity as they serve according to their gifts and callings.
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