

Defining the Integration of Faith and Learning

Darrin Thomas

Abstract

This article addresses the issue of defining the phrase “integration of faith and learning” (IFL). An examination of the phrase and the various perspectives of IFL has revealed that IFL can be defined as a process that a person undergoes personally before serving as a catalyst to cause this to happen in others. An understanding of seeing IFL from this viewpoint can help Christian educators who are attempting to grasp the concept of IFL.

Key words: faith, learning, Christian education

Developing s Definition of the Integration of Faith and Learning

Christian educators are increasingly encouraging the integration of faith and learning (IFL) in their schools and universities. Many fundamental questions about IFL have been addressed in part but need further clarifications. Such questions include, “What is IFL?”, and “How can different viewpoints or perspectives change the meaning of IFL?” Each of these questions serves the purpose of providing a deeper explanation of IFL.

The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical context from which to address these relevant questions in relation to IFL. Through addressing these questions, it is desired to provide a framework upon which a further development of the concept of IFL can take place. This is an exploratory study of the relevant literature in relation to IFL with the goal of determining what has been discussed in regards to this subject. It is important to grasp that our understanding of IFL is still emerging. Definitions and frameworks have been developed previously, however, further development of the nascent knowledge on the concept of IFL is still needed in the world of Christian education. Lastly, as this is a theoretical study, the implementation of IFL will not be addressed as this is going beyond the scope of the article.

Defining the Integration of Faith and Learning

The history of IFL dates back to the creation of man (Thomas, 2011). It was in the 20th century that IFL was formerly named. Frank Gaebelein first used the phrase “integration of faith and learning” in 1954 in the book *The Patterns of God’s Truth* (Badley, 1994 & 2009). In this book, Gaebelein addressed problems that impede the IFL. The next major use of this term was in Arthur Holmes book *The Idea of a Christian College*. Holmes (1987) argued that a Christian College should be an arm of the church, which entails evangelistic, missionary, and humanitarian responsibilities in addition to the academic goals of every school. Rasi’s (2006) interpretation of IFL is consistent with Holmes’ (1987), in that he defines IFL as an intentional institutional-wide process of expressing education from a Christian perspective. Both Gaebelein (1954) and Holmes’ (1987) books helped to set the stage for the debate over what the IFL really is. Each of these authors was a pioneer in the development of IFL, however, with many new branches of knowledge, the initial defining and application of IFL was not as clear as it needed to be. This ambiguity can be observed in the disagreement over defining IFL.

A Disputed Term

Badley (1996) states that the definition of the term IFL is disputed and the literature does not agree on

one meaning. Originally, evangelical Christian parents did not attempt to define IFL, they wanted to see it happen in the classrooms of their children (Badley, 1994 & 2009). This naturally led to confusion since there was a demand for IFL when educators were not sure what it was. Badley (2009) states that the term IFL is an essentially a contested concept, which means that the definition of IFL is an idea that is not agreed upon by those who are concerned with defining the notion of IFL. Without agreement on the definition, it can make it difficult to apply the concept.

With such ambiguity in defining the term IFL, many in the field of faith and learning believe that the IFL is entangled in an identity crisis (Hall, Gorsuch, Malony Jr., Narramore, & Leeuwen, 2006). Not only do experts disagree on how to define the IFL, but students also have a different perception on defining it. Ripley, Garzon, Hall, Mangis, & Murphy (2009) conducted a study in which students and faculty defined the IFL different from one another. Students consistently put the responsibility for integrating faith and learning on the teachers while the teachers' definition would vary in terms of where the burden was for integrating faith and learning. Therefore, it appears that parents, teachers, and students do not agree on what IFL is. This confusion has led to a lack of clarity as to how to implement the IFL.

The Phrase "Integration of Faith and Learning"

The term "integration of faith and learning" is comprised of three key words: integration, faith, and learning. The word '*integration*' comes from the same Latin word as the word '*integrity*' (Sorenson, Derflinger, Bufford, & McMinn, 2004). One of the many meanings of the word integrity is "the state of being whole" (Aubuchon, 2003, p. 1). This implies, as a philosophical assumption, that in order for education to be whole or integrated it must include both faith and learning. Hall, et al (2006) claims that one of the problems with the term IFL is the word 'integration', because people who are Christian already have a worldview in which faith and learning are united and thus do not need to integrate. Therefore, in order for this unity to flow within a Christian context, the word integration must be removed from the term IFL. Yet despite this, integration remains a part of the phrase, which may be in part due to tradition. In addition, the word integration serves as a reminder to Christian educators that faith and learning must remain together in Christian education.

The word '*faith*' is much more difficult to define and is the second word in the term IFL. Parker (2009) defines faith as a "universal activity of meaning-making it is not an asset of beliefs but a way of knowing" (p. 40). This definition entails that faith is something everyone engages in because it is universal. This is yet another philosophical assumption. Yet, many agree that either people have faith in God or they have faith that there is no God. The purpose of faith is to make meaning out of which worldview one subscribes to as an individual. If one has faith in God, one will find evidence for God's existence. White (1945) supports this when she says, "faith rests on evidence, not demonstration" (p. 68). In other words, because of faith in God, people will uncover evidence that supports their original belief.

Cooper (1999) defines faith as "openness to revelations from God and a guide of human actions" (p. 383). This entails a supernatural approach to faith because of the idea of revelations from God. Cooper's (1999) definition relies more on an experience with a god through revelations and these revelations serve as a guide for humans. It is true in many religions that people have had revelations from a god that directly influences their behavior. In the book of Exodus, the Israelites and the Egyptians have a revelation of the true God of the Bible. The Israelites chose to have faith and obey God while the Egyptians chose not to have faith or submit to the true God despite the supernatural revelations God was providing them.

Ream, Beaty, and Lion (2004) support this by defining faith as religiously motivated beliefs and practices. People who are motivated to do something because of a religious experience are demonstrating faith. Those who have faith in God often have different values and worldviews from those who do not have faith and this can be contributed to the believer's supernatural encounter. Therefore, if one is motivated by God to teach or to study they are demonstrating faith because the motivation is religious. This is an example of intrinsic motivation that did not arise from the will of the person but was implanted supernaturally.

Hasel (2006) explains that faith has three aspects to it: cognitive, relational, and volitional. The cognitive aspect of faith is what a person believes. For example, some believe in God and some do not. The relational aspect of faith is about having a relationship or connection with what one believes. If one believes in God, one will develop a relationship with the God that one believes in. This assumption here is that one can have a personal relationship with God. Lastly, the volitional aspect of faith has to do with practicing what one claims to believe. If one's God says, "Keep the Sabbath holy" faith is demonstrated by deciding to obey what one's God has commanded one to do. In others words, this is an instance of showing one's faith by one's actions.

Many of the definitions related to the final word 'learning' pertain to changes in behavior or the behaviorist definition of learning. Learning prepares people to perform different actions (Zimmerman & Schuhck, 2003). This implies that learning happens in order to accomplish a task. Smith and Pourchot (1998) agree with this when they said that learning brings about development in an individual. This development leads to a change in the behavior of the person (Lawrence, Burton, & Nwosu, 2005). From these definitions, it appears that learning focuses on changes in behavior. The reason for this is that changes in behavior can be assessed and observed by others. Faith is closely related to learning in that when one has true faith in something his behavior should be different. This is in agreement with Hasel (2006) volitional aspect of faith.

In the book of James in the New Testament, James uncovers this relationship between faith and learning which is defined as a change in behavior.

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." (James 2:18) NKJV

What James is implying here is that faith is showing others that one has learned something by demonstrating a corresponding change in behavior. To describe this differently, one can show someone their faith (a revelation from God) by works (a change in behavior through learning). When faith is a part of the learning process it necessitates a change in the behavior of those involved.

IFL is deeper than only defining each word in the phrase. It is necessary to understand how defining IFL can vary depending on the perspective or purpose one has for IFL. In addition, each perspective serves as a critical step in understanding IFL.

Defining the IFL from Various Perspectives

From the Christian viewpoint, there are at least four perspectives from which the IFL can be defined and they are connective, ontological, worldview, and evangelistic. Each viewpoint provides a fuller picture of what IFL is. Through looking at them as a whole one can better understand exactly what the definition of IFL could potentially be.

Connective View

The connective perspective to defining the IFL states that there must be a dialog or a connection between the religious aspect of faith and the academic aspect of learning (Lyon, Beaty, Parker, & Mencken, 2005; Hall, Ripley, Garzon, & Mangis, 2009). Through such a dialog, students' lives can be transformed by seeing the connections between scholarship and biblical truth (Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2007; Schroeder, 2008). Transformation of lives is one of the goals of IFL as students accept the faith of the teacher, which leads to a corresponding change in the students' behavior.

Ontological View

The Ontological perspective relates to the study of the nature of being or existing (Ehrig, 2007). Sites, Garzon, Milacci, & Boothe, (2009) "state that faith, which is an integral part of integrating faith and learning, must be holistic and it must involve every aspect of one's being" (p. 32). That is faith must be a part of the educator's existence or their ontology in order for them to integrate faith and learning. This unity between self and faith in God is critical to demonstrating the corresponding change in behavior that students need to see to be convinced of the power of God.

Living a holistic life is another way to reiterate the importance of an ontological definition of the IFL. Burton and Nwsou (2003) state that living a holistic life is foundational to the IFL in the classroom since a teacher cannot integrate what they do not possess. Integration must first happen within the life of the teacher before it can be present in the classroom (Polestar, 2009). How this is done is beyond the scope of this article. However, from the ontological viewpoint, IFL starts with the life of the teacher and the oneness of faith with his own actions and behavior.

This viewpoint is at odds with the connective viewpoint because it sees faith and learning as one entity whereas the connective viewpoint asserts that faith and learning are separate. However, oneness can also be achieved through dialoging and coming to an agreement. Therefore, though it appears that the ontological and connective viewpoint contradict one another they may be different steps of one process. First, there is a

dialog, which is in agreement with the connective viewpoint, and then there is consensus or oneness, which is in agreement with the ontological viewpoint.

Worldview Perspective

The worldview perspective to defining the IFL is explaining this expression as a way of seeing the world. A worldview is a set of presuppositions by which one answers questions (Hall et. al, 2006). One's worldview affects in a great deal the way one will answer questions. An example is a Christian looking at nature and he sees the beauty of God's creative power. However, when an atheist looks at creation he sees the beauty in natural selection. Each person is correct according to his or her worldview and the presuppositions each possesses. This difference in worldview has significantly influence their interpretations of the world around them.

Defining the IFL from the worldview perspective is closely related with thinking christianly. Thinking christianly involves seeking the mind of Christ. Seeking the mind of Christ means to attempt to make decisions and see things from Christ's perspective. This implies having the mind of Christ, which is explained in the book of Philippians. Thinking christianly can also be defined as understanding God as the creator and redeemer and exploring human existence from this worldview (Burton & Nwosu, 2003). The purpose of Christian education is trained students to see and interpret the world from a biblical viewpoint (White, 1952).

In demonstrating the unity between each perspective, one can say that IFL starts with a dialog (the connective perspective). Through this dialog, faith and learning become one (ontological perspective). After this, a person now has a unique set of presupposition from which to answer questions and deal with the world (worldview perspective).

Evangelistic Perspective

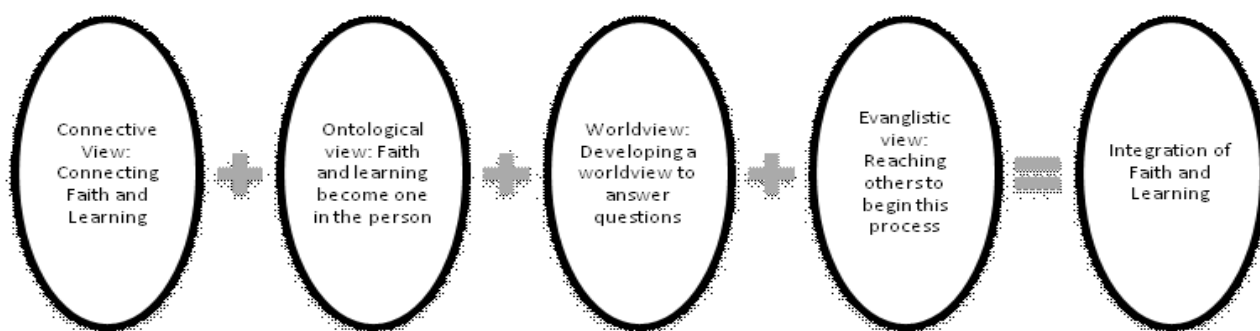
The last perspective from which IFL is defined is from an evangelistic perspective. The evangelistic perspective relates to seeking to convert people to a particular faith. For the Christian church evangelism is about seeing people join the Church upon accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior. The evangelistic perspective sees the IFL as being about redemption (Glanzer, 2008). Redemption is defined as restoring within man the image of God (White, 1952). The purpose of evangelism is to see people brought to Christ. Through being with Christ, the individual is restored to the image of God. The IFL in the classroom can help with this through the teacher's spiritual life having an impact on the students or in other words, through the students seeing the works of the teacher (Polestra, 2009). The goal of the IFL is for the teacher to pass on their faith to the students so that they do what the teacher does (Burton & Nwosu, 2003). White (1952), emphasis this point when she states that teachers need to have the character that they want their students to have in the future. Faith without works is futile in regards to IFL.

The evangelistic perspective of the IFL shows the importance of it to the Christian identity (Holcomb, 2006). Through defining the IFL from an evangelistic perspective, one's desire is to see people changed by setting a Christ-like example. Indeed, there are two primary objectives for integrating faith and learning. The first is evangelistic which relates to increasing the number or quantity of Christians. The second goal should be to strengthen those who are already Christian or to improve the quality of current Christians, which can be defined as revivalist goal.

The evangelistic perspective is the final aspect of defining IFL. First, there needs to be a dialog between faith and learning (connection). This leads to an oneness in the life of the person in regards to faith and learning (ontology). Next is a distinct worldview from which one deals with questions (worldview). Finally, a person begins to reach out to their students in order for this process to begin in them (evangelistic). Figure one provides a conceptual framework of IFL.

Figure 1

Aspects of the Integration of Faith and Learning



A Definition of the Integration of Faith and Learning

The integration of faith and learning is a concept that deals with maintaining the integrity or the wholeness that is found between faith and learning from a religious or non-religious perspective. Faith is related to knowing and believing in something based on either supernatural or natural revelation. Learning is the acquiring of knowledge via faith, which brings about a change in behavior.

Therefore, the integration of faith and learning is about maintaining the wholeness or connection between learning new information and seeing a corresponding change in behavior because of this new information. It begins with a dialog with the goal of consensus, which affects a person worldview. IFL has to do with transmitting one's faith (supernatural or natural revelation) to others, which causes a change in their behavior. The IFL is not limited to bringing the Christian God into the classroom. It can also be about bringing Buddha into the classroom or any other deeply held perspective into the classroom, because these are the beliefs and values of the people who are integrating their faith with their learning. From the Christian perspective, the IFL has to do with bringing God into the classroom in a way that provides the evidence students need to come to Christ or grow in Christ.

Conclusion

This study has explored the literature to contribute to a deeper understand of IFL. Defining the IFL is something that educators need to do in order to determine how it can be accomplished. There are different perspectives or ways to see the IFL and each is an important way to attempt to explain what it is. Through combining these perspectives into a process, an individual can develop a fuller sense of what IFL is. Naturally, no spiritual process is strictly linear as God's Spirit moves in mysterious ways to humans, however, the model provided gives some guidance as to how to see what IFL is.

The IFL is the intentional action of an individual to bring his or her personal beliefs and faith into his or her classroom in a way that affects the behaviors and attitudes of the students. The behavior of the teacher influences the worldview of the students in such a way that the student experiences a paradigm shift in their thinking. With such a definition, educators are prepared to develop strategies for implementing the integration of faith and learning in the classroom and see results amongst the students.

References

- Aubuchon, D.
2003 *Integrity: Do You Have It?* Lincoln, NE: iUniverse Inc.
- Badley, K.
2009 Clarifying "faith-learning integration": Essentially contested concepts and the concept-conception distinction. *Journal of Education & Christian Belief*, 13 (1), 7-17.

-
- 1996 Two 'cop-outs' in faith-learning integration: Incarnational integration and Worldviewish integration. *Spectrum* , 28 (2), 105-118.
- 1994 The Faith/learning integration movement in Christian higher education: Slogan or substance. *Journal of Research on Christian Education* , 3 (1), 13-34.
- Badley, K. Burton, L., & Nwosu, C.
- 2003 Student perceptions of the integration of faith, learning, and practice in an educational methods course. *Journal of Research on Christian Education* , 12 (2), 101-135.
- Cooper, M.
- 1999 Faculty perspectives on the integration of faith and academic discipline in southern Baptist higher education. *Religious Education* , 94 (4), 380-394.
- Ehrig, M.
- 2007 *Ontology Alignment: Bridging the Semantic Gap*. New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media LLC.
- Glanzer, P.
- 2008 Why we should discard "the integration of faith and learning": Rearticulating the mission of the Christian scholar. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* , 12 (1), 41-51.
- Hall, M., Gorsuch, R., Malony Jr., H., Narramore, S., & Leeuwen, M.
- 2006 Dialogue, embodiment, and the unity of faith and learning: A conversation on integration i in a postmodern age. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* , 25 (4), 331-337.
- Hall, M., Ripley, J., Garzon, F., & Mangis, M.
- 2009 The other side of the podium: Student perspectives on learning integration. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* , 37 (1), 15-26.
- Hasel, F.
- 2006 Passing on what really counts: Transmitting Adventist values, beliefs and a spirit of service and mission. *Journal of Adventist Education* , 63 (3), 16-21.
- Holcomb, J.
- 2006 Financing faith and learning: Assessing the constitutional implications of integrating faith and learning at the church-related college. *Journal of Church and State* , 48 (4), 831-850.
- Holmes, A.
- 1987 *The Idea of a Christian College*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Lawrence, T., Burton, L., & Nwosu, C.
- 2005 Refocusing on the learning in "integration of faith and learning". *Journal of Research on Christian Education* , 14 (1), 17-50.
- Lyon, L., Beaty, M., Parker, J., & Mencken, C.
- 2005 Faculty attitudes on integrating faith and learning at religious colleges and universities: A research note. *Sociology of Religion* , 6 (1), 61-69.
- Parker, S.
- 2009 Measuring faith development. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* , 34 (4), 337-348.
- Polestra, P.
- 2009 Faith-praxis integration in research design and statistics. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* , 37 (1), 62-69.
-

Rasi, H.

2006 *Integration of Faith and Learning*. Retrieved August 4, 2011, from The Institute of Christian Teaching: http://www.aiias.edu/ict/ifl_definition.html

Ream, T., Beaty, M., & Lion, L.

2004 Faith and learning: Toward a typology of faculty views at religious research universities. *Christian Higher Education* , 3, 349-372.

Ripley, J., Garzon, F., Hall, M., Mangis, M., & Murphy, C.

2009 Pilgrims' progress: Faculty and University factors in graduate student integration of faith and learning. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* , 37 (1), 5-14.

Schroeder, B.

2008 Science instruction in the context of Christian faith. *Theology and Science* , 6 (3), 319-330.

Sherr, M., Huff, G., & Curran, M.

2007 Student perceptions of salient indicators of integration of faith and learning (ifl): The Christian vocation model. *Journal of Research on Christian Education* , 16, 15-33.

Sites, E., Garzon, F., Milacci, F., & Boothe, B.

2009 A phenomenology of the integration of faith and learning. *Journal of Psychology and Theology* , 37 (1), 28-38.

Smith, M., & Pourchot, T.

1998 *Adult Learning and Development: Perspectives from Educational Psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sorenson, R., Derflinger, K., Bufford, R., & McMinn, M.

2004 National collaborative research on how students learn integration: Final report. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* , 23 (4), 355-365.

Thomas, D.

2011 A history of the Integration of Faith and Learning. *Catalyst* , 6 (1), 18-22.

White, E.

1952 *Education*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

1945 *Testimonies to the Church* (Vol. 5). Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

Zimmerman, B., & Schunk, D.

2003 *Educational Psychology: A Century of Contributions*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

About the author

Darrin Thomas is a doctoral student at Adventist International Institute for Advance Studies, Philippines.