

# Faith-Learning Integration in Economics

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*Starting from the understanding that all truth emanates from a single source, the Scriptures, the authors provide a systematic overview of integrative techniques and illustrate many of the approaches applicable to the classroom in the discipline of economics.*

## The Challenge of Integration

The Cedarville College Catalog contains the following statement under the heading of Purpose: "Since its establishment, the purpose of the College has remained the same: to offer an education consistent with biblical truth" (*Cedarville College Catalog 1996-1997*, p. 6). Two key words in the above statement are "consistent with." In other words, whatever is taught in the classroom must ultimately be in agreement with and be judged by one standard, the Word of God.

In our endeavor to understand the nature of the integration of Scripture and knowledge, we find implicit within the above statements the understanding that "truth" emanates from a singular source. At the core of all reality we discover that truth is "one." Thus, in order to effectively integrate Scripture with discipline-specific content, the undergirding and foundational presupposition that directs and energizes our efforts must be that all "truth" is located in a singular source.

Indeed the Scriptures confirm this unity of truth. Paul, when speaking of Christ in Colossians, states, "...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). It is biblically accurate to speak metaphorically of a merger where the parallel tracks of faith and learning converge and come together in one source, Christ. In Christ, "all things hold together or consist" (Colossians 1:17b).<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer has noted in several of his writings (for instance, *The God Who is There*), that in God we find the "infinite reference point" for all of creation. He represents the ultimate synthesis for all of reality.

Everything that exists extracts its meaning and purpose from the second person of the triune Godhead. Whether we speak of our lives individually or civilization collectively, purpose and significance are derived through Him. If we fail or are unwilling to accept this unifying foundation for all of creation, integration becomes little more than an esoteric mental exercise.

It is possible to remove the centrality of Christ from our integrative endeavors and to replace Him with another focal point. In business, such concerns as shareholders' wealth or stakeholders' concerns can become that synthesizing factor. Specifically for the economist, the maximization and glorification of productivity and efficiency can easily take center stage. But this constitutes idolatry. "The failure to develop theory that is faithful to revealed evidence and consistent with the attributes, motives, and intentions of God is ultimately idolatrous" (Ward, 1995, p. 10).

The Old Testament also clearly confirms this integrative conjunctiveness. In the Great Shema we read, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). It is the writer's contention that in this affirmation of the unity within the Godhead resides the basis of all integrative activity. "On the other hand, the omniscience of God requires that there is a necessary unity of truth, for all truth is unified in its common source, Colossians 2:3" (Integration Task Team, 1993, p. 6).

### **The Search for Metaphors**

In light of the singularity of all truth, what would be an appropriate metaphor to help us visualize the integrative task? A standard definition of

integration is "To make into a whole by bringing all parts together, to unify" (*American Heritage Dictionary* 1980, p. 682). Common definitions of integration have generally led to the employment of such basic metaphors as railroad tracks which run parallel to each other but then merge in the viewer's perception of distance.

*...integration... "To make into a whole by bringing all parts together, to unify."*  
*American Heritage Dictionary*

Yet another common metaphor is the use of a puzzle where the pieces need to be fitted together. "The question is, how do we put the puzzle together? How do the pieces interrelate? What is the pattern of the culture?" (Walsh, 1984, p. 18). "The sum total of truth may be likened to a jigsaw puzzle with many interlocking pieces. The puzzle, as designed by its maker, is intended to represent a coherent picture" (Estes, 1993, p. 4).

Perhaps a more appropriate symbolic and pictorial representation of "integration" would be a metaphor that places the initial emphasis on a common source rather than placing the stress on the fragmentation of the parts. Thus our search is for a metaphor that pictures things

originating from one origin and then becoming splintered and fragmented.

Developmentally speaking, we might borrow from the botanical world.<sup>2</sup> Botanical growth is often pictured in Scripture to show that a plant's plumage develops from a single source. To use the metaphor of a flower bulb from which a beautiful bouquet originates is beneficial in that it directs our central focus in the integration process to the unity of truth rather than the resultant disciplinary fragmentation. Integration, then, becomes not so much, the merger of the many branches of knowledge, but a return to the common root source of all knowledge. Perhaps the metaphor of a fireworks display where an initial rocket burst fragments into a beautiful panorama of vivid colors and designs could also symbolically picture integration. Irrespective of the particular metaphor chosen to picture the process of integration, the metaphor, to be accurate, must accentuate the unity of truth.

### **The Search for Models: Three Approaches to Integration**

Metaphors are useful for visualizing the overall dynamic of a system. But to understand the underlying processes of a system, we need to develop models that help us analyze the matter at hand.

In the body of literature regarding integration in education (which is notable primarily for its rather surprisingly small size) we discover three basic models: Vertical Integration, Horizontal Integration, and Intersensory Integration.

**Vertical Integration**, as the writers are using the term, refers to what is commonly understood as the integration of Scripture and discipline-specific content. Several terms have been given to this type of integrative activity. Writers in the past spoke in terms of the integration of Scripture and Knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis given by this term was that integration "explores the explicit linkages between biblical data and knowledge from outside the Scriptures" (Integration Task Team, 1993, p. 2).<sup>4</sup> More recently the term for this basic vertical integrative framework was articulated as the integration of faith and learning.

The integration of faith and learning is more encompassing than the integration of Scripture and knowledge. In this context, faith refers to the whole Christian theological system, and learning speaks of the comprehensive corpus of human thought found in the various academic disciplines (Integrative Task Team, 1993, p. 2).

Most recently the term employed has been the integration of faith, learning, and life. This term is intended to focus on the application of integration to life: “Its specific contribution lies in the application of the epistemological insights to the realities of life. Thus, it seeks to bridge theory and practice, knowledge and practice, ideal and real” (Integrative Task Team, 1993, p. 2). We will deal with this approach to integration in much more detail later in this paper, so we will forgo specific examples in the teaching of economics at this point.

Another major form of integrative activity could be labeled **Horizontal Integration**. This type of integrative methodology seeks to draw parallels in thought across interdisciplinary contents. Indeed, since truth is “one” and emanates from a singular source, then all knowledge, regardless of the man-made taxonomical classifications, should have interdisciplinary links. In other words, as a common source for all knowledge and a common *modus operandi* of the Creator as visualized through the creation are accepted, the common concept threads can be made more apparent and should be shared in the classroom. There should be common presuppositional principles that transcend man’s classifications of

knowledge based on content and disciplines. For example, economics presumes the same notion of orderly cause and effect that many sciences do. And the interdependencies found in ecological systems can be instructive in appreciating market interaction.

One other broad classification of integration should be mentioned at this time, that of **Intersensory Integration**. This type of integration is neglected in most classrooms. Knowledge has become too singularly cognitive in transmission, omitting the important role of effect (feelings and intuition) in the learning process.

The essence of reality is not primarily located in the cognitive domain. Yet it seems as though we have made integration predominantly a cognitive exercise. Though this represents an evident weakness it probably has also, in part, led to the sterility of knowledge and may have contributed to the cleavage between knowledge and wisdom.<sup>5</sup>

Intersensory integration seeks to encourage learning through a wide variety of experiences in addition to reading. Multimedia efforts (now available in some basic economic texts and through individual web home page efforts

by professors at some colleges and universities) reflect the desire to incorporate words, music, and still and moving picture images into the learning experience. This focus is especially important in the light of different learning style preferences among college students, such as visual, auditory, and psychomotor (manipulative).

### **Focusing on Vertical Integration**

Vertical Integration, the tying of scriptural passages and principles to the issues and insights of economics, is of special interest to the authors of this paper. Christian colleges encourage this activity, and we have found it an especially fruitful approach in the classroom.

The thesis of this paper is that certain pedagogical procedures of vertical integration may be better suited, from a developmental perspective, in facilitating both intellectual and spiritual growth. Thus we must now address some of these specific integrative possibilities.

#### ***Seven Pedagogical Integrative Methods***

There are at least seven pedagogical integrative methods that an instructor can employ in the classroom.

The most basic method to accomplish vertical integration is to use given proof texts in support of a concept in the discipline. From several texts we can draw a proposition and thus judge discipline-specific content in light

of that proposition. We will label this the **Propositional or Principle Approach** to integration.

We begin our life in Christ with the gathering of individual biblical propositions—individual statements that are true. The spirit uses these to cause us to do something, alter our perception about something, or store it for application in the future (Chewning, 1989, p. 14).

In economics, the concept of God's sovereign ownership and man's role as vice regent and servant-steward over the material creation is propositionally supported by such references as Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it" (see also Psalm 50:10-12, Haggai 2:8, etc.). Yet another example of this integrative approach is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14 where we are told, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...." This passage is usually applied to the marriage covenant, but from the context, is just as appropriately applied to business structures, specifically partnerships. Numerous other examples and illustrations could be used, but, suffice it to say, this is a quite common integrative technique.

A second pedagogical approach to integration in the

classroom is what might be labeled the **Reformed or Theonomic Approach** to integration. This approach would view the activity of integration as having as its objective the application of God's law to all areas of life. The idea is to bring the whole world under the rule of God's law. This would include moral and civil, not ceremonial law—in essence, those aspects of God's law not specifically abrogated in the New Testament.

One of the more prolific writers in this area has been Rousas John Rushdoony. His major work, entitled *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, was written in 1973. "The Institutes extensively examined the Ten Commandments as the expression of God's law. Much in the vein of the New England Puritans, Rushdoony's work sought to develop the implications of biblical law for modern economic and political institutions" (Noell, 1993, p. 6).

Also known as the Reconstructionist Approach, theonomic implies that the integrator will appraise the content of his discipline through the Law of God. The "decatalogue" can be used as the summary lens for all of the "Law." For example, the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is used to support the institution of private property. Private property, as employed here, stands in contrast to public

property which is controlled by the state. From this perspective, private contract law is then justifiably based on the concept of private property rights. These ideas flow rather naturally out of the decalogue as the summary of the entirety of God's Law.

Having substantiated, from the decalogue, the legitimacy of private property rights, the Reconstructionist would then define as unjust any violation of these rights. Stealing is sin because it violates the law. The absence of stealing leads to the reinforcement of work as a "calling." The tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" also affirms private property, condemning stealing and encouraging work as a legitimate calling.

The Reformed Approach relies heavily on the apologetic of Cornelius Van Till which is often referred to as "presuppositional apologetics." This apologetic would hold to the premise that it is impossible to move one from unbelief to belief through the use of evidential and empirical criteria. In addition they would almost universally hold to a postmillennial eschatology. These, coupled with their theonomic approach to ethics, give them a rather distinct approach to the integration of Scripture and knowledge.

Reconstructionists understand this task in terms of bringing

the whole world under the rule of God's Law. This understanding is derived from two other principle doctrines associated with reconstructionism: its postmillennial eschatology and its theonomic approach to ethics. Postmillennialism contends that prior to the Second Coming of Christ, His kingdom will be manifested in a worldwide conversion to Christianity. This theonomic doctrine affirms that every detail of God's law as given through Moses is explicitly binding on Christians today. Reconstructionists who espouse theonomic postmillennialism assert that worldwide victory for the gospel will result in adherence by all nations to the standards found in biblical law (Noell, 1993, p. 8).

**The Theological-Doctrinal Approach** constitutes a third technique of vertical integration. In this pedagogical method the classical theological doctrines are used as starting points for inquiry in to discipline-specific content. The approach examines course content from the perspective of the major biblical doctrines. Major theological doctrines such as Anthropology, The Fall, Redemption, Resurrection, Eschatology and others, become

the launching pads for integrative endeavors.

Consider, as an example, the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine can sustain a wealth of integrative pursuits. Out of the Trinity comes the basic tradeoff between the "many and the one," the "parts and the whole." Within the Godhead we see plurality and diversity, but always within the framework of "oneness" and unity of purpose. Thus, whenever we encounter, within our

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disciplines, situations of the plural and the singular, we can effectively employ this overarching integrative concept.

In economics, there are many course topics that explode with meaning against the backdrop of the Trinity. In the areas of conflict management and resolution, the goal is to find a single acceptable solution from many possibilities. The process of collective bargaining and grievance procedure in labor economics also uses this technique. In studying the harmony within the Trinity we gain valuable insights into these areas. In the field of political economy, popularly

known as business and government, we study what are known as “public choice mechanisms.” These mechanisms are utilized when the group needs to come up with one proposal to a given social problem. This particular subject area also lends itself nicely to this doctrinal form of integration.<sup>6</sup>

The framers of public policy, in regard to economic concerns, have often been surprised by the outcomes of their enacted legislation. The legislation was designed to alleviate economic ills, but instead only served to complicate matters and worsen the financial situation. This discrepancy comes about because they started with a faulty view of man, a deficient anthropology. A correct view of man in this instance, allows for effective integration and an accurate assessment as to the long run economic consequences of public policy.

In the area of comparative economics, economic systems are analyzed based upon the Theological-Doctrinal approach to learning. Is a market system inherently more sinful than a system managed by the government, socialism?<sup>7</sup> “Does capitalism cater to human depravity? Any economic system including capitalism is subject to exploitation by the deceit and perversity of the human heart; no system is immune to or a

protection against that corruption” (Gaffin, 1989, p. 153).

If we balance the fact that men and women are image bearers of God with the concomitant reality of our depravity, then these two doctrines drive much in the way of business practice. We would like to be able to work with people and assume that they always want to do what is right and that they are motivated to be creative and to do good work. But that is often not the case. In the real world we must compensate for the fact that sin has caused the image of God in our lives to become shattered. Our motives are not always pure (Chewning, 1990, p. 42).

Richard Chewning continues by further explaining that this doctrinal combination can be observed in how we treat our employees. Such concerns as fairness, impartiality, and dignity of each employee are impacted by our view of men and women in the light of Scriptural truth. But we also must develop business policies that constrain the depravity that pervades humankind.

We must recognize that temptation is everywhere in business. When we place people in positions of potential temptation, such as handling large sums of cash, overseeing valuable



merchandise, being under great pressure in a job where cheating will probably escape detection and so on, we must also provide controls over that temptation (Chewning, 1990, p. 42).

Closely aligned to the Theological-Doctrinal Approach is the **Attributes of God Approach**. This specific technique incorporates the attributes and perfections of God as the lens through which to visualize specific business practices. This particular methodology of integration has been used most successfully by Dr. Richard C. Chewning.<sup>8</sup>

In economics, this approach would encourage us to consider that God is a creator, bringing into existence that which is new in form and function. And, because we are made in His image, we too can be creators. In fact, one could assert that economic systems that encourage and reward individual creativity are those most closely aligned with developing “godly character” in people. Other attributes such as God’s justice and God’s grace also have implication for social economic policy.

A fifth integrative modality is the **Creationist Approach**. This could simply be called the “Back to Genesis” method. Though this could be considered a subapproach to the Theological-

Doctrinal approach, because of the never ending tension between evolutionism and creationism, it deserves an independent platform.

This integrative technique analyzes discipline and course content from the seminal teachings on creation and the origins of the earth and mankind found in Genesis. Included within this examination are the presuppositions and principles of a given discipline. Regardless of the field of inquiry, our cognitive pursuits have been tainted by the encompassing tentacles of depravity. The evolutionary perspective has often saturated not only content but methods of assimilating that content. This is certainly a valid starting point for effectual integration.

The first chapters of a standard text in international economics will spend considerable time examining theories as to the “why” of trade and exchange. Why are international economic dealings mutually advantageous to the trading partners? The answer, if we go “back to Genesis,” is to contemplate the diversity of God’s creative acts. God creates with such variety; He created different soils, different skeletal structures, and varying land masses and mineral compositions. This heterogeneity in resource base gives rise to mutually advantageous and profitable trading. It is fascinating to read

chapter after chapter of a text trying to explain international trade, and then how refreshing to open the Word of God and have truth.

The **Time-Historical Approach** has as its starting point the correct interpretation of time and historical phenomena and begins by examining various theories of time and history, including: the dialectic approach and the cyclical approach—the idea that time and history are an ascending spiral.

This integrative technique has been particularly beneficial in examining the history of economic thought. Karl Marx held to a “dialectic” conception of history which was borrowed from the philosopher Hegel and tended to shade all the theories that Marx espoused. When we examine Scripture we are acutely aware that a correct view of time and history is a “linear” perspective. God is providentially engineering events in time and space to bring glory to His Son. History has an end. It is going somewhere, and indeed it is “His Story.”

The last integrative method to be discussed is the **Comparative Religions Approach** to the discipline of economics. When studying both comparative economic systems and international economics it becomes evident that most economic behavior, values, etc., are driven by “religious values.”

If we become familiar with a country’s religious base, it is much easier to make sense of the edifice of economic activity. An often used illustration is India. Why is the country so poor and unable to feed its starving masses? We are well aware that this is not primarily an economic problem but a faulty religious belief in reincarnation. This belief results in a perspective that one’s economic status is determined by previous lives and present birth rather than by effort and energy devoted to gaining a better future. Note the inter-approach overlap with the time-historical. The people are holding to a cyclical perception of time and history.

### Summary

This paper has covered a number of different techniques and methodologies which can be employed in the classroom to introduce, examine, and illustrate discipline-specific content:

- The Propositional or Principle Approach
- The Reformed or Theonomic Approach
- The Theological-Doctrinal Approach
- The Attributes of God Approach
- The Creationist Approach
- The Time-Historical Approach
- The Comparative Religions Approach

These approaches lead to a

veritable gold mine of integrative potential. Thank God that we have come to a knowledge of the truth (and it is "one"), and we are forever learning (See 2 Timothy 3:7). We might end by making the following observations concerning the process of integration:

- **Integration never occurs accidentally.** Teachers must develop the commitment and devise the methodology by which to bring this about. Casual reference to a few Bible verses will not "get the job done." If students are to learn that the Bible does speak to all areas of life, including economics and business, they will need to see it modeled before them in a continuous and intentional way.
- **Integration never occurs easily.** While some Scripture-discipline connections may seem apparent, a thorough-going effort at joining biblical precepts and business practice is never an obvious matter. Professors have to work at both interpreting Scripture properly (letting it speak its own voice rather than trying to force it to agree with what we want to say) and applying Scripture naturally to the concepts of our discipline field. Proof-texting, for example, is a contrivance that students see through very easily.

- **Integration never occurs passively.** While demonstrating integrative ties to students is essential, the more demanding challenge is to develop projects and assignments that will lead students to experience integration on their own. The authors of this paper have used a variety of techniques including cases, group presentations, and term papers especially designed to raise integrative issues.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word that is used for "hold together," "consist" is *sunistao*. This is a composite of two words. The first is the Greek word *sun*, which means "with, together with, united in." The second is a derivative of the Greek word *histemi* which simply means "to stand." Thus when coupled together they mean, "to stand together."

<sup>2</sup>See Psalm 1 among others. Also see Downs, 1994, 112.

<sup>3</sup>In 1978 a task team was set up at Cedarville College to examine the whole area of integration in the classroom. This task team presented papers on various aspects of integration. The task team became known by the acronym ISK, Integration of Scripture and Knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>It was the privilege of author Smith to serve on this Integrative Task Team.

<sup>5</sup>This quote is taken from a three-page working paper which author Smith compiled while working on the Cedarville College Integration Task Team in 1993, entitled, "Some Thoughts on Integration."

<sup>6</sup>For an illustration of the doctrine of eschatology in integration, see *Biblical Principles and Business: The Foundations*. Volume 1, Section F, pp. 229-258.

<sup>7</sup>For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Ronald H. Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work*, particularly chapters six and seven.

<sup>8</sup>Dr. Chewning opened the 1995 annual meeting of the CBFA (Christian Business Faculty Association) with a message on business ethics based on the character of God.

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