

How Should a Theologian Integrate the Biblical Text with Theology?

A Proposal for Biblical Integration

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Introduction

The key aspect for distinguishing Christian education from any other type of education is the essential element of biblical integration. Biblical integration enhances a student's learning because a new set of questions are introduced into the field of study. For any field or discipline, one's view on biblical integration affects the tools of study deemed appropriate, the scope of study, and the ultimate goal of the study or activity in the field.

Christian scholars in various academic fields often struggle to articulate how biblical integration affects their research or teaching because of a perceived lack of overlap between the Bible and the content of their field. For the theologian, the problem may be just the opposite. Due to the close connections between theology and the Bible, the scholar can assume (wrongly) that biblical integration is always happening. This assumption can lead the theologian to be haphazard in integrating biblical terminology or texts into theological discourse. More intentionality in biblical integration adds a valuable component to a theologian's academic pursuits. Greater clarity on what biblical integration is can help distinguish its value and will increase intentionality in biblical integration regardless of the academic discipline. The relationship of knowledge drawn from the Bible and that discovered in other sources is a key question for biblical integration.

Biblical texts such as 2 Corinthians 10:5 have implications for understanding the possible tension in how biblical knowledge interacts with some aspects of general (i.e. secular) knowledge or religious knowledge drawn from other sources.¹ Biblical knowledge and general knowledge often do find complementarity, however, some aspects of "knowledge" or enquiry are

¹2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV) "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

not compatible with biblical revelation. The Apostle Paul puts this incompatibility in terms of a spiritual conflict. Theories or research in the “hard sciences” that adopt as a starting point non-theistic ideas will inevitably conflict with biblical teaching. In the social (“soft”) sciences certain understandings about human nature cannot coincide with the biblical description of humans. In the area of the theological disciplines, drawing authoritatively on non-biblical sources has led at times in church history to adopting views that are heterodox by the church’s standards and/ or do not provide proper deference to the canonical texts.

Noted Cautions in this Endeavor

However, the warfare analogy depicted by Paul does not mean that all things found in the sphere of secular (general) knowledge are in conflict with biblical revelation. Christian academics strive to discern what aspects of their chosen field need to be rejected, what aspects can be revised, and which ones can be affirmed. As far as different fields of knowledge discover true things, the affinity with Scripture can be straightforward. Arthur Holmes describes this phenomenon thusly, “The Christian regards the biblical revelation as the final rule of faith and conduct, but he does not think of it as an exhaustive source of all truth... and in the final analysis there will be no conflict between the truth taught in Scripture and truth available from other sources.”²

Conversely, the 2 Corinthians 10 text also implies that some things which are true can also be used by deceived or depraved human minds to dishonor or discredit the things of God. Truths discovered in history, sciences, and arts can be used to cloud or even blind a vision of who God is, which does not devalue the truths inherently, but does reinforce the role of the

²Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 18.

scholar as interpreter. Even truths discovered in religious research or theological discussion can mitigate against the knowledge of God. So, biblical integration that draws heavily on a biblical interpretative approach that affirms biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority will be most helpful in the task of discernment. This need for biblical interpretation for the theological purpose of understanding human nature, the world, or any element of life calls for biblical integration. It also indicates the diligence and sobriety required for a proper approach to biblical integration.

Methodology of the Paper

This paper intends to be a personal proposal for biblical integration to my field, theology, and my specific sub-disciplines of historical theology, the history of biblical interpretation, and hermeneutics.³ To summarize the following proposal, initially I will provide a working definition of biblical integration (with some implications) and then I will describe two foundational elements for biblical integration: 1) worldview and the 2) correlation between scripture and theology. I will also provide comments on 3) Christian higher education as a specific context for biblical integration. Briefly, I will depict how biblical integration works in a general context for 4) faith and practice in all disciplines, fields, and life scenarios. Finally, 5) I will present evidence of my own methods and means, which reflect my goals and objectives for biblical integration in my teaching,

Definition of biblical integration. Biblical integration is the theological application of the biblical author's textual meaning to a particular academic discipline, professional field, or life situation. As biblical integration is an expressly theological task, it should draw on theological

³Thus, whether statements are presented from a third-person or first-person point of view, they are reflective of my own attempts at biblical integration.

tools, as well as related tools in philosophy or history. Two foundational choices will shape the variation of biblical integration that is attempted by an individual: biblical authority and biblical hermeneutics. How much authority is granted to the biblical text is determinative to how biblical integration is conceived. George Guthrie indicates the connection of biblical authority with biblical integration:

(The) process of integrating the Christian view of the world with academic discipline—that is, working out how the authority of Scripture works with other forms of authority in the academy—has been neither simple nor simplistic. For millennia Christian academics have wrestled with how a God-oriented view of the world integrates with non-theological aspects of learning.⁴

Does the Christian scholar interpret the biblical text and the biblical author's viewpoint as the goal or are Scriptural principles used as a starting point (or means) for considering the implications of a certain research trajectory or discovered data? While both of these options may intend to cede an authoritative place to the Bible, the former conceives the primary question as not one of “relevance” of the Bible to a discipline, but how textual meaning might transform our thinking. In other words, a valuing of the biblical text and its meaning is a task that is distinct from integration and will be logically prior to the theological task of integrating biblical truth to a specific academic discipline.⁵ Michael Shepherd provides some insight into the reorientation required by an authoritative view of the biblical text. Shepherd writes:

There are basically two types of readers of the Bible: (1) those who want to see what the Bible says about something and (2) those who want to see what the Bible says. It almost goes without saying that the first type represents the vast majority of Bible readers. People have their own concerns, and they want the Bible to provide insight into what they consider to be important in life. Relatively few readers reach the point where they are content to let the Bible raise its own set of questions. Few are willing to set aside

⁴George Guthrie, “The Authority of Scripture” in David Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury (eds.), *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 23.

⁵The intention here is not to diminish the value of biblical integration within an academic discipline, but to acknowledge a beneficial process that gives logical priority to interpreting the biblical text in its own terms before attempting to resolve a set of issues or questions prompted by a contemporary discussion or observation.

what they think is relevant in order to allow their reading of the Bible to reorient their minds to what is central to the biblical authors.⁶

A robust view of the value and authority of the biblical text comes from an affirmation of the text as inspired and inerrant.⁷ Recognizing the inspiration of the biblical text necessitates a prevailing interest in its textual meaning and its theological purpose. As John Sailhamer asserts, “If our starting point is verbal inspiration, then the text should be the focus of our biblical theology.”⁸ The model of integration that draws consistently on this authoritative view on the inspired biblical text will always prioritize the biblical text’s meaning and will not settle for affirming the Bible as the “first among equals” as a source of revelation.⁹

The notion of textual meaning as central leads to the second foundational choice for biblical integration, which hermeneutical approach will be utilized. A hermeneutical approach that focuses on the inspired, textual revelation found in the Scriptures will pursue authorial intention (meaning) in the details of the biblical text. Textual tools such as an attention to vocabulary, grammar and syntax, compositional features, and canonical context will be used frequently in this hermeneutical approach. Historically-informed tools such as philology, lexicography, and text transmission also undergird this approach. In keeping with the commitment to the authority of the inspired and revelatory biblical text, this hermeneutical approach also begins with the theological starting points of the historical reliability, accuracy, and clarity of the biblical texts. The model for biblical integration described in the following

⁶Michael Shepherd, *The Textual World of the Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 87.

⁷See *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) and *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* (1982) for more explanation and biblical rationale on the relationship of biblical authority, inspiration, and inerrancy, along with their relationship with hermeneutics.

⁸John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 199.

⁹See sections below for the relationship of general and special revelation.

sections of this paper is built on a high view of biblical authority and a textual approach to biblical hermeneutics.

Christian Worldview

For theology, it seems like a given that the theologian would be operating from a Christian worldview. However, the existence of secular theology or a history of religions approach to theology prohibits even this basic assumption.¹⁰ Among theologians that would claim to work as a “Christian,” there are vast differences of the worldviews of a liberal theologian, a neo-orthodox theologian, a feminist theologian, a Roman Catholic theologian, and an evangelical, free-church theologian (etc.).¹¹ Not only does the range of Christian theologies create a variety of approaches to worldview in theological scholarship, but also the distinction of the purposes of theology and worldview creates some dissonance. Arthur Holmes comments on the differences between worldview and theology in terms of how they define and investigate “revelation”:

“A world and life view is not the same as a theology: Christian theology is a study of the perspective itself as disclosed by the biblical revelation. It looks within, whereas a Christian worldview looks without, at life and thought in other departments and disciplines, in order to see these other things from the standpoint of revelation and as an interrelated whole.”¹²

So, because of the differences noted by Holmes of worldview and theology, there could be a difference in the methodology for biblical integration if a scholar uses theology or worldview as the foundation or catalyst for integration.

¹⁰For an example of secular theology, see Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). For an example of the history of religions approach to theology, see Richard Reitzenstein, *The Hellenistic Mystery Religions*, translated by John E. Steely (Pittsburgh: Wipf & Stock, 1978).

¹¹For an insightful discussion of a free-church (or “believers’ church”) theological method and worldview, see Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), chapters 3 and 5.

¹²Holmes, *Christian College*, 59.

The theologian who intends to make use of “worldview” discussions will have to determine what the appropriate understanding of revelation is for the theological discipline and what the appropriate sources are. As Holmes describes revelation and its sources, he states, “While there is, of course, more to the idea of revelation than this, witness-bearing is plainly associated with God’s self-revelation in nature, in Christ, and in the church. In other words, God is known because he reveals himself to men through the witness of his creatures and his Son.”¹³ Noticeably, as Holmes describes his worldview methodology he does not prioritize the Scriptures as revelation (or actually even mention them explicitly). However, because of his worldview approach and views on the unity of truth, prioritizing Scripture as revelation could be counterproductive to his integrated approach to truth. After all, Holmes affirms the person of God, not the written texts of Scripture as “the ultimate locus of truth.” Holmes explains:

A similar relation between the truth of propositions and personal truth appears in regard to special revelation.... We also speak of the truthfulness or veracity of Scripture, both in the sense that its divine author is personally reliable in what he says (2 Tim 3:14-17), and in the sense that what Scripture teaches is true. Yet the ultimate locus of truth is not just in true propositions, not even in the written statements of Scripture, but in the utter reliability of the true God, one jot or tittle of whose word can never pass away (Matt. 5:17-18).¹⁴

As a means of distinguishing among the spectrum of “Christian” worldviews, there will be an attempt here to provide a sketch of worldview that amplifies the place of the biblical text as revelation in worldview construction. Along these lines, George Guthrie contends, “God’s revelation is preserved through his inspiration of the Scripture. Thus, every area of human life and inquiry has at its foundation the reality reflected by God’s revelation in Scripture. Therefore, Scripture forms the appropriate beginning point for shaping a worldview.”¹⁵ While

¹³Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God’s Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 32.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵Guthrie, “The Authority of Scripture,” 28.

space in this paper prohibits the articulation of a fully-developed worldview, key elements such as an understanding of God, creation, humanity, and the nature of knowledge should be noted. Additionally, the place of biblical authority in this worldview should also be noted.

A “biblical” worldview begins with an understanding of God and how humans can know him. The one, true God has revealed Himself definitively in the biblical texts as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁶ Therefore, the Bible becomes essential to knowing the trinitarian God truly. The trinitarian essence of God, which is fundamental to His nature, requires biblical revelation to be known. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth provides a lengthy discussion of the revelation provided by the Scriptures as the “root of the doctrine of the Trinity.” In this section, Barth explains,

Our assertion then is that we designate the doctrine of the Trinity as the interpretation of revelation, or revelation as the ground of the doctrine of the Trinity: we find revelation itself so attested in Holy Scripture that our understanding of revelation (which is related to this testimony), i.e. of the self-revealing God, must be this very doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁷

The Bible not only reveals God’s true nature, but also depicts His activity as consistent with His being. So, to study the biblical text’s depiction and explanation of God’s work, is to have access to God, His truth, and His purposes. The Bible begins with God as the creator of all things. God’s creative work provides the backdrop for every biblical narrative and all of its poetry, and serves as the beginning point of history. The biblical account of creation is then foundational for every understanding of reality from a biblical worldview. The Scriptures assert that a failure to recognize God as creator, will skew every accomplishment of human knowledge and will darken every motive of human ingenuity.¹⁸

¹⁶Biblical references to the trinity include: John 14, 2 Cor 13, 2 Thess 2, 1 Tim 2, Titus 3, and Jude.

¹⁷Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, translated by G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), 359.

¹⁸See Genesis 6; Isaiah 41:20; Isaiah 42, 45; Amos 4:6-13; Colossians 1; Romans 1:20-32; 1 Corinthians 2.

The ideal state of creation does not last long, because in Genesis 3, the first humans (Adam and Eve) break the covenantal relationship of creation through disobedience to God's command. Therefore, next in the biblical text, God is now revealed as judge, as He pronounces the "curses," and as the redeemer who rescues fallen humanity (Gen. 3:15, 20-21). Human existence is altered permanently as foundational human relationships are marred and death now becomes a reality.¹⁹ By Genesis 12, humanity has experienced death, geographic expansion, advances in civilization, and catastrophic destruction. From this point of biblical history forward, God is revealed as creator, judge, and redeemer. Humanity is revealed as created in the image of God, capable of relationship with God, rebellious from God in thought and action, and as the central stewards and inheritors of the land. Graciously, God speaks to humans through His messengers, both angels and prophets, until the prototypical prophet, Moses writes the first biblical text. Moses asserts that God can be known through these biblical texts and that this knowledge should lead to faith-filled obedience.²⁰ Wisdom derived from meditating on and living out the biblical texts is a constant biblical theme from Joshua 1 forward. So, a central element to a biblical worldview is to see life and reality through the biblical wisdom gleaned from God's character and purposes as revealed in the Bible, an expressly theological task.

A theological vision for integration that prioritizes the place of the biblical texts as revelation should ultimately result in an engagement with all disciplines and fields for the sake of the glory of God. In his essay describing differing approaches to integration, William Hasker concludes that biblical integration should ultimately be done as a "contribution to the kingdom of

¹⁹Compare the description of the marriage relationship in Gen 2:18-25 with the description in Gen 3:16-21. Also, see that Adam and Eve are barred from the tree of life in Gen 3:22-24, indicating their impending death. Furthermore, Cain murders his brother, Abel in Gen 4:7-8, making explicit the link between sin and death.

²⁰See Deut 29:25-31:13.

God.”²¹ Furthermore, in what he asserts is the “least emphasized” aspect of integration, Hasker urges for a positive contribution to various fields as a means of enhancing “the overall vision of reality in the light of Christ.”²²

Before describing further a positive model for integration that builds on a theology that prioritizes and grants authority to the biblical texts, a brief indication of the consequences of adopting a contrasting approach may be useful. What George Marsden refers to as the “Warfieldian” tradition finds its progenitor in the work of Charles Hodge on the relationship between science and the Bible. Because Hodge believes that there is a common “scientific truth” for secularists and those who support a high view on the Scriptures, though they vary greatly in their presuppositions, he contends that the “truths” found in either will be complementary to each other regardless of source. Hodge writes, “The proposition that the Bible must be interpreted by science is all but self-evident. Nature is as truly a revelation of God as the Bible, and we only interpret the Word of God by the Word of God when we interpret the Bible by science.”²³ Hodge and the Princeton tradition is known for their high view of the Scriptures, but he also has clearly elevated the status of natural revelation found in scientific processes.

Another historian familiar with evangelicalism, Mark Noll, in his introduction to Charles Hodge’s work on the relationship between science and religion, describes Hodge and the Princeton tradition’s “long-standing efforts to maintain harmony between divine truth expounded in Scripture and valid knowledge of the natural world learned from scientific procedures.”²⁴ However, as Noll himself exemplifies, there are some difficulties with treating the Bible and

²¹William Hasker, “Faith-Learning Integration: An Overview,” *Christian Scholar's Review*, XXI:3 (March 1992), 247.

²²Hasker, “Faith-Learning Integration,” 246.

²³Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism? And Other Writings on Science & Religion*, edited by Mark Noll and David Livingstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 54. This essay was originally published as “Scripture and Science” in *New York Observer*, March 12, 1863.

²⁴Hodge, *What is Darwinism*, 52.

science as equal partners in truth bearing.²⁵ Eventually, one part of the couplet becomes more than simply an interpreter of the other, but the arbiter of truth for both. Noll's emphasis on the validity of scientific research illustrates the favoring of one over the other,

if the consensus of modern scientists, who devote their lives to looking at the data of the physical world, is that humans have existed on the planet for a very long time, it is foolish for biblical interpreters to say that 'the Bible teaches' the recent creation of human beings... It means that, for people today to say they are being loyal to the Bible and to demand belief in a recent creation of humanity as a sign of obedience to Scripture is in fact being unfaithful to the Bible, which, in Psalm 19 and elsewhere, calls upon followers of God to listen to the speech that God has caused the natural world to speak.²⁶

As Marsden points out, Warfield and others pick up on this trajectory from Hodge of (secular) science and Bible being in agreement, or at least committed to the same search for truth.²⁷ Marsden contrasts that with the Kuyperian tradition, also among evangelicals, that places more significance on presuppositions. Marsden explains:

The Warfieldians, those who believe in one science or rationality on which all humanity ought to agree, point to the breakdown of any promised consensus in secular twentieth-century thought and claim that evangelical Christians can still argue their way to victory, at least in individual cases. To do so, they must stay on common ground with the non-Christians as long as possible, pursuing the technical aspects of their disciplines with just the same methodologies as their secular contemporaries do, but adding to them Christian moral and theological principles that truly objective people will see are rationally necessary to complete the picture. The Kuyperians, in contrast, emphasize that any discipline is built on starting assumptions and that Christians' basic assumptions should have substantial effects on many of their theoretical conclusions in a discipline.²⁸

With this tension noted, this paper will now return to a positive model for integration that builds on a theology that prioritizes biblical texts.

²⁵Charles Hodge also notes this tension, "There is a two-fold evil on this subject against which it would be for Christians to guard. There are some good men who are much too ready to adopt the opinions and theories of scientific men, and to adopt forced and unnatural interpretations of the Bible, to bring it to accord with those opinions. There are others who not only refuse to admit the opinions of men, but science itself, to have any voice in the interpretation of Scripture. Both of these errors should be avoided." Hodge, *What is Darwinism*, 55.

²⁶Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 207.

²⁷George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 123.

²⁸*Ibid*, 150–51. See also Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 156–57.

Correlation between Scripture and Theology

In the academic field of theology, the biblical text must first be read and carefully interpreted so that the author's textual meaning can be validated and serve as the stimuli for theological endeavors.²⁹ Also, a parallel between textual meaning and biblical revelation should be made. Textual meaning (using hermeneutical language) is revelation (using theological language). Moreover, it is important to understand the quality of revelation (special) found in the Scriptures and how it differs from the revelation found in the natural world (general). This theological understanding will affect the manner in which a scholar interprets Scripture and what is appropriate for the data produced in biblical interpretation. In sum, these questions help move from field-related issues to the theological issues related to refining a proposal for biblical integration.

To build biblical integration on a biblical foundation, the academic must grapple with two theological considerations about Scripture. One theological consideration relates to the nature of Scripture as revelation. The other theological consideration relates to the proper approach to interpreting Scripture.

The Bible as the definite, special revelation of God. A fundamental element of the nature of Scripture is that as inspired texts, the Scriptures serve as the definitive revelation of God. As the definite, special revelation of God, the Scriptures are a sure foundation of truth. To outline this consideration briefly, three implications of key texts will be noted.

- Deut. 29:24-29: Remember that theology raises the “why” questions. In this text, unbelievers ask the “why” theological question. What is a mystery (“secret”) to them has

²⁹The term “validate” intends to convey the ideas expressed in E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 169–73.

been revealed in the “words of this law.” This mystery may also include the “new covenant” alluded to in the next chapter (30:6). The contrast is between things not revealed (or not yet) and those revealed, not general revelation vs. special revelation (Scripture).

- Psalm 19:1-14 The majesty of God (glory) is revealed (displayed) in creation. The fact of the revelation having “no words” may reflect its universality, but probably also reflects its limits. However, with v.7, the psalmist focuses on the Word of God which is described with characteristics (perfect, sure, right, etc.) and functions (restores the soul, makes wise, rejoices the heart, etc.). The Word of God is the most “desirable” thing, especially warns us of our “errors” and points us to our “Redeemer.”
- Romans 1:18-20: God has revealed himself among the nations (“evident among them”), displaying even His “invisible” attributes (irony of “clearly seen”). His glory (“eternal power and divine nature”) are shown through this general revelation and His grace is revealed in the gospel of the Scriptures (1:1-6). In this text, general revelation provides little positive value as it simply removes the nations’ “excuse.” Of course, the Jews who have received the revelation in the Word of God (“the Law”; Rom. 2) are even more so, without “excuse.”

The idea that the Bible is the definite, special revelation of God is not without its critics. At the inauguration of a new Federated Theological faculty at the University of Chicago in 1943, university president, Robert Hutchins explained that a theological faculty was essential and central to a university because theology dealt with the Scriptures as God’s revelation. In *The Christian Century*, an editorial quoted Hutchins’ view of the place of theology and theological school in the university stating that they “are at the apex of the university and its studies because

they seek to supply the answers to the ultimate questions about the most fundamental matters with which the university is concerned.” Hutchins continues, “The existence and nature of God, the character and destiny of the human soul, and the salvation of man are problems which remain obscure in the light of human reason. Theology, which adds faith to reason, illuminates them.”³⁰ However, in what was a favorable editorial, one critique was provided, but not on the place of theology in the university (hardly a consensus idea), but on “President Hutchins’ identification of the Scriptures as the Christian revelation” which was described as “inadequate and unsound.” As an alternative the editorial stated that “the Scriptures are not the revelation, but a mirror of the revelation.”³¹ If Dr. Hutchins is correct that the Scriptures are the revelation of God, then theology can be based on direct revelation as long as it has biblical interpretation as its foundation.

The Bible reveals God, therefore its purpose is theological. The Scriptures ultimately have a theological purpose, to reveal God and His purposes. Due to this aspect of Scripture, biblical interpretation should be “theological interpretation.” Though Theological Interpretation (TI) is often discussed in academic circles today as a movement relating to biblical theology, theology, and hermeneutics, the specific discipline is not in view here.³² In this paper, the term is used more generically, essentially meaning a biblical interpretation that is theologically aware. In other words, this understanding of theological interpretation differs from the TI movement because it does not intend to bring an external theological framework to the biblical text as an interpretative guide. Instead, it intends to perceive well the theological meaning intended by the

³⁰“Theology in the University.” *The Christian Century* 60, no. 46 (November 17, 1943): 1326–28.

³¹Ibid. The quotation continues, “that the revelation consists of the actual events which emerged in history in and through Jesus Christ.”

³² For more on the movement of Theological Interpretation (TI) see Daniel Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

biblical authors, using the canonical context as a guide. Again, to outline succinctly the position of biblical warrant for an overall theological reading of texts, three key texts will be utilized.

- 2 Tim 3:14-17: The theological purpose of the Scripture can be called “wisdom” (Ps. 119: 103-105, 160). The Scriptures reveal God’s wisdom, the truth.
- 1 Corinthians 2:6-16: The wisdom of the Scripture differs from secular wisdom in content (“secret and hidden wisdom of God”) and medium (“revealed to us through the Spirit”) and has a “personal dynamic.” In v.14, the wisdom revealed by the Spirit (in “words,” i.e. the Scripture), requires interpretation (and illumination by the Spirit). See the three phrases of v.9- no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor anyone imagined; all areas of general revelation.³³
- Hebrews 1:1-3; 3:7, 15; 4:7, 12-13: The Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and David all “say” the same verse (Ps 95:7). The divine-human authors combine to produce the inspired Word of God (“living and active”) by which all will be judged (even their intentions) and by the Word are rendered without excuse (cf. Rom 1). Revealing the person and purposes of God (including His judgments) is the Bible’s primary task.

These theological considerations ultimately guide biblical interpretation to be fundamental to any theological method that seeks God’s revelation as its norming norm. If theology is understood to be speaking about or the study of God, then God’s revelation of Himself then makes theology possible (and not confined to parochial subjectivity).

Role in and Commitment to Christian Higher Education

³³See Walter Kaiser, “A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 1991: 301–19.

The scholar (or student) with this biblical-theological mindset can pursue and communicate wisdom in predominately “secular” academic fields. This pursuit and communication requires penetrating the citadel of contemporary “knowledge” and brings every thought captive in service to others and for the sake of God’s glory (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The mind that has been “renewed” or trained by biblical theology drawn from the biblical texts “sees” and “hears” things differently.

Theology meshes well with other areas of a liberal arts curriculum in a Christian university. Christian higher education should be marked with distinctive characteristics including a central role for biblical revelation and situating an academic’s own discipline with a theological framework. Brad Green writes on a commitment to biblical revelation, “At the heart of Christian higher education is the affirmation that God has spoken. The God of Scripture is a God who has revealed himself. This is a crucial affirmation, not a peripheral one, and a biblical doctrine of revelation has profound implications for a Christian understanding of education.”³⁴ Furthermore, a theological framework must be constructed by drawing on a historical confessional tradition (e.g. Augsburg, Westminster, etc.) or an original document (e.g. Cedarville’s Doctrinal Statement). Then the academic’s specific discipline is then engaged within those doctrinal commitments with the goal of a distinctly Christian body of knowledge. David Wells speaks of this intersection of theology and academic discipline as “coherence,” he contends for:

a different kind of faculty... who, regardless of their discipline, are able to think theologically and to think of their own discipline within a larger theological frame. What is needed are not more specialists to break down further the coherence of what is learned, but for those who can once again build up this coherence within their own detailed

³⁴Brad Green, “Theological and Philosophical Foundations” in David Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury (eds.), *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 73.

knowledge of their specific field. The only way this coherence will be found again is if it built upon biblical and theological foundations.³⁵

In 1950, S. T. Ludwig makes an impassioned plea for the role of the “church college” in a prospering society. He critiques the “gaudy” initiatives that many churches and Christians attempt to influence society. Instead, he argues that “it is incumbent upon the church college to help establish a Christian pattern for the future that will raise the level of life and make our society more nearly Christian.”³⁶ As Ludwig contends, if higher education is not driven by Christian principles and infused with Christian ideas, then people can “can lose their sense of ‘belongingness’ and become isolated units with no chart to guide.” Christian education sets a different course and in so doing forwards the most holistic thinking of the current day and has an opportunity to chart a new vision of the future (both personal and corporate). Ludwig continues, “It is the function of the church college in our disintegrating society to so present Christ and teach principles of His culture in every phase of the curriculum, until the incoming power of His spirit can change lives and make them a part of God’s great program.”³⁷ What Ludwig later asserts as a need is a collection of faculty who have a “high sense of life purpose” to this calling of changing lives and thought patterns. At Cedarville University, the need is for a faculty that humbly takes less pay than they can achieve elsewhere, works hard on multiple tasks (teaching, scholarship, service), and do not strive for individual recognition in favor of allowing the purposes of God to prompt and sustain our labors. The impact of this Christian approach to education is immediate on students, has a long-term effect on society, and will bear fruit in eternity.

³⁵David Wells, “Educating for a Countercultural Spirituality” in D. G. Hart and R. Albert Mohler (eds.), *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 298–99.

³⁶S.T. Ludwig, “The Church College in a Changing Culture.” *Vital Speeches of the Day* 17, no. 2 (November 1950): 56. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost, 58.

³⁷Ibid.

Relationship between Faith and Practice

The biblical stimulus for Christian higher education is the call for followers of Christ to be discipled and to disciple others. James Spiegel refers to a primary goal of Christian education as building the “content” and “carriage” of wisdom. The content of wisdom is moral insights possessed by the wise individual. The carriage of wisdom is the “outlook or attitude of mind that characterizes the wise person.”³⁸ This content and carriage can be developed by certain spiritual disciplines such as study and prayer. Spiegel remarks that “these practices build wisdom both directly and indirectly, as in various ways they contribute either to the content or carriage of wisdom (or both) for the person who practices them.”³⁹

While this discipleship emphasis should be significant for all Christian higher education, it is especially so for those teaching biblical interpretation and theology. The goal of teaching theology should be the conformity of the teacher and the students to the character and purposes of God, a result of knowing Him rightly. Ronald Horton asserts, “The goal of Bible teaching is that of all Christian education—godliness of life and character . . . the teacher’s major thrust will be teaching God’s Word so that Christian students will grow in Christ . . . [and] also seek to equip students for Christian service, since being ‘thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ (cf. 2 Tim. 3:17) is God’s will for the maturing believer.”⁴⁰ Since the best teaching includes interactions in and out of the classroom setting, a theology professor must model Christian character as an expression of theology. This approach can reproduce students (and ministers) who are “not simply those who are proficient in the language and interests of the learned guild,

³⁸James S. Spiegel, "Growing Wise: Resources for Nourishing the Supreme Virtue," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6 (Fall 2013): 317.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 321.

⁴⁰Ronald A. Horton (ed.), *Christian Education: Its Mandate and Mission*, (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1992), 78.

but those who can think biblically and theologically about themselves and their world, and to do so out of godly commitment.”⁴¹ A theology professor should reflect the growth in Christian character that comes through submission to biblical authority and as a result of the work of the Spirit.

Methods and Means in the Classroom

There are two typical ways to think of biblical integration in terms of goals in the classroom environment. One goal is student-interest driven and the other subject-matter driven. First, in a student-interest effort, the goal is to connect the Bible’s teaching and texts to another field or concern of the student. In this way, the Bible and its theology is seen as addressing a student’s academic discipline or professional field, even if the discipline or field does not have an intuitive connection to theology. This way may also include efforts of integrating biblical teaching with a student’s thinking on a variety of life questions unrelated to his/ her discipline or field. This type of student-interest effort is frequent in our Bible Minor courses here at Cedarville University due to most of the students coming from majors outside of biblical and theological studies. It helps demonstrate the relevance of biblical and theological understanding to “everyday life” scenarios. Below, I will provide two examples of this type of integration efforts from my Bible and the Gospel (B&G) course and my Biblical Care and Counseling (BCC) course.

For example, in the B&G course, we discuss texts like 1 Cor. 10 and Col. 3 that lead to “life questions” such as how we have a relationship with God or what it means to glorify God in all things. From that discussion, I lead the students to develop an awareness of their “primary and secondary callings” that helps them articulate how their interpretation of biblical texts and theological understanding of glorifying God leads to certain life pursuits guided by theological

⁴¹Wells, “Educating for a Countercultural Spirituality,” 299.

purposes. In this discussion and exercise, students are led to think more biblically about their vocation and career. In this sense, the Bible is integrated into a major life choice that might otherwise be made on less biblical-theological grounds.

As a further example of a student-interest effort in biblical integration, my BCC course gives multiple opportunities for students to consider a biblical-theological angle to premises or practices in their professional field. Because of the variety of majors represented in this upper-level course, it could be argued that the BCC course has the most opportunities for me to display this type of effort at biblical integration and to ask the student to attempt the same. In the course projects and presentations, the students present multiple findings of where the biblical-theological discussions of the course intersect with their “secular” fields. For example, the nursing students in the course often value the theological insights of “biblical care” in the BCC course and express a desire to incorporate the “informal” quality of biblical counseling in their patient care and professional relationships. On a related note, we were able to connect these concepts with the SALINE training that they received from the School of Nursing, which equipped them to transition from physiological health care questions to “spiritual wholeness” questions.⁴²

Second, the subject-matter type of integration effort is of special concern to the theologian. In these efforts, the subject matter itself requires interacting with biblical texts at a foundational level. This type predominates classes that front the interpretation and understanding of biblical texts as a chief concern. Courses in biblical literature, biblical theology, or biblical interpretation all require the integration of biblical and theological concepts with literary, grammatical, and historical ones. My own efforts in biblical integration in these classes

⁴²For information on the Saline Process see www.hcfglobal.org/saline.

focus on Bible reading, continue to biblical interpretation, and include theological enquiry and expression. In my B&G course, this process occurs at the most basic level. We read through and memorize Colossians 3 together. This careful reading (and re-reading) of the text prompts interpretative questions about the meaning of words along with use of grammar and syntax. From these interpretative exercises we discuss theological matters such as forgiveness, corporate worship, and God-honoring relationships. We continue this process with other “Christian living” topics that are addressed in the class. We read texts, discover the meaning of the texts, and grapple with the theological understandings prompted by the biblical texts.

Many of the other courses that I have taught here at Cedarville have a similar method. Starting with several weeks of interpretative work on specified texts and then moving to the theological and ethical issues that drive contemporary questions. In the Scriptural Interpretation and Gender Issues course, the Personal Evangelism course, and in Interpreting and Teaching the Bible considerable time is given to interpreting key texts related to the course content and to present a biblical-theological foundation for the ministry skills and practices that will be predominate the rest of the course. One goal of this process is to let the biblical text frame the theological discussion before moving to the talking points set by broader society.

Three courses that are somewhat similar in how I try to integrate biblical texts as foundational for the theological discussions are Church History, Historical Theology, and Contemporary Theology in a Historical Context. In each of these courses, a history of biblical interpretation looms large. For example, as the course deals with the historical debates on Christology, the class is memorizing some key Christological texts, and we spend some time in class demonstrating how parts of the debate interact with different readings of these texts. In their historical research for their papers in these courses, the students have to search in primary

and secondary sources to explain how the key texts are being interpreted by the theologians in a particular controversy or debate. This focus on the history of biblical interpretation as the key element of historical theology is uncommon in the approach of most historical theologians or church historians. Many church historians will spend a great deal of effort in investigating the broader social, political, or intellectual influences on a particular debate or movement. However, hermeneutical shifts that could be driving the theological development is often a minor chord in the discussion.⁴³

Finally, in my courses that spend some time on the practice of biblical interpretation as one of the main learning outcomes for the course, I have some exercises that can be foundational for the students' own practice of integration. As biblical interpretation is foundational for biblical integration, the students are gaining competence in handling biblical texts. Over the past few years, I have added "Guided Practice Worksheets" in courses such as Spiritual Formation, B&G, Hermeneutics, and Interpreting and Teaching the Bible as a means of getting the students comfortable with handling biblical texts. The last few questions on these sheets deal more with some theological formulations that come out of the meaning of the texts being studied. Again, this movement from textual meaning to theological expression lays the groundwork for integration of biblical texts with life questions or other fields of knowledge.

Conclusion

In the remaining years of service that the Lord grants me at Cedarville University, I hope to continue to grow in my understanding of biblical integration and the foundational skills of

⁴³To cite a few examples related to the field of Reformation studies, see Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Lewis Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985); Will Durant, *The Reformation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking Press, 2003).

biblical interpretation and theological expression that enable it. My students will benefit from my continued engagement with a biblically-informed theology. As a theologian, I realize that not every part of my discipline is related to biblical interpretation, but I hope that I can remain an active participant in understanding biblical textual meaning for the sake of integrating and proclaiming the Bible's truth, as God's truth.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Arthur Holmes contends, "The fact that ideas are clear, distinct and impressive may mean nothing other than that they are meaningful: for clarity, etc., are the criteria of meaning rather than of truth. Critical or analytic procedures, however, seek to clarify and distinguish ideas, so as to discern their truth value. Understanding must precede judgment." Arthur F. Holmes, "The Nature of Theistic Apologetics," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 2.2 (Spring 1959): 5.

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