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A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

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This phenomenological investigation examined how eight student-nominated faculty who teach at an evangelical Christian liberal arts university describe their understanding and practice of the Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL). Collected data via informal, conversational, taped interviews led to the emergence of two primary themes: *the Inseparability of Faith from Practice* and *the Outworking of Faith in Practice*. The findings of the study highlight the need to create a more conducive context in which students can learn IFL and call for a re-examination of the already murky discourse surrounding definitional aspects of IFL. The study proposes to move the discourse forward by offering a new, yet to be discussed construct that emanated from the participants of this study, *ontological foundation*. A conceptual model describing its relationship with IFL is proposed.

Numerous conceptual models for the integration of faith and learning (IFL) are present in the general literature (Farnsworth, 1982; Faw, 1998; Holmes, 1987) and in the counseling/clinical psychology literature (Carter & Narramore, 1979; Eck, 1996; Entwistle, 2004). What is less prevalent is a consensus definition for IFL (Faw, 1998; See Badley, 1994, for a review) and specific studies on how faculty members at religious universities actually do IFL.

The current study seeks to fill that gap by phenomenologically investigating how eight Christian faculty members at a Christian liberal arts university actually live out IFL. These faculty members are unique in that they were not the product of a broad sample, or nominated by administrators or colleagues as exemplary integrators. Rather, these integrators were nominated by students as the professors from whom the students had learned the most about IFL.

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Broadening Entwistle's (2004) IFL definition from a focus on psychology to general academic disciplines, we conceptualize IFL as a multidimensional scholarly yet holistic task. All italicized words were in Entwistle's original text. The integration of faith and learning (or integration) is a "multifaceted attempt to discern the underlying truths" (p. 242) about one's liberal arts discipline and "Christianity (in theology, faith, and practice)" (p. 242). "It will involve explicating the *foundational* presuppositions and histories of our disciplines. It will be a *disciplinary and scholarly* exercise when one attempts to integrate the findings of the ... [liberal arts discipline] and theology" (p. 243). It will be "an *applied* integration" as men and women attempt to live out their findings (p. 243). "Finally, it will be *public and personal*; it will be a *shared responsibility* and a *personal quest* for wholeness by individuals within their communities and in relation to God" (p. 243).

We begin this study by briefly recognizing IFL models that exhibit a continuum of differing levels of interaction between the discipline and Christianity. Particular attention will be given to writers who explore IFL more holistically, specifically in regards to intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. Next, research that focuses on how Christian faculty do IFL will be examined. Particular attention is given to the only currently researched model of how students learn IFL (proposed by Sorenson, 1997). Subsequently, the faculty participants in this study are introduced, and their phenomenological descriptions of IFL and its practice are presented. The findings are then explored in regards to their implications for defining integration and its task.

The IFL Continuum

Many theorists have created models of IFL involving various potential levels of interaction

between the academic disciplines and Christianity. These often start with a level indicating no interaction (or perhaps even hostility at the idea) and proceed to one indicating a high level of academic/theological engagement to discover unified truth (See Carter & Narramore, 1979; Eck, 1996; Entwistle, 2004; Farnsworth, 1982; Faw, 1998; Holmes, 1987). While most of these model developers acknowledge the importance of intrapersonal and interpersonal integration on the part of the professor, fewer developers have delved more deeply into these aspects of the holistic context in which IFL occurs.

Farnsworth (1982) notes these aspects in his "embodied integration" (p. 310) concept. As one discovers unifying truths underlying psychology and theology, one must apply these truths in life through "right thinking and right living, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy" (p. 310). "In short, it is living—thought *and* action, hearing *and* doing—with God" (pp. 317-318, emphasis in the original). Thus, Farnsworth emphasizes that truths discovered from scholarly integrative activities must be applied personally. Little additional exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects takes place.

In contrast, Gill (1979) applied incarnational theology to IFL specifically to emphasize "the human context" (p. 1010) of learning. Professors need to strive to know students more personally and learn what is important to them. An emphasis must be placed on the process of learning and not just the content.

Bouma-Prediger (1990) perhaps goes the farthest of IFL model developers in addressing intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects. He proposes a typology of four kinds of integration. *Interdisciplinary* IFL depicts the integration between two disciplines (e.g., psychology and theology). *Intradisciplinary* IFL "is the attempt to unite or bring into harmony theoretical perspective and professional practice" (p. 25). *Experiential integration* involves the quest for "personal wholeness and spiritual well-being...the resolution of intrapersonal conflict ..." (p. 28). Of particular interest is *faith-praxis integration*.

It is the attempt to live out one's faith commitment as authentically as possible in everyday life, including one's vocation or professional life but usually going beyond that to include, for example, family relations, business decisions, educational endeavors, institutional religious involvement, ethical decision making, and so forth. The aim with this type of integration is internal harmony or consistency between faith commitment and way of life. In other words, the task is to live in accordance with one's faith commitment and world view. (p. 27)

In summary, numerous scholars have utilized a continuum of levels in describing their IFL models. Most models focus primarily on the scholarly aspects of interdisciplinary engagement between theology and the academic disciplines. Fewer have addressed more holistic elements such as intrapersonal and interpersonal elements involved in IFL.

Research on how Christian Faculty do IFL

While many IFL models exist, few studies have been done on what Christian faculty are actually doing regarding IFL. Hardin, Sweeney, and Whitworth (1999) quantitatively surveyed faculty members in the teacher education departments of colleges associated with the Church of Christ to ascertain how they practiced IFL. Seventy surveys were returned, with 81% disagreeing with the need to separate faith into only certain areas of the teacher education curriculum. Such responses were "consistent with respondents' comments that it is difficult if not impossible to compartmentalize one's religious faith and that it must permeate through virtually every aspect of a person's life, including his/her professional life as a teacher educator" (p. 6).

Ream, Beaty, and Lion. (2004) sought to discover how faculty members at four research-focused religious schools (Baylor, Boston College, Brigham Young, and Notre Dame) understand IFL through a qualitative examination of faculty responses to open-ended questions in a survey ($N = 1728$, 53% response rate). They found a variety of views that appeared consistent with the continuum of IFL possibilities proposed by several model developers noted above, from one subset believing faith and learning should be separate and independent to those espousing a more holistic incorporation of faith in a variety of campus elements.

Morton (2004) interviewed 30 faculty participants from three Southern Baptist colleges who were selected by their academic deans as professors "who purported to deliberately integrate faith and learning" (p. 56). The areas of fine arts, humanities, math and sciences, social sciences, and professional studies were represented. In addition to the interviews, Morton examined course syllabi and made class observations. Based on his findings, Morton developed a seven-level IFL model that had clear similarities to the previous models noted in this literature review.

Milacci's (2003, 2006) phenomenology of Christian spirituality was conducted with a purposive

sample of eight adult educators who taught in non-religious settings. These professors were identified and confirmed by reputation and works to ascribe to some form of Christian faith. A "strong, recurring theme, implicitly and explicitly, in all participants' descriptions of how their faith informs or frames their practice was community building" (p. 124), "engaging others on a deeper level" (p. 127), and "facilitating others in their growth" (p. 130). Thus, Milacci's (2003) eight participants described the desire to holistically integrate their faith in education though the non-religious contexts presented clear constraints to this ability.

In summary, current research on how Christian faculty do IFL has utilized quantitative survey strategies, content analysis of open-ended survey questions, and phenomenological inquiry. Each sample of professors in these studies was either chosen by administrators, part of a large invited sample, or, in the phenomenological study, a purposive sample. Taken together, the studies clearly indicate that faculty integrate along a continuum of IFL levels consistent with various literature descriptions described above.

Sorenson's Research on how Students Learn Integration

Given that faculty integrate differently, the question of how these approaches impact the students' learning of IFL becomes paramount. Sorenson's (1997) theoretical and empirical work stands out as highly useful in describing key aspects of the student's IFL learning process. Specific information on his studies may be found in Ripley, Garzon, Hall, and Mangis (2009) and Sorenson, Derflinger, Buford, & McMinn (2004). His general findings will be described below.

Sorenson based his ideas on attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1988) and contemporary psychoanalysis (e.g., Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Consistent with these theories, his studies indicated that the quality of relationship between potential mentors and the graduate psychology student had greater influence on the student's IFL perspective than the integration content of the psychology program. "Evidence of a professor's ongoing process in a personal relationship with God is the single most important dimension that accounts for what students found helpful for their own integration of clinical psychology and faith" (Sorenson, 1997, p. 541). In other words, as the professors shared from

their own spiritual lives with students, their IFL teachings became more impactful. Emotional transparency and a sense of humor were also helpful qualities.

One style does not fit all, however. Because students are different in personality, the relational style most influential in learning integration varied. A caring "pastoral" personal style was helpful for some students while a more sojourning or "struggling" faith style helped others. Individual, personal interactions were more meaningful for some students while group-focused interactions were more important for others. As a whole, Sorenson's (1997) research calls into question the heavy emphasis on scholarly aspects of IFL without consideration of the student-professor relational matrix that either catalyzes such activity or extinguishes it.

Rationale for the Study

Taken together, the on-going definitional issues surrounding IFL and the paucity of studies on how faculty actually do IFL support the need for further research on faculty members' understanding and practice of IFL. Likewise, the importance of how students appear to learn integration indicates a need to focus on faculty members that students identify as helpful in their integration-learning process.

The current study explored student-nominated faculty members' understanding and practice of the integration of faith and learning (IFL) who teach in a large, Evangelical Christian liberal arts university in the Southeastern United States. Given this focus, along with the fact that qualitative research in general and phenomenology in particular are concerned with describing and interpreting human phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced them (Heidegger, 1972; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990), phenomenological inquiry was deemed most appropriate. Two questions framed the study: 1). How do student-nominated faculty understand IFL and 2). How do they describe the relationship between their faith and their practice as educators?

METHOD

Consistent with most phenomenological research, data was collected via conversational, semi-structured interviews as the primary means of exploring in depth the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Participants answered open-ended questions and thus were able to tell their stories with all the richness inherent

therein (Lee & Stronks, 1994). All interviews lasted from 60 minutes to 2 and 1/2 hours and began by asking participants several "grand tour" questions (Leech, 2002, p. 667) such as "tell me about your faith" in an attempt to get them to share their own stories and narratives in a very open-ended fashion (Milacci, 2003). Seven of the eight interviews were audio taped and subsequently transcribed. One participant requested that she not be recorded; however, permission was granted to type this participant's responses as the interview progressed. Follow up interviews were also conducted with all participants.

Subsequent to the data collection process, the data was approached in terms of "meaning units, structures of meaning or themes" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). This process of recovering themes embodied in the work is identified as "theme analysis" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78), a procedure in which the researcher attempts to gain control and order of the data by "seeing" meaning in the data (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Initially, the data analysis began by listening and re-listening to the interview tapes while at the same time reading and re-reading the transcribed interview data, field notes, and other pertinent participant documents in search of meaning units or structures of the phenomenon of interest, the *Integration of Faith and Learning*. Then, words, phrases, sentences, etcetera, that were deemed potentially significant to this study were highlighted and/or noted directly on the written transcripts. In time, after a myriad of readings and re-readings of the transcripts, data that directly addressed the research questions were coded into meaning units that eventually became the themes and subthemes of this study. Finally, it should be noted that as a means of ensuring credibility and trustworthiness, both member checking with participants and periodic peer review of the data (Creswell, 2007) were employed.

Participant selection for this study was accomplished through a form of criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007). More specifically, selection for participation was based on student perception of a faculty member's effectiveness in the practice of integration. Towards that end, students in a random sample of 10% of the graduate classes taking place at the time of the study were given a 52-item survey to assess their perception of the integration of faith and learning. One question in the survey asked students to identify one individual whom they considered "to be the faculty member that I have learned Christian integration from the most". The faculty members

who received the highest number of student nominations were invited to participate in the study.

Ultimately, eight such student-nominated faculty members of varying ages were identified and subsequently interviewed (four female, four male): Kimberly, Theresa, Cathy, Natalie, Peter, Harold, William, and George (all pseudonyms). Since data saturation occurred with these participants, it was determined that no further selection was needed. Seven of the 8 participants were Caucasian, one had a bi-racial background. At the time of their interview, all had taught full time in a higher education context anywhere from 1 to 29 years in a variety of disciplines. Cathy, for example, taught in the Communications Studies Department, Natalie in the English Department, and both Kimberly and Theresa were members of the Nursing Department. One male, Peter, worked in the School of Education; the other 3 males, Harold, William and George, were graduate counseling faculty.

The participants shared some noteworthy commonalities not specific to the criteria used for selection. Specifically, all eight related a deep and abiding faith in God. Interestingly, seven of the eight participants told of how their understanding of faith grew out of crises in their lives.

Finally, it should be noted that to be a truly phenomenological inquiry, the written text should include a generous sampling of the participants' voices (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) because it is in the participants' voices the richness and depth of phenomenological meaning of IFL would be found (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the voices of the participants are presented in abundance—deliberately so—in the study.

FINDINGS: PICTURES OF THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING (IFL)

Initially, the research questions guiding the study seemed to lend themselves to two discreet categories of analysis: 1) how participants described the construct of integration and, 2) how participants applied their understanding of these descriptions to their work. But as data analysis continued, it became apparent that the results could not be so easily compartmentalized. Rather, it seemed that multiple themes could slip easily and fluidly between the categories (participants' understanding of integration and the practical application of those understandings). Put

another way, there appeared to be no distinction between the understanding and application of integration in the minds of these student-nominated integrators. Ultimately, the following two main themes emerged: *The Inseparability of Faith from Practice* and *The Outworking of Faith in Practice*.

The Inseparability of Faith from Practice

From the beginning of the first interview, all eight participants described their faith in ontological terms, such as the essence of their being, inseparable in every way from every aspect of their life and work, the center of everything they do, as Kimberly's words exemplify:

[Faith is] paramount. It's just, it is your being People need to be able to see Christ emulating through you in your care, in your touch, how you speak with them, how you have eye contact with them. What is your presence? They need to see that emulating from you, from your walk with Christ.

To underscore her point, Kimberly used the metaphor of a woven fabric as a means of depicting her understanding of how integral faith was to her life, being, and practice:

If you think of a fabric, [faith] is woven into the fabric of the education. And it's like, if you had a fabric, like your jacket. [The researcher was wearing a plaid jacket during Kimberly's interview.] If you took out the white threads, and let's say that was the faith part in your education, your fabric would be flawed. It would have holes in it. But with the right fabric, with the right threads, it's made whole.

Peter's perspective was similar to that of Kimberly, stating that for him, it simply was not possible to "separate faith ... from any part of your life." He continued that, in his discipline (education), "[faith is] the kind of thing that you can't separate ... we're integrating both educational principles as well as faith." He went on to add that,

Many of our experiences in the area of education come as a result of who we are in Christ, not just that we've read a book. ... I think many times faith is just not using a word, a character word, or Bible verse, or even mentioning the name of God or Christ, but what makes me the best person that I could possibly be.

Similarly, George declared that he does not separate faith from his actions or from the rest of his being. "My faith fills everything I do. It is the essence of who I am. So I don't separate out my 'secular life' from my 'faith life'."

For Harold, "faith plays a key role ... faith is at the center of who we should be, here at this place, and who we are, I think, as a department." William

concurred, adding that faith for him is inseparable from every other aspect of his being.

These participant descriptions of faith as the center of being reflect a profoundly holistic understanding of integration. As such, these student-nominated faculty members expressed their desire to live out—or integrate—their faith in every area of their lives, including and especially in their educational practice; concomitantly, for them, faith is inseparable from educational practice.

This integrative perspective is implicitly reflected, for example, in Cathy's statement that, "Maybe what I'm doing is I'm living it. Living my faith and talking about my life and that's how it [integration] is reflected." In a similar fashion, Natalie referred to integration as "bringing who God is making me to be into the classroom to discuss that alongside literature." She continued,

I have a hard time, I think, defining [integration]. But the first picture that comes to my mind—how do you live on Sunday versus how do you live the rest of the week? I can't separate—can't walk into the classroom and do something with my mind that is not already going on. I can't do integration in the classroom if I haven't already been doing it.

For Harold and William, this ontological notion of being and practice was more explicit; in fact, it was what they both hoped to impart to their students. According to Harold, his desire is that "they [my students] will be a person of faith. That faith permeates who they are in everything they do." William shared a similar vision:

Well, if a student really gets what I teach, the first thing that would happen would be that they would define themselves in a markedly different way. Their definition would start from the inside and work its way out, not start from the outside and work its way in. So, they would understand that first and foremost they're image bearers. They're created in the image of God. And they are recreated, regenerated through the power of the Holy Spirit to refresh and renew the image of God at the core and to have that permeate their thought life, their feelings, their choices, their bodies, their relationships. So that would be, they would be inside-out thinkers.

George also—indirectly—referenced this type of integrative approach when he expressed frustration that some of his colleagues hold to a faith but do not practice it in certain domains of their lives. More specifically, for George, failure in integration is reflected when other faculty members compartmentalize their faith from their attitudes and actions in the classroom, for example, when they make bitter comments about work in their lectures to students. As George declared, "that to me is absolute poison for integration."

It's a very sad thing when you see an embittered professor bleed that into his or her classroom. It's a very sad thing, and that modeled a very non-Christ-like character to me, to the students. It was immature, and it harmed and, to me, invalidated much of what the professors would talk about as far as being Christ-like in their profession.

William also expressed concern about failing to integrate faith into every area of life—including educational practice—referring to it as “a sink hole,” as a place “where you've got this veneer, but underneath there's this vacuous hole.” Later, when asked about what he would do at his institution to address this “sink hole” and enhance integration (if he had *carte blanche*), William replied,

I would require every faculty member in the university to participate in clearly defined and strategized lessons, lectures, training on what it means to be a healthy integrated person. That's what I'd do. I would have a team of people who did nothing at the university but meet with faculty and participate in faculty development that was very strategic and very, very focused on helping faculty to mature in their Christian faith. If I had the magic wand, and I could do anything, that's what I [would do], because everything starts with the person.

Based on this data, it would appear that these student-nominated participants did not view integration on a continuum of application as much of the literature did. Rather, they saw their faith as being so much a part of them that it is the essence of their being and inseparable from every part of their lives.

The Outworking of Faith in Practice

Not only did participants describe the inseparability of their faith *from* their educational practice, they also shared their understanding of how their faith manifested itself *in* their practice. In particular, participants' descriptions of how faith impacts practice are framed by the following two themes: *The Infusion of Faith in Pedagogy* and *The Demonstration of Faith in Relationships*.

The Infusion of Faith in Pedagogy

All participants spoke—directly or indirectly—of infusing faith into their educational practice, their pedagogy. For some, this infusion was manifested in terms of incorporating Scripture into their curriculum. Theresa, for example, stated:

I developed an online course for our graduate students in health assessment. And so, as I was teaching each body part, I would integrate how God had created that particular thing, everything from, you know, the eyes to the ears, everything. So, and then the lesson went on to just sort of capitalize [on]

that. So that's sort of a tangible way of saying integration of faith and curriculum.

Similarly, Kimberly mentioned how when she teaches about the human body to her pathophysiology students, God's “perfect design” becomes very evident:

Down at the cellular level, the ion level, how that perfect design comes into play. And we talk about that quite a bit. And looking at the regulatory, the mechanisms of the body, and the counter-regulatory mechanisms, and how everything is meshed together.

Natalie shared that one of the ways she explicitly infuses faith into her discipline of English is by using ancient Biblical literature, such as the book of Genesis or the Psalms. Other times, she uses a more implicit approach by having students focus on literature that alludes to Scripture:

It fascinates me. I get the opportunity to teach from a shepherd's perspective. The kids can be as interested in the images as I am. The image of the lost sheep who is set upon the right path is fascinating. In *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, he talks about when a sheep falls over, it cannot set itself aright. It can't stand on its own and is apparently too stupid to do it—body structure. The shepherd setting sheep on the right path, we can talk about pictures like that.

Natalie reflected that whether she is using texts “that are based on scripture,” or ones that are secular in nature, “I am in a field [e.g. literature] that gives me a wealth of opportunity to integrate.”

William uses metaphors from Scripture because he believes students remember metaphors more than other constructs that are taught: “I realize that in those metaphors is integration. In those metaphors is power. And in those metaphors [is] healing for them and energy to move forward and have better relationships, with themselves and with God and with others.” Harold uses historical characters from Scripture as a means of illustrating some of the subject matter his students need for licensure in his field of counseling. “We can take families from the Scripture and perform a genogram on them and examine family systems and how they function.”

In addition to this practice of incorporating Scripture into the curriculum by some of the participants, for others, the infusion of faith into their pedagogy is manifested in terms of teaching from a Christian worldview. Cathy, for example, mentioned how she uses a “Christian worldview” when teaching Communication Studies:

When something comes up that is an ethical or moral question. What I am doing now, and this is a process too, particularly in the graduate [level courses] ..., is looking more at the

material we use in class. And since I'm learning more about this and reading more about it, looking at the worldview of the author and ... trying to teach from a Christian worldview.

Later, Cathy went on to explain that, as a means of showing to her students the practical implications of this Christian worldview on the field of Communications Studies, she often asks her class if, as Christians, they should even be teaching advertising. "Should we [Christians] be in a business where we are marketing things for people's wants and not their needs? I'm still struggling with that."

Natalie indirectly referred to her practice of taking the Christian worldview and integrating it into her discipline (English) by reflecting on human life in literature:

It's almost ridiculous to say I teach ... stories; I'm teaching reflections of people—contemplating what it means to live life—contemplating human conflict. Literature is really about exploring the human condition—what it means to be human. Who do we listen to as authority—what drives us—what we need and what we want.

In a similar manner, Peter, Harold, and William all referenced their practice of incorporating the "Christian worldview" directly in their teaching.

George did not explicitly reference the Christian worldview when reflecting on his teaching praxis. Instead, he spoke of doing what he termed as "Christian scholarship," an academic and spiritual endeavor he described as "a holy enterprise."

What I think is more challenging [than critical thinking] is to learn Biblical creative thinking. What might God be saying in this argument? What would make this argument better? What would I add to make this make sense? How would I refine this to make it better? So, I think there's a creative thinking process that's a part of integration and scholarship that sometimes we miss if we just do critical thinking. Because when we can take things apart, that doesn't mean that we can see the whole or put it together in a better package. And I think that that's a part of Christian scholarship as well.

The Demonstration of Faith in Relationships

In addition to directly or indirectly infusing faith into their pedagogy, a second way in which participants described the outworking of faith in practice was in terms of how that faith is demonstrated in their interpersonal relationships. More specifically, all eight participants emphasized the importance of intentionally cultivating loving relationships with others—both in and outside of the classroom. For these educators, "others" included (but was not limited to) students, colleagues, staff, and those outside of the university.

Natalie, for example, described how true integration occurs when she is able to build a "sincere relationship between me and the students." This is important to Natalie "[because students] want to know that I care about them, before they whole heartedly accept what I have to say." Kimberly agreed, adding that "[Integration] starts with us caring for them. And so, showing the love of Christ to them one on one. And I think that's the other thing is we have to respect them, just respect them for who they are."

A story recounted by George illustrates how seriously he—and for that matter, all of the participants—took this notion of showing students they are valued, cared for, and respected:

[There was] an instance where a professor left a university in the middle of a term ... for a variety of reasons. We prayed; we really sought God in terms of how to deal with the situation. And there was a way in which that crisis, I think, brought us together as a community. So, the situation was dealt with, and the person was honored, and the students were honored in terms of their hurt and frustration and their needs, and we as a faculty worked together to make sure that the students' needs were met. I think, at that point, how we handled that could have either validated or invalidated everything we were teaching in the classroom.

For Harold, cultivating loving relationships with students was something he believed was tied directly to his vocation, his calling. A practical outworking of that calling was found in his intentional attempts to mentor his students. For Harold, this is "the key, the heart of it ... encouraging them, and loving them, and giving them direction in Christ."

Theresa emphasized that cultivating loving relationships with students is something that must be done on a daily basis, as a regular part of her life as a faculty member:

I think it's just how we live. I mean, what we do on a day to day basis really shows our integration of faith more than standing in a classroom and lecturing about it. It's sort of like talkin' the talk and walkin' the walk.

Theresa went on to describe her belief that faith is inseparable from the way she treats others, not just in the classroom on campus, but also in the clinical "classroom" at the hospital; simply stated, for Theresa, integration is faith in practice:

Integration is when we actually practice, you know, what we teach, we practice at the bedside. So if we're teaching the love of Christ in the classroom and how we give compassionate care, we should be doing that at the bedside, and that's true integration.

Kimberly, like Theresa, spoke of the importance of showing the love of Christ to others outside of

the classroom, including people who are difficult to love.

We have to show Christ's love to [difficult patients] as unlovely as they may be, even when they may be cursing us, and ungodly, and unloving, and dying. And if we're able to integrate [at] that time, we can sometimes help them to often see things a little differently, and come to know the Lord, or maybe rededicate their lives to the Lord. You have to be able to live what you're doing and live that love of Christ in others.

Cathy emphasized the importance of cultivating loving relationships with her colleagues, and in fact exclaimed, "I love my colleagues. What good camaraderie you can have with faculty!" Peter agreed, stating, "I love [my department]. I think a lot has to do with my attitude as well as the attitude of the others."

Kimberly described the relationship with her colleagues in the Nursing Department as one in which "we care about one another, not only as we come together as a body of believers, but also a body of professionals." She went on to add,

We want to encourage each other professionally through scholarship endeavors and research, publication, other things of that nature, looking at each other's clinical practice, but more so we also work on encouraging each other spiritually. We pray for one another. We support one another if someone is ill or needs help. We are there with meals, with childcare, housecleaning, whatever needs [to be] done. Just like a family unit that was functional as a healthy family, we support one another.

William mentioned how he regularly reaches out to three or four colleagues, "a group of people with whom I have a very intimate and close connection." He expressed how his desire in his relationships with his colleagues was "to honor the people that [I'm] leading. And by that I mean I try to be sensitive to them. I try to create opportunities for them. I try to be kind to them. I try to be gracious to them."

Finally, George spoke of the value of cultivating relationships with everyone who is part of the university community, even those who might be considered less significant or important.

I believe that what appears to be the smallest job here is actually the largest. So, many times the job like, the janitors that come around here and take the trash, the people that are fixing up the buildings, TAs, GAs, . . . They're people that are "assistants" that you take for granted. But actually, they're what really give the flavor and the Christian impact in many ways that we don't realize here . . . And so to me, the things that appear the smallest – really are quite large in terms of conveying an environment for Christian learning. I mean, they're just essential, and oftentimes, we miss them. But, they're really important.

George believes that the way he treats others "matters" because it will impact the whole environment. William agrees, stating that

What we do day after day after day after day to minister to the weakest person in this place [matters]. You know, because if I touch the life of a person here, every life is like a pebble in a pond. It ripples out.

Taken together, the data from this study indicate that these student-nominated faculty see their faith as an inseparable aspect of their being that flows into all areas of their life, including the academic. Concomitantly, faith infuses their pedagogy and strengthens the care they express in relationships.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings call for a re-examination of the already murky area of defining IFL and its tasks (Faw, 1998). Specifically, two points will be considered. First, IFL requires additional contextual elements in order to occur optimally for students. Second, the best integrators in students' eyes convey an aspect as yet not discussed in the literature, *ontological foundation*.

Contextual Elements for Optimal IFL in Students

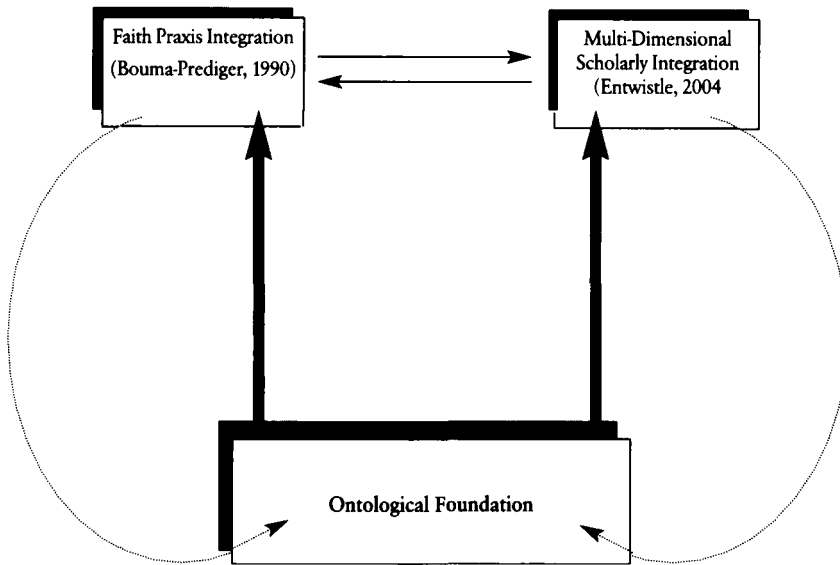
Sorenson's research, the first two studies in this special edition (Ripley et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2009), and this study combine to underline the students' emphasis on holistic elements crucial to the IFL task. Entwistle (2004) acknowledges the importance of some of these elements in his description of the *public and personal* aspects of IFL: "Integration is done by people who live and work in community. . . . We must cultivate a culture [for IFL] in which dialogue, critique, and support are found" (Entwistle, 2004, p. 245).

Taken together, these studies highlight just how in-depth those supportive elements need to be to create a more conducive context for students to learn IFL. To students, the professor's challenge is much more than scholarly. Integration must occur in the context of caring relationships with mentors (professors, administrators, etc.) who have spiritual depth and who bring this depth out experientially and conceptually (cf. Hall & Porter, 2004) both inside and outside the classroom. The current study also highlights an important component of IFL for further consideration.

Ontological Foundation

Entwistle's (2004) definition of multidimensional scholarly integration and Bouma-Prediger's

Figure 1. Conceptual model for integration in student-nominated professors



(1990) emphasis on faith praxis integration capture only some aspects of these participants' descriptions. In particular, the words used to define faith praxis—"attempt," "aim ... is ... internal harmony or consistency," "task is to live in accordance ..." (Bouma-Prediger, 1990, p. 27)—imply intentional effort on behalf of the integrators. These worthwhile endeavors contrast with the IFL descriptions from the participants of this study. For example, "It is your being...a fabric" (Kimberly), "you can't separate ..." (Peter), "it is the essence of who I am" (George), "faith is at the center ..." (Harold), "... bringing who God is making me to be into the classroom" (Natalie), etc. Rather than being intentionally integrated, these participants described IFL as involving a foundational aspect of themselves, similar to what Milacci (2005) expressed when he argued,

How can I integrate that which already lies at the very core of my being? To me, this seems no more plausible than asking someone to integrate their gender or culture into every part of their life: Whether or not these kinds of core elements are consciously acknowledged, they are always present. A more appropriate question might be, 'How do I determine when to be explicit and when to be implicit about my spirituality?' (p. 157)

Therefore, we propose the term, *ontological foundation*, to describe this aspect of IFL in student-nominated professors. For us, *ontological foundation* is the natural out flowing of one's faith and being into the pedagogical, relational, and community contexts of academic life (cf., Jn 7:38). This out flowing of faith and being has a spontaneous, fluid quality which is distinct from the intentional quality of faith praxis, while still going hand-in-hand with faith praxis and multidimensional scholarly IFL. Professors differ regarding this quality, and students appear to readily identify professors possessing this quality as being the most helpful in their learning of integration.

Conceptually, a reciprocal relationship between these three aspects of IFL can be observed. It appears one's ontological foundation impacts both faith praxis and scholarly IFL directly, while faith praxis and scholarly IFL can also influence one's ontological foundation but much more slowly since ontological elements by nature reside at the very core of one's being. Faith praxis and scholarly IFL can more readily influence each other because of their intentionality. Figure 1 captures these relationships in student-nominated professors.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The emergence of ontological foundation as an IFL construct has implications for professors wanting to integrate effectively with students. Integration does not start with scholarly acumen; rather, it starts with each faculty member's personal spiritual depth as expressed in their ontological foundation. Some might argue that this is "obvious" and in fact not IFL but, when combined with faith praxis, is simply "Christian living"; however, we contend that the fact that each of these eight student-nominated faculty displayed this ontological component speaks to its foundational importance for integration. The present study therefore amplifies how profound Sorenson's (1997, p. 541) "on-going process in relationship with God" actually is. These faculty participants were being themselves in an ontological sense rather than integrating.

In some ways, we implicitly have questioned the adequacy of the overarching construct, *the integration of faith and learning*, with the findings of this study. Specifically, if integration involves the natural outflowing of a person's spiritual essence, what exactly is being integrated? At the same time, occasions do arise when one must intentionally think about who they are as followers of Christ and what that will mean in a given context. This lends support to the relationship between ontological foundation and faith praxis in regards to IFL.

Further research is needed to substantiate ontological foundation as a construct and to clarify the proposed relationship between ontological foundation, faith praxis, and multidimensional scholarly integration. The results of this study are limited in that they have focused on 8 student-nominated faculty from one evangelical Christian university. Additional research on student-nominated faculty from a variety of Christian universities is warranted.

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