Biblical Integration: A Search for Understanding
BY ANGELA HARWOOD

As a student of history, I am aware that when most adults hear the word “integration” they think of the 1950s and 1960s when the Supreme Court began implementing Civil Rights laws to break down the racial barriers in our country. For a Christian educator, the idea of integration goes far beyond race; it brings to mind the need to combine the course content of a given class with the Bible. This process is commonly referred to as “biblical integration.” When Christian teachers think of biblical integration their thoughts progress to teaching their courses from a biblical world view. And for some, this is difficult. Biblical integration is a daunting task; but when it is broken into its assimilated parts and digested in moderate amounts, it can be a relatively uncomplicated process. It is unfortunate that some Christian school teachers do not understand the very aspect of teaching that makes Christian instruction unique. Teachers should view biblical integration as the lifeblood of their teaching, an indispensable component of their mission.

As a product of Christian education, I have been exposed to a gamut of teachers whose use of biblical integration spanned from beneficial to detrimental. As a high school student, I recognized that biblical integration, when forced, is not only uncomfortable and ineffective for teachers, but it comes across as unnatural to students. Now as a Christian teacher of both English and history, I have realized a wealth of possibilities for effective biblical integration. Yet, I despair for the English teacher who diagrams Bible verses as the application of biblical truth for the day, or the history teacher who simply finds a Christian leader to study in every chapter. This is not true biblical integration. Students are sharp enough to recognize this inadequate form of biblical integration and will later speak of it in cynical or humorous tones. If we inadvertently “teach” our students not to appreciate biblical truth presented without genuine application (the relationship of the Bible to knowledge), are we fulfilling our mission as Christian educators? Unfortunately, no.

Biblical Integration and Literature

The secret to implementing true biblical integration in every academic subject is finding biblical principles that are evident in everyday ideas and topics. If you will notice, everyday ideas and topics do not delineate a “spiritual” derivation. Spiritual foundations are required for biblical integration but are not necessarily a point of origin. Some of the best integration originates from secular sources. For example, a criterion for true classical literature is that it supports biblical principles; such as, the negative consequences of evil choices or the depravity of natural man. That does not mean that every author of classical literature was a Christian or wrote from a Christian perspective. In fact, the perspective of most classical authors was antithetical to Christianity. Yet even though authors from Hemingway to Homer were, from a spiritual standpoint, completely ungodly in mind and action, they still wrote literature that contained biblical principles which Christian school teachers should discover and apply.
Think of a story which you have heard many times. It has all the elements of good literature: setting, plot, character, conflict, and theme. It has a hero, ruined by a life filled with debauchery and squandering. There is the father—still full of unconditional love, ready to accept the return of the rebellious hero. Of what story does this remind you? Perhaps you recalled one of the greatest examples of biblical integration ever told, the “Parable of the Prodigal Son.” Even though this story is in the New Testament, there is nothing innately spiritual in the parable that Jesus told. (A parable is an earthly story with a spiritual application.) This is the model that all classical literature follows.

Jesus, the Teacher of teachers, understood the difference between forced integration and true integration. He took a common human occurrence, the instance of a runaway son, and reinforced it with a biblical principle, unconditional love, and acceptance. He did not “put” the Bible where it was not. In fact, He did not even mention the Scriptures. Yet students of the Bible through the centuries have clearly understood the message of the “Prodigal Son.” It makes sense to them because of its clear presentation of biblical truth as it is revealed in normal life, and they never forget the story or the spiritual application.

Literature class provides a vehicle for the application of biblical principles and the direct study of biblical literature. For example, the study of Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* can be augmented by a parallel study of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. Becky Sharp’s experiences illustrate many of the principles that Solomon describes: the pleasures of money, fame, prestige, and power are all vanity. The book of Job provides an excellent example of Hebrew narrative and dialogue for study. The poetic devices are evidenced throughout the Psalms and Proverbs—simile, metaphor, hyperbole, parallelism, contrast, apostrophe—making these books especially appropriate for the study of poetry.

**Biblical Integration and World History**

One of the best examples of biblical integration in my classroom occurred in world history. As a second-year teacher I was struggling with ways to inspire my 27 students. Every day I made a point to try some new technique.

One day, while trying a completely new approach, I simply “talked” to my students about the ancient Phoenicians. I shared that they were the Philistines from the Bible. In the words of my high school world history teacher, “They were the first people to turn the Mediterranean into their own private lake.” But the Phoenicians’ greatest historical contribution was simply that they were the first people who spread civilization. They also shared their culture with the entire Mediterranean world through trade, their major occupation.

I then explained to the class my personal theory of missions. I discussed how modern history and geography have shown that today’s world is remarkably open to tent-making ministries. And, most importantly, that the historical record of the Phoenicians proves that tent-making missions can succeed. If the ancient Phoenicians
are remembered for spreading civilization through occupation, it stands to reason that today’s Christianity could be as effective in spreading the Gospel through the practice of medicine, through teaching, through trade, or through industry. Jesus told the disciples to teach the Gospel to every nation; perhaps the best way to accomplish this mission today is through the provision of a needed service or occupation by a believer who demonstrates Christ in his life.

My students sat mesmerized throughout the entire class. They listened and understood. They extended their knowledge by adding to concepts they already knew. New perceptions were revealed as the class discussed the Phoenicians. This was an imitation of the biblical model of integration, the model which Jesus exhibited in the Gospels. This kind of application, as evidenced by the Master Teacher, made an impact upon my students.

**Biblical Integration and Mathematics**

An excellent example of biblical integration in mathematics was used by one of my colleagues. She teaches advanced algebra and precalculus. Using her computer, the teacher created a banner which takes $\pi$ to the fifteenth place followed with an ellipsis denoting infinity. She explained to the class that $\pi$ is a real number but that man cannot find its ending decimal. In fact, there are scientists with grants from the United States government whose entire job consists of sitting in front of a computer and watching as the computer figures twenty-two divided by seven.

After the students had time to digest the meaning of infinity, the teacher placed another banner beneath the $\pi$ banner. This one read, “God and heaven go on forever, too.” Using class time for a discussion on the meaning of eternity, the teacher explained how God placed laws in mathematics for a purpose and that these laws are a reflection of His majesty. She also made a special note of the fact that any laws which are present in the universe were created by God and that most of these laws have been implied or described in the Bible. This same concept could also be used in upper elementary grades and beyond.

**Biblical Integration and Science**

The science teacher can relate the Bible to a popular modern science theme, ecology. Most people benefit from the use of some type of fossil fuel—natural gas, coal, and oil. Fossil fuels, according to evolutionists, were created from the remains of dead animals and plants. Evolutionary scientists claim that fossil fuels take millions of years to develop. This fallacious concept has led to the development of a strong conservation movement, not that conservation does not have some merit. Presented with the evolutionary view of origin, this is a frightening picture to the unknowledgeable. Unless more reserves are found, it is believed that the existing reserves will be depleted in 200 to 300 years.
The creationist view differs. Evolutionary scientists have trouble explaining the “mix-up” in the layers of the earth. Each layer represents one “age” of the earth. In some layers, there are fossils believed to belong to earlier eras. These fossils do not belong in that stratum, but the evolutionists cannot explain the phenomenon away. Christians can offer an explanation. During the Great Flood, or Deluge, which occurred in Genesis, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, wreaking much havoc on the crust of the earth. Nothing like this had ever happened before, and will never happen again. During the Flood, much pressure was placed on the earth’s crust. This would have accelerated the creation of fossils. In fact, it would speed up the process to the degree that fossils and fossil fuels could be created in a matter of minutes—quite a contrast from evolutionary timing of millions of years. During the flood, God destroyed every living thing which was not in the ark. That would have provided an abundance of fossil fuels. In fact, God created more fossil fuels during the flood than man can imagine depleting in hundreds of lifetimes. Many Christian scientists also believe that fossil fuels take less than a year to be created under normal circumstances. This means that God has provided man with enough fuel to last well into the next millennium, and possibly beyond.

Secular Education

Secular education has been attempting to implement the same techniques that enhance genuine biblical integration, that is, teaching through everyday occurrences. This is the mainstay of the secular programs Teaching for Understanding, the BIG Program, Thinking-Centered Learning, and Authentic Instruction. All four of these related theories state that learning is more easily and enduringly achieved when connected to a learner’s common knowledge and experience. This is the same absolute of education presented by Jesus in the biblical model.

Conclusion

By implementing true biblical integration, we “super-achieve” what modern educational philosophers are advocating. Not only do our students learn more easily, they also learn more effectively. They learn biblical content and how to apply its teachings. God gave believers the pattern centuries before the secular world “discovered” it. Though they follow the technique, they are missing the fundamental source of teachable truth—the Word of God. They choose to replace it with human cognition. Of course, biblical principles are much more effective, and Christians through the ages, including the modern Christian school teacher, can employ the methods of Scripture and teach the application of its truth to subject content. This is biblical integration.

Angela Harwood was a former language and social science teacher with two AACS schools and a curriculum coordinator. Currently she is a stay-at-home mom in northern Virginia.