



## GRACE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

As faculty members at Grace and individuals who are committed to a life of worship and spiritual growth, we actively look for reflective and practical ways the Christian faith intersects with our disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The integration of faith and learning is based on the shared understanding that our faith “sacralizes” the pursuits of the Christian academician. That is, to the extent to which we do our work consciously as Christians, our professional lives become an offering of worship to God, and our faith “gives the questions we struggle with in our work and in our lives larger significance.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, we are whole individuals and recognize the deficiency of a compartmentalized life.<sup>3</sup> Based on this foundation, our faith informs our work and makes it distinctive.<sup>4</sup> This distinctiveness may be further enhanced by the richness of our Grace Brethren heritage, which is rooted in the Pietist, Anabaptist, and Evangelical traditions, and we value the contributions these historical streams have to offer.<sup>5</sup>

As we strive for greater integration of faith and learning, our Christian faith prompts us to facilitate a rich sense of collegiality and community among faculty and students.<sup>6</sup> This is largely made possible through the fruit of the spirit. Humility prods us to consider our own biases and presuppositions. It calls us to listen to competing voices and perform our work in dialogue with colleagues and others within the broader discipline. Integrity requires that we accurately

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard T. Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001) and Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Holmes writes (46), “Integration should be seen not as an achievement or a position but as an intellectual activity that goes on as long as we keep learning anything at all.”

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wuthnow, “Living the Question,” in *Christianity in the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993) 211-112, quoted in George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1997) 65.

<sup>3</sup> On living an integrated Christian life, see Grace Brethren author Kary Oberbrunner, *The Fine Line: Re-envisioning the Gap between Christ and Culture* (Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> For more on Christian distinctiveness, consult Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, 68-70.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of how others within the Anabaptist tradition have wrestled with the integration of faith and learning, see J. Denny Weaver, and Gerald Biesecker Mast, eds. *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts* (San Antonio: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003) and David Weaver-Zercher, ed., *Minding the Church: Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition*.

<sup>6</sup> On the important link between learning and Christian community, See Claudia Beversluis, “Community as Curriculum.” Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Online Resource Center (<http://www.cccu.org/resourcecenter>). Consult as well, Holmes chapter seven, “College as Community” in, *Idea of a Christian College*, 77-85.

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represent the views of others, resisting generalizations and caricatures. It also requires that we strive for Christian excellence in all that we do, maintaining the highest standards of professionalism. Love prompts us to encourage and challenge each other as faculty members while caring for and serving our students. In an atmosphere permeated by the fruit of the spirit, our community will be a grace-filled place for us and our students to think critically, ask questions, and wrestle with the challenges of our world.

God has called us to be a certain kind of people (BEING), for example, humane, communal, compassionate, redemptive, honest, just, hard working, etc. Further, God has called us to a life of learning and has invested us with the requisite skills and resources to learn (KNOWING), such as the mind and its cognitive capacities, the Scriptures, academic institutions, life experiences, peoples and nations, etc. Finally, God has asked us to convert our being and knowing into service to others (DOING) as a way of expressing our love for and service to him. Therefore, Grace College and Grace Theological Seminary and their faculties are committed to integrated learning as a necessary component for empowering people to create lives that are whole, full, balanced, and rewarding.<sup>7</sup>

There are a myriad of specific ways to accomplish the integration of faith and learning in our study and in our teaching. They will vary depending on the context and discipline, but will always move beyond mere indoctrination.<sup>8</sup> At times, they may be of a reflective nature, having more to do with the questions that we ask and less about our conclusions. We might ask ourselves and our students, “How is the understanding that God created and sustains the world relevant to the material in question?” or “How does my belief in the fallen nature of human beings affect my world view?” or “How does the belief that all of humanity is loved and valued by God influence the way I consider those of other cultures?”<sup>9</sup> Other times, the integration of

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<sup>7</sup> From, Forbes, et. al., “Philosophy of Liberal Education,” Appendix C.

<sup>8</sup> According to Arthur Holmes (Idea of a Christian College, 46) “prepackaged answers” will never satisfy inquiring minds. “Students need rather to gain a realistic look at life and to discover for themselves the questions that confront us. They need to work their way painfully through the maze of alternative ideas and arguments while finding out how the Christian faith speaks to such matters. They need a teacher as a catalyst and guide, one who has struggled and is struggling with similar questions and knows some of the pertinent materials and procedures. They need to be exposed to the frontiers of learning where problems are still not fully formulated and knowledge is exploding, and where by the very nature of things indoctrination is impossible.”

<sup>9</sup> On the significance and usefulness of theological questions within the context of Christian higher education, see Denise Lardner Carmody, *Organizing a Christian Mind* (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press International, 1996).

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faith and learning will be of a more applied nature.<sup>10</sup> This will happen in many ways, not only in the classroom, but also as we mentor and advise students. We may prod ourselves and our students to consider ethical questions related to medical, scientific, or business practice. We may bring discussions of justice and caring for the oppressed into our classrooms and offices. We will no doubt consider specific portions of the Bible. And we may engage students in questions concerning the most effective ways of ministering, expressing themselves artistically, or serving Christ in local industries or within a chosen field.<sup>11</sup>

At Grace, we believe that an education that emphasizes the integration of faith and learning lays the foundation for and is in perfect concert with the institutional mission. Our mission statement reads: “Grace is an evangelical Christian community of higher education which applies biblical values in strengthening character, sharpening competence, and preparing for service [Emphasis added]. Our curriculum and delivery system are designed to achieve these goals.

Character is the sum of distinctive dispositions, traits, qualities, attributes, and behaviors that constitute the nature of an individual or community. People of good character are marked by a desire to be learners. The goal of a Grace College education is to create people of deeper substance who understand and desire the more noble and healthy values. They are able to make discriminating judgments between truth and error, merit and demerit, the substantial and superficial. They possess a developing sense of self and place in God’s world and purpose. They are people who have maturing skills and a growing sense of confidence that they can contribute and make a positive difference. People of strong character appreciate (give place to) and engage (think through, even debate) the perennial and often controversial questions of life in a civil and reasonable way. People of character possess an elevated work ethic, care about workmanship, and are committed to a productive life, careful performance, and excellent products. As Christians, we best demonstrate this character when we live intentionally and consistently

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<sup>10</sup> George Marsden observes that faith can and should be integrated within even the most applied disciplines. He writes, “Even mathematicians or technical scientists will be able to point out some faith-related considerations that have relevance to the foundational questions affecting the frameworks of their disciplines or the application of their work. It simply does not follow that, because there is no special Christian view of photosynthesis, there is therefore not a Christian view of biology.”

<sup>11</sup> For some practical examples from several Grace faculty members, of the way faith and learning might be integrated within a variety of disciplines, see James E. Bowling and Joel B. Curry, *Values in a Christian Liberal Arts Education* (Winona Lake, BMH Books, 1992).

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through our calling and profession of faith and biblical/theological commitments. Therefore, the undergraduate curriculum at Grace is designed to strengthen character.

Competence is the pursuit of proficiencies and credentials that enable one to be a contributing member of society. A competent person possesses the requisite capacities and skills essential to a personal, professional, and community life. A competent person increases knowledge bases and sharpens abilities and dispositions to put this knowledge to use in productive ways. A person who is competent is one who can gather data, think, discern, analyze, synthesize, and create solutions to problems. Such a person is one who suspends personal prejudices, who uses wise judgment, and who negotiates the world of ideas, grasps issues, wrestles with argumentation, interprets and traces implications, and makes connections to others and their ideas and expressions. A competent person is a literate person who is empowered to take in more and contribute more with his or her mind and life. A competent person is creative, enterprising, and confident -- one who exercises initiative, takes risks, exhibits leadership, and commands respect. A competent person is thoughtful, articulate, expressive, and able to communicate in knowledgeable and persuasive ways. Such a person is one whose curiosity is wide ranging and one who can conduct a substantive conversation on a variety of subject matters, someone who is interesting to be around. Therefore, the Grace undergraduate education is designed to produce people who are sharpening their competence as persons, Christians, citizens, and professionals.

Service is a central imperative of the Christian faith. It is the natural outgrowth of loving and worshiping God. It is an outcome of a life well-lived. People of character serve competently. One ought to use one's personal and professional competencies to serve one another and the larger society, thus fulfilling one's service to God. Learning for the purpose of service is an act of stewardship and worship. Learning is a prerequisite that empowers service. A Grace education contributes to both the practical and moral dimensions of life. Practically, it empowers people to gain the proficiencies that make them marketable and employable. One's professional life produces the resources and contexts for service. However, this is not the total goal of education. Life is more than work for personal gain. The Grace education should inspire students to build lives and careers that will be turned toward advancing the cause of the One whom we ultimately serve. The mode of Christian servanthood can be expressed in several specific imperatives, each located somewhere in the curricular and co-curricular educational activities (e.g., go make disciples, call God's people to a renewed vision and energy to serve Christ and his kingdom, defend and perpetuate the truth of God's revelation, work for the moral health of society, and pursue peace and justice in the world). The investment of our time, skills, intellect, and energies will leave an effect on our families, communities, work places, churches, the market place, and all of society. Therefore, at Grace, we have an education designed to foster service.<sup>12</sup>

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In summary, as faculty, we strive to do our work as faithful worshippers of God, to embody the Fruit of the Spirit, and to prod ourselves and our students to reflect on the ways our respective disciplines <sup>13</sup>intersect with the depths of the Christian faith. This is an issue of character that enhances competence and empowers us for service.

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<sup>12</sup> The definitions of Character, Competence, and Service are from: Forbes, et. al. Appendix C.

<sup>13</sup> See James E. Bowling and Joel B. Curry.

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