Sometimes before the Fall, Adam sits under a tree, and a piece of fruit falls and strikes him on the head. Picking up the fruit, he ponders for a moment and then exclaims, “The force of gravity that caused the fruit to fall is one of three great universal laws of motion in the universe.” Not long afterward, Adam is confronted by another piece of fruit, this time handed to him by Eve. After eating this fruit, his eyes are opened (Genesis 3:7), but they also became closed to his understanding of the three great universal laws of motion in the universe, laws that would await several millennia before Isaac Newton recognized them.

Christian educators often speak of the need to engage students in the biblical integration of academic content. Educators comprehend the necessity to engage in integration when they understand that a biblical worldview requires distinctively biblical thinkers—people who can apply biblical concepts to how they operate in the world. In a sense, this description of biblical thinkers explains what Christian educators are trying to accomplish through integration—helping students develop ways of knowing, understanding, and operating in the world that are based on the Bible and a biblical worldview. Integration, however, implies that there is a set of foundational principles that guide the ways of knowing, understanding, and operating in the world. While Christian educators often speak of the need to engage in integration and though they understand that integration must be biblically based, little discussion takes place about what these foundational principles are and how they should direct the development of curriculum and the types of instruction that would most appropriately and effectively encourage integration.

My Philosophy of Education course at Cedarville University introduces preservice teachers to three principles of integration that teachers can use regardless of the content areas they teach. Teachers can use these principles to inform curricular and instructional decisions that will result in engaging students in biblical integration. The first

The Essentials of Integration:

The Principle of Stewardship

by Eddie K. Baumann

The principle of stewardship underscores the importance of learning about and engaging in the creation in a way that pleases the Owner—who is God.
principle, which this article focuses on, is the principle of stewardship. In brief, people apply the stewardship principle when they responsibly use their talents, abilities, knowledge, and resources for the service of God by ministering to the spiritual, mental, emotional, or physical needs of others and by caring for the world that God created. The principle of stewardship underscores the importance of learning about and engaging in the creation in a way that pleases the Owner—who is God.

According to the Bible, the principle of stewardship forms a foundation for all learning, and God gave this principle to Adam as part of the mandate before the Fall. As the above fictitious story of Adam attempts to highlight, God placed human beings in the Garden and gave them meaningful work to do. Yet God created human beings as dependent beings so that, even before the Fall, they relied on God for all aspects of life. This dependency would have most certainly included their cognitive understanding of the world for, if they had been omniscient, they would have had no need of God in that area of life. As a result, in order to fulfill their stewardship obligation, they would have had to learn not only what God desires as the Owner, a task that requires close fellowship, but also what the characteristics of the creation are, a knowledge that is necessary for human beings to accomplish God’s will.

Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 state God’s expectations before the Fall. These two verses are often referred to as the stewardship or cultural mandates, for they present God’s requirements for engaging with the creation. Genesis 1:28 gives the command to be “fruitful and multiply,” “fill the earth,” and “subdue it” (NASB). In other words, God commanded human beings to procreate, to inhabit the earth, and to bring it under subjection. Genesis 2:15 further clarifies these commands by explaining that God placed Adam in the Garden “to cultivate it and keep it,” that is, to develop culture or add value to it and to do no harm. Note that in 2:18, even though Adam is living in a perfect environment and in perfect relationship with God, the Lord says, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” indicating that Adam could not be fully human without others. Also note that this statement by God does not refer back solely to the procreation command of 1:28 but more specifically to the cultivate and keep commands of 2:15. Thus, Adam’s fulfillment of God’s expectation to “cultivate” (NASB) or “work” (NIV) or “dress” (KJV) the garden required someone else to be the beneficiary of the value created by the work.

The principle of stewardship, however, raises the question, How does one add value or increase the wealth of God, who is the Creator and Possessor of everything?

To illustrate, if the Fall had not occurred, faithful human beings would have procreated to the point at which they would have filled the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (where Eden is thought to have been). In order to obey the “fill the earth” command, they would have had to cross the river. The question is, How could they have crossed the river to be faithful to the command of God? They could have, for example, walked around the river or built a raft or a bridge. Each option, however, would have required learning something about the creation in order to develop the technology necessary to fulfill the command. Choosing to build a raft would have required a rudimentary knowledge of buoyancy, and this knowledge would have helped both the developer and other people fulfill God’s command to inhabit the earth. Assuming they used a tree as a raft, they would have also used a renewable resource in order to be consistent with the command to do no harm. Later generations would have received instruction about the concept of buoyancy and, fulfilling their stewardship obligation, would have improved on it by developing an understanding of displacement and thus would have developed boats.

The stewardship principle of Genesis 2:15 is reiterated by Jesus in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). In that parable, an owner entrusts some of his possessions to three servants, giving them resources to manage. The first two work to increase the value of the original investment. The wealth does not belong to the servants but to the owner, so in essence the servants add value while preserving the original investment. The only servant called wicked and lazy (v. 26) is the one who keeps the original investment but does not add value, thus not fulfilling both parts of the stewardship command to cultivate and to keep. The principle of stewardship, however, raises the question, How does one add value or increase the wealth of God, who is the Creator and Possessor of everything? The answer to this question comes later in Matthew when the King returns in judgment and the righteous ask, “When did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” (25:37–39, NASB). The King answers, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (v. 40). The principle of stewardship notes that as human beings...
engage in and learn about the creation, they are supposed to glorify God by serving and ministering through using the knowledge they discover, the technology they develop, and the talents, gifts, resources, and abilities granted to them by God.

The principle of stewardship is embedded in Christ’s description of the summary of the Law in Luke 10:27, where we are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love others as ourselves. Properly loving God requires the dedication of our time, knowledge, resources, and abilities to the service of others so that they can also properly fulfill their obligation to be more suitable for the ducks and geese that reside there.

In language arts, a teacher could use the principle of stewardship to direct students in using their gifts to inspire others in a positive fashion. Students could engage in reading or writing stories that focus on positive actions toward others or the creation—actions that demonstrate the stewardship principle. One seventh-grade teacher, in a unit on persuasive writing, requires students to incorporate a biblical understanding of stewardship to persuade the reader to engage in actions that minister to the needs of others. A high school teacher uses a popular movie to underscore the biblical principle of the benefit that stewardship actions have on the recipients. These benefits affect both the performer of the action and the witnesses (see Matthew 5:16).

Christian schools can extend the biblical concept of stewardship to all academic disciplines because stewardship extends beyond the care of the creation to the development of the creation and to the use of a person’s time, talents, energies, and resources for the care and empowerment of others. In the end, stewardship serves to direct instruction toward the positive and responsible use of knowledge and resources away from personal benefit to care and concern for others and the creation—and looking for opportunities to allow students to exercise their biblical responsibilities to be stewards. Any unit of instruction that seeks to give students an understanding of how to use the content knowledge and their talents in light of God’s values fulfills the biblical mandate to educate students to be stewards—and prepares students to fulfill their biblical obligation to use their talents and resources to develop and care for others and the creation.

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