Bridging the Gap:
Integration of Faith, Learning, and Living
in Christian Professional Programs

Prepared for

The Cedarville College Tenure Committee

by

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September, 2000

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ABSTRACT

In order to develop a model of integration of biblical faith, learning, and life, a biblical concept of truth is first developed. Truth is divided into three categories: revealed, discoverable, and undiscoverable. Next, the learning process for the Christian disciple is studied by means of a phase diagram, and the critical point on the diagram is identified. Based on this model, implications for integration of faith and learning in the Christian collegiate faculty and climate are drawn. As the learning process matures, the critical point becomes the point of entry for penetrating the unchurched with the gospel.

IS TRUTH, AND IF SO, WHAT?

Is truth, and if so, what? This play on Pilot's query of John 18:38 decries the lack of belief in absolute truth in society in the late 20th century. In order to establish a model for learning, one must first establish that there is absolute truth; then one must identify it.

If truth is to exist at all, it must be absolute. A partial truth is no truth at all. Webster's dictionary defines truth as "the body of real things, events, and facts: actuality."

Psalm 119:160 states that the "entirety of Your word is truth." Jesus confirmed this idea when He prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth; Your word is truth." Thus it is evident that there is absolute truth, and all that is found in the Bible is true.

Is there any truth which exists outside of the covers of the Holy Bible, the word of God? In Deuteronomy 29:29, Moses, inspired by the Spirit of God, made a profound statement: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." This statement points to truth which has not been stated through special revelation, that is, which is not contained in the Bible.

Proverbs 25:2 states, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter." Another category of truth then is that which may be searched out. If something can be sought out then it must exist; there must be some truth about it to be searched.

John Milton Gregory, 19th century Christian educator and author of *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, seems to have held this view as well. He stated (Gregory, p. 11) that the same principles of teaching must be followed in "studying the Word of God as in studying his works." William Hasker holds a similar view: "One's scholarly thinking should already be permeated by Christian attitudes and beliefs, by Christian ways of seeing God's world." This helps to foster a unitary vision of truth instead of an attempt to integrate "disjoint bodies of knowledge and belief" (Hasker).

Now a model can be drawn which describes the various categories of truth. It is shown in Figure 1. Specially revealed truth includes everything in the Bible and nothing more at this time in history. Discoverable truth (Proverbs 25:2) is divided into two categories: that which has already been discovered and that which is yet undiscovered. Undiscoverable truth is the third category. It includes spiritual truths not revealed in the Word of God.
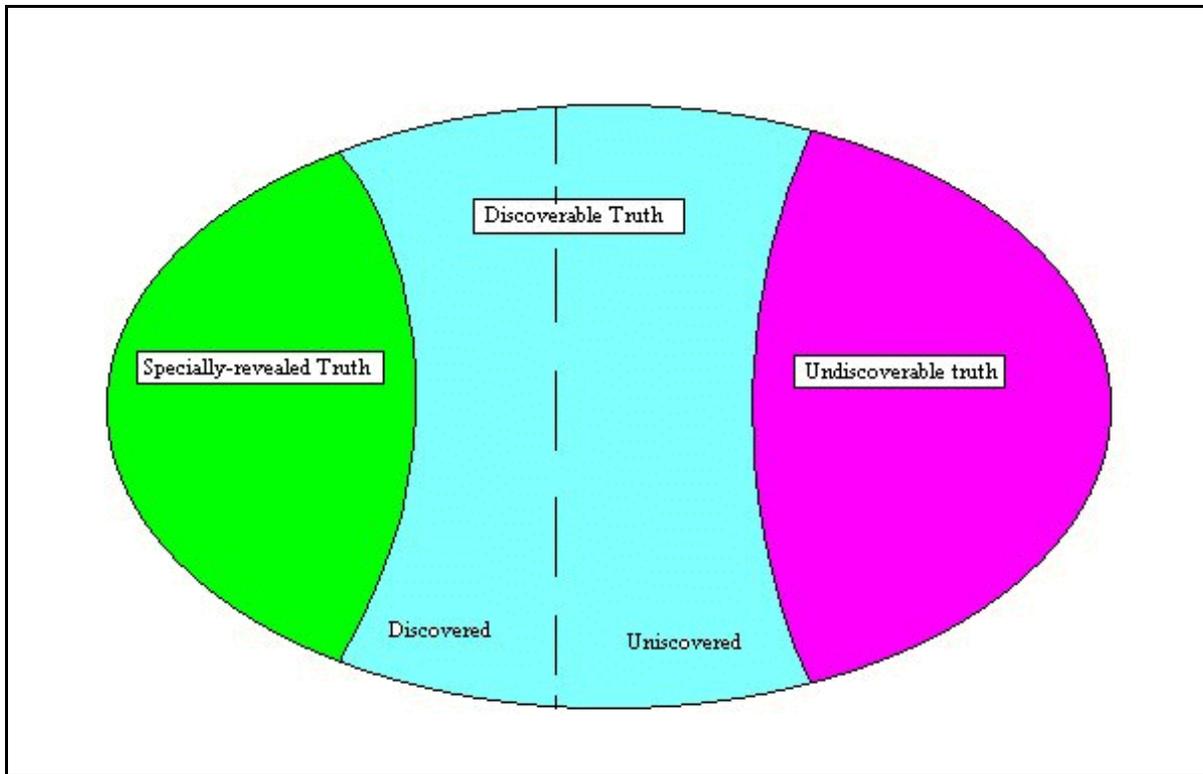

 **Figure 1**. Areas of Truth

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Truth is acquired gradually throughout life in the process of learning. This process involves at least three stages: understanding, applying or proving, and teaching. (This simple model deals in broader terms than Bloom's well-known model of learing levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.) Ezra 7:10 states, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." As the

student matures, his field of understanding and application expands across the region of specially-revealed and discovered truth shown in Figure 2. Learned truths, then, can be pictured as areas of land which have risen up out of the waters of ignorance. Learning is the propagation of a phase line between learned and unlearned truth. Unknowable truth stands in the deepest, murkiest, unsearchable waters (Romans 11:33).

The learning phase line (Figure 2) extends across the boundary between specially revealed truth and discovered truth. This model holds interesting implications for the process of integration of faith and learning. These implications are next investigated in depth.
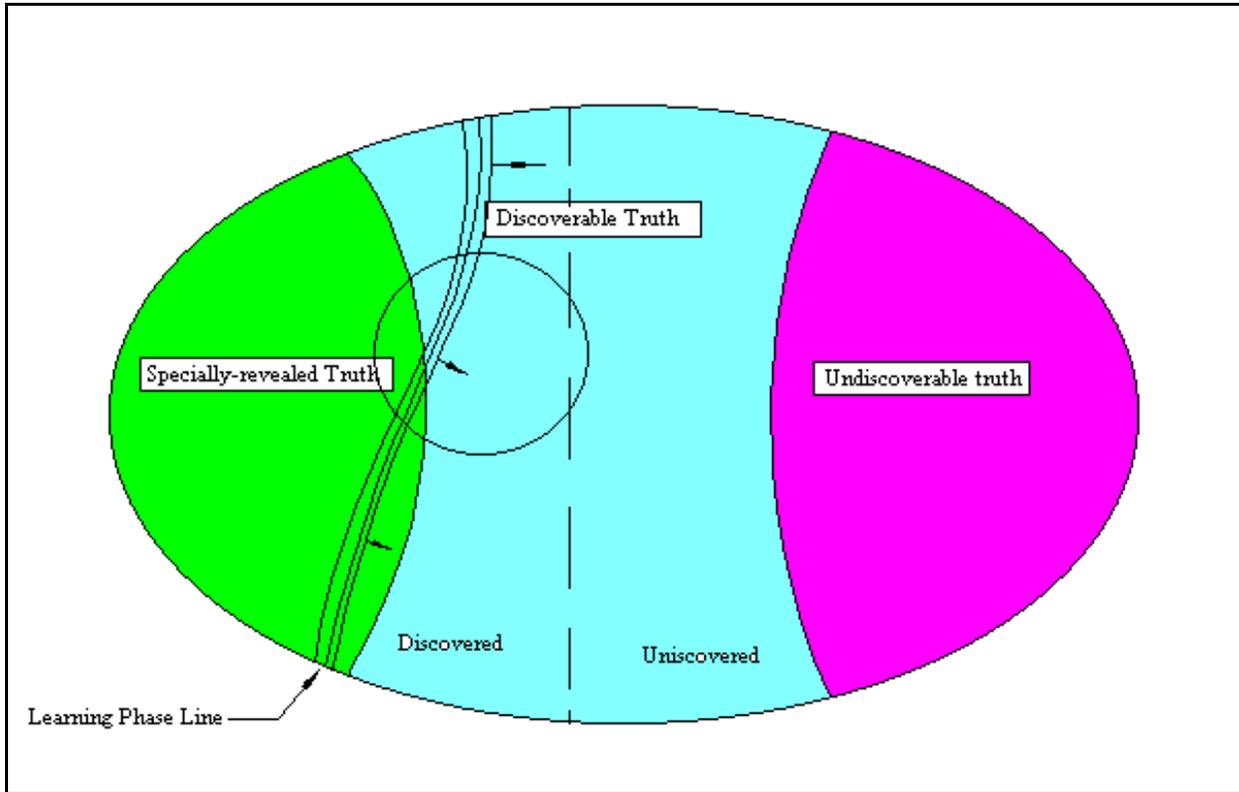
Figure 2. The Learning Phase Line
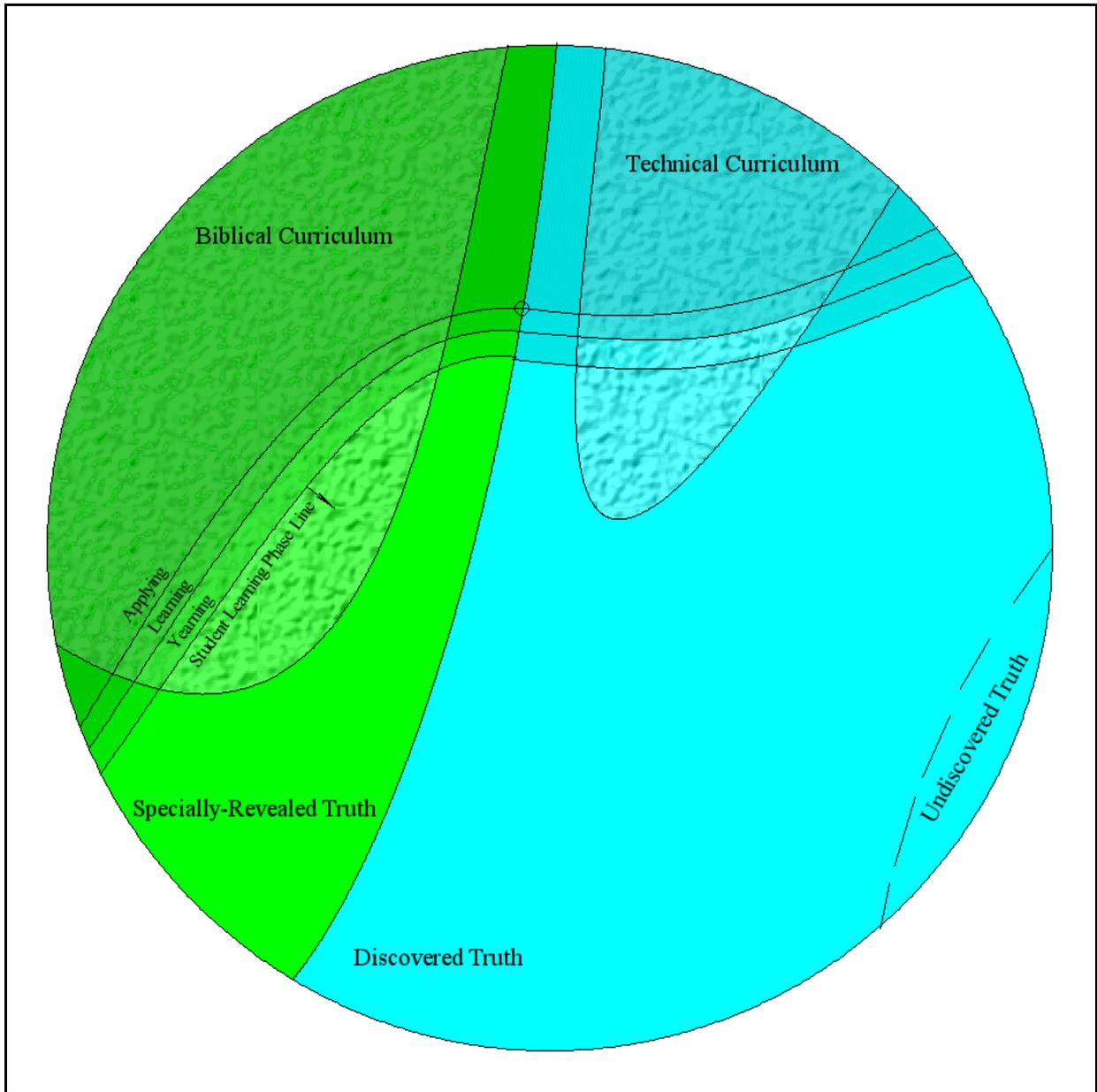
Figure 3. Models of Curriculums

A MODEL FOR INTEGRATION OF FAITH, LEARNING, AND LIFE

Learning Phase line

Figure 3 is a detailed view of a portion of Figure 2. It presents a model for integrated learning of specially revealed truth and discovered truth. The focus is on the region surrounding the point of intersection of the boundary between revealed and discovered truth and the learner's phase line. This intersection is the critical point in the Christian learning environment.

A close study of the learning phase line reveals at least three wave fronts. The first is yearning. This was the "preparing" of Ezra's heart. Proverbs 2:3-5 promises,

> Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
> And lift up your voice for understanding,
> If you seek her as silver,
> And search for her as for hidden treasures;
> Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
> And find the knowledge of God.

The catalyst to learning is the desire to learn. Gregory (p. 25) called this the focus of the attention of the student. One key mark of an effective teacher is his ability to motivate students' desire to uncover God's truth.

The second wave-front--termed "learning"--is the mental assimilation and comprehension of truth. The third is the application, the proving of the learned truth (Gregory, p. 5). Psalm 111:10 states, "A good understanding have all those who do." The student's critical point is actually along the phase line of application.

Curricular Domains

How does integration of biblical truth influence the teaching of a field such as engineering, in which most all of the curriculum material lies in the area of discovered truth (or simplistic models which attempt to describe discoverable truth)? Bible courses derived mostly from biblical truth can be required, but how are the courses brought together in the student's mind for an integrated learning experience?

Figure 4 adds simplified models of these curricula to the learning chart. The tendency is for the syllabus of each course to focus only on its own type of truth. This is necessary, but it leaves along the boundary of biblical truth a chasm which threatens to retard progress of the student's critical learning point.

This is the decisive issue in integration of faith, learning, and life. Integration has been defined as the process by which the various data of God's truth are linked together into a coherent whole (Integration Task Team, p. 10). In the context of Figure 4, this means maintaining a learning phase line which is without a notch at the critical point.

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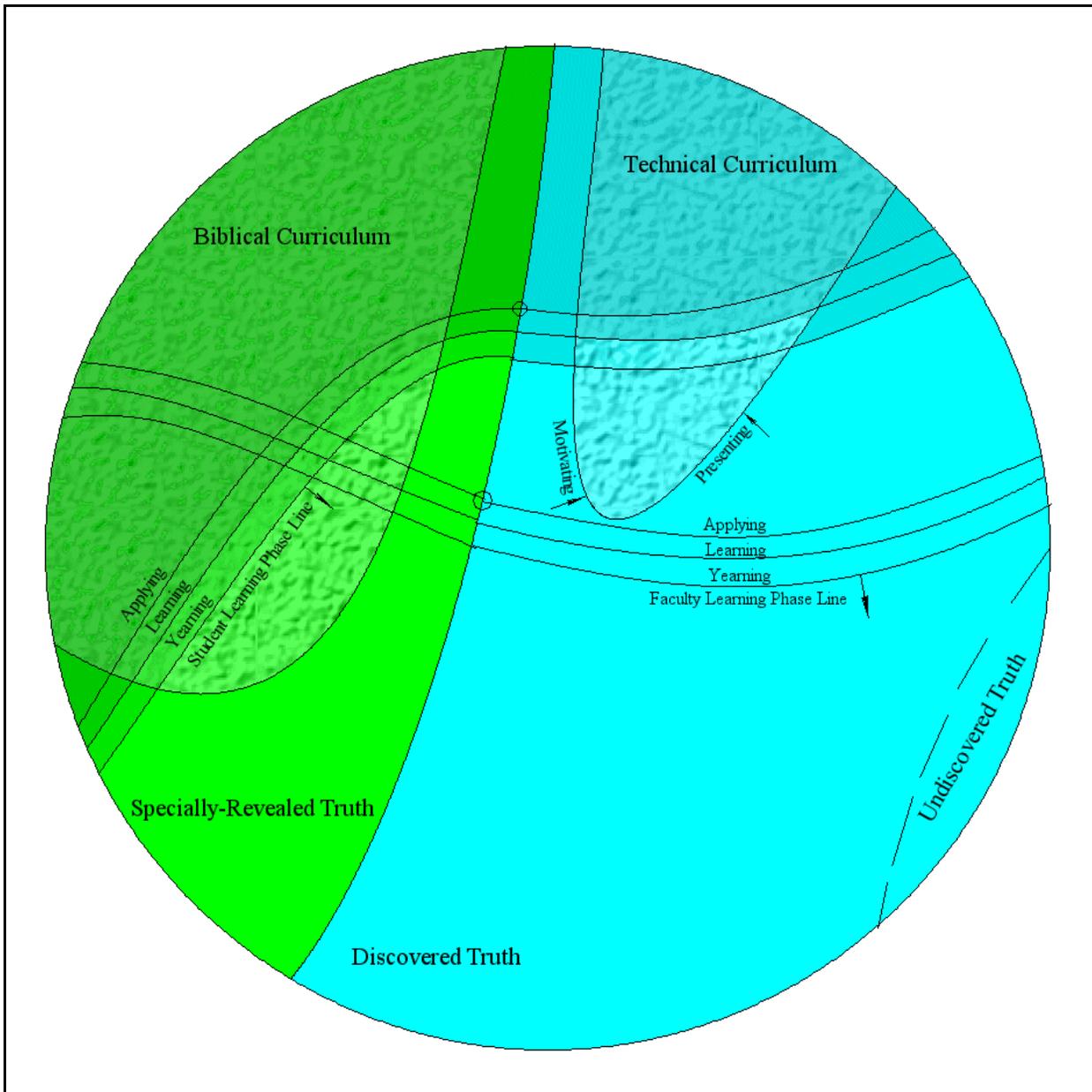
Figure 4. Learning Line of the Teacher

Figure 4 adds the learning line of the teacher to the model. The teacher learns by the same process as the learner, but is usually ahead of the learner in the area being taught. In areas in which the teacher has already applied truth, he is able to present truth and motivate students to assimilate it. This is based on the first two of "The Seven Laws of Teaching" of Gregory. The teacher can only teach what he already knows, and the teacher must have the attention of the students.
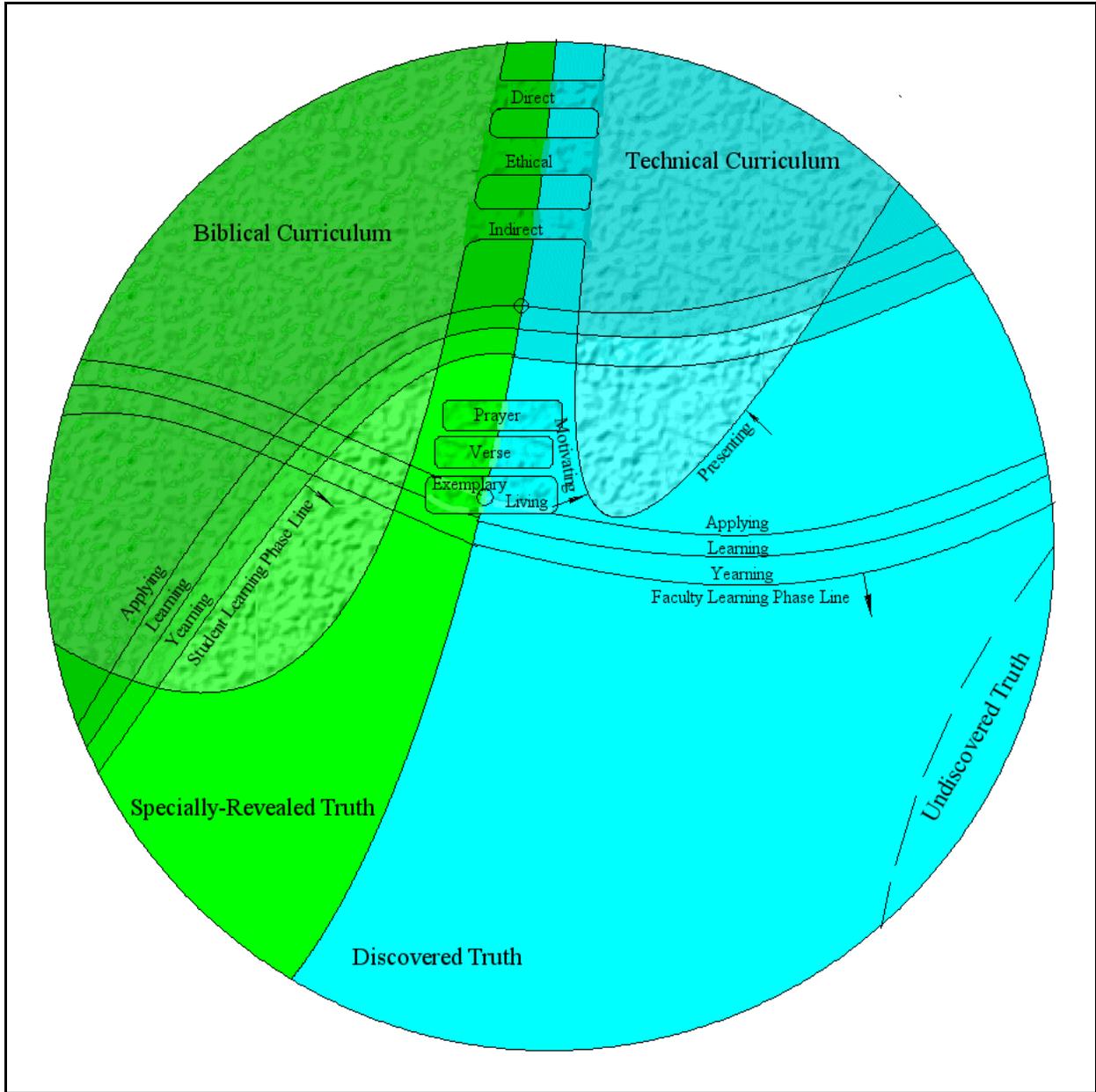
Figure 5. Bridges and Stepping Stones

The teacher has his own critical point. This will become a crucial element in establishing the integrated learning environment. The learning phase line of the teacher probably does not exceed that of the learner in all areas. On the other hand, it may be pushing the envelope of undiscovered truth in other areas.

The Gap

How then is the gap between curriculum in "Biblical" and "technical" specialties narrowed? Figure 5 illustrates some possible bridges. These are located in the areas of curriculum (the truth to be learned as part of a course), lifestyle (who the teacher is and how he lives), and mindset.

Curriculum. The curricular means of narrowing the gap can be described as direct, ethical, and indirect reference to the scripture within the professional program. These three lie nearest the crux of the gap. An example of each is now given.

In some cases, the Bible will speak specifically to areas being taught. This truth must be brought to the student's focus. For example, in learning to engineer tall buildings, the student should learn the truth of Deuteronomy 22:8, "When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it." Direct scriptural prooftexts of this type are fairly rare in the field of engineeing.

Second, biblical ethics may be brought into focus in the curriculum of courses of professional programs. For example, part of the engineering design process is brainstorming. The engineering student should be taught to brainstorm; he should also be reminded from scripture how a Christian should behave toward co-workers in group brainstorming sessions. The wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, and open to reason (James 3:17). A negative, critical spirit is not a good witness.

Third, indirect reference may be made to scriptural truth, for the purposes of illustrating a similar truth in the technical field. This is a good way to apply Gregory's fourth law of teaching (Gregory, p. 5): "The lesson to be mastered must be explicable in the terms of truth already known by the learner--the UNKNOWN must be explained by means of the KNOWN." The common group of Biblical knowledge of many students could provide fertile ground for helpful illustrations. A weak example is that of telling students in a computer lab to be like the builders with Nehemiah: they should have a pencil in one hand and a computer keyboard in the other.

These three techniques form "land bridges" which bring the curricula closer together. However, these bridges alone do not eliminate a notch in the student's learning phase line.

Lifestyle. The second means of bridging the gap is the lifestyle of the teacher. This includes his character, manner of life, speech, and activities in and out of the classroom. This emphasizes who he is, not what he does. Although not part of the curriculum, these considerations provide stepping stones which lie near the desired critical point of the students (Figure 5).

Praying at the beginning of each class is an activity which fits this category. This lies closest to the curriculum land bridges mentioned previously.

Using a devotional verse of the day is another example.

Direct contact with students in and out of the classroom provides another means of conveying the life of Christ to students. This occurs through office hours and advising sessions. Inviting students into one's home is another way. This not only deepens the teacher-learner

relationship for more effective learning, but it also graphically exposes them to the professor's lifestyle and values.

This leads to the final stepping stone. That is, the living out of Biblical values by example. This has to do with the way the teacher treats his students, and others around him. It has to do with applying God's word to his own life on a daily basis. It has to do with applying these principles within the profession into which God has placed him--teaching. A common saying among the Navigators is, "You reproduce your life." Not that you should or can reproduce it, but that you will–the good and the bad. This power of imitative learning is all too apparent to parents of young children!

This stepping stone is the most important in integrating faith, learning, and life, for it lies directly on the teacher's own critical learning point, that intersection of his own application of biblically-revealed and discovered truth.

The word integration is closely related to integrity, the condition of the outer form and function reflecting a truth which permeates the interior. The integration of faith and learning in the academic environment depends upon faculty who integrate the faith in their own living. As Holmes writes, "I am a Christian scholar and teacher in response to the biblical mandate . . . Faith is not just the content of biblical teaching, but my continued responsiveness to God." Also, "virtues taught in Scripture are requisite for disciplined learning, for scholarship, and for teaching. We need to cultivate, embody, and model them for students" (Holmes).

Mindset. The curricula and lifestyle of integration are most energetically projected by the scholar with an integrative mindset. Such a scholar is convinced that beneath the waters dividing bodies of biblical and discovered curricula there lies a firm ocean floor of God's unified truth.

Richard John Neuhaus wrote, "it is within the Christian understanding of reality that everything finds its role." Sidney Greidanus concurred: "The Bible calls us to faith and to the living out of our faith in everything we do including our scientific work . . .Whether we work therefore, in physics or in chemistry, in geology or biology, we are investigating the workmanship of God and the structures that conform to the laws of God."

The integrative mindset is the essence of the integration of faith, learning, and life; indeed it is the carrying out of Colossians 3:23 within the sphere of the Christian educator and scholar: "whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men."

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS MODEL

The purpose of Cedarville College is to offer an education consistent with Biblical truth. This paper has restated that goal in terms of maintaining a continuous learning phase line along the boundary between biblical and discovered truth. What will be the fruit of successful integration?

The graduate will enter a world in which the discovered truth is too often completely separate in people's thinking from Biblical truth. Many people live dual lives by constantly shifting between these two worlds. Even many Christians, although contacting unbelievers in their occupation, live

in the two separate worlds without bringing God's truth to bear on their life at work. This does not further the progress of the gospel.

One who has learned, and continues to learn, in a biblically integrated sense, will be strategically placed to reach the world with the gospel. As he continues to apply God's word to his life and seeks as Daniel to excel in his vocation, his critical learning point will become a stepping stone, ministry opportunity, and point of contact to expose unbelievers within his unique sphere of influence to the truth of God's word and to draw them to the grace of God through His Son Jesus Christ.

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