Faith-Learning Integration and Interdisciplinary Studies

History of the Integration of Religion and Society

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Professor

David Ward, Ph.D., Th.M.

**David, I am very impressed with your Course Learning Journal for PHI 805 & 815-22! Your reflections on what you learned in these courses are profound. You are a good writer.**

**Your Assignment 3 in each course was terrific. I especially appreciate your ability to integrate concepts across courses and make connections between ideas in ways that advance your own academic and professional goals. It was so encouraging to see the synthetic insights and how well you are "getting" exactly what PHI805 and PHI 815 were designed to accomplish. I agree with you that calling and vocation are integrating truths that are one of the best ways to understand the Christian life in the world. Luther's titanic recovery of the revolutionary theological insight that “the just shall live by faith” pulls together calling and vocation. Calling directs faith to the One Who calls and our obedient response to God's call in Christ produces vocation (Phil. 2:12-13), working out what God is working in. I have so many great resources on calling and vocation to share with you. Your chart of Trans-modernism, adapted from the format from Noebel and Myers's Understanding the Times classic worldview book, has intrigued me and I think you are onto something with far-reaching implications.**

**Keep up the great work! -- Prof. David Ward**

**Grade: A**

Assignment #4 – Course Learning Journal The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course. The Learning Journal integrates the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor insights gained as a result of the course. The course learning journal should be 3-5 pages in length and should include the following sections: 1. Introduction – Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence. 2. Personal Growth - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or challenged you– and your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained. 3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning in your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study? 4. Conclusion – Evaluate the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals

# Introduction

Core 2 turned out to produce a rewarding exploration of interdisciplinary and faith-learning integration. Considering the process of faith-learning integration through engaging interdisciplinary research assisted in firming up a better understanding of approaches and directions for current and future research. Review the history of the integration of religion and society, stimulated ideas for current and future application. Particularly appreciated was practicing a simulated research project which was assigned to one class but brought the materials of both classes together.

I learned a great deal this term. I have been examining postmodernism from a philosophical and cultural perspective since the early 2000s when I was last enrolled at OGS. Reviewing the articulated worldviews presented in the course provided an opportunity to clarify what I had discovered, as well as help me to understand that postmodernism is not the only competing worldview in our culture. I had not appreciated the degree of influence secularism has to this day nor its resistance to postmodernism. This insight helps me to better parse the literature and make sense of the arguments being made therein. The view of the “new age” framework, seems to me to be obsolete, more testimony to a concern about Eastern spirituality entering during the age of globalism, something that happened to a degree to be sure. But I think the current fascination with spirituality within a framework critical of organized religion is pointing at something new.

I particularly appreciated Hasker’s identification of three approaches toward secular knowledge: compatibilist, transformational, and reconstructive. When engaging variant materials in the past that were not compatible with orthodox Christianity, I had not so clearly articulated how I should respond to them. These categories will make for more targeted and reasonable responses to variant materials while assisting in not throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

Hegeman’s thesis that culturative history is intended to be the unfolding of God’s purpose for humanity set me to pondering. At first, it felt variant. Within my tradition, there is a strong understanding that this world is fallen. I have spent almost 30 years researching and teaching on the book of Revelation and I stand by my interpretation that the book presents a prophetic narrative of the corruption of human civilization to the point that we are on the verge of destroying ourselves when Christ returns. But I also recall that in seminary I took a class on Ecological Theology which has us focusing on God’s gifting of dominion which is a call to service. I found myself drawn back to Hegeman as an insightful view of our call to life together in this world. Many years ago, a professor in my undergraduate work introduced me to the work of various existential philosophers and one quote has always stuck with me from Ortega Y. Gasset, “I am myself and my circumstances.” This mirrors for me a primary quote from Martin Luther, “God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.” Thus, I am reminded that a place remains in a fallen world to do what we can for it is in response to God’s call to make a civilization and God’s call to love our neighbor.

The doctrine of vocation became a bridge between the two courses. This was the subject of my historical review, but it also came to light as a viable doorway to reach GenZ young adults who have failed to launch. This is an important but often neglected doctrine within my tradition, a strongly defined doctrine but not necessarily a central one as it does not pertain to salvation but to life in this world. Along with some others within my tradition such as Gene Veith, I believe this doctrine needs to be reclaimed and utilized for the church’s life in the world as salt and light. Of course, our primary calling is the proclamation of the Gospel, and this calling must not be sacrificed for some variation of the social gospel, but it is not our only calling. We are called to love and serve our neighbor.

Thus, I wrestled a bit in general with a Lutheran approach to the integration of religion and society. Many within my tradition would advocate the only purpose of such would be to facilitate the Gospel mission of proclaiming salvation through Christ for the new heaven and the new earth, as this one is doomed. Yet conversations are starting to emerge about our lives together in the world touching on race relations, social justice, and more. We are conservative Lutherans and are motivated by a strong desire to uphold Biblical teaching whether it is popular or not, but there is a growing awareness that we cannot be faithful if we retreat behind walls that block off conversation. I reviewed Niebuhr’s seminal models of faith and culture and find I still subscribe to the paradox model as not only most congruent with my Lutheran tradition but also Scripture. The key thing to remember about the paradox model is while it defines God’s rule in two separate realms (civil and church) with two different purposes (life/order, saving faith) with two different instruments (law/culture, Gospel & sacraments), all realms are God’s, all Scripturally revealed purposes are God’s. This doctrine does not prohibit the church from entering and working in the world for the betterment of others but rather requires it through the lens of vocation.

The simulated research project provided an opportunity to practice what I have learned in the past terms and over the previous years and gave me confidence in my ability to complete this degree and to generate research that can make a qualitative difference for people. The assignment clarified the orderly process that will produce the final dissertation. I had previously completed four cores with OGS some twenty years ago. This assignment was the most helpful of the assignments that I have had thus far.

This core has shaped my ministry and leadership as a parish pastor and congregational consultant in several ways. It helped me to articulate a better understanding of some of my established viewpoints, but also added tools to my toolbox for future leadership. First, examining the whole concept of faith-learning integration has reminded me, as stated above, of the importance of the doctrine of vocation as something to be teaching to the people in my orbit of influence. We are called to love God by loving neighbor and this certainly contains the call to go make disciples but is not limited to that call. And while the church proper is focused on the call to make disciples, we all as Christians stand with one foot in the secular realm, not both feet planted in the churchly realm. Dreher responds as do many to the changes and challenges of an increasingly ungodly culture that is increasingly hostile toward Christianity. He calls for the church to become more internally focused on building strong spiritual communities that can withstand the winds and storms of cultural change and influence. He is not entirely wrong, but we cannot become so focused on defense that we take refuge behind strong walls only caring for those who are in our tribe. The walls are necessary, the community is essential, and the catechesis of our people with Biblical knowledge cannot be sacrificed, but the gates must be open so we can go forth and so others may come in.

The simulated research project which had the goal to familiarize us with and make us comfortable with the process of completing a dissertation, produced valuable insight into a real-world problem many of my flock are wrestling with and has provided insights and suggestions for a path forward for my spiritual leadership. Not only did the project provide insight into those experiencing failure to launch syndrome, but into GenZ in general, and has given me a rich range of insight and ideas about how to reach out and partner with our younger adults and youth that may bring some transformations. Partnering with GenZ leveraging their interest in meaning-making and spirituality, their awareness of our interdependence, their desire to make a difference in the world, and recognizing their fear, anxiety, and disappointments opens doors not only to help them remain active in the Christian Church but allowing them to lead older generations to consider new ways in which we may remain faithful to ancient callings to love God and love neighbors. As stated before, the doctrine of vocation came to the surface here as bridging both courses. Among those I read for in this project, Jorgenson stood out, expanding my consideration of vocation to not just include direct acts for our neighbor, but caring for the earth as well as it is God’s creation and our joint home.

Finally, as we reviewed and I read and considered articulating what I understand regarding postmodernism and its transformative power over our culture, it came to me that certain cultural trends suggest an emergence of a new worldview, which I call transmodernism. As I shared in my DLL, “Postmodernism was largely a critique of the failures of modernity. Transmodernism may critique the failures of postmodernism, but there is the suggestion that this is not the foundational concern for this emerging way of thinking. Transmodernism is more reasonable, more open to common sense, and more focused on real-life problems and solutions than theoretical ones. It is being shaped by real-world pressures...” This is a hypothesis I will be attending to in my future research and reading.

Below is the latest chart that captures my hypothesis.

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| Transmodernism | | |
| Theology | Spiritual not religious | Skeptical of organized religion  Open to spirituality and desire meaning-making. |
| Philosophy | Reconstruction  Pragmatic | Focus on building rather than tearing down.  Truth reflects real-world experiences of the community understood holistically. |
| Ethics | Communitarian  Cosmopolitan | Importance of community and shared values  Importance of world citizenship  Right/wrong is not informed by traditional rules/regulations/culture but by empathic concern for others |
| Biology | Anti-materialist  Transhumanism  Plastic | The recognition we are more than just biological organisms, there is something “spiritual” to a human being. |
| Psychology | Socio/cultural | Identity is shaped by membership in communities.  Identity is fluid and transcends biological determinates.  Identity is complex and interconnected (intersectionality) |
| Sociology | Multi-generational family  integration of work/school/life  virtual world  holistic  Empathy core value | Recognizes the role society has in shaping values.  Tolerance for diverse lifestyles and viewpoints is a must.  Individuals are social beings.  We are more alike than different.  Virtual interactions can be more real than face-to-face ones. |
| Law | Skeptical  Constructive reformist approach | Question the fairness and impartiality of the legal system and are particularly sensitive to perceived injustices or biases. Want transparency, accountability, and reform. The law should serve to create a world of equality for all. |
| Politics | Communitarianism | The cynicism of existing governmental structures, weariness of polarizing conflict, and desire for unity are driven by the need for the common good. |
| Economics | Humanist/Ecological economics | Work must serve human well-being and serve others.  Economies should also recognize the importance of taking care of our home planet.  Work serves life, not the other way around. |
| History | Critical global awareness | Digital learning brings history to life.  Strong influence of social justice lens  Desire to connect with the past to make it relevant but with a critical lens.  Global awareness – informed by events and cultures from many regions across many time periods.  Purpose – not so much to celebrate or retain the past, but to inform an emphatic response for the future |

This core was rich and rewarding as it helped me to clarify and synthesize my understanding of faith-learning integration and helped me to identify core elements within my tradition that can facilitate my future research in hopes of making a difference in the lives of others. Particularly interesting is the generation of the hypothesis that a new worldview, transmodernism, is emerging, and I look forward to examining this in the future.