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Developing spiritually grounded lecturers through supportive higher education environments

Abstract

Integrating faith and learning in higher education presents significant challenges for lecturers. This task often involves integrating secular content with biblical principles, creating tension when attempting to deliver content from a Christian perspective. As a result, many Christian lecturers opt to present material pedagogically without critically evaluating it through a Christian worldview. Consequently, Christian higher education institutions may lack a coherent framework aligned with the Great Commission outlined in Matthew 28:19-20. Christian higher education institutions can support lecturers in integrating faith and learning within their subject content. This study employs a qualitative research design to conduct a thematic analysis of documents on the integration of faith and learning. The study revealed that faith integration in Christian higher education institutions is most effective when institutionally scaffolded and spiritually embodied. Key institutional support structures such as reformed biblical frameworks, reflective practice, academic staff, academic staff development, and communal accountability enable lecturers to align their academic teaching with the transformative mission of the Great Commission. Therefore, this article argues that Christian higher education institutions should provide institutional support to lecturers through clear policies, dedicated resources, and targeted training. Such support can help reduce tensions and foster greater coherence in educational approaches. Moreover, when teaching is aligned with the Great Commission, a holistic environment is created, which leads to a supportive community of lecturers who can share practices and strategies for effective faith integration. This research highlights the role of institutional support in overcoming the challenges of faith integration in Christian higher education. It also provides a framework for faith-learning integration, which Christian higher education institutions can explore to equip their lecturers better to fulfil their educational purpose while staying true to biblical foundations.

Keywords: Christian higher education institutions; Christian worldview; faith integration; Great Commission; institutional support

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:19–20)

Opsomming

Die ontwikkeling van geestelik gegronde dosente deur middel van ondersteunende hoëronderrigingsomgewings

Die integrasie van geloof en leer in hoër onderrig skep unieke uitdagings vir dosente. Hierdie proses vereis die koppeling van sekulêre inhoud met bybelse beginsels, wat dikwels spanning veroorsaak wanneer inhoud vanuit ’n Christelike perspektief aangebied word. Juis hierom

verkie heelwat dosente om materiaal pedagogies aan te bied sonder om dit krities vanuit 'n Christelike wêreldbeskouing te evalueer. Gevolglik beskik Christelike hoërondewysinstellings nie altyd oor 'n samehangende raamwerk wat die Groot Opdrag weerspieël wat in Matteus 28:19–20 gegee word nie. Hierdie studie gebruik 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerpe ten einde die integrasie van geloof en leer te ondersoek. Dit geskied deur 'n tematiese analise van dokumente. Die bevindinge toon dat geloofsintegrasie die doeltreffendste plaasvind wanneer dit institusioneel gestruktureer en geestelik beliggaam word. Belangrike ondersteuningsmeganismes sluit in: gereformeerde bybelse raamwerke, reflektiewe praktyke, ontwikkeling van akademiese personeel en gemeenskaplike aanspreeklikheid. Hierdie strukture stel dosente in staat om hul onderrig met die transformerende missie van die Groot Opdrag te belyn. Die studie voer dus aan dat Christelike hoërondewysinstellings institusionele ondersteuning behoort te verskaf deur middel van duidelike beleide, toegewysde hulpbronne en toegespitste opleiding. Sodanige ondersteuning kan help om spanning te verminder, en dit kan samehang tussen opvoedingsbenaderings versterk. Bowendien, wanneer onderrig met die Groot Opdrag belyn word, word 'n holistiese gemeenskap geskep, wat tot 'n ondersteunende akademiese gemeenskap bydra. Sodanige gemeenskap kan praktyke en strategieë met die oog op doeltreffende geloofsintegrasie deel. Hierdie navorsing beklemtoon dus die rol van institusionele ondersteuning. Dit bied ook 'n raamwerk vir geloof-leerintegrasie wat Christelike hoërondewysinstellings kan gebruik om hul dosente beter toe te rus om hul roeping in die onderwys te vervul terwyl hulle getrou aan Bybelse grondslae bly.

Kernbegrippe: Christelike hoërondewysinstellings; Christelike wêreldbeskouing; geloofsintegrasie; Groot Opdrag; institusionele ondersteuning

1. Background and problem statement

The integration of faith and learning remains a complex and challenging phenomenon within Christian higher education institutions. Many lecturers struggle when attempting to align secular content with biblical principles (Cosgrove, 2015; Farbishel, Staples & Pellish, 2020; Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Purper, Stumpf, Morris & Duncan, 2023). This leads to pedagogical inconsistencies that undermine the coherence and integrity of subject matter within Christian higher education institutions.

These authors argue that a contributing factor to this challenge is the absence of institutional frameworks and professional development structures that effectively support lecturers in integrating faith into their teaching. Without intentional strategies to foster institutional unity, Christian higher education institutions risk failing to fulfil their mission as articulated in the Great Commission (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (hereafter referred to as CCCU, s.a.); Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Purper *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore strategies that support lecturers in navigating these tensions through structured institutional frameworks in order to cultivate a faith-informed educational environment.

At a deeper level, the challenge of integrating faith and learning is also ontological and epistemological, rooted in the religious direction of the whole academic vocation. Ontology addresses the nature of reality and being, while epistemology concerns the understanding and pursuit of knowledge (Van der Walt, 2024:45-46). The lecturer's heart-orientation decisively shapes the content and the manner of teaching, so that faith integration flows from the spiritual commitments and worldview that inform scholarly practice.

This article's conceptual foundations are rooted in the Biblical principle of the Great Commission as well as the ongoing need for coherent frameworks that guide the integration

of faith and learning in Christian higher education institutions. The Great Commission serves not only as the driving force behind this article but also as a reminder that Christian higher education is more than academic excellence. Thus, it is a calling to disciple, to teach in obedience to Christ, and to integrate truth with eternal purpose (Burton & Nwosu, 2003; CCCU, s.a.; Farbishel, Staples & Pellish, 2020; Purper *et al.*, 2023). In this light, faith and learning should not function as separate entities, but as a unified response to Christ's command to teach all nations and to uphold his teachings.

Christian lecturers are more than content experts; they are spiritual mentors called to shape students' lives according to biblical truth, a task that is both profound and complex (Ristiono, Latif & Kotte, 2023:2). The inherent tensions between secular knowledge and a biblical worldview often result in incoherent teaching. Without clear frameworks and intentional institutional support, Christian higher education risks losing unity in its mission (Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Farbishel *et al.*, 2020; Holmes, 1987; Purper *et al.*, 2023). It is here that the Great Commission calls both lecturers and institutions to return to their core purpose: aligning personal faith with institutional mission, as well as cultivating structured support systems. Thereby, faith integration becomes more than a theory; it becomes a lived, purposeful response to Christ's final instruction (Dockery, 2019; Nehrbass, 2022; Smith, 2016).

The main research question that guided this study was: How can institutional support enhance lecturers' ability to integrate faith and learning in higher education institutions? As the researcher, I fully acknowledge the complexity of this question and the extensive research that still needs to be conducted to explore its many dimensions. However, this article seeks to offer an initial framework for faith integration within Christian higher education institutions. The proposed framework is not intended as a final answer, but rather as a foundational step that can stimulate further inquiry into the various components that contribute to meaningful faith-learning integration. By establishing this starting point, the study hopes to encourage both theoretical exploration and practical application within Christian academic environments.

While this study seeks to offer a framework for faith integration within Christian higher education institutions, it is important to recognise that this is not the first attempt of its kind. Christian scholars and institutions have a long tradition of developing models for faith-learning integration and Christian worldview approaches (Holmes, 1987; Dockery & Morgan, 2018; CCCU, 2021). These frameworks have laid a rich foundation, yet they also reveal certain limitations. This study, therefore, does not claim novelty in proposing integration, but rather seeks to extend and enrich this established body of work by offering a biblically grounded, institutionally supported framework rooted in the Great Commission. Its unique contribution lies in drawing from reformed institutional documents to propose practical, systemic supports that enable lecturers to faithfully embody faith integration in their teaching.

This article begins with a conceptual framework that is rooted in the Great Commission and focused on professional development. Next, the methodology section explains the qualitative approach used, followed by a discussion of key findings. Lastly, a faith integration framework is presented. The article concludes with recommendations for institutions and suggestions for future research.

2. Conceptual framework

For the purposes of this study, several key terms must be distinguished. Following Badley (2009), the phrase "faith-learning integration" refers not merely to a pedagogical process whereby academic content and Christian conviction are intentionally connected. A Christian worldview provides the broadest framework, reflecting perspectives grounded in core Christian beliefs. Within this, a biblical worldview refers more specifically to how life is

viewed and knowledge through the lens of Scripture. A reformed theological worldview narrows this further, grounding integration in doctrinal commitments of the reformed tradition. In contrast, a theological vision describes a collective framework that guides institutional mission and shared practice, while spiritual formation emphasises the personal and communal growth of faith that sustains integration. These terms are related but not interchangeable, and this study employs them distinctly: the Faith Integration Framework arises from a reformed worldview, is anchored in the Great Commission, and is expressed pedagogically through faith-learning integration, while being grounded in ongoing spiritual formation.

Faith integration in Christian higher education is the intentional process of connecting biblical truth with academic content, pedagogy, and professional practice in a manner that is both biblically grounded and educationally sound (Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Purper *et al.*, 2023; Ripley, Garzon, Hall & Mangis, 2009; Dockery & Morgan, 2018). The integration process often reveals points of tension between the biblical worldview and secular academic paradigms, particularly in areas such as ethics, human identity, and epistemology, which necessitate a thoughtful and critical engagement with competing truth claims (Cosgrove, 2015; Purper *et al.*, 2023; Nehrbass, 2022). In this light, the need for a consistent, institutionally supported approach to faith integration becomes foundational to ensure that academic practice remains faithful to the mission of Christian higher education.

The biblical foundation of faith integration in higher education institutions is rooted in the Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:19–20. This biblical mandate (*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* [my italicisation]) shapes not only the missional purpose of Christian institutions. It also shapes their pedagogical core by compelling lecturers to evaluate all subject content through a biblical lens (Burgess, Baker, Conner, Giles, Joseph & Layell, 2025:8). Within this mandate, faith integration is not merely an institutional expectation but a spiritual vocation whereby academic inquiry and discipleship coalesce (Azusa Pacific University, s.a.). Furthermore, the curriculum becomes a site of spiritual formation, and teaching transforms into a form of bearing witness to Christ’s lordship over all disciplines. In this view, the higher education classroom becomes an extension of the institution’s broader mission, where students are shaped through both intellectual engagement and values-based formation (Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Purper *et al.*, 2023). This approach challenges the traditional divide between faith-informed perspectives and academic disciplines, encouraging lecturers to approach knowledge holistically by aligning academic inquiry with a consistent, value-driven framework.

The Commission’s imperative to “teach them to observe” necessitates that Christian lecturers model and mentor a life of faithful discipleship, echoing empirical findings that highlight the centrality of the lecturer’s personal spiritual authenticity in effective faith integration (Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Purper *et al.*, 2023). Research across Christian higher education demonstrates that students respond most meaningfully when integration is relationally embodied, when lecturers not only transmit knowledge but also visibly live the gospel (Azusa Pacific University, s.a.; Christian Communication Scholars Network, s.a.; Perez, 2023; Savarirajan & Fong, 2019; Tinkey, 2010).

In this context, the biblical foundation of the Great Commission calls for a teaching approach that is both relational and dialogical, where lecturers model Christian values and support students through mentorship and meaningful engagement. Lecturers are not only transmitters of content but serve as agents who model and cultivate holistic development in students, shaping intellectual capacity and character (Hayes, 2022:2).

In this way, the principles underpinning the Great Commission inform not only the institutional mission of Christian higher education but also its pedagogical practices. They aim to produce graduates who are intellectually grounded, ethically responsible, and

mature in their personal development. The aforementioned suggests that if a lecturer does not actively embody a Christian lifestyle, it becomes challenging to integrate faith into academic teaching in a meaningful way. This embodiment necessitates consistent engagement with Christian practices, cultivating a personal relationship with God and developing a comprehensive understanding of both Scripture and the Creation. As a result, the lecturer cannot fully live out the Great Commission, leading to an inconsistent biblical worldview that not only affects the lecturer but also influences the students they teach (Azusa Pacific University, s.a.; Mun & Bermejo, 2023; Perez, 2023; Purper *et al.*, 2023; Tinkey, 2010). Savarirajan (2019:12) confirms this by stating that students engage most deeply when faith integration is lived out by spiritually mature lecturers and supported by institutions that promote a shared biblical vision, provide opportunities for reflection, and foster a strong sense of calling. This raises a critical question: in what ways can higher education institutions effectively support lecturers in addressing this evident challenge?

A common concern in discussions about integrating faith and learning in Christian higher education is the lack of clear institutional frameworks and structured professional development opportunities (Burgess *et al.*, 2025:8). Without this support, lecturers often feel uncertain about how to incorporate biblical perspectives into their subject teaching in a meaningful way. As a result, the integration process can become inconsistent, disconnected and overly reliant on individual effort rather than a shared institutional approach. The tensions between secular content and a biblical worldview become even more challenging when Christian lecturers are expected to integrate these perspectives on their own without sufficient training or opportunities to learn from shared best practices.

In conclusion, the preceding discussion confirms that faith integration in Christian higher education is a shared responsibility, where the institution works in conjunction with lecturers, building on the foundation of the Great Commission.

When lecturers truly live out a Christian worldview marked by deepened personal faith, regular study of Scripture and a commitment to discipleship, their teaching becomes an influential testimony of faith. Successful faith integration requires more than just the efforts of individual lecturers. It requires clear institutional guidelines and regular professional development.

This raises an important question: How can Christian higher education institutions and their lecturers work together to cultivate an environment where faith integration is supported institutionally and embodied personally? Christian higher education institutions play an essential role in equipping lecturers to integrate faith within their academic disciplines (Knight, 2019:4). A foundational step is the development of a clear institutional vision and framework for faith-learning integration, which provides coherence and a shared understanding among academic staff (CCCU, 2021).

3. Methodology

This study was situated within a qualitative research design that affirms the constructed nature of knowledge and acknowledges the interpretative role of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Anchored in a reformed biblical worldview, the study investigated the potential of Christian higher education institutional support mechanisms to improve lecturers' capacity to integrate faith and learning. The study involved a systematic analysis of relevant institutional documents (c.f. Table 1.1). A document analysis approach was employed as the primary method of data collection (Morgan, 2022). This strategy was selected for its capacity to engage deeply with extant textual data, particularly curriculum guides, institutional policy documents, syllabi, and publications by academic staff that explicitly reflect reformed biblical commitments. Document analysis, as Bowen (2009:27) articulates, is especially appropriate in qualitative research, where the aim is not only to

extract meaning but also to critically interpret the underlying worldview assumptions that shape such texts. The sampling of documents was purposively selected, guided by their alignment with the central tenets of the reformed biblical tradition, which ensures relevance to the study's biblical and contextual framework (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015:2).

Table 1.1: Documents used for document analysis¹

Institution and document title	Code for data analysis	Focus areas	Document type
Kuyper College: Doctrinal Statement	K	Reformed biblical identity, authority of Scripture, Christian worldview, doctrinal accountability	Program outline
Calvin University: Who we are & faculty expectations	C	Reformed Christian commitment, faculty development, virtues, integration of faith and learning	Institutional identity documents and relevant faculty policies
Calvin University (De Vries Institute): Reflecting faith program overview	R	Faith-informed pedagogy, biblical reflection, global faculty development, certificate program	Program outline
The educational task of Dordt University	D	Cultural mandate, Great Commission, biblical worldview, holistic education, sphere sovereignty, serviceable insight	Institutional philosophy statement

Thematic analysis was employed as the analytic framework, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Throughout the analytical process, reflexivity was maintained, particularly given the researcher's dual role as both scholar and participant within the reformed academic context. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was achieved through comparing themes across various document types and through peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with the biblical and educational frameworks under investigation (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Findings and discussion

The following section presents the key findings derived from the four documents used for data collection. When referring to a specific document, the corresponding code provided in Table 1.1 is used. The findings are thematically organised to reflect both the structural and spiritual dimensions of faith integration.

4.1 Reformed Christian identity

A reformed Christian identity serves as the biblical foundation for many Christian higher education institutions (Van den Brink, Van der Kooi & De Bruijne, 2008). This identity is deeply rooted in the historic confessions and creeds of the reformed tradition, such as the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, which articulate doctrinal clarity and

¹ The original wording from the documents used for the document analysis has been retained in this table. This includes the use of American linguistic variants such as faculty and program.

biblical continuity across generations (K). These foundational texts ground most of the reformed institution's faith commitments, ensuring that biblical teaching is not unplanned but consistently aligned with a biblically faithful worldview. Central to this identity is the covenant principle, which affirms God's enduring relationship with His people and institutions (C), thereby underscoring a communal and redemptive understanding of Christian education (D). Furthermore, the sovereignty of God is a defining doctrinal tenet, highlighting divine authority over all realms of Creation, including academic inquiry (D, K). Doctrines such as total depravity and unconditional election, emblematic of the Calvinist tradition (C), further shape the intellectual and moral framework within which education is delivered.

4.2 Integration of faith and learning

The integration of faith and learning is a symbol of Christian higher education and is especially emphasised within reformed biblical frameworks. This integration entails more than the superficial inclusion of biblical references in the classroom (C); it is a comprehensive approach that shapes pedagogy, research and service through the lens of Christian belief (R). Faith-informed pedagogy reflects the conviction that teaching methods and content must align with biblical principles (K). From a reformed worldview, all aspects of life (including scholarly disciplines) are understood to be subject to the authority of Christ. Consequently, Christian scholarship becomes a vehicle not only for intellectual advancement but also for redemptive purpose, addressing brokenness in the world through the dual lens of sin and grace (D). This approach calls lecturers and students to recognise the fallenness of Creation while bearing witness to God's redemptive work. Faith-learning integration is thereby a spiritually formative process that calls all academic endeavours into the service of Christ's kingdom.

4.3 Institutional calling and educational task

Christian higher education institutions, grounded in a reformed vision, view their educational task as a divine calling that aligns with both the cultural mandate and the Great Commission (D). The cultural mandate compels humanity to steward creation responsibly, a task that finds expression in education as a transformative vocation. In this light, academic work becomes a means through which God's kingdom is extended. The Great Commission, in turn, informs the missional core of Christian higher education, calling institutions not only to educate but also to disciple, equipping students to live as faithful witnesses of Christ in all spheres of life. Academic staff, staff, and students are thus conceived as co-labourers with divine responsibility who serve within a broader narrative of God's redemptive mission (K). Moreover, the global dimension of Christian education is acknowledged through the pursuit of international engagement and the extension of the biblical and academic influence (C) across cultural boundaries. This global ministry is sustained by strategic collaboration with the church, ensuring that the educational mission remains anchored in ecclesial life and biblical integrity.

4.4 Authority of Scripture and biblical worldview

A commitment to the authority of Scripture undergirds every aspect of the academic and institutional life in reformed Christian institutions. Scripture is not merely a source of personal devotion, but the ultimate guide for discerning truth, shaping curricula, informing ethical reasoning, and defining institutional vision (K, D and C). A scriptural orientation to education ensures that all intellectual pursuits are rooted in God's revealed Word. This commitment affirms the dignity and vocation of all human beings as created in the image of God, and thus directs academic inquiry toward purposes that uphold human worth and contribute to human flourishing (Müller, 2020). In this context, academic freedom is respected but is not absolute; it is understood to operate within the bounds of biblical truth. Free inquiry is encouraged, but always with the recognition that Scripture exercises final authority over all domains of knowledge (C). This perspective safeguards biblical integrity while fostering a strong academic environment wherein truth-seeking is guided by divine revelation.

4.5 Holistic formation and virtue ethics

Reformed Christian education aims to develop students' character and spiritual lives in addition to their intellectual capabilities. (Arthur, 2021). Institutions seek to cultivate Christian virtues such as humility, justice, courage, and compassion, virtues that reflect Christlike character and are essential for moral discernment in contemporary society (C). Spiritual formation is central to this educational vision, promoting growth in faith and maturity in Christ through discipleship, worship, and reflective practice (R). The development of dispositions of service is also emphasised, encouraging students to live out their faith through active engagement with the needs of others. Education thus becomes a transformative process (D) whereby students are shaped not only in mind but also in heart and action, preparing them to lead lives marked by moral integrity and faithful witness.

4.6 Diversity, hospitality, and global engagement

In a globalised academic landscape, reformed Christian institutions are called to embody biblical hospitality and justice while remaining biblically faithful (C). Diversity and inclusion are embraced not as cultural trends but as biblically imperatives rooted in the call to welcome the stranger and seek justice for all (Shirley, Nel & Meyer, 2024). Such inclusion, however, is carefully framed within the boundaries of confessional commitments to maintain doctrinal coherence. The value of hospitality (R) is expressed through intentional community-building, respectful dialogue, and a posture of care that reflects Christ's example. Additionally, institutions increasingly engage in global partnerships, equipping academic staff and institutions across diverse contexts (K) to participate in shared biblical and educational missions. This global engagement fosters cross-cultural learning and enables the church's academic witness to extend beyond geographic and denominational borders. Yet it must also be recognised that every cultural sphere, though ordered by God's creational ordinances, can be directed by very different spiritual ground-motives. Smith (2016) argues that all human practices, including academic work, are directed by the heart's orientation, revealing their underlying spiritual commitments. A Christ-centred educational vision, therefore, stands in sharp contrast to secular approaches, for it acknowledges the religious nature of all theoretical thought. Furthermore, it calls academic work to be reoriented toward Christ as Lord of all Creation.

4.7 Academic freedom and sphere sovereignty

Reformed Christian higher education affirms the importance of academic freedom while upholding the principle of sphere sovereignty (D). Sphere sovereignty, a concept developed in reformed social thought, recognises that various spheres of life, such as church, state, family, and education, have distinct God-given responsibilities and authorities (Moorlag, 2019). Within this framework, academic freedom is not unfettered but exists within scriptural and institutional boundaries (K). This ensures that educational inquiry remains faithful to biblical truth while allowing space for critical engagement and exploration. Respectful dialogue with divergent views is encouraged as a means of sharpening understanding and deepening faith. Nevertheless, doctrinal coherence remains dominant (C); academic staff and curricula are expected to reflect the biblical convictions of the institution. This balanced approach to freedom and accountability fosters intellectual precision, spiritual maturity, and institutional fidelity.

By situating these themes within the broader mandate of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), the discussion explored how faith-informed pedagogy, biblical worldview alignment, and holistic formation can be fostered through intentional support structures. The thematic analysis of the four documents (see Table 1.1) revealed a clear and richly textured vision of faith integration within reformed Christian higher education. The data underscored the foundational role of a reformed Christian identity (shaped by confessions, covenant scripture, and the sovereignty of God) across all documents (K, C, D). Faith and learning integration emerged as more than curricular alignment; it is a spiritually formative practice embedded in pedagogy, scholarship, and institutional life (R, C, D). The findings also

highlighted a strong missional orientation, where academic work is framed as a response to both the cultural mandate and the Great Commission (D, K). Scriptural authority was affirmed as the guiding norm for truth, ethics, and institutional vision, serving as a check on academic freedom while enabling intellectual and moral flourishing (K, C, D). Institutions prioritised holistic formation through the cultivation of Christian virtues and spiritual growth, aligning educational aims with Christlike character (C, R).

Furthermore, the data demonstrated a growing awareness of the biblical necessity of diversity and global engagement, shaped by biblical hospitality and the call to justice (R, C, K). Finally, the documents reinforced the principle of sphere sovereignty as essential to safeguarding doctrinal integrity and ensuring that freedom in academic inquiry remains bounded by biblical truth (D, K, C). Collectively, these insights informed the development of a faith integration framework that offers a structured, biblically grounded model for supporting lecturers in integrating faith and learning with biblical coherence, vocational integrity, and institutional accountability.

5. A faith integration framework

In response to the research question, which explored how institutional support can strengthen lecturers' ability to integrate faith and learning, a faith integration framework was developed. This was done through a careful thematic analysis of the institutional documents. At the heart of this framework lies the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), which aims to provide a biblical anchor for connecting institutional policies, academic formation, and spiritual vocation within Christian higher education.

The five pillars illustrated in Figure 1.1 were directly derived from the data (as outlined in Section 4) and are intended to provide both a biblically grounded and pedagogically meaningful approach to faith integration.



Figure 1.1: The Faith Integration Framework

The first pillar, institutional alignment, highlights the essential role of clearly articulated policies and intentional structural support in fostering mission-driven and biblically coherent faith integration. For faith and learning to be meaningfully embedded in the life of a Christian higher education institution, alignment must begin at the level of institutional vision and flow through every layer of academic practice (Gu & Kim, 2024). This includes the

formal adoption of a faith integration policy that guides decision-making across faculties, the integration of biblical principles into curriculum development, and the delivery of faith-based outcomes within course objectives and assessment practices. In doing so, the institution signals its commitment to cultivating a shared understanding of its calling, which is not only to educate but to disciple through academic formation.

The second pillar, professional development, speaks to the essential task of equipping lecturers with both biblical depth and pedagogical fluency in faith integration. This is not a once-off initiative, but a sustained investment in the spiritual and academic growth of academic staff members. Training workshops rooted in Scripture, mentorship opportunities with Christian lecturers, and funding for participation in conferences or research on Christian pedagogy provide a scaffolding for lecturers to grow in confidence and clarity. This pillar affirms that excellence in Christian education requires deliberate formation that includes academic, spiritual, and communal principles. This will help ensure that lecturers teach from a biblical worldview.

The third pillar, reflective practice, draws on a deeply reformed view of vocation: that lecturers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but stewards of truth, called to live and teach in response to God's Word. Faithful integration cannot flourish in the absence of personal spiritual formation. Lecturers who are rooted in daily communion with Christ, shaped by Scripture, and dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit are better positioned to guide students not only intellectually but spiritually (Setran, Wilhoit, Ratcliff, Haase & Rozema, 2021). Strategies such as incorporating biblical prompts into lesson planning, maintaining a rhythm of biblical reflection, or journaling on teaching practices help encourage this alignment between personal faith and professional responsibility. In this way, the classroom becomes a site of worship and witness, and the calling to teach becomes a lived response to Christ's Commission.

The fourth pillar, community and collaboration, acknowledges that faith integration is not a solitary endeavour. It flourishes within a vibrant academic community marked by mutual encouragement, biblical dialogue, and the collective pursuit of faithful teaching. Communities of practice, whether shaped around faculties, disciplines, or shared biblical questions, can offer spaces of trust where lecturers exchange ideas, share testimonies of God's work in their teaching, and explore the integration of faith in contextually meaningful ways (Rettler-Pagel, 2023). Interdisciplinary panels, shared reading groups, and intentional academic staff forums offer avenues for deepening relationships and renewing vision. In these spaces, faith and learning become shared commitments, not isolated experiments.

Finally, the fifth pillar, evaluation and accountability, insists that faith integration must be both visible and measurable. While the work of integration is often complex and deeply personal, institutions must develop tools to monitor its quality, foster growth, and ensure alignment with institutional mission. These tools include developing rubrics to assess biblical knowledge and pedagogical effectiveness, creating peer review processes for course content and classroom practices, and inviting students to reflect meaningfully on how faith integration impacts their learning. This pillar ensures that faith integration does not remain aspirational but becomes a lived reality shaped by thoughtful evaluation and ongoing refinement.

Together, these five pillars aim to form a dynamic and interwoven framework that seeks to support a reformed Christian academic environment in which faith, learning, and formation are held together in covenantal unity. Anchored in the Great Commission and shaped by the sovereignty of Christ over all of life, this framework invites institutions and lecturers alike to take seriously the task of forming students who think biblically, live faithfully, and serve the world with wisdom and grace.

6. Recommendations

Grounded in the biblical mandate of Matthew 28:19-20, this section presents practical recommendations for Christian higher education institutions and identifies key areas for future research. The aim is to strengthen institutional coherence, nurture spiritually grounded lecturers, and deepen the intentional integration of faith and learning across all academic disciplines.

6.1 Recommendations for Christian higher education institutions

To enhance the integration of faith and learning, Christian higher education institutions should begin by developing clear faith integration policies that align curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment with a biblical worldview, clearly affirming the Great Commission and articulating the institution's reformed biblical identity.

Targeted professional development must accompany these policies through structured and ongoing training initiatives. Institutions should also create interdisciplinary communities of practice where academic staff engage in shared learning, biblical reflection, and mutual mentoring. This will strengthen institutional coherence. Faith integration should be embedded in academic staff evaluation processes, including performance reviews and promotion criteria, to reinforce the vocational and spiritual dimensions of teaching. Moreover, reflective practice must be encouraged through intentional lesson planning, recognising that effective pedagogy flows from personal discipleship.

Finally, institutions should uphold bounded academic freedom by affirming sphere sovereignty, respecting the autonomy of each discipline while ensuring that all inquiry remains subject to the authority of Scripture.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

Future research on faith integration in Christian higher education should examine academic staff perspectives across disciplines to understand how integration is approached uniquely. Furthermore, research in examining student outcomes is also important, as it can reveal how faith-integrated curricula influence students' spiritual maturity, vocational discernment, and cultural engagement. This, in turn, will inform more effective pedagogical strategies. Additionally, exploring various mentorship models – whether peer-to-peer, intergenerational, or cross-disciplinary – could offer valuable insights into how mentoring relationships shape academic staff integration practices and personal spiritual growth.

Lastly, evaluating institutional case studies from universities with well-established integration frameworks could provide replicable models and contextually adaptable strategies for other institutions seeking to deepen their commitment to Christ-centred education.

7. Conclusion

This article confirms that the integration of faith and learning in Christian higher education is not an exterior aspiration, but a biblical mandate rooted in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20). As Christian institutions seek to disciple future generations, they must ensure that academic inquiry is consistently aligned with a clear biblical worldview. The lack of institutional frameworks, as well as tensions between secular content and biblical convictions, can undermine coherence.

Through the proposed Faith Integration Framework, institutions are invited to embrace a five-pillar framework: institutional alignment, professional development, reflective practice, community and collaboration, and evaluation and accountability. This framework is anchored in the missional calling of Matthew 28. This model aims to serve not as a rigid formula, but as a strategic guide. In conclusion, Christian higher education must reclaim its distinctiveness not by mimicking secular paradigms, but by discipling minds and hearts in obedience to Christ.

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