

My Philosophy of Christian Education

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By

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Background

This paper is written as a partial fulfillment for the requirements the ACSI Administrator's Certification Process. It is done after the completion of readings on Christian Educational Philosophy including *Christian Philosophy of Education* (1995), *The Christian Mind* (1963), *Christian Education in a Democracy* (1995), and *The Pattern of God's Truth* (1993). The ACSI video series on the Philosophy of Christian Education was also viewed as a part of this process.

The developing of a Christian philosophy of education has been a pursuit that has continued over the past 20 years of my professional career. It is a concept that began to take shape in my mind during my undergraduate studies in Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh. Although that academic experience was in a secular context, it was also one that provided a strong understanding of the developmental growth processes of children as it relates to education and overall development.

In this same academic context, I also found myself immersed in a distinctly Christian community of professionals who were striving to understand their faith in the context of the professional development we are experiencing. It was within this experience that my philosophy of human services as well as Christian education began to develop. Although looking back now on the process, it would have been wonderful to benefit from a distinctly Christian perspective in that formative time, there was a tremendous amount of truth taught in that setting. Although the context of the University's secular worldview did not maximize God's

truth that I learned there, it was still true. This is descriptive of Gabelein's discussion of all truth being God's Truth as described in *The Pattern of God's Truth*. Of course, as with any professional development process my understanding of God's perspective on education continues to develop. This paper represents my understanding of that process at this particular point of my development. It reflects my experiences in the classroom as well as my current context of administration.

Christian World View

From my perspective, a philosophy of Christian education has to begin with understanding the context of worldview. Worldview is best described as a perspective from which one filters all information. Francis Schaeffer (1992) was the first author that I read who discussed the concept of worldview. It is my perspective that the developing of a Christian worldview is one of the most important priorities that need to happen in children and adults who want to follow Christ. If we think about world view in the context of perspectives it can be seen as a broad set of assumptions that are made by human beings in order to be able to make sense of the world around them. These assumptions then provide the underlying base from which to understand all experiences and information. A Christian worldview is distinctly different from other worldviews. In today's educational societies and systems, the primary worldview that is prevalent is a humanistic worldview that essentially sees man as the center of the universe. Because of this, man-centered understandings of all experiences are expected to be driven within that context. A Christian World View, which essentially establishes God at the center of everything, is derived from Biblical perspectives, seeing God and His Truth at the Center of all things. The differences between these worldviews provide significant differences from which other education methodologies, reference points, and perspectives can be drawn. Several areas of such differences are essential to my understanding of what is a Christian philosophy of education.

Source of truth: In a Christian worldview the source of truth is derived from God and an understanding of who He is, as well as what he has said to be true. This is understood through correct interpretation of His word, the Bible. Although there are many areas of debate about truth as it relates to education, essentially any educational philosophy that attempts to understand truth must begin from a perspective on what truth is. A Humanistic worldview essentially sees man as

having the ability to discover truth, articulate truth, or know truth, based on who he is and his abilities. Truth also becomes relative because truth for one culture, system or person may be different from another. This plays itself out in incredible ways in the educational systems of our day. Although we all may agree that $2 + 2 = 4$, or that the law of gravity is a valid law of science, we may understand the reasons for that from vastly different perspectives. These issues become more critical in a variety of areas of study, such as the study of origins, psychology, sociology or even education itself. What is unfortunate about a religious humanistic perspective on education is that it allows for a spiritual nature but does not allow for integration of that perspective within certain contexts. Unfortunately, many Christians are willing to settle for that perspective which allows for faith and God to be communicated in certain contexts in certain areas of their lives, but to accept the fact that it must be prohibited in other areas. Examples of areas that are excluded are vocation, academic studies and certain life discussions. It is precisely this temptation that makes Christian education and the philosophy of Christian education so vital to the Christian community today. It is also a natural outgrowth of an integrated Christian Education for individuals to establish a real understanding about how to allow Jesus to be Lord over every area of their lives.

Understanding who man is: This, along with man's role, and his nature is another difference between worldviews. A humanistic worldview of mankind, or of course children, sees men as beings that are ultimately good. Such innate goodness if given just the right circumstances will not only produce and grow in healthy and fulfilling kinds of ways, but also will discover truth and do the right things. Although these characteristics of mankind are descriptive of our nature, they are more reflective of our God-centered nature than our human-centered nature. They are more reflections of God's character than people. A Christian worldview attempts to study man, his role, and his nature in the context of scripture. There are varieties of key concepts in scripture that relate to this. Some of the highlights are that man is by nature fallen and sinful. He does need the direction, accountability, and instruction that comes through God's truth. He also needs, because of his fallen nature, redemption and regeneration through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Although, once again methodologies appear similar in striving toward these ends, the basic assumptions about the heart of man and who he is remains critical to understanding and shaping those processes.

Goals of life: Another major difference between worldviews relate to the goals mankind should have for his life. A humanistic worldview sees at best its goals of

life to produce happiness, contentment, success, and a variety of other things that are derived from a variety of perspectives. Although these things are not by nature wrong, in a Christian worldview the goals of man are seen as glorifying God by fulfilling a calling he has on our lives. Education, of course, is seen as critical in preparing children for life, but once again, although similar, there are core differences in how we begin to prepare students based on our understanding of worldview, shaping the goals of what students are to do.

Authority: This is a perspective that changes immensely based on an understanding of worldviews. From a Christian and biblio-centric worldview, God is seen as the ultimate authority in life. It is based on His perspective that we understand ourselves, what we do, and how we live. In the education system, the authorities are in place, from teachers to board members, to be responsible for educational issues. All authorities are seen as subject to other authorities under the context of the Lord. This is ultimately rooted in an understanding of God's truth and who He is. In a humanistic perspective, authority is seen as relative and individuals are seen as the highest authority in our lives. Although respect is given to the concept of authority in a humanistic worldview, it is not because of ultimate truth or reality, but because there must be order in the world. Therefore, authority needs to be challenged, to be checked, and to be understood in the context of who we are as opposed to checking and understanding ourselves in the context of ultimate authority. Obviously, this has huge implications for how we discipline students, the kind of rationales that are developed around student discipline issues or even how faculty members, staff, or parents are understood in the context of education. It is important in this context to understand not only why we discipline students but also what the ultimate goal of discipline is. An accurate understanding of authority, which forms a Christian perspective about subjection to Christ, and His lordship on our lives, is critical to the development of a Godly person.

The role of parents: This is the last area that I want to touch on regarding the differences in worldviews. Who parents are, what their roles are, and their relationship with schools and students is viewed differently based on your worldview. In a distinctly Christian worldview, the parents are seen as the ones given by God the responsibility to educate and raise children. Schools, in that context are seen as assisting parents and enabling parents to ultimately educate their children thereby fulfilling this God-given responsibility. This role shapes policy about who makes final education decisions in the lives of students. This is true whether we agree or disagree with these decisions as a school. In the context of a

humanistic worldview, parents are seen only as one authority in the lives of students. Government and other authorities are placed with equal value and responsibilities toward raising children. This at times even requires children to make a decision about which authority to listen to when there are conflicting values. This basic difference in the role of schools in the lives of students exemplifies the concepts described in *Christian Education in A Democracy* (1995).

Although there are many other issues that relate and could be compared or contrasted within the context of worldview, I will move onto other issues that essentially use a worldview as a backdrop to understanding a Christian educational Philosophy.

Human Development in Context

Any educational philosophy has to deal with the philosophical underpinnings that affect methodology. It is my perspective that a Christian educational philosophy has to understand how we work with kids in the context of how God has created and designed them. It is from this perspective that I believe God's Word drives us to understand students as made up of a variety of different aspects integrated into one whole. He has created different aspects of humanity that are affected by education. In my mind, although they need to be addressed in different contexts they cannot be separated, as described in a variety of sections in *The Philosophy of Christian Education* (1995). They are integrated parts of a student to be described in the following five categories:

Spiritual Development: This part of us can develop an understanding of who God is, relates, and understands God in the context of the spirit world. This is the part of mankind or children that could be most significantly influenced by Christian education in the context of helping them come to an understanding of Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Just as significant is the developing of an understanding of spiritual truths and how they relate to the worship of Jesus Christ in not only your spiritual life, but in every other aspect of our life. It is this spiritual component that rules over the other areas of our development. In this sense, it affects the overall development of students' lives. In addressing spiritual development, the Christian educational philosophy has to work from the beginning in basics that are developed from God's word. God's Word needs to be central in all aspects of curriculum and other areas of growth and development. Biblical principles for living, learning, and growing, are integrated into every other aspect of education.

Without this we end up with a fragmented understanding of the world in which we separate the various components of our lives and in a sense put God in a box.

Cognitive Development: This area relates to thinking and the development of cognitive processes that enable us to function throughout the whole of life. It of course relates to the academic discipline and the academic order that is required to learn and shape our understanding. Again, it is my perspective that this relates to every other area of development and must be tied to how God has designed children to learn. This unique process helps to develop the distinctly Christian mind talked about by Blamires in *The Christian Mind* (1978). It is my belief that there are significant scriptural references and indications that students learn in a developmental way that builds upon previous learning experiences and addresses critical periods in the context of growth and development. It is indicated and identified by scripture that commands us to bring up a child in a way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). This passage is thought to mean that if we give our kids lots of God centered training when they are young it will cause a wayward child to come back to Christ in his older years. Although this is implied in that passage, the real key to understanding this passage is to understand that if we do not shape and grow children spiritually at critical periods of development (the way they should go), it will be nearly impossible for them to assimilate both scriptural and spiritual truths later in their lives. This again, drives the goal of Christian education to integrate all areas of spiritual development in the context of who kids are. Other areas of cognitive growth that have to be addressed by Christian educational philosophy relate to how students learn. Although there is in our godly design a drive to learn, it is a discipline process that must be administered and directed by godly teachers that not only love the Lord and have a good understanding of education, but also are able to listen to the Holy Spirit to guide and direct the learning of each student in their classroom.

Emotional Development: This area is seen as the part of students that deals with their affect or their ability to feel and to understand themselves in the context of who they are and how they feel about themselves. Critical issues that need to be addressed in this area are self-esteem that relates not to self-being the center of the world but to understanding ourselves in the right relationship with Jesus Christ. This not only involves understanding the importance of who we are in relationship to Christ, but ourselves as well. It also addresses dealing appropriately with our emotions enabling us to honor God and relate effectively with others.

Social Development: This area is so critical from a Christian education philosophy that scripture speaks repeatedly about how we are to understand ourselves in the context of others, as servants and fellow laborers in Christ. Biblical perspectives address how we deal with confrontation (Matthew 18), authority, relationships, and our development of an understanding of our future relationships with a spouse, friends, or even employers.

Physical Development: The last area is physical development, which from a Christian educational philosophy needs to be addressed in the context of our bodies being the temple that has been created to serve Christ. Scripturally God not only demands care and respect of our bodies because of our desire to live longer, but as a discipline and stewardship process which reflects an understanding of the creation and the Creator behind our bodies. This area of development needs to be addressed not only from a classroom perspective, but also from a lifestyle perspective.

In summary, each of these areas of development becomes critical for students to develop from a Christian worldview. The design of a Christian educational philosophy must articulate the ways that each area is encouraged to develop in the lives of students. The context of a Christian education must drive us to move beyond somewhat myopic models that only see the academic disciplines as the areas appropriate for work in school. It is my belief that any educational philosophy that doesn't account of the overall growth and development of students leaves a student not only less prepared for life, but less prepared to understand himself in the context of the kingdom of God and therefore less prepared to serve Him.

Methodology

In the context of methodology, besides understanding who students are by design it is important to understand key principals that I believe are related in God's word to drive the educational process.

Central to this concept is the idea of discipline. Discipline is a process that not only is designed to control classrooms to enable learning to take place, but also is in itself a process built on the model of becoming more like Christ. Any discipline techniques, philosophies, and methods really need to be rooted in the disciple making process or the idea of creating a follower of Christ. Scripture talks about

this process in the case that a student when fully developed will be like his teacher. It is important for Christian educators to understand the discipline process to be rooted in the building of students to be like Christ, and to have His ultimate goals in mind. Of course, the daily management of classroom and student behavior are important, but ultimately the training of students to be like Christ is our goal.

Academic confidence and excellence are areas that although not addressed directly by scripture, are implied in scripture. God calls us to prepare ourselves to serve Him, and to live a godly life in the world. In the context of modern society, education systems play a significant role in that process. It is therefore my perspective that we have to take this process not only seriously, but to continually evaluate that process to ensure that what we are doing is preparing students for life. To allow students to achieve God's plan for their life requires skills and knowledge to be integrated successfully in their lives. It also requires professionals who train students to understand not only human development and God's design for students, but to understand to the best of their ability how students learn, effective techniques for learning, and ways to best accomplish these goals in the lives of students.

Integration is talked about in the context of worldview. Integration is also critical in the context of effective education. Not only do subjects need to be integrated with each other to best provide for learning to happen but likewise, Christian principles and worldviews must be integrated in this context as well. It is an ever-evolving process as students grow in Christ. As faculty members grow to understand Christ and Christian principles more and more we must develop a school system that will allow and encourage integration to happen on even more significant levels. To have areas of stimulation for faculty members which allow them to grow spiritually not only in their subject areas but also in their lives will cause that to be reflected in the lives of students. The better that Christian schools and Christian parents do this the fewer work students will need to do to undo secular worldviews in the context of who they are. This will put students further on the road to being able to be fully equipped to serve God and to function in life fulfilling His purposes. This is ultimately the goal of any Christian Philosophy of Education!

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