The Importance of the Teacher's Worldview

By Michelle Holland

A major aim of Christian schools is to promote a biblical worldview in their students. But what is a biblical worldview? How can we define it? How will we know whether we have accomplished this goal? I question whether many schools have really thought these questions through, or if they measure worldview as they measure academic progress. This is a concern particularly in the science discipline. Are we adequately preparing our students to examine scientific evidence in light of the Bible so that their faith will not be shaken?

The term worldview comes from the German word weltanschauung. It can be defined as “a comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity’s relation to it” (Dictionary.com). So, a biblical worldview is an internal belief system that approaches all of life’s circumstances in light of God’s truth as revealed in His Word, the Bible. All my decisions and actions are based on my underlying values and beliefs. Therefore, what I think and believe ultimately determines my behavior. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (NLT). Christian schools cannot forget this basic principle when educating their students.

Factors That Influence Worldview

Various factors contribute to students’ development of a biblical worldview. In a study, Raymond Meyer found that the length of the student’s personal commitment to Christ was a key factor in biblical thinking. He also found that family support and attachment to a local church were important. Although the length of enrollment in a Christian school was not shown to be significant (2003, 174), Christian school enrollment overlaps with the family’s commitment to Christianity and probably the student’s personal commitment as well. Another study found that students who had been previously exposed to creationist
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ideas scored higher on a biblical worldview test than those who had not, and that direct instruction on the issue increased student scores (Deckard et al. 2003).

Teacher worldviews make a difference too. Studies have shown that the teacher’s worldview shapes those of the students over the length of the course. James A. Fyock found “that teaching a course from a biblical Christian worldview by an experienced faculty member increased biblical understanding on a number of worldview issues. Intentionally weaving biblical truth into instructional methodology and curriculum content seems to have a positive effect on the worldview of students” (2008, iii). Teachers are influencers. Their job is to make an impact on students, so it should come as no surprise that they actually do affect their students’ worldviews.

Many Christian schools count on a teacher to be able to develop a biblical worldview in the students without ever first ascertaining the teacher’s worldview or offering any training on the subject. Many believe that the teacher is “the key source of worldview instruction and of a Christian perspective on science” (Guthrie 2009, 86). However, the sad news is that a Barna Group study found that less than one out of every five born-again Christians (19 percent) had a biblical worldview as determined by their position on six basic biblical teachings (2009). This should cause alarm! If most adults do not have a solid biblical worldview, how can they possibly cultivate one in the next generation?

Ways to Cultivate a Biblical Worldview

And yet, Christian schools fail to address this crucial issue. They employ teachers who say the right things in an interview, but do those teachers really live their lives by the Word of God? I am not saying that the teachers are malicious or scheming, but all of us have been more infiltrated by this world than we would like to think. We don’t stop to analyze or evaluate our thoughts and beliefs enough; we fail to notice inconsistencies or fallacies in our logic. Christian schools could take several steps to rectify this situation:

• Help the faculty analyze their own thoughts and beliefs
• Offer professional development that measures teachers’ worldview
• Assess students’ progress toward a more coherent biblical worldview
• Carefully consider what textbooks to use in their classrooms

I know that the subject of textbooks is sometimes sensitive, particularly in the sciences. Many Christian schools use secular science textbooks because of their rigor, their ancillaries, or their overall quality; however, there is no statistical difference between the ACT Science Reasoning subtest scores of students using Christian-published textbooks and those using secular-published texts (Guthrie 2009, 89, 139–140). So, from a science perspective, the students are being equally prepared regardless of publisher. However, what about worldview? I would venture to say that there would likely be a difference in the biblical worldview of students who use Christian science texts and those who do not. While there are many great science teachers who are teaching their students to think from a Christian perspective in every area, there are probably many more who are not.

I don’t say all this because I think Christian education is ineffective. I love Christian education! I am the product of Christian education, and I am a Christian educator. I simply want us to fulfill the purpose for which we exist—to train students to think and live like Christ in this world so they can enter secular arenas equipped to withstand atheistic and humanistic worldviews as well as spark change in those around them. I think we can do that much more effectively if we will consciously and truthfully examine our own worldview; then we can nurture a robust
biblical worldview in our students. We must operate from a position of knowledge and intentionality. The mission is too important. Being unaware and ignorant is simply not an option.

References


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